

Grimly

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/30421758) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/30421758>.

Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	Major Character Death
Categories:	F/M , M/M
Fandom:	Harry Potter - J. K. Rowling
Relationships:	Hermione Granger/Harry Potter , Andromeda Black Tonks/Ted Tonks , Mr Granger/Mrs Granger (Harry Potter) , Mr Brown/Mrs Brown (Harry Potter) , Pandora Lovegood/Xenophilius Lovegood , Mr Greengrass/Mrs Greengrass (Harry Potter) , Sirius Black/Remus Lupin , Petunia Evans Dursley/Vernon Dursley , Hope Lupin/Lyall Lupin , Hannah Abbott/Neville Longbottom
Characters:	Harry Potter , Grim Reaper (OC) , Amelia Bones , Alastor "Mad-Eye" Moody , Rufus Scrimgeour , Gornuk (Harry Potter) , Goblins (Harry Potter) , Andromeda Black Tonks , Augusta Longbottom , Neville Longbottom , Susan Bones' Father , Susan Bones , Susan Bones' Mother , Remus Lupin , House-Elves (Harry Potter) , Griphook (Harry Potter) , Potter Family (Harry Potter) Portraits , Ted Tonks , Lavender Brown , Hannah Abbott , Anthony Goldstein , Arabella Figg , Petunia Evans Dursley , Hermione Granger , Mrs Granger (Harry Potter) , Mr Granger (Harry Potter) , Sirius Black , Whisper Scale (OC Snake) , Mrs Brown (Harry Potter) , Mr Brown (Harry Potter) , Peter Pettigrew , Daphne Greengrass , Ernie Macmillan , Megan Jones (Harry Potter) , Lisa Turpin , Mandy Brocklehurst , Luna Lovegood , Pandora Lovegood , Xenophilius Lovegood , Mr Jones (Harry Potter) , Albus Dumbledore , Cornelius Fudge , Astoria Greengrass , Mr Greengrass (Harry Potter) , Mrs Greengrass (Harry Potter) , Bartemius Crouch Sr. , Bartemius Crouch Jr. , Winky (Harry Potter) , Narcissa Black Malfoy , Draco Malfoy , Igor Karkaroff , Tom Riddle Voldemort , Severus Snape , Fawkes (Harry Potter) , Dudley Dursley , Vernon Dursley , Marge Dursley , The Judge (OMC) , Lyall Lupin , Minerva McGonagall , Ron Weasley , Ginny Weasley , George Weasley , Fred Weasley , Molly Weasley , Roger Davies , Cho Chang , Filius Flitwick , Dean Thomas , Seamus Finnigan , Hogwarts Students
Additional Tags:	Reptilia28's Don't Fear the Reaper Challenge , Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence , Not Beta Read , Kid Fic , Pre-Hogwarts , Parselmouth Harry Potter , Sirius Black Gets a Trial , Mild Dumbledore Bashing , Wizarding Broadcasting Network , Slice of Life , Minor Character Death , Canonical Character Death , Character Bashing
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2021-04-02 Completed: 2021-05-28 Words: 115,022 Chapters: 55/55

Grimly

by [CeliaEquus](#)

Summary

Inspired by Reptilia28's Don't Fear the Reaper Challenge.

Harry Potter has died for the sixth time, and his personal reaper is NOT okay with this. It seems an overhaul is needed... from much earlier than Harry anticipated.

Usual I-don't-own-this disclaimers apply. :)

(I have virtually no plans for this story, so tags will be added as we go.)

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

Chapter One

Harry was confused to realise that he was sitting in a chair. They'd just been celebrating victory, hadn't they? Had he lost track of time somehow? Because this didn't look like any office he'd seen at Hogwarts. And the newspaper in front of him wasn't any paper he'd ever heard of.

Opposite was a desk, a person reclining in a chair (face hidden by the newspaper), and a plain white wall. There were old copies of the newspaper around, scrunched-up pieces of paper, empty takeaway coffee cups, and some long-decayed food on a plate which reminded him strongly of Nearly Headless Nick's Death Day party.

Unwilling to sound like Umbridge, but wishing to get the person's attention, Harry cleared his throat. The newspaper went flying upwards, and Harry fought the urge to grin as the person cartwheeled their arms to stay balanced.

That urge disappeared when he realised that he was staring at himself.

"What..."

"*What are you doing here?*" his copy bellowed. Harry had never seen himself as angry as that, and cringed back in his seat. "It can't be time yet... no, you still look too young. You're supposed to be a hundred and twenty-two years old, not, not... *How* old are you?"

"Uh... seventeen, sir."

"Seven... *seventeen?*" He looked about ready to have a heart attack or something. "I'm going to get *fired* for this. I only saw you..." He flipped through a telephone card index, the kind Uncle Vernon called 'Too old-fashioned'. "A year ago. It feels like we just cut the cake celebrating your grand re-return to the land of the living!" He gestured to the food.

"Re-return?" Harry asked, hoping that he sounded polite.

"Welcome *back* to the land of the dead," his copy said, spreading his arms wide. "*Again.*"

"I... I know I died earlier, which got rid of the horcrux," Harry said, tapping his forehead. "But you weren't there."

"No, that old meddler got to you first," he said grimly. "Still kept secrets. Still didn't apologise for all he put you through. Still didn't give you all the information you needed. This is the *sixth* time we've met, and I'm going to be demoted if we meet again before you're *supposed* to die."

Harry remembered that the Dursleys went to church once, to try to look like normal people. He wasn't allowed to go, naturally. But Dudley and Uncle Vernon were so bored by the whole thing that Aunt Petunia told everyone that they'd chosen to go to a church farther afield, and then they'd go to the movies on a Sunday instead, or do some other fun activity Harry was

never allowed to participate in. But he'd heard on the school playground about heaven and hell, about someone called God and his son Jesus, and other 'Sunday School claptrap', as Uncle Vernon put it, that people typically picked up at an English comprehensive school.

So was this heaven or hell? Did it really matter? He was dead, apparently, and would never get to go on and have a normal life, or a family with Ginny, or work as an auror...

“Stop it!”

“Uh, so who are you?” asked Harry.

“I'm your reaper, and I know what you're thinking. You mentioned all of this last time. Well, guess what, it isn't *meant* to happen like that. You can never have a normal life: you're the Chosen One, get over it, use your fame for something worthwhile. Two, why this Ginny person? The initial's correct, but your soulmate is some Granger girl, not some *Ginny* girl. Did you hit your head after I sent you back?”

“I've hit my head numerous times,” Harry said drily.

“I'm well aware,” his reaper said. “As for being an auror, forget what your father did. He chose that profession in a time of war. You've chosen it in a time of war. Once the war is over, do you *really* want to keep fighting?”

“Well, Ron wants to become an auror--”

The reaper held up his hand to silence Harry, and began flicking through some files in his drawer.

“Ron, Ron... nope,” he said. “He doesn't want to do anything which comes with so much paperwork to fill out. He just wants to ride your coat-tails and get you to do the hard work. Why do you think he wants your soulmate there? She does the work for all three of you right now.”

“That's not fair!” Harry argued.

“Really?” the reaper said, sitting back as his eyes narrowed. “You both worked hard enough when you started out at school, all eager to learn. As soon as you made friends with,” he glanced at another file, “Hermione Granger, your soulmate, you two began to leave most of the work to her. You had to do your own written assignments before that; afterwards, she seemed more interested in getting you through school. It's a wonder she hasn't aged prematurely with the burden she took on, keeping the two of you up to snuff. She could do so much better than you.”

“Maybe,” Harry said. “But she and Ron--”

“Ever heard of love potions?” the reaper said. Harry stopped short. “Of *course*, you learnt about them in your sixth year. When she suddenly showed a lot more attraction to this Weasley boy, and you started showing attraction to his younger sister. *What* a coincidence. You were so engrossed in an old book that you didn't notice anything else. And without their

older siblings to keep an eye on them, and with the inefficient staff at that school of yours..." He made a thumbs-down gesture.

"You're saying we were *potioned*?"

"Mmm-hmm."

"And... and I've died before."

"Six times, including now, not including the horcrux," the reaper said, kicking his feet back up onto the desk.

"Then why don't I remember? And why do you look like me?"

"I look like you because I'm your personal reaper," he said slowly, as if Harry were particularly stupid. "*Genius*." Harry scowled. "And you're not supposed to remember this place. It's very hush-hush. Unfortunately," he sighed, "erasing the memories of this place also erases the memories of what you're told to fix."

"Oh, that's *very* helpful."

"Don't get sarcastic with me, Harry James Potter! You're on *very* thin ice." He slammed his hand against the wall. "We need special permission and a contract, or he'll just keep screwing up!"

"I really don't understand what's going on," Harry said, feeling a bit despondent. Someone he thought was his best friend was complicit in... in attempted rape. Harry had only had crushes before, but it felt like the real thing with Ginny. He'd been planning on marriage if they survived the war, as soon as she graduated from Hogwarts.

"Was Ginny aware of--"

"Yes," his reaper said shortly. A hole opened up in the wall and a handful of papers were passed through. He sat back at the desk and pulled a fountain pen out of thin air. "She's smarter than he is. Who do you think actually brewed the potions?"

Harry felt sick. Wasn't there anyone he could trust?

"Now," his reaper said, rapping on the desk to get Harry's attention. "*This* time, when you're sent back for another life, we're doing things differently."

"But... bad things happen to people who mess with time--"

His reaper snorted.

"Only when you humans are the ones to mess with it," he said. "We'll choose a good date for you to return to your body, this time with your memories intact. To cover ourselves – and you – there will be a block so that you can't actually do things you're not yet capable of. You can't yet perform spells that you've already mastered unless you go back to an age where you've mastered them. You have to re-learn things. There'll also be a block on your mind so the

meddler can't see what you know. You could choose to tell him, of course.” The reaper gave Harry a dark look. “He will only believe it if he believes that you are telling the truth. This applies to anyone you talk to. But don't go around telling everyone about this. Your soulmate can be trusted; anyone else should be considered *very* carefully. Especially those who misuse their power. And anyone too close to those who misuse their power. If it's something you wouldn't tell your enemy, don't tell anyone who knows your enemy.”

Harry was starting to get a headache.

“So if someone believes that I'm telling the truth, then they'll, what, just *know* that what I'm saying is true?” he said. “With all due respect, that's how belief works. And so many people never bloody believe me that your secret couldn't be safer with anyone else,” he added bitterly.

“Your soulmate will always believe you,” the reaper said. “Now, this contract states that you will fulfil that damned prophecy as soon as possible, get together with your soulmate, and – so I don't see you too soon from something like an aneurysm – choose a less stressful job than law enforcement! Do you think you can manage to do that?”

“But what if the smallest change that I make to the timeline alters everything else so that I can't do the job? And... and what if I just want to stay here after all?”

“Is the prospect of a long and mostly happy life just too much for your poor little brain to handle?”

Harry growled. He almost sounded like Sirius.

“Nothing in life goes right for me,” he said.

“And nothing in *death* will go right for you, since you're here over a century too early,” his reaper finished, shoving the papers towards Harry and slamming the pen down. “I liked you better as a baby. That was the first time you died. The meddler left you on a doorstep in the middle of a late autumn's night. You perished from hypothermia. Oh, *now* you grow enough common sense to read something before signing it? Fine. I'll wait. Stupid, stubborn kid.”

Harry ignored him. The contract did indeed state that Harry would have his memories of the afterlife intact, until he reached the age at which he died this last time. Then the alternative timeline's memories would disappear. That date and time was his deadline... literally. He would be able to speak about his time in the afterlife, but no one would believe him unless and until they realised that he couldn't be doing anything *but* telling the truth. No one could use Legillimency on him. He wouldn't be able to demonstrate any knowledge he wasn't yet supposed to have.

“Should've been in Slytherin,” the reaper sang softly.

“What do you mean?”

“You're too blunt. You'll have to learn how to imply and mislead and misdirect.”

“Well, that isn't fair. How can I talk about the horcruxes and make sure they get destroyed if I go back to, say, my fourth year?” Not that he wanted to do the Triwizard Tournament all over again.

“So you're happy to let,” he consulted the files, “Peter Pettigrew get away, let students be petrified, almost lose to Tom Riddle in your first year... You're happy to start in your fourth year?”

“Wait, so there's no limit on *how* far I can go back?”

His reaper sighed.

“Your parents can't be brought back,” he said. “They weren't supposed to be together in the first place, but other forces, arguably stronger than us, led them astray from their intended paths. Because they didn't die until after the prophecy was created, no one here knew what had happened. And the prophecy sealed their fate, leading to their deaths as punishment for not following their own destinies. If we'd known sooner...” He spread his hands, looking at Harry with genuine compassion for the first time. “I'm sorry. And there's nothing you can do as an infant. You have to be able to walk and talk coherently, at the very least.”

Tears spilled down Harry's cheeks. For a moment he'd held out some hope... but he should've known better. He sniffed.

“I don't know how to do this, other than the way it all went,” he said. “How can I get to the Lestrange vault sooner? How can I destroy the horcruxes without going up against the basilisk in the Chamber of Secrets? What do I do about Sirius being in jail?”

“Ah, now, do you remember something I said earlier?” his reaper said, suddenly smiling.

“Uh... which part?”

“Where I much preferred you as a baby.”

Harry frowned.

“But you just said that I have to be able to walk and talk--”

“Perhaps so, but young children are still adorable enough to melt most people's hearts, and, shall we say... *influence* them?”

Harry considered it.

“I suppose so,” he said. “But how do I deal with the Dursleys?”

His reaper eyed him carefully, then flipped through a large file with a red cross stamped on the front. Was that file for Harry's medical issues? No wonder it was so thick.

“I've got an idea,” the reaper said. “But first let's set up a plan. I'll tell you everything that I can. Then I'll write the date on the contract and, as soon as it's signed, you'll be back in your own body, back in time, and on your own. Do you understand?”

Harry nodded. He felt oddly... relieved.

Chapter Two

Chapter Summary

It's time to get started.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

For some strange reason the local optometrist had taken a spontaneous holiday. (If a certain reaper had anything to do with it, such a thing could never be proven.) So when Harry's teacher suggested that he may need glasses, there was nothing for it but to travel further afield. Deciding to make a day of it, the Dursleys chose to take him to London, with their own plans to go to London Zoo while leaving Harry with the optometrist.

Harry had other plans. When he recognised where they had stopped (at traffic lights which were never there before, but again, nothing could be proven), he removed his seatbelt and jumped out of the car. He began to run, and wouldn't stop running until he found The Leaky Cauldron.

Seven-year-old Harry Potter was about to re-enter the world of magic sooner than expected.

("Seven is a magical number," his reaper reminded him. "And it's when you got your glasses. It says so in your file.")

"If you say so," Harry replied.)

Even if the Dursleys had been able to pull over and give chase, Harry very much doubted that they wanted to. And if Aunt Petunia had ever been to Diagon Alley, it was unlikely that she'd remember the location, and she wouldn't be able to access it by herself. No. He was safe now. All that remained to be seen was whether he'd stay that way.

Harry tripped while he was running, scraping his knees and the palms of his hands on the uneven London pavement. As a child he cried more easily, and he made sure to think of all the people he'd lost as he ran into the pub. Tears and mucus streaming down his face, he dived under a table and sobbed loudly, curled up in a ball.

Chaos ensued. Chairs scraped, people tried to reach for Harry under the table, Tom shouted for calm, and Harry stayed put in his corner.

"They'll kill me, they'll kill me," he cried. "Don't tell them I'm here, *please!*"

Someone had the sense to summon the aurors to investigate who was trying to kill a child. Pity they didn't do the same thing when Voldemort tried to kill *him*.

Harry's perception of time was skewed, now that he was much younger. With nothing to do other than wait, and stare at the blood stains on his clothes from scraping his skin, he grew bored. But he didn't know who might be out there, and he didn't know if anyone would recognise him at a glance, so he remained where he was. Until he heard a familiar voice.

“Get outta the way, go on, official auror business!”

Did he really want Alastor Moody to know who he was? If an agent of Dumbledore found out about Harry being there, he'd only end up back with the Dursleys, with absolute hell to pay. The thought made a wave of fresh tears fall with hopelessness.

“Poor thing.” That was a woman's voice. He peeked out from behind his arms, crossed over his knees, and saw a somewhat friendly face. A monocle was tucked into a robe pocket. Was it really Amelia Bones? He buried his face again. “What happened to you, sweetheart?”

As far as Harry knew, she was unmarried. Susan Bones's aunt. Murdered by Death Eaters. She wasn't in the Order of the Phoenix, and she cared deeply about justice. She was a safe option.

“M' family,” he mumbled, raising his head a little. “Aunt. Uncle. Cousin.” He wiped his eyes with his sleeve to look even more pathetic. “I ran away. They'll be so angry. My uncle... H-he'll kill me! I don't want to go back.” He sobbed loudly again.

“What about your parents?” she asked kindly. Someone managed to shoo people away from the table, so their conversation was more private.

“T-they died,” he said. “Car crash. They were d-d-drunk?”

“Drunk?”

“Yeah.”

“Here's some chocolate,” she said, handing him a bar of Professor Lupin's favourite.

“I'm not allowed,” he said, shaking his head violently. “F-freaks aren't allowed chocolate.”

“What do you mean, 'freaks'?”

He shook his head again.

“You'll hate me, too,” he said quietly.

“I promise I won't,” Amelia said, still holding out the chocolate. Harry was feeling hungry, but it wasn't an unusual feeling for him at this age. He could cope for a bit longer.

“I make... weird things happen,” he admitted. “When t-they hurt me at school. Or when Aunt Tunia cuts my hair. It g-grows back. But my eyes are bad.” He wiped them again. “Just another way I'm a *f-freak*.”

“Problems with your eyes do *not* make you a freak,” she said. “Come with me. I *promise* that you will never have to return to the people who've hurt you.”

Harry wasn't supposed to know about magical oaths, and it would be unfair to ask her to take one when she might not be able to keep it.

“Okay,” he said softly. He kept his head low as he crawled out from under the table. She straightened up and tugged her robes back into place.

“How old are you, boy?” Moody asked, eyeing him from a distance.

“S-seven,” Harry said. Moody's mouth became pinched as he looked Harry up and down, and several people tutted, clearly agreeing that Harry was too small for his age. He probably looked closer to four or five, and that would undoubtedly be in his favour for once.

“What's your name?” another auror asked. A man with a mane of red hair: Rufus Scrimgeour. Three dead aurors in front of him.

Harry shook his head at the question.

“They'll find me,” he said quietly.

“They won't,” Amelia insisted. “We won't let them. Now come with us.” She held out her hand. With a wary look, Harry took it, wincing when his open wounds brushed her skin. “I'm sorry. We'll fix your hands soon. And your knees.”

“It's okay,” he muttered. “They'll get better in a few days.”

Scrimgeour walked out first, while Amelia dawdled to make sure that Harry ate some of the chocolate. When they got outside there was a car waiting for them. Had it been sized down and kept in Scrimgeour's pocket in case they needed it? But then he didn't know how long he'd been under the table, or how far they were from the Ministry of Magic.

He stared out the window as they drove along, thinking over some of the things his reaper had told him.

His first death had been hypothermia when he was left on the Dursleys' doorstep all night.

His second was when he didn't know how to get onto Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$, and was kidnapped, held for a ransom the Dursleys wouldn't pay, and murdered. The afterlife had influenced Molly Weasley to talk about the platform within Harry's hearing to fix that death.

His third death was the basilisk.

Number four was falling from his broomstick when Dementors decided to become spectators to a Quidditch match in his third year.

The fifth was at the end of his sixth year. He'd moved too soon and been blasted from the Astronomy Tower by one of the Death Eaters, landing beside Dumbledore's body. There was

no time for those Death Eaters to be punished for robbing Voldemort of his kill before Harry had been sent back with shock, to prevent him from moving sooner.

The last time was when an unknown cloaked Death Eater had regained consciousness after the battle and struck Harry down from behind.

He'd finished off the chocolate by the time they arrived at the Ministry through an entrance he'd never seen. It was obviously for people who didn't know about magic. He climbed out of the car, and hurried back to Amelia's side, still keeping his head down so his fringe would keep his scar hidden. He took her hand without prompting, and hoped it didn't look suspicious. But she just curled her fingers gently around his hand, keeping away from the scraped skin, and made no comment on his clinginess.

By keeping his head down he was also able to miss a lot of the magic happening around him, including the flying memos, the apparation points, and even the golden fountain. It saved him from having to look around and pretend to be surprised.

While he still didn't have glasses, some things just couldn't be blamed on bad vision.

"He's awfully quiet," Moody muttered.

"Probably thinks he's being kidnapped," Scrimgeour said.

"Quiet, both of you," Amelia snapped in a hushed voice. Harry heard every word, his right ear tilted in their direction, but kept his eyes on his feet and didn't speak.

They took the lifts to the DMLE. Harry hummed tunelessly so they'd think he couldn't hear the department name being announced. It wasn't until he was seated in a private room, with the aurors across from him, that he dared to look up.

"First of all," Amelia said, "we should explain something to you. You are *not* a freak. What you can do is magic."

"My uncle says there's no such thing as magic," Harry said.

"Well, there is, and we can all perform it," she said, drawing out her wand. Harry shrank back.

"Don't whip me!" he blurted out, feeling that childish fear coming back in full force. Amelia looked as though she'd been slapped.

"They hit you?" she said quietly. "No, no, I'm not going to do that. Watch this." She turned a quill on the desk into a kitten. Harry gasped, and hoped it didn't sound over the top. He couldn't help smiling as the kitten slipped on some parchment and nearly went nose-over-tail. He made a sad noise when Amelia turned the kitten back into a quill. "You see? We can do that, and you can too, when you go to school."

"I already go to school," he said. "They teach us how to write, and do sums, and where rain clouds come from." He rubbed his eyes. "I'm stupid, though. I can't see the board properly, or what I'm writing. It's all blurry."

“We can get your eyes checked for you,” Amelia said. “What's your name? We won't tell anyone who might put you in danger.”

Won't you, just? Harry thought bitterly. But he had no reason to mistrust her. And Scrimgeour had died refusing to reveal Harry's location. Moody was the unknown element, due to his friendship with Dumbledore.

“At home, they call me 'freak' and 'boy',” he said. “So I guess that's my name?”

All three flinched. Scrimgeour cleared his throat.

“You said that you go to school,” he said. “What do they call you there? What do your teachers call you?”

“Potter,” he said. “Sometimes they call me Harry, at the start, but when they get to know me they only call me 'Potter'.”

“Harry Potter,” Amelia murmured.

“Where in Merlin's name has he been all this time?” Scrimgeour said, eyes wide.

“With people who abuse him,” Moody said grimly.

“He's not going back there,” Amelia said. “We keep this secret for now. He doesn't need to be mobbed. We'll take him to Gringotts and see what help they can provide. His parents would never have left him with people who'd treat him like this.”

“No, Lily and James would never have done that,” Moody affirmed. “I don't know what their wills said, but there must've been someone other than Sirius Black who could've looked after him.”

“W-who are Lily and James?” Harry asked. “And Sirius Black?”

There was an awkward silence.

“You're too young for the whole story,” Scrimgeour said. “But Lily and James Potter were your parents.”

“And they certainly didn't die in a car crash,” Amelia said, clearly remembering Harry's words. He had hoped someone would. “But first, let me heal your hands and knees, and I'll patch up your clothes. They're far too big for you.”

“They're my cousin's,” Harry said. The chair he was sitting on was tall enough for him to swing his legs a bit, drawing attention to the shoes which were big enough to trip him up. And the saggy old socks which would've delighted Dobby, but didn't keep his feet warm, or his heels from chafing on the inside of the shoes.

“We'll buy you some new clothes as well,” Amelia said.

“But freaks don't get new... oh, sorry,” Harry said, wincing.

“Don't apologise for that,” she said, touching his shoulder. “Let's get you cleaned up, and all three of us will make sure that you *never* have to return to those people.”

He could've cried in relief if it didn't feel too good to be true.

Chapter End Notes

Well, the weird thing is that I'm proofreading this while watching a train travel program being narrated by Bill Nighy, who played Rufus Scrimgeour. Anyone else enjoy watching documentaries about trains? I like trains. So does my brother-in-law's father. We've had some bonding moments over trains.

Anyway, enough boasting about my sister having nice in-laws. I know not everyone is that lucky. Look at James Potter's in-laws.

Not sure how much bashing of various characters will happen, but I'll probably tag for that to be on the safe side. And don't worry! I have plans for where this story is headed. We might not even see much of Hermione yet. Who knows? The author doesn't. Oops.

Please review!

Chapter Three

Chapter Summary

It's time for a visit to Gringott's.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Harry's hands and knees were no longer sore, and he was in a different office, perched in a far more comfortable armchair. Tea had been delivered by a house elf, but it was still only the three adults, now all sitting as well, and exchanging looks while Harry sipped his tea.

“Dumbledore was supposed to place him,” Moody said. “Do you think someone kidnapped the boy and raised him, pretending to be his family?”

“The Muggles have their own child,” Scrimgeour said, his fingers steeped as he pretended that he wasn't studying Harry intensely. Moody was far less subtle. “But if they intended to use him as a slave, or wanted a second child but were spooked by his abilities...”

“Then they could have left him at an orphanage,” Amelia said. Harry nearly grimaced as he remembered the place where Voldemort lived as a child. He still found it hard to fathom that Tom Riddle wasn't placed with a family during the holidays, instead of being returned to the orphanage every year. Would it have been that difficult? He could have charmed any family into taking him in. It's not like *he* had blood wards apparently tying him to a particular location.

“So the question is, who are these people and why have they been looking after him?”

Moody snorted.

“You call that looking after?” he asked. “We need to get him to St Mungo's. There might be underlying damage they can take care of. But we'll need someone discreet.”

“And *neutral*,” Amelia said firmly, side-eyeing him. “I know you're a personal friend of his, but if Dumbledore was responsible for Harry being with such terrible people then...”

“Then?” he prompted.

She pursed her lips and then raised her wand.

“I, Amelia Bones, swear on my life and magic that Harry Potter will not be returned to the Dursley family,” she said. Scrimgeour nearly choked on his tea, and Harry gripped his cup

and saucer to avoid dropping them. Magic swirled around Amelia briefly, before settling again. “There. If he's forced back to an abusive household, I won't have to live with it.”

“Sweet Merlin, Bones,” Moody said, staring at her. “That was...”

“Were you planning to return him to those anti-magic *thugs*?” she asked crisply, unruffled by the vow she had made. “I'm disappointed in you, Alastor.”

“We may have no *choice*,” he hissed.

“There is *always* a choice to do the right thing by a child,” she said. “If either of you want to be responsible for my death, go ahead. *Betray this child's trust.*”

They all looked at Harry, who had finally finished his tea. He shakily placed the cup and saucer back on the coffee table and pulled his legs up to hug his knees.

“I don't want to be any trouble,” he said, lying through his teeth. If the Ministry had done their job the first time around, or even the *second* time around, so many wouldn't have died. He didn't mind troubling them at all. Though he didn't want Susan Bones's aunt to die for his sake. Not after she was so fair to him during his trial.

“I'll take him to Gringott's and find out if there's somewhere else for him to go,” Amelia said, standing up and brushing imaginary dust from her robes. “If there isn't, he will stay with me until a better situation is found.”

“Oh, for the love of... *fine* then,” Moody said. He raised his wand and made the same oath. With a bemused shake of his head, Scrimgeour followed suit. Tears slipped from Harry's eyes when he saw how willing they were to protect him. *Finally* some adults were ready to take responsibility for his safety. Now all he had to do to keep *them* safe was make sure that he never went near Number 4 Privet Drive again.

Good thing he didn't actually own anything which needed to be fetched from there. But he'd happily give them the address – and tell them all about the cupboard under the stairs – if it meant that his aunt and uncle faced justice. Pity Dudley was too young to be punished, but if he didn't reform then Harry had plenty of time to come up with a suitable punishment of his own.

“Come over here, Harry,” Amelia said. “I'll show you how to travel through fireplaces.”

“Through *what*?” Harry said, sounding suitably flabbergasted. “Won't we get burnt?”

She laughed, shaking her head.

“No, it's perfectly safe with Floo Powder,” she said.

This time, Harry made sure to inhale *before* stepping into the fireplace. He didn't want a repeat of his second year.

“Where are the others?” he asked Amelia as they walked through the back door of The Leaky Cauldron. She tapped the bricks of the wall, and he watched with an open mouth as the

archway formed in front of his eyes.

“This is Diagon Alley, the central shopping district of Muggle London,” she said, taking his hand again. “But we're going to the bank. Keep your head down and don't tell anyone your name unless I tell you to. Can you do that for me?”

“Yes, ma'am,” he said.

“Good boy.”

At Gringott's, Harry noticed the very formal greetings that Amelia Bones gave. He copied her, and received approving smiles; though where she curtsied, he bowed. He repeated 'May your fortune grow and your enemies diminish', his childish tongue stumbling over 'diminish'. But they seemed to appreciate the effort. Amelia squeezed his hand as they repeated the words to him, both hoping that the words would prove prophetic.

“We would like to see a manager in private, please,” she said.

“Very well, Madam Bones.”

Harry looked around in wonder, feeling more intimidated by the bank and the goblins now that he was much smaller than he'd ever been on a previous visit to Gringotts. He clutched Amelia's hand tightly as they were led behind the scenes. There were signs written in Gobbledegook, no doubt to ensure that thieves couldn't find their way around if they got this far unaccompanied. Unless, he supposed, the thief was a goblin.

They were left waiting in a room, with two guards watching them, until a manager joined them.

“Madam Bones, may your fortune grow and your enemies diminish,” he said.

“Thank you, Gornuk,” she replied. Harry recognised that name. “May your fortune grow and your enemies diminish.”

“What brings you to Gringott's today?”

“It is confidential. I wish to see the wills of James and Lily Potter.”

Gornuk's gaze focused on Harry.

“May your fortune grow and... and your enemies dim-im-im-ish,” Harry said.

“You are Harry Potter?”

“Yes, Mr Gornuk, sir.”

“May your fortune grow and your enemies diminish, Mr Potter. I will need to confirm your identity, of course. Anyone can fake a scar with a Glamour--”

“Scar?” Harry said. “You mean this one?” He shifted his fringe out of the way. Gornuk nodded.

“You received that as a baby,” he said.

“I hadn't told him that yet,” Amelia said. “Is there a way to confirm his identity without drawing any blood? He's had a trying time and I don't want to put him through any more pain.”

“It won't hurt much, Mr Potter,” Gornuk said, softening when Harry looked at him with wide, sorrowful eyes. “You can be brave for a moment, can't you? I will heal you again immediately.”

“Y-yes, sir,” Harry said. Was he laying it on a bit thick? He hoped not. Goblins were even more perceptive than aurors, and he was in a room with both. But neither seemed to notice anything out of the ordinary, as Gornuk snapped his fingers to create a small cut on the pad of Harry's thumb. After a few drops fell onto a specially-prepared piece of parchment, he healed the cut as promised. The parchment slowly filled with words in spindly, inky writing. It was upside down from Harry's perspective, and his vision still hadn't been corrected. Was someone going to remember that?

“It's nearly done,” Gornuk said.

“I don't think I can read it,” Harry said.

“Why not?”

“My eyes are bad.”

“Alastor and Rufus are tracking down a healer who knows how to keep silent,” Amelia said. “We don't want to have to remove or change anyone's memories of interacting with you if it can possibly be avoided.”

“You can *do* that?” Harry said. Amelia nodded. Then she put her monocle in place and leaned towards the desk as Gornuk made a copy of the results. He handed one to her, and Harry waited patiently for someone to speak.

“It's certainly you,” Gornuk said. “Harry James Potter, son of Lily and James, born July thirty-first, nineteen-eighty. Parents died Halloween the next year. Godfather... Sirius Black. Additional godparents Alice and Frank Longbottom--”

“Oh no,” Amelia murmured.

“What's wrong?” Harry asked, knowing full well what was wrong.

“They... are not well,” she said. “Their son is in the care of his grandmother instead. Perhaps you could go to them? I will write to Augusta Longbottom and make an appointment with her as soon as possible.”

“If I may continue,” Gornuk said grumpily.

“Of course. My apologies, Gornuk.”

“Very well. The wills have not been read to...” He trailed off. “Usually it would state that they have not been read to the person in question, but this says they have not been read at *all*.”

Amelia looked up sharply, and Harry tensed. He'd never heard his parents' wills; Sirius had only mentioned them in passing. The only times he'd inherited from anyone were from Dumbledore and Sirius, no one else. It was assumed that Harry inherited everything. But what else could they learn from the wills? What if they'd been wrong all this time? All six years?

“I think it's time that was remedied, don't you?” Amelia said. Gornuk nodded.

“They left copies with Gringott's as well as the Ministry of Magic,” he said. “And a good thing, too, if the Ministry has chosen not to have those wills read to anyone. Their wishes have been *completely* disregarded. Much as we do not get on with wizards, we do respect due process.”

“You don't like us?” Harry said. “You don't like m-me?”

Gornuk's face softened again. No matter how goblins felt about adult humans, he was at least more sympathetic towards a child than the Dursleys ever were to Harry.

“I have no ill will towards you, Mr Potter,” he said. “I'll send for the wills from our records office.”

“Thank you,” Amelia said.

“In the meantime, would you like some tea?”

“I'm full from the tea I had before, but thank you,” Harry said. He wasn't full, really, but the more pathetic he seemed, the better. And he also knew that eating too much after being regularly starved could make him sick.

Several minutes later the Potter wills were sitting in front of them.

“The good news is that there is no stipulation regarding who needs to be present, aside from you, Mr Potter,” Gornuk said. Harry waited for the bad news. “According to these labels, your father's was registered first, so we will read that one before your mother's.”

“No... bad news?” Harry said.

“We haven't read the wills yet. For your sake, I hope there is no bad news.”

“I should warn you in advance that the people Harry has been living with have abused him,” Amelia said. “I swore on my life and magic that he would not have to return to them.”

“A foolish thing to do without knowing his parents' wishes,” Gornuk grunted. “Typical, sentimental human nonsense.”

“His parents would never have wanted him to fear for his life at the age of seven,” she said.

“Fear for his... I see.” He opened James's will. “I will give you copies of these before you leave, in case they are sealed at the Ministry. Now, there is a trust vault for Mr Potter, three family properties including Potter Manor, and the main Potter vault when he reaches his majority. That means when you're grown up, Mr Potter.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“If anything happens to your father, you are to go to your mother. If anything happens to both of them, you are to go to Sirius Black.”

“He is *not* going to Azkaban,” Amelia muttered.

“Failing Mr Black, you are to go to Frank and Alice Longbottom. If *they* are also unable to take Mr Potter, then Remus Lupin is to have care of him, all expenses paid from the family vault.” He frowned. “Slightly unusual. Of course, the Lupin name is not an old family, and he is listed as single in the will, so perhaps the money is to supplement his income and pay for childcare.”

Harry knew exactly why Remus would need the money to look after him.

“There is a letter for Mr Lupin included with the will. We will send it to him as soon as possible.”

“Is it possible for you to summon him to Gringott's and hand him the letter in person?” Amelia asked. “I want to ensure that he knows how important discretion is in this matter. Harry must *not* be returned to the Dursleys, and I do not say this because my life is on the line.”

“I should say not,” Gornuk said, still reading the will. “James Potter has no remaining relatives, and he has specifically stated that his son is not to go to Petunia and Vernon Dursley, unless Mr Potter is visited regularly by a member of the magical community to ensure his well-being. It may be that Lily Potter's will says otherwise. As she died after James, her will would supersede his.”

Harry had never considered that. But then he'd never really considered his parents wills until his reaper told him how important it was to know what they said.

“As you have suggested, Madam Bones, we will summon Remus Lupin for a meeting,” Gornuk continued. “There are more specific figures and legacies, but those can be sorted later.”

“Is Albus Dumbledore mentioned?”

Gornuk scanned the document carefully.

“Only as a witness,” he said. Amelia's expression turned stony.

“He was the one to leave Harry with those... those *people*,” she said.

Gornuk pursed his lips as he rolled up James's will and opened Lily's.

“Yes, I could believe that of him,” he said. “Now, Lily Potter. The same guardians, same assets, more personal legacies. Albus Dumbledore witnessed this one as well. Her objection to Mr Potter staying with her sister is more... strongly-worded, shall we say? She states that while she doesn't want to deprive her son of knowing his family, they are not a family worth knowing, as he would soon see, and she expects that he will never want to live with them.”

“That's true,” Harry said.

“Legally, there is no reason for him to return,” Gornuk said. “If it was a matter of protection, a pair of Muggles could never stand up to any wizard or witch.”

Harry recalled Uncle Vernon's shotgun. He also recalled how easily Hagrid had dealt with that. A bullet may move much faster than the Killing Curse, but would his uncle have ever used a gun to defend Harry, or just his wife and son? He had died when he was eleven because they refused to pay ransom for him. No, Uncle Vernon's shotgun would never even come into play if Harry was the only one under threat.

“Excellent,” Amelia said. “Thank you for your help in this matter, Gornuk. Please let me know when you have made an appointment with Remus Lupin. I wish to meet with him myself. I will let you know what Augusta Longbottom says as well, if you wish.”

“I would very much like to know, Madam Bones.”

“Come along, Harry. It's high time you visited St Mungo's.”

Chapter End Notes

Might leave it there for now. But hey, we'll see Remus soon!

The reason the wills didn't state the identity of the secret keeper was because the wills were registered at the Ministry of Magic as well. Also, if the Potters were betrayed OBVIOUSLY the truth would be discovered soon after. Who would throw someone into Azkaban without a trial? Inconceivable. /s

silently rages for an hour

Please review! And happy Easter, all!

Chapter Four

Chapter Summary

Harry meets some people from his 'past' at St Mungo's.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

St Mungo's was as Harry remembered it: sterile and busy. At least with his short stature he wasn't as visible among all the people thronging around. Unfortunately, he also couldn't see where they were going, with all the billowing robes blocking most of his view. He held tight to Amelia's hand, now less as a touch-starved child and more so that he wouldn't get lost. What if it led to yet another untimely death? His reaper would be *pissed*.

Scrimgeour was waiting by a doorway for them. Harry had lost his bearings entirely, but assumed that they were going to an examination room. When they got there, he thought the waiting healer looked familiar, but couldn't immediately place why, trying to work it out as Scrimgeour cast a strong set of wards on the door and windows.

“Healer Tonks,” Amelia greeted.

Oh. It was Andromeda Tonks, nee Black. Sirius's cousin.

“I believe you have a special charge for me?” Healer Tonks said. When Harry peeked out at her from behind Amelia, she gasped. “James... no. *Harry*? Where have you--”

“He was left with unsuitable guardians,” Amelia said. “I believe there may be physical evidence to be found. Harry also has trouble with his vision.”

“Let's get you up on the bed, Harry,” Healer Tonks said. “I knew your father a little. He and one of my cousins were great friends.”

“Really?” Harry asked. Scrimgeour helped him get onto the hospital bed, and then stood guard by the pillows.

“Harry doesn't know much about his parents and the... situation they were in,” Amelia explained.

“I need everyone to be quiet while I conduct my examination,” Healer Tonks said. “Lie down for me, please, Harry. Auror Scrimgeour, if you could just move a few feet away. Thank you. This won't hurt at all, Harry. It's just a simple scan. If you do feel any pain or discomfort, let me know right away.”

“O-okay.” Harry was nervous now; not because of the scan, but because of his numerous stays in the hospital wing at Hogwarts. It was never from something simple like the cold; it was always an injury caused by someone trying to hurt or kill him, or even trying to protect him (Dobby).

It was awhile before anyone spoke again; but then, Harry's perception of time might have still been skewed, not to mention that his dislike of hospitals probably made time seem to drag more than it actually was. It was Healer Tonks who spoke first.

“My daughter attends Hogwarts,” she said. “She's fourteen. Her name is Nymphadora and she's in Hufflepuff house.”

“Hogwarts?” Harry said. “What's that?”

She nearly dropped her wand and stared at him.

“You don't know...”

“He didn't know about magic until today,” Amelia said softly. “And he thought that his parents were killed while driving drunk.”

Healer Tonks scowled.

“Who's been telling him these lies?” she demanded.

“Remember what I told you of the family he lives with?” Scrimgeour said.

“But... but he's *Harry Potter*.”

“I didn't know my name until I started school two years ago,” Harry volunteered. He carefully concealed his glee when he saw the angry looks all three adults wore upon hearing this information.

“You are *not* returning to them, and that's healer's orders,” Healer Tonks said. “Now, the trouble with your eyes is that you can't see things up close. Do you sit near the front of the classroom at your school?”

“Yes. My aunt and uncle tell the teachers I'm a trouble-maker, so they make sure I'm where they can see me.”

“No wonder you're having trouble. You'd see the board much better from further back. Your long sight is excellent.”

“If he could fly, he'd probably be a good Seeker,” Scrimgeour muttered with a small smile. Harry nearly laughed at the accurate prediction.

Though considering that one of his deaths was Quidditch related, and he certainly didn't want to draw more attention to himself, he'd have to truly consider whether he wanted to join the team of whichever house he was sorted into.

His reaper had told him that he'd need to study, as he wouldn't remember everything he'd learnt, except maybe some defensive skills. For Hermione's sake, and to keep his distance from Ron, Harry was prepared to become the best student possible. If he ended up in Ravenclaw house, he could even protect Luna, and maybe get private duelling lessons from Professor Flitwick.

"Right, I've made a prescription for Mr Potter," Healer Tonks said, tapping a sheet of parchment with her wand. "You can get that filled at the desk. I haven't added your name to it. It's not strictly necessary; it's mostly for filing. But here's a copy so that you won't need to give your name if you need another pair in future. I recommend the standard protective spells. When your magic has settled after puberty, come back here and we can cure your eyes properly."

"Y-you can do?" he spluttered. No one had ever told him *that* before. Though maybe at seventeen his magic still wasn't settled enough? But it still stung that he could have his vision permanently fixed and *no one thought to inform him*.

"It's magic," Healer Tonks said, smiling. "As for underlying injuries, you'll need a longer stay in hospital for that. Or any comfortable place where you can be supervised by medical staff. It will be at least an overnight stay. Once you are settled in new accommodations, we can make another appointment. The way you're going, you may be in for very bad arthritis some decades down the line. Some old breaks haven't healed properly."

"Old breaks?" Scrimgeour said. "He's *seven*."

"Yes," she said, her expression darkening. It reminded Harry of Bellatrix Lestrange, and he suppressed a shudder. "I'll send a full report to you, Madam Bones. Make as many copies as you need. I'll sneak one into his records here."

"I have a record here?" Harry asked.

"You were born at St Mungo's." Her eyes looked suspiciously damp. "I helped deliver you. I only wish we'd known where you were all these years. We looked, but no one knew where you were living. Except, obviously, whoever left you there. I've always known not to blindly trust Albus Dumbledore, but I never thought he could be so... *careless*." Her tone suggested that 'careless' was too kind a word. "Being in Slytherin really helps to open your eyes. Not that many of the students in that house are virtuous, either, but at least we're not mindlessly devoted to the notion of some Greater Good. Did you notice that he never actually states *what* that Greater Good is supposed to be? I read once that *Grindelwald* used that same expression." She shook her head fiercely. "The secret of your return to our world is safe with me, Mr Potter."

"Please call me Harry," he said. "Since you saw me as a baby, I guess you should."

She touched him on the shoulder.

"I hope your new glasses will make you see *everything* more clearly, Harry," she said.

Scrimgeour went ahead to get the prescription filled, since his longer legs gave him an advantage in speed, whereas Amelia and Harry followed at a more sedate pace. He jumped when a door opened nearby, and stared as two people emerged.

“Oh,” Amelia said, halting. Harry nearly ran into her. “Mrs Longbottom. I was intending to write to you today.”

Ah. He could just about make out that the sign over the door said JANUS THICKEY. It was Mrs Longbottom and Neville. He willingly went with Amelia as they met halfway. Neville was several inches taller than him.

“How old is your grandson now?” Amelia asked politely.

“He's seven,” Mrs Longbottom said. Harry felt Amelia's grip tighten as she recognised just how significantly Harry had been neglected to be not just shorter, but all around smaller than someone his own age.

“How are your son and daughter-in-law?”

“The same as always,” Mrs Longbottom said. “It hasn't been long, so we continue to hold out hope for a cure.”

“Yes. I can't imagine how hard it must be.”

“What can I do for you, Madam Bones?” she said, squeezing Neville's shoulder until he winced as she changed the subject. “You said you were going to write to me?”

“I would like to meet with you in private sometime very soon,” Amelia said. “At your earliest convenience, of course. It's a matter of some urgency.”

“I will check my schedule and owl you the times I'm available,” Mrs Longbottom said. “The Wizengamot is meeting in two weeks--”

“Sooner than that, I'm afraid.”

“Very well,” she said, nodding. She eyed Harry. “And who is this young man?”

“A friend of Susan's,” Amelia said. “He had an appointment, and I had spare time. I'm sure he'll be happy to spend time with your grandson as well.”

“We'll see about that. Now that it appears that Neville isn't a Squib,” both he and Neville cringed, “we've arranged some lessons for him.”

“I'm sure this one would benefit from private lessons as well, before Hogwarts,” Amelia said. “We had best be on our way. I do have to return to work, and we need to get H-- his glasses. I'll be waiting for your owl, Mrs Longbottom.”

“Good day, Madam Bones. Come, Neville. It's time to go home.”

Harry did give Neville a small wave, which the boy returned with a half-hearted smile. Then they left in the blink of an eye, and Amelia began leading him through the hospital again.

It was so nice to see clearly that Harry decided never to complain about wearing glasses again; although he'd still investigate getting his eyes fixed as soon as possible. He read the copies of his parents' wills, drinking in the samples of their handwriting and stroking their signatures with his thumb. The evidence that he was never meant to be placed with the Dursleys, except as an absolute last resort, made him angry. The evidence that Dumbledore knew all along made him even angrier. This was a man who should never have been put in charge of an entire school of children, when he clearly didn't care about their welfare. Regular visitors to keep the Dursleys in line would've made such a difference, as suggested in his father's will, and the headmaster didn't even do that much!

No matter how furious he was, Harry didn't dare crumple the paper. So he browsed through an old copy of The Daily Prophet which Amelia had summoned for him from the waiting area outside. An advertisement for furniture made him think of something.

"Where am I going to sleep tonight?" he asked. Amelia paused, set down her quill, and gave him her full attention. He was suddenly sure that he never wanted to be interrogated by her.

"I was thinking that you could stay with my niece and her parents," she said. "I am just writing to my brother now, as it happens. They have a spare child's bed for when Susan has friends to stay. I'll ask them to move it into the guest room so that I can be there to protect you. Susan is your age, as it happens. It would be nice for you to know someone before you go to Hogwarts. She has private lessons in Pureblood etiquette, since ours is an old family. So is yours. You could join one of her lessons and see if you like it, although the rules are slightly different for wizards. If you end up living with the Longbottoms, you may be able to share Neville's tutors."

"But his grandma seemed really... uh..."

"Strict, yes," Amelia said. "She's from the old school of child rearing, and she's never been the same since her son... You're too young for that story. Let's just say that you and Neville have had similarly bad luck in life so far. But if you live with someone else, you may be able to provide the respite he needs from his grandmother. Don't tell her I said that, though, will you?"

"No, of course not, Madam Bones."

"Oh." She looked surprised. "You can call me Amelia, dear. Or Auntie Amelia, like Susan does. I daresay you'll pick it up from her soon enough."

Harry nodded, feeling a little emotional himself. While he liked the thought of being closer to Neville, Augusta Longbottom was intimidating and, yes, too strict. Neville needed a gentler hand, something he was more likely to get from Remus. Or even Sirius.

If only Harry could do something about getting his godfather out of Azkaban. But he'd done so much today already that his young body felt tired. He curled up on the easy chair Amelia had transfigured for him and easily fell asleep.

Chapter End Notes

I suddenly remembered that children get tired when dragged from one place to another. I've witnessed enough meltdowns at shopping centres to know this, the poor things. I feel very protective of children.

Hope everyone had a good Easter, or whatever you do instead of celebrating Easter. Long weekend? Chocolate day? Whatever.

I read on the HP-Lexicon that the Longbottoms were likely tortured somewhere between 1984 and 1986, rather than in 1981. There's quite an interesting article explaining how they came to this heart-breaking conclusion.

Please review! I promise, Remus will make an appearance soon.

Chapter Five

Chapter Summary

Harry meets an old ally from his school days.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Harry was aware of being woken at the end of the work day, after a nap of a few hours. Amelia had ordered a portkey while he was asleep. She held a small suitcase in one hand, her wand tucked into a holster, and held out the portkey. Harry eyed the suitcase.

“I keep a few extra outfits at the office with me,” she explained. “In case I need to travel at a moment's notice and have no time to pack. Clothes for different climates. The case is much bigger on the inside than on the outside. Magic.” She winked. He grinned, remembering the first time he saw the inside of a magical tent, *and* Hermione's beaded purple bag. “Now touch the other end of this ruler. You won't be able to let go until we reach our destination, but you might feel steadier if you're holding it. Good. *Tempus fugit.*”

They disappeared from the Ministry. Harry was glad he hadn't had much to eat, since his body wasn't used to the weird ways of magical travel yet. It felt worse than the first time he'd taken a portkey, the summer before his fourth year. Amelia grabbed him as they landed, so at least he didn't fall on his arse this time.

“Amelia!”

“Gerald,” she said, far more calmly. “Thank you for providing us with shelter for the time being. I will ensure that our stay is as brief as possible.”

“Nonsense, you know you're always welcome,” he said, enveloping her in a hug. “You're Susan's favourite aunt.”

“I'm her only aunt,” she said, with a bittersweet smile. “You understand that this must be kept completely confidential? That I may need to ask you to take a vow of silence on the matter?”

“I will do anything necessary to ensure that you can keep your own vow,” he said seriously. “You have put your life on the line. I wouldn't be much of a brother if I did anything to jeopardise that, would I?”

“Then may I introduce Harry Potter,” Amelia said. Gerald nearly choked on air as he stared down at Harry, who solemnly held out his hand.

“H-hello, sir,” Harry said. Ugh, he hated how much taller the adults were when he was this age.

“Mr Potter,” Gerald said, shaking his hand. “How do you do?”

“Uh...”

“He needs asylum until a more suitable guardian can be arranged,” Amelia said. “I am looking into the matter, with the assistance of the goblins. I don't want Susan to know right away. I lied and told Augusta Longbottom that Harry is one of Susan's friends, but she doesn't know his identity yet. Whether or not she is in allegiance with Dumbledore will determine whether she is trustworthy.”

“What does Dumbledore have to do with it?” he asked.

“I'll explain later,” she replied. “In the meantime, Harry is very tired. Could your house elf arrange some food to be delivered to the guest room?”

“Of course. The second bed is already there. Do you have a change of clothes, Mr Potter?” Harry shook his head. “I might have some robes from when I was at Hogwarts. I'll see what I can find or resize. You know where the guest room is, Amelia.”

“I do. Come along, Harry. You can meet Susan tomorrow.”

Harry had never been to Susan's house, and it didn't feel right to stare around, so he kept his head down and focused on not tripping in Dudley's old shoes.

While Harry knew he had probably had equally comfortable sleeps, the bed soothed his sore, tired body, and the presence of a competent adult – who was willing to protect him – ensured a much nicer sleep than usual. He did wake for a short while after a confusing dream, but he'd endured much worse nightmares before. At least with the horcrux gone he wasn't going to accidentally dream about Voldemort. He mentally thanked his reaper for that.

He couldn't check the time when he woke up, and he didn't know the names of the house elves, so Harry knew he would have to venture downstairs when he realised that Amelia was gone. He got dressed into a set of child's robes which had been left out for him, and slipped on his old socks and shoes. Then he emerged from the guest room.

No one around. It was unnerving. But it was a large house, and if everyone else was already up then they were likely to be downstairs.

He found his way back to the entrance hall easily enough. He wandered around, sticking close to the doors in the hope of hearing someone. Towards the right side of the staircase, he heard a couple of voices. He stuck his ear right against the keyhole and strained to listen.

“...out last night? You brought work with you, and it must be something to do with that boy.”

“It is. I gathered files on everyone mentioned in the Potters' wills. That's why I had to leave in the middle of the night: to get more information.”

“Yes, but *what did you find?*”

Amelia sighed. Another woman's voice chimed in.

“There's something wrong, isn't there?” she asked. “Amelia?”

“Sirius Black never had a trial. I can't find any record of it. I wasn't the department head then. I have to speak with Mr Crouch as soon as possible. Black wasn't even questioned at the DMLE under Veritaserum. He was thrown into Azkaban *with no just cause.*”

Two adults gasped. Harry grinned.

“What are you going to do, Amelia?” Gerald asked.

“Aside from talking to Crouch? I have a few ideas...”

Harry pulled himself away, aware that his stomach could grumble any second. He didn't want to be caught eavesdropping; he knew that adults didn't like it when he had too much knowledge that they felt he wasn't entitled to. Especially when he was *very* entitled to know it. Much as he respected Amelia Bones, he knew that the Bones family would have strong connections to Dumbledore, and he hoped that it wouldn't compromise Sirius's release.

He headed to the opposite side of the house, figuring that the conversation would probably be held far away from wherever Susan and the house elves might be. Sure enough, he stumbled across the kitchen. One of the house elves showed him to the breakfast parlour. The furniture looked genuine, rather than the imitation Edwardian-Victorian-Stuart-whatever Aunt Petunia had. (History of England had never been Harry's strong suit. Of course, he'd had to dumb down his work so he wouldn't achieve higher grades than Dudley. By the time they learnt history, Harry had made it a habit to be an under-performing student. That was a habit he intended to break by the time he attended Hogwarts this time around.)

A breakfast of bacon, eggs, sausages, tomatoes, toast, and mushrooms was placed before him. His nose rejoiced, but his stomach would rebel if he ate too quickly. So he took small bites, sipping a glass of pumpkin juice every so often. A warming charm on the plate kept everything hot enough, without turning greasy or soggy. It was as good as any meal at Hogwarts, and much quieter and less stressful.

“Hello!”

He dropped his cutlery and reached for his non-existent wand while turning in his seat. He relaxed when he saw it was a young girl. Susan.

“Hi,” he said.

“Sorry, I didn't mean to scare you,” she said, wide-eyed.

“I was just thinking too much,” he said. “Have you had breakfast?”

“Yes, ages ago,” she said. “You’re the boy Auntie Amelia brought last night, aren’t you?”

“It would be weird if there was another one,” he said. She giggled. “I’m Harry.”

Her eyes widened further for a moment, but then she shook her head, seeming to dismiss the possibility that this small boy in front of her, eating alone in her house, could be The Boy Who Lived. She sat in the opposite chair, and a house elf brought up some more pumpkin juice.

“I’m Susan,” she said. “Are you staying with us for long?”

“Uh, I’m not sure yet. You don’t want me around, do you?”

“What? No! I mean, I have friends visiting tomorrow. That’s all.”

“Oh,” he said, relaxing.

“If Auntie’s rescued you, you might not want to meet lots of people at once. I didn’t want you to worry about that. They’re really nice, though. Mostly. But you don’t have to meet them if you don’t want. If you’re still here tomorrow, I mean.”

“Who’s coming?” he asked.

“Let’s see. Ernie Macmillan, Lavender Brown, Daphne Greengrass is coming for the first time, and Terry Boot. Sometimes another girl, Hannah Abbott, comes along. And Anthony Goldstein. There are others who’ll be going to Hogwarts at the same time as me, but they’re not all worth knowing. Some of them come from very Dark families.”

“Dark like skin colour?” Harry asked, feigning ignorance.

“No!” She looked shocked. “What would that matter? No, as in they’re from Slytherin House, mostly, and Slytherin was a bad man. They were all friends of...” She dropped her voice to a whisper. “You Know Who.”

“Who?” he said.

She looked surprised enough to faint. Harry kept eating his food, still making eye contact with her as he waited.

“Uh... you’ll find out,” she said. “Are you a Muggleborn?” He shrugged. “Oh. Maybe I shouldn’t say anything else.”

“Okay,” Harry said, accepting it easily. He probably shouldn’t have been leading her a dance like that, but it still stung that she never apologised for all the slights during their second and fourth years, when she’d believed the worst of him along with most of the school. At least Ernie and some others had apologised. He was only behaving himself for her aunt’s sake.

Susan eventually mumbled an excuse and left. A house elf appeared to take her cup. Harry had finished his meal by then, and thanked the house elf for the meal. It looked surprised to

hear thanks, and Harry wondered why so few wizards and witches found it near impossible to be polite to house elves and goblins. It was common bloody decency.

He was lingering in the entrance hall, not knowing quite what to do, when Susan's parents and Amelia left the room where they'd been conferring.

"Ah, Harry, did you have a nice breakfast?" Mrs Bones asked.

"Yes, thank you, ma'am," he said. "I met Susan. I didn't tell her my last name."

"Good," Amelia said. "I had an owl during breakfast. Remus Lupin is at Gringott's. I'll grab my things and we'll floo there straight away."

Harry didn't have anything to bring with him, so he waited by the fireplace, warming up. The house elves had taken his old clothes to be washed, so he was stuck with robes for the time being, and not much beneath them.

He floored after Amelia, giving Gerald and his wife a quick wave first, and tumbled out into a room at Gringott's. Gornuk was nearby, watching as Harry dusted himself off. Then Harry looked up and saw Amelia talking to a sandy-haired man with his back to them. Gornuk subtly indicated that Harry follow him. They exchanged the usual greetings in quiet voices.

"Madam Bones will no doubt extract a vow from Mr Lupin not to discuss you with anyone without her prior approval," Gornuk said. "I mean, without her say-so."

"Thank you, sir."

"Not at all, Mr Potter. We understand the seriousness of your situation. You are young enough to be innocent in our eyes, and you have shown respect towards us."

"I thanked a house elf this morning," Harry said. "Is that weird or normal?"

"It is, I am sorry to say, far from normal," Gornuk said. "But that is a strike against others, not against you. Now, do you require tea?"

"I only had breakfast a little while ago. Maybe half an hour ago?"

"Very well. I hope Madam Bones will arrive soon. Do you have any questions for me in the meantime?"

"Do wizards... a-and witches, of course... do we use pounds and pence?"

Gornuk looked almost pained at Harry's pretended lack of knowledge, but he was saved having to work out the politest way to answer when there was a knock at the door.

"Come in!" he called.

"Harry," Amelia said, walking in. "This is one of your father's oldest friends, Remus Lupin."

"Oh, Harry," Remus said, tears in his eyes. "It's been far too long."

Chapter End Notes

Sorry. `Twas getting a bit long there. But now Remus can have his own proper reunion with Harry, as the focus of the next chapter, instead of it being part of just another chapter.

Please review!

Chapter Six

Chapter Summary

Remus. My favourite werewolf.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

All Harry wanted to do was run into Remus's arms and hug his former professor. But he couldn't do that; not when he was acting the part of a shy, traumatised child who'd never met this man before, at least not since infancy. Had Harry met all of the Marauders when he was a child? He knew about the picture of him flying on the toy broomstick, but he was the focus of the photograph, no one else.

“Hello,” Harry said meekly. He scrambled to stand as though remembering his manners, but he didn't stray from the desk. He did keep eye contact with Remus, to remind the man of Lily.

Lily. He'd been shocked when he'd asked about his parents' destinies, to find out what they were supposed to have done. Names hadn't been mentioned, but Lily was supposed to have married her best friend, who was in a different Hogwarts house, and they were supposed to make great advances in the world of magic. Including a cure for lycanthropy, using a combination of runes, spellwork, and potions. Something which was prevented due to a fight, which would never have happened if there was no rivalry between the houses.

Did his mother have a best friend in Slytherin? It made the most sense, while also making no sense at all. She was a Muggleborn. How did she have a friend in the snake pit?

As for James, he was supposed to become a famous Quidditch player, and then use his fame to encourage people to fight against Voldemort. Harry felt ashamed that he hadn't used his fame in the same way. But it's not like he'd known how to!

Since James became obsessed with Lily – attracted by her repeated rejections, according to his reaper – and she eventually broke up with her best friend, they'd denied their destinies. They had never had the chance to correct them, not dying until it was too late. And now Remus would have no cure anytime soon, Harry was an orphan, and they'd both been miserable for six years.

“I saw you when you were a baby,” Remus said, his voice sounding choked. “Only once, for your first birthday. James and Lily took the risk... they wanted you to know your uncles.” He wiped away a tear. “Just in case anything happened. I can't believe that Sirius...” He exhaled, his breath shuddering. “He *doted* on you that day. All three of us went shopping, and he kept talking about all the things he'd buy for you when you were older. P-Peter tried to stop him from splashing out on a broomstick, but Sirius... he was impetuous. And I don't understand

why...” He took a minute to compose himself. Harry inched forward, glancing at Amelia. She was watching Remus with a calculating look. When she realised that Harry was staring at her, she smiled at him reassuringly.

“So you're my uncle?” Harry asked. “A real one? Uncle Vernon isn't nice to me. But... but you bought me presents, so you must be a real uncle.”

“They never bought you...?” Remus frowned. “Yes, of course we bought you presents. That's what people do when someone has a birthday. I even learnt how to make a cake! It was chocolate.” Of course it was. Harry smiled at that. Remus smiled back, encouraged. “You looked so funny with frosting smeared all over your mouth. It nearly went up your nose, but you didn't care. I have photos. If I'd known I was meeting you, I'd have brought them with me. I always wondered where you'd got to, but Professor Dumbledore told me you were safe.” His smile faded. “And I listened to him. He was kind to me, and I thought he knew what he was doing.”

“He went against the wishes of the parents,” Gornuk said.

“At the moment, you're the best option we have to take care of Harry,” Amelia said.

“M-me?” Remus spluttered.

“Among other legacies, if you were to be Harry's guardian there was a stipend set aside so you wouldn't have to spend any of your own money while carrying out the duties of a guardian,” she said, unfolding a piece of parchment. “You can see the instructions in James Potter's will, just here. He mentioned that Potter Manor is their first choice of location, rather than Godric's Hollow, and that there are large grounds bordered by a forest. And here is the letter which was included. You can see that it's addressed to you.”

“Perhaps you would care to sit down?” Gornuk said, indicating the chair beside Harry.

“Oh, uh, yes, thank you,” Remus said, approaching the desk. He sat down, and Harry perched back on the chair beside him. Amelia sat in the corner.

Remus opened the envelope, still holding the will in one hand, and read the letter. More tears spilled down his cheeks, and he sniffed from time to time. Amelia handed him a handkerchief. He thanked her quietly and wiped away the tears. When he finished the letter he bowed his head, swallowed twice, and then looked at Harry.

“Your parents were the kindest... they were so good to me,” he said. “I wish you'd known them.”

“Me too,” Harry whispered.

“I'll tell you everything I can remember about them. But... I know what James says in his letter, about why they trust me. But I've never looked after children. I, I don't have a job at the moment.”

“Why not?” Amelia asked.

He looked haunted. Or perhaps hunted.

“It's harder for... Muggleborns... to get work,” he said. “Purebloods usually get first preference.”

Harry knew that wasn't the reason, but it was still a good reason. It's not like Amelia was going to look up his marks from Hogwarts and question why such a smart man wasn't employed. Blood prejudice was not only a valid excuse, it could go unquestioned.

“How true,” Amelia said. “I'm sorry.”

“No, no, it's not your fault,” he said. “I'd be happy to look after Harry. They've,” he chuckled, “they've even given me instructions to take a few nights off a month for 'self care'. If I were to take over Harry's care, is there somewhere else he could stay? It would be nice for him to have more friends his own age who will be going to Hogwarts.”

“I don't have any friends,” Harry said. Remus winced.

“I know what that was like at your age,” he said.

“But you seem really nice!”

He laughed bitterly.

“Yes, well, some people don't consider that important,” he replied.

“I do,” Harry said stubbornly.

“Thank you.”

“Harry has met my niece,” Amelia said. “If we could be sure that she will keep quiet about his true identity, he can have a sleepover there. He's also met Neville Longbottom, though they weren't formally introduced.”

“Alice and Frank's boy? Of course, they'd be nearly the same age. Their due dates were very close. I remember Sirius taking bets on who'd go into labour first. Alastor Moody ended up winning, if I recall correctly. How that old bachelor got it right, I'll never know.”

“I'd like to see Neville again,” Harry said. He was determined to make sure that Neville had the confidence he needed this time around, as well as the friendship he should have had from the start. If the Longbottoms had never been attacked, Harry would've been brought up with Neville like brothers. Unless Dumbledore interfered there as well.

“I'll make sure that you do,” Remus said firmly. “Usually I'd baulk at accepting so much money to do something I'd gladly do for free. But if it means I spend more time with Harry, and can get him up to scratch before he starts Hogwarts, then I'll do it. For Harry. And because it's what my friends wanted. Do you know what state Potter Manor is in?” he said, addressing Gornuk. “It's been many years since I was last there.”

“I've made enquiries, and it's habitable,” Gornuk said.

“Harry will need new clothes, amongst other things,” Amelia said. “I have to return to work soon, but Alastor will accompany you while you make those purchases. Harry has access to his trust vault, doesn't he, Gornuk?”

“He does, Madam Bones. When going through the Potter accounts, we found that money was sent to the Dursleys for Mr Potter's care, although we cannot reveal who authorised that.” *Dumbledore, most likely*, Harry thought. “Clearly that money has not been spent on him. We will be chasing that up at the earliest opportunity. Our human employees deal with Muggles. They have already begun an investigation.”

“Good,” Remus said crisply.

“As Mr Potter's guardian, you will have to look after his key. The original key is not here, so we have cut a new one and adjusted the lock on the vault accordingly.” Gornuk's grin was malicious, and Harry felt no sympathy for whoever had the old key to the vault. Next time they tried to use it, they were in for a surprise. “We'll take you there before you go.”

“Have you ever been on a rollercoaster, Harry?” Remus asked.

Harry hoped his seven-year-old stomach could handle a journey to his family vault.

Shopping with Remus was fun. There were instructions in the letter to make sure that Remus got clothes befitting the guardian of a Potter child, so he couldn't stick to his usual tattered garments; and while Harry had grown indifferent to clothes shopping for himself, he enjoyed 'dressing up' his uncle. And they got the boring stuff out of the way first.

Now that Harry was determined to be an excellent student, he allowed his previous love of books to return. He'd used them to escape before, usually books Dudley was given but didn't want to read. This time he got to choose what to read, and some toys to buy. He was fairly indifferent to toys, not having any of his own growing up, but he grew excited when he saw toy broomsticks. He also found that at this age he was curling into a ball as he slept, so Remus recommended a soft toy to hold so that Harry wouldn't curl as much. It would save him from backache. So Harry bought a large, snowy white owl which reminded him of Hedwig. It would remind him to keep going, to do what he could about the horcruxes: because he knew what was at stake.

When they stopped for lunch, he changed into a new set of robes, and Moody promised to return the others to Amelia so she could send them back to her brother.

“You tired yet?” he asked.

“A bit,” Harry admitted. “But I've never gone shopping before, except to carry the shopping bags for Aunt Petunia. This is all new to me.”

He was still concerned that either Remus or Moody could decide that Dumbledore needed to know about Harry's escape from Privet Drive; so the more he told them about his mistreatment there, the less likely they were to tell. Not unless they wanted to feel guilty the

rest of their lives. He didn't want anyone to meddle in his one, last chance at a happier life than he'd had before. And he knew that Dumbledore loved nothing more than meddling.

“Do you have a favourite colour, Harry?” Remus asked. “We could use that to decorate your new bedroom.”

“No,” Harry said. “I’ve never had a favourite colour. Freaks aren't allowed to have favourite things, so... oh yeah. Sorry.”

“That's what they'd call him,” Moody said. “It's what they call people like us.”

“I'm glad I'm not a freak,” Harry said softly, looking up from beneath his eyelashes to the two men. Both of them had to look away. Were they feeling ashamed of their previous belief in Albus Dumbledore? He sincerely hoped so. It was about time he had adults he could rely on.

By mid-afternoon he was yawning as they walked, his annoyingly weak seven-year-old body tiring already. They returned to Gringott's, where the goblins would then take them to Potter Manor. Harry shook Moody's hand before he left.

“I'm sure Bones will be in touch with you later,” Moody told Remus.

“I expect so,” Remus said. “Thank you for all your help.”

“Look after him.”

“I will.”

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Potter Manor.

If anyone knows whether there's a blueprint, or any kind of details about the place, please let me know. Otherwise I'll just end up guessing and using vague descriptions, like with Susan's house. Ooh, do you think they had horses? I want horses.

Please review!

Chapter Seven

Chapter Summary

Potter Manor is bigger than Harry was expecting. Eat your heart out, Petunia.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

There was nothing to see at first. A goblin handed a piece of parchment to Harry, and he realised that the house – *manor* – was under a Fidelius charm. *Potter Manor is in Dorsetshire, two miles north of Weymouth.* He looked up and gasped. He barely noticed Remus taking the parchment from him; he was too busy staring at the magnificent building taking shape before him. He owned a house *this big*? It looked like a palace!

The manor was trimmed with large slabs of red stone, and the outside walls were a faded lemon colour. He stopped counting the front windows after twenty. The gates and fence which had appeared before them were a bit rusty; one of the goblins had to wear gloves to open the gates. He gestured for Harry to go first. As soon as Harry passed through the gates he felt magic wash over him, followed by an enormous sense of safety. He turned back to grin at Remus, who followed him through. He also looked more relaxed.

The goblins left after that, before Harry could offer to serve them tea. Even if there were no house elves here, he could make it himself. Oh, but what if there were no supplies? He didn't know the county at all. Where were the shops? They'd come straight here, and the manor seemed isolated.

“Let's go inside and find out what needs to be done,” Remus said, a gentle hand on Harry's shoulder.

“Okay, Uncle Remus,” Harry said. He noticed Remus smile, misty-eyed, out of the corner of his eye, but pretended not to see it. The path from the gate to the house was made of cobbled stone, but they didn't feel cobbled. Obviously the cobbled look was the desired aesthetic, but a spell made it feel smooth. Even in his old shoes he doubted he would've tripped.

When he reached the front door he knocked politely, out of sheer habit. Remus chuckled. Harry blushed and then turned the giant knob on the door. They both had to push to get it open. It creaked loudly, which was probably a good security measure to have, though the squeak of the hinges made him wince. They both stumbled a little when the door gave way.

It was eerie. The manor was so still, yet not a speck of dust could be seen, not even in the air as sunlight streamed through the windows. Their steps echoed, Harry's hand clutching Remus's left hand as he felt his heart pounding somewhere in the vicinity of his throat.

“Who are you?”

Remus pushed Harry behind him immediately, wand already at hand. He only stopped growling when the house elf gasped.

“Master Remus? Is that you?”

Remus relaxed.

“Mintzi,” he said. “It's good to see you again. I didn't know you stayed here after James's parents died. Is Biddy here as well?”

Her ears drooped a little.

“Biddy died six years ago,” she said. “She hoped to look after Master Harry, but she never saw him, and we don't know where he...” Harry peered around Remus and she trailed off. “Oh. Oh, it... it's Master Harry! It is, it is!”

“Hello,” he said. “Is your name Mintzi?”

“Yes, Master Harry,” she said, nodding enthusiastically.

“You live here by yourself?”

She nodded again.

“But I do not stay here all the time,” she said. “I go to your parent's house and make sure it is still preserved the way it... it was, when your parents...” She bowed her head. “Oh, if *only* they'd taken me with them, or Biddy. We would have looked after you. We could have kept you safe. All of you. But they... they wanted to keep *us* safe.” She wailed. The anguished sound brought tears to Harry's eyes. “Master James *ordered* us to stay away. We couldn't help! I'm so sorry, Master Harry. I'm so sorry.”

Harry couldn't stand to see her cry, and ran forward to catch her in a hug.

“Please don't cry,” he begged. “It's not your fault. He made you stay away.”

“We should have *done* something,” she wept. “But the Fidelius Charm...”

“I know,” Harry said. It didn't matter whether he knew or not; it was something people said to comfort others, so his knowledge wouldn't be questioned. It would be assumed that he was just trying to help, and he was perfectly fine with Remus making that assumption.

“Mintzi,” Remus said gently, “Harry and I have come here to live. We're staying here.”

She jumped back with another, more dramatic gasp, and smiled widely.

“Really?” she said.

“Yes.”

“And you will get another elf to help?”

“I don't know how to go about that, so any advice you have would be much appreciated.”

“Oh, I will do *anything* you need, Master Remus. Oh, Master Harry, you shouldn't be holding me. Go back to your uncle. The drawing room is through there.” She pointed to a door which looked exactly the same as all the other inside doors. “I will bring tea and then we will talk about why it has taken so long for you to come here. Did something happen to Master Sirius?”

“Uh,” Remus blanched, “I'll tell you more later, Mintzi. But tea would be lovely.”

The furniture in the drawing room was made of dark brown wood and the upholstery matched the light blue walls perfectly. The curtains drew themselves back, letting the afternoon sun shine through. The glass panels were mostly plain, but at the top was a small section of stained glass showing the Potter crest. The coffee table was the same wood as the rest of the furniture, and there was a piano against one wall. It wasn't the fancy types Harry had seen before; it was flat at the back so it could sit against the wall. There was a shelf beside it with books of – presumably – sheet music. The piano stool had the same upholstery as the couch and armchairs, and it looked as plump as the padding on everything else. He'd never studied the piano; maybe that was something he could learn to keep himself occupied? Unless Remus sent him to a Muggle school for the next four years, which Harry doubted. It seemed he would be forced into a Pureblood education whether he wanted one or not.

Mintzi appeared with the tea tray. She made tea for Remus, who remarked that she'd remembered how he liked it, and then waited for Harry's instructions.

“Oh, uh, I don't know,” Harry said. “I've never had tea before. My aunt wouldn't let me.”

“What?” Mintzi said. “You... you have never had *tea*?”

“I'll explain later,” Remus said firmly. “Harry, your mother always liked milk and half a teaspoon of sugar, and your father liked three lumps of sugar or some honey, depending on the time of day. If it was after work, he'd have honey. Before work, sugar. Ever since school he was like that. Sugar to wake up, honey to go to sleep.” He smiled wistfully. “But try it on its own first. At your age you may not even like it.”

Harry nodded. He tried some tea, and found it too bitter. Some milk helped, but he declined sugar. He still wasn't used to being allowed sweet things at this age, and he knew that the first time he tried tea with sugar he found it almost too sweet, in the original timeline. In this way, he was clearly more like his mother than his father. He didn't mind that.

“Where have you been?” Mintzi asked, after they finished their first cups of tea. She nudged a plate of shortbread towards them. Harry decided to let Remus tell the story, as the adult, and nibbled on the rich, buttery shortbread. Remus said merely that Harry had been given to other people, against the wishes of his parents, and that the situation was now being rectified.

“There's another property, but it's too far away,” he said. “The last place we want Harry to be right now is Scotland. Apparently it's fairly close to Hogwarts, and with Dumbledore there...”

"I see," Mintzi said. "He shall not get close to Master Harry. Either of you can call on me if you're in trouble and I will come right away."

"Do all house elves talk so well?" Harry asked.

"We spend so much time looking after the babies that we *have* to speak well, or the babies won't learn as they grow up," Mintzi said. That made a lot of sense, which made Harry wonder why other Pureblood families didn't train their house elves the same way. No doubt classism was to blame.

"But not everyone is as smart as the House of Potter," Remus said, ruffling Harry's hair. "Mintzi, where will we be sleeping? Will Harry have James's old room?"

"Yes," she said. "And you shall have the master bedroom across the hall from him."

"Oh, uh, is that necessary?" Remus said. "I'm not head of the household."

"Neither is Master Harry until he comes of age," she said, crossing her arms. "And you *are* the head of the household, for now."

"Right." Remus looked conflicted, but he didn't argue.

Mintzi led them upstairs, and Harry wondered – not for the first time – how someone would go if they were stuck in a wheelchair. He'd never heard of a witch or wizard being stuck in a wheelchair, and no doubt if magical wheelchairs existed they'd be able to levitate. But it still seemed odd, having seen as more ramps were added to Muggle buildings, not to accommodate people who couldn't use stairs.

They went left at the top of the stairs, and on the right was a set of double doors, light blue with white accents.

"The master suite is through there," Mintzi said.

"Ah yes, I remember now," Remus said. "We pranked the Potters once. I kept guard while Peter distracted them and James and Sirius... But I'm not going to give you any ideas, Harry, so perhaps we should find your room instead. You must be getting tired. I think you should have a nap before dinner. Mintzi can put our shopping away."

"That is one of my *favourite* things to do," she declared.

Sure enough, the door opposite to the master suite led to a room... which didn't have a bed. There were bookshelves and a desk, a carpet in the middle of the wooden floor, and a pair of large trunks in the corner.

"This is your study," Mintzi explained. She led him to a door on the right, beside a bookshelf. "In here is the bathroom." It was done in creams and golds, and the bath tub was *enormous*. "And now," she led him to the other door in the study, "here is your bedroom. I can change the sheets now, if you like."

Harry was staring around the room, bedecked in eye-watering Gryffindor colours, and almost missed what Mintzi said.

“Uh, no, it's okay,” he said. Would the sheets still smell like his father? “I *am* tired, though.”

“If you need a book to sleep, there are some on the shelf over here, but there are books more appropriate for your age in one of the trunks.”

“We bought some today,” Remus said, placing Harry's shrunken shopping bags on the floor. He re-sized them with a wave of his wand. “Harry, will you be alright in here now?”

“Yes, Uncle Remus. I'll go straight to bed. Can you make sure I'm awake before dinner?”

“Of course. The unpacking can wait until later. Mintzi, could you help me unpack?”

They left the room. Harry waited until he heard the door to the hallway close, and then removed his shoes. He sneaked through the study and pressed his ear to the door. He heard Remus mutter the Muffliato charm, probably out of habit, and sighed. He wouldn't be able to eavesdrop this time.

But chances are that he was telling Mintzi things Harry already knew. So he returned to the bedroom, shoved the covers down the bed, and climbed in. Whether or not the bed smelled like his father was irrelevant, since Harry wouldn't know. He sighed again as he removed his glasses, set them on the bedside table, and then fell into a restless sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Boy, I'm feeling tired all the time. No wonder Harry keeps going to sleep. Might be anxiety and depression. Could be sleep apnoea. Maybe it's Maybelline.

Anyway. From Sunday onwards there are big changes happening in my life, as well as a sleep study next Thursday, so I'll try to make sure that I post earlier in the day since I probably won't have my laptop with me. Even if I do, I don't know if I can connect to the hospital wi-fi, or if all the electrodes attached to my head will interfere with the signal. Joy of joys.

Enough waffling. Please review! And yes, Remus is recapping stuff we already know, so eavesdropping would've been redundant.

Chapter Eight

Chapter Summary

There's no time for a lie-in when Mintzi means business.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Harry was disoriented when he woke up, even after he put his glasses on. He thought he was in the Gryffindor dormitories for a moment. But he snapped out of it when a house elf popped into the room right beside him.

“Good morning, Master Harry!” she chirped.

“Uh, good morning... Mintzi,” he said. “Sorry. I've just woken up.”

“I know,” she said. “What would you like for breakfast?”

Harry thought as quickly as his sleepy brain would allow.

“Toast... marmalade...”

“You're a growing boy,” she said, her eyes narrowing. “You need more than that. I shall do a full English breakfast. You wait here.”

Harry wondered why she'd asked his opinion if she had other plans for him. Was it a test, to see if he was still in the mindset he had at the Dursleys? He'd never met a house elf like her before, so it was hard to know. He still wouldn't have minded some marmalade, though. He remembered liking it a lot when he had a full day of work ahead of him. Not that Aunt Petunia would let him have much, but she allowed him a *little* when she saw that the sugar gave him enough energy to do the gardening and cleaning. Perhaps Mintzi didn't have any marmalade?

Which reminded him: he and Remus had to find out whether there were any stores nearby, and whether they were living near Muggles or witches and wizards. For secrecy's sake, it was better if they were near Muggles.

He'd pushed his covers back, and was studying the old posters on the wall, when Mintzi popped back into the room with a full tray. She cast a charm to ensure that the heavily laden tray hovered above Harry's lap, instead of resting fully on his legs. Then she left him to it, saying that Master Remus was now awake. No doubt woken by the smell of freshly-cooked bacon and sausages.

Harry tucked in with a hearty appetite, now that the sleep was wearing off. What would they get up to today? Would they explore the rest of the manor? The grounds? Go for a walk outside and see the sights? Visit the dreaded Ministry of Magic? Maybe see Neville instead?

When he was done he left the tray on the bedside table (to keep the sheets clean), and dug around in the dresser drawers for fresh clothes to wear. There was a shoe rack, which had some of his father's old shoes as well as the new ones they'd bought. He decided it was probably better to break in a new pair, although in his experience magical shoes were already comfortable and didn't need to be worn in at all. Besides, he should revel in having new clothes, not old ones, now that he finally had new things. He'd *never* had new things at this age, except his glasses and underwear.

He wondered whether Aunt Petunia hated spending money on him because she couldn't take in old underwear, or could've done it but hated the thought of putting in any effort just for Harry. It was a wonder she even gave Harry Dudley's old things, in case he 'tainted' stuff she'd spent money on in the first place for her precious Duddiekins.

Not that Harry was bitter.

He had a wash, got dressed into his selected clothes, and returned to the bedroom to find that the tray was gone. He noticed that some of his father's books from the bedroom had been moved to make way for Harry's. Well, he had plenty of time to look over his father's things, including the two trunks in the study. Remus would no doubt like to look through them as well. And maybe his grandparents had left things as well, like letters, photographs... He'd definitely have a good look around the first chance he got.

He brushed his teeth quickly. House elves could apparate quite a distance, so that didn't indicate that there were shops close by where Mintzi could get toothpaste and toothbrushes. In fact, he had no idea how she'd got these things.

He went to the master suite to find Remus, who likely got the breakfast-in-bed treatment as well.

His uncle was wolfing down sausages – Harry grinned at the pun – when Harry found the bedroom on the right. He looked up and smiled at Harry.

“I hope you had a good night's sleep,” he said.

“Yes, Uncle Remus. I wasn't expecting Mintzi to just appear like that, you know?”

“Oh, I'm aware,” Remus said. “I'm sorry, I should have warned you. It gave me quite a shock the first time she did it, when I visited here Christmas... oh, what year was it? Second or third year, I think. My parents were going to be away, so James insisted I come here instead of staying at the castle. Still, it was better to be woken by Mintzi than one of your father's pranks. Although...” His smile fell away. “I'd give anything for one last prank, in hindsight. It's hard, when the people you care about most have all gone away.”

“Why are there scars on you?” Harry asked, trying to pull Remus out of his darkening thoughts.

“Scars?” Remus looked down at his bare chest. Harry could see that he was wearing sleep pants, but no shirt. “Oh. Uh, I get injured a lot. Less these days. Boys rough house with each other, don't you know?”

“I had scars from my uncle's belt, until Healer Tonks healed them,” Harry said conversationally, jumping to perch on the edge of the bed. “No one's hurt you, have they?”

“No! No, my parents were very kind to me.”

“Where are they?” Harry asked. He'd never heard about Remus's parents before. Had they died in the war as well? He hoped he hadn't just put his foot in it.

“They're getting on a bit,” Remus said. “They weren't as young as your parents were when they had you. I was a... surprise. To say the least. They're Muggles, so they didn't know about magic. When I... when I first performed magic, it was even more of a surprise. But no, they were – *are* – lovely people. I hope you have the chance to meet them.”

“Me too,” Harry said, bouncing a little on the bed as the food kicked in and energised him. “But you didn't say where they *are*.”

“Devonshire. It's the next county over. It will be nice to live near them.”

“Why can't they come and live here?” Harry asked.

Remus shook his head with a sad smile.

“They need extra care we just can't provide,” he said. “But maybe we could get them to visit for the day. Sometime.”

“So what are we doing today?” Harry was going to use a child's inquisitive nature to get as much information from people as he could this time around, while they could still write it off as sheer curiosity. He'd lost that curiosity early in life, but no one needed to know that. And finding out about magic was as good an excuse as any to spark that curiosity again.

“I think we should get to know the area while the weather's still good,” Remus said. “And maybe look around the grounds. We can save exploring the manor until a rainy day.”

Harry acknowledged the wisdom in this. Mintzi came to collect the tray, so Harry headed back to his father's study to allow Remus to get ready. He studied the trunks, wondering whether he'd need magic to open them. One had his father's initials on it: his school trunk? The other was a metal steam trunk, with faded initials. It must have belonged to one of his ancestors.

He then turned his attention to the shelves. There were many books he'd never heard of; how many of them were written by Muggles, if any? Or by people who'd lived as Muggles, but actually been magical all along?

“Harry!”

He hurried out to the hallway. Remus smiled down at him.

"Mintzi has given me a map," he said, holding it out. Harry bit his tongue to stop himself from asking if it was the Marauder's Map; although according to his reaper, he wouldn't be able to ask that anyway. "There's a Muggle village not far from here. We didn't notice it yesterday because we were facing the house. There's a nice view of the ocean from the study window, I see."

"I've never been to the ocean," Harry said. "Can we go to the beach?"

"You'll need swimming clothes, but we can easily fix that. If there are any tools to make sand castles, we'll get those as well. Have you ever made a sand castle?" Harry shook his head. He'd never had the opportunity in his other life, either. "It's lots of fun."

"Let's go, then," Harry said, taking his free hand. Remus gave him another soft look.

Following Mintzi's directions, they travelled over the hilltop in a southerly direction, and could see a village of sorts in the distance. There were farms further out, and Harry saw animals dotting the landscape. If they went even further south, they would reach the seaside town of Weymouth, but Remus said that Harry would have to build up more strength before they attempted to hike as far as two miles.

"I wonder if they get milk fresh from the dairy?" he said.

"What about fresh eggs?" Harry said. "Aunt Petunia said she couldn't trust me with hens, or she would've bought some so we could have fresh eggs. But if they wanted chicken for dinner, I'd have to pluck the chickens, and I couldn't do that. It's mean to hurt chickens."

"I'm not sure whether we can get any hens, but maybe a different pet," Remus said. "I use the Royal Mail when I want to correspond with... uh, write to my parents. I don't keep in contact with many others. But if you make friends with Neville, and some other children your age, we could get an owl so you can write to them."

"Oh, *that's* why there was an owl shop in Dia... what was it again?"

"Diagon Alley. Yes, we use owls to send mail. Like carrier pigeons, only haughtier."

Harry laughed.

"Did you know, Harry, that Dorset is famous for its fossils?" Remus said.

"Fossils?"

"Yes. Many dinosaur bones have been found here."

"We learnt about dinosaurs at school! You mean there were dinosaurs here hundreds of years ago?"

"*Millions* of years ago."

"Wow. That's *wicked*."

“We could go to some places along the shoreline and have a look. There are bound to be people looking for more fossils along the beaches, especially at Lyme. But don't worry, I haven't forgotten that you want to go to a *real* beach. I'll make sure that happens soon. Perhaps we could even take a picnic?”

“I've always wanted to go on a picnic,” Harry declared happily, squeezing Remus's hand.

“I'll make sure you do,” Remus said. “Mintzi said to get whatever food we like so she knows what to order from the shop in future.”

“Marmalade,” Harry said with a decisive nod.

“Have you ever read the Paddington Bear stories?”

“No, Uncle Remus.”

“Well, remind me to read some to you later,” he said. “I think you'll like them.”

Chapter End Notes

I love the Paddington movies so freaking much. And that song and dance number in the end credits of the second film? Best. Movie. Scene. EVER.

Okay, so I'm trying to do some research into Dorset county, but when I try to find distances between places I get conflicting numbers. So let's just pretend that I'm writing something accurate to Dorset of 1987, m'kay?

Please review! And sorry if I haven't replied to your comments yet, but AO3 was having server problems this morning. I'll get onto it once I'm sure it'll work.

Chapter Nine

Chapter Summary

Now for some time skips! It's about time. (Pun intended.)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

There was a small grocery store with essential supplies, and some not-so-essential. Remus picked up marmalade for Harry, chocolate and cocoa powder for himself, and a colouring book and pencils for Harry. The shops didn't have anything for the beach, though, since there were so many closer to the coast with the right supplies. Remus got some bus timetables so they wouldn't have to walk everywhere.

"I can't drive, and there's nowhere to park a car at the manor," he explained to Harry. "We could learn how to ride bicycles, I suppose, but I don't want you to tire yourself out getting to the beach in the first place."

Remus was disappointed that the village didn't have a bookshop, or even a library.

"We'll have to make do with what we've already got," he said. "At least Potter Manor has a great collection of books on magic. That will help when you start preparing for Hogwarts. Personally, I don't think you need to start too soon. We'll see what your friends are learning. Would you like to go back to the kind of school you were at before?"

"Will it help when I get to my new school?" Harry asked. "The Hog one?"

"You'll mainly need to know how to read and write, how to compose an essay... uh, write an essay, and maths will help when you're buying things, of course. Learning how to keep track of all the money you spend and save, making sure that you earn enough from your job and that no one tries to underpay you. That sort of thing."

"Do I have to do that *now*?"

"No, no, that's years away for you, Harry. Come on. By the time we get back, Mintzi will be ready to make lunch. Then we can look over the grounds afterwards. Would you like that?"

"Yeah!"

Surprisingly, it was a few days before the rain hit. Remus and Harry bought an owl to keep in touch with Amelia Bones, as well as getting a subscription to *The Daily Prophet*. Harry

could have sworn he felt hives developing when he saw the newspaper, but he hid his revulsion for the dirty rag of so-called journalism. He supposed that if he couldn't hide it, and someone asked why he hated a newspaper he'd never read, he could say that he feared being hit with it. Uncle Vernon had done that before, and referring to the Dursleys was becoming a good way to get people to stop looking further into his reactions.

Besides, if it wasn't for that paper, would Voldemort have had the chance to rise again?

Harry had been giving a lot of thought to actions and consequences; he imagined that most people who time-travelled considered these things. He, of course, had virtually carte blanche to get rid of Tom Riddle and his stain on the world, so he'd thought back over how he'd managed to get back into power in the first place. Aside from the existence of the horcruxes, it all led back to one thing: Sirius breaking out of jail. And why did he break out of jail? Because he saw the picture of Peter Pettigrew with the Weasleys on the front of *The Daily Prophet* and realised the danger Harry was in (and had been for two years already). If Sirius never saw the newspaper, he would have stayed in Azkaban, and Peter Pettigrew wouldn't have had to run away and find Voldemort to protect him.

Not that Harry wanted Sirius to stay in Azkaban. But what could he do? He wasn't supposed to know anything about the world of magic, or about his parents' deaths. The contents of the wills didn't prove Sirius's innocence. At the age of seven, Harry had no reason to ask about the justice system of wizarding Britain, or about truth serum or even Azkaban. If he told anyone that he'd travelled through time – sort of – and was believed, then they'd look at him differently and all his subtle manipulations so far would be for nought.

What was he supposed to do?

Prove Pettigrew is alive, whispered a small voice in his brain. Was it his reaper?

Did it matter? It was a bloody good idea, if he could pull it off.

“Uncle Remus, could we invite Neville over?” Harry asked. “I think he'd like a break from his grandmother. She seemed... not mean, but not really... I don't know, *loving*?”

“She's certainly a tough, stubborn old woman,” Remus said. “Don't tell her I said that. What makes you think she isn't loving towards Neville?”

“She said that he wasn't a... squid?”

“Do you mean 'squib'?”

“Yeah. I think that's what she said. And she squeezed his shoulder really hard. He winced. It just seemed like she didn't care much about him. I know what that's like, so maybe that's why I saw it? Or I could be wrong,” he hurried to say. But he'd planted the seed. Remus looked thoughtful.

“Madam Bones was going to talk to her,” he said. “I'll owl her and find out the situation. Her niece could also come along, unless you only want to see Neville?”

“Susan already has friends,” Harry said with a shrug. “If Neville doesn't, it'd be nice to be his.”

“You're a good soul, Harry. I'll write to Madam Bones. The weather report didn't predict any storms, so Archer should be safe to fly to London.”

“Have... have I been reported missing?”

“I'll ask her that, too. Someone's bound to notice that you're not around anymore. Whether your aunt and uncle make up a good enough excuse for your absence could determine if your neighbours call the police.”

“I don't think anyone there will miss me,” he said. How often did Arabella Figg report to Albus Dumbledore? Could she get news to him immediately, or did she have to wait for him to contact her first? If anyone knew that something was wrong, it would be her; but she likely wouldn't call the police unless she thought that they could do something. No; she'd wait for instructions from the headmaster first.

It was out of Harry's hands for now. Amelia would know more, and would hopefully be willing to tell Harry's new guardian... preferably within earshot.

Harry was reading by the fireplace in the drawing room, a book about an enchanted castle. It was suspiciously similar to Hogwarts, with the disadvantage of not having a map that students could take with them to find their way around. He'd always lamented that they learn the Point-Me spell so much later on, instead of on the train to Hogwarts. It would've been handy getting to classes on time. So would signage in the halls.

He noticed the flames change in his peripheral vision and glanced over. He immediately saw that it was a floo message.

How would a Muggle-raised seven year old, new to the world of magic, react to such a thing?

“What the...” He left the armchair. He yelped when he saw Amelia's head. “Uncle Remus, Uncle Remus! There's a head on fire! We have to get water! Uncle Remus?” He ran to the door while he was shouting, knowing that Remus was in the study. The man was already flinging open the door by the time Harry skidded to a stop on the marble floor. “There's a head in the fireplace! We need water, now! Mintzi, we need water!”

“Master Harry?” she said, appearing before him.

“It's fine, Mintzi,” Remus said. Harry felt bad for frazzling him, but, well... realism. “It sounds like there's a floo call and Harry wasn't expecting it.”

“I thought we walked through the fireplaces?” Harry said, trotting after Remus, back into the drawing room.

“I'm sorry for causing a panic,” Amelia said.

"It's slightly different from travelling by floo," Remus said. "But it's the magical equivalent of a phone call."

"Oh. I wondered why there wasn't a phone. I thought we did everything by owl."

"Not quite," his uncle said, amused. "How can we help you, Amelia?"

"I got your owl," she said. "No one has reported your charge missing. There are no Muggle police reports."

"They really don't care," Harry said, trying to sound mournful.

"If they cared, they might fight to get you back," Remus pointed out. "Do you want that?"

"No!"

"There you are, then. *We* care about you, Harry. You don't need the Dursleys."

"Okay," Harry said. "I'm sorry for shouting when I saw you, Madam... I mean, Aunt Amelia."

"It's fine, Harry," she said. "The floo wouldn't have worked if no one at the manor was in the same room as a fireplace. I didn't expect you to be on your own."

"I've been reading," he said, holding up the book. "I'm safe here, so Uncle Remus doesn't need to be with me all the time."

"That's true," she said. "Have you settled in?"

"Yes. We haven't been to the beach yet, but we're going to. Uncle Remus is going to show me how to build sand castles!"

"That sounds like fun. How would you like company?"

"Are you coming to visit?" he asked.

"I was thinking more someone your own age," she replied. "Augusta Longbottom has agreed not to mention you to anyone, and she's made sure that Neville knows how important it is to keep you secret, for now. Would you like him to visit on Saturday? You could meet at... I believe Remus said you live near Weymouth?"

"That's right," Remus said.

"They could meet you at Weymouth," she said. "That way, your location will remain a secret and we can see just how trustworthy they are. And once you're used to company, you can visit Susan and meet some of her friends. She knows who you are now, and not to say anything to anyone. But her friends are still an unknown element. I mean, they might not understand why they can't talk about you to just anyone. I'm still finding out who's safe for you to meet. But for the moment, I know that the Longbottoms are free on Saturday and Sunday."

“The weather should be clearing up by Sunday,” Remus said. “Should I write to them directly?”

“No, I will,” Amelia said. “I’ll also send Rufus Scrimgeour along to watch from a distance. You won’t see him, but he’ll be there in case your safety is compromised.”

“Thank you.”

“Will I see you again?” Harry asked.

“You will, dear,” she said.

Sunday dawned much brighter. Harry was out of bed and racing to have a wash and get dressed before Mintzi could even bring breakfast. He was excited to see Neville again. He felt doubly sorry for the boy, knowing that the prophecy had affected both of them, even though it was Harry’s parents who’d brought about punishment by defying their destinies.

“Will you eat breakfast in the dining room, Master Harry?” Mintzi asked, startling him as he tried to choose the best shoes to wear to the beach.

“Oh, uh, yes. Is it ready?”

“It will be by the time you get downstairs. If you leave *now*.”

“I’m coming,” he said. She popped away without another word, and he stuffed his feet back into his slippers. His shoes could wait; breakfast – and a bossy house elf – could not.

Harry had grown tired of having a full English breakfast; it felt too much now that he was getting the right amount of food the rest of the day as well. But Mintzi ensured that there was plenty of toast, plus the pot of marmalade, and a soft-boiled egg with bacon on the side. Since the bacon was flat, it didn’t stuff Harry as full as the sausages did. He cut one of the slices of toast into long strips, which he dipped in the egg.

Remus joined him just as Harry was spreading marmalade on his third piece of toast.

“Good morning,” he said. “You’ll build up an appetite swimming, so we’ll have lunch while we’re out. Does fish ‘n’ chips sound good to you?”

“Mmm-hmm,” Harry mumbled around a mouthful of toast. He nodded, swallowed quickly, and licked the excess marmalade from his lips. “Sounds great. I won’t get swept out to sea, will I?”

“Stick close to the shore and you should be safe. But I’ll be right there. Don’t worry, okay?”

After he’d finished eating, Harry sipped slowly at his milk to draw it out while Remus ate. Mintzi told him that he needed milk for stronger bones. He didn’t even know that house elves knew that; he thought it was a Muggle thing.

Remus advised him to wear sneakers, and said that they'd buy beach clothing at Weymouth.

“The water might be too cold for swimming anyway,” he pointed out. “We only need something you don't mind getting wet sand on while we're building sand castles.”

“How are we getting there, Uncle Remus?”

“It's not too far to the bus stop. Have you been on a bus before?” Harry shook his head. “One day I'll show you The Knight Bus, but you need to build up your strength before then. It's only for emergencies, anyway, not a jaunt to the seaside.”

Mintzi waved them off at the door, with instructions to leave their beach clothes in a basket outside the front door when they got home. Hand in hand, they walked to the bus stop, and Harry wondered what this meeting with Neville would be like.

Please let them keep their mouths shut around Dumbledore , he thought.

Chapter End Notes

Now to research public beaches at Weymouth. They're nothing like Australian beaches, from what I've heard of England. Can you even make sand castles in England, or do you only have pebbles? Gah! I've mostly only been in England during winter, and ain't nobody going to the seaside then. Certainly not an Aussie.

Please review!

Chapter Ten

Chapter Summary

A trip to the seaside helps a friendship to blossom.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

They bought sand castle building tools and beach-appropriate clothing from shops at Weymouth Bay, and then headed to Weymouth Beach itself. Harry was surprised to see castle ruins close by.

“Let's see,” Remus said, studying a map of the area. “Sandsfoot Castle. The sand is certainly at its feet, so they're right there. Although it's been said that wise men built their houses on rocks.”

“Maybe that's why it's a ruin now,” Harry said. Remus laughed.

“Alright, let's get changed,” he said.

Harry was glad that the weather was cool enough to warrant a shirt, even though his scars had been healed. He wouldn't have minded keeping them, although Healer Tonks had told Amelia that she'd stand witness and provide a memory for the court if necessary. She stuck to it that to heal inside, he needed to be healed outside first.

He was fairly certain Muggle therapists would argue that, but what did he know? He'd never sought therapy for his issues. The world of magic didn't have them, as far as he knew. They'd probably be called Mind Healers, or something like that.

“I saw a theatre before,” Remus said. “We could come back here sometime and see a pantomime.”

“What's that?” Harry asked.

“It's a child-friendly show on the stage. There's singing and dancing. The pantomime is traditional English entertainment, and you need some of that. It's an important part of our culture.”

“The Alexandra Gardens Theatre,” Harry read from the map.

“We can go there before we go to the bus stop and see if they have information on their shows,” Remus said. “Have you been to the theatre before?”

“No. Will I like it?”

“We'll find out.”

They waited near the edge of the beach, looking around. Harry spotted Neville and his grandmother appear out of nowhere, and grabbed Remus's sleeve.

“There they are!” he said, jabbing his finger in their direction. “Neville!” He waved his arm energetically. Remus waved more sedately, but his height helped catch August Longbottom's attention. She approached, a hand on Neville's shoulder. Harry had never realised just how much more affectionate it was to hold hands. A hand on the shoulder looked domineering; a hand in another hand was more intimate and vulnerable. Especially for a child. It gave a feeling of safety that Harry had sorely lacked his entire (and previous) life.

“Good morning, Mr Lupin, Mr Potter,” Mrs Longbottom said. “This is my grandson, Neville.”

“Hello,” Neville mumbled.

“Hi, Neville,” Harry said. “We saw each other at St Mungo's, remember? Last week?” Neville nodded. “I'm glad to see you again. We're going to make sand castles! Have you made sand castles before?” Neville shook his head. “Uncle Remus is going to show me how. Come on. I think we need wet sand, don't we, Uncle Remus?”

“Yes, but not too wet, or it won't hold its shape,” Remus said.

Harry took Neville's hand and gently pulled him out of his grandmother's grip. He led Neville over the sand and found a good spot to put down a towel. He waited for Neville to remove his shoes and socks. They worked out quickly to spoon shovels full of sand into the plastic moulds, but were confused about what to do next.

“Won't all the sand fall out if we tip these over?” Neville asked.

“I guess that's why the sand's supposed to be not too wet,” Harry said, scratching his head and getting sand in his hair. “Maybe if we go really quickly?”

“We should wait,” Neville said, looking over his shoulder. Harry didn't even glance back.

“I say we go for it,” he said. “It's only sand. If it doesn't work, we can try again. Nothing's going to break.”

“Okay,” he replied bravely. “Let's try.”

They both swiftly turned the moulds over and slammed them down on the sand they'd flattened out. After a moment, they nodded at each other and gently pulled the moulds up carefully.

“It worked!” Neville exclaimed. “Look at that.”

“That's *wicked*,” Harry said.

"I can watch over them for you," Remus said, startling both boys. Augusta wasn't with him. He lowered himself onto the towel. "You can find sticks, leaves, even shelves to decorate them."

"Wow," Neville said. "What's the biggest castle you've ever made?"

"I made one with Harry's father and our friends once," he said. "We made a model of Hogwarts. But we used magic to make sure it held and didn't fall over, so it doesn't really count. I used to have a brick-shaped mould and made a wall out of it. But the biggest castle? Probably only a foot high. It was cold at the time, so the wet sand held much better. I was pretty determined, I can tell you. I think I ended up with a cold for my troubles."

"Where's Grandmother?" Neville asked.

"She's sitting in the shade," Remus said. "She didn't like the idea of getting sand in her shoes."

"I like sand," Harry declared, wriggling his toes in the wet sand. "Let's look for shells. Do you want to, Neville?"

The other boy nodded enthusiastically, so they ran off. The shells weren't particularly interesting, but they'd make good doors. There were no leaves, but there were sticks, which was better than nothing. They hurried back to Remus and set about decorating their castles. They used the small moulds, just for fun. Then they buried their feet in the sand, giggling as it squelched between their toes. Harry told Neville about the theatre, and Neville admitted that he'd never been to the theatre either. They ran about in the shallow waves for awhile.

Neither of them asked the other about their parents. It was a nice change for Harry.

Eventually they smashed their sand castles; according to Remus, it was the best bit. They had fun stomping all over the sand. They each kept one of the shells they'd found, and then washed off at the showers. They dried off with a clean towel, pulled on their socks and shoes, but didn't bother changing out of their beach clothes.

Augusta looked disapproving of this choice when they joined her in a shady spot. She looked ready to argue when Remus suggested lunch, but he gave her a look and she shut her mouth. Harry held Neville's hand as they walked to a fish and chips shop. It smelled delicious, and Harry's stomach grumbled. They hadn't gone swimming, but the sea air made him feel ravenous, and he could tell that Neville felt the same.

"It's nice to have a friend," he told Neville as they sat down. Neville's eyes widened.

"Yeah," he said. "I'm glad I met you before Hog... uh, school." He glanced around at the Muggles sitting close by. "Grandmother doesn't let me see people. I don't know what Madam Bones or your uncle said to her, but this is the first time I've been out, except for shopping."

"Me too," Harry said. "I've never even been to the zoo. Uncle Remus said he'd take me sometime. Do you want to come along?"

“The zoo?”

“Yeah. We can see lions, bears, giraffes, all sorts of animals!”

“That sounds *awesome*,” Neville said. “I’ve never even heard of those. Are they... non-magical?”

Harry nodded. Remus and Augusta returned from the counter then, having placed the orders, and sat on the opposite side of the table.

“When we have to shop for school, can we go with Neville and his grandmother?” Harry said. “We can buy our wands together! You said that’s important.” He was going to make sure that Neville had his own wand from the very start.

“If Mrs Longbottom says yes, I don’t see why not,” Remus said. “But that’s four years away, Harry. Don’t get ahead of yourself. You both have plenty of time before school.”

The fish and chips were delicious. The fish was battered on the outside, so flavoursome, and so tender and juicy on the inside. The chips were the same; crispy outside, pillowy soft inside. The tomato sauce was thick and rich, and the lemon juice gave an inviting tang. Remus had bought lemonade for them, and the bubbles nearly went up Harry’s nose. Neville was more cheerful than Harry had ever seen him, and it gave him another boost of happiness.

He was sad to part from his new/old friend, and gave him a fierce hug. Mrs Longbottom hadn’t softened, but at least she was holding Neville’s wrist instead when they walked away. They were gone in the blink of an eye, and Harry glanced around looking for security cameras.

“Purebloods,” Remus muttered, shaking his head. “Let’s look at the theatre. Are you full?”

“Pretty much,” Harry said.

“Too full for ice cream?”

Harry’s eyes lit up.

“I’d like to try ice cream,” he said. “Is it yummy?”

“It’s the best,” Remus said.

They found a stand selling soft-serve ice cream. Remus ordered chocolate, naturally, and Harry ordered vanilla raspberry swirl. It was refreshing – and arguably healthy – after stuffing himself with fish and chips. They both ended up with ice cream on their noses and a fit of the giggles. They were done by the time they reached the theatre. Remus picked up a pamphlet about upcoming shows. There was a second hand shop, and they had time before the bus, so they had a good browse and bought some books.

When they reached the front door of the manor, they found bath robes waiting for them, as well as slippers. They took off their outer beach clothes, threw them into the hamper Mintzi

had left out, and pulled on the soft slippers and robes. Mintzi wasn't around, so they went to their rooms to bathe, wash their hair (in Harry's case), and get back into their casual clothes.

Remus wrote some letters in the study while Harry sat by the fire, reading again. This time there was no surprise floo call. When Remus was done, he joined Harry. Mintzi brought afternoon tea for them. Harry told her all about their day at the seaside, and said he wished she could join them one day and build sand castles too. Mintzi nodded politely, and once he'd wound down she popped away. Remus was chuckling softly, but when Harry looked at him he had a straight face.

“Did you say something?” Remus asked innocently.

Harry gave him a look of deep suspicion and returned to his reading.

Chapter End Notes

I haven't been to the beach in aaaaaaages, and I don't have anything to build a sand castle with. But I'm hoping that when travel restrictions are lifted, my sister will bring her family to Australia. Then I can make sand castles with my niece! And more importantly, my mother can meet her granddaughter.

Anyway, it's nice to see that Remus is pranking Harry back, albeit mildly. No idea if people were making vanilla raspberry swirl soft serve ice cream in the 80s, and whether it was being sold at Weymouth Bay. Or whether the Alexandra Gardens Theatre was showing pantos. It burnt down in 1993, so I can't find out.

Please review! As you can see, Weymouth has appropriate sand for sand castles, so my panic was all for nothing. Hurrah!

Chapter Eleven

Chapter Summary

Some emotion, some discussion, some memory.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Harry shyly asked Remus to go through the trunks with him. This was partly because the trunks were sealed with magic; he hadn't been able to open them himself, and couldn't even conjure up a burst of accidental magic. Remus was happy to help, and they dragged the trunks away from the corner to ensure they had enough room. Remus unlocked the trunks with *Alohomora*. With a look at each other and a deep breath, they opened the trunks: Harry, the metal one, and Remus the school one with James Potter's initials.

“Oh, this brings back memories,” Remus murmured.

“Are you okay?”

“Mmm-hmm.”

Harry shrugged and started digging through the metal trunk. There were clothes, including some old Hogwarts robes. Mostly Gryffindor, which led Harry to wonder just how much blood played in Sorting. Courage wasn't necessarily a genetic trait, though he supposed it could be trained. But he'd never been trained to be courageous; just resigned. It must have been his recklessness which led him to being placed in Gryffindor.

He set the robes aside and found some jewellery boxes, as well as books. There was an old copy of *Tales of Beedle the Bard*. Very old indeed. He didn't dare open it without Remus ready to repair torn pages and a broken spine. He gingerly set it beside the robes. He also peeked through the boxes of jewellery, but it didn't really interest him, except a necklace with a small Deathly Hallows pendant. He quickly put that back inside.

“I don't know if there's anything else here,” he said. He looked at Remus, who was staring down at what looked like a journal. Harry peeked over his shoulder. When it became clear that his uncle was too caught up in his reading to notice anything else, Harry reached into his father's school trunk and fished out another journal. Going by the date written inside the front cover, it was from sixth year. He read idly about the Marauders keeping Remus company in The Shrieking Shack.

“Are you a werewolf?” Harry asked.

That caught Remus's attention.

“W-what? What did you say, Harry?”

“Well, my father wrote that it was the full moon again, so he'd be helping you get through the night. So were Sirius and Peter. I'm guessing those are your nicknames? Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot? Did my father have a nickname, or did he just give them to other people?”

“H-he... he was Prongs.” Remus dropped the journal he was reading and covered his face with his hands. “This is why I was reluctant to become your guardian. Your father was so sure you'd be fine with me, as long as we were at Potter Manor so I could run around in the grounds, and use some of the stipend to buy Wolfsbane Potion so I could keep my mind. But I *knew* it was a bad idea.”

“Are you *really* a werewolf? That's wicked!”

“It's not *wicked*, Harry, it's awful. I can't get a job because I have to take time off around the full moon, and it's not long before people realise *why* I need those days off. The transformation is so damn painful, even with the potion. Your father and Sirius and Peter... they were able to keep me sane, distract me from hurting anyone. But that instinct to hunt is there. That instinct to protect *you* is there, so strong, and every time I hear about something bad the Dursleys did, I just want to rip their throats out with my teeth. I'm a dangerous man, Harry. You'd be better off with someone else, but I so wanted to try.”

Genuine tears welled up in Harry's eyes and he launched himself into Remus's lap, throwing his arms around the man's neck.

“Don't leave me, Uncle Remus!” he cried. “You've been *kind* to me. I don't want to go back to the Dursleys. I don't want to go to Neville's grandmother. I want to stay with *you*. My parents wanted you to. You wouldn't hurt me, would you? And I'll be safe inside. Mintzi would make sure. Please don't leave me.” He clung on tightly, and Remus hugged him back.

“You'd be safer without me,” he whispered.

“Don't *say* that. Don't you love me? I haven't done something wrong, have I?”

“You couldn't do anything wrong, Harry, not even if you tried. You're only a child.” He felt Remus's tears on his neck. Harry scrambled even closer, burying his nose behind Remus's ear.

“I'll go away if you want me to,” he said. “Just around the full moon. If you *really* want me to. But don't go away. I don't h-have anyone else.”

“Oh, cub,” Remus said, rubbing his back. “I'll stay. I promise. I won't let anyone take you away from me.”

There wasn't much of interest in James's trunk, aside from the journals. Remus agreed to let Harry read the journals first, since he had found some notes from James's education before Hogwarts. He wanted to know what pureblood children learnt to make sure that Harry wasn't disadvantaged when he began at Hogwarts. Were he a Muggleborn child it would be one

thing, but The Boy Who Lived wouldn't get away with having so little knowledge of the magical world. According to Remus.

Harry nearly snorted. How little *he* knew.

They decided to wander the manor instead, and see what they could find.

“Do you think there are secret passages?” Harry said. “One of Dudley's books had secret passages in it, and they were used to solve a crime.”

“I daresay there are secrets,” Remus said. “Hogwarts is full of secret passageways and rooms. We tried to find all of them, your father, Peter, Sirius and I. But I won't tell you how to find any of them until you're older. If you're as much a trouble-maker as we were, I don't think it would be in anyone's best interests to give you unlimited access to the castle. Not sure I remember all of them, anyway. And there are *bound* to be some we never found.”

“How do you find a secret passage?” Harry asked.

“At Hogwarts? It was more than just magic, though that helped. But secret rooms are the easiest to find anywhere. It's simply a matter of mathematics. If a room is five yards wide, the room next to it is two yards wide, and the walls are an inch thick, what do you get?”

“Seven yards, one inch, or three inches if you're measuring from outside the rooms.”

“Very good. What if the length from the end of one room to the far end of the other room is ten yards long instead?”

“Then... there's a secret room in between! And it's... two yards, seven inches. No, six, because there's another room.”

“*Very* well done, Harry,” Remus said, beaming at him. Harry swelled with pride. “Of course, it's complicated when magic is involved. The room could be there, but the length is still seven yards, three inches. *Unless you know the room is there.* Or you could step through a doorway and be in a different place than you were expecting. Or the inside of the room can be bigger than the outside suggests.”

“I *love* magic,” Harry said.

“Yes, though it does make it more difficult to find hidden rooms,” Remus said. “A lot of secret rooms and passages in older buildings happened because there was an accident and they had to close the room off so no one could find it and get hurt. Typically, that's not a problem wizards and witches have. So anything that's hidden will be hidden by magic.”

“Does anything need to be hidden when the whole *house* is hidden?”

“Good point, Harry. But James might have wanted to keep something hidden from his parents, love letters from your mother, perhaps. Or evidence of the pranks we played at school. And equally, they might have wanted to keep something from him. Or from any visitors to the house. This place wasn't always held under a Fidelius Charm, you know.”

“I didn't know,” Harry said. “What's the other house we're supposed to have?”

“At Godric's Hollow? Where you lived as a baby?”

“No, the *other* one.”

“Oh.” Remus nodded, his mouth pinched. “In Scotland. Near a village called Hogsmeade, which is close to Hogwarts. When you start school we could move there, at least by your third year. You can travel in to Hogsmeade then, and we could meet up for tea. I'll be lonely without you, Harry.”

“I won't leave you, either,” Harry said, gripping Remus's hand. “Not `til I have to.”

“Good.”

Harry was nearly scared out of his wits when he saw his reaper. He thought he'd gone to bed, and now he was dead?

“No, you're not dead,” his reaper said shortly, frowning over the top of his glasses. It was just a bit too reminiscent of Dumbledore. “But I thought you'd want to see a conversation from earlier today. It's relevant to you.”

“You can do that?” dream-Harry asked.

“Of course I can,” the reaper scoffed.

“Can you talk to my mother's friend? The one she was supposed to be with?”

“It wouldn't be healthy for them to know, and I'm not their reaper. Now, do you want to see this conversation or not?”

Harry nodded eagerly. The reaper shoved a Pensieve forward.

“At least you'll know how to use this,” his reaper said. “Go on. I'll wait.”

He tipped forward and landed feet-first in an office. Amelia Bones was at a desk, and he could see backwards writing on the door with her name and 'HEAD OF DMLE' printed in large, black letters.

“I want something done about this *now*,” she said, tapping a sheet of parchment forcefully. “Not tomorrow, not the day after. *Now*.”

“But, Madam Bones--”

“Don't you 'but' me,” she said sternly, and Harry almost winced in sympathy for the person facing her wrath. But by then he'd wandered behind the desk, unseen by the room's occupants, and saw Sirius's facing staring up at him. His heart leapt to his throat. “He never

had a trial. I want him to go on trial at the next seating of the Wizengamot, and I want him to take Veritaserum. If he objects, too bad. Force it down his throat.”

“But he was found guilty--”

“By *whom*?” she shouted. “No trial, *no conviction*. I thought I trained you lot better than that. Lily and James Potter deserve justice, and until he is found guilty or not guilty their justice remains in limbo. I've told Bartemius Crouch how... displeased I am by the lack of due process. *Don't make me give you the same lecture*. Sirius Black will be tried, and if there's any doubt I'll call on magic *itself* to give a verdict. But don't forget that if one heir of a Pureblood family can be thrown into Azkaban without a trial, it could happen to *anyone*. And I don't want that as a precedent. *Am I understood?*”

Harry was cheering by the time he left the memory. This was so much better than before. At this rate, Sirius could be out anytime soon! And then he'd have both his godfather and his uncle to look after him. They'd also have Grimauld Place as a retreat, plus any other Black properties which existed. Remus would have a companion when Harry went to Hogwarts, and Sirius could advocate for Harry to stay with them, rather than returning to the Dursleys.

But again, he couldn't get ahead of himself. He knew how the Ministry of Magic worked.

“Yes, there are always machinations behind the scenes,” his reaper said. “This is a much better development than the previous timeline, but you've a long ways to go. Have you even started on finding the horcruxes yet?”

“There's not much I can do at this age, but I have an idea on how to get the ball rolling,” Harry said, scratching the back of his neck. “But I need an excuse to go to Gringott's.”

“I think I can help you with that.”

Chapter End Notes

Better yet, dear readers, can YOU help me with that? Harry's had his inheritance, and Remus is taking care of the financial paperwork, so there's no reason for them to go back to Gringott's anytime soon. Unless... maybe he wants to check the family vault for stuff to decorate the manor? Or he wants to put some stuff in storage there? Yeah, that could work. But if you have any better ideas, feel free to let me know.

Please review! Sorry this is later than usual, but I've had a hecking busy day.

Chapter Twelve

Chapter Summary

Harry wishes to visit Gringott's, and accidentally causes a bit of a sensation. To put it mildly.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Harry was walking through to the dining room, since breakfast in bed should be reserved only for special occasions, when he heard a squeak. His right hand went, again, for a non-existent wand, as he whirled around.

One of the paintings, which he assumed were all landscapes, had a person in it.

“Hi,” Harry said awkwardly, straightening up.

“I... you... wha... HOW?” the person stuttered. Then they vanished through the side of the painting. With a shrug, Harry went to the dining room and found Remus already devouring sausages. The full moon was getting closer, and Harry had asked if Remus ate enough in the days leading up to it, in case his wolf form was angry because he was hungry. Remus didn't take the theory all that seriously; he ate ravenously because he was used to being hungry and near-homeless.

“There was a person in one of the paintings in the hall,” Harry said, sitting down.

“I wondered where they'd got to,” Remus said. “I thought the house magic had lain dormant for so long that they disappeared off to other portraits, perhaps in the Scottish property. It's not like anyone was around, except Mintzi, and she'd be too busy to spend all her time entertaining a bunch of pictures.”

“They didn't go far,” Mintzi said, popping into the room when her name was mentioned. “There's a portrait gallery. It *was* a ballroom, but with no one to entertain I took all the second portraits from other hallways into there so they can talk to each other.”

“You didn't tell them we'd moved in?” Remus asked.

“As you said, I don't have time to fuss around with 'a bunch of pictures',” she said. “Especially with two humans to look after.”

She left, taking the empty toast rack with her. Remus winced.

“Maybe she thought that meeting too many people at once would be alarming to you,” he said. “I take it you’ve never seen a moving portrait?”

“Muggles don’t have them,” Harry said. It wasn’t a lie; just an evasion. “It was a surprise all right. I thought the paintings were still lifes and stuff like that.”

“Yes, I should have considered that,” Remus said. “My mind’s been on... *other* things recently. I’m sorry, Harry. I should’ve warned you.”

“That’s okay,” Harry said. “Lots of things will seem normal to you that aren’t to me, and it’s not all to do with magic.” He scrunched up his face. “How often do we have to visit the bank? I know that Aunt Petunia went twice a week. She didn’t like carrying much money around with her.”

“Do you *want* to visit Gringott’s?”

“I want to learn more about the goblins,” Harry said. “Should I know stuff about what my parents left to me? And weren’t there things which had to go to other people?”

“Yes, there were, though the goblin tend to most of that,” Remus said. “They would’ve transferred the legacies to the recipients’ vaults and notified them via owl. I mean...”

“You don’t have to explain it. If it’s something I don’t need to know, then it’s okay.”

“Right. But if you want to learn more about goblin culture...?”

“Do they do magic the same way we do? I didn’t see them with wands, but you use a wand, and so does Susan’s aunt, and other people.”

“Ah. Don’t mention the wand thing to the goblins. They don’t like it.”

“*I* don’t have a wand,” Harry pointed out.

“You’ll get one when you’re eleven. That’s the difference.”

“It’s not fair, Uncle Remus. They do magic, too, don’t they?”

“Yes.”

“And so do house elves like Mintzi.”

“We do *not* need wands,” Mintzi said, appearing again, and disappearing just as quickly with the empty plates.

“Ooh, can I learn to do magic without a wand?” Harry asked, bouncing in his seat.

“I’m sure you’ll learn how to one day, but start with a wand,” Remus said. “I’m willing to make a trip to the bank. I need to pick up the Wolfsbane I ordered from Diagon Alley, so we can go in to London. If you’re alright with the crowds?”

Harry nodded as he swallowed the last of his milk.

"I'm okay," he said. "Could I get a camera?"

"A camera?"

"Do... do they not use cameras in the magical world?"

"Yes, they do, though I've never used one myself," Remus said. "But if you want a camera to take still pictures, we won't get that in Diagon Alley."

"*Photos* move as well? Like the paintings?"

They decided to do a few things. Harry didn't really care about the jewellery they'd found, and he was nervous about keeping some things like the Peverell copy of *The Tales of Beedle the Bard* where he might accidentally damage it, so they decided to drop it off in the Potter vault, and see if there was anything useful they could bring back to the manor. As long as it was not money, the goblins would probably allow them some leeway. Harry was especially eager to see if Gringott's stored any of his mother's things. Aunt Petunia never mentioned whether she had inherited her sister's possessions, or at least kept them somewhere safe for Harry.

He hoped she hadn't burned them in a fit of rage.

Remus picked up the potion first, since that was the main reason for visiting Diagon Alley. He also helped Harry find a camera, film, and the tools to develop magical photographs. Harry remembered Colin Creevey's death, and wanted to honour him in some way. As well as ensure that he wouldn't die so young. He felt bad for brushing off the boy, who'd simply been too young to have any tact.

Their bit of shopping done, they went to Gringott's. Remus asked to talk to someone about the Potter vaults. This time, Harry was simultaneously pleased and terrified to see Griphook.

Once the usual greetings were out of the way – greetings Remus gave without hesitation – they sat down to business.

"Harry would like to deposit some valuables from Potter Manor in the main Potter vault," Remus said. "He'd feel better if they were under Gringott's excellent protection."

"I bet you can do all sorts of magic I'll never learn," Harry said, bouncing in his seat again. As long as he looked like an innocent child still getting used to a new world, the goblins would (hopefully) not look any further. "Did you know that *paintings* move? I saw one this morning!"

"Apparently the family portraits gave up lingering in the main part of the house with no humans in residence," Remus explained to Griphook, who looked unimpressed with Harry's enthusiasm. "Our wonderful house elf – she truly is a treasure – has looked after everything well. I'm glad we're able to give her something to do."

“She can do magic by snapping her fingers,” Harry stage-whispered with wide eyes. “I wish I could do that. Ordinary magic must be so *boring*. What kind of things can goblins do? I... I'm not hurting your feelings, am I? This is all just really, *really* interesting.”

“There *are* things we can do that humans cannot,” Griphook said.

“How do you know what's in each vault? Muggles keep all these long lists of people's money, but not what's in, like, a safety box. What's it called again, Uncle Remus?”

“A safety deposit box,” Remus said, his eyes crinkling at the corners with amusement.

“Yeah, one of those,” Harry said. “The bank doesn't know what's in those, I don't think. But Uncle Remus has huge lists to go over. Is that all money?”

“No, there are other artefacts in storage here,” Griphook said. “I can only tell you about what's in your vaults, and what has had to be removed.”

“Removed?” Harry asked, tilting his head. “Was there anything my mother owned? I don't have anything of hers. Except her eyes.” He pointed to them. “Uncle Remus says I've got her eyes. I don't have a picture of her, so I wouldn't know.” He looked down, the pitiful orphan in need of kindness.

“As we are visiting the main vault anyhow, we can check what is there,” Griphook said. “Some items from the vaults have been recalled as they were on temporary loan. Other items, such as un-renewed patents and items now deemed illicit, have all been removed from the vaults.”

“Nothing you need to worry about,” Remus assured Harry. “I told you, the goblins are marvellous at taking care of these things.”

“So you're always looking out for bad things,” Harry said. “To make sure you get rid of them.”

“Only when there is an audit, such as for an inheritance,” Griphook said.

“But... but what if someone puts something bad in Gringott's? Can't you tell?” Harry was glad that it had taken so little effort to turn the conversation in this direction. “What if there was something really evil, like... like thumb screws, or a death ray? Would you know?”

“We do surprise inspections on well-used vaults,” Griphook replied. “If a vault has lain dormant for long enough – that is, hasn't been used recently – then we have no need to check.”

“In the Muggle world, police always have to check the properties of bad people, like robbers,” he said, holding Remus's hand as they made their way to the tunnels, still talking. “I guess you have to do the checking, huh? And see if they stored any of their... loot? Yeah, that's it. Loot. It must be really easy to do using magic!”

“Yes,” Griphook said. “Come this way a moment, as you are so keen to learn.”

Remus held Harry's hand a little tighter as Griphook led them around a corner. He stroked one of the candelabras jutting from a wall, and a panel appeared.

“You see this?” Griphook said. “Only goblins can access it. But we can do many things from here, in an emergency. And in non-emergency situations. To prove to you how *safe* we are, and that our magic is *not* to be under-estimated, I will show you something. It will scan the entire contents of the bank for Dark objects. Don't expect anything to happen, though. Gringott's is the safest place in magical Britain.”

Harry nearly snorted, thinking of the dangers down in the vault areas, such as the blind dragon who guarded the most secure vaults. But he kept his thoughts to himself as Griphook pulled a lever.

“It will start from the top of the building and makes its way down,” the goblin said. “The panel will disappear when the scan is over.”

“Does it work like radar?” Harry asked, following Griphook once again towards the tunnels. “It's what Muggles use. I don't know how it works, but it sounds like magic.”

“It most certainly *is* magic,” Griphook said, summoning a cart. “Fasten yourself in, Mr Potter. We don't want you to fall out.”

Safest place in magical Britain indeed , Harry thought sarcastically.

They were zooming through the vaults when an alarm sounded. Remus gripped Harry as the cart came to a halt. Griphook swore in Gobbledegook – it sounded like swearing, at least – and manually controlled the cart the rest of the way. They all got out, Harry clutching Remus's robe as the siren kept sounding off. The cart disappeared as another one sped past, with lights blazing and more goblins shouting in Gobbledegook.

“Surely it can't be...” Griphook trailed off. His eyes narrowed at Remus and Harry. “Wait. Here.”

Chapter End Notes

Okay, so you're all amazing. I incorporated as many of the ideas as I could. From balloongal247, I said that they would explore the vaults. From AuntieL, I made sure they brought along the jewellery to place in the vault. From burungmalan, I mentioned that Harry would like to have some of his mother's things. From TomHRichardson, I remembered that we hadn't had any talking portraits so far. Whether there's more in the vaults, I haven't worked it out yet. From Tellur, I added that items have been removed and mentioned paperwork. As for Lowten's suggestion of accessing Potter Cottage, that hasn't made its way in yet, but it'll undoubtedly be added after all the excitement is over. After all, that's probably where Lily's things are.

Now you see why Harry wanted to visit Gringott's.

Please review! And there'll be more on Sirius's case soon.

Chapter Thirteen

Chapter Summary

What's happening at Gringott's? Will Harry end up seeing his parents sooner than expected?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“What do we do now?” Harry asked.

“We can't get into the vault without a goblin,” Remus said, clearly fretting. “You don't think that... radar thing actually *found* something dangerous in Gringott's, do you?”

They noticed a burst of flame from a distance and heard a loud roar.

“Is that a dragon?”

“I wouldn't be surprised,” Remus muttered. “Well, we're stuck here. I don't think I can get us out any of the usual ways.”

“Want to play I Spy?” Harry said brightly.

Six minutes later a cart pulled up in front of them. The goblin briefly apologised for the wait and led them into the vault. They found where other jewellery was stowed and dropped off what they'd brought along. There were bookshelves as well, and added the few valuable volumes to it. Harry browsed and found some interesting tomes, which the unnamed goblin granted permission for them to remove. Remus was particularly approving of Harry's choices. He also found a training broom, more appropriate for Harry's age. The only paintings in the vault were empty of people.

“Nothing of my mother,” Harry said, his head drooping.

“There may be something in your personal trust vault,” Remus said. “I'll look over the wills again and see if I can get any clues from those, especially Lily's.”

“I want to see where they died.”

“Oh, Harry, I'm not sure that's a good--”

“Please, Uncle Remus?”

He sighed.

"I'll see what we can do when we leave here," he said.

It wasn't as easy as that. They were 'requested' to remain at Gringott's, which meant – according to Remus – that leaving would be very unhealthy for them. It was supposed to reassure Harry, but he could read between the lines.

Griphook tracked them down and led them back to the same office. With guards.

"Why did you want to know how to scan for evil objects?" he asked bluntly.

"I've heard that a bad person killed my parents, but no one will tell me more," Harry said. "This means at least one evil person can use magic to hurt others. I want to know if Gringott's is safe. If it's *not* safe, someone could make me go back to the Dursleys, and I don't *want* to go back there." Just the thought of going back was enough to make his heart race in fear. He could feel the blood drain from his face. "They'll *hurt* me again."

Remus swiftly explained what he knew of Harry's time imprisoned at Privet Drive, and what was being done to ensure that Harry wouldn't be forced to return. Griphook's attitude softened, and he nodded in sympathy.

"Very well," he said. "We are glad you asked, Mr Potter. Something evil *was* discovered. But we cannot tell you anything about it. Just know that you have our gratitude."

"Can you destroy it?" Harry asked.

"Perhaps, but we will discuss the matter with the Unspeakables first. They work for the Ministry of Magic. As it is a human-made object, it is their jurisdiction. That is, their responsibility."

"Okay," Harry said. "We couldn't find anything which belonged to my mum."

"You may have better luck at Godric's Hollow," Griphook said. "The Ministry quickly set the place up as a shrine to your family, which means that the contents of the house are very likely untouched. If anyone has the right to visit your childhood home, it is you, Mr Potter."

"Is there a way to access the property without the Ministry being alerted?" Remus asked.

"I should think you would be allowed to walk in, as family."

"Thank you, Mr Griphook, sir," Harry said.

"You are welcome. Good luck, Mr Potter."

They left Diagon Alley by way of The Leaky Cauldron. Remus took him to an alleyway.

"It will be easier to Side-Along Apparate you there," he said. "It's sort of like... being in one place one moment, then in another place a moment later. That's the best way I can describe it. Have you heard of teleportation?" Harry shook his head. "You might feel a bit sick after it, but it's been awhile since breakfast. If you don't like it, we don't have to do it again. We can find a place to floo back to Potter Manor from there."

“Okay, Uncle Remus.”

Harry's stomach turned over when they got to Godric's Hollow, but that was partly because he remembered visiting with Hermione, and his wand being broken when they tried to escape Nagini. Remus offered him some chocolate, but the last thing Harry wanted was anything dairy-based.

Remus took him to the cemetery first, and left a wreath on the Potters' graves, just as Hermione had done. Harry wondered how many others would have thought to do that for him. For *them*.

Despite the cold air of the open house, Harry felt warm when he passed into the cottage. Was it the residue of his parents' magic, welcoming him home? Not that this place could ever be home to him, with the bad memories it held. But they weren't there to reminisce – not that Harry could.

“Oh my,” Remus said, walking towards the fireplace. “That... that painting. Your parents.”

Harry hurried to his side. It was indeed a portrait of his parents, though still. How could it be here? He'd never heard that a portrait of his parents existed. Was this a present from the afterlife, to help him in his mission? He blinked away tears of anger and hurt. He could have been getting to know his parents in the afterlife right now, but instead he had to fix *other people's* mistakes, and if he succeeded he wouldn't see his parents again for over a century.

“Harry, may I lift you up for a second?” Remus asked.

“What? Uh, yes, Uncle Remus.”

“If you touch the portrait... attaboy... oh my...” The portrait bloomed to life under Harry's touch, and Remus quickly set him down.

“Remus?” Lily said.

“Harry!” James exclaimed. “You look to be about five now. You've grown so much.”

“He's seven,” Remus said. His voice sounded funny. Harry glanced up and saw tears streaming down his cheeks. “He was sent to live with your sister, Lily. We only got him a week ago. Harry ran from them and was found by aurors.”

“*Petunia* got Harry?” Lily said. “But you're alive! What about Alice and Frank? What about *Sirius*? Oh, sweet Merlin, don't tell me he did something stupid after our death and got himself killed? Oh no, my poor baby.” She looked down at Harry. Portraits couldn't cry, but her forehead was creased with sorrow.

“Sirius is in Azkaban,” Remus said.

“What?” James said. “How did *that* happen?”

“But... surely you realise... I mean, you're *dead*.” He winced and glanced down at Harry. “Uh, why don't you go upstairs and look for your mother's things? If they're still here, they're

likely to be in one of the family rooms. I'll talk to your parents."

Harry nodded, and he crept away. But he paused halfway up the stairs, straining to hear.

"...be in Azkaban instead. If we're dead, it could be because *he* betrayed us. Peter was our Secret Keeper, not Sirius. Sirius was the obvious choice."

"But he's in Azkaban!" Remus argued. "They must have found him guilty of collaboration, at the very least. He wouldn't be thrown into prison without good reason."

Harry grimaced. He should have known Remus wouldn't take the news well. He'd be filled with guilt, which wasn't healthy in the run-up to the full moon.

He made it the rest of the way upstairs silently, and found his nursery first. The toy broomstick was in pieces from the explosion, as were most of his toys and baby clothes. He marvelled that he'd gotten away with only one scar. Or maybe there'd been other injuries which were healed first?

In the master bedroom, he found his parents' clothes. There was also a chest at the end of the bed, which contained winter blankets and snow shoes. He checked the wardrobe, but there was nothing there. In frustration, he sat on the edge of the bed and flopped down.

And saw the hatch in the ceiling.

"Uncle Remus!" he called. "I think there's an attic!"

Eventually he heard his uncle's feet thumping up the stairs. He quickly wiped the remaining tears from his face and looked up to where Harry was pointing.

"Ah yes," he said. "Well spotted, Harry."

He was able to get the ladder down, but insisted that Harry stay where he was, 'just in case'. With a grunt of disapproval, Harry sat down on his parents' bed again, sending up yet another puff of dust. The place may have been sealed, but clearly that didn't matter to the chipped ceiling paint and the peeling wallpaper. Flakes of both had settled on the floor and the furniture. Harry sneezed.

"Are you alright?" Remus called out.

"Yes! Have you found anything?"

"Your mother's school trunk is here. We can come back and search for more things later. But we'll take this and your mother's portrait. We may have to call Mintzi to take them for us."

"Mintzi?" Harry said. She appeared in front of him and looked around.

"This place is *filthy*," she said with a haughty sniff. Then she sneezed as well.

"Bless you," Harry said.

“Where are we?” she asked.

“Potter Cottage,” he said. “My parents have a portrait over the fireplace downstairs, and Uncle Remus has found my mother's school trunk. Could you please take those to Potter Manor for us?”

“Of course,” she said. “The other portraits have all insisted on meeting you. Make sure you are clean first, and after lunch I will show you to the portrait gallery.”

She disappeared. Harry heard Remus greet her. A minute later, his uncle was back in the master bedroom and dusting himself off with a cursory gesture.

“Let's find a fireplace connected to the floo network,” he said.

“Nonsense,” Mintzi said, reappearing. “It will be faster if I take you home myself.”

Then she grabbed their hands and popped them away again.

Lily and James wanted to watch over Harry, but he didn't like the idea of being watched while he slept, so they compromised by having their portrait hung in the drawing room, where Harry often read and coloured. Remus promised to buy a lap desk and work from the drawing room in the future, rather than hiding himself away in the study.

“It's not hiding,” he insisted, as he carefully hung the portrait above the fireplace, while Mintzi took away the mirror which had been there before. “Harry needs alone time, and you know I'm not that sociable. Besides, the chair in the study is better for the posture when I need to look over the accounts and deal with correspondence.”

“I trust that when you have visitors, you'll entertain them?” James said. “Potters are known for their hospitality.”

“*You* might be a Potter, but I'm a Lupin,” Remus reminded them.

“You're still family,” Lily said firmly. “You've been better family to Harry than his blood relations. Not that he was *supposed* to go to them in the first place. Albus knew what was in our wills. Why didn't he see to... oh no. Did something happen to *him*?”

“Not as far as I know,” Remus said drily. “He's still perfectly fine, from what I've heard.”

James's expression grew thunderous. Harry felt nervous around these people he'd barely spoken to in his past lifetime, and not at all in this one. Not since infancy. And he was starting to feel hungry, now that the nausea from Apparating had passed.

“Can we have lunch now, Uncle Remus?” he asked.

“Of course, Harry. Would you like to write to Neville after that? We need to work out where you're going for the full moon.”

“Harry should be safe here, as long as you're on the potion,” Lily said.

“I know, but he shouldn't spend all his free time with someone twenty years his senior,” Remus pointed out.

“What happened to the Longbottoms?” James asked.

“...I'll tell you later. Harry's too young to hear it.”

“After lunch, you should write to Bartemius Crouch and tell him that Sirius is innocent,” he added.

“Amelia Bones is in charge of the DMLE now.”

“Write to *her*, then,” Lily said.

“I will, I will,” Remus said. “Though I don't think the testimony of portraits is considered valid in the Wizengamot.”

“We'll see about that,” James said. “Just get the ball rolling.”

Harry didn't mention that the ball was already rolling. He mentally crossed his fingers and hoped that within another week, one more innocent person would be freed of their wrongful imprisonment, and on their way to recovery.

Chapter End Notes

So, a couple of things are being dealt with already. Hurrah! I figured the goblins would be at least a little bit suspicious, but would probably figure that since the vault was last used well before Harry could have known about it, he couldn't possibly have any knowledge that there would be a dark item in that vault. Obviously.

The thing is, has anyone noticed that Potter Cottage has been visited? Something to think about, don't you reckon?

Please review!

Chapter Fourteen

Chapter Summary

Author is tired. Author has to do sleep study.

Oh, and Dumbledore now knows that something's afoot.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Harry was there while his parents dictated a letter from Remus to Amelia Bones. Remus asked how to explain that he and Harry had invaded a shrine, which led to more choice words from James and Lily. They were very unimpressed that their wills had been completely ignored, and that Harry had only seen his home for the first time in six years, as a *memorial* to them.

He pretended to be too absorbed in his book to hear their saltier phrases.

After Remus sent off the carefully crafted letter, he and Harry went to James's study to go through Lily's school trunk. Again a simple unlocking spell opened the trunk and they both leaned forward to look inside. There were journals, though a quick flip through showed that they were more notes on magic than a record of Lily's feelings. But Harry could see how she was trying to understand enough about the basics to create her own spells and potions.

Of course. She was supposed to cure lycanthropy.

“What a wonderful mind,” Remus said. “Your mother was the cleverest witch I've ever met.”

You haven't met Hermione yet, Harry thought. But Hermione was less innovative, and more about utilising existing information in more effective ways.

“I think this is too hard for me to understand,” Harry said. “I'm still reading my father's journals. I know I'm slow.”

“You're not slow,” Remus said. “You're getting used to wearing glasses and you're *much* younger than I am. It's natural that I'd read faster than you.”

Lily's trunk also had introduction to magic books, written for Muggleborns. Harry wished he'd had them before he started Hogwarts. No wonder people thought he was an idiot: he was expected to know these things because of his blood status, but his upbringing kept him in ignorance. He put the books on one of the shelves in the study, while Remus continued to sift through Lily's notes.

There wasn't much else of interest in her trunk; certainly nothing to help him in his quest. Not that the other books were out-of-date, which should've been concerning. Twenty years between his education and his mother's, and the textbooks were exactly the same? (Although at least she'd never been subjected to Gilderoy Lockhart's 'memoirs'.)

He not-so-idly picked up her potions book and opened it. Her name was written inside, but there were notes in another hand as well. The name had been scratched out, but it was longer than hers, and he had a feeling he knew who it was.

“Did my father write this?” he asked Remus, showing him the scribbles. Remus blanched.

“Just... one of your mother's friends,” he said. “They weren't friends anymore by the end of school. But your mother had us by then. And people like the Longbottoms. She didn't need S... him.”

Harry frowned. He didn't want to think about his mother being married to Severus Snape, although at least Harry would never have ended up with the Dursleys. He wouldn't have been born, but if it meant a cure for Remus's 'furry little problem' he'd deem it a fair trade.

Pity it would never happen. Neville needed a better potions teacher.

Perhaps something could still be done about that... one day.

When Harry saw his reaper again, he wasn't nervous. It must have been time for another chat.

“At least you're learning,” the reaper grunted.

“Am I here for a reason?” Harry asked.

“I thought you'd want to see another relevant event from today.”

“Ooh. Is it from Gringott's? Did they get the horcrux from the Lestrangle vault?”

“Of *course* they got it. I thought that was blatantly obvious. But that's not what you're here for.”

“So what--”

“Just shut up and watch.” He shoved the Pensieve towards Harry again. With a shrug, Harry leaned over the Pensieve to have a look.

He appeared in the headmaster's office. Dumbledore's head jerked up as one of the gadgets in his room went off. He hurried to check on it just as Professor McGonagall came in.

“You must do something about Nymphadora Tonks,” she said. “Her fellow students believe they can all learn to become... what are you doing, Albus?”

“Hmm?” He turned away from the gadget quickly. “Nothing. What is wrong, Minerva?”

“The other students want to learn how to become Metamorphmagi, even though it is impossible. I cannot get her head of house to see reason. Next thing you know they'll find out about Animagi, and I'll be forced to give lessons in that. Most of these students don't have the patience--”

The memory moved on to Dumbledore apparating from Hogsmeade to Godric's Hollow, striding towards the cottage in the growing darkness. He looked both ways and then walked into the cottage as though he owned the place. Harry scowled as the old man poked around his parents' things, the shrine which should never have been.

“At least the portrait was frozen... what?” Dumbledore's jaw dropped as he stared at the empty wall above the fireplace. “*No*. Where has it gone?” He waved his wand, growing visibly frustrated as he didn't get the results he was looking for. Then he hurried upstairs with surprising vigour. Harry followed hot on his heels, and gained smug satisfaction when Dumbledore saw that the attic ladder was still where Remus left it. “No, no, *no*. Who was here? *Damn* Minerva for preventing me from getting here sooner. Thieves!”

Harry snorted at the hypocrisy of Dumbledore breaking and entering, and calling someone *else* thieves. Then he noticed the outline from where he'd flopped back on his parents' bed, at the same moment as the headmaster. The old man studied the silhouette.

“A child,” he said. “Too small for Harry, surely? And yet... Arabella told me...”

He straightened up with a calculating look on his face. Harry's heart plummeted. They had reached the danger zone, and there was no going back.

With a whirl of brightly-coloured robes, the headmaster left, and the memory faded to him sitting at his desk. Harry looked over his shoulder and saw that Dumbledore was writing to Mrs Figg, to tell her that they had to meet as soon as possible. Just as Dumbledore passed the letter to Fawkes, the memory faded and Harry was back in his reaper's office. Or wherever he was in this dreamscape.

“Helpful?” his reaper asked.

“Worrying,” Harry said.

“At least the horcrux is with the Unspeakables now. Leave it with them. Concentrate on thwarting Dumbledore instead. He may not be able to visit you at Potter Manor, but you cannot stay in hiding forever. And he *will* want to find you.”

Harry swallowed, nodding solemnly.

He was reluctant even to go to the seaside again, when Remus suggested it.

“Healer Tonks wishes to know how you are recovering,” Remus said. “I thought a bit of sunshine would do you good, and then you can go to her for the full moon. I'm sure she and her husband miss having their daughter around. They are both in on the secret, and you'll be

perfectly safe with them. I've also made copies of your parents' wills, and written a letter to go with them, for you to give to Ted Tonks. He's a lawyer, and we may need his help."

"Okay," Harry said. "I still wish I could stay with you, Uncle Remus."

"Not this first time. In a new location, with new smells around, and a new member of my pack, my wolf side needs time to process this. I'll feel better if I know you're with someone trustworthy."

Harry still refused to go to the beach, afraid that Dumbledore knew the approximate location of Potter Manor and might find him. But he dutifully packed for his stay with Healer and Mr Tonks, taking along one of his father's diaries to keep reading at night. He was both eager to read it all at once, and wanting to savour the experience. Even though he could now ask a painted source, he was unlikely to be told everything he wanted to know. Journals were private, and may even contain memories his father had forgotten. Whereas portraits could keep secrets forever, something which was anathema to Harry.

Remus claimed to Healer Tonks that a compulsory night off was stipulated in the wills, and he knew that she would want to see Harry again. Harry had given Mintzi strict instructions to make sure that Remus took his Wolfsbane on time. There was no other reference – no matter how oblique – to what his uncle would be going through that night.

"I'll see you tomorrow, Uncle Remus," Harry said, hugging him tightly around the middle. "You'll come back for me, won't you?"

"You *know* I will, Harry. I promised I wouldn't leave you, remember?" He kissed the top of Harry's head. "We'll let Mintzi have a break from making lunch for both of us, and I'll pick you up early in the afternoon. Don't run the Tonkses ragged, will you? You'll behave yourself?"

"I will. I *promise*."

"Good boy."

After he left, Harry was shown to Tonks's bedroom, as he would have been swamped in the queen-sized guest bed. He made sure to hand over the documents to Mr Tonks, and counted frogs in the garden pond with Healer Tonks.

"Call me Andromeda, dear."

"I can't call adults by their first name! Aunt Petunia said *never* to do that, or I'd get the belt."

Her lips thinned.

"Aunty Andromeda, then," she said. "I'm sure no one can object to that. Do *you*?"

"I get another aunty? Yes! First there's Aunty Amelia, and now you! And I have Uncle Remus."

"I'm sure my husband wouldn't mind if you called him Uncle Ted."

“Like a teddy bear?”

“He can be like a teddy bear sometimes,” she agreed, looking amused.

“Where else can we find frogs, Aunty Andromeda?”

Chapter End Notes

Whoever thought that toads would make good pets? They're freaking dangerous, dudes! And there are dangerous frogs, for that matter. We need harmless amphibians, not toads. They secrete poison, damn it!

Uh, anyway. I'm sorry if this chapter isn't up to scratch, but I was out longer than expected with the initial appointment this morning, and I've been watching a wild west documentary to keep myself awake, which took much of my attention. I have to go and shower and pack, so I'll have to do a swift proofread and post, I'm afraid.

Please review! Unless the chapter's too crappy to warrant a review.

Chapter Fifteen

Chapter Summary

Harry's sleepover continues. And ends.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

In the middle of the night, Harry crept to the window and looked out at the full moon. He wished his uncle a good night of running around and hoped he was watching the moon at the same time.

It occurred to Harry that he'd been sleeping in the bed of Remus's future wife, though considering her current age it was a nauseating thought. He grimaced as he settled back down in the bed, the curtain now open so the light of the moon could shine through on the carpet.

Remus had been a reluctant father. Harry knew, intellectually, that it was because Remus was scared that he's passed lycanthropy onto his son. Of course, if that *had* been the case then Remus was actually the best person to be around the child. But what if Remus had never *wanted* to be a father? What if Tonks pressured him into it, or it was an accident? What if lycanthropy was just an excuse to avoid parenting? Had Harry placed him in a difficult position? It's not like his uncle spent much time with him before they got the portrait. He'd been happy to leave Harry to his own devices outside of meal times, except for when they went to the beach or Diagon Alley.

If they were able to free Sirius, would Remus disappear off rather than stick around?

Tears dripping off the end of his nose, Harry buried himself under the blankets. Maybe it was for the best if he went to someone else. If Remus didn't want to be looking after a seven year old boy, maybe it would be better if Harry just... went back to the Dursleys.

No, don't think like that , he told himself. *The manor's big enough for both of us. And I'm supposed to go to Sirius first. Remus can stay at the manor while we're at Grimmauld Place instead. Or if Sirius has another place to live. He wasn't living with his family during the war. He must have had another residence.*

His sleep was unsettled after that. Remus was a good teacher, but that didn't mean he wanted to be around children all the time, or even just one. Especially just one, who probably reminded him at every moment of the friends he'd lost.

I won't go back to the Dursleys, but I won't be a burden on anyone, either , he decided. *Even if I end up having to live on my own near Hogwarts. Dumbledore can't lay his hands on me if I'm hidden by wards, even so close to Hogsmeade.*

Over breakfast, Healer Tonks received a letter.

“Amelia Bones wishes to see you,” she told Harry.

“Aunty Amelia? Is she coming here?”

“Yes. It's safer than going to the Ministry.”

“Good,” Ted remarked. “I need to have a talk with her over this will business.”

“She'll be here by half nine. Remember to be on your best behaviour, Harry. She's not coming here to socialise; it will be official DMLE business.”

“Yes, Aunty Andromeda,” Harry said, straightening his back.

Harry made sure to wash and dry behind his ears, as well as tidy Tonks's bedroom, before he took his packed bag downstairs. In case he had to go to the Ministry for whatever reason, it was best to have the bag to hand.

Amelia was looking over the documents Ted was showing her when Harry entered the room.

“Yes, a clear miscarriage of just... Harry, good morning,” she said.

“Hello, Aunty Amelia. Is Uncle Ted showing you the things Uncle Remus sent with me?”

“He is,” she said, inclining her head. “I thought you might like to visit Susan later this week, for a tea party. She's invited Neville Longbottom as well, so you'll already know a couple of the children there. Usually Augusta won't let him out of her sight. Maybe she's starting to see that he needs to interact... to *play* with children his own age.”

“What do I wear to a tea party?” Harry asked.

“It's formal dress,” she said. “Your nicest robes, according to Susan. My brother will ensure that your clothes are protected from spills, don't worry. Did you enjoy your sleepover last night?”

“Yes, thank you. We counted frogs in the garden!”

She smiled at his enthusiasm, nodding in all the right places as he babbled about the different sizes, shades of green, as well as the tadpoles in their different stages of life. Andromeda placed a hand on his head when she joined him.

“You're welcome to come back anytime and see how much more the tadpoles have grown,” she said. “Madam Bones, you had business with us?”

“Apparently Harry and Mr Lupin went to Godric's Hollow and found a portrait of the Potters,” she replied. “The Potters have corroborated the contents of their wills. More to the

point, they are distressed to hear that their wishes have been ignored, especially by Albus Dumbledore.”

“What are you going to do about it?”

“Right now, successfully proving ill will – so to speak – would be difficult. I am going to Gringott's this morning to see if they can find evidence of corruption or malicious intent. You and I both know how well he can speak circles around people. Before attack... uh,” she glanced at Harry, “before *confronting* him, we need an iron clad case.”

“Can my parents' portrait talk to the wiz... wiz... the backgammon thing.”

“Backgammon... oh, the *Wizengamot*? I'm afraid it doesn't work that way, Harry. Portraits are only considered up-to-date to the time they are created, which means their opinion cannot change.”

“But...” He frowned. “My dad's diary says that you can talk to portraits at Hogwarts, and they have to remember new passwords. That means they can change *somehow*, right?”

Amelia looked at the Tonkses. They looked back at her. Then all three looked at Harry.

“I'd never looked at it that way before,” she admitted. “Regardless, there's nothing we can do about it, unless the law is changed very soon. And the ways a portrait can be influenced... we'd need an expert to check every time and ensure that there was no tampering.”

Would've been nice if someone did that after my name emerged from the Goblet of Fire, Harry thought bitterly.

“I guess,” he said, shrugging while he interally raged against the system.

“We're building a case, but it has to be done in the utmost secrecy,” Amelia continued. “There are too many at the Ministry who are on Dumbledore's side, who would *definitely* report to him if they heard so much as a whisper that there was an investigation. Almost as many as there are who would use such knowledge as leverage against him instead. As soon as we're sure, we'll then need to strip him of his position as the Chief of the Wizengamot, due to the investigation. It's not a fast process, I'm afraid. But we're doing our best for you, Harry. I haven't forgotten my vow. Though it seems to be fulfilled at the moment.” She smiled. “I'm glad you're looking healthier.”

“He certainly is,” Healer Tonks said.

“Something weird happened at Gringott's the other day,” Harry said. “There was an alarm? One of the goblins was showing us how they look for evil objects. He said – it was Griphook – he said that the Ministry would help, or something.”

“I heard about that,” she said. “I didn't realise that you were there, though, or that you were even the catalyst.”

“I'm pretty sure there was a dragon down there as well.”

"I don't question how Gringott's protects its vaults," Amelia said. "When someone in my position asks too many questions, people tend to stop answering them. No wonder I'm single."

"You'll find the right person someday," Ted told her.

"Tell the goblins I said hello," Harry said quickly.

"I will," she said. "Make sure your guardian... your uncle brings you to tea on Friday. I want to talk to him too."

As she turned to leave, Harry thought of one last thing.

"My parents said that Peter was the one who... who kept a secret, not Sirius," he said. "That's what their painting said. What does it mean? What secret did Peter tell?"

Amelia looked over her shoulder at him, frowning.

"I'll find out everything I can, Harry," she said. "I may not be able to tell you everything yet, but I have your best interests in mind. Trust me."

Harry hated that adults demanded unequivocal trust, but he nodded. She'd have key information a few days early, as well, giving her time to adjust her investigation if necessary.

It would've been nice if his parents had left documentation to prove the identity of the secret keeper, but that would involve the kind of luck Harry never had, even on Felix Felicis.

Harry was still worrying when Remus came to pick him up, looking a bit worse for wear, but more respectable than he had at school. Harry resisted the urge to run up to him, carrying his bag with both hands instead. Remus looked concerned.

"Are you alright, Harry?" he asked. "Did you have a nightmare?"

"No," Harry said quietly. "Am I okay to come home now?"

"Of course you are," Remus said, ruffling his hair. "Mintzi's putting on a feast tonight. And she's baked a chocolate slice. I'm sure you want to have some before I can eat it all."

"Take care of yourself, Harry," Healer Tonks said, squeezing him tight. "If you need me, I'm just an owl away."

"Thank you, Auntie Andromeda."

Ted thanked Remus for the documents, told him about Amelia's visit and Susan's invitation, and then said goodbye to Harry with a pat on the back. They stepped through the fireplace, the flames green with floo powder, and went home.

"Now, what went wrong?" Remus asked as soon as they emerged in the drawing room. Mintzi was placing a tray of tea and chocolate slices, and her eyes narrowed.

"Something happened?" she said. "I *knew* he should have stayed here."

"It's nothing," Harry said. "Wait `til I tell you about the frogs--"

"Harry," Remus said sternly.

"What happened, son?" James asked. Harry had forgotten his parents were there, hanging over the fireplace. His shoulders sagged in defeat.

"Are you sure you want me around, Uncle Remus?" he said. "You don't have a wife or children. Did you really want to look after me? Or am I just in the way? I could stay in my room i-if you'd rather. I don't want you to feel like... like you h-have to l-l-look after me, just `cause no one else will." He wiped away tears.

"What... where did *this* come from?" Remus said. "What did they say to you?"

"Y-you didn't get a choice," Harry said. "Did you really n-need to send me away, or did you j-just want a break from me?"

"Harry, it was for *your* safety. I couldn't live with myself if I got you hurt. I love spending time with you. But I'm *not* one of your parents, and we've only known each other less than ten days. I thought you'd need more time to adjust to the situation, and that maybe you didn't trust grown-ups because of the Dursleys. If you want me around more, I'll be there. But don't *ever* think that I want to get rid of you. If I'd known from the start where Dumbledore was sending you, I'd have grabbed you and run off to keep you safe, no matter the cost. I've... I never thought I could be a father." He knelt down in front of Harry and cupped his face. "And I'm not trying to be one, not replace him, I mean. You have no idea what it means to me when you call me your uncle." A tear slipped down his cheek. "You are a gift in my life and *to* my life. Please don't *ever* doubt that I want you here, and that I'll fight tooth and nail to keep you."

Harry nodded, relieved.

Chapter End Notes

The results are in. My sleep apnoea is worse than it was, and I'm now in the moderate to severe category. So, CPAP machine time. Have to do the study again in four days' time so they can work out what pressure I need. Then a two-month trial at home, which means I should probably tidy my bedroom. Oops. Not to mention oh, sweet Merlin, where will the hecking machine go? I have stuff on all surfaces!

Anyway. Another busy afternoon, since I'm starting an online course next week and had to chat with one of the co-ordinators for over an hour. So yeah. Light on plot in this

chapter, really. Oh gosh, and I keep forgetting that they should visit Remus's parents!
Stupid brain.

Please review!

Chapter Sixteen

Chapter Summary

Tea party. What more can I say? Plans are also made, but nothing sinister, I assure you.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Even Mintzi couldn't tame his thick, unruly hair, but Harry didn't mind. He was more concerned about who may turn up to the tea party, and whether Dumbledore would find out. He'd barely been able to relax during the sleepover; Tonks must've had a reason to join the Order of the Phoenix when the second war broke out, and what if the whole family was too close to him? But he'd made it out of there alright. And the Bones family had also had time to report his reappearance if they intended to do that.

Mintzi took Harry and Remus straight to Susan's house, so they wouldn't get soot on their clothes from travelling via the floo network. Harry decided that he preferred travelling elf-style. It felt smoother and was also less nausea-inducing. Could the goblins do something similar?

He nervously clutched Remus's hand as Susan bounced ahead of them, plaits hitting her shoulders, to show them to the drawing room. A table had been magically adjusted to be the right size for the children, with equally smaller chairs dotted around. Most of them were filled. Harry gave Neville a wave, and the boy waved back.

While shyness was natural in young children, Harry was worried that he might let something slip about their time at Hogwarts. He'd been terrified at first with Susan, and also with Neville: now he had three others to worry about.

"This is Lavender Brown," Susan said, beginning the introductions.

"Hello!" Lavender piped up. "It's nice to meet you, Harry."

"You too," he said, sorrow welling up when he remembered how she was killed during the final battle. By the same person who'd attacked Remus as a child. He hoped the two would never have that in common. "I think Susan mentioned you." Lavender looked pleased at that.

"And this is Anthony Goldstein," Susan said. "And Hannah Abbott."

Both greeted Harry, and he returned their greetings. He felt Remus pat his shoulder and glanced up at his uncle, who smiled at him encouragingly.

"You know Neville already, don't you?" Susan asked.

“Yes, we made sand castles together,” Harry said.

“What's a sand castle?” Hannah asked. Since it was only the six of them, introductions were over, though Harry hadn't even sat down yet. He plopped into the chair between Neville and Susan, and saw Remus moving to the far end of the room to join the other adults for their own tea.

“It's a castle... made out of sand,” Harry said, confused by the question.

“Yeah, but you use a special bucket shaped like a castle to make it,” Neville said. “You have to use sand that's kind of wet.”

“But not too wet,” Harry added, grateful for his friend's intervention. “Uncle Remus said that you can make all kinds of things out of sand. He told me that some people make coloured sand and fill bottles with it, to make all sorts of patterns.”

“Really?” Anthony said. “You can do that at the beach?”

“I didn't see anything like that last time,” Harry said, frowning. “But I think someone had a stall to sell bottles of coloured sand.”

“Gran and I passed it when we were leaving,” Neville said. “We didn't have time to look, though.”

“I'd like to make my own bottle of coloured sand,” Lavender said. “It sounds pretty.”

“Maybe we could *all* go to the beach sometime,” Susan said brightly. “Oh, please have some of the cakes and sandwiches. Just tell the teacup what you want to drink, Harry. You too, Neville.”

“Are you really Harry Potter?” Anthony asked.

“Yes,” Harry said reluctantly. “But I didn't know that people knew about me. I only found out about magic a couple of weeks ago. I thought I was just... weird.” He shrugged. “My cousin called me a lot of bad names because I was different.”

“But... but that's so *mean*,” Lavender said. Harry noticed the tears welling up in her eyes.

“I'm used to it,” he said. “Susan's aunt rescued me and I don't have to go back there again. Now I get to meet people who can also do magic. I'm not alone anymore.” He smiled widely, hoping that her tears would clear up. She smiled tremulously.

“If Madam Bones is keeping you safe, then you're *really* safe,” Hannah said.

The topic stalled long enough for them to place their drink orders. Harry felt warmed by the tea, as well as Neville's steadfast presence at his side. That such a loyal person could instead be sorted into Gryffindor, rather than Hufflepuff, showed how brave the boy was inside.

There were many different sorts of sandwiches. Harry preferred the ham and cheese ones, the cheese and pickle ones, and he discovered a fondness for cucumber sandwiches, too. He'd

always associated them too much with Aunt Petunia to try one, but he really liked them. He'd have to ask Mintzi to make them sometime. They were a much healthier snack than the chocolate-based desserts Remus preferred.

Aside from the sandwiches, there were mini scones, dense with buttermilk and topped with clotted cream and strawberry jam; small caramel tartlets drizzled with chocolate; delicate puff pastry shells filled with pat é ; and brightly-coloured French fancies with iced decorations.

Whoever made this food needed a raise. It was *spectacular* .

As the (mentally) oldest of the group, Harry broke the silence by talking about the frogs he'd seen in the Tonks's garden. Hannah was the most interested; Harry wondered why she hadn't made friends with Neville in the previous lifetime if they shared an interest in amphibians.

“What house do you think you'll be in at Hogwarts?” Anthony said. It could've been considered a general question for the whole group, but he was looking in Harry's direction.

“Most of my family's been in Hufflepuff,” Susan said. “So I'll probably go there.”

Pity they were too young to bring up the nature versus nurture debate.

“My mum and dad were in Gryffindor,” Harry offered. “But my dad got into trouble sometimes. Do you think any of the same teachers are there who would've taught my parents?”

“I think most of them have been there for a hundred years,” Susan said, grabbing another scone.

“Not *quite* a hundred, Susan,” her mother called from the other end of the room. Susan rolled her eyes as she popped the whole scone into her mouth.

“My dad's journal said that one of the teachers is a *ghost*,” Harry added. “But ghosts don't really exist, so--”

“They do,” all five children, and all adults, replied. Harry jumped in his seat.

“And Hogwarts has hundreds of them,” Anthony said. “Are you scared?”

“Anthony,” one of the adults began in a warning tone.

“I think it's *awesome*, don't you?” Harry said. “We can talk to the dead! I bet they know *all* about the history of the school. The stuff you can't read about. The stuff,” he dropped his voice, “that the grown-ups won't tell us.”

The other children now looked both intrigued and impressed.

“I never thought of that,” Neville said.

"I guess I've got a lot more to learn than all of you," Harry said, dropping his head and giving his best puppy-dog eyes. "You all know loads more than me."

"We'll fix that," Lavender declared. "You can owl us and we'll tell you everything we know."

"What house do *you* think you'll be in?" he asked her. He was intrigued to learn what made her a Gryffindor, rather than another house. As a Pureblood, she could fit in anywhere.

"I don't know," she said. "I know that people really respect the headmaster, Albus Dumbledore, and he was in Gryffindor." Harry froze as he reached for another caramel tartlet. Her eyes widened as she looked at Harry. "Oh! I forgot."

"I'm sure there are loads of people from other houses who are also respected," Harry said, daintily bringing the tartlet to his plate. He pushed it around while he thought. "I'm sure every house has good and bad things about it. And people change. I've been reading my dad's diary, and he changed from causing trouble to being head boy. Whatever he was like when he started at Hogwarts, he was different by the end."

"I wonder how the Muggles do it?" Hannah said. "Do they have houses?"

"Yeah," Harry said. "Most places do it by name. I was in a different house to my cousin because we have different last names."

"You went to a Muggle school? What was it like? What do they teach there?"

Harry went over all the subjects he'd studied by age seven, which was mostly English, maths, art, science, music, sports, history, reading and writing. He told them how rain clouds formed, the differences between adjectives, nouns and verbs, and the games they played on sports day. He also told them about the television the Dursleys owned, the car they drove, and paper money.

"That would make your purse *really* light," Susan said.

They were also astonished as he told them about fast food, including the pizza he'd had one time when Dudley threw a tantrum because there weren't enough toppings. Vernon had tried to sue the pizza joint; they'd instead black-listed the household, and many other delivery places did the same in solidarity. Which meant more work for Harry when Petunia didn't feel like doing food prep.

But he was away from all that now, to his relief.

Neville chimed in to tell them about the fish and chips they'd had at the seaside, and the children once again expressed an interest in visiting the beach, especially if they followed it up with lunch. And when Harry told them about the ice cream stand, they grew even more insistent on going as soon as possible. Remus eventually had to capitulate.

"We could go when the pantomime is on, and see that first," he said. "Then we can have lunch, go to the beach, and have ice cream last of all. Does that sound good?"

It was unanimously agreed that this sounded good.

Chapter End Notes

Do I want to write a pantomime scene? Hell yes. Will that be within the next couple of chapters? Probably not. Other plotty stuff must happen.

Can't really remember much of Hannah and Anthony from the books, and certainly not at all from the movies. Will Harry meet anyone else from their year? Will he meet Luna? I don't know yet. But I DO know that he'll get to Hogwarts at some point.

If I do a pantomime, it will probably be Cinderella, just so you know. Or maybe even The Three Billy Goats Gruff, since I've been in a version of that before, back in 2004.

Please review! Hope I didn't make anyone hungry.

Chapter Seventeen

Chapter Summary

There are memories and there is correspondence. I think you'll be particularly pleased with this chapter. (I hope.)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Harry once again saw his reaper. Whatever happened, he slept right through, since he always woke refreshed in the morning.

“Productive day?” the reaper said.

“No, but it was still enjoyable,” Harry said. “I think Amelia Bones is doing something about Sirius, but she won't tell me what.”

“I think I'll keep what *I* know about it hidden from you, so you won't have to act surprised.”

“Thanks,” Harry said drily.

“But this is something you'll be very interested in,” he continued, pushing forward the pensieve.

With a tentative smile, Harry dove head-first into the memory.

Dumbledore attracted a great many stares with his inability to blend in to Muggle surroundings, as always dressed in flamboyantly coloured clothes. It was a canary yellow suit made of some shiny material, and Harry wanted to claw his eyes out after staring at it for too many seconds. He instead focused on the woman Dumbledore was meeting: Mrs Arabella Figg. Still covered in cat fur, doing her dodderly old dear act, until he cast a privacy charm around them. Clearly privacy charms didn't apply to spies in the afterlife.

“Albus,” she said crisply.

“Arabella,” he said, pouring on the charm. “Now--”

“The boy's missing,” she said. “The police keep questioning the Dursleys.”

“Oh dear,” Dumbledore said, his affable smile falling away. “What do they think happened?”

“After doing a thorough search of the house, they discovered that he sleeps in a cupboard under a flight of stairs.” Dumbledore's expression didn't change, and Harry wondered if he'd looked in the address book to see how Harry's Hogwarts letter would be addressed. If he

knew how Harry had been 'living' already. What would the address read now? "They've instituted a search of hospitals, orphanages, and dug about in the garden. The Dursleys claim that the boy ran away, but he could never run fast, that child. Not the way they starved him. And yes, I told the police that when I was questioned. I told them that I made sure to feed him whenever he visited me. You didn't tell me that someone was coming for the lad, but a good dose of suspicion will do that family good, and I didn't have an instructions from you, so I had to improvise. At least he's somewhere safer now."

"I haven't sent anyone for Harry," Dumbledore replied. She dropped her cup of tea. He repaired it with a wave of his hand and cleaned up the spill.

"He's *really* missing?" Mrs Figg said. "But that's *awful*, Albus! What if a Death Eater has got him? Or what if the Dursleys *have* dumped him somewhere? What if he's dead?"

"Calm down, Arabella," he began.

Harry saw the moment something in her snapped. She grabbed the hot, nearly full teapot, and threw it at Dumbledore's head. It broke, splashing hot liquid all over him, even as he tried to protect his face. She stood up, towering over him as she quivered in anger.

"I told you for *years* how they treated that boy," she hissed. "But you didn't listen. You didn't *care*. Now something's happened to him and *you're* to blame. I wouldn't be surprised if they accidentally killed him and they've hidden the body away so *your* lot won't come after them for another four years. Well, as Harry is *gone*, my work for you is *finished*, Albus Dumbledore. Do *not* contact me again. That poor child." She shook her head. "If anything terrible has happened to him, it is *all your fault*. I've done all I can. I only wish I could have done more."

She left Dumbledore, both scalded and scolded, muttering 'Poor Harry, that poor boy' as she walked out of the cafe. Dumbledore sighed, waved his wand to tidy and repair everything, including the gash on his forehead, and left without paying. Harry pursed his lips at the utter rudeness of not leaving so much as a penny.

The memory moved on to Number 4, Privet Drive. Petunia answered the front door when it rang, and yelped when she saw it was Dumbledore.

"We don't know where he is," she said. "If you could tell the police where to find him, and prove that he's safe, we would *appreciate* that. I do not like being a suspect in the freak's disappearance."

"I remember a time when you wanted to be a 'freak', as you call us," Dumbledore said calmly. "Tell me what happened."

"We were in London. The boy needed glasses. While the car was stopped at a red light, he jumped out of the car and ran. I certainly couldn't run after him in my shoes, and Dudley refused to look for him. Vernon was driving. We had no opportunity to find him."

"Where was this?" Dumbledore asked.

She told him. He hummed thoughtfully.

“Have you ever told him about magic?” he asked.

“Of course not! Do you think I wanted him knowing what he could do to us?”

“And he wouldn't know how to get into Diagon Alley,” Dumbledore murmured, no longer focusing on Petunia. “Thank you.”

Harry was withdrawn from the memory and stared at his reaper.

“So he knows that I'm missing, but he still doesn't know where I am,” he concluded. “Only that I ran away near The Leaky Cauldron. But he has no reason to suspect that I'd go there because I shouldn't know anything about magic at this age.”

“Yes,” his reaper said. “Your job is to keep your location secret from him for as long as possible.”

“I'm doing my best, but it's not like I can tell anyone the *real* reason I need to keep a low profile,” Harry said, a bit waspishly. “You said that they wouldn't believe it unless they absolutely knew that I could not be lying. And I don't want anyone calling me crazy. I don't need that again.”

“I can't actually show you what the Unspeakables have discovered since receiving the cup, but I can *tell* you what's happened,” the reaper said. “Perhaps that will cheer you up?”

“Alright. Go ahead.”

“They discovered quite quickly that it was a horcrux,” his reaper said. “Each Unspeakable was shown the cup. One of them, Rookwood--”

“The Death Eater,” Harry said.

“Yes. He *may* have had the strangest impulse to touch it, and it immediately showed his fear of being discovered to be a Death Eater. He has since been remanded into custody.”

“Yes!” Harry cheered, pumping his fist up and down. “Wait. Impulse?”

“I have no idea what you're talking about,” the reaper replied, the picture of innocence.

“...Right.”

“Having identified the creator of the horcrux, the Unspeakables interrogated Rookwood. Under Veritaserum. He spoke of valuable objects given to the Inner Circle: a diary to the Malfoy family, a locket to the Black family, and the cup to the Lestrangle family. As the goblins had found nothing similar in their scan, the Unspeakables are planning a raid on all known family homes of the Malfoys and Blacks.”

“Will they get any irresistible urges to search specific places?” Harry asked.

“There are only so many irresistible urges I can arrange.”

“Pity. But this is excellent news. Thank you.”

“You may not hear about the raids or the arrests, as your guardian doesn't subscribe to *The Daily Prophet*, but I can let you know once they are successful.”

“That's good.”

“Now all we have to do is await the meddler's next move.”

Harry nodded with a grim smile.

Harry wanted no part of his family's money going towards *The Daily Prophet*, and he didn't want to show any interest in reading it. How many seven-year-old children were actually interested in the newspaper? No, he didn't want to draw any more attention than he already did.

Hannah and Neville both wrote to ask about visiting the Tonks home to see the frogs; Harry wrote to 'Auntie Andromeda', to see if he could bring his friends there on his next visit. She wrote back that she'd be delighted to have them around sometime.

Lavender also owled, asking about the coloured sand again, and what a pantomime was. Harry did his best to explain pantomime, and Remus advised him that the best place to get coloured sand was at the Isle of Wight. That would be an even bigger day out than going to Weymouth Beach, and he didn't know how far the rest of them were from Portsmouth, let alone the Isle.

But he was curious to see more of his home country. Remus warned him that the sand wouldn't be as good as the stuff at Weymouth, but that the Isle of Wight would be a magnificent place to visit, especially if Lavender was so interested in coloured sand. So Harry told her what he knew. In her reply, it turned out that they lived near the New Forest, so it was much closer for her.

I will host the next tea party, she declared. *And we can all go to the Isle of Wight from there*.

It was somewhat distressing to realise how little she knew of her local geography, all because she was a Pureblood. They considered that the things Muggles learnt were of little value. He snorted, wondering who would eventually reveal that Muggles invented radio, the printing press, cameras, plumbing, spectacles, clocks...

It was ridiculous. He'd been too dazzled by the world of magic to realise it before, but the belief that Muggles were inferior made no sense. *Robes* made no sense, especially on broomsticks. How were floo calls better than a simple telephone? Where were all the myriad works of fiction? Think of all the ideas Fred and George could have gotten for pranks from Muggle novels!

Anthony sent a very formal apology for offending Harry. With advice from his parents and Remus, Harry penned a very formal acceptance of the apology, and said that he understood being wary of strangers. It wasn't quite forgiving, but it gave Anthony and his parents an 'out' for his behaviour.

Susan wrote as well, mainly because Harry had insisted on sending a letter of appreciation for the food, and especially his newfound love for cucumber sandwiches. She said that their house elf had cried from happiness at this small acknowledgement of his work. Harry hoped that the Boneses, and other families, would learn to treat their house elves more kindly from his example. The house elf, Cuttler, sent chocolate tartlets with Susan's letter, as a thank-you. Remus was particularly happy with this result.

Mintzi was offended until she heard about why food had been sent, and then made extra steak and kidney pies for dinner. Harry wasn't sure if it was a reward, or her way of staking her territory. Or, rather, *steak* -ing her territory.

Chapter End Notes

I couldn't top that last line. I tried and gave up. I may be a vegetarian, but a pun is a pun, and all puns are quality. Not sure what type of quality, but some type of quality nonetheless.

Please review!

Chapter Eighteen

Chapter Summary

BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOKS!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

author loses mind

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Harry, I was wondering something,” Remus said over breakfast one day.

“What's that, Uncle Remus?”

“There's a place I'd like to go to, but I'm afraid you'd be a bit bored,” he said. “Mintzi could look after you, of course, but I don't want to leave you behind to go and do something only I'd enjoy.”

“Is it only something grown-ups are allowed to do?” he asked, tilting his head. “I could see if Neville's free.”

“No, children are allowed,” Remus said quickly. “But I wasn't sure how you'd feel about a whole day of shopping for books.”

In the other lifetime, Harry would have enjoyed it at this age, but become bored easily after Ron got him into Quidditch and skiving off homework. He wasn't going to allow it this time; and he may as well get more books for when he finished the ones he'd been reading. Most of his father's books were too old for him yet.

“It's better than shopping for clothes,” he said. “*That's* boring.” Remus smiled. “Where is it?”

“Wales. It's called Hay-on-Wye, and it has the most second hand book shops in one location in the *world*.”

“Wow!”

“I know!” Remus was nearly bouncing in his seat. “There's also an area only people like us can access. The Muggles keep away from it without knowing why, and they can't see it. But we can. I know we're keeping your identity a secret, but as long as you're wearing a hat then you should be fine. It's not like sellers will be as interested in you.”

“Why not?” Harry asked. He was relieved, but still indignant.

“Because you're a child, so you're unlikely to be spending as much as an adult,” he explained.

“...Oh.”

“Normally I wouldn't have gone, but your parents – their portrait, I mean – insisted on it. Do you really want to come along?” Harry nodded, his mouth full of scrambled eggs. “Alright. I'll order a portkey from the Ministry for us.”

He used the floo to contact the portkey office, while Mintzi packed a picnic lunch for them. She also gave Harry a few bags.

“This one is for you,” she said, slinging it over his shoulder. “Any books you put in here will be sent straight to your study.” It was no longer James's study, but Harry's. “These two are for Mr Lupin. I will... there you are,” she continued, as he entered the room. “This one, with the tartan pattern, will send any books placed in there straight to the manor's library. And this one is keyed to your study.”

“My study?”

“Outside the master suite,” she clarified.

“Thank you, Mintzi. This certainly makes shopping easier.”

“They will look heavier as you go, in case Muggles ask questions,” she said.

“You're the cleverest house elf, Mintzi,” Harry said. She looked smug, and he expected her to start preening when they left.

Once he and Remus were ready, they took the portkey – a shoe-string – and hurtled all the way from Dorsetshire to Wales.

They went to Hay Castle first, since the portkey dropped them nearby. Remus pocketed the shoe-string and took Harry's hand, even though there were few people about. There were repairs taking place inside: the scaffolding was visible from outside, and there were placards explaining that the repairs were due to a fire ten years before. Harry was glad that he'd thought to bring his camera, which was hanging from around his neck. He insisted on taking a picture of the castle with Remus standing in front of it, looking awkward but happy. Then they went inside, saw more of the repairs, and found an open-air bookshop. Remus brightened further, and Harry explored the children's book area while his uncle scoured the rest of the volumes. Harry interrupted only once, to ask for some money to pay for his purchases.

Remus looked happier that *Harry* had found something, which confirmed his suspicion that Remus truly had been worried that Harry would be bored, and was only here out of pity. He even approved of Harry's choices, especially when he showed Remus that one of the books was the one with secret passages that he'd mentioned when they moved to the manor.

“I look forward to reading it after you're done,” he said. “Now, make sure you stay nearby. I won't take much longer.”

Once they'd finished at the castle, they found a souvenir place which sold postcards. Harry bought some for his new friends, pictures of the castle as a reminder of their planned trip to the beach. He also bought one of the clock tower, hoping it would amuse his reaper: the subtle reminder that the clock was ticking on ensuring a successful – and safe – future.

They ate some snacks, since it was too early for lunch. While Remus conceded that cucumber sandwiches were refreshing, his sweet tooth still reigned over him. Mintzi had made pistachio macarons with jam inside for him. Harry thought they looked like Christmas.

After that, they began wandering the streets to look at the bookshops. Harry had strict instructions to ensure that they had lunch on time. Since Remus was the bigger bookworm, it made sense for Harry to be the time keeper.

Five bookshops in, and many books sent back to the manor via all three bags, Harry was getting a bit tired. But the breath was knocked out of him and he forgot everything.

A girl with bushy hair stood across the road, staring down an alleyway. Her parents were trying to insist that nothing was there. Harry knew better. He ran across the street, much to Remus's shock, and nearly bumped into the girl.

“Hi,” he said.

“H-hello,” she replied, staring at him with wide eyes. He'd forgotten that she was nearly as short as he was. It was nice to be eye-to-eye with someone his age.

“I'm Harry.”

“What did you do that for?” Remus scolded, catching up with him. “You know to look both ways before crossing the street, Harry.”

“Come along, Hermione,” Mrs Granger said, taking her daughter's hand. “You can't...” She gasped as she saw the alleyway out of the corner of her eye, and immediately dropped Hermione's hand.

“Ah,” Remus said. Harry always knew he was the smartest of the Marauders. “Did you see an alleyway for a second there?”

“Is this place haunted?” Mr Granger asked.

“You're a witch!” Harry blurted out. “I'm a wizard. So is Remus. We can see the alley, but your parents can't see it unless you're holding their hands. It's magic, you see?”

“Harry!” Remus admonished. “Keep your voice down.”

“I'll show you,” Harry said, grabbing both of the Grangers' hands. “Look!”

They paled, but he could see the alley reflected in their irises, where it had been missing a second ago. He let go and it disappeared from their view, but not his.

"It's about time for lunch," Remus said wearily. "We brought a picnic. You're welcome to join us, and I can... explain about our world. Where are you from?"

"We're English," Mr Granger said.

"So your daughter will likely attend the same school as Harry after she turns eleven."

"We can be friends!" Harry said. "Do you like books? We've been going book shopping. There are probably more bookshops down there. Some of the stores have magic sections, but you have to know where to look."

"Harry, let her get a word in," Remus said gently.

"I *do* like books," Hermione said quietly. "That's why we're here. I've had... trouble lately, so Mum and Dad brought me here as a treat. We're staying overnight because it's so far to go."

"Uncle Remus got a portkey for us," Harry said. "It brought us here in about a minute."

"From where?"

"Dorset."

"That *far*?" she squeaked. "In a *minute*? But that's impossible!"

"Not with magic," Harry said, grinning. "Want to have lunch with us? I'm sure we have plenty to go around."

"Oh, yes *please*! Is that why strange things happen around me? Because I'm a witch?"

"Uh-huh."

With much cajoling from Hermione, and a promise to keep in the public eye from Remus, they all found a nice spot in a park to set up. Remus tapped the blanket twice, while glancing around, and it tripled in size, making enough room for all of them to sit down. The Grangers were surprised by how much food the small hamper held, their eyes growing as more and more boxes of food were removed from it, as well as flasks of ice cold pumpkin juice to combat the heat of the sun.

While they ate, Remus told them about Hogwarts, the Ministry of Magic, the statute of secrecy, and answered their numerous questions. Sometimes Harry answered with what he'd learnt so far, to give Remus a chance to eat, and Hermione shared some of her instances of accidental magic. She was shocked to hear about the time Harry escaped his bullying cousin by teleporting himself to the top of a school building. She was most interested in the classes at Hogwarts.

"I suppose I could write to the Ministry and ask if you can join us on outings, so you can get to know other children who'll be at school with you," Remus asked. The Grangers had become very accepting of him once they learned that he had become Harry's guardian to keep him from being forced to return to his abusive relatives. "I was like you: magical, but with non-magical parents. I didn't know any of the other students when I went to school. But

Harry's father was welcoming, and he made me feel right at home. I still wish I'd had at least one extra year to learn about magic, though, and how our world works. I felt left behind when talking to others.”

“I don't want to be left behind,” Hermione said. “That would be *horrible*.”

Remus explained about the day out they had planned with the others, and that he could get three extra tickets to the panto for them. It would be a Muggle-style outing, for the benefit of the children who had no experience of that world, and it would give the Grangers an opportunity to meet the other parents in a more comfortable setting. They agreed to meet, and Harry's heart swooped.

He hadn't expected to see his soulmate that day. But now he'd get an extra four years to be with her, without interference from Ron and Ginny. They could get to know each other, learn together, and he couldn't be happier.

Chapter End Notes

Yes, I've been planning to do this. Especially since watching an episode of 'Escape to the Country' the other night, where they went to Hay-on-Wye. I was going to have them going to the festival... then found out that it was started in 1988. This story has begun in 1987. FML.

Please review!

Chapter Nineteen

Chapter Summary

A mixed bag of random scenes because author is odd.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Buzzing with excitement, Harry told his parents' portrait all about their outing, especially meeting Hermione and her parents. Remus left him to it while he went into Weymouth to get extra tickets for the pantomime.

“Just like a Potter,” James said. “Infatuated from the first.”

Well, at least Harry was 'infatuated' with his actual soulmate. The same couldn't have been said for his father; but this wasn't something he was going to tell them.

He had started talking to other portraits when they found him, but had yet to venture all the way to the former ballroom-cum-gallery. Partly because he wasn't interested in their input, and it wasn't his job to entertain them. And he didn't want to neglect his parents' portrait, even though he still found the idea really weird. If he'd had access to their portrait in the other timeline, he would be used to it, and it wasn't as though he had much memory of his parents. Whereas speaking to the portrait of Dumbledore before the Battle of Hogwarts? That *was* weird. It felt more comfortable talking to him in the afterlife, because at least he seemed three-dimensional there.

He nestled up with the book he was currently reading, once he'd worn himself out talking, and tried to concentrate. But he kept looking up and around, wishing that Hermione was there. When he met her previously, they were staying in the same tower, albeit in different dormitories; this time, she wasn't anywhere near him, certainly not around for the same meals, classes, and the like. She'd be returning to her Muggle school, unless the Ministry allowed otherwise. Harry would be starting lessons with Neville in... actually, he wasn't sure *what* they'd be learning. Etiquette? Old traditions which were completely ignored at Hogwarts? *Politics*? They were seven! They were supposed to be learning times tables, not how the Wizengamot operates.

He settled down after some tea, and suspected that Mintzi had added Calming Draught. He drank it all and allowed her to remove the cup before Remus's wolf senses could pick it up and wonder why Harry needed a potion. He didn't need to be mothered right now, especially when he knew that Remus was looking forward to getting stuck into his new books.

After parting from the Grangers, they'd gone to the alleyway and found a magic-specific bookstore, which included books for young witches and wizards. Harry had bought a number

of them, hoping to get through them all before passing them to Hermione. They seemed very junior, yet were aimed at his age group. That explained why some of the teachers were so surprised that the students could learn easily, if their intelligence was constantly underestimated.

Then again, remembering that Crabbe and Goyle somehow managed to avoid being kept behind, it seemed there was some basis for believing pureblood children to be inherently stupid and getting away with it. How did the Ministry manage to employ so many Purebloods?

Since he still had some restlessness to burn off, Harry grabbed the medium-sized broomstick they'd found in the Potter vault, and went for a fly out the back of the manor. This was blessedly familiar, even in a younger body, and he adjusted quite well. It was slower than his Nimbus 2000, but then the broomstick had been tucked away for a long time. His father may have learnt on it. And since it was designed for use by children, it was only sensible to cap the speed. Hogwarts really should have thought of putting restrictions on the brooms they let the first years use. Of course, Harry wouldn't have ended up as the youngest new team member in a hundred years.

And I wouldn't have died in my third year during a Quidditch match, he remembered. But that was mostly the fault of the Dementors, the Ministry, and – to an extent – Sirius.

How was Sirius doing? Had he been brought from Azkaban yet? Or would that alert Dumbledore that something was happening?

Of course, he already knew that Harry was 'missing', but both events together could raise suspicions that he did *not* want to be raised.

Each day Mintzi would visit Hermione with a new letter from Harry, and return later for a reply. He felt bad about it, even though she was only looking after two people. Remus was making enquiries into finding a second house elf, under her direction, so at least she'd get some help soon.

This afternoon, however, Hermione sent a copy of the newspaper to Harry, along with a letter.

They had no pictures of you! she wrote indignantly. *Not even school ones. Were you sick that day? At my school they always have a make-up day if you missed the rest of the school photos. I'm sorry they were so mean to you.*

By the time he got to that part of the letter Remus had found the article. Harry's disappearance had made it into a national newspaper. There was a poor artist's impression, apparently given by one of Harry's relatives when the police questioned them. Remus scoffed that the photograph looked nothing like Harry. Personally, Harry was grateful for this.

“Someone named Arabella Figg is quoted quite a lot,” he said, frowning. “The name sounds familiar, but for the life of me...”

“She's one of the Dursleys' neighbours,” Harry said. “I'd spend the day with her when the family went out to the zoo or the movies. She has a *lot* of cats.”

“Hmm.” Remus shook his head. “Well, they haven't even given your middle name. It's possible that anyone keeping up with the Muggle press may not realise it's you. Can you imagine if they worked it out?”

“Remus.” Harry frowned, putting down Hermione's letter. “Does the newspaper say what day it was I went missing? Because anyone who was at The Leaky Cauldron could work it out.”

Remus swore softly.

“I'll write to Madam Bones, though she's likely to be aware already,” he said.

“We can still go to the pantomime, though, can't we?”

“Oh yes,” he replied, nodding. “I don't think anyone at the seaside will recognise you from *this*. It gives your age, for one thing--”

“And I'm small for my age,” Harry concluded.

“It's not your fault. Everyone is different, Harry, without experiencing even half of what you've gone through over the last six years. Don't worry about it.”

Harry returned to Hermione's letter, warmed by her concern over him, and her indignation over how poorly his relatives spoke about him.

They even said they were surprised anyone noticed you were gone. It makes me so angry! I'll bet no one would miss them if they were gone .

Harry knew that he certainly wouldn't miss them if they were to disappear, for all that Dudley ended up warming to him later. If it was because Harry saved him from Dementors, Harry didn't want to be put back in that same position again, so Dudley would have to suck it up and learn to be a decent human through some other revelation. It wasn't Harry's damn job to make him a better person.

Lavender reported that her parents had found a way to floo from their house near the New Forest to the Isle of Wight. Remus had told him that there were sometimes magical creatures in the area of the New Forest, and if they had time it would be nice to explore a bit after they'd come back from the Isle. As long as there were no Muggles around.

Harry finally had the sense to make sure that everyone going to the seaside would have appropriate clothing. Hermione did, and she also had more sand castle building tools. She said that she'd never had someone to share them with, and that it would be nice to finally have friends.

Harry hoped that no one would be unkind to her. He'd warned the others, and knew that he could count on Neville to be welcoming, if shy. The others were unknown elements, yet

again, in how they would act around her non-magical parents. If they ended the day in trouble with the Ministry of Magic for breaking the statue of secrecy, he knew that he'd be in for an unpleasant lecture from his reaper.

“What am I supposed to wear to the pantomime?” Harry asked, shaking Remus awake in bed one night. Remus looked at him with sleep-blurred eyes.

“Huh?” he said.

“What do I wear to the pantomime, Uncle Remus?”

“Harry... go back to bed. It's not for three days... no, two now. Let me sleep.”

“Sorry, Uncle Remus.”

He'd finished his father's journals, since James only wrote intermittent entries, and Harry was more interested in being able to claim that he knew some things from reading diaries. He only needed to know what was said. Though now he could also claim to have heard things from both his parents' portrait and the other ones at Potter Manor. The journals had mentioned finding some of the secret passages, and Harry had noted which ones they were, in case he couldn't get to the Marauder's Map before the Weasley twins.

There was a pang in his chest when he realised that in less than four years he'd be going to boarding school, away from Remus and Mintzi. Sure, he'd have friends there, and hopefully no Dumbledore to meddle in his life. But now that he had a home life he actually enjoyed, the thought of school no longer filled him with the relief it did when he was living with the Dursleys. He'd actually have someone to miss when he went away.

It was a bittersweet feeling.

Mintzi did nothing to discourage Harry the day of the pantomime, when he leapt onto Remus's bed to wake him up.

“We're going to Weymouth!” Harry cried happily, bouncing on his knees. Remus flailed for his wand until he realised that he wasn't really under attack. Well, not a bad attack. Just a child looking forward to his first trip to the theatre.

“I'm putting a lock on this door,” Remus muttered, rubbing his eyes.

“Can't you use magic?” Harry asked.

“I *do*. You *still* keep getting in.”

At first Harry was worried; but then he saw Remus's kind smile and relaxed.

“Sorry, Uncle Remus.”

“I don't mind you waking me up in the morning, but don't make a habit of it. I don't want you to run in here the night after a full moon.”

“Okay. Should I get dressed *after* breakfast?”

“You can if you like. I'm going to shave first.”

Harry took that as a dismissal and hurried out of the master suite and downstairs, slippers slapping the fine marble stairs.

They were going to the theatre and he was going to see Hermione again!

Chapter End Notes

Now to research.

Sorry I didn't get anything posted yesterday. I wrote half a page, then couldn't think of what else to write without rushing straight to the panto, so I decided to think about it instead. And I did. Clearly. But yes, my apologies for the lateness of this posting. At least I now have a CPAP machine, so if I start getting much better sleep hopefully I'll be able to write better and more efficiently.

Please review!

Chapter Twenty

Chapter Summary

PANTO!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Remus had scouted a good location for everyone to meet at Weymouth, or at least for the magicals to turn up. The Grangers were already waiting near the bus stop when they arrived, so all three accompanied them to the apparation point. The Longbottoms arrived first. It was hard to say which caused more shock: the sudden appearance or Mrs Longbottom's hat. But they were all polite. Harry introduced Neville and Hermione to each other immediately. Then the rest arrived quickly after that.

Once their group was complete, they went to a sweet shop to stock up for the pantomime. The two Granger parents were reluctant at first; they were dentists, after all. But once they realised that the witches and wizards had no idea what any of the candies were, they switched to talking about their childhood favourites, and helping the parents figure out what they might like. Hermione was in her element, telling them not just about the sweet snacks but the savoury ones, like crisps and popcorn and crackers. Harry made sure that she kept her explanations short, and Remus kept everyone on schedule. They, and the Grangers, were in charge of making sure that the magicals didn't appear too ignorant about the currency they were using.

They went to the theatre, which was a perfect excuse for any odd clothing choices. The show was nearing the end of its season, so it had been easy enough to get tickets together at this time of the school holidays. The children sat in a group, with their parents (and guardians) behind. Already digging into the sweets, of course.

The lights started to dim, and the audience began to quieten, so the magical children followed suit (though already Hermione knew this meant the play was about to start). No one rustled with candy wrappers or sucked their drinks dry as the curtains opened on 'Puss in Boots'.

Three brothers were summoned to be told what they had inherited from their father. Three brothers; it made Harry think of the Peverells. He told his mind to shut up and not think about the Deathly Hallows. (Though the sooner he had the Invisibility Cloak, the happier he'd be.)

The third brother – played by a young woman, according to the programme – was disappointed to receive only a cat from her deceased father.

“What on earth am I, a young man, to do with a pussy?” she asked.

The adults laughed and Harry nearly snorted his lemonade up his nose. Was that kind of thing just *allowed* in a children's show? Was in an accident of the script? But he hid his humour; a seven year old wasn't supposed to laugh at that sort of joke.

After a song about being the forgotten child, the one less loved, 'he' was finally joined by the cat, who was played by someone in costume.

"It's not a real cat?" Hannah whispered.

"I am here, young master!" declared the cat.

"Oh," she continued, nodding. "That's why."

Harry smiled. He'd wondered whether an actual cat would be on stage, but it seemed unlikely. No one could control a cat.

"And what is your name, cat?" the 'boy' asked.

"I am called Puss! Your father, I may say, had no imagination." The audience laughed. "But I would make one request of you."

"Name it, good Puss."

"Could I wear a pair of boots? I have always thought that Puss in Boots is a far nicer name than simply Puss."

The cat was given shoes to wear, while the lead apologised that 'he' could not provide much more, as his brothers had inherited the rest of the property and left him with nothing else. Then the 'boy' walked off stage, dejected. 'Puss' turned to the audience.

"Little does he know that I will make his fortune," he said, with a big, obvious wink. "We cats are the smartest creatures in the world, as you will see."

There was a scene change and the audience was introduced to the queen; surprisingly played by a man. Harry blinked. Why was the casting like this?

"Dear daughter, you must marry," 'she' said. "I want grandchildren before I die. And you know that the only men who look upon me want to be king. They do not look upon me with love."

'She' sighed dramatically, and many in the audience said "Aw!" in sympathy.

It was established that the young woman would only marry for love, while the 'queen' insisted that he have a title, at the very least. But the princess had met many lords and earls and the like, and she didn't love any of them.

During the scene, Puss arrived. No one in the played seemed bothered by the fact that a cat could talk. Harry, being used to fiction, was able to suspend his disbelief; but he saw that the others kept looking very confused. Neville had stopped snacking on his candy and was rubbing his temples.

Puss declared that the bag contained a rabbit, a present from the Marquis of Carabas. While the two royals exclaimed over how thoughtful the gift was, Puss spoke again to the audience and said that he had caught the rabbit in the forest.

The next scene took place a week later. Each day Puss had taken something else he caught in the forest to the royal palace, as a gift from the Marquis of Carabas. Each time the game was bigger: a hare, a fox, a pheasant, and so on, until he was dragging a large sack containing a deer.

(Harry winced, but it was invisible in the darkness. He hoped Remus wasn't thinking about Prongs being in that bag instead.)

Lavender was quite upset about the animals dying, but Anthony pointed out that they didn't see the inside of the bags, so the bags probably had something else inside, not real animals. She calmed down at the reminder that it was all pretend.

The villain was finally introduced while Harry was stuffing his face with crisps. Other people in the audience started to boo when the creepy music played, and then someone in a hideous costume came onstage. He declared himself an ogre, and even got his own song about being a generally horrible person. Harry heard Remus hissing, and turned to look at him in surprise. Remus was sitting forward in his chair, completely caught up in the show. The ogre, meanwhile, seemed to revel in all the hate he was getting. Harry wasn't prepared to join in, though: he'd been at the end of hate before, and knew how bad it felt.

The royal family were sent for to deal with the ogre, which Harry found completely far-fetched; but so was the idea of a talking cat, really. The 'queen' turned out to be adept with a sword, while the princess was endearingly clumsy. The actress had excellent reflexes to be able to avoid all number of near-catastrophes while she tried to wield her own weapon.

While they were walking through the forest, Puss ran towards them in a panic.

"Help, help!" he called. "My master, the Marquis of Carabas, went swimming in the river and his clothes were stolen!"

The 'queen' ordered for a set of clothes 'befitting a marquis' to be brought at once. Puss ran off with them and emerged seconds later with his 'master'. The princess dropped her weapon as soon as she saw the hero, who immediately picked up the sword and held it in a suggestive position when 'he' saw the princess in return. The princess commented on 'his' remarkable pussy, leading to more laughter from the adults in the audience.

Ah. So it was deliberate.

The hero offered to deal with the ogre instead, at Puss's urging, despite great reluctance to do any actual fighting. The 'queen' swooned at the gallant gesture, and Puss ran ahead to announce that the marquis would be confronting the ogre.

Instead, once inside the ogre's castle, Puss asked the ogre to leave before he could be executed, and Harry again questioned how appropriate this was for children. He glanced at Neville, knowing that the boy beside him could grow up to wield just such a sword in battle,

The ogre instead turned into a lion; squinting through the flashing lights, Harry saw the costume being stripped away to reveal a lion one beneath, though it was somewhat obscured by fog. Not to mention how distracting the music was. Puss trembled in fear and hid behind a throne, where he seemed to count to three.

“It's very easy indeed to turn into a lion, I imagine,” he said bravely. “But a lion is big. It would take far more magic to turn into a mouse. I'm sure you cannot be *that* powerful.”

“Oh yes I am!” the ogre declared.

“Oh no you're not!” Puss responded.

This was apparently a cue for the audience to join Puss in saying 'Oh no you're not' every time the ogre-turned-lion said 'Oh yes I am'. It went on for nearly half a minute before the ogre roared that he'd prove it. Harry shoved chocolate into his mouth, wondering how they'd manage *this* piece of stage transfiguration.

Instead, the lighting changed. The ogre-lion and Puss were now silhouetted, and the lion appeared to shrink to the size of a mouse. Puss 'pounced' on the shadow, which squeaked in fear, and when the lights returned to normal the ogre was nowhere to be seen. Puss was rubbing his belly as his 'master' hurried in, sword at the ready.

“W-where is the ogre, Puss?” 'he' asked.

“I have eaten the ogre,” Puss said. Harry gained some grim satisfaction at the thought of the mouse actually being a certain rat by the name of Scabbers.

By the time the royal family and their servants arrived, Puss had instructed his master to pretend to be the Marquis of Carabas, and promised that he would organise people to work in the castle and be his servants. The fake marquis and the princess decided to get married – Harry nearly choked in disbelief again – and they all sang a song which seemed popular with the Muggles. Harry vaguely recalled hearing it on the radio, and Hermione seemed to know it.

Well. It was the most bizarre thing Harry had sat through. He'd been enthralled at times, but it was hard to switch off his adult brain to enjoy the jokes aimed at children, hide his humour at the adult jokes, and also stop analysing the things which confused him. But he'd joined in with the 'Oh no you're not' part, at least, and came to understand that the villain *wanted* to be booed and hissed. And he clapped his hands hard at the end while the actors took their bows.

They emerged from the darkened theatre to the seaside sun, and had to wait until their eyes adjusted. The Grangers were gushing over how much they'd enjoyed seeing a pantomime again, and promised to take Hermione to another before Christmas. Harry wondered if she'd gone to the pantomime their first holiday after starting Hogwarts.

Now that the children were hopped up on candy, Remus recommended swimming first, to burn off their excess energy – and the food – before lunchtime.

“And then after lunch we can make sand castles, unless you'd rather make sand castles now,” he said, raising his eyebrows.

They decided to do both, since some of the children hadn't yet learned how to swim. Hermione could, of course, as could Harry. Anthony and Hannah had done a bit of swimming on holiday, so they were fine. But Lavender, Susan, and Neville were completely out of their depth. Did the other champions have to learn how to swim in time for the second task, or were purebloods taught before going to Hogwarts?

He splashed about in the ocean, running after the others and being chased by them in turn. Then, with Neville and Hermione, he taught the others how to make sand castles. He stood guard while they collected decorations. Then he swam for awhile longer, watching while Hermione and Neville taught them the noble art of stamping all over their castles. Not before Remus obligingly took pictures of their creations, of course, with the camera Harry insisted on bringing.

They cleaned up the Muggle way, since they were in public, before heading for a slightly late lunch at the same restaurant they went to last time. Harry decided to be more adventurous, choosing squid. Hermione opted for prawns, as did Remus, and Augusta chose oysters. Everyone else was happy with fish, though, and ended up ordering an extra basket of chips, as they disappeared into stomachs hungry from the sea air. Before they could order yet more chips, Remus reminded them of the ice cream he'd promised.

Lunch was finished off with individual scoops of ice cream, in a variety of flavours. Harry asked a stranger to take a photo of the whole group. They took pictures outside the theatre, too, beside a cut-out of Puss. Finally, they returned to the beach to find the stall which sold bottles of coloured sand. The girls were particularly enthused, and Harry was impressed by a flat-sided bottle which actually depicted a beach scene, complete with palm tree. It cost more, but he didn't mind, and neither did Remus. Harry carried it *very* carefully as they all returned to the apparation point.

Hermione had managed to get on well with Hannah, Neville and Susan; Anthony was still a bit too condescending, using the word 'Muggle' far too much and being too surprised by their ingenuity, while Lavender's gregarious personality was intimidating. But, all in all, Harry thought it had gone well. Lavender even asked Hermione to come to the New Forest with them, without having to be prompted, and smiled widely when Hermione said yes, she'd love to.

The day ended on a positive note, and when Harry got home he collapsed onto the couch in the drawing room and fell asleep, exhausted from sheer relief.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry there wasn't much more interaction. This was more of a tell chapter rather than a show one, wasn't it? But I didn't want to write out all the lines of the pantomime,

especially since it's been a long time since I saw 'Puss in Boots' on stage. Thank Merlin for Wikipedia.

Please review!

Chapter Twenty-One

Chapter Summary

There's a surprise visitor.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Harry didn't feel like much for dinner, to Mintzi's disappointment; but from too much junk food in the morning, through a large lunch, followed by an ice cream, as well as an afternoon nap, he didn't want much to eat.

“He has plenty of time to grow into his proper height,” Remus told her. Mintzi huffed, and made a large platter of sandwiches for them to share. And no dessert, much to Remus's disappointment. If Harry had had the energy, he would've laughed over his uncle's forlorn look.

During the evening, he asked Remus if they could get a television.

“It might be tricky to get it to work, with all the magic around,” he said.

“But someone made radios work,” Harry pointed out. “Shouldn't magic make them *stop* working?”

Remus opened and closed his mouth a few times, looking stunned.

“I have no answer for that,” he said. “Still, radio transmissions aren't the same as television, I'd have thought. But then what do I know about it? There must be some kind of wards inside the radio casing. Perhaps runes? I need to look into this.”

While he muttered about it, Harry kept reading his *Child's Guide to Understanding Potions*. It was no longer in circulation, according to Remus, but it helped him understand why certain ingredients were necessary, what they provided, which ones would always clash, and even how to experiment safely in making your own potion. It also made reference to the types of cauldrons best suited for certain types of potions, the best stirrers to use, and how to determine how long a potion will last if it's kept in a glass vial, depending on ambient temperature.

It was fascinating, and he was determined to track down extra copies of it. He knew Hermione would devour the information therein, and it might even help Neville. But why was it no longer printed? Why were there no more copies of the *Child's Guide to Understanding* series? If all of the volumes, such as the ones on Transfiguration and Ancient Runes that he'd also picked up, were as helpful as this one, they should be *required* reading.

Oh, of *course* . The old families probably still had copies, and as blood prejudice grew it would be in the purebloods' best interests to ensure that Muggle-raised and Muggleborn children had as much of a disadvantage as possible.

Bastards.

Remus ended up writing a letter to order another magical radio by mail, and declared that he'd head back into Weymouth soon to buy some Muggle tools.

"I'm going to figure this out," he said.

"I'm going to write a letter, too," Harry said.

But this one was to the original publishers of the *Child's Guide to Understanding* books. It was too risky to send it as himself yet, but he could perhaps convince Neville to send it under his own name instead. A pureblood's word held weight, and Harry was going to exploit that.

Harry awoke when he heard a muffled shriek. His war instincts had him jumping out of the bed in a split second. His seven-year-old body had him miscalculate the distance and fall over flat. But he was up and running without missing a beat, accidental magic blasting the doors open as he ran to the master suite and straight into Remus's room.

"Uncle Remus, are you o--!" He skidded to a halt in his bed socks, staring at the man in bed with him. "What..."

"Sirius, get off!" Remus said, shoving his friend out of the bed. Harry was still in shock. There'd been no warning from his reaper. "Harry, this is your godfather. He is *not* supposed to be here, but he thought it would be funny to... *surprise* us. By doing what you do and jumping on me."

"I don't jump on you," Harry said indignantly. "I jump on the bed."

"Oh, my mistake," Remus said drily. Harry stuck his tongue out at him.

"Hello, Harry," Sirius said, grinning up at him from the floor.

"Are you my Uncle Sirius?"

"Yes, that's me," he said, his eyes crinkling at the corners.

"What are you doing here? Where have you *been*?"

"He was away," Remus hurried to say. "But I wasn't expecting him. How in Merlin's name did you get here, Sirius? The property is warded."

"Yeah, and the Potters adopted me," Sirius said, shrugging. "I've known where Potter Manor was all this time, ever since they took me in after my parents kicked me out. And Mintzi still considers me family, so I called for her and got her to sneak me in."

“Should I hug you?” Harry asked bluntly. He wanted to, but this was the first time they'd met, in this timeline. “I hug Uncle Remus sometimes. I'm still getting used to hugs.”

Sirius looked devastated for a moment, but he cleared his expression.

“Hug me whenever you want,” he said.

“Alright.” Harry walked forward as his godfather stood up, and then gave him a quick – but fierce – hug around the middle. Then he stepped back. “You shouldn't jump on Uncle Remus. He gets worried about hurting someone since he's a werewolf.”

“You know about that?” Sirius said.

“James wrote about it in his journals,” Remus said. “Enough for Harry to put it all together.”

“Clever boy,” Sirius said proudly. “That's my godson.”

When it was a more reasonable hour, they went down to breakfast. Harry had returned to his room so Remus could tell Sirius everything which had been happening, and waited until Mintzi popped in to tell him that breakfast would soon be ready. His muscles still ached a little from paddling in the ocean waves, so he didn't run. And his uncles were happy to keep a slow pace as they made their way to the dining room.

Mintzi scolded Sirius for being too thin, just like Remus and Harry, and said that if he didn't fatten up soon she would consider herself a disgrace as a house elf.

“I come from a family of svelte people,” Sirius said.

“Your cheeks are *hollow*,” she rebutted. He gave up trying to argue with her and instead tucked into the extra large breakfast she'd made for him.

“Why are you... here now?” Remus asked cautiously.

“Bones has been working to get me a trial,” Sirius said.

“A trial?” Harry said. “Like when people go to prison?”

“Uh...” Sirius looked around awkwardly, and then sighed. “Yes. I was in prison. I shouldn't have been, but I felt guilty about... what happened to your parents, and not being able to get revenge for them, so I gave up. Had I known you were with Lily's awful sister, I would have done whatever was necessary to leave. But I thought that the Longbottoms would take you, or Remus. *Anyone* but Lily's sister. I'm so sorry, Harry. I should have fought from the beginning, if only to make sure you were alright. I never heard anything about you. I didn't know what had been happening until the aurors showed up at Azkaban, sent me to a Ministry cell, and... well, since I was sent to prison unlawfully... uh, I mean, they shouldn't have put me there without a trial. Because of that, I'm allowed to go wherever I want within the British Isles, as long as I turn up when I'm summoned.”

“Do you know when the trial will be?” Remus asked.

“This afternoon, during the Wizengamot meeting. I asked if I could spend a few hours here, and invite you to come along. You both have a right. Though after what Moony's told me, Harry, it may be better for you to stay in hiding, at least for now. If we could sneak you in, we would.”

“I'll be okay with Mintzi,” Harry said. “I think Uncle Remus should go with you. It'll make you feel better. I know I feel better about bad things if someone's with me.”

“That's very mature of you, Harry. Thank you.”

“You'd better wear something nicer than that,” Remus said, indicating Sirius's rags. “You'll fit into some of mine, I shouldn't wonder. We can do alterations as necessary.”

“Uncle Remus can alter clothes with *magic*,” Harry said. “Isn't it amazing? Mintzi can disappear, and there are secret bookshops, and I went flying on a broomstick, and--”

“When was that?” Remus interrupted. “When did you go flying?”

“The other day,” Harry said, shrugging. “It was pretty easy. I used the broomstick we found at Gringott's. I sort of... hopped on and took off. I stayed in the backyard, though. I didn't go anywhere other people would see me. And Mintzi was here! It's when you went to get more tickets to the pantomime, for Hermione and her parents.”

“Hermione?” Sirius asked.

“Harry's newest friend,” Remus said. “I should tell you what James said about...” Sirius's head snapped up at that.

“Their portrait is here?” he said sharply.

“It is now. We found it at the cottage in Godric's Hollow. Harry wanted to see the place, and get some of his mother's belongings. It was hanging over the fireplace, inactive until Harry touched it. Since the place is only being used as a shrine, we brought it back here.”

“You *stole* it,” Sirius said, looking delighted.

“It's Harry's rightful property, no matter what else the Ministry may *believe*,” Remus said, giving a haughty sniff. “It's not stealing when it belongs to him. We also found Lily's school trunk.”

“I'm so proud of you, Moony,” Sirius said, wiping away a fake tear. “Breaking and entering, taking personal effects and appropriating works of art. You really have grown up.”

“Oh, shut up,” Remus said mildly, throwing a half-eaten piece of toast at Sirius. Sirius caught it in his teeth, winked at Harry, and gobbled it down.

“Buttered toast,” he mumbled around the last mouthful. “My favourite.”

Remus rolled his eyes while Harry giggled.

Chapter End Notes

Don't think I'll bother with the trial, just because Harry won't be there. I don't know what he'll be doing instead. And I don't know how this is going to affect things which I have planned for later on. But oh well. I didn't want to leave Sirius to suffer any longer.

Please review!

Chapter Twenty-Two

Chapter Summary

What will Harry do while Sirius is on trial?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

If Harry had realised how *excruciating* the wait would be, he would have begged to go along to the trial with Remus, no matter the danger. Was this how the others felt when he was on trial before his fifth year? But at least his trial was in the morning, and they all had too much faith in Dumbledore to doubt that Harry would return to Hogwarts.

But if they hadn't succeeded, what would he have done? Gone to another school, now that he knew about Beauxbatons and Durmstrang? Chosen private tutoring? Sirius wouldn't have died if Harry had just *stayed put* instead of returning to Hogwarts. He could have learnt Defence from Remus, maybe become an Animagus like his father, become proficient in wandless magic, and had proper time to recover from Cedric's death. Sure, Voldemort might not have been exposed as soon as he was; then again, he might have been exposed *sooner*.

All this waiting was causing him to ruminate too much. He needed to be productive, but his mind couldn't concentrate on one thing together for longer than a minute, and only negative thoughts found a place in his mind.

He floo-called Neville, who was happy for the break in classes, not to mention surprised to hear that his grandmother was attending the trial of Sirius Black at that very moment.

"I'm sorry, Harry," he said. "But I can't sneak us in."

"No, it's alright," Harry said. "I just need something to take my mind off the trial."

After the call ended, he considered having a nap. Maybe his reaper would visit and show him the trial while it was happening? Even if there was no visit, at least the nap would make the time go faster, and Remus – and hopefully Sirius – would be home sooner.

But he was too unsettled to sleep. Full of nervous energy, he grabbed the broomstick and went flying. He dipped into the forest, the part which was warded to keep people away so Moony was free to roam the woods during the full moon. Harry knew it made him feel better to check the boundaries and ensure that no one was getting too close, especially any magical people.

He paused mid-flight when he saw a snake on the ground. With the weather getting warmer, the reptiles were emerging more, though he hadn't seen one yet. But the hibernation period

was clearly over, and he drifted down closer to have a look.

“Hello,” he said, wondering if he could still speak Parseltongue, or whether the removal of the horcrux meant that he could no longer converse with snakes.

“You are a speaker?” the snake asked.

Well, that answered that question.

“Yes,” Harry said, landing the broomstick and sitting cross-legged in front of the snake. “My name is Harry. I live in the manor house over there now.” He pointed back the way he'd come. “Do you live in this area?”

“I do.”

“What's your name?”

The snake seemed amused. It was just an impression Harry got.

“We do not use names,” it replied. “We know each other by our unique scents, and we have special calls for each other. But it will not translate.”

“Maybe I can say the special call for you?” Harry said. “That's what a name is.”

“You call us snakes. Is that not a name?”

“It's what you are,” he said. “Just like I'm a human. I'm Harry Potter the human. I'm a boy; I don't know if you can tell that.”

“They call me *Whisper Scale*. We can tell that you are male. I am not.”

“So you're female?”

“Close enough. You can call me that if you like.”

“Hello, *Whisper Scale*.”

At least he now had a distraction. He told *Whisper Scale* about magic, and that he wasn't sure why he could speak to snakes, but he was very glad that he could.

“Can you speak with lizards?” *Whisper Scale* asked.

“I don't know. Are there any lizards nearby?”

They were able to find a sand lizard, who looked ready to fight at first, until he was told that Harry was only there to see if they could converse. To his surprise, lizard-speak just sounded like heavily accented Parseltongue. They were able to talk without too much difficulty.

“Can you make it to the beach at Weymouth, or would you like me to take you next time I go there?” Harry asked.

"I ken get sere wissout trouble, sank you," the unnamed lizard said, before disappearing back into his hidey-hole, grumbling about interfering humans messing up his first day out of hibernation.

"Just one human!" Harry called, while *Whisper Scale* hissed a sort of laugh.

"Et leas' I'm not spending time wiss edders!" the lizard replied loudly.

"You're an adder?" Harry asked.

"Yes," *Whisper Scale* said. "But you're in no danger from me."

Considering Harry's encounter with the basilisk, he wasn't that concerned about an adder.

"I'd better warn you that my uncle is a werewolf," Harry said. "And my godfather can turn into a dog. On the full moon they'll be in these woods. I'll tell them that I met you, so maybe you can talk to them if you see them. But please make sure no one hurts them."

"As long as they behave themselves, we will not feel threatened, Harry Potter the human."

After seeing the best sights in the forest, Harry flew back to the manor, dropping *Whisper Scale* off on the way at her own hole in the ground. She said that she'd consider becoming his familiar, but currently she was ready to settle down and find a mate and lay eggs. The last thing Harry wanted was to deprive baby snakes of their mother.

Mintzi provided him with cucumber sandwiches and tea cake. Harry was about to ask why she had provided hot chocolate in three mugs when the drawing room floo activated and Remus stepped through. Harry held his breath. Then Sirius followed and he broke into a grin.

"Ah, hot chocolate," Remus said, immediately helping himself.

"Only tea cake and sandwiches?" Sirius asked.

"I could ask Mintzi to buy dog treats," Harry said, ever so politely. Remus accidentally dropped an entire handful of marshmallows into his mug, while Sirius's eyes narrowed.

"My fault," portrait James said. "The journals I wrote, remember?"

"Ah," Sirius said. "Sorry. I'm on edge. And still feeling vulnerable. I was given the antidote to Veritaserum, but you feel so exposed, ready to reveal all your secrets. It was necessary, and now they know the truth. They even viewed my memories." He grimaced. "Not my best light, but I've been worse. I'll be getting restitution from the Ministry for wrongful imprisonment. I mean, they're giving me the money that I could have earned if I wasn't in prison," he explained. "Anyway, I'm glad you weren't there, Harry. It wasn't nice. You don't need to know everything about... that night. That Halloween." He looked haunted. "Mintzi?"

"Yes, Mr Black?" she asked after she appeared.

“I think Harry should have his afternoon tea... elsewhere. He shouldn't hear all of this yet. He's too young. But James and Lily should know, and so should you.”

Harry didn't want to be alone after an hour of socialising with the reptiles in the forest. There were a few snakes, many lizards, and some turtles in a small pond. Harry didn't even realise that he could talk to turtles, let alone lizards. But he'd had no opportunity to talk with them before, and any time he was in a garden area there were usually other people around. He'd assumed it was humans he could hear talking, but now he was second-guessing that.

But he settled in the dining room, since he didn't want to go all the way upstairs if he'd be called back again soon. Time passed, and he finished his hot chocolate, the sandwiches, and more tea cake. He pushed the plates away and slumped on the table, resting his chin on folded arms.

Eventually Remus came for him.

“Sirius is... busy,” he said.

“Doing what?” Harry asked.

“He was talking to your parents and now he's crying. I decided it was best to leave him there, with Mintzi to make sure he's okay. I think he'll need to take the rest of the day for himself. He's still recovering from Azkaban. He's been mostly healed, physically. His body needs to catch up a bit, but he'll be fine. In that respect. That way, I mean. But his mind... it's harder to heal. Fix. You're still shy around strangers, thanks to the way you were treated by your aunt, uncle and cousin. Once your mind – heart – has been hurt, it's the hardest thing in the world to make it feel better again. Sirius is very good at masking... at pretending he's fine. But I think he'll need to put up silencing charms around his room. He may even need to share with me at first, so I can reassure him as soon as he wakes up. He'll have nightmares, like you do sometimes.”

Harry was grateful that he didn't have as many nightmares as he feared he would, but it seemed that the afterlife had made sure that if he did have nightmares, he wouldn't be in any position to give away information about the other lifetime, or anything else Harry shouldn't know. Remus assumed that his nightmares would be about the Dursleys, and there was no point in correcting him.

“Will he tell us when he wants hugs and things like that?” Harry asked. “*We're* trying to talk to each other when we're worried about things, but Uncle Sirius doesn't know that.”

“I'll make sure he knows that we'll listen when he needs to talk,” Remus said.

“Is there anything you can tell me about what happened today?”

Remus thought for a minute, idly playing with a doily on the table.

“Everyone – nearly everyone – was very surprised when Sirius was brought in. The official story is that the DMLE is considering a new filing system, and when there was no record found of Sirius's trial to go with the rest of his paperwork they investigated. He was brought

to the Ministry cells to be healed, where he asked about you. Since no one knew – *officially* – about where you were and how you were doing, he chose to reveal that he wasn't responsible for your parents' deaths, to find out more about you. He also asked to talk to me. Remember, Harry, this is the *official* story.”

“What really happened?”

“Madam Bones was looking into all the people named in your parents' wills, and found that Sirius had never been on trial. The official story is the excuse, alright?” Harry nodded. “After he was questioned by the Wizengamot, and showed his memories, he paid a fine for not registering as an Animagus – he never told the Ministry that he can turn into a dog – he was declared innocent and a free man. He can live here with us now.”

“Yay!” Harry cheered. Remus smiled.

“He asked the Wizengamot for your location, to take over his duties as godfather and guardian. The Wizengamot asked their chief, Albus Dumbledore, to make sure that Sirius got that information in private, to protect you from possible danger. Neville's grandmother was there, and she said that she'd asked Dumbledore before about your location, since her son and daughter-in-law were also potential guardians for you. I said that I was another possible guardian, and wanted to know where you were. There was a bit of a stir that Dumbledore was keeping you hidden from people who were supposed to be trustworthy, particularly the Longbottom family.

“Things got a bit out of hand, especially when Madam Bones revealed that the Ministry of Magic had no record of your location, or that you even existed, outside of your birth certificate recorded by St Mungo's. It was pointed out, by quite a number of people, that if you weren't in the magical world then you were in more danger than living with people like the Longbottoms, or Sirius, or even me. They said you wouldn't be protected.

“Dumbledore was clearly under pressure. When Anthony's father produced the Muggle newspaper with the article about your disappearance, all hell broke loose. Dumbledore was forced to admit that you were the missing Harry Potter in question, and Minister Fudge has ordered that you be found as soon as possible. I'm afraid that means you'll have to stay inside the wards for awhile, until you're ready to be found. The plus side is that the aurors will investigate the Dursleys and likely prosecute them... uh, get them into trouble for being mean to you.”

“Wow,” Harry said, wide-eyed. “How did the Goldsteins get the paper?”

“I have no idea, but Anthony's mother is a Muggleborn, so she may get the newspaper to keep up with what's happening in the world she grew up in. You can do the same when you're old enough, if you like. It's up to you.”

“Good thing the manor's so big, and we bought new books the other day,” Harry said. “Can I visit my friends?”

“Maybe, but going to the Isle of Wight is out of the question for now,” Remus said, and Harry's face fell. “We hadn't settled on a date for it. If the Dursleys are arrested quickly, you

won't have to return to them, and we can 'find' you.”

“Where am I supposed to have been all this time?” Harry asked.

“Madam Bones thinks that you should say you've been living on the streets, and that you were found after performing accidental magic in front of Muggles. That you've been recovering in private, tended to by Healer Tonks, who couldn't say anything because of her healer's oath. But we may need to change the story if someone finds out the truth.”

“Okay. Oh, at the next full moon don't eat any snakes or lizards or turtles.”

“I wasn't planning to,” Remus said, raising his eyebrows. “Why?”

“Because they're my new friends, especially *Whisper Scale*. She's an adder.”

Remus looked alarmed.

Chapter End Notes

Oh, Harry. Your timing.

Slightly longer chapter. I'd forgotten that I wanted to go over whether or not Harry's still a Parselmouth. Clearly, I decided that he is. I asked Google if dragons are considered reptiles, and they are, so imagine if Harry had just talked the dragon in the first task.

Please review!

Chapter Twenty-Three

Chapter Summary

Dumbledore takes action. So does Harry.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Harry was woken in the middle of the night, before he could reach the dreamscape and possibly see his reaper. He woke to Remus pleading frantically with him.

“What's wrong?” Harry slurred, still half-asleep.

“There's an emergency,” Remus said. “I left Sirius to sleep, since he needs it. But I want Mintzi to spend the night in here, with you. She'll bring her bed. I didn't want you to wake up and wonder why she was here.”

“`Mergency?” Harry said. “What `mergency?”

“Dumbledore knows that you ran away and that the aurors found you.”

That woke him up.

“What?” he said, sitting up straight. “How?”

“I don't know yet. You'll be safe here, because of the wards, but Dumbledore may have a record of this address. He could very well look here. Mintzi will take you somewhere safe if he gets in. Try to go back to sleep. If he's already outside, and realises that someone's up and about, he'll know that we know, and he'll make a move.”

“Was it the newspaper?” Harry asked.

“What?”

“The newspaper.” He rubbed his eyes. “Anthony doesn't go to school, so I don't think his mum gets the Muggle newspaper, if she's left it all behind. I thought it was weird. But that's got to be it.”

“Yes, it probably is,” Remus said, sighing as he perched on the edge of Harry's bed. “If Mintzi wakes you up and takes you somewhere, you have to promise not to fight her.”

“What about you, Uncle Remus?”

“Sirius and I will manage,” he said. “Once you're safe elsewhere, Mintzi can return and remove all traces of you. We'll tell Dumbledore that we decided to get the manor ready for when we take over your guardianship. If there's no evidence of you living here, he can't do anything about it.”

“Portrait. In the drawing room. And Mum's trunk. We took those--”

“From the cottage,” Remus said, eyes growing wide. “You're right. I'll make sure Mintzi knows to remove those as well.”

“Okay.”

Remus kissed him on the forehead, and Harry settled down in bed. He noticed a shadow beside the door: Sirius. He closed his eyes and evened out his breathing so they'd think he was already asleep.

“Breaking into the manor in the middle of the night wouldn't be a good look for Dumbles,” Sirius pointed out quietly, as Remus began to pull the door closed.

“Perhaps not, but I'm not taking any chances with Harry's safety. Dumbledore *could* wait for a more reasonable visiting hour, or he could make us sweat awhile.”

“He might not even know that we know,” Sirius said. Their voices were getting softer as they moved away from the door.

“But he'll prepare in case we *do*...”

Sleep was a long time coming. Mintzi came in and set up her elf-sized bed while he blinked in the darkness, now fully aware of the danger.

He'd faced dragons, acromantulas, angry goblins, Death Eaters, Umbridge, Voldemort, Dementors, literal *death* ... yet he was more terrified of returning to the Dursleys. And not just because three aurors, and potentially Remus as well, would lose their lives if he was forced to return.

He didn't want to be under Dumbledore's thumb anymore. The so-called Leader of the Light had failed him: he'd kept Harry in the dark about his horcrux for *years*; he hadn't stopped Snape's bullying, or the bullying of the other students; he'd forced Harry to participate in the Triwizard Tournament; he hadn't organised a trial for Sirius, even though he was in a position to do so; he'd allowed the Weasley children to get away with anything, including the use of love potions; he'd done nothing to expel the Dementors from Hogwarts.

Harry had had a great deal of time to consider all that Dumbledore had concealed and allowed over the years, all in the name of an unspecified Greater Good. Whose Greater Good?

Not Harry's. Not the students who were tortured and killed by Death Eaters. Not Snape, who led a double life and died without knowing whether his sacrifice would be worth it. Not Remus, whose job prospects would have significantly improved with just a word from Albus

Dumbledore, or even Professor McGonagall. Not Neville or Luna or any of the other bullied children. *No one's* life was improved by Dumbledore's actions, except maybe Dumbledore. And even then, any difficulties he faced would have added to his self-inflated image of the martyr he wanted Harry to be.

Not this time.

Mintzi eventually sang a lullaby, when she could see that Harry was struggling, and whatever she sang it managed to lull him to sleep.

There was no visitor in the night: neither Dumbledore nor Harry's reaper.

There didn't need to be.

"Who contacted you to say that Dumbledore knew?" Sirius asked Remus over breakfast. Remus glanced at Harry, who stared right back, daring him to keep it secret. His uncle sighed.

"Madam Bones told me," he said. "She sent a Patronus."

"Yes, I thought that was her voice that woke me up."

"How did she find out?" Harry asked. What he'd eaten of his breakfast sat heavy inside him, and he found it hard to swallow. The image of Vernon Dursley's bright red face and quivering moustache floated to the front of his brain, and he wanted to be sick. He *couldn't* go back to that.

"Apparently Dumbledore visited the Goldsteins, but they weren't in. Then he went to Susan's place, where she was having lessons with some of the other pureblood girls. Lavender was returning from the bathroom when he encountered her outside the classroom. He... he used Legillimancy on her."

Sirius dropped his cutlery as he swore.

"That's illegal!" he barked. "She's a child. She's too young to give consent."

"He didn't ask for consent, according to Lavender," Remus said. "He saw some of our day at the beach with Harry, enough to know that he's been with me, and that we were at Weymouth. It won't take him long to search his records and find... Harry, where are you going?"

He didn't answer. He stalked to the drawing room, anger giving speed to his steps. He grabbed floo powder, tossed it into the fireplace, and stepped in.

"Brown Lodge," he said firmly, just as Sirius ran into the drawing room. He swirled away in the green flames and tumbled out at the other end. Lavender had given him their floo address in one of her letters, and had described the lodge well enough that he soon found the dining room.

She was seated at the table, her parents protectively sitting either side of her. Tears streaked down her cheeks and she was only pushing the food around on her plate. When they realised they had company, all three looked up.

“Harry!” she exclaimed. “I’m so sorry. I didn’t say anything, really I didn’t. He was just suddenly *in* there and--”

He’d rushed around the table as she spoke and nearly pulled her off her chair into a hug.

“Are you okay?” he demanded. “Did it hurt? Did he hurt you?”

“It was so s-s-scary!” she cried into his shoulder, her blonde hair tickling his nose. “It f-felt *awful*. I had a h-headache for hours and I couldn’t sleep. I kept having n-n-nightmares.”

“It’s okay, Lavender,” Harry said, rubbing her back. “It won’t last forever. St Mungo’s can help. I’m sorry you got caught up in this. It’s my fault.”

“No!” she said. “It isn’t. But you’ll h-hate me now!”

“I *don’t* hate you,” he said. “I hate Dumbledore. He frightened you and hurt you and made you really upset. He made you *cry*. That’s *not* okay, and I’ll make sure he knows never to do that again. I promise, he’ll never hurt you again. Do you want me to make an oath? I will, if it makes you feel better. Please don’t cry, Lavender. Please.”

“Harry, you don’t have to make a vow,” Mrs Brown said, touching his shoulder. “We know it’s not your fault. But Lavender was most worried about losing your friendship.”

“That won’t happen,” he said fiercely. “She didn’t do anything wrong.”

“You’re a good boy, Harry,” Remus said. He looked over his shoulder and saw his godfather and uncle standing there, watching him. “You’re so like your mother sometimes.”

“Dumbledore will pay for this,” Harry whispered, so only Lavender could hear. Remus furrowed his brows and Harry internally cursed werewolf hearing. “You eat breakfast now. Don’t forget, we still have to go to the Isle of Wight sometime.”

Lavender nodded, and she sat back down with Harry’s help.

“Do you want to join us for breakfast?” Mr Brown asked. “Our house elf always makes more than enough to go around, and Lavender hasn’t eaten much.”

“Not today, thank you,” Harry said. “I have something else to do. But I’ll see you again soon, I hope. We have to go and see the coloured sand, remember?”

Lavender nodded, finally giving a small smile, and her parents looked relieved. Then Harry spun on his heel, returned to the fireplace, threw in some floo powder, and stepped in.

“The Three Broomsticks,” he said clearly.

“Well, shi--” he heard Sirius said, before he was again whirling away through the floo network on another important mission.

At the other end, Harry marched out of the pub, and then broke into a run when he got outside. He ducked amongst the Hogsmeade shoppers, using his small size to dodge around and between people on the streets. He took the shortcut through the Shrieking Shack, under the assumption that his uncle and godfather wouldn't look for him there.

Unless Sirius turned into Padfoot and searched for him by scent. But Harry didn't care. No one was going to stop him now, no matter how strong or powerful they were.

They'd risen early, to be ready for evacuation at a moment's notice. Breakfast was soon due to start at Hogwarts, which meant that Dumbledore would be making his way down.

The front doors opened before he could touch them, clearly sensing his anger. He timed it perfectly. Most of the students were in the Great Hall, with only a few still about to go in, and Dumbledore was coming down the stairs. He paused when he saw Harry, smiled, and continued walking down the stairs, but now towards him.

“You. Hurt. *Lavender!*” Harry shouted. “You used mind magic on her, illegally! You should be in Azkaban, you foul old man! How *dare* you hurt one of my friends! It's bad enough that you sent me to the Dursleys, *against my parents' wishes*, but to hurt Lavender? She's only seven! Like me! You shouldn't be in charge of a school at all! You just want to hurt innocent children. They have a *name* for people like you in the Muggle world, and it isn't a nice one!”

“Harry!” Remus said, clutching his shoulder as he panted. Sirius soon appeared at his other side. Some students and staff had emerged from the Great Hall when they heard the shouting. Professor McGonagall was making great strides towards them.

“What is the meaning of this?” she asked. “Mr Lupin? Mr Black? I hope you have an explanation for this. Surely... surely *this* isn't Harry Potter?”

“Yes, orphaned Harry Potter, *abused* Harry Potter, friendless until a *week* ago Harry Potter!” Harry said, warming to the subject. “He,” he pointed at Dumbledore, “used illegal magic on one of my friends to find out where I was. I was *safe* until he found out. I was finally safe from my aunt and uncle and cousin. They hated me, called me names, *beat me*. *He* sent me there in the first place, and *he'll* want me to go back. Well, I won't. Not when he's happy to hurt children and let others hurt them. He shouldn't be anywhere *near* children.”

“Albus, is this true?” McGonagall asked. Harry ground his teeth; of course she didn't bloody believe him; why did he think she would? She never had before when it was most important! He regretted using an Unforgivable to defend her.

“Of course not,” Dumbledore immediately lied.

“Actually, you'll find that St Mungo's will beg to differ,” Sirius said. “As will the aurors. And even you are not immune to Veritaserum.”

“Harry *must* go back to his family!” Dumbledore said.

"I wouldn't advise that," another voice said from behind them. Harry whirled around, filling with relief. Amelia Bones was there, along with Rufus Scrimgeour and Alastor Moody. They all had their wands out, magic-suppressing handcuffs dangling from their belts. "The three of us took oaths, on our lives, that Harry Potter would not be returned to his relatives. Now that you know that, if you return him there – or arrange for him to return there – you will be committing murder, and that's life imprisonment in Azkaban."

"It's for Harry's safety--"

"Safety! That's laughable. I've seen his report from St Mungo's. Malnutrition, fractured bones which have healed badly, broken blood vessels which have never healed at all, and no doubt psychological issues from the verbal abuse he's suffered. They kept him in a *cupboard*. Harry, have you suffered at all since living with your uncle?"

"No," Harry said. "Not a scratch. Not even sunburn from the seaside."

"Child endangerment, failure to carry out wills, use of Legillimancy on a minor," Scrimgeour listed.

"You're in big trouble, Dumbledore," Moody said. "No doubt other charges will come up."

"I'm sure it was a misunderstanding," a student said.

"There is *no* misunderstanding, sonny!" Moody snapped at the redhead.

"Our parents will stand by you, headmaster," a younger redhead said. Harry realised who it was as soon as he saw the rat peeking out of the boy's pocket. Percy Weasley. And Scabbers.

"Nice mouse," Harry said, walking towards him. "A couple of my friends prefer frogs and toads, but they're not furry enough for me. Can I see him?"

"He's a rat, actually," Percy said condescendingly, pulling out Scabbers.

"Come and look," Harry said, beckoning Remus and Sirius over. Everyone was confused by his sudden change in mood and his actions. Percy almost stepped back, but held his head high like a pureblood and a Gryffindor.

"What?" Sirius growled. He whipped out his wand and, before anyone could do anything, he cast a charm which returned Scabbers to human form. "*Peter Pettigrew*."

"Good gods!" Scrimgeour said. Amelia's monocle fell from her eye. McGonagall gasped. Percy backed away in terror, with Bill and Charlie catching his shoulders in a protective stance. Harry glared down at the mouse-turned-man, who Remus calmly bound in ropes.

"Add harbouring a known fugitive to that list of charges," Amelia said calmly. She used a stunner to keep Pettigrew from returning to rat form. "This wasn't the day I was expecting when I woke up, but I must say, Mr Potter, you keep my life interesting."

"You're welcome, Auntie Amelia," he said, giving her his best doe eyes. "May I go home for now? I only have one home, and that's with my *true* family. Uncle Remus, Uncle Sirius, and

Mintzi.”

“Of course,” she said. “You’ll need to make a statement later, but I’ll owl you with possible times. Go home for now. We can deal with this.”

Harry noticed that Moody had already put cuffs on Dumbledore, who was trying to do his I’m Very Disappointed In You act. Moody was immune to it, thank Merlin.

Harry took Sirius and Remus by the hands, and they left Hogwarts. For now.

All in all, it was a good day’s work.

Chapter End Notes

I was originally going to leave off with Harry reaching Hogsmeade, then realised that my dear readers would NOT be pleased with me if I did that. So I resolved things. A little bit. There’s still stuff to do, including dealing with Barty Crouch Jr, the horcruxes, and so on. But those can wait. Harry’s had a big morning and needs a bit of a break.

Please review!

Chapter Twenty-Four

Chapter Summary

Harry's made progress, but the day isn't quite over yet.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Sirius declared that a celebration was in order, at least for Pettigrew's capture. Remus pointed out that they could be summoned for a statement at any time. Harry just wanted to nap. Mintzi gave him a mug of warm milk, made sure he drank it all, then saw him safely to bed, while Sirius was still talking about hitting the town, going to the fanciest restaurant in London, buying fireworks, and other increasingly elaborate ideas.

There was no reaper visit as Harry napped, but then he'd been present for the latest developments, so he didn't need to be caught up with what was going on yet. And he wanted to be well-rested by the time they went to the Ministry of Magic.

It was late afternoon, after lunch, by the time Amelia summoned them by owl. They flooded to the Ministry, and Harry clutched his guardians' hands as they walked through the atrium. He saw a hooded figure watching them, and recognised the robes of an Unspeakable. He wished fervently that he knew what they were doing about the horcruxes, and how far along they were. If only there was a way to make an anonymous tip about where to find the missing ones. But his information could be incorrect at this point in time, and then where would they be?

He sighed as the lift reached the DMLE's floor, and he was taken to a familiar, comfortable room to be questioned.

"Harry, why did you go to Hogwarts?" Amelia asked gently.

"Because Dumbledore hurt Lavender," Harry said. "She said she had a headache and nightmares after he read her mind. She was *crying*. I couldn't let him get away with it! She's my friend. I'd be a bad friend if I didn't help her when she was hurt and upset. I'd do the same if it was Hermione, or Neville, or Susan, or--"

"Yes, I get the picture," she said, smiling. "You're a good boy." Sirius chuckled, and she gave him a hard stare. He stopped laughing. "How did you know that Albus Dumbledore had read Lavender Brown's mind?"

"Uncle Remus told us at breakfast. So I went to the fireplace in the drawing room and used the floo powder to get to Lavender's place. I knew where she'd be from her letters. After she

was smiling again, I went to The Three Broomsticks. I knew about it from my father's diary. I also knew there was a way to Hogwarts from the Shrieking Shack.”

“I can't believe James *wrote that down*,” Remus muttered. “It was so reckless of him.”

“I did it to help Lavender,” Harry said stubbornly, crossing his arms. “And I'd do it again. If he's supposed to look after children, he shouldn't be hurting them. And he was looking for me, so it's my fault.”

“It's *not* your fault, Harry,” Amelia said, touching his free hand. “In the St Mungo's report it shows that Lavender is particularly susceptible to... I mean, she's more sensitive to mind magic. Anyone at your age is sensitive to it. You haven't been practising magic at Hogwarts, and becoming magically stronger, so Legillimancy would hurt more. It shouldn't hurt, especially when being performed by someone as powerful as Albus Dumbledore, but he wasn't being careful. We've seen her memories, and he looked almost... unhinged. Out of control. We don't know why, and you don't need to know why, either. He committed a crime against the only child of a Pureblood family, the last of the line, and he'll be in big trouble for that.”

“He should be in trouble for *more* than that,” Sirius grumbled.

“He claims not to have known that Peter Pettigrew was masquerading as a pet rat, nor that he was at Hogwarts itself,” she said. “We can't prove that he knew, and he had no reason to know that we can find. There's no way we can make that charge stick, so we have to focus on building cases we can prove. If there was someone we could talk to about Harry being left at the Dursleys, who could testify that Dumbledore *knew* about the abuse but did nothing...” She shrugged. “But we have no address for any magicals living in the area.”

Harry blinked. Could he possibly...?

“Mrs Figg knew,” he said. “She was the one who told the newspaper about me, I think. She was nice to me. I'd like her to know that I'm okay.”

“Arabella Figg?” Sirius asked, sitting up straight.

“Yes,” Harry said.

His godfather's eyes lit up.

“She's a squib!” he said, delighted. “Madam Bones, Arabella Figg is a squib who is friends with Dumbledore. She was one of the Muggle world contacts of the Order of the Phoenix.”

“The Order of the Phoenix?” Amelia said, while Remus gasped.

“*That's* why I recognised the name,” he said.

“She knew Dumbledore?” Harry said, acting surprised. “Why didn't she tell me I was a wizard? She must have known. She always asked me questions about what the Dursleys were like, and I told her everything. But... but she never helped me leave.” He lowered his eyes and slumped back, to seem even more pathetic.

"I'll be sure to bring her in," Amelia said. "And I'll tell her that you're safe."

"Can you ask her why she didn't tell me anything?" Harry asked in a quiet voice. "I want to know why... why so many people just d-didn't care. Didn't t-try to *find* me."

"Oh, Harry," Sirius said, scooping him out of his chair and into a hug.

"I'll get every answer I can wring out of her," Amelia said firmly.

"T-thank you," he said, his voice muffled by Sirius's shoulder.

It was amusing when Sirius still insisted on dragging them out to dinner, and took them to an area called *Wandsworth*, of all places. He said that he'd read about a restaurant named Harveys while he was trying to learn what he'd missed out on over the past six years. They went to Diagon Alley first, so he could get plenty of Muggle cash.

"Have you had French food before, Harry?" Sirius asked, nearly bouncing in excitement as they walked along.

"I had half a croissant that Dudley couldn't finish once," Harry said. "That's French, right?" That was actually when he was nine, but no one was going to check up on that little detail.

"They have some very strange foods, but I'm sure you'll find something you like. The children's menu at restaurants is usually less adventurous. Do you like garlic?"

"The Dursleys don't eat garlic. They think it's too foreign."

"I *love* garlic. So does Remus. You'll probably like it, too."

"No frog's legs, though," Remus said.

"Who'd eat frog's legs?" Harry asked, making a face.

"The French," his guardians chorused.

"You don't have to eat any," Sirius said. "It's considered a delicacy there."

"I couldn't do that to Neville and Hannah!" Harry exclaimed. "And what about the frogs in the pond at Auntie Andromeda's place? I couldn't do that to them, either!"

"Auntie Andromeda?" Sirius said, staring at him. "You call my cousin Auntie?"

"She said I could."

"Of course she did," he said, rolling his eyes.

"Here's the restaurant," Remus said. "It feels like we're under-dressed."

"Money talks more than clothing," Sirius said. "Don't worry so much, Moony."

They received a few looks for not wearing typical upper class Muggle clothes, and especially since it was two adult men with a child. He imagined the kind of things they were thinking, and almost glared at the people who stared. Fewer stared when Sirius ordered the most expensive champagne for their celebration, likely because they remembered to focus on their own over-priced meals and drinks, rather than watching others.

Harry was feeling hungry by then; he'd missed most of his breakfast, was still a bit dozy after his nap to eat much for lunch, and hadn't had time for snacks while they were at the Ministry. But he was sensible enough to order something safe made with duck and vegetables, while Remus tried snails and Sirius foie gras. They also ordered some sides, including cheese-filled pastry things Harry couldn't pronounce. But they sounded something like 'gorgeous', and they were delicious, so he tried to remember what they were like to tell Mintzi about them.

It was so nice not being the one to have to learn new dishes to cook on demand, and he made sure that Mintzi knew how much he appreciated her hard work. Of course, she had the advantage of being able to use magic to get chores done.

“Do you think you can fit in some dessert, Harry?” Sirius asked with a grin.

Harry nodded eagerly.

Remus had chocolate souffle, Sirius had something with alcohol, and Harry had biscuit glacé, since he felt like ice cream. It was unusual, but he liked it. Not as much as the cheese things, but it was refreshing after a very savoury, garlicky meal.

After dinner, Sirius paid the bill and left an extremely generous tip. They walked for awhile to settle their stomachs, before apparating home to the manor. Harry was tired again, and Mintzi had to make sure that he didn't fall asleep while brushing his teeth.

He staggered to bed, drifted off easily into slumber, and smiled in his sleep when he saw his reaper.

Chapter End Notes

I know some people are enjoying this story, but sometimes I worry that it isn't good enough. It's been a long time since I wrote fan fiction, especially Harry Potter fan fiction, and I was only inspired to write this because I was reading so much. I've been enjoying myself writing again, but I know that the fandom has probably changed over the years since I was a regular contributor and reader. I want to continue on and finish this story, but is it worth it? I wonder. I don't want to waste anyone's time if the story isn't good enough.

Chapter Twenty-Five

Chapter Summary

Harry is glad to see his reaper.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“You've done well so far,” Harry's reaper said. “The meddler is in a cell, the traitor in another, both soon to be facing trial.”

“It was a stroke of luck, Percy being there with Scabbers,” Harry said, shrugging. His reaper smiled a deeply unsettling smile. “Wait... did *you* have something to do with that?”

“He always takes the rat to breakfast,” the reaper said. “And he follows his elder brothers around, learning all he can. The boy could have made a good Ravenclaw. No, it was more delaying the Weasley boys from getting to breakfast sooner. No doubt they'd have come running at the sign of the meddler needing help, but I chose to ensure it instead when I saw what you intended to do. And before they could even discover from the newspaper that Sirius Black was innocent.”

“Imagine if Pettigrew had found out and escaped,” Harry said, and he shuddered.

“Your godfather was exonerated. Catching the rat was not necessary, although I'm sure you'd prefer to see him rot in Azkaban than be swallowed whole by some street cat.”

“Yes, I suppose,” Harry said. “What if he changed back partway through? The poor cat. No, it's better this way.”

“Not surprising that you are more concerned about a hypothetical cat than the person who betrayed your parents.”

“What about Dumbledore? Will the charges stick?”

“There is no denying them,” his reaper said, rolling what looked like a golf ball along the surface of the desk with his deft fingers. “However, the difficulty is in ensuring that enough people vote against him in the Wizengamot. He does hold a lot of sway.”

“You can't see the future?” Harry said, bewildered.

“It's constantly in flux, so there's no point. He may lose his position as headmaster of Hogwarts, but he could still keep his liberty. And that means--”

“He can still get to me, and I can never be free of him,” Harry said hollowly.

“Despairing so soon? Come, come. First, let me show you the interview with your neighbour.”

Harry dutifully leaned over the pensieve, downhearted at the prospect of Dumbledore not facing justice. But there was nothing he could do about it. He was resigned to again becoming a prisoner, this time of Potter Manor. And later Hogwarts. He couldn't be free until the old man was dead, and that was a long way off, considering magical longevity.

The pensieve took him to Amelia Bones's office, rather than the comfortable interrogation room he was becoming accustomed to. Arabella Figg was sitting opposite, tissues clutched in her fists.

“H-he's alive?” she said. “Oh, thank goodness! I thought perhaps he'd been worked too hard, and his relatives had hidden the evidence. He really is safe now?” Amelia nodded. “Thank *goodness*. Oh, that poor boy.”

“Why did you never report that 'poor boy's' situation to the Ministry of Magic?” Amelia asked.

“But... how could I? I don't have an owl, my fireplace isn't connected to the floo network, and I have no floo powder anyway. I can't apparate or create a portkey. I had no way of getting news to you except through Dumbledore. My family disowned me when I turned out to be a squib, and I don't remember where they lived, *or* know where they'd live now. How could I tell you what was going on? I had *no way to do so*. And that isn't a failure on my part; it's a failure on *your* world for not giving us a way to contact you. Of course,” she grumbled, “the meddling old fool would have sent the boy back to the Dursleys and obliterated anyone who said otherwise. I don't know why he was so determined to keep Harry there, but he would rather have seen the boy *dead* than be proven wrong about something.”

Harry winced, knowing the truth of what she said. Amelia didn't flinch at all.

“That wasn't for you to decide,” she said.

“How do you propose I could have told the Ministry anything?” Mrs Figg shot back. “I can't call the family house elves; I *tried* the first time I heard Dursley give Harry a beating. I tried to find the entrance to the Ministry of Magic in Whitehall, the one my parents used when they took me to file the paperwork registering me as a squib. But I couldn't find the entrance. Every time I tried to look closer, I'd get an urge to go shopping at Harrod's. While I would *love* to afford to go there, I can't, and I'm too practical to give in to that urge, so I knew it was magic keeping me away. Whether it was Dumbledore or the Ministry, I don't know, but I couldn't undo whatever it was.

“As for St Mungo's,” she continued as Amelia opened her mouth, “I'd be taken there enough times for testing with my parents, but the blasted mannequin wouldn't let me through without them, no matter how many times I told it there was an emergency. I was nearly carted off by the police when I kicked the window. Some Muggles thought I was off my rocker.”

"I'll admit that we do have certain protective enchantments to curb non-magicals from getting into the Ministry of Magic from the red phone booth," Amelia said, looking mollified. "And thank you for trying to get into St Mungo's. I'll have a word with them about allowing squibs through in the future. I had no idea how difficult your situation was."

"You should have *asked* instead of castigating me," Mrs Figg said, still miffed. "I kept records of *everything* that happened at Number Four Privet Drive." She patted her bulging knitting bag. "And I told Dumbledore every last thing. He did *nothing*. I called the school, child services, even the police, but they'd never believe me. They'd ask the other neighbours first, who were all stupid enough to buy into the Dursleys' act of respectability. I was told off for being a *nuisance*, and they wouldn't send anyone out again. Not until the school reported that he hadn't shown up for classes. When I called they listened this time, but too late." She sighed, as if she'd been relieved of a great burden, and slumped back in the chair. "If I could have told Harry about magic, I would have."

"Were you prevented from doing so?" Amelia asked, now simple curiosity in her tone, and none of the anger.

"I didn't know if he could keep his mouth shut about it around his aunt and uncle. And what could he do? I could have taken him to the Ministry or St Mungo's, yes, but if nothing came of it then he'd be sent back, and I'd be forbidden from contact with him. Better that he get the occasional respite with me, and give me more for my records, than completely lose contact with him. Though, in hindsight, I wish I *had* brought him to London myself. If I'd known that you'd all do right by him, I would have brought him when he was only a toddler."

"You did what you thought was best," Amelia said, as Mrs Figg sobbed into the tissues.

"I'm so ashamed," she whispered. "Oh, I wish I could see him for myself, make sure that he's fine. But I couldn't look him in the eyes, knowing that I failed him. He could have been safe sooner. He could have grown up without memories of the Dursleys, especially that brute with the dogs."

"I'm sure Harry would forgive you, if he knew you did your best--"

"But can I forgive myself? I'm not so sure. Poor little boy." She sat up straight. "No. I can't see him. He needs a clean break from that old life, and forcing him to see me would do neither of us any good. If you could send me news of him from time to time, and perhaps a photograph...?"

"I'll see what I can do," Amelia said gently.

Harry was brought out of the memory, tears on his cheeks echoing those of Mrs Figg. Now he understood how limited she'd been. She did nearly everything she could, and only hesitated in doing more because she couldn't guarantee a good result for him. He appreciated her efforts and knew that he had to forgive her. He'd begun to take magical communication too much for granted, and he suspected that Amelia felt the same way.

If ever she asked for pictures of him, he'd give them without hesitation. He'd tell Amelia everything he was doing so she'd have plenty to tell Mrs Figg. And maybe one day he'd ask

about her, when he felt ready to re-open that chapter in life, and write to her himself.

“Do you feel better now?” his reaper asked, startling Harry.

“Uh, yes. Thanks. Sort of.”

“Mixed emotions. How glad I am that I'm not human.”

“You still look exactly like my older self,” Harry said.

“Yes, it was quite awkward when I appeared as a toddler to you after your first premature death.”

Harry snorted in amusement, picturing what that encounter must have been like.

“Is there anything else you need to show me?” he asked.

“I can tell you that the prisoners you captured today – very well, allowed the aurors to capture – are most unhappy with their respective situations right now. The traitor wet himself when he woke up and realised where he was, and that he couldn't turn into a rat again. Then he soiled himself when he was taunted that everyone knew he betrayed your parents, who are considered national heroes. I am glad I don't have the ability to smell.”

Harry wrinkled his nose.

“As for the meddler,” the reaper continued, “he considers a Ministry holding cell far below his dignity. Some of the Death Eaters at the Ministry are pleased to know that the leader of the light is at the mercy of the Wizengamot, though.”

“I'll bet they are,” Harry muttered.

“At least the DMLE won't face opposition from them when it comes to the charges. Pity Malfoy won't be able to vote in favour of sending the meddler to Azkaban, but he's also incarcerated.”

“What?!”

“When Unspeakables searched his property, they were having trouble finding the horcrux, until one had the... misfortune... to fall over while holding a heavy object and heard a hollow sound below the floorboards where there shouldn't have been one. When they investigated, what do you know? Many illicit objects, including a certain diary you once destroyed.”

“Oh good,” Harry said, eyes gleaming eagerly. “What about the ring? And the locket?”

“You ought to ask your godfather if he has any other properties, maybe something closer to London in case you all go out at night again, and don't want to travel all the way back to Dorset. Right now, the Unspeakables can't access Grimmauld Place due to the Fidelius Charm. But if he gets someone in to check the place over for dark objects, so it will be safe for a pre-Hogwarts child to stay there, then someone's bound to find the locket. Haven't worked out how to lead them to the ring yet, but I'm sure something will come to me.”

“If only they knew Voldemort's real name, then they could find out his connection to the Gaunts and check all their known properties,” Harry said. “Dumbledore knows his identity. But what if he uses that as a bargaining chip to argue his way out of going to Azkaban? I don't *want* him to have that ammunition. I want him *gone*.”

“Leave it to me,” his reaper said. “I don't have anything better to do than help you fulfil your destiny.”

“Especially since you might get fired if you don't,” Harry said.

“Precisely.”

Chapter End Notes

I was so overwhelmed by the messages of support that I couldn't reply right away, I was this damn close to crying. Today was a bit up and down for me, so the uplifting comments really helped. I'm tempted to screenshot them and get my mother to print them out (I seriously need to connect to the wireless printer sometime, ugh). I'm sure she's got plenty of coloured ink left from Christmas.

Anyway, I'm trying to be less of an emotional beast right now. Just wanted to let you know that the messages were and are appreciated, and I'll get around to answering them once I'm sure that I won't burst into happy tears at the drop of a hat.

So, what did you think of this chapter? I know not much is happening, but Harry's asleep, and at least he's doing a bit more plotting with his reaper.

Chapter Twenty-Six

Chapter Summary

It's time for another day out! Anything to take everyone's mind off the previous day's excitement.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Harry was woken by someone jumping on his bed. He still wasn't out of the habit of reaching for his wand when he felt danger, but he relaxed at his godfather's laughter.

“Uncle Sirius!” he scolded, shoving at the man's chest. Sirius stopped bouncing and got this teary-eyed look. It was the same with Remus, every time Harry called one of them 'uncle'. He briefly wondered if it would wear off. “What's the time? Did I sleep in?”

“You were sound asleep and actually smiling,” Sirius said. “I think we all slept well last night.”

“Your breath smells of garlic,” Harry said, which set Sirius off laughing again.

“Still have to get used to cleaning my teeth after all that time in Azkaban,” he said. “It wasn't the height of luxury, don't you know?”

Feeling bad, Harry wrapped his arms around Sirius's shoulders and mumbled an apology. Sirius squeezed him back tightly, and then let go.

“It's after nine, in case you were still wondering,” he said.

“Nine?” Harry wasn't used to sleeping that late. Sirius's eyes softened.

“It's probably the relief of knowing that Dumbledore is behind bars right now,” he said. “Remus and I would've managed to sleep in if it wasn't for the fact that we got an owl rapping at the window half an hour ago. Miss Brown needs to be distracted. Her parents have sent around invitations to ask if we want to join them at the Lodge and go to the New Forest.”

“Is Hermione invited as well?” Harry asked.

“Plus some others you haven't met,” Sirius said, nodding. Remus knocked on the door frame, and they both looked up at him.

“I thought I'd trained jumping onto beds out of him, and now you're proving just as bad, Padfoot,” he said.

"It's nice to feel proper mattresses again," Sirius said, giving him puppy dog eyes. Remus sighed, and gave them both a smile.

"So do you want to go out today, Harry, or would you rather stay in?" he asked. "The Isle of Wight can wait until another time."

"No, I want to check on Lavender," Harry said. "Did her parents say if she's okay?"

"She's recovered, thanks to St Mungo's. I think she wants company to distract her, and something to do. Sitting around, dwelling on what happened, won't help her. She'll have plenty of time to do that overnight and during the evenings."

"I'll do whatever I can to help her. What should I wear?"

"Comfortable clothes and walking shoes. Preferably darker colours for blending into the trees in the forest, if we want to find wildlife. Uh." He scratched the back of his neck. "Try not to seek out snakes to talk to, yes? Some people find the ability to talk to snakes... unnerving."

"What's wrong with talking to snakes?" Harry asked. "I think it's wicked! And really useful. *Oh*, I see. You think they'll be jealous. Okay, I won't mention it."

"Yeah, jealous. That's it," Sirius said, slowly getting off the bed.

"There's nothing *bad* about it," Harry said. "It's not like it means I'm evil or anything. Or Uncle Vernon and Dudley and Aunt Petunia could've talked to snakes, too."

He ignored the awkward silence that descended. He wanted to inure people to the fact that he was a Parselmouth before he went to Hogwarts.

Oh *damn* . He'd meant to ask his reaper why he could still speak Parseltongue. He'd have to wait until next time. Unless being asleep meant that he'd forget? He couldn't risk writing it down... well, he'd just see what happened next time he fell asleep.

He got out brown pants and a green pullover, made out of a light material that would breathe if they were walking for ages. He organised matching shoes and socks, as well as a hat to hide his mass of black hair. He wasn't sure if he should take anything, so he decided to leave that up to Remus and Sirius. It's not like he was planning to collect potion ingredients or anything.

Breakfast was substantial, to give them the energy to face the day ahead. None of them had been to the New Forest before. Remus had heard of the ponies, but worried that they wouldn't be allowed to feed them. Mintzi promised to pack snacks for them and include apples and carrots anyway, so they'd be prepared.

They flooded to the Lodge at the time the Browns suggested. Harry made a beeline to Lavender to make sure she was alright. Then he thanked her for making sure to invite Hermione, who was with Susan and Anthony, having an in-depth discussion on how to act around ponies. She'd apparently been researching the New Forest and Isle of Wight ever

since she was invited on the expedition, which was such a typical Hermione move that Harry wanted to hug her.

There were others there he'd known at Hogwarts, but hadn't yet seen in this timeline. To his shock, among them was Daphne Greengrass. Evidently the initial meeting she'd had with Susan had gone well enough for her to be invited, despite knowing that Harry was there. Then again, *The Daily Prophet* was apparently full of his confrontation with Dumbledore, so there was no hiding his reappearance in the magical world anymore.

Ernie MacMillan was there, and so were Megan Jones, Lisa Turpin and Mandy Brocklehurst. The girls outnumbered the boys, especially since it was mostly mothers accompanying them, but that would probably help Lavender to feel safer. As long as Harry wasn't stuck talking to Ernie for too long. And at least Zacharias Smith wasn't there. Harry didn't want to raise questions by belting someone across the face without seeming provocation.

The Browns were a family of nature lovers, and had over half a dozen binoculars to share around. Harry also had his camera, shrunk down and kept in Remus's pocket, but he didn't intend to use that in the New Forest. He didn't want to scare the animals. But some nice scenic pictures by the sea, especially something he could arrange to be sent to Mrs Figg, would be nice. As well as having a record of a nice day out for Lavender to remember.

Now, to make sure the day *stayed* nice.

The house was a short walk from the hiker-friendly part of the New Forest, so they all strolled there in sets of two or three, adults leading the way, spread throughout, and right at the back. Sirius was one of the adults at the back, while Remus stuck to the front. No doubt ready to sniff out potential trouble. Harry was behind Lavender and Neville, who were discussing the flowers and other plants they might see on the walk, and he was on Hermione's left while she told Daphne about why the sands at the Isle of Wight were naturally different colours, with Ernie listening close behind. Harry could almost see him scoffing, and clenched his hands into fists, ready to intervene if he chose to be rude to Harry's soulmate.

Friend. Soul-friend. That was all.

"You were missing for six years," Ernie finally said, choosing to talk to Harry. "Is it true you don't know anything about magic?"

"I *didn't*," Harry said.

"But you're *Harry Potter*," Ernie said. "You won against You-Know-Who when you were a *baby*."

"I haven't been to Hogwarts yet," Harry said, sticking his fists into his pockets so no one would notice the way they shook. "I'm pretty sure I didn't do anything special."

"No, you probably didn't," Ernie said. Hannah and Mandy, who were walking behind them, both gasped loudly at his words. He looked down his nose at them. "What?"

"I don't like to think about that night," Harry said quickly, to stave off any arguments. "I lost my parents, you know. And then I was stuck with horrible people for six years. Can we talk about something else? I've never met a pony before, but I saw a police horse during a parade once. It was *huge*. It was for some... war thing, I think. Remembrance Day? No one else could look after me, so my relatives had to take me with them. But ponies are smaller, I know that. Still loads bigger than us, but nowhere near as big as an elephant."

Having successfully derailed the conversation, judging by the confusion on the purebloods' faces, he proceeded to tell them about various African animals, and that they probably had some at London Zoo. He moved on to Asia, after remembering Asian elephants, and told them about how there weren't as many pandas as there used to be, and how he'd love to see one someday, but it looked less like it was going to happen...

Then they all stopped. Remus was looking off in one direction and had pulled everyone up short.

"This way," he whispered, beckoning them off the path. Harry was glad that he knew his uncle wasn't the Big Bad Wolf in the tale of Little Red Riding Hood, and that no one was wearing a bright red cape anyway. They all straggled after him, careful to step over tree roots and around boulders. Then Remus stopped at a tree and indicated for them to line up beside him. As more joined him there, they gasped in succession.

There was a grey pony standing only a dozen yards away, a light grey foal nuzzling under her belly for milk. There were a few other ponies nearby, including another feeding foal. Harry regretted that his camera had flash, since it was a beautiful moment. The adult ponies grazed; and while they were still smaller than horses, they were also bigger than the seven-year-olds.

He grabbed Sirius's hand and held on. He saw that the girls particularly were delighted with their find. Remus looked proud of himself for making this moment possible, and Harry beamed when he made eye contact with his uncle. Remus ducked his head with a small smile.

There was still plenty of the forest left to investigate, so Remus led them back to the path and they continued filing along, occasionally stopping for Neville to examine a plant. Harry noticed a little lizard on a tree, but resisted the urge to stop for a chat. No point in alarming anyone yet.

Remus pointed to evidence of magicals going along a particular path, suggesting that magical creatures could be found along that way.

"Unicorns?" Lisa asked with hope in her eyes.

"We won't know until we get there," Remus said. "There might not be any, since they wouldn't want to fight the ponies for grass. But you never know."

They continued down the new path until they found a tent. Harry recognised the brand and knew it was a magical tent. If the owners were friendly, and the tent large enough on the inside, they could even share their snacks. But who'd be out in the middle of a forest...?

He saw a flash of blonde hair and *immediately* knew who would be seeking magical creatures here.

He grinned when he saw six-year-old Luna Lovegood peek out of the tent at them, blinking her large blue eyes.

“Hello,” Harry said.

Chapter End Notes

More characters! More... tags to add. Damn.

Please review! What kind of magical creatures do you think would be in the New Forest? Are there paths there? I'm guessing at the moment; I've never been there, but my sister has, and made sure to take pictures of ponies for me. As you can tell from the second half of my username, horses are my favourite animals. (Equus is Greek for 'horse', and it's where we get the word 'equestrian'.)

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Chapter Summary

Harry gets to meet an old friend, and has the chance to save a life.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Is someone there, Luna?” A woman emerged from the tent. Harry recognised her from the photo in Luna's room. Mrs Lovegood. He'd never learnt her first name. “Oh. Xeno, we have visitors!”

“Sorry to intrude,” Mrs Brown said. “We were on a walk and found the signs of magic. Are you looking for magical creatures?”

“Oh yes,” Mrs Lovegood said, and she smiled as she stroked Luna's plaited hair. “My husband is obsessed with magical creatures, and Luna has caught his love for them.”

“Hi, Luna,” Harry said, stepping forward. “My name's Harry.”

“Hello, Harry,” she said, and he noticed that her fingers were entangled in her mother's dress.

“What have you found so far?” Remus asked politely, since he was at the front of the group. “We saw some of the New Forest ponies off the path, but there hasn't been much other activity.”

“What are we hoping to see today, Luna?” Mrs Lovegood said, looking down at her daughter.

“Porlocks,” Luna said, her wide eyes roaming their group. She paused on a few of them, before returning to look at Harry. “You're Harry Potter, aren't you? They wrote about you in the paper.”

“Not our newspaper of choice, but sometimes they get things right,” Mr Lovegood said, stepping from around the back of the tent, examining the notebook he was holding. He looked up and was clearly surprised at the number of people. “Haven't seen much yet? We're hoping to summon an ashwinder or a salamander with the campfire.” He gestured to their fire pit. “Top it up, would you, Pandora? I don't think it's hot enough yet.”

Mrs Lovegood added kindling to the fire, but Luna stayed where she was, finally letting go of her mother's clothes. She was now studying Remus. Harry grew nervous about what she might see.

“Um, Mrs Brown, could you introduce everyone?” he said quickly.

“Of course, dear,” she said. She introduced the adults first, and then the children. She neglected to mention their blood status, which pleased Harry. But then Lavender had never been a snob about that, so he expected as much from her parents.

“We brought snacks,” Sirius volunteered. “Would you like to help us eat them? House elves do tend to go over the top when preparing food for a simple outing.”

“That sounds lovely,” Mrs Lovegood said. “Xeno?”

“As long as someone keeps an eye on the fire,” he said.

“Actually, you shouldn't stare at a fire too long or it damages your eyes,” Hermione said. “It's a less intense version of staring at the sun, or worse, a solar eclipse. I've read my parents' medical books before, and sometimes they'll let me read their medical journals, too.”

“We could take it in turns,” Mr Jones said. “Megan and I can go first.”

That pleased Xenophilius Lovegood greatly, and he made sure that where they sat had the best view of the fire pit. Everyone who'd brought a picnic basket full of snacks brought them out. Hermione had brought bags of crisps, which the purebloods found fascinating. They marvelled at how thinly cut the potatoes were, and that Muggles had used all sorts of different taste combinations to elevate them. She told them about other flavours that were available, as well as some of the TV adverts for the brands.

Which then led to questions about what 'TV' stood for, what televisions did, how they worked, and why they were invented. Hermione and Remus fielded most of the questions, Harry contributed the little he knew, and Remus mentioned that he was trying to make a magic-proof TV with runes to make it work, like wizarding radios. Mrs Lovegood chimed in that she experimented with spells, and would be happy to help if spellwork was required. Which reminded Harry of how she died, and he nearly choked on a caramel tartlet.

“Is that dangerous?” he asked. “Making up spells?”

“It can be, depending on what you're trying to do,” she said.

“But you make sure you're safe, right?” he said. “And Luna's safe, isn't she?”

“Luna isn't allowed anywhere near when I'm experimenting,” Mrs Lovegood said. “When she's older, I'll allow her into my workspace, if she takes an interest.”

“But if it's dangerous you shouldn't do it!” Harry said, getting distressed.

“Take it easy, Harry,” Sirius said, squeezing his shoulder. “It's okay.”

“No, it's not,” he said, desperate to get his point across. “My parents were supposed to be safe, and they... they...” He bowed his head and rubbed at his eyes, doing his best to bring on tears. The thought that he could save Luna's mother, and that it might not work because she was stubborn, was enough to produce some. “I was only a baby, so I don't remember them. But I couldn't bear it if I lost Uncle Remus because he was trying to make a TV work. It'd be

my fault, because I asked about it in the first place. I don't want to lose him.” He looked at Mrs Lovegood with tear-stained cheeks and red eyes, and she looked stricken.

“I’ll... I’ll make sure to put up better protection in future,” she said. “I didn’t think of that. I promise to be careful, Harry. Alright?”

He nodded and dried off his cheeks. It would have to do for now, since he didn’t know the exact date that Mrs Lovegood died, or how else he could protect her.

“I’m sorry,” he mumbled to the others. He straightened his glasses and hoped that they hid the redness around his eyes. He noticed Remus’s gaze snap towards the fire, and looked that way as well. It was Ernie and Anthony’s turn to watch the fire, but they’d become distracted by Harry’s little performance. They looked as well and yelped when they saw something snake-like stirring among the flames. Everyone turned, and Mr Lovegood scooped up his own camera.

“No flash on it, you see?” he said. “Now, everyone, stay back. The next issue of *The Quibbler* will have full colour pictures in it, mark my words.”

They all stayed a respectful distance, but watched with bated breath as the wriggling form took full shape and became a reddish snake. An ashwinder. Mr Lovegood snapped away with his camera, and the ashwinder gave what could only be called a *disdainful* look in his direction. Then it left the fire, leaving a trail of ashes.

“We’ll have to follow and make sure the eggs won’t burn the forest down,” Mr Lovegood said.

“Can I come along, Daddy?” Luna asked.

“Alright, but be careful.”

“Can I come, too?” Harry said.

“Yes, yes, a few of you can come along, but *hurry*. It’ll be gone in an hour.”

They followed the ashy trail to the base of a tree, where some of the tree litter had formed a sort of nest between the roots. Most of them chose to stay behind and finish off the snacks, but an intrepid few followed, including Remus. The teacher in him was clearly eager to see an ashwinder laying its eggs up close and personal... or as close as they could get.

The small group waited at a distance, while Mr Lovegood took pictures. Harry held Remus’s hand, more out of habit than any sense of danger. Out of respect for a mother laying her eggs, he looked away, knowing the pictures would end up in *The Quibbler* anyhow, and noticed some branches on nearby trees stirring. He tugged on Remus’s hand and pointed.

“Are those branches moving?” he whispered. “I can’t feel a breeze, but it looks like it.”

“Yes, I think you’re right,” Remus murmured back. “Could be bowtruckles.”

After the ashwinder finished laying its eggs, Mr Lovegood crept closer and squatted down, camera ready to take a picture. The ashwinder curled around its eggs and tucked its head away.

“Come on, look up, just this once,” Harry chanted.

The ashwinder raised its head and looked straight at him. Remus's hand clutched Harry's tightly, and he heard a few gasps.

Damn it. The secret was out now.

“Oh yes, that's it!” Mr Lovegood said, snapping more pictures, oblivious to the impending drama taking place behind him.

“You can talk to snakes?” Ernie said, his eyes growing rounder. “But that's evil!”

“I think the word is 'wicked',” Harry corrected. “It's awesome, isn't it? I've made friends with the adder in our garden. Her name is--”

“But *Salazar Slytherin* could speak to snakes!”

“Shh!” Mr Lovegood scolded. “Look.”

Some managed to look away, including Harry, in time to see the ashwinder disintegrate to dust and settle around the red-hot glowing eggs. Mr Lovegood cast a couple of charms, collected the eggs, and put them into a pouch.

“There, the forest will be safe now,” he said. He noticed the agitated glances. “What?”

Back at camp, Ernie immediately blurted out that Harry was a Parselmouth. Sirius winced. Mrs Lovegood looked intrigued, and so did Hermione.

“What does that mean?” she asked.

“He can talk to snakes, which is--”

“Not just snakes,” Harry corrected. “Reptiles. I thought it was something everyone could do, but the adder told me that most humans are too stupid to know how to speak snake. N-not that I think anyone here is stupid!” he added. *Except Ernie*, he thought viciously. “I can talk with lizards and turtles, too. I haven't tried talking with turtles underwater yet, since there aren't many around. One day I'd like to try, though. But they're harder to understand, like the lizards. Snakes sound normal to me. It's not a bad thing, right?”

“Of course not!” Mr Lovegood said. “I think it's marvellous. Why, as soon as he spoke to the ashwinder it unwound and looked up, and I was able to get some wonderful photos! Say, young Mr Potter, would you like to come on another expedition sometime? Having someone on the team who can talk with reptiles would be a stroke of luck for us!”

“But it's--” Ernie tried. Lavender smacked him on the arm.

“Stop it!” she said. “It’s my day out, and if you spoil it by being mean to Harry about something he can’t help, you’ll have to go home. We still haven’t been to the Isle of Wight yet.”

Remus relaxed, and stopped pacing around the group in a protective, predatory way. Luna was eyeing him again, but said not a word. Then Remus stiffened, his head swivelling in yet another direction, and began to move further into the forest. Harry gave Ernie a mildly sour look, then trotted after his uncle, followed by many of the others. They’d now learned that Remus had a sixth sense for creatures; either that or they’d worked out he was a werewolf with enhanced senses, and were too polite to mention it.

“Equines,” Remus said, as they came to a stop behind him. He waved his hand and some of the bushes gently parted, disentangling branches and leaves to reduce the noise. They moved closer and could see more ponies. But some of them had wings, and there was a squat, furry animal nearby, keeping an eye on them as it played with the grass at its feet. Mr Lovegood took pictures from behind a tree, and Harry saw him grinning like all his Christmases had come at once.

“You’re also welcome on our expeditions anytime, Mr Lupin,” he whispered.

The porlock – Harry assumed that was what they were looking at – had brown and cream coloured fur, much like the herd it was protecting, and it looked even more mottled as light streamed between the leaves of the overhead canopy. Harry hoped that the poor lighting wouldn’t negatively impact the pictures Mr Lovegood was taking.

Eventually the porlock realised that there was company, and it turned to look at them with a hiss. They wisely backed away and returned to camp.

“I’ll send you a copy of the next edition of *The Quibbler* as soon as it’s printed,” Mr Lovegood said, clapping Harry on the back. “I’m glad to have met you.”

“We might leave for the Isle now,” Mrs Brown said. “We need to get moving if we want to see it before the sun starts to set.”

“Could Luna come?” Harry asked Lavender quietly. She nodded.

“Would you like to come with us, Luna?” she asked. “We’re going to see the different coloured sands at the beach.”

Luna looked uncertain, but her mother accepted.

“Your father has to develop those pictures before he takes any more,” she said. “He can do that on his own. We’ll extinguish the fire so no one needs to keep watch over it, and I’ll come with you. If that’s alright with Miss Brown.”

“Yes, of course,” Lavender said.

“Thank you. It’s very kind of you. Luna doesn’t know many others her own age. Oh, you’re all a bit older, I think?”

“Seven,” they chorussed.

“We tried to get Luna and the Weasleys' youngest, Ginevra, to get along. But Ginevra was more interested in wanting to fly on a broomstick than a hippogriff. It didn't go well. And the boys are simply too boisterous.”

“I have a younger sister,” Daphne said. “She's younger than Luna, but I'm sure she'd be happy for the company if we all met up again.”

“How kind you are, sweetheart,” Mrs Lovegood said. Daphne blushed under the praise. “Come along, Luna. We'll be back in an hour or so, Xeno. Keep the tent closed while you're developing the photographs.”

“Will do, my love,” he said, giving them a wave. “Cheerio!”

Chapter End Notes

Okay, so Harry's planted the seeds of saving Pandora Lovegood. Let's hope it sticks.

And they're about to go to the Isle of Wight! I was planning to go there this chapter, but it's getting late so I don't have time to keep waffling on. There were other animals I considered adding to this chapter, based on my re-reading of 'Fantastic Beasts', but that didn't end up happening. And don't think Ernie's ready to let it lie that Harry's a Parselmouth.

I know sort of where I'm going with that, I promise.

Please review! I'm going to a book sale tomorrow, all things being equal. Wish me luck!

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Chapter Summary

FINALLY we get to the Isle of Wight. Took me long enough, am I right?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Luna began to open up more, especially as Lavender was determined to distract herself, so she took the younger girl under her wing and asked her about various magical animals. She was particularly interested in the puffskein; she liked to pet soft things, apparently, which explained why Ron was more assiduous in washing his hair after he got together with Lavender. Until he was less invested in the relationship, that is.

Harry was happy to have Luna taken care of, and tried to engage Hermione in conversation; only to find that Mandy, Megan, Hannah and Daphne had found out about makeup, which required no magic either to apply or sustain. Since Harry couldn't feign an interest in *that*, he talked to Anthony, leaving poor Neville to tackle Ernie. He was putting up a valiant defence of Harry, saying that someone who defeated You-Know-Who couldn't be evil, that nobody could be evil at aged seven.

Thinking of some of Dudley's friends, Harry knew damn well just how evil children could be, but it would be detrimental to his case to talk about that.

"We don't eat shellfish, of course," Anthony was saying. "We eat fish if it's kosher, though."

"Kosher?" Harry asked.

"My family is Jewish," Anthony said. "Kosher means that it's been prepared properly. Fish is pareve, actually, so it just has to be the right kind of fish. I think? My mum tried to explain it to me, but it's hard to remember everything. As long as it's made the right way at school, then I don't have to worry."

Oh, Anthony, Harry fretted. He'd have to talk to someone about that.

"I'm glad I don't have to remember stuff like that," he said. "You must be really smart to remember *any* of it."

"And I'm learning Hebrew!"

"*Wow*. I only know English. Is it hard to learn another language?"

As they reached the boardwalk looking down over the beach, they all streamed to the railings and forgot their conversations, though Ernie still eyed Harry with deep distrust.

“Uncle Remus, are there dolphins off the coast?” Harry asked.

“Yes, there are some in the Atlantic Ocean, though I'm not sure how close they'd come to the shore here,” Remus replied. “Let me just grab a pair of binoculars.”

“Could I have my camera, please?”

“Of course, Harry. Here you are.”

“See?” Neville hissed to Ernie. “Evil people don't say 'please'.”

“Good thing we got here at low tide,” Remus said. “Look, over there! You won't need binoculars to see those.”

“Are those... *dinosaur* footprints?” Hermione said, and she started bouncing up and down. “Of course! How could I forget? Dinosaur fossils have been found at Compton Bay! Real dinosaur footprints.” She sighed dreamily. “How amazing.”

“What kind of footprints are *those*?” Neville said. “They're enormous!”

“I just said, dinosaur footprints,” she said, while Remus trained the binoculars on the waves.

“What does that mean?”

“They don't know what dinosaurs are, Hermione,” Harry said. She gasped.

“But... they were the biggest animals ever to *live*!” she said. “They were *huge*! Some were as tall as... as... three humans! And some had really long tails. Then there were ones who lived under the water, and others had wings. Some scientists believe dinosaurs may have had feathers, but we don't know for sure. We only have their bones to study. They could've looked completely different. But they all died out long before humans existed.”

“What?” Daphne said. “But that's impossible!”

“Ha! I'll take you to the natural history museum sometime, and you can see some of the bones. They've even rebuilt the skeletons, so you can see just how big dinosaurs were.”

“You're on,” Daphne said. “I'll buy you any book at the museum if I believe you.”

“Really?” Hermione said, her eyes getting that book-mad gleam.

“Aren't birds the closest things to dinosaurs we still have?” Harry said. “I think my teacher said that once. And that's why some people think dinosaurs had feathers.”

“Imagine anything *that* big having feathers,” Many said, gesturing to the footprint. “I wouldn't find it scary at all.”

“Wait until you see the size of their teeth,” Hermione said.

“Not all of the dinosaurs ate meat, though,” Harry said, when Mandy looked terrified.

“No, some of them were herbivores and some were carnivores,” Remus said, eyes still glued to the binoculars.

“Herbivores eat only plants and carnivores eat only meat,” Hermione added.

“Ah, I think I saw a fin! But the tide's too low at the moment for them to be close. Let's go and look at the sands. Before we leave we can check the waves again.”

There was actually a building which contained many sands not just in naturally occurring colours, but also in many different rainbow colours. Sirius said that he'd like nothing better than to spend his horrible family's fortune on Muggle things, so he bought vials for everyone to fill with whatever sands they liked.

“I wonder,” Sirius whispered to Harry, “whether you could've used Parseltongue to sic a dinosaur on Ernie, if they were still roaming the Isle of Wight.”

Harry snorted. He noticed Remus shaking his head with a stern look, although the corner of his mouth twitched like he wanted to smile. That was certainly something to consider. Could Harry have spoken to dinosaurs if they were still around?

Could he speak to *dragons* ?

Damn it, that would've made the first task of the Triwizard Tournament so much easier. And why did he never try to talk down the basilisk? Okay, so maybe neither animal could've been reasoned with at the time. But he should've *tried* .

Harry decided to be fancy and fill his vial at an angle, with alternating yellow, purple, and white sands. He capped it off when the vial was full. It was shaped like a tear drop, a reminder of the nearby ocean. The sand miraculously didn't shift inside, and he heaved a sigh of relief. He got a thread for his vial and tied it around his neck, so he could have his hands free for the camera once again. The girls insisted on posing for a photograph together, with their sand creations, and he promised that one of his guardians would make copies for all of them. Luna was smiling widely as he asked for her address to send her a copy, too.

He still wanted a group picture, and was tempted to ask Ernie to take it as a slight against him, but didn't want the boy to deliberately take a bad photograph. So an obliging tourist took a picture for them, with the distant sea in the background. Sirius had to explain how to take a picture, and the person seemed somewhat baffled by how the camera functioned. They simply commented on how the English had strange cameras, and took the photo without complaint. They all thanked him profusely, and he went on his way with money from Sirius to go and fill his own vial of sand.

“But what *is* a dolphin?” Lavender asked. “Harry asked if there were any dolphins in the water, but never said what they are.”

“Oh, Lavender,” Hermione said. “I’m sorry, I didn’t think. Uh... look! See the plastic vial I chose? This shape is a dolphin. It was harder to fill, but I wanted the challenge. That’s what a dolphin is shaped like. It’s like a big fish, but they’re really very smart. They’re considered the smartest species, after humans, of course. They can learn to do all sorts of tricks, and they find their way quickly through the water using echo... echo...”

“Echolocation,” Remus said, ever the teacher.

“Yes,” Hermione said, embarrassed about needing to be rescued, judging by the growing redness on her cheeks. “It means they make a sound under the water, and however long it takes for the sound to bounce back tells them how close something is. Bats use it, too, but they’re blind so they need the extra help. And they fly around in the dark.”

“It sounds complicated,” Hannah said. “I wouldn’t like to have to do it.”

“It’s really clever, though. I’m sure the natural history museum would have more about it. I also have lots of books on... on all *sorts* of things, including animals.”

“The tide’s too high at the moment,” Remus said. “The dolphins won’t be visible for a few hours yet, I should think.”

“We need to get back to Xeno,” Mrs Lovegood said. “It was wonderful to meet you all. Be sure to send us copies of those pictures, Harry.”

“I will,” he said.

“Thank you for inviting me,” Luna said to Lavender.

“If we go somewhere else, I’d be happy to invite you again,” the blonde said, her uneasiness of the previous day entirely forgotten by now. She and Lavender had both chosen seashell shaped vials, but different coloured sands.

“We look forward to it,” Mrs Lovegood said. “Harry has our address. Come along, Luna. Time to apparate back to Daddy.”

The others all returned to the apparation point as well, and set off in small groups to return to the lodge. They’d missed their usual lunch time, and everyone was getting hungry as their snacks wore off. The binoculars were placed on a table, and Sirius said that they had to get back to develop the pictures as soon as possible. So Harry reluctantly took his leave of the others (less reluctantly in Ernie’s case), and hoped that someone would make the boy see reason before he left.

“I suggest a quick sandwich, and then we must get on with processing the photographs,” Sirius said when they arrived back at Potter Manor.

“I’ll ask Mintzi,” Remus began. She appeared in front of them.

“I will bring sandwiches to the drawing room soon,” she said. “Go and sit down. Did you get wet and sandy again?”

“No,” Harry said. “Here, Mintzi.” He removed the pendant from the cord. “It's not clothing. It's a plastic vial of sand. I thought you might like it, since you can't make one of your own. I'm afraid it's not much, but you wear these colours all the time, so I thought maybe they were your favourites or something.”

Mintzi's eyes welled up as she held the pendant close to her chest.

“I will treasure it, Master Harry,” she said. Then she disappeared with a loud pop. Sirius sighed.

“You're too soft on her,” he said. “She'll try to adopt you one day.”

“With all the chores I had to do for the Dursleys, I'm practically a house elf myself,” Harry said.

Chapter End Notes

I bought 14 books today. I could've bought more but I chose to be restrained. (What can I say? The Lifeline Bookfest is four or five times bigger. You should see me when I've been to one of those. We were only at the book fair about an hour today, and at least ten minutes was spent in line.)

Anyway. More playdates in the Muggle world being set up. Why is Hermione not in school? I don't know. Just go with it. I have no idea what time of year it is, but there are students at Hogwarts, clearly, so it's not the summer holiday.

Please review!

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Chapter Summary

It's payoff time.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Harry was woken early yet again, and he opened his mouth to ask about who'd been hurt this time; but Remus reassured him that he and Sirius had to go to the Ministry of Magic because Dumbledore was going on trial. Due to his connections, the DMLE had pushed for a hasty trial before he could spin lies to his supporters.

“I'm coming,” Harry said.

“You know Mintzi can look after you--”

“I'm *coming*, Uncle Remus. I want to. After what he did... I want to be there. Lavender might be there, and I promised to look after her. I *promised* her, Uncle Remus! He can't hurt her if I'm in the way.”

“He's hurt you enough,” Remus said.

“I don't care. I'm used to being hurt. Lavender isn't. I'm her friend, so I have to be there for her.”

Remus gave up and told Harry to make sure he dressed well. With a nod, Harry got out of bed, stuffed his feet into slippers, and shuffled to the bathroom to start getting ready for the day. He heard Remus and Sirius talking out in the corridor, and considered listening in; but it was likely that they were talking about Harry's desire to see Dumbledore on trial... to be there for Lavender, officially, but unofficially...

Well. Harry had plans. But he was going to need co-operation from the aurors to fulfil them, and he wasn't sure how to get it.

The Ministry was abuzz with news of Dumbledore being on trial. Some stared as Harry walked through, protectively flanked by his guardians. He let go and ran forward when he saw Lavender with her parents.

“Lavender!” he called. She turned around and smiled widely when she saw him. He wrapped her in a hug. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah,” she said. “I slept really well last night after being out all day. We went back to the beach in the evening, but we didn’t know what to look for.”

“We should go to an aquarium sometime,” Harry said, letting her go. “It’d be nice to go to one with huge tanks you can walk around, even walk *under*. You can see more than just dolphins. I haven’t been to one before, but I know my relatives went there once. Dudley thought it was boring, but he threatened to feed me to the sharks. I suggested he’d make a bigger meal for them. He beat me up but it was worth it.”

The adults and Lavender looked alarmed as usual. But at least it probably took their minds off the upcoming trial. And there were other adults nearby who’d hear about the abuse he had suffered, who’d spread it around the Ministry and wizarding Britain in general. The more it spread before the trial, the better.

They were invited to file in and take seats. While Harry knew he should sit between his guardians, he was determined to protect Lavender, so he sat to her right. Just because he didn’t have a wand was no excuse to have his wand hand occupied when it could be free for defence. Lavender played with the sand-filled shell pendant still hanging from her neck. Harry hoped it gave her comfort, in the reminder of a day out with friends.

Harry found it hard to concentrate while Sirius whispered explanations to him in an almost-constant stream. But it became obvious when Lavender was called up to the stand.

“She’s only *seven*,” he hissed to Sirius. “Is that allowed?”

“Yes,” Sirius said, as though it never occurred to him that there was anything wrong with that. At least Lavender’s father had been given time off work to be at his daughter’s side while she was questioned. Mrs Brown moved closer and took Harry’s hand, obviously needing reassurance from someone. He was happy to oblige.

He may not have been friends with Lavender before, but she’d fought in the Battle of Hogwarts, and even took on Greyback. She lost against him, and Harry would feel guilty about that as long as he remembered it. It felt like he hadn’t trained her enough; his failure led to her death. So he’d do everything he could to protect her now.

Lavender answered the questions, though her father had to use a Sonorus charm on her voice so she could be heard. She wasn’t allowed to be cross-examined, due to her age. At least they had the sense to recognise that a bullying lawyer could cause a breakdown in a seven year old, especially one as sensitive as Lavender. She held her head high, like a true Gryffindor, and refused to answer questions which didn’t relate to Dumbledore. She certainly wouldn’t speak about previously meeting Harry, and became mulishly stubborn until her father intervened.

“This bears no relevance to Albus Dumbledore’s *abuse* of my child,” Mr Brown said. “He can answer for his motives himself; all *you* need to establish is what happened to the witness, *not* why it happened nor what his actions revealed.”

Harry silently cheered for Mr Brown, and smiled up at Mrs Brown. She looked proud of her husband and squeezed Harry’s hand when she saw his smile.

Lavender was sent back to her seat, and Mr Brown spoke about her behaviour after Dumbledore invaded her mind, including the difficult night full of headaches and nightmares. Mrs Brown replaced him to add her own perspective, as well as the times she was with Lavender without her husband. Once all three Browns had been questioned, a healer from St Mungo's presented the indisputable evidence of a forced entry via Legillimancy, and a list of the only potions they were legally able to give Lavender, due to her age. They were quick enough to act in diagnosing her that they found traces of a magical signature, which had since been matched to Dumbledore's wand, confiscated by the aurors when they took him into custody.

Rufus Scrimgeour then testified that aurors were already planning to go to Hogwarts when the attack was reported to them. He said that Dumbledore had ignored the wishes of the Potters' wills, knowingly, by sending their son to inappropriate and abusive relations.

Finally, Dumbledore was questioned about the allegations.

"I could not speak about the Potters' wills as their contents were erased from my mind to protect the location of Potter Cottage," he claimed. Harry's eyes immediately narrowed.

"Liar," he whispered.

"As for what happened with Miss Brown, it was an accident, I assure you," Dumbledore said. "I was concerned about Mr Potter's safety. It really is safest for him to stay with his *family*."

"I agree," Sirius muttered. "*We're* his family."

"I want to talk to him," Harry said quietly. Both Lavender and Sirius looked at him. "I want to talk with him in private. I have a right."

"Harry, no," Sirius said.

"Is there a problem up there?" Minister Fudge asked, looking up at them. Harry stood up and looked over the edge of the fence.

"I want to talk to the *prisoner*," Harry said. "Right now."

"Who are you?"

"Harry Potter."

There were murmurs and gasps from others. Order was called. Dumbledore twisted around to look up at Harry, but Harry kept his eyes on Fudge.

There was some discussion, but it was agreed that Harry could talk to Dumbledore briefly, in an antechamber, as long as aurors and his guardians were present. It was unprecedented, but Harry's stubborn expression and small stature made people reluctant to say no. And if anyone had a right to a private interrogation, it was Harry Potter.

He was starting to understand why his reaper told him he should use his fame. He could do it without the arrogance Snape always accused him of. And if all else failed, puppy eyes.

Dumbledore was securely fastened to a seat, magic-binding handcuffs on. Harry requested a vial of Veritaserum and its antidote. These were presented with the warning that they might not work so well, with Dumbledore's Occlumency and ability to spin his own truths.

"It'll work," Harry said, refusing to make eye contact with Dumbledore. He waited for the vials to be placed beside him, and told which was which. He requested that attention be on Dumbledore, and then asked for silencing charms so no one else in the room could hear their conversation: only Harry and the prisoner.

With great reluctance, this was done. Then Harry opened the vial of Veritaserum.

"Just one drop should do it," Harry said. He opened his mouth, let a drop of potion fall on his tongue, and let it settle while he stoppered the vial again. "I am Harry James Potter, born the last day of July in nineteen eighty. My godfather is Sirius Orion Black and my other legally recognised guardian is Remus John Lupin. Until very recently I lived at Number Four Privet Drive in Surrey, with my aunt Petunia Dursley nee Evans, her husband Vernon Dursley, and their son Dudley Dursley. These last three have been incredibly cruel to me since I came into their so-called care when I was a little over a year old. I remember the green light of my mother's death, and I remember my father shouting at her to take me and run. Do you believe that I'm telling the truth?" Dumbledore nodded. "Answer me!"

"Yes," Dumbledore said, obviously startled by Harry's vehemence. "You have given detailed answers, displaying that the Veritaserum is working."

"Good. Now shut up. If you start to ask me any questions I'll take the antidote and have the aurors silence you. It's your choice: speak and you'll be forced to be quiet. Or stay silent and hear what I have to say." Dumbledore didn't say anything. "Good."

"When you left me on that doorstep in Surrey, in the middle of the night in mid-autumn, I actually died. How do I know this? Because it wasn't the last time I died too early." Dumbledore's eyes widened. "There is an afterlife. You know this to be true because I'm saying it. I died several times, all of them long before I was meant to die. Because of *your* interference."

"What..." Dumbledore whispered. Harry allowed him that moment of shock.

"I managed to defeat Voldemort, you'll be pleased to know. Got rid of his horcruxes, with a bit of help. Let him kill me, just as you wanted him to. That was the *only* time I was supposed to die early. I met you briefly; yes, you were dead by then. It was your own damn fault that you died. And because of it, *many people suffered and died*. Your actions – even your *inactions* – led to dozens of deaths. Then I died again, and this time my reaper had had it.

"Yes, we all have our own grim reapers. I won't spoil *all* of the surprise for you, but it'll look like someone you know. And they know *everything about you*. All your sins, all the shit you pulled while trying to look like a good person." Dumbledore pursed his lips when Harry swore. "They'll know and they'll *judge you*. I was given one last chance to go back and fix things. If I fail, well, I don't like to think what the consequences are. But I'm not *going* to fail. I'm already ahead this time, partly because I'm getting you out of the way."

“You don't want to go to Azkaban; no one does. It's a place that's supposed to be for bad people who can't be redeemed, you see? And guess what? *Death Eaters cannot be redeemed*. They can be tamed, become almost like pets. Slaves. Just like Professor Severus Snape, the man who was in love with my mother. They were fated to meet, fated to be friends. They were *not* fated to be split apart, because *guess what*? I wasn't supposed to be born! My parents were *never* supposed to be together. And that's on you.”

“Me?” Dumbledore said. Harry inched his hand closer to the antidote, and Dumbledore shut his mouth with a snap.

“*You*,” Harry said, “were headmaster of Hogwarts. You had the minds of all the young witches and wizards of Great Britain at your disposal, ready for moulding. You had the opportunity to update Muggle Studies and make it compulsory from first year onwards, and compulsory for all pureblood students to take, unless they could prove sufficient knowledge of the Muggle world and tolerance for non-magical people in general. You had the opportunity to end house rivalry and prejudice.

“You *squandered* that opportunity. Instead of going to the Ministry of Magic with your suspicions about Tom Marvolo Riddle Junior – aka Voldemort – you kept silent. You thought you could deal with it yourself, just like you dealt with Grindelwald. You allowed another student to take the fall for Myrtle's death. Acromantulas don't cause petrification; basilisks *do*. You had all that time to have Rubeus Hagrid exonerated and Riddle investigated and *exposed*. You had the opportunity to stop Slytherin students being bullied to the point where they became Death Eaters, because other students already thought they were all evil!

“But do you know what real evil is? *Child abuse*. You've never met me before, so you clearly never checked up on me. I know full well about Mrs Figg, by the way; when I was fifteen she told me that she was a squib, after I was attacked by Dementors sent by the Ministry of Magic. This was after Voldemort was resurrected. I killed him nearly three years later, after I gained the mastery of all three Deathly Hallows.”

Dumbledore was looking more and more pale with every accusation, almost every word.

“You were an accessory before the fact to child abuse, and an accessory after the fact,” Harry said. “I told you – numerous times – at Hogwarts about how the Dursleys were horrible to me. You even *admitted* that you knew I'd be mistreated by them, when I was sixteen. Now you've gone and literally abused one of my *friends*. The first time I died was because you abandoned me in the middle of the night. The second time, I didn't know how to get onto the platform to get to Hogwarts, because the person you sent with my Hogwarts letter didn't tell me how to get there. So I was kidnapped and eventually killed, since the Dursleys wouldn't pay ransom.”

“Oh, Harry,” Dumbledore murmured.

“You don't get to use my name!” Harry shouted. Dumbledore flinched. “It's the name my parents gave me, and you let them die! They would've been safe elsewhere, but you used them as *bait* to draw Voldemort out into the open. Then you left them *helpless*. Just because they defied their own destinies... And that's *another* thing my reaper told me.

“Like I said before, I wasn't meant to be born. My father was meant to become a professional Quidditch player. My mother was meant to go into partnership with Snape and cure werewolves. They were supposed to cure *lycanthropy*. They'd eventually marry, mostly because they wanted children, were best friends, and also for tax purposes, I think.

“But you kept prejudice alive among the students who influenced Snape. He had poison poured into his ears from the very *bloody* start, because you never checked the older students in their behaviour, or their parents before them, or even their *grandparents*. You let Gryffindor students, including my father and his friends, bully other students. You still allowed bullying when *I* was at Hogwarts! I'll bet if anyone went there today they'd find at least five students who are consistently picked on, and most Slytherin students ready to sign up for the dark side as soon as Voldemort regains human form. A growing crisis directly under your nose, and you did *nothing*.

“Snape would never have grown prejudiced against Muggleborns if Slytherins in general weren't so anti-Muggle. If bullying was forbidden at Hogwarts – *as it should be* – then he and my mother would never have been torn apart. If someone had told my father to leave my mother alone, he would have concentrated on Quidditch instead of the war, used his fame to speak out against Voldemort and his Death Eaters, and more people would have fought them. My mother and Snape would have worked to find a way to defeat him and get rid of the horcruxes. Because they couldn't do that – *thanks to you* – a prophecy was created. I was born to carry out what *could* have been done if the magical world was populated with *competent adults*.”

He was breathing heavily by now, and his voice was getting tired. His throat was dry, but he pressed on. This had been weighing on him, and he needed to get it out.

“Voldemort tried to kill me when I was fifteen months old,” Harry said. “By leaving me on a doorstep, without so much as a knock on the door, you *did* kill me once. Your failure to follow up on Mrs Figg's reports could have led to yet more premature deaths. *You refused to act*. You are *just* as bad as the man you call a dark lord. As far as I'm concerned, every despicable act *he* committed is *your* fault. You could've arranged for him to stay with a classmate's family during the holidays, instead of sending him back to that orphanage. You could've focused his intelligence on doing good work, somewhere he could be watched for signs of becoming a dark lord. But you let him do his own thing, unleashed him on an unsuspecting world, and then left *child soldiers* to do the dirty work the *adults* should've been doing! You are *not* fit to be around children. You are fit to sit in Azkaban for the rest of your days, contemplating your sins. You think you just failed Arianna? *Think again*. You failed people who haven't even been born yet. You've failed everyone who died in the first war. *You* should be called a dark lord, too. When my day of judgement in the afterlife comes, I know I'll have done my best to do good, using this last chance the afterlife has given me to fix things. I know what my reward is likely to be. Do *you*?”

He stood up, used the antidote, and stepped outside of the silenced zone. An auror cancelled the charms.

“I need a drink,” Harry said. He really meant Ogden's, but knew that wasn't going to happen.

“Mintzi gave me a flask of pumpkin juice,” Remus said. “I’ll pour some for you when we get back to our seats.”

“Thank you,” Harry said. His voice was getting hoarse. He didn’t look back, didn’t acknowledge Dumbledore at all, as they walked out of the room and returned to court.

When Dumbledore was finally brought back and sat in the chained chair, he looked different. They could all see that his shoulders sagged and he wouldn’t meet anyone’s eyes. If he’d used wandless Legillimancy on Harry, it would’ve only confirmed the truth he was hearing, which was why Harry looked him dead in the eye the entire time he was talking.

Now Dumbledore looked deflated... and old. When he was asked to continue speaking from before, he cleared his throat.

“I... I would like to plead guilty... to all charges... and request life imprisonment in Azkaban,” he said, not looking at anyone.

It was almost pandemonium. Once the minister had successfully called for quiet again, he stared at Dumbledore in shock. Then he looked at Harry. So did nearly everyone else. Those below or to the side craned their necks to see. Harry ignored them all, only looking at the minister. He nodded. Fudge nodded back and looked at Dumbledore again.

“Very well,” he said.

Chapter End Notes

Right. I know some have been disappointed in how I handled the whole thing with Harry’s parents not having been meant for each other, et cetera. But I had this scene in mind before I began to write the story, and knew that I wanted the prophecy to be a consequence of the ongoing bullying and prejudice going unchecked at Hogwarts. I wanted Dumbledore to be shamed. And I think I kind of achieved that. I hope the payoff was worth it.

Please review! Harry’s job isn’t over yet, of course. We may even see Dumbledore one last time.

Chapter Thirty

Chapter Summary

Z00000000000000000000000000000000!!!!!!!

(Author loves animals.)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“You *have* been busy,” the reaper said when Harry dreamed that night.

“That felt cathartic,” Harry said, stretching in the chair. “Do you have new memories to show me?”

“Your job isn't over yet,” he said, which wasn't a proper answer. “You still have much to do to complete your destiny.”

“I thought the Unspeakables were doing it?” Harry said.

“Have you spoken to your godfather about opening up Grimmauld Place yet?” his reaper asked.

“Damn it,” he muttered. He knew he'd forgotten something. “I don't suppose there's a way you can remind me to ask about it later?”

“I have been busy influencing your world enough. There is an opportunity coming your way, very soon, to deal with another Death Eater at large.”

“One of the ones at the Ministry of Magic?” Harry asked. “Not sure how I can get Madam Bones onboard to deal with that. Though if I could be considered paranoid enough, I could walk around with a Sneakoscope at all times, and anyone who's a threat to me can be automatically sent to the DMLE. D'you think that's possible? It'd be easier if we could key something to the Dark Mark, but it'd go off near Snape. *Can* he be redeemed? Can I at least get him out of my life by getting him a job away from Hogwarts? He shouldn't be anywhere near Neville. And what about Neville's parents? Can I do something about them?”

“So many questions,” his reaper said, shaking his head. “Severus Snape's redemption – or not – is up to him. He is *not* your responsibility. Tom Riddle is.”

“But I don't know where to find Riddle's spirit! I think he was in the Black Forest at one point. Ooh.” Harry's eyes lit up. “What if I paid for an expedition there with the Lovegoods, to look for magical creatures, and Riddle latched onto a magical creature?”

“He would latch onto a *human*. Who are you planning to sacrifice? Pandora Lovegood?”

“No!” Harry shouted. “I want to save her. Can I? Have I said enough to stop her from dying? For now, I mean? I know we all have to die one day, but not until Luna's at least out of Hogwarts. And not right in front of Luna, either. What can I do?”

“Just keep yourself in their lives,” his reaper said. “You are enough of a reminder of the danger of leaving a child without parents.”

“...Thanks.”

“As for the Longbottoms, it is unlikely that magic can save them. Even surgery will never be advanced enough to repair the strain that their bodies were put under. Once the mind has snapped, nothing can be done to repair it. They can't be reasoned with, so therapy would never work. And it is not the kind of physical damage that future micro-surgery can repair.”

“Oh.” Harry hung his head. “Well... I asked.”

“You did.”

“And... what about the cure for lycanthropy? Will that ever happen? It's not fair that Remus has to suffer like this, or worry about his children ever suffering. And there *has* to be way to take down Fenrir Greyback. People like *him*... shouldn't get to live. He goes after *children*.”

“I want you to remember something that the meddler tried to make people forget,” the reaper said, leaning forward in his desk chair. “You told him that Death Eaters cannot be redeemed. You are right; they cannot. They can be prevented, but once they are Death Eaters they are irrevocably tainted with the weight of their sins. But, Harry, there are others who are *not* Death Eaters, whose sins will *also* never be cleansed from them. They need to be put down or thrown into Azkaban to rot. They have lost their *privilege* of freedom and forgiveness. Try to give them freedom again, and they will fall back into their old ways. They will then also carry resentment towards those who collared them in the first place, and will be more vicious and unhinged than ever.”

“What do I do?” Harry asked, his heart racing as he panicked.

His reaper casually leaned back in the chair and put his feet up on the desk, the annoying picture of complete nonchalance.

“I think you should spend more time in your garden, don't you?” he said.

Then he was gone and Harry was awake, panting and clutching the sheets in fear. Mintzi appeared beside him with a glass of water. She forced him to drink every last drop, lie down again, and then she sang him to sleep.

The weekend arrived, and Harry had introduced his guardians to *Whisper Scale*. They were nervous at first, more for Harry's sake than their own. But Remus took a good smell of her,

and so did Sirius in his Padfoot form, so they'd recognise her as pack while out during the full moon.

Also during the week they organised, through a flurry of owls, to meet up and go to London Zoo on Saturday. Hermione wouldn't have school and the others wouldn't have classes. Harry thought it was a bit fast to be going out again so soon; until he remembered that this was all new for everyone else. Sirius was out of Azkaban after only six years; Remus was living a better life in general, and so was Harry; Hermione and her parents knew about magic; and the purebloods were willing to learn about Muggles, so he shouldn't look a gift horse in the mouth.

He idly wondered if Hermione would continue to go to Muggle school, or if she'd instead go into lessons with the rest of them. Would *Harry* go back to Muggle school? Maybe, after the Dursleys had suffered enough.

He made sure not to wear loose clothing, as Remus advised, in case any animals took an interest in nibbling his sleeves. It was also to protect him from insects hanging around the enclosures. He wore one of his usual pairs of walking shoes, socks he'd had to buy because they had wolves on them (to fluster Remus, naturally), and a cap with a dog's paw print on the front.

He was glad that Mintzi had only provided a light breakfast, since he wasn't sure how well it would sit. He was a bundle of nerves again.

The day after the trial, the paper had been full of news about Dumbledore requesting punishment. The DMLE released a press statement on his behalf saying that he believed he had not only failed Harry and Lavender, but all students who had been in his care and suffered. He confessed that he hadn't intervened when he knew of bullying; he had believed in giving too many second chances, where punishment should instead have been meted out. He urged the board of governors to learn from his mistakes.

There was no mention yet of Harry's ability to talk with snakes. He was relieved that Ernie had either kept his mouth shut, or it wasn't considered newsworthy.

The latest edition of *The Quibbler* had been produced and distributed, however. The pictures of the ashwinder were amazing, as well as the winged horses and their protective porlock. Mr Lovegood was clearly an excellent photographer.

Harry was personally pleased with the pictures he and the tourist had taken at the Isle of Wight, copies of which had been sent out to various people. Perhaps the photo they'd sent to Ernie kept him quiet? Harry hoped so. He wasn't going to work hard at bringing the boy to his side, having seen his unwarranted behaviour so far; but he wouldn't reject any overtures of friendship from him, either, if it meant that Harry had the chance to get him to change his attitude.

"Ready to go, Harry?" Sirius asked, peeking around the door frame. Harry was pacing in the study. He snatched up his camera and turned to his godfather with a nod.

“Uncle Sirius, do *you* have a house?” he asked. “Now that you're out of Azkaban, you're living here. But did you used to live anywhere else?”

“I lived here after my mother kicked me out,” Sirius said. “Before that, I actually lived in London. Not far from some very interesting Muggle places, including the British Museum. It has a magic section, did you know that?”

“I've never been there,” Harry said.

“I suppose I could always check to see if I inherited the property. If I do, I could get someone to go through and clear it out, make it safe for you and your friends. Probably some dark objects there, and cursed books. Your Muggleborn friend, Hermione, seems to be a bookworm.”

“We met her in Hay on Wye, book shopping,” Harry reminded him.

“Ah yes. I remember Remus telling me. I wouldn't want one of my family's cursed books to hurt her. If I own Grimmauld Place, I'll do what I can. It would be useful to have it available, so we can stay there overnight when we need to. I'd like to go to the theatre, and I'll bet the Dursleys never took you there.”

“No. I've been to the pantomime with Uncle Remus and the others!”

“Not the same as a West End show,” Sirius said with a grin. “I read about something called *The Phantom of the Opera* in the newspaper. I used to read the Phantom comics just to annoy my parents. I almost went through a phase of wearing purple to really drive it home, but after seeing how flamboyantly the headmaster dressed I couldn't go through with it. I didn't want to be compared to him.” He sneered. “Especially now.” When Harry stared at him with a worried expression, he lost the sneer. “There's another one called *Chess*. Not sure if it'd be as interesting as a game of wizarding chess, but--”

“Wizarding chess?”

“There's bound to be a set around here somewhere,” Sirius said, looking around. “We could teach you how to play, if you're interested.”

Harry wasn't fond of chess, but he knew that at this age he should show an interest. He opened his mouth to speak when Remus joined them.

“Ready?” he asked.

“Yes,” Harry said. “No loose clothing.”

“Good show. Let's get going. There's an apparation point not far from the zoo. We're meeting just outside it. Mintzi?” She appeared. “We'll probably have lunch out.”

“I know,” she said.

“Of course you do.”

All the adults were able to come along this time. Luna was there, raring to see Muggle creatures, and Hermione had brought a guidebook from a previous visit. Mr Greengrass had insisted on paying for the tickets. Harry suspected he didn't want to seem beholden to either Sirius or the Browns, or perhaps wanted to be seen to be paying his share. They'd also brought Astoria, a year younger than Luna and put out that she'd missed their other outings. Harry made a fuss over her to make up for it, and was somewhat dismayed to realise he was about the same height as her. He really did seem to look more five years old than seven.

Amelia wasn't there; according to Susan, she was still busy with the results of the trial. Harry felt bad for her, but comforted himself with the knowledge that she'd be busy regardless of the results, and at least they'd had a positive outcome. Besides, if everyone enjoyed themselves there'd be other opportunities for her to join them. He decided to buy her a souvenir from the gift shop. And he wouldn't even mention that the Dursleys had never done as much for him. As far as he was concerned, she and the others had fulfilled their vows to him.

“Careful crossing the street!” Remus warned the others. Harry knew he was warning the adults as much as the children, but it wouldn't seem like that to outsiders. Hermione's father was at the other end of the group, and her mother in the middle, so they could help the purebloods.

The pre-ordered tickets saw them quickly into the zoo, rather than joining the long queue outside, and a few more guidebooks were purchased, since they contained maps. Then, en masse, they moved through the zoo.

There were camels, giraffes, Asian elephants, big cats, primates, various bears including pandas, and so many other animals that Harry had trouble choosing which ones to photograph. He ended up taking requests. Hermione was smitten with the otters, which reminded Harry of her patronus. The Grangers explained that primates, like the gorillas and orangutans, were very similar to humans physiologically, and that some had even learnt sign language.

Which led to an explanation of what sign language was, and the horrifying realisation that magical children who were born blind or deaf, and who couldn't be cured by potions, were simply left in the wild to die. The Grangers looked *furious*, and Harry saw where Hermione got her temper from. He felt much the same way. Even Remus was shocked, since he'd never heard of it. Sirius looked ashamed that it was so casually spoken about.

“Well, if they can't be cured,” Mrs Greengrass began.

“There are ways of working around it,” male Dr Granger said through clenched teeth. “Braille writing for the blind. Sign language for the deaf. Helen Keller learned how to communicate while being both blind *and* deaf.”

“Wasn't there a movie about it?” Remus said. Mr Granger nodded. “We should find a copy of it.”

“Yes, there's bound to be something at a video library,” female Dr Granger said.

“Look, there's the reptile house up ahead,” Harry said. He needed a distraction from his own simmering anger. He could understand why someone might be better off dead if they had no quality of life; but to think that the Longbottoms, who were without hope of getting better, were kept alive while babies who were otherwise mentally capable were left to *die*, just because it was easier than accommodating them in the magical world, was *heinous*.

“Oh yes, I'll bet you want to see the snakes,” Ernie said. Harry smiled sweetly.

“Of course I do!” he said. “I promise to tell my adder friend all about them.”

He blanched at the word 'adder' and didn't say another word as they filed into the reptile house.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, it's getting late, and the Parseltongue conversation might go on for a bit, so I'm going to leave this here. Besides, the previous chapter was longer than usual. There's a public holiday tomorrow, so there won't be much to do except at home. Ah well.

Please review! Shout-out to those of us who remembering borrowing VHS tapes from video libraries.

Chapter Thirty-One

Chapter Summary

London Zoo continued, and author is a stickybeak who wants to know people's favourite animals.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The reptile house was spacious and warm. Harry wondered if the same snake he had met when he was eleven, in the previous timeline, was around yet. He hurried to the Burmese python exhibit and grinned when he saw his old friend.

“Hello,” he said. The snake looked up.

“A speaker?” it asked.

“Yes. My name is Harry. What do they call you?”

“I gave myself the name *Spiketail*.”

“Bred in captivity,” Harry read aloud. “I’m sorry. My parents died when I was a baby. Did you get to meet yours?”

“I met my mother,” *Spiketail* said. “She nurtured me. We were separated when she grew scale rot, and I never saw her again.”

“Was she nice?”

“She understood me more than the humans *think* they do.”

“Wow.” Harry jumped when he heard Hermione speak from beside him. “Is it a boy or girl?”

“Are you male or female?” Harry asked. “My friend wants to know.”

“I am male,” *Spiketail* replied.

Harry forced himself to concentrate on speaking human.

“Male,” he told Hermione. “His name is... it translates to *Spiketail*. It's his snake name, not the one the zoo keepers gave him.”

“Does he like his exhibit?” she asked.

Harry repeated the question to *Spiketail* .

“I have known no other,” the snake said.

“He's never had another home,” Harry said.

“Poor thing,” Hermione said. Some of the others had gathered close by. Harry told *Spiketail* their names, and that most of them could do magic. After all, it's not like he was breaking the Statute of Secrecy by talking to a snake.

When it was feeding time, they moved on. Ernie still didn't look comfortable, especially around the more venomous snakes. Anthony asked Harry if it was hard to learn Parseltongue.

“I can just... sort of do it,” Harry said. “I'm not sure how. But try doing this.” He hissed 'Hello', and Anthony imitated him pretty well perfectly. “There! That's how you say 'hello' in snake.”

Anthony looked delighted. Hermione asked for lessons. So did Neville, Daphne, and Hannah, though the others were more reticent. Or just didn't feel like learning another language. Harry promised to write down a list of things they should definitely learn, like 'Please don't bite me'.

They had lunch at the zoo and then went to the aquarium. No one ate fish, fortunately, or it might have been strange to go and see the close relatives of their food.

Though it would've gone unnoticed when they saw the penguins being fed. Children were allowed to throw some fish, too. Lavender baulked at touching raw fish, and Anthony couldn't; but Astoria gamely threw some fish – with advice from Sirius on how to throw it really far – and so did Ernie, Daphne, Megan, and Luna. Mandy was too shy to step up and do anything like that in front of other people, and Harry had fed thestrals in his past lifetime, so he wasn't in a hurry. But he was certainly amused – and pleased – to see the purebloods getting their hands dirty to join in the fun. Hermione said that since she'd thrown fish before, she wouldn't take the chance away from someone else, and Harry gave her a hug. He said that she'd have lots of fun feeding magical animals one day. She was thrilled at the prospect.

They ended the day with more pictures before venturing into the gift shop. Astoria immediately made a beeline for the soft toys. Lavender asked what 'stickers' were.

“They're bits of paper which are sticky on one side, and you can stick them to anything,” Hermione said. “They'll attach themselves to nearly any kind of material. I get them for my school notebooks so I can tell them apart by looking at the stickers, instead of reading the name of the subject.”

They were all intrigued by the stickers, which didn't cost much. Remus and Mrs Granger both got some books by David Attenborough. Luna and Astoria found some wonderfully illustrated books, though they were disappointed that the pictures didn't move.

“Wait until they see a movie,” Remus murmured to Harry.

“They'll lose their minds,” Harry agreed.

Mr Lovegood bought an animal encyclopedia. Harry decided to start a collection of postcards, and he was still intent on getting something for Madam Bones. He bought her a special souvenir guide, with pictures of royal visits to the zoo. Hermione insisted on buying copies of the first Winnie the Pooh book for her new friends, since she'd grown up on the books, and the real life bear had lived at London Zoo after the war. That was something Harry had never known.

After they finalised their purchases – with some usual souvenir items, like bags and pens – they left the gift shop. With a final picture outside the front of the zoo, they walked around to Regent's Park. Sirius had picked up on Neville's fascination with flowers and showed them the Rose Garden, where he'd once organised a date for James and Lily. With Remus's help. (Harry suspected that Remus did the actual organisation, and Sirius paid for everything.)

There was a memorial to people killed in an IRA bombing, which Harry stood in front of for awhile, joined by Remus and Sirius.

“I didn't even hear about it while I was in Azkaban,” Sirius said softly.

Harry was mainly wondering whether there would have been a memorial to those lost in the second war against Voldemort, what it would've looked like, if it would've been in a public place like this but magicked to look different to non-Muggles like the one in Godric's Hollow.

Neville asked shyly if Harry could take pictures of the flowers for him, which Harry obligingly did, though the camera was getting full. Remus had to confiscate it as the film neared its end. Harry promised to find a book on non-magical plants and send it to Neville, or take him shopping to buy his own.

“I don't think there's a Waterstones nearby,” Remus said. “Pity. But I think we've all done well at the London Zoo gift shop. You're probably getting tired.”

Astoria and Luna were definitely starting to flag, despite their interest in everything. Harry knew his feet would soon start to blister, and agreed that they should go home. They made a slow return to the apparation point, and said their farewells. Then they all apparated away in their groups, until it was just the Potter Manor contingent. Harry had bought a guidebook for Mintzi, with plans to hint that she could always sneak into the zoo at night and see her way around without humans. He'd do that out of earshot of Remus, though. Sirius might encourage the mischief, but Remus would put his foot down about risking the Statute like that.

Honestly, it's as if Mintzi couldn't make herself invisible to the cameras and do a bit of sight-seeing in the dark.

Amelia wrote back about how pleased she was by the present Harry had sent her, by way of Susan, and thanked him for the copies of the pictures he'd sent. He'd taken a lot more photographs than he'd realised, including ones of the children throwing fish to the penguins. The Greengrasses also politely thanked him via owl for sending copies, as well as an

excellent outing. He replied that Astoria was welcome to come to the beach with them next time they went to Weymouth, and he'd be sure that she got to make a sand castle.

Mintzi was quiet after Harry handed her the guide book and told her that if she had spare time outside zoo visiting hours, she could visit while invisible and see the animals for herself. But one morning she wouldn't stop smiling, even when Sirius told her that she was ruining his waistline by giving him too much food. She told him that he could always help her with the cleaning if he wanted to lose some weight. Remus fell out of his dining chair laughing at the look on Sirius's face, and Harry knew then that she'd had a good night out. It would do her good to spend time away from the manor, after being stuck as its only resident for years.

"If Mintzi needs help, we should get another house elf," Harry said. "Weren't we supposed to?"

"I... was supposed to," Remus said, breathlessly getting off the floor and flopping back into his chair. He wiped tears of mirth from his cheeks. "I've been busy organising outings instead. Sorry."

"I haven't been sassed by her since I left Hogwarts," Sirius said, still in shock. "It's almost like the old days again."

One night, shortly before the next full moon, Harry's dream was interrupted by his reaper again, and his dream self straightened up when he saw that he was back in the familiar office.

"I know, I haven't done anything about the horcruxes yet," he began.

"The ring has been found," his reaper said.

"...What? How? When?"

"The ring was found, by the Unspeakables, today. That diary they found? Do you remember what was on the cover?"

Harry tried to picture it, and then groaned.

"His *name*," he said.

"They traced Tom Riddle's family history, work history, registered portkeys he took, and any other movements before he emerged as Voldemort," the reaper said. "They found the Gaunt house, found and destroyed the ring. Unknown to you, your godfather Sirius Black has made enquiries into the residence known as Grimmauld Place. Specialists were sent in first to find dark items. The locket was found and destroyed."

"What about the house elf Kreacher?" Harry asked.

"He has discussed what to do about the elf with Remus Lupin. Kreacher would not be welcome here, and he would not make you welcome."

“What about... what if... a swap!”

“Could you rephrase that into a proper sentence?” his reaper snarked.

“Sorry. Yeah, so, Kreacher loves to serve purebloods only. And Dobby's abused by the Malfoys. I want to save him *now*. Could Sirius somehow swap Kreacher for Dobby, and could Dobby work here? I mean, he'd have to cool it with calling me 'great' all the time, but at least he wouldn't be allowed to hurt himself here.”

“You truly have a good heart. I will see what I can arrange. But you must leave this to me. You should not know about Dobby at this age, or in this timeline.”

“With Lucius Malfoy in jail, Sirius has a lot of bargaining power,” Harry mused. “Yes. Not that I want Kreacher to be abused; but Dobby was always more open-minded and less obsequious. I'm sure Kreacher would be fine. But... could you let me know?”

“That is not your concern. As I told you last time, a particular opportunity is coming up, and we must plan for it. Now.”

Chapter End Notes

Want to guess what that opportunity will be?

By the way, feel free to tell me your favourite animals! Mine is the horse. I love to hear about people's favourites.

Please review!

Chapter Thirty-Two

Chapter Summary

Developments. IDK what to tell you, readers.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Once the plan was set, Harry asked something which had been lingering at the back of his mind for days now.

“What's it like in Azkaban for Dumbledore?” he asked. The headmaster may have seemed to be remorseful, but he was smart and powerful enough to break out. He could call Fawkes to him and escape. Just because they hadn't heard anything about it, didn't mean he hadn't already tried – and succeeded – to escape.

“He was taken from his cell once to speak with personnel from the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, but you will learn what they spoke of in time,” his reaper replied.

“But is he still in his cell? Is he still imprisoned?”

“No.” Harry sighed. He knew-- “Prisoner Dumbledore died the morning after the interview with Madam Bones.”

Harry's head jerked up.

“What?” he said cautiously. “He's...”

“Dead-bones dead,” the reaper said.

“But... I didn't mean for that to happen. I... did *I* kill him?”

“He had cardiac failure due to his overwhelming feelings of guilt. It was sometime between his breakfast tray being collected and his lunch tray being delivered. It was ten minutes past ten on the dot, if you must know. His last thoughts were of his sister, but exposure to the Dementors had brought him to tears of remorse over *everything* during the preceding days, brought on by your conversation with him. That is why he met with Madam Bones. She will tell you about that interview when you see her today. So you should go to sleep.”

Harry woke from the shock of being removed from the office so abruptly, after such big news. The man who'd condemned him to the Dursleys, who'd kept secrets and sent Harry to his death time and time again, was now dead. Strangely, that description could almost fit Voldemort, though he had only tried to kill Harry once so far. No doubt there'd be another

attempt once he hijacked a body to get back to the UK, now that Harry's re-emergence was known. And if the news of Dumbledore's death was released, it would become even more urgent for the Dark Lord to return, with the man he feared most gone, and Harry nowhere near trained enough to fight him.

It wasn't fair that the prophecy said he had to defeat Voldemort. It *wasn't fair* .

He huffed, tears spilling onto his cheeks, as he lay back in bed. He didn't want to summon Mintzi, but a lullaby would be nice right about now. But what if she was doing more sight-seeing, now that she realised she could? Of course, she had to sleep sometime, especially since she was doing all the work on her own. Harry had offered to help, since he was so used to chores, but she was horrified at the very suggestion.

“Go to sleep, Master Harry,” she whispered. She had come in his hour of need anyway, bless her.

“Thank you,” he murmured, and he concentrated on the lull of her voice until he was asleep again.

Sirius had subscribed to *The Daily Prophet* . Apparently he owned shares in it; or, more accurately, had inherited shares in it. Harry wished he'd been able to use his influence in the previous timeline to get the defamatory articles removed from the newspaper, especially the ones about Hermione. It was a terrible time during fourth year, and especially during fifth while the Ministry pretended that Voldemort wasn't back. But all the hate mail Hermione received... it was *horrible* , and he'd never fully forgive Molly Weasley for believing it and treating Hermione with such disrespect. Harry was surprised Hermione was able to forgive the woman. Harry should have written to Molly and explained that it was all lies. He should have set her straight sooner.

He licked the marmalade from his lips.

“Uncle Remus, why don't you read the newspaper?” Harry asked.

“If you're referring to *The Daily Prophet*, I'd hardly call it a newspaper,” Remus said.

“I read it to learn more about the enemy,” Sirius quipped.

“I'm not wasting my money on it,” Remus said. “I certainly couldn't afford to before... well...”

“Me, and my parents' wills,” Harry said bluntly.

“Yes. Not that I took on your guardianship for the money. Your parents were far too generous. But if I'd known that Sirius could take you on so soon--”

“If you'd thought I was innocent,” Sirius muttered.

“Then I would have left you in Madam Bones's care,” Remus said. “You know the worries I've had over being a good enough guardian for you, Harry. But I thought I was the best option at the time.”

“You *are* the best option,” Harry said. “You and Sirius, I mean.”

Sirius grinned at him from across the table as he stirred his tea.

“The Ministry does use the newspaper too much to spread propaganda. I mean, uh, what they want people to know, which isn't always the truth. The Ministry wants everyone to think it's perfect, and it isn't. Far from it. But people like Madam Bones are good. Unfortunately, the good people who want to speak the truth usually have bad articles written about them. Untrue articles. It's one of those things you'll learn when you get older. I *hope* not through personal experience.”

Fat chance of that, Harry thought bitterly. But he smiled to reassure his uncle, and spread some marmalade on his last slice of toast.

An owl interrupted them as they were finishing breakfast. It was jointly addressed to Sirius and Remus, as Harry's guardians. While Sirius opened the letter, since Remus's appetite was increasing in the run up to the full moon, Harry considered things.

What if Remus had been subscribed to *The Daily Prophet* before he became a teacher? What if he'd seen the same picture and the same article as Sirius, and realised the same things, that Peter Pettigrew was alive and close to Harry? How would things have changed? Would he have gone to the Ministry and told them about Pettigrew's secret animagus form? Or would he have gone straight to the Weasleys and revealed the traitor in their midst? Things would have been sorted so early, and Pettigrew would never have found Voldemort and resurrected him. There would've been no fighting among the trio during their third year, and Harry would never have been forced to compete in the Triwizard Tournament and end up fighting with Ron.

He couldn't complain how things had turned out now; but he could certainly wonder about what might have been.

Sirius choked on his tea, and Remus snatched the letter out of his hand to read it. He dropped the fork in his hand with a clatter, his eyes widening.

“I didn't read it wrong?” Sirius asked hoarsely. Mintzi delivered a glass of water straight into his hand, which he began to gulp down.

“What happened?” Harry said, though he suspected it was news of Dumbledore.

“Uh... Madam Bones wishes us to visit her at the Ministry of Magic as soon as possible,” Remus said. “She has... news. It's to do with you, Harry. Sirius and I are to come along. I'll have to put off getting a second elf for yet another day. Unless there's somewhere I can hire one at the Ministry of Magic. Mintzi?” She appeared. “Where would I go to hire a house elf?”

“We have been approached by an elf,” she said, looking displeased. “He wants to work for Harry.”

“Sounds like a potential spy,” Sirius said.

“He worked for your cousin Narcissa Malfoy.”

“What? Oh, he's *definitely* a spy.”

“What do you mean, he worked for her?” Harry asked, straightening up in his chair.

“After her husband was arrested, she was in a terrible temper, and threw clothes at him. She did not *actually* say that he was dismissed, but he... *chose* to interpret it that way.” She sneered. “I thought it was a strange story, so I told him to leave.”

“Did they hurt him?” Harry said.

“He was covered in bandages and bruise paste.”

“Then he won't be loyal to them! He probably *hates* them. The Dursleys hurt me, and I ended up running away, just like he did. As soon as he saw a chance to get free, he took it. I can't blame him for doing that, can you?”

Her face softened.

“If we properly bonded him, then even if he was a spy he couldn't report on us,” Sirius said.

“Especially if we worded the bond correctly,” Remus said. “Something about doing nothing that will lead to any of us getting hurt. House elf magic will prevent him from even doing something accidentally that could lead to that. It's prevented house elves from preparing a dish with unknown allergens in it. I mean,” he quickly said, glancing at Harry, “when someone is allergic to nuts, and no one knows, a house elf with a protective bond can't make any food for them which has nuts in it. The house elf won't know why at first, but it's usually not long before people work out why.”

“House elf magic sounds *amazing*,” Harry said. “Can I learn it?”

“You're not a house elf, Harry, so I don't think so,” Sirius said, exchanging looks with Remus.

“Aw!”

“But he can talk to snakes without being trained,” Remus said, now staring at the tablecloth, food forgotten. “I wonder what else is possible?”

They got to the Ministry around half past eight. Amelia was in her office, and she beckoned them to come in. Once they were seated, she sighed deeply.

“Harry, Dumbledore died yesterday morning,” she said. “I didn't know until the afternoon, when I received the news in an urgent memo.” Harry tried to feign shock. “With his penchant for sweets and his advanced age, he didn't last long.”

Remus and Sirius simultaneously reached out and grasped Harry's shoulders comfortingly. He didn't need the comfort, but it was a nice thought.

“I didn't really know him,” Harry lied. Technically, there was a great deal he thought he'd known about the man which turned out to be false, so it wasn't exactly untrue. “Is it going to be in the newspaper? Uncle Sirius was reading it this morning, and he didn't say anything about it.”

“No, it's not in the paper yet,” she said. “It's taking a long time to create a press statement that sets the right tone, which will double as an obituary. I mean, um...”

“You don't have to explain, Aunty Amelia,” he said.

“Good. But there are two things. One, he gave us a great deal of information to get through when we visited him the day before last. Some of it... a great deal of it pertains to you. He also had a solicitor visit him to create a new last will and testament, and hinted that it would be important to you. He told us where to find this.” She opened a package and produced the Invisibility Cloak. Remus and Sirius both gasped. “It belonged to your father. Dumbledore planned to give it to you when he deemed you old enough. Violating your parents' wills again, though in this case I can understand why. It's a very valuable item, and I would prefer it if you guardians kept it safe until you're responsible enough to use it.”

“Okay,” Harry said. He was fine with that. Sirius would make sure he took it to Hogwarts with him. Also from the package Amelia drew a wand. It was the Elder Wand.

“Originally he wanted to be buried with this, but he said that he would feel safer if it was with you instead, under your protection,” she said. “Again, you're too young for this. And it may not be compatible with you. The wand chooses the wizard or witch, not the other way around. I don't know what he was thinking, believing that these were child-appropriate gifts. There's a letter as well, but he wants to wait until you're ready to go to Hogwarts before reading it.”

“I went to Hogwarts to confront him,” Harry said. “Does that count?”

“Uh... I suppose it would. But I still believe that it would be better if you wait a few years. If it has anything to do with the things he told us, you are *far* too young to be dealing with it. Of course, if you trust your guardians to read it for you, they could decide when you are ready.”

“Alright.” She handed the letter to Sirius, as Remus was holding the cloak and the wand. Two of the Deathly Hallows. Had Dumbledore done that because Harry told him that he would eventually become Master of Death? “There was one more thing I wanted to discuss with you.”

“What is it?”

“There is someone who wants to apologise to you in person, and to Sirius,” she said.

“Who is it?” Harry asked, trying to work out who it might be.

“Bartemius Crouch,” she said. “For locking Sirius in Azkaban without a trial, and what it ended up meaning for you, Harry. I thought we could visit him. I already reamed him out about how his decisions affected you. I scolded him, I mean.” Sirius snorted, and she glared at him. “Would you be willing to visit him so he can apologise?”

Harry hesitated. This was it. This was the chance his reaper said he would get.

“Sure,” he said. “Why not?”

Chapter End Notes

Huzzah! Bet you weren't expecting that!

But what will happen? How much does BC 2.0 know about what's been happening? Will the events of the summer before the fourth year occur earlier, just as everything else has?

Please review!

Chapter Thirty-Three

Chapter Summary

Author forgot to write a damn chapter, so is writing it really late. Author is sorry.

Also, we meet Mr Crouch. And anyone else...?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The colours of the Crouch family home were darker and richer than the lighter colour scheme of the Bones mansion or Potter Manor. There were fewer lighter colours to relieve the dark browns and greens and blues. The fireplace was the lightest colour in the room, blazing yellow and red from among dark red bricks. The ones closest to the blaze were blackened from soot.

“Young Mr Potter,” Mr Crouch said. “I hope you don't mind meeting in my home. I thought the Ministry of Magic would not be appropriate, given the circumstances. And there is no privacy in a place like Diagon Alley. Please, take a seat.”

“Are we staying long?” Harry asked. “If we are, we should let our house elf know.”

“Of course not, no.” There was a sound from upstairs and they all looked up on reflex. “That must be Winky. Usually she's quiet, but we, uh, we don't get many visitors. She insisted on cleaning the rooms you won't even see.” He chuckled nervously, and gestured again to the lounge set. Harry sat between his guardians on the settee; Amelia sat in a winged armchair at one end of the coffee table, and Mr Crouch in a matching chair at the other end. Tea was already laid out for them.

“Can I try pouring?” Harry asked. “I've seen Remus and Sirius do it, and I know how they like their tea. Besides, you should be telling Sirius that you're sorry for putting him in jail.”

“Uh, quite,” Mr Crouch said. “Of course you may pour, if you wish.”

Since he'd made sure that Sirius sat on the side closest to Mr Crouch, Harry was able to busy himself with the tea service, quietly asked 'Aunty Amelia' for her preference, and made her tea first. Then he made Remus's, handed it to him, and started on Sirius's tea. He put it aside, made his own, also put that aside, and interrupted Mr Crouch's blustering, paltry attempt at an appropriate apology for jailing an innocent man without a trial for six bloody years, to find out how he had his tea.

“I've made yours, when you're ready,” Harry told Sirius, who nodded while maintaining eye contact with Mr Crouch. He glanced at Amelia and Remus, wordlessly asking if their tea was

alright. They both confirmed that they were satisfied, and took obligingly long sips to prove it.

He took the chance, with everyone distracted, to slip mild truth potion into Mr Crouch's cup, before handing it to him. The man was so eager to take a break from his apology that he took a long drink.

The potion wasn't as powerful as Veritaserum. It was made from ingredients commonly found in breakfast foods and tea. It prompted the drinker to get something off their chest that had been weighing them down for awhile. It was used more by mind healers on difficult patients, especially when trauma rendered them mute. His mother had written an essay about it, which was among her effects from Hogwarts. She'd received an Outstanding from Professor Slughorn.

Harry knew it wouldn't take effect immediately. It was meant to go unnoticed, and would kick in slowly. So he didn't mind that Mr Crouch continued to waffle on about the pressure he was under at the time, and that Sirius must have somehow got caught up in the shuffle, but it was very wrong not to make sure that all the 'i's were dotted and the 't's crossed.

“This is all well and good, but I'm not hearing the words 'I'm sorry' anywhere,” Sirius said, in his best 'lord of the manor' impression. “And it's such a pity I was locked away while so many real Death Eaters, such as Lucius Malfoy, were able to get away by claiming to have been Imperiused. The same plea your son began with, if I remember correctly.”

Oh, Sirius, I do love you, Harry thought, internally grinning as his godfather unknowingly prompted the potion to kick in.

“He's still alive, you know,” Mr Crouch said. “My son Barty. My wife wouldn't countenance him being in Azkaban, so I used Polyjuice potion so they could change places. My poor wife. She was so good, and she's buried on that hellhole of an island.” A tear slipped down his cheek. “It feels like I betrayed our wedding vows, but it's what she wanted. Winky tells me that Barty shouldn't be locked up in the manor all the time like this, but what else can I do? He's lost his mind!”

During his speech, Amelia had shot to her feet. There was another noise upstairs.

“That's probably him, fighting the Imperius Curse again,” Mr Crouch continued, more tears spilling down his cheeks, as he remained oblivious to the potion's effects. Harry was intrigued. His mother had mentioned that crying was a common side effect, usually because the subject was experiencing the trauma all over again by recounting. While he didn't like causing anyone pain, this had to happen, and he refused to feel sorry for the man who'd thrown Sirius in jail and thus ensured that Dumbledore had a clear path to send Harry to his martyrdom.

Sirius stunned Mr Crouch without a word. He and Amelia barrelled upstairs, while Remus kept his wand trained on Mr Crouch.

“Were you expecting that?” Harry asked.

“No,” Remus said shortly. “But he'll have a lot of explaining to do. And he confessed to using one of the Unforgiveables. Good thing Madam Bones was with us.”

“Good thing we came today,” Harry said, and he took another sip of his untainted tea, before placing it back on the tray. “Winky?” The house elf appeared. “I think we're finished with tea now. You can take the dishes and wash them. Thank you.”

“What happened to my master?” she said, staring at Mr Crouch.

“He lost conch... what's the word, Uncle Remus?”

“Consciousness,” Remus said.

“That's it,” Harry said. “So you can see why we're not having tea anymore.”

Winky looked distressed, but she took the dishes away. With any luck she'd clean them with house elf magic immediately, ridding any trace of the potion. When Harry had experimented making 'fake' potions himself, using his father's old cauldron, he'd had to ask Mintzi to clean it for him. She assured him that a simple cleaning spell would clean it as thoroughly as any Scourgify.

Thank you for keeping that essay, Mum , he thought. If he didn't need to keep this all so secret, he'd thank her portrait himself.

His reaper reassured him that when he lost the memories of his previous life, certain things from the new timeline would become blurred in his memory, so he wouldn't wonder about it decades down the line.

There was quite the furore when Amelia turned up at the Ministry of Magic with Mr Crouch and his son, both unconscious for the purposes of getting them into holding cells without trouble. Sirius, Remus, and Harry were all questioned about what had happened, but they'd been there such a short time (and were so unsuspecting of the true culprit of all this trouble) that they were soon let go. When a healer checked Mr Crouch, they'd see the individual ingredients he'd ingested but assume it was from breakfast and morning tea. They were unlikely to question Winky.

If there was one thing Harry could rely upon, it was the short-sightedness of witches and wizards.

Later that day, after his post-lunch nap and while Sirius was dealing with more correspondence (“Ah, the joys of catching up on six years of paperwork, Harry; wouldn't wish it on anyone”) Remus sequestered himself away in the room where he was occasionally tinkering with the radio he'd bought. He'd recently acquired a television and had taken it apart to see how he could replicate the magic from the wireless to the TV.

Harry nearly fell off the couch, where he was curled up reading so his parents could observe him better, and he could ask them questions, when they all heard a cry from down the

hallway. Sirius was on his feet in an instant, wand in hand, but Harry was pretty sure it was a cry of triumph. Soon enough, Remus rushed into the drawing room.

“Come and see, come and see!” he shouted, before running out again. Harry and Sirius were hot on his trail. James and Lily demanded that they be told everything when the others got back. Harry briefly considered going back for his parents' portrait, but didn't want to delay Remus's excitement.

They all skidded to a halt in Remus's workshop.

“The TV's on,” Harry said. “What...”

“You did it!” Sirius cried, and he swept Remus into a hug. “Well done, Moony!”

“It's powered by the same ever-charge crystals used in radios, but I used ten of them since it's a bigger machine. I haven't been able to tune into any stations yet. But if I can do that, we can get television. And if I can't, I can just do the same thing with a VCR and we can watch movies. I'm planning to do it with a projector as well, and get a projector screen, so we can make it more like a movie theatre. When Harry has his friends over, they can watch movies together.”

“You're a *genius*, Moony,” Sirius said. “You must patent these.”

“The crystals were a *little* expensive to get,” Remus admitted. “But if a manufacturer could buy them wholesale, it would end up costing less. I'm not sure there's much of a market for this, but--”

“Of course there is! My genius wolf.” And Sirius kissed him on the lips.

Harry stared.

“Huh?” he said.

Chapter End Notes

It just seemed to be heading towards Wolfstar! I'm sorry!

Anyway. What did you think of my lowkey solution to the Crouch problem? I'm quite proud of it. I know it wasn't very flash or anything, but think how useful such a potion would be.

Please review!

Chapter Thirty-Four

Chapter Summary

Author is posting early this time in hopes of getting to sleep at a decent time OR SO
HELP ME MERLIN.

I mean, uh, Remus and Sirius are reluctant to talk about their feelings, so Harry forces the issue. By leaving.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

There was awkward silence for awhile. Remus had turned bright red with embarrassment, Sirius looked a bit proud and a bit bashful while he rubbed the back of his neck. Harry was poleaxed and needed to sit down as his mind raced. Was this why Remus married Tonks, because she was Sirius's cousin? Was this why he actually didn't want to marry her? Oh Merlin, had others *pressured* him into it because they thought it was weird that he was single and mourning his best friend?

Harry knew it was weird that Sirius, who'd seemed to be a player at Hogwarts, hadn't started dating anyone now that he was a free man. Of course, all he had to go on was seeing a girl staring at him dreamily during his guardians' OWLs, and a bunch of hearsay. But he'd never picked up anything more than friendship and some guilt between Remus and Sirius... *oh*. Oh, Harry was an idiot.

“Do you love each other?” he asked, breaking the silence. Now both his uncle and godfather looked ready to panic, staring wide-eyed at each other and then looking away. “People don't kiss people they hate.”

“*Some* do,” Sirius muttered. Remus looked hurt. “Not that I hate you, Remus! No! I'm just saying that... that not all kisses mean something.”

“No, not all kisses do,” Remus said, his voice soft.

“But you're best friends!” Harry said. “So you have to love each other anyway, right? Friends love each other? I'm pretty sure they're s'posed to. I've read about it in books. The Dursleys loved each other, but they didn't love me, so they never kissed me. But Aunt Petunia would kiss Dudley on the top of the head or the cheek, like Aunt Amelia does. And you both kiss me on the top of the head. So *you* love me... don't you?”

“Of *course* we do, Harry,” Sirius immediately said, hurrying to grasp his shoulders. “But there are different types of love, and different ways to show that. Your parents loved each other enough to get married and have you.”

“Will you two get married?” Harry asked. “Or wasn't it that type of kiss?”

Yes, he was probably torturing them, but his own brain was glitching a bit as he tried to reconcile what happened in the other timeline's future with what was happening now. Were they trying to find solace in each other? No, because they'd been celebrating when Sirius kissed Remus. Unless they'd been doing this on the sly, and it was only now becoming known? In which case they deserved a bit of discomfort for keeping Harry in the dark.

“Uh...” Sirius trailed off, stepping back from Harry but also from Remus. “I...”

“Men can't marry each other, Harry, even if... even if they wanted to,” Remus said, looking in Harry's direction but not making eye contact.

“*Would* you want to?” Sirius mumbled. His eyes widened, like he hadn't meant to speak out loud. Remus looked at him, mouth opening and closing a few times.

“I... that's not the point,” he said. “And you wouldn't want to, anyway.”

“Okay,” Sirius said, which wasn't a real answer, and Harry was tempted to stamp his foot and shout at them to sort it out.

Actually, he was seven years old. He could get away with it.

“Sort it out then!” he shouted, stamping his foot. “If I can't have my parents in my life properly, it'd be nice to have both of you around. But if you're going to be awkward, then I want to go and stay with one of my friends. So *sort it out*.”

He hurried upstairs with all the dignity at his disposal, which wasn't very much. But he hadn't been allowed to throw any tantrums at Privet Drive, so damned if he wasn't going to take the chance now, especially if it could achieve some good. He stomped to his room; the effect was dampened by the plush carpet underfoot. But he set about packing a suitcase with things he'd need to stay overnight somewhere, and hoped it wouldn't take longer than that. Then he wrote a letter to Andromeda to ask if he could stay the night, since Sirius and Remus were being 'silly about something', and he thought they needed a night without him. He summoned Mintzi and asked her to take it to Healer Tonks without delay, and wait until for a reply.

“And Uncle Sirius and Uncle Remus aren't to have any dessert tonight,” he said.

“Why not?” Mintzi asked, though her eyes gleamed knowingly.

“I want them to figure things out, and until they do they don't get any sweets,” Harry said firmly.

“I will be glad to follow this order,” she said. He began to suspect that she knew what had happened and was just as impatient for it to be sorted as he was.

After she left, he wondered whether he should give her the potion recipe in hopes that Remus and Sirius would be truthful about their feelings, but they had enough bad memories weighing on them that they'd probably talk about anything else instead, and the evening would be wasted.

Mintzi returned promptly to say that Healer Tonks was happy for Harry to stay until his guardians stopped being 'silly', and that he was welcome to go straight to the Tonks home. Mintzi side-along apparated him there, made sure he was settled in, and returned to tell Remus and Sirius that he was safe, but staying away until they'd worked out what their relationship was going to be like going forward. Harry made sure she knew that he didn't care if they were in love, as long as they were happy with each other. But he didn't want to be around so much uncertainty, and knew he'd just be a distraction and excuse for both of them to avoid talking about their feelings.

He'd brought his camera, as well as the supplies to develop photographs, now that he knew how to do it. He took pictures of the frogs in the pond, and even searched for lizards and snakes, without success. He then pottered about in the kitchen, making gingerbread dough from scratch the way he did every Christmas at the Dursleys. He'd only done it twice in this timeline, but had far more experience with it in the other one. He rolled balls of dough and squashed them down with a fork, sprinkled a little raw sugar on top, and put the full trays into the oven.

After that, he set about making soup. They had a lot of root vegetables which needed to be used up, and powdered vegetable stock which was due to expire in a week. They had no bread but some yeast, also nearing the end of its life, so he made some quick-rise bread dough, and set it in the patchy sunshine outside to help it rise, since the proving drawer was full of yet more trays.

The soup was left to simmer while the gingerbread cooled, and he stomach growled. He ate one of the still-warm pieces of gingerbread and smiled. He hadn't lost his ability to bake, it seemed. He'd grown concerned that having a house elf to do everything would make his skills grow rusty. That was his constant concern at Hogwarts, too. He didn't like cooking for the Dursleys, but it was a valuable skill that many witches and wizards didn't have. And until he was eleven he never thought he could afford to have someone else cook for him, so it was an essential life skill. One he should have utilised more during the horcrux hunt, instead of leaving it all to Hermione, now that he thought about it. One more thing to feel guilty about.

Now he could bake and cook for pleasure. Or, in this case, to make up for the Tonkses having to host him without much warning. He could at least make their lives a little easier while he stayed.

Once the dough had nearly tripled in size, Harry pummelled it into submission again, and then divided it up into smaller amounts to make dinner rolls. He filled some of the trays from the proving drawer, leaving plenty of room for the dough to rise and bake evenly around the edges. He found an empty biscuit tin and put the cooled gingerbread inside. He placed it in the middle of the dining table and checked the time. Not long until his hosts were due home.

He grated half a large block of cheese, which was going a bit hard at the corners, into a nice serving bowl, then left it out to keep it at room temperature. Once half of the bread rolls had cooked, he waited for them to cool before cutting them in half with a bread knife. He placed them back on the tray, flat side up, and sprinkled some of the cheese on top, along with a bit of freshly-chopped basil and rosemary from the garden. Then he toasted them under the grill. He was sorting out plates when Ted arrived home, his nose leading him to the kitchen.

“Hello, Uncle Ted!” Harry chirped. “Aunty Andromeda said I can stay the night. Can you take this basket of bread out? It's still warm. I've got toasted cheese in the oven, and the soup is ready to go any time. There's gingerbread in the biscuit tin, if you can't wait for dinner.”

Ted seemed overwhelmed by the load of information Harry had just dumped at his feet, but he obediently put down his briefcase and took the bread out to the table. He also set the table for three and got glasses down, which were too high up for Harry to reach. He filled a pitcher with pumpkin juice and took it to the table. Harry heard him greet his wife, who hurried into the kitchen.

“Harry!” she scolded. “You're not supposed to be making dinner for us.”

“I was bored,” he said, shrugging. “It's not fun looking at frogs on your own, and I haven't finished up a roll of film so I can't develop the pictures on my camera yet. I made gingerbread! And there's soup. And look.” He opened the oven. “I think it's time to take the cheese toast out now. Are you ready for dinner?”

“I'll just wash my hands again,” she said. “Honestly, those people who hurt you have no idea what a treasure they've lost.”

Harry beamed, genuinely touched by the compliment. She kissed the top of his head and washed her hands at the kitchen sink, while Ted helped him place the toasted cheese rolls on a large platter. Andromeda used magic to pour the soup from the heavy pot into a large tureen, and then used more magic to levitate it through to the dining room. Harry brought the bowl with the remaining cheese, as well as the salt and pepper shakers, to the table.

They all sat down and began on the soup. Harry liked dunking the cheesy bread into the broth, and he tried not to get messy. He noticed that his hosts were particularly pleased, and went back for seconds of the soup and thirds of the rolls.

“What were my cousin and your uncle being silly about?” Andromeda asked, once she'd had her fill and was letting it settle.

“Sirius kissed Remus on the mouth and then they got all awkward about it,” Harry said. Ted nearly choked on his pumpkin juice.

“Last thing I expected to hear,” he said, wiping his mouth and nose with a napkin.

“Our house elf has promised that they won't get dessert until they've worked it all out. But *we* get dessert because we're not being silly. I... I hope you don't mind that I used stuff without asking, Aunty Andromeda. I just wanted to be helpful.”

“Oh, Harry, of *course* we don't mind. I don't think we can finish the soup tonight, but we can put the rest of it in the fridge or freezer and have it tomorrow. I'm sure the rolls will keep as well. I'm only worried that you were working on your own all this time. You could have been hurt and we wouldn't have known.”

“I've been doing it for years at the Dursleys,” Harry said dismissively. “And now I can call for our house elf if I'm in trouble. I think she'd know if I was in trouble anyway.”

“It would be nice if we could get a house elf, but it's usually the old families that get them. House elves are quite proud about where they work, even when they're treated badly.”

“Mr Crouch was arrested today, and he had a house elf,” Harry said.

“I *thought* I'd heard about his arrest, but it didn't seem likely,” Ted said. “What happened? Is it true that his son was living with him, instead of Azkaban?” Harry nodded. “Wow.”

“But his house elf, Winky, probably won't have a job anymore,” Harry said. “And the Malfoys lost *their* house elf. He's also looking for work. I don't see why you shouldn't get one to work for you. You both work a lot and need someone to help. What do you *usually* do for dinner?”

“When we've both been working?” Andromeda said. “Something very simple and quick, and we usually eat later than this. Then we have a difficult night trying to get to sleep. We certainly never get to have dessert.” She opened the biscuit tin. “You made these?”

“You had lots of treacle you didn't seem to be using,” he replied. “And raw sugar. I've written down the things in your pantry which are close to expiring.”

“You really are a treasure, Harry,” she said. “And we'll look into hiring a house elf. I can't expect you to cook every time you come to visit.”

Chapter End Notes

Not as much plot happening in this chapter, but Sirius and Remus weren't making it easy on me. Besides, I've been reading a story where Harry loves to cook but isn't getting much opportunity because of the house elves. I personally enjoy baking, and if someone tried to stop me from using my extensive cookie cutter collection I'd turn THEM into a freaking cookie cutter.

(That sounded more threatening in my head.)

Please review!

Chapter Thirty-Five

Chapter Summary

So what's happened with Remus and Sirius?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Harry was happy to see his reaper, and he leaned forward on the desk, keen eyes locked on the pensieve.

“What's happening back home?” he asked.

“I am not your personal messenger service,” the reaper said. Harry looked up at him and arched an eyebrow. “And you are too young to see. Not to mention that this is *highly* private.”

“Why? What's going on? Have they sorted things out?”

“They're 'sorting things out' very thoroughly. Right now. In bed.”

“Oh.” Harry's face heated up, and he wondered if he was blushing in his sleep. “Okay. I don't need to see that. But they're happy, aren't they?”

“Yes,” his reaper said. “After you left they chose to talk about it in the drawing room, hoping for advice from your parents. Apparently it was 'blatantly obvious' to them that Remus Lupin was pining the whole time they were at school, and they hoped that Sirius Black was merely oblivious or in denial. But they decided that instead of bringing you back for dinner, they would make it a date instead. Your house elf made self-saucing chocolate pudding for dessert. Now they are taking advantage of your continued absence to--”

“I got that part, thanks,” Harry said. “Right. They're happy. That's all that matters. Okay. So what about the Crouches?”

“Mr Crouch is very remorseful, though confused as to why he confessed what had happened. He was only checked for the usual truth potions, like Veritaserum. No one had used wand magic on his mind, either, except for your godfather stunning him. But that was after the confession. Amelia Bones questioned the house elf Winky about any other strangers who may have visited in the preceding twenty-four hours, but it came to nothing.

“As for the son, Mr Crouch the Second, he keeps spitting vile invectives about his father, the Ministry of Magic in general, and the Department of Magical Law Enforcement in particular. He says that he will find his master as soon as he gets out and make sure that he is brought

back. He displayed some knowledge of the existence of the horcruxes, though he has not yet mentioned anything specific. The auror department is considering the use of Veritaserum on him.”

“It's only the diadem left, isn't it? Is there any way of getting rid of it in the next four years, before I get to Hogwarts? And what do we know about the location of Voldemort's spirit?”

“Slow down,” his reaper said, holding up his hands. “The diadem is the only one left, as the snake has not yet been found by Tom Riddle. He does not have the strength to create another horcrux yet, nor the means of doing so. His reaper is sick of waiting for him to die, so they are ensuring that his soul does not accidentally fracture again, the way it did the night your parents were killed. Still, it must be better than being the meddler's reaper, after the way the meddler tore verbal strips off--”

“What?” Harry blurted. “You know what happened to Dumbledore after he died?”

His reaper looked uncomfortable, and shuffled in place for a moment.

“We could all hear it,” he said, dropping his voice. “As soon as he met his reaper, he demanded the same chance you had had, to fix things so that it was not left to you, a child. When he was told that he had had the opportunity previous times that *he* had died--”

“He's died before?”

The reaper glared at him for the second interruption in as many minutes.

“You are not that special,” he snapped. “Of course others have died prematurely. They do not usually need the level of help *you* do, however, even without their memories.”

“Ouch,” Harry muttered.

“As I was *saying*, when the meddler died previously he was given instructions to *stop* meddling when he returned to life. Due to erasing his memories of being here, he forgot, and so the cycle continued.”

“It's a flawed system,” Harry said.

“As you told me. He... was less polite than you were. Called the afterlife *itself* incompetent. Said that he should have the opportunity to save more lives, as he was not yet supposed to die in your other timeline. But since that timeline is only being maintained in your memories so that you can fulfil your destiny with the least amount of trouble, that timeline no longer applies. He was meant to die when he has now died, so he was not granted the opportunity to go back and change his previous actions.”

“Pity,” Harry said.

“You would never have existed if he did that.”

“It would be *worth* it. No one would miss me if I never existed, and people like the McKinnons and Regulus Black would never have died. That house elf who was falsely

accused of killing her mistress would never have been punished, either.”

“The new destiny has been set ever since your parents' fifth year at Hogwarts, and it cannot be changed now. Fate would have *all* our heads if it had to be... *tweaked* again.”

“And we wouldn't want that.”

“No.”

“Speaking of destiny,” Harry said slowly, “what about Snape?”

“Severus Snape?”

“His destiny changed and he'll never know what was originally meant to be. And, like I've said before, I *don't* want him at Hogwarts when Neville and I start there. Not unless he can learn to stop being a bully. Could I get a copy of my mother's notes to him, so he can still develop a cure for lycanthropy? Or would he not be interested in doing that after what Sirius did?”

“He no longer cares about potion development,” the reaper said. “Stop concerning yourself with him. Leave his fate *alone*.”

“The second he says *anything* mean to Neville, I'm getting a private potions tutor for us, and anyone else who falls foul of him,” Harry said fiercely.

“Of course. Why did you never do that last time?”

“I was determined not to let him beat me at his game. But I should've seen what it was doing to Neville. Just because he managed to pass – even do well – doesn't mean he should have gone through so much bullying. He would've done much better with a supportive environment.”

“He *will*. Your friendship has already made a significant difference in that boy's life.”

Harry was surprised that an owl arrived at breakfast for him. It clearly knew to find him at the Tonks's house. Ted was sure to scan it for possible traps first, while Harry happily fed the owl some bacon. He made sure to tell the owl how clever it was to find him, and the bird preened under his lavish praise. After years with Hedwig, Harry knew how important it was to stoke owls' egos.

“Why is a publishing house writing to you, Harry?” Ted asked, handing over the letter, now declared safe to be handled.

“Ooh!” Harry ripped it open hastily, breakfast now forgotten, and scanned through the letter two or three times, feeling more pleased every time. “That's *brilliant*!”

“What happened?”

“Well, when Uncle Remus and I went to Hay, I bought these books which are sort of subject guides for children who are going to Hogwarts. I'm going to lend them to my friends. I know Hermione won't have them. I wrote to tell the publishers how good I think the books are, and asked when Muggleborns get them, and how often the books are updated, since my copies are secondhand. I said they were really useful. Then I asked where I could buy more up-to-date ones.” He'd barely taken a breath through all that, feeling rather like Hermione, so he took a pause. “They've said they don't publish them anymore. No one ever said how useful they were, and they were taken off the Hogwarts book list long ago. So they stopped making them. But they said that if I really think they're good, and if I think children would buy them, then they could do a...” He referred to the letter. “A short run. Whatever that means.”

“I think we had those,” Andromeda said. “They weren't on our book list for Hogwarts, just as they weren't for Nymphadora. But there were copies in the Black library. Fairly old and tattered. Did you really find them helpful?” Harry nodded, mouth full of eggs and unable to respond verbally. “I think I should take a look at them. Nymphadora might appreciate the extra help.”

“I didn't know they existed,” Ted remarked. “I'd be interested in looking at them as well.”

“Uncle Sirius has a place in London now, and it has a library. Maybe it has copies, too?”

“Those are probably the ones I remember,” Andromeda said. “That would be wonderful, Harry, thank you. And I think I might ask everyone I know about whether they had the books. It seems that Muggleborns wouldn't have.” She nodded at her husband. “I'm always amazed – and ashamed – when I realise how much of an advantage purebloods have. I don't think I ever read those guides, yet I *still* knew more before I arrived at Hogwarts simply from observing my family. I'm sure you've learnt a great deal since living with his guardians.”

“Not much,” Harry said. “They do a lot without saying anything. But Uncle Remus has made a TV work with magic, which is really interesting.”

“Ah.” Ted looked off into space. “I wonder how he'll deal with patenting that.”

“Is it hard to do?”

“No, not if he has a successful product and can convince a manufacturer of its attractiveness to buyers in the marketplace. A manufacturer who's Muggleborn would be an advantage.”

“He's a werewolf. Will that be a problem?”

Andromeda dropped her teacup and Ted's gaze snapped to Harry's.

“Maybe,” he said. “But if he's smart enough to hire my services, I'm sure I can find a way around it. There are always potential legal loopholes in the magical world, Harry. Arrogant purebloods think themselves untouchable, and won't make contracts as watertight as they should. Which means there's always work for me.” He winked. “You tell your uncle to owl me, and I'll see what I can do to help him patent his magical television.”

When it was time to head home to Potter Manor, Mintzi came to pick Harry up. He said goodbye to the Tonkses, and Andromeda kissed him on both cheeks, extra thankful that they could heat up their soup for dinner without extra effort. She also promised to look into finding an elf.

Harry took Mintzi's hand and she took him straight to the drawing room, where Sirius and Remus were curled up on the couch together. They were all lovey-dovey, and Harry glared at Mintzi.

"I'm sure they didn't want you to bring me right *here*, while they're like this," he said.

"No, it's alright, Harry," Sirius said, quickly sitting up from where he'd been entangled in Remus's arms. "We need to remember that this is your home, and you could appear out of nowhere any time. Especially if you have a nightmare. You might not be able to barge in on us right away, but you can still come to us. You know this doesn't change things, don't you?"

"You were sharing the master bed before anyway," Harry said with a shrug. His guardians both blushed at that. "Uncle Remus, Uncle Ted said that he can help you pay... patent? The TV. He can find loopholes or something. I think that was it."

"Did you have a nice dinner?" Remus asked, fingering his collar. Harry could've sworn he saw lovebites on Remus's neck, and wished he hadn't. It was like knowing that his parents had to get all romantic. It wasn't something a child should think about. Or a teenager. A person at any age, really. He felt that way about the Weasleys, too.

"Yes," Harry said. "I made soup and bread rolls and toasted some of the rolls with cheese on top, and I also made gingerbread for dessert. It wasn't fancy, but--"

"*You* cooked?" Sirius said. Harry frowned.

"You expected them to cook for me when they'd been working all day?" he asked. "Besides, I didn't have anything else much to do. Oh!" He pulled out the letter from the publishers. "Look, I got this!"

Sirius read it while Remus read over his shoulder.

"Well done, Harry," Remus said. "I'm glad we went book shopping."

"So am I," Harry said. "It's where we met Hermione, remember?"

"I remember those books," Sirius said. "We were forced to read them. I have no idea if they were useful, but if you think they were then I'll see if I can find them in the library at Grimmauld Place."

"Aunty Andromeda and Uncle Ted want to see them, too."

"Noted," Sirius said. "Now go and unpack, and come back to tell us how you learned to make soup and bread rolls."

"Okay!" Harry said, and he ran upstairs to unpack his overnight bag.

Chapter End Notes

We're planning to go out tomorrow. There's a big anniversary thing at a local cemetery, near one of the historic prisons. I'll try to get some of the next chapter written in advance, so there's less to do when we get back. Not sure how long we'll be out, but it should all be very interesting. The anniversary was supposed to happen last year but, you know... COVID-19.

Please review!

Chapter Thirty-Six

Chapter Summary

"Full mooooooooooon, now I'm no longer aloooooone..."

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

During the full moon, Harry looked out his window, but this time he was at Potter Manor, and he could see Remus and Sirius running around in the moonlight. They dipped into the forest a couple of times, but mostly romped about in the grass, stretching their legs and really *running*.

With a smile, Harry went to bed, reading the children's guide to Transfiguration. It was fascinating to read about how the earliest known cases were inspired by Christian belief, that wine and wafers could actually be turned to blood and flesh through prayer. Magic-wielders simply took it further, at first by transfiguring similarly-shaped objects. Like the matches-to-needles work they undertook as first years. Pity the history and logic behind it wasn't actually explained. If it had been, Harry hadn't been paying attention, probably thanks to Ron.

Transfiguration developed from that, as the best incantations and wand movements were discovered and recorded. The fact that there was a science behind wand movements had never occurred to Harry; but as he considered what he remembered from charms and defence, certain similar spells had similar movements, to indicate whether an object was being manipulated or if you were instead summoning a substance like water from thin air.

Eventually, he had to read some fiction so he wouldn't be kept awake by thoughts swirling through his mind. He was reading the second Paddington book at the moment. He appreciated the bear's love of marmalade, and found his orphaned status relatable as well. And his penchant for getting into trouble, then having to get himself back *out* of trouble. At least Paddington's trouble never put his loved ones in mortal danger.

The next morning Remus needed to sleep off the second transformation, so Sirius took Harry to Grimmauld Place.

"Good thing I had the place gone over thoroughly," he said. "There were some very bad things here. One in particular could have hurt us if we'd come in contact with it. Now, I've had curse-breakers working on the library with priority. This townhouse still isn't livable yet. But the books are all clean now; we can find those guides for Andromeda and Ted. You might find even more useful books. I'll do what I can to help."

“Uncle Sirius, you know how we can make sure Hermione's ready for Hogwarts?” Harry said as they walked upstairs.

“Mmm-hmm?”

“What about other Muggleborns? What if there are more kids like me, who aren't Muggleborn but don't know they have magic? How do we find kids like that, so they can be ready, too?”

“Traditionally they don't find out until they're eleven,” Sirius said. “It boils my blood that you would've been kept in the dark that long.”

“And you in Azkaban,” Harry said. Sirius ruffled his hair with a rueful smile.

“Yes,” he said.

“But it isn't fair. If you grow up with magic then you have an... what did Aunty Andromeda say? Ad... advan...”

“Advantage?”

“Yeah, that. It's not fair. And the purebloods keep looking down on the Grangers. They don't see all the amazing things Muggles have made. Muggles don't have magic, so people like Enid Blyton made up magical worlds. But there aren't all that many stories in the magical world.”

“Our people have done extraordinary things that put fiction to shame,” Sirius said.

Harry frowned at him. How could Sirius be such a snob when he had a motorbike?

“So have Muggles,” he said. “There have been huge wars where millions died, and people who risked their lives to save them. Muggles make movies about real life people. Remember at the zoo, when Uncle Remus talked about Helen Keller? We read about her at school. She was born deaf and blind. She couldn't hear or see *anything* for her *whole life*. Her teacher had to come up with a way to talk with her, and teach her about the world. There's so much people are used to that she never got to experience. How would you teach her what yellow is?”

Sirius stopped walking at that last question, but they were nearly at the library.

“Oh,” he said, blinking.

When it became clear, after a couple of minutes, that Sirius's brain had shut down for the time being, Harry went into the library. It took a bit to find the books. By then Sirius had wandered in and sat at the desk. He still looked spaced out. As long as he was actually thinking about what Harry had said, that was a good thing. He needed people like Sirius to see that change was needed, and willing to do something about it. That they took too much for granted.

“By the time Lily was willing to be friends with us, she'd had time to learn so much,” Sirius said under his voice. He was tracing mindless patterns on the desk and had forgotten about

Harry. "And there was *Snape*. He taught her before she got to Hogwarts. She had that advantage. But not all of them do. Hermione will because of Harry. What if she didn't?"

Harry nearly snorted. Hermione did more than okay in the previous lifetime, without the advantage she'd have *this* time. How extraordinary could she be this time around?

"I found these," Harry said, deciding that it was time to interrupt. Sirius jumped in the chair and stared at Harry unseeingly for a few seconds, before he visibly snapped out of it.

"Is that all of them?" he asked, holding out his hands. Harry gave him the large pile of books, which covered more than just the subjects taught at Hogwarts in his time, including a book on the dark arts. Not unexpected in the Black household. Nothing on Muggle studies, of course.

"It's all I found from the series I've been reading," Harry said.

"Dark arts," Sirius muttered, when he saw that title. "They stopped teaching that years ago. After Dumbledore became headmaster, I believe. So many students unprepared to recognise dark magic. A lot of them had to catch up when they became healers, learn on the job. When Andromeda became a healer she was in demand because she knew... the sort of spells her sister Bellatrix cast. I hope you *never* meet Bellatrix Lestrangle."

I hope Hermione never meets her, Harry thought.

"Are there any other books we should take home?" Harry asked. Sirius looked up at him.

"I'll check," he said. "Might be some etiquette books. Most of that was chucked out over time, since it didn't seem to matter when we were fighting a war. Nowadays many think that the old-fashioned manners purebloods used to espouse are evil simply because Death Eaters were masters of etiquette. Good manners, you know. They were brought up knowing the correct bows and the like. A lot of the old celebrations disappeared as well. I don't mind; I enjoy all the chocolate at Easter, and Remus loves it. And it's great to see the Muggles feel more accepted."

"Anthony is Jewish," Harry said. "He doesn't celebrate Easter or Christmas."

"Damn, so the system's still flawed," Sirius said, pinching the bridge of his nose. "Right. It seems we really need to look to the children to know how to progress. Hogwarts will be going through a huge upheaval at the moment, since Dumbledore's gone."

"I didn't mean to make everyone work so hard," Harry said. A small lie. He didn't really care if they had to put in the effort, because it was well past time for them to do so. He'd bloody well defeated Voldemort at the age of seventeen, after facing off against him numerous times before; it was time the adults did their job of preventing the need to do that again.

The Unspeakables were doing very good work. They just needed the diadem. If Harry could only find a way to get information to them...

How quickly would *they* have defeated Voldemort, if given all the clues required? If Dumbledore had never placed so much faith in the prophecy, how *easy* it would've been. Harry's life would've been much simpler and quieter. And Slughorn was at fault, too, for not telling anyone that Tom Riddle had asked about horcruxes.

“Let's see,” Sirius said, while he was scouring the shelves. Harry left him to it, and searched for books on herbology. He wanted to be able to show them to Neville if he was able to invite his friends over to Grimmauld Place in the future.

They returned in time for lunch, though Mintzi scolded Sirius for cutting it close.

“Master Potter is a growing boy and needs his meals on *time*,” she said.

No one mentioned the odd times they'd had lunch during outings, especially to the seaside. That was more a case of eating when they could get seating, irrespective of any house elf schedule.

It was a meat-heavy lunch, to help Remus regain his energy and caloric intake. Harry was happy enough to nibble on bread and cheese, but his physical appetite had improved over the last several weeks, so he was able to scarf down chicken, ham, and pork with crackling. He left the large beef steaks to Remus and Sirius, and delicately gnawed on roasted cauliflower. He still couldn't escape the mindset of eating every scrap possible, in case he couldn't get food the next day. While that was his mindset from the camping trip, it fit with the image of a starved child as well, so it was about the easiest act to pull off.

With another weekend approaching, correspondence increased. The children were getting antsy to go sight-seeing in Muggle London again, or anywhere interesting. Daphne was determined to see if dinosaurs really had existed, and Hermione was determined to win a book out of it. Luna was looking forward to seeing the skeletons and agreeing or disagreeing with how palaeontologists thought they would have looked.

Anyone who has seen the skeleton of a puffskein would never guess what it really looked like , she wrote to Harry, sending him a sketch of a puffskein skeleton. He agreed.

Harry was somewhat distracted when Amelia Bones asked to have a meeting with him. He agreed to visit her at the Ministry. Remus was going to meet Ted Tonks to talk about patent opportunities, so they agreed to meet in Diagon Alley afterwards for lunch. Sirius accompanied Harry, and when Amelia requested that she put up a silencing charm so he couldn't hear the conversation, he paused before agreeing.

“Seeing what happened with Dumbledore after *their* private conversation, I'm interested to see what will happen this time,” he said, ever reckless. But Harry didn't mind. Amelia had been his first contact with the magical world this time around; if she wanted the truth, he'd give it to her, whether she believed him or not.

“Harry, something has been bugging me,” she said. He almost asked if it was Rita Skeeter.

“What's wrong?” he asked.

“Mr Crouch's sudden confession,” she replied. Harry tensed. “One of my aurors put forward the theory that he'd ingested a less easily detected truth potion, and we found a couple of possibilities. I don't want to get anyone into trouble, considering the result of the confession. But if--”

“It was me,” Harry said. Her eyes widened. “I found an essay my mum wrote at Hogwarts about it. Mind healers use it to help people get things off their chests that they can't talk about easily. I think that's what the essay said? Anyway, I thought that maybe Mr Crouch might not really mean his apology to Sirius, or that he might not say it easily. He didn't say he was sorry at all, did he?”

“No, he didn't,” Amelia murmured. “I'm sorry to say that I felt he'd muck it up as well.”

“I just wanted to know if he was really sorry for what he did,” Harry said. “I used my dad's school cauldron. We had all the things for the recipe. But Mintzi didn't know. No one did except me. Uncle Remus has been busy with his TV thing, and Uncle Sirius spends *hours* talking to my parents' painting. They know I like to be on my own sometimes. It was easy to make.”

“Yes, so I've heard,” she said, and she rubbed her temples. “Alright. Well, I can't argue with the result, as I said. It's good to have Crouch Junior back in custody where he belongs. I'm guessing that's why you volunteered to make the tea?” He nodded. “May I... may I read your mother's essay? Something like this could be very handy for use on suspects and witnesses. It's not in the Hogwarts curriculum, so only healers would suspect its use in tea. But I'd like to know more about it first.”

“She got a zero for it, though,” Harry said, acting confused.

“Zero?”

“Well, there was an 'O' and the teacher wrote 'Well done', so I don't know.”

“Ah.” She chuckled. “It's an 'O' for Outstanding. The best mark you can get.”

“That's weird,” Harry said. “The top mark we get at school is supposed to be 'A'.”

“Hogwarts isn't an ordinary school,” she said.

It certainly isn't, Harry thought.

“I'll find it when I get home,” he said. “It should be near the top of the trunk.”

“Thank you, Harry.”

“Are there still bad people around?” he asked. “What if someone's done something like Mr Crouch did? Could you make everyone here take the potion?”

“That would be unethical,” she said. “It would be wrong, I mean.”

Harry sighed. It was worth a try.

Chapter End Notes

Now I have to research the Natural History Museum. I've never been there before, though of course I've seen dinosaur bones. I'd love to travel up to Winton, in outback Queensland, to see the fossils out there. One of my aunts showed me pictures of when she and my uncle went there awhile ago.

Please review! Told you someone might get suspicious of Harry...

Chapter Thirty-Seven

Chapter Summary

Museum. Dinosaurs. At least no one's planning to cast substitutiary locomotion. We don't need that.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The Natural History Museum of London was *huge*. It looked like a palace from the outside, with a large terracotta facade complete with towers and a flagpole. Technically, it was the British Museum (Natural History) by name, though it was no longer connected with the British Museum, according to Hermione's letters.

Harry supposed you'd need a big building to hold dinosaur skeletons.

They weren't the first to arrive. Hermione and her parents were already there, having caught the Tube to South Kensington. The dentists' eyes were starting to glaze over with how much Hermione was talking; it was likely second nature for them to tune out at least some of her babbling. Harry caught her attention as soon as they arrived, and she started talking about the previous times she'd been there. He was happy to let her rattle on, since he'd never visited, not even on a school trip.

“And wait until you see Dippy, not that it's the real one, it's a plaster cast replica, but he's *enormous*, and there are other real skeletons--”

“Dippy?” Harry said.

“The diplodocus,” she said.

“Oh. They're the ones with long necks, aren't they?”

“Uh-huh!” Hermione said, nodding emphatically, her curls bouncing. “One of them, anyway. Oh, there's Hannah! I wish Lavender could come today, but she's seeing a mind healer. Did she tell you that?”

“Yes. Poor Lavender. We'll have to bring her again sometime.”

“And there's Anthony. Hello!” She waved her arm. “Is anyone new coming today?”

“Yes,” Sirius said. “I've invited a couple of guests. I hope you don't mind, but it might do them some good. I had to be talked into it.”

"I don't remember--" Remus began. Sirius held up his hand.

"I hadn't told you," he said. "I'm sorry. I wasn't even sure whether they'd show up. They still might not. I told them that if they weren't here on time, they'd be on their own."

The others gradually showed up. Neville and Ernie had lessons, and Megan had come down with a cold, so they were a much diminished group. At least Harry didn't have to deal with Ernie.

Then he saw the people who must've been Sirius's guests, and realised that he had someone even worse to deal with.

"What are the Malfoys doing here?" Daphne asked. Harry jumped, not having realised she was right behind him.

"The Malfoys?" he said.

"Mr Malfoy was arrested recently," she said.

"Narcissa Malfoy is my cousin," Sirius said. "Harry, she's one of Andromeda's sisters."

"Is she as nice as Auntie Andromeda?" Harry asked innocently. Sirius winced.

"She's... not in favour of Muggles," he said. "After being forced to meet with her again, I thought I should take the chance to change her mind, and change her son's mind as well. You're the same age, so you'll all be together at Hogwarts at the same time. Most of the time, for Luna and Astoria." He nodded to where the younger girls were talking about animals. "She'll need support, now that her husband's reputation has taken a downturn. Much as I couldn't care less, Andromeda browbeat me into this, so if you have a bad time with them, blame it on her. Just... play nice for *her* sake."

"Okay," Harry said. "For Auntie Andromeda's sake. But if either of them say anything mean about Hermione--"

"I'll keep them in line," Sirius said. He sighed. "Leave it to me."

He made introductions around the group. Mrs Malfoy didn't shake anyone's hand, but she nodded to each of the adults and children. Draco looked surly; or perhaps the sunny day was hard on his eyes. Many of them had to squint, Harry included.

"Time to show you that dinosaurs *are* real," Hermione said, looking Daphne in the eye. "They died off millions of years ago, but their skeletons are still around. Have you heard of dinosaurs?" she asked Draco, far more politely than he deserved.

"No, I haven't," he said, far more politely than Harry expected.

"They were huge reptiles," Hermione said. "Ooh! There's also a whale skeleton. A *blue* whale. The biggest mammals in the world. Elephants are the biggest land mammals. It's a pity you didn't come to the zoo with us, but perhaps you can come next time, and see the elephants in person!"

Draco nodded. He was clearly on his best behaviour. Harry decided to give him this chance, in hopes that he wouldn't become the same brat who used words like 'Mudblood' and became a Death Eater before he was seventeen. Regulus Black also became a Death Eater early and had a change of heart very soon after. Unlike the Death Eaters who continued serving Voldemort for years on end.

Did magical people grow less intelligent after they reached twenty?

They filed inside easily, since there was no fee to pay, so no tickets needed to be purchased. Half of them picked up maps. Harry and Hermione shared one, although she knew her way around well enough from previous visits.

“What's your favourite place in the museum?” Harry asked. That was one thing he'd never known about her in the previous lifetime. He was determined to discover much more this time around.

“I don't know,” she said, her brow furrowing. “The green zone is where the main hall is, where we'll see Dippy. But the orange zone has a wildlife garden. But there's so much to see *everywhere*. We're members of the museum, so we can go to the special members area in the green zone, but we won't leave you all behind. Not today anyway.” Her eyes sparkled mischievously as she looked at him, and he grinned back.

“We'll behave ourselves, I promise,” he said.

They walked into the main hall, since Hermione was keen to show off the diplodocus. Daphne stopped walking in the doorway, and had to be physically moved out of the way of other tourists by Remus. Her parents and sister, as well as the other purebloods, were all astonished. So was Harry; it was one thing to learn about dinosaurs in class, but another to see a skeleton in person.

“I think it's as big as a dragon,” Luna said in a hushed voice. Her father was busy with his paper that day, so she just had her mother with her.

“Or bigger,” Harry said, remembering the ones he'd encountered.

“You're right. There could have been lots of meat and muscle on the bones. And if it really did have feathers as well, it would look even bigger.”

“Like the puffskein,” Harry said, smiling at her. She nodded.

“Wait until you see Hope, the blue whale,” Hermione said. “There's also a stegosaurus in the red zone.”

“I'm glad they're no longer walking around anymore,” Mandy said. “I'd be *terrified* of meeting one of those in real life.”

“There were some smaller ones, but not many bigger,” Hermione explained. “The most terrifying of all was the tyrannosaurus rex. They had short arms but *vicious* looking teeth, and they only ate meat. We'd be nothing more than a snack to them.” Harry nudged her and

indicated Astoria, who looked frightened. "But they don't exist anymore! So we're safe. Unless someone uses that spell from *Bedknobs and Broomsticks* to bring the skeletons to life." She laughed lightly. "You couldn't do that in real life, of course."

"You could," Mrs Malfoy said. "I don't think anyone would want to, though."

"We'd be alright with Dippy," Hermione said. "As I told some of the others, Mrs Malfoy, this isn't the real skeleton; it's a replica. But even if it was the real skeleton, the diplodocus ate leaves and bark and other plants, not meat. We'd only be in danger of being stomped on by it. They could actually rear up on their back legs to reach *really* high up, and get leaves from the tops of trees! Imagine how useful they'd be if you needed to rescue someone from a tall building."

"It probably happened in an episode of *The Flintstones*," male Dr Granger said. "It's a cartoon TV show. Oh, but you don't have televisions, do you?"

"We will!" Harry said, poking Remus in the side. "Tell him, Uncle Remus."

Remus lowered his voice so only their group could hear.

"I'm patenting a magical television set," he said. "It won't be run on electricity, but it can get the usual channels. It would be marvellous if the Wizarding Wireless Network could establish its own network, so that we might catch up to the Muggles a bit more. They're so far ahead with their telecommunications that we've been left decades behind."

"Do you think we could get magical TV on our ordinary set?" Hermione asked.

"I don't think the Statute of Secrecy would allow that," Remus said. She pouted.

"If it's only going to be boring stuff like the news, you won't miss much," Harry said, squeezing her hand. She smiled shyly.

"I suppose," she said. "So, Daphne. What do you think of Dippy?"

"I'll buy you *any* book you want," Daphne said. "Did you say there are more skeletons? I want to see them. I want to see *everything* here."

"It certainly is fascinating," Mrs Malfoy said.

"Why don't we split up?" Sirius said. "The doctors Granger can lead a group each. Anyone who wants to stop and read more about the displays can go with one of them, and the rest can go with the other. Or should I go and buy some guidebooks?"

"We can act as guides ourselves," female Dr Granger said. "If you want to take it slowly, come with me. If you want to race ahead, go with my husband."

Mrs Malfoy moved towards Hermione's mother, and gave her a small smile. Draco clearly didn't want to leave her side. Mandy and Hannah and their parents were happy to take it slow. Sirius also went with them, more to keep an eye on his relations than anything else, Harry

suspected. He figured that Hermione was as good a guide as any, so when she moved to her father he followed. Others also separated into the two groups.

Last of all, Luna and her mother chose to go with Hermione's mother. Luna had a notebook out, clearly ready to take notes for her father, or perhaps draw what she thought the dinosaurs would really have looked like.

“Are we all set?” Sirius asked. Everyone nodded. “Let's meet at... where's a good place to meet?”

“The Kitchen,” Hermione's mother said. “By the time we're done we might want lunch, and there are activities for the children to do. It's in the red zone.”

“Right, whoever is there first, make sure you save seats for the rest of us,” Sirius said. “Let's go.”

Chapter End Notes

You can tell that this information has mostly been found on Wikipedia. Sigh.

Please review!

Chapter Thirty-Eight

Chapter Summary

Museum continued.

(It was too late to proofread and post last night. I had a busy day yesterday. Sorry.)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

They were a fairly small group, smaller than the other. Mr Granger was happy to talk about his first visit, when he was a child, and the changes which had been made since then. Since he was up ahead, Harry made sure to hold Hermione's hand, as well as Remus's. There were enough people to make separation possible if the children weren't held, and Harry and Hermione were both on the shorter side for their age. Harry could have suggested that Remus hold Hermione's hand; but he wanted to do it himself, and besides, Remus was holding a map. He didn't have a free hand.

"I wish I was better at school," Harry said.

"I could help if you want," Hermione said.

"I used to be okay," he said, eyebrows drawing together. "But I'd get in trouble for getting better marks than Dudley. My cousin," he added. "So I had to make sure I scored lower, which put me at the bottom of the class. Now I can't remember how to do well."

"Oh, Harry," she said, one hand covering her mouth as her eyes welled with tears. "Don't worry. As long as you get back into the swing of it before we start getting homework. I'll help you. Why don't you come to my school? You can travel far so quickly."

"I'm afraid the government would notice," Remus said. "And Harry is still technically considered a missing person, remember?"

"I'd forgotten that," she said. "Sometimes my parents see your picture in the newspaper."

"We should probably do something about it," Harry said. "I just don't want to risk being sent back to the Dursleys."

"We won't let that happen," Remus said, squeezing his hand warmly. "The Muggles wouldn't let that happen either, now that they know how you were treated."

"I'll do whatever I can to help," Hermione said, shifting closer to Harry as they walked into the next zone. "You can count on me."

“It's nice to have friends,” Harry said, remembering Luna's bittersweet words.

“Yes, it really is,” Hermione replied, grinning as she gripped his hand.

Harry was glad that he knew something about the animals shown in the museum, though the size of Hope the blue whale still impressed him, even more than the dinosaurs. The stegosaurus was less impressive after Dippy the diplodocus. The dodo nearly made Harry laugh, since Newt Scamander revealed that they were magical beasts, and had simply gone into hiding to avoid extinction. But he couldn't say anything about it; he'd simply have to wait until they got their books for Hogwarts. He noticed Remus's smile, as they looked at the stuffed dodo, and wondered if he was thinking the same thing.

“It's so sad,” Hermione said. “They weren't *pretty* birds, but they shouldn't have been made extinct, all because people wanted to eat them.”

“Yeah, it's sad,” Harry said. He waited, but Remus didn't say anything.

“It reminds me of a diricawl,” Mr Greengrass remarked, peering at the bird.

“Look, here's a picture of its skeleton,” Daphne said, pointing to an information board.

“This is what scientists think the dodo looked like,” Mr Granger said. “Based on their findings. Of course, it might be wrong. They don't know what colour the feathers would be, or how much extra muscle or webbing they had. They're believed to have been flightless, like penguins and emus.”

“Why do I know the name 'dodo'?” Mrs Goldstein said.

“Have you read *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll?” Hermione enquired.

“Actually,” Remus whispered, finally breaking, “the diricawl and the dodo are the same animal.”

“Of *course*,” Mrs Goldstein said, snapping her fingers. “*That's* why I've heard of it. From *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*.”

“I think my dad had that book,” Harry said. Hermione was staring from one person to the other, wide-eyed and confused.

“Diricawl?” she said.

“A magical bird that can teleport anywhere,” Remus said. “When humans began to eat them, they hid away to avoid being hunted down. That's why they're believed to be extinct. It's kept secret from Muggles so they learn not to hunt other species to extinction. Not that it's helped much,” he added in a resentful mutter. “The poor Tasmanian tiger...”

“Probably a good idea,” Mr Granger said, before Hermione could protest this knowledge being concealed.

“As long as it keeps them safe, right, Hermione?” Harry said. She looked around helplessly and then sighed.

“Yes,” she said. “Imagine if people started going after *other* animals who can't get away so easily. There are already so many endangered species, like the giant panda.”

“It's important to do our bit to keep them safe,” Mr Granger said, patting her shoulder. She nodded, and then grinned.

“What an amazing secret to keep,” she said, and she giggled.

“Are we supposed to keep dinosaurs secret?” Daphne asked. “I know they're extinct, too...”

“No, most people know about dinosaurs,” Hermione said.

“Yes, you should tell everyone you know about them,” Harry added. He was determined that his year at Hogwarts would be the best educated of them all, if he could.

The rocks and skeletons were spectacular, and Anthony said that everything they'd learnt about the solar system made him even more excited to study astronomy at Hogwarts.

“Just imagine, people have really walked on the moon,” Harry said. He knew that purebloods were ignorant of this, and couldn't resist putting the cat among the pigeons.

“What?” Mrs Greengrass squawked. “Walked on the moon?”

“Yes,” Harry said, looking as confused as possible. “It was years and years ago. Do you remember it, Uncle Remus?”

“It wasn't long before I started at Hogwarts,” Remus said. “It was all over the television. I'm still surprised that it never made *The Daily Prophet*. It was *huge*. American won the space race and people went wild seeing photographs of Neil Armstrong walking on the surface of the moon.”

They dragged the purebloods over to show them pictures of the moon, which included pictures of astronauts on its surface, walking slowly in low gravity. Astoria bounced up and down.

“I want to do that,” she said, pointing at the picture. “I want to go there!”

“Then you need to study lots of science,” Hermione said. “You have to be brilliant to work for NASA, which is your best chance of going into outer space. Unless there's a magical way of getting there?” She looked up at Remus, their unofficial mentor on magic.

“Not yet,” he said. “Muggles still have the best technology. It would be too cold in space; you couldn't hop on a broomstick or a flying carpet – flying carpets are illegal, by the way – and zip on out there. You know how far it is, I'm sure.”

“Nearly two hundred and forty thousand miles, on average,” she said. Mr Goldstein let out a low, impressed whistle. “Though it can be as far as two hundred and fifty-three thousand miles away, depending on the time of year.”

“I hoped you'd know that, because I've forgotten over time,” Remus said. “Well done.”

Harry wished they'd brought a picnic when they went to the wildlife garden, since others were sitting on picnic blankets and eating. But he knew that the Greengrasses wanted to pay for lunch this time, especially as they'd brought Astoria as well.

His stomach growled lowly not long before they finished looking through the final area. They may have intended to be quicker, but stopping to explain about space travel, diricawls, and the like had slowed them. They were still at The Kitchen before the others, and arrived between morning tea and lunch. They occupied a smaller table at first, and when one beside it became vacant they spread out to keep extra seats. There were colouring in sheets and puzzles. Hermione was pleased to see that the puzzles were different from the last time they'd visited. Harry kept Astoria company by colouring, while Hermione, Daphne, and Anthony collaborated over the puzzles.

Finally they were joined by the others, after about forty-five minutes. They agreed to an early lunch, and went up in smaller groups to place their orders. Harry didn't want to betray Mintzi by having something hot, like a pie, so he went with sandwiches and crisps. Hermione was happy to have a pie, though, with salad. Astoria wanted sandwiches, since they came in plastic tubes, like the food astronauts had to eat. Harry didn't have the heart to tell her that they couldn't have anything as bitsy as sandwiches. She'd likely grow out of this phase anyhow, especially since she couldn't go and study at a Muggle school to learn physics and biology and chemistry, or whatever she'd need to travel space.

If she came up with a solid idea for how magicals could travel to the moon in style and comfort, however, Harry would happily fund it. Would a Bubblehead charm work in place of a helmet?

Someone had the sense to wandlessly cast a Notice-Me-Not charm around their area, so the Muggles wouldn't hear the children and adults exclaiming over all the things they'd seen. The video footage terminals around the museum had intrigued them as well, and Remus was guaranteed to sell several television sets already. Astoria was talking about how she wanted to visit the moon and the stars, and Draco was still struck by the skeletons and models of the large mammals. Mrs Lovegood confirmed that the diricawl and the dodo were the same animal, having seen the dodo skeleton for herself, and having also seen a diricawl skeleton.

They took awhile to eat lunch, since nearly everyone had something they were stunned by. When they finally finished, other people were no doubt glad to have the tables and chairs. Astoria and Luna began to discuss what kind of animals might live on the moon, and how they could search for them there one day. Hermione explained about how they'd float, which led to an explanation of gravity, and why astronauts had to be really fit to survive.

Harry looked for a present for Mintzi first. He bought her a framed picture of an underwater scene, full of colourful coral, to hang in her living quarters.

Amelia made everyone laugh when she bought a poster of a tyrannosaurus rex, so that if anyone misbehaved she could threaten to find a way to resurrect a t-rex and sic it on the person who was in trouble. She also bought a necklace with a pendant in the shape of an iguanodon tooth.

Astoria happily clutched a book her parents bought for her on space travel and the solar system, while Daphne not only bought a book on geology for Hermione, she bought one on dinosaurs for herself, as well as a poster showing some of them beside humans for scale.

Anthony got an ant farm, joking that they shared the first three letters of his name. Draco got a microscope and a kit to examine specimens, so he could show his friends all the tiny bacteria and other microbes to be found in everyday life.

Luna bought a dinosaur tail to attach around her waist, and insisted on wearing it at once. Her mother made her promise to remove it before they apparated, in case Velcro couldn't be relied upon. Luna accepted, with the proviso that she put the tail back on before seeing her father.

Harry bought Hermione a model kit of a stegosaurus, since she'd said that she didn't have that one.

"It's not much, but you seem to like puzzles," he said. "And it was your idea to come here. Thank you for showing me around."

Hermione looked fit to burst with happiness, and bought Harry a small model of a dodo.

"Until we can see the real thing one day," she whispered.

Chapter End Notes

No idea if these things were available at the museum in 1987, but there's only so much I can find out on the internet. If anyone has a time machine, though, I'd happily make my fan fiction more accurate. *sobs*

Please review!

Chapter Thirty-Nine

Chapter Summary

A bunch of stuff happens in quick succession. To make up for yesterday's chapter being posted today instead. Damn, I need to get to sleep soon. Not looking forward to tomorrow.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Mintzi was pleased with her picture, although Harry had to help her carry since it was too big for her to carry on her own.

(It later occurred to him that she could have used magic to 'disappear' it to her quarters. The fact that she engineered an excuse to take Harry there was a great show of trust to a house elf. He'd said all the right things, and was pleased nearly to tears to see his vial of sand in pride of place on the mantel over the small fireplace.)

She was also pleased when he told her that he'd keep the guidebook on a shelf in his study, in case she ever wanted to use it 'for any reason'. He winked and she smiled widely. He suspected that they'd be having another overly-cheerful breakfast again someday soon.

He'd received a polite letter from the Malfoys – they all had – expressing their pleasure in being invited in the first place and their hopes of seeing everyone again. Mrs Malfoy mentioned that she had seen diricawls near their property before, and said that she would try to take a picture when she next saw one, to send copies to Harry and Hermione. They trusted the Malfoys not to hurt them, since the Malfoys kept pet peacocks and treated them well.

Diricawls are actually quite beautifully coloured , she wrote. *Our camera does not take colour photographs, but you will be able to see the sheen on their feathers.*

Harry squirmed in happiness that the Malfoys planned to send a picture to Hermione as well. And he was glad that they weren't extending an invitation straight away; it would be rude to refuse so soon, especially as they were Sirius's relations, but there was no way Harry was going there in the near future. He could still remember hearing Hermione's screams while trapped in the basement. He could still remember the word Bellatrix Lestrange carved into her arm.

If he saw Hermione in that room again, at any age, he might throw up.

When the photo arrived, Sirius scanned it first, declared it safe, and Harry found an empty frame to put the picture in. He put it up in his study, on top of the bookshelf he'd cleared for

his own use, where he was careful to stash guides and maps so that Mintzi could borrow them. It was a shorter bookshelf, accessible for children and house elves alike.

Some of the others were jealous that they'd missed out on a great day trip, but Hermione assured Harry that next time they had a free weekend, she and her parents would take them there.

Andromeda wrote and told Harry that they'd hired Winky. She would mostly be keeping house for them, but she was also sent off to Hogwarts each Sunday to train Tonks (Harry couldn't think of her as Nymphadora) in how to prepare potions ingredients. Tonks had a nasty habit of her clumsiness kicking in when preparing potion ingredients, and frequently had to go to the hospital wing for minor patch-ups to her hands. She was also losing house points because of it. As house elves were exceptional cooks, Winky had to know how to chop, dice, mince, use mortar and pestle, and all the other things Harry had become rusty at after a year of horcrux hunting. He'd no longer have the muscle memory for potions, either, outside of what he did for the Dursleys as meal prep.

He'd have to ask Mintzi for instruction.

“When I am less busy,” she said. “You do not start at Hogwarts for four years.”

“Are you busy... going places?” Harry asked. She glanced around, and then shook her head.

“Your uncle has taken on a new house elf,” she said. “He belonged to the Malfoy family first. His name is Dobby, but he does not speak well enough to be a Potter elf.”

Harry nearly buzzed with excitement that Dobby was somewhere around the manor and *safe*.

“So you're teaching him to speak properly?” he said.

“Yes,” she said. “It is disgraceful, the way so many older families allow their elves to talk. He is young enough to train. But he wishes to meet you, and I will *not* have that until he can control his language.”

“I'm sure he's doing his best to learn,” Harry said. “Should I bring him a souvenir?”

“I will decide his rewards,” she said. “Now shoo.”

He obediently shooed outside, leapt onto his broomstick and flew around the house at high speeds, giddy with glee that Dobby could yet be saved.

He was back in front of a familiar desk, opposite his older mirror image.

“Hello,” Harry said, deciding that a greeting would be the best way to begin, after being berated last time for being too informal and impatient. “Did you hear that Dobby is safe with us now?”

“He would still give his life for you,” his reaper said. “But we can reduce that necessity.”

"I'm glad," Harry said, somewhat alarmed by the ominous words. "What should I do about the diadem? I know it's in--"

"Forget the diadem."

"...Why?"

"The Unspeakables and aurors worked together to track Tom Riddle's life, and used the meddler's memories to work out that the diadem of Ravenclaw may be a horcrux, in keeping with the others found so far. An auror from Ravenclaw suggested that they ask the ghost of Helena Ravenclaw. She confirmed that Tom Riddle had handled the diadem. When they finally thought to question the house elves, they learned about the Come-And-Go Room, and found the diadem there. They have also confiscated other dangerous items, including the Vanishing Cabinet."

"Right," Harry said, after a moment's pause to process that. "All we have to do is find Voldemort's remaining spirit and... do something to it. Can I destroy it with touch, like I did with Quirrell? My mother's blood would still be running through my veins, and Voldemort hasn't used it in a ritual to resurrect himself yet."

"I can tell you that he has found a willing body and is on his way to Britain," the reaper said. "The body has since died, with only Riddle's power sustaining it."

"So someone has still died," Harry said, his heart sinking.

"There was nothing you could have done to prevent this."

"It's still on me. It's someone who should be alive, not serving as a corpse vessel for a Dark Lord!"

"Again, *there was nothing you could have done to prevent this.*"

Harry flopped back in the chair, crossing his arms as he fought the urge to scream in frustration. He didn't want to wake the household.

"What do I do when they turn up, whoever they are?" Harry asked.

"You will think of something. And stop fretting. It is not someone who will be missed. It is someone who died last time, deservedly. But they are not worth your sorrow."

"Is there anything else you needed to tell me?"

"You might be interested in this," his reaper said, pushing forward the Pensieve. "The story will be broken in the newspaper tomorrow, so try to look surprised if your guardians mention it."

Harry dove into the memory and appeared in Amelia Bones's office. She was in a meeting with other department heads.

"I have been learning about Muggle approaches to mental wellness," she said. "They recommend that people in high stress jobs have regular appointments with a therapist to talk about anything troubling them. I believe we should trial it for a month, and see if we notice an improvement. We should start with anyone who was working in the Ministry during You-Know-Who's reign of terror. They may need the most help. Especially those accused of being Death Eaters. Why, that kind of stain is worse than any tattoo. And those who were Imperiused? They need the most help. Yes, we should start with them. The sooner they get help, the better."

The others all reluctantly agreed, while Amelia smiled pleasantly, fiddling with the iguanodon tooth hanging from around her neck.

The surroundings changed to the comfortable interrogation room, where Harry had first been taken by the three aurors who collected him from The Leaky Cauldron. Someone Harry didn't recognise was seated opposite Walden Macnair.

"Now, Walden, you came under suspicion several years ago of conspiring with the criminal known as Voldemort," the stranger said, picking up a piece of shortbread from the tea tray. "It must have been a very difficult time for you, being a loyal Ministry worker. Please, don't forget your tea. It contains some chamomile to help you relax. It will make the therapy easier."

Macnair sniffed the tea, then drank some of it.

"There you are. Where was I? Ah yes. You were accused of being a Death Eater."

"Yes, I am a Death Eater, not that there's a Dark Lord to follow now," Macnair said, oblivious to the fact that he was spilling his guts. "I hate following orders, usually, but I liked his. Thanks to animal lovers like that maniac Newt Scamander, there isn't much of a call to execute beasts these days. So many we had recruited to the Dark Lord's cause went into hiding after his death. If he comes back one day, I'll be here, waiting to serve him again."

He was Stunned out of nowhere, and Amelia revealed herself from the corner. She'd been standing behind a full coat-stand. It was clever; magic might be detected, but simply hiding? Purebloods tended not to think of mundane solutions.

The scene changed again. Harry moved around a bit and saw Amelia hidden again. This time Yaxley was sitting opposite whoever was posing as a mind healer. He waved his hand over his cup of tea. Nothing happened. Harry remembered Sirius talking about family rings being able to detect harmful potions. No wonder it didn't pick up a potion typically used in healing.

"Corban, you have progressed through the Ministry of Magic well. You must be a hard worker, which is why this therapy session is so important. We must make sure that no one becomes too stressed. It can take a physical toll on the body, and make it more difficult to cast magic accurately. Do you understand?" He nodded while he swallowed a mouthful of tea. "Good. I am surprised you have progressed so far after being accused of following the criminal known as Voldemort."

“Who wouldn't follow him?” Yaxley said. “He was far more charismatic than Cornelius Fudge. Of course, Fudge doesn't use the Cruciatus Curse. But such things are a small price to pay to put Mudbloods and their ilk in place. Those of pure blood must keep all the power. I'm part of the Sacred Twenty-Eight; I'm not letting some jumped-up Muggle spawn have work that belongs to their betters. My only regret about taking the Dark Mark is having to cover it up when everything came crashing down. And, of course, having people believe that I couldn't shake off the Imperius Curse. It's *laughable*. No one can keep me under the Imperius Curse.”

Amelia Stunned him and emerged yet again. She exchanged a grim smile with the fake healer. Or perhaps it was a real mind healer, who wanted Death Eaters put away as much as Harry did.

The memories continued. While Umbridge was not actually a Death Eater, she was still a Death Eater-sympathiser. Her 'burden' was that she hadn't yet done enough to suppress the rights of 'half-breeds, Mudbloods, and other filth that don't *deserve* magic'. Her admission that she held blackmail material over much of the Wizengamot, and at least a third of the Ministry's employees, was enough to have her charged.

Harry watched as quick trials were held, where evidence was produced that most of the people interrogated had lied about being forced or brainwashed to become Death Eaters (or, in Umbridge's case, for being a bigoted and corrupt bitch). Fudge reluctantly accepted the evidence, but once the criminals were all sent off to Azkaban he actually relaxed. He looked *relieved*. It occurred to Harry that he held comparatively little power while the influential people pulled the real strings, and he had to dance to their tune or lose power; or worse, lose his life. Much as Harry despised the man, it was better to keep him where he was for now. Better the devil you know, and all that.

Especially as the Ministry was down several dozen workers and a few members of the Wizengamot. They now had many positions to fill.

He hoped that their hiring practices would be much improved this time around.

Chapter End Notes

Wham! Stuff happened.

So we now know the house elves are employed, a bunch of Death Eaters are headed to Azkaban, the horcruxes are gone, and Voldemort is on the move.

If you have any touristy suggestions for the group, let me know. Not much point in visiting any of the cathedrals or Abbeys. Sirius still wants to take Harry to 'The Phantom of the Opera', under the mistaken belief that it has something to do with the Phantom comics. But I should also be focusing on the plot. It's just that Harry's in a seven-year-old body and gets tired more easily. He also seriously needs some fun.

Anyway. Please review!

Chapter Forty

Chapter Summary

What do you do on a rainy day?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The good weather couldn't last. One day it was absolutely bucketing down. Harry fretted about the owls, until Sirius reassured him that they'd be fine.

“They know how to survive much better than we do,” Remus added. “Much more sensible than humans. And more attuned to the Earth.”

“I resent the implication that an owl is more sensible than me,” Sirius said.

“You *resemble* the implication, Sirius.”

Sirius looked so comically offended that Harry couldn't help giggling.

“At least Mintzi brought the Muggle newspaper for us,” Sirius said. “I've found the movie section. Harry, have you ever been to the movies?”

“No.”

“Not sure what's a children movie, that's the problem,” he said, squinting at the fine text. “Ooh! This one has Sean Connery! He played James Bond, Harry. The quintessential spy.”

“Is he the one who says 'Bond. James Bond'?”

“That's the one,” Remus said, sighing. “I don't know whether your godfather wants to *be* him or be *with* him.”

“Be him, obviously,” Sirius said. “And you're my Bond girl.”

Remus snorted.

“You won't catch me rising out of the waves in a bikini,” he said.

“What's a bikini?” Harry asked, a bit cruelly. His guardians blushed deeply.

“You'll find out when you're older,” Sirius said.

Harry generally left it at that, since he knew so much already, and usually knew the answers to the questions he asked to tease.

“Anyone else interesting in the cast?” Remus asked.

“Couple of blokes named Kevin Costner and Andy Garcia. Ooh, and Robert De Niro! Remember when we sneaked into the cinemas to watch *The Godfather Part Two*? He was good in that. We should go and see this. It's *culture*, Remus!”

Remus, by this time, was looking over Sirius's shoulder at the movie notice.

“It's for *teen audiences and up*, Sirius,” he said.

“Only if they're unaccompanied. Come *on*, Remus. We need something to do. We can't do outdoor stuff in this weather; it's not even safe for apparating. The floo network might be down from flooding. Why not get the boy some popcorn and sweets, wind him up with a movie, and let him sleep it off this afternoon? Then we'd be free for canoodling.” He waggled his eyebrows.

“I'm still here,” Harry said half-heartedly. “I don't mind what we see.”

“Let me see this,” Remus said, taking the newspaper from a reluctant Sirius. He read in silence for a minute. “It's *gangsters*. It's Al Capone and Eliot Ness. There's *swearing*. Find something else.”

“Look, we *know* that Capone was arrested,” Sirius said. “Justice *prevailed*. Harry needs to know that justice *will* prevail, sometimes.”

“It already has, in some respects,” Remus said, glancing at the copy of *The Daily Prophet* he'd been reading, but hadn't commented on yet. Harry had caught a glimpse of the front page news about Death Eaters throughout the Ministry of Magic being re-arrested. “Well, we're certainly not taking him to see *The Living Daylights*, either. Bond films are *not* suitable for seven year olds.”

“It has action,” Sirius said.

“It has *adult* action,” Remus said, with a significant look that Harry pretended not to understand.

“The 'coming soon' section is no use to us,” Sirius muttered.

“Pity; *The Princess Bride* would be more suitable.”

“I read that book!” Harry exclaimed. They looked at him. “Dudley didn't want to read something with 'princess' in the title, so I got it instead. I'd like to see it.”

“We'll make a note of that for when it's released,” Remus said, with an indulgent smile.

“There's a *fourth* Superman film already?” Sirius shrieked, when he got the newspaper back. “But they'd only made two when I went into Azkaban!”

“There's something called *The Witches of Eastwick*,” Remus said. “Just noticed it before you snatched the paper away again.”

“I'm having a crisis and you're still talking about movies,” Sirius grumped. Harry sipped his milk quietly, watching his guardians bicker like an old married couple.

“Might not be suitable for children, though,” Remus continued. “Especially if the witches end up being persecuted. Harry doesn't need that.”

“So...” Sirius said, raising his eyebrows. Remus rolled his eyes.

“Fine!” he said. “We'll see if the cinema will allow Harry in.”

“We could get Mintzi to sneak him in, like old times,” Sirius suggested.

“No. I'm not making her a party to criminal activity.”

“Again.”

“Don't remind me. You're such a reprobate.”

“You talk so sweetly to me,” Sirius said, batting his eyelashes.

“What does 'reprobate' mean?” Harry asked. “Is it something nice?”

“No,” Remus repeated. “It isn't.”

“To you, maybe,” Sirius said, eyes sparkling affectionately as he stared up at his partner. “Harry, go and get ready. We're going to the movies!”

While he was making those kind of moon eyes, Harry was eager to escape for a bit. As long as Mintzi didn't walk in on anything private and become traumatised.

The ticket seller warned them that *The Untouchables* might frighten Harry, but Sirius insisted that it was historical drama, so they got tickets, popcorn, drinks, lollies, and found the cinema. Harry sat between them, not because he wanted to but so that they could both keep him safe. He insisted that he could sit by himself, since there weren't many people around, but he was told in no uncertain terms that he was staying between them and that was final.

The noise of the guns did make Harry jump in his seat, and Remus asked if he wanted to leave. But he was riveted by the story. He ignored the swearing quite easily, being used to the Gryffindor boys' dorm, and sat on the edge of his seat as the tension ramped up. He sat, face stuffed full of popcorn but not chewing, absolutely riveted during the scene at the train station. When he finally sighed in relief that the baby in the pram was safe, he almost choked on the popcorn. He made sure to take smaller mouthfuls after that.

The courtroom scene was also intense; technically courthouse scene, since Eliot Ness ended up on the roof at one point. But Harry admired the crusader. He didn't give up, even when his

family was in danger, even when members of his team were killed off. Even faced with one of the most notorious gangsters of all time, he stayed focused and honest, beyond corruption.

If only all government officials were like that. Amelia Bones was one of very few he'd met who couldn't be bought or tricked in some way.

He sagged with relief when the movie was done. He'd been upset over the two main deaths, but he was more physically exhausted from being a bundle of tension throughout most of the second half of the movie.

"Wow," Sirius said, staring at the screen.

"Yeah," Harry said. "That was *wild*."

"It didn't upset you?" Remus asked. "We can talk about it when we get home, if you need to."

"No, I think I'm okay. Some parts of it were really sad, but the good guys won, and that's the main thing. Right? I don't understand all this tax stuff, and I really wish they'd got him for killing all those people. But at least he went to jail."

"That's right," Sirius said. "It's always good when the *right* people go to jail, not the wrong ones."

"And it's always sad when the innocent pay the price," Remus murmured. Sirius reached across and squeezed his shoulder.

"It'll be better one day," he said firmly.

Harry was drowsy by the time they returned to the manor; partly because of the sugary food and drink now causing him to crash, and partly from sitting in a darkened room for a couple of hours. His guardians saw him upstairs and into bed.

"Good night, Moomy," he mumbled. "Good night, Dadfoot."

He faintly heard their twin gasps, and wondered why it felt so right to start thinking of them as his parents, when he'd never felt that urge in the previous lifetime. But that thought faded as he fell fast asleep, curled up, as the rain continued to lash against the window.

Chapter End Notes

So the past couple of days it's been pissing it down in Brisbane, usually later in the day. A lot of lightning one night, which made me glad that my epilepsy isn't photo-sensitive. Could see it even through my closed eyelids, especially since I can't wear a sleep mask anymore with the CPAP machine. Sigh. Then I remembered that it rains a lot in the UK. Where this story takes place. Double sigh.

In other words, cue the rainy day. If I have to put up with at least one blackout, fictional characters can jolly well do indoor activities for a bit.

Please review!

Chapter Forty-One

Chapter Summary

It's another rainy day, but they're staying in. What's going to happen? What do Harry's guardians think of Harry's sleepy mumbling?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

As the rain was set to continue for a few more days, Remus tinkered with a VCR, while Sirius and Harry kept him company. Harry was reading a new book that he'd found at a secondhand bookshop near the cinema, which Remus had insisted on visiting.

("Uncle Sirius, can I buy this?" he asked, showing his godfather the cover. Sirius took one look and fell to the floor laughing. Harry's lips twitched, but he composed his expression by the time Remus came over to find out what was happening.

"What is your godfather doing?" Remus said.

"All I asked was if I could get this book," Harry said, showing it to him. Then Remus fell to the floor, also laughing helplessly. Harry couldn't help giggling at the sight.

Of course, they insisted that he go ahead and buy *A Dinosaur Called Minerva*. Harry asked why they found it so funny, and if they'd read it before. When all he got in reply was another fit of laughter, he paid for the book and ushered them out.)

Since he'd called them Moomy and Dadfoot, they'd been hesitant around him, and he was beginning to fret. That made it hard to concentrate on the book. Remus didn't seem to be getting much work done, and Sirius was frowning at a letter he was supposed to start half an hour ago.

The portrait of Lily and James, now hanging in the workshop, contained two very confused-looking people.

"Who are you writing to, Uncle Sirius?" Harry asked.

"Oh, uh, the headmistress," he said. "Professor McGonagall." He glanced at the book Harry was reading and a grin flickered across his face.

"I thought I wasn't supposed to start for another four years," Harry said. "Why are you writing to her now?"

"I elected myself as a governor of Hogwarts, now that a few of them have had to resign because they're in, well, Azkaban. Especially since I'm getting to know many of the future students, as well as being your guardian. As a governor, I've been asked for input on how to improve the school, since it's been in a bit of an uproar since Dumbledore's arrest. Apparently he told aurors that bullying needed to be stopped at Hogwarts, students monitored better, and that inter-house friendship should be promoted. I mean that everyone should be friends with everyone else, not just the people from their house. Do you follow me so far?"

"Uh-huh," Harry said. Remus had stopped pretending that he could concentrate on work, and was instead watching Sirius.

"But because of meeting your friends, I've thought of even more things which need to be done, just as urgently. I'm not sure how to say it, though, or whether it's too forward of me. Besides, it's hard to concentrate with my mind on... other things."

"Can I help?" Harry asked.

"Uh... of course. What did you have in mind?"

"Well, Anthony can only have some foods when they've been specially prepared," Harry said. "Do the chefs at Hogwarts know how to make it... ko-something..."

"Kosher," Remus said.

"That's it. And I remember Aunt Petunia talking about someone being a vege... someone who doesn't eat meat."

"Vegetarian," Remus again interjected.

"Is it all set food at Hogwarts, or can you choose your own stuff?" Harry asked. "Or do you make your own food? I can already do that."

"No, students don't make the food at Hogwarts," Sirius said. "There are house elves."

"As long as they make food that Anthony can eat, and any other Jewish students," Harry said. "Do you celebrate Jewish holidays at Hogwarts?"

"Just Christmas, Easter and Halloween," Remus said. Harry nearly flinched, remembering his personal experiences with that holiday.

"So Christian holidays and a pagan one," Harry said. "That's not fair to others."

"You're right, I know you're right," Sirius said. "But we have to make these changes gradually. The old set would never accept it."

"Old set?"

"Purebloods."

"But Anthony's a pureblood, isn't he?" Harry asked.

“Certainly at least half-blood.”

“And Lavender's a pureblood, and so is Susan, and Luna and Ernie. It's a school. We should be learning about each other's lives. And there are other religions. What if... what if a Buddhist came to Hogwarts? Or... I don't know. A Muslim? Um... what other religions are there?”

“I think the likelihood is fairly low,” Remus said, his lips twitching up in amusement.

“But it's still possible,” Harry said. “And what about people like Hermione, or me? We're learning all this stuff about a world that's new to us. You were like that, Uncle Remus. Wasn't it hard? Was it hard for... was it hard for you?” he asked the portrait.

“I had a bit of help early, like your Hermione has,” portrait Lily replied. “What would you suggest, darling? It's a lot to learn on your first day at Hogwarts, or even in the months after someone gets their letter.”

“Why not start early?” Harry asked. “Or make all the purebloods learn about the non-magical world while the Muggleborns learn about the magical world? Classes could be at the same time, and then everyone talks about it. Maybe all the Muggleborns and purebloods can be paired up together, like a buddy system. They tried that at our school, but no one wanted to be my buddy.” All the adults, flesh and painted alike, flinched at that. “They didn't want to be Dudley's either, because he complained all the time. They thought I'd be like him. Then they thought I was boring.”

“You are *not* boring, Harry,” Remus said firmly.

“I know I'm not now. But Hermione said that she thought she was weird when she started doing magic accidentally. Her parents took her to the doctor.”

“A doctor?” Remus said. “But if she'd demonstrated magic to a doctor, it could have gotten out of hand. The statute of secrecy could've been broken!”

“What else were the Grangers supposed to do?” Harry said quietly, looking his uncle in the eye. “If someone from the Ministry told them right away, they wouldn't have worried. Then Hermione could have started learning, so she wouldn't be behind on all this stuff when she got to Hogwarts. If we hadn't found her, that is,” he added quickly, realising his near-slip. But Remus and Sirius had gone pale at the thought of the statute being broken so easily, due to the Ministry not acting.

“I think I need to write to Amelia Bones,” Sirius said.

“Let me do that,” Remus said. “You write to Minerva. I think we've found the most urgent thing to start work on.”

Sirius nodded, picked up his quill, and began to write. Harry returned to his book.

Apparently the Ministry was sufficiently spooked that Amelia set out to speak to the Grangers immediately. She tracked down the parents of other Muggleborn students who were currently at Hogwarts, and spoke to Ministry staff who were Muggleborn. Many had come close to accidentally blowing the statute of secrecy out of the water. She proceeded to rake at least three departments over the coals – verbally – about their ineffective policies. They shouldn't have only been keeping an eye out to make sure that a child didn't turn into an Obscurial; there were so many things which could have gone wrong, and it was through sheer luck that they didn't.

Harry learned all this later when Amelia floo-called to rant about the busy day she'd had, and how the Ministry of Magic was staffed by far too many short-sighted, old-fashioned fools who'd relied on luck so far, but weren't going to anymore. She warned Sirius that the next Wizengamot meeting would have a host of revised policies needing to be approved so they could be implemented right away. He promised to support her.

“Thank you,” she said, looking exhausted.

“Would you like me to come over and make dinner for you?” Harry offered.

“I'll join my brother and his family for dinner tonight, but thank you for the offer, dear.”

“Say hello to Susan for me. I haven't owled her for a couple of days.”

“I will. Good night, Harry.”

“Good night, Auntie Amelia.”

When the conversation was over, Harry was sent to go and have a shower. That never happened; he was usually asked if he wanted a shower, but this time Remus made it a very firm suggestion.

Being an obedient sort, Harry left the drawing room and closed the door.

Being a bit deceptive at times, Harry waited outside with his ear stuck to the keyhole.

“Harry said something odd last night,” Sirius said.

“It... it was wonderful, but it felt wrong,” Remus said. “*You're* his parents, not us.”

“He called me Dadfoot and called Remus Moomy. He was half-asleep, so I don't think he realised he was doing it.”

“We can't really do much for him from here,” portrait James said, sounding regretful. “We may have raised him so far, but he doesn't remember us. He doesn't even address us as parents when he talks to our portrait.”

“It hurts,” portrait Lily said. “But it's understandable. We were a concept to him for years. You're the ones who've hugged him when he's had nightmares, held his hand to cross the street. You took him to Diagon Alley and you'll see him off on his way to Hogwarts. All we can do is watch and talk and listen. The sad reality is that we can't be his parents. Not the

kind of parents he deserves. He needs to learn about life and love from you. We're no more than painted ancestors now. If... if it makes it easier, you could move us to the portrait gallery. Then we won't be hanging over the three of you anymore, literally or figuratively."

"It's not fair on you," Sirius growled.

"It is what it is, Padfoot," portrait James said. "We'll see him again one day, in the afterlife. You can tell us all about how he's going at Hogwarts. But it's getting harder each day to see him and not be able to hold him close. We had so little time together. He doesn't go to the portrait gallery much, so it won't be constant, whereas you're in the drawing room a few times a day."

"We didn't know it was hurting you," Remus said. "We wanted you to be involved."

"We still do," Sirius added.

"But he needs something more normal," portrait Lily said. "We loved him dearly, and we still do. But he should see you as his fathers. You'll be there for him in all the ways we can't. You need to be what we *hoped* you would be. When we wanted you to be his guardians, it wasn't for you to keep our memory alive forever. It was for Harry to have people who loved him. We thought that if we died early, before he had memories of us, he'd see one – or both – of you as fathers. There's simply been a six year delay."

It was getting too much for Harry to hear. He crept off in his sock-clad feet and went to have a shower. It would wash away the tears.

Chapter End Notes

Yikes. Got a bit emotional there.

I'm glad to have received such positive feedback on Harry upgrading his relationship with his guardians, so to speak.

Please review!

By the way, that book – 'A Dinosaur Called Minerva' – is real. I found it in a secondhand shop yesterday and had to buy it, specifically to mention it in this fan fic.

Chapter Forty-Two

Chapter Summary

Harry is in for surprises on a day out in London.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

It was dry long enough one morning for the three humans and two house elves to pack up and move to Grimmauld Place. The townhouse was now clean, and they wanted to be nearer the action – and mass public transport – in case the bad weather continued. Harry had finished reading *A Dinosaur Called Minerva* and was on to the next Paddington book. He wanted to go to Paddington station to see the statue of the bear. His guardians, ever indulgent, got him safely onto the Tube, squashed in a train, and arrived in time for lunch. Harry wanted a picture with the statue first, and Sirius convinced a passerby to take a picture of the three of them with the bear.

Harry was concerned about some of the strange looks his godfather and uncle received. He'd heard Remus fretting over a Muggle newspaper article about rising death from something called AIDS, and warned Harry that he couldn't call them his fathers out in public. They could hardly get away with being considered related, and someone might try to hurt them.

Privately, Harry thought there'd be more trouble if he was recognised as the missing boy, so he kept his head down and clutched his guardians' hands tightly.

They had lunch at a cafe, part of a major franchise. Harry had never been allowed to go to one, so he was keen to try their toasted sandwiches and hot chocolate. The hot chocolate wasn't as good as Mintzi's, but the sandwiches were made with chunky slices of Turkish bread, which crunched beneath his teeth as he took a large bite. Brie cheese, thick slices of turkey, some kind of lettuce, cherry tomatoes and onion salsa. It was amazing. He'd never had fancy cheese on a sandwich before, but it was a revelation.

“Now for the Northern line,” Remus said, tugging Harry back to the barriers.

“Why?” Sirius asked. Then his eyes widened. “Wait... North--”

“Yes,” Remus said, grinning. “Come on.”

“Oh, this'll be good,” Sirius said, trotting beside them.

“What'll be good?” Harry asked, confused by this conversation.

“Wait until you see!”

Now a bit peeved that they were keeping something secret from him, no matter how briefly, Harry tried to tell himself not to be annoyed. There was plenty that he was deliberately keeping them in the dark about; whereas it seemed that Sirius, at least, had forgotten about... whatever this was. Which meant that it might not have been something that his time travelling had altered.

They took the District and Circle line train around to Embankment, and Harry began to wrack his brains over what might be there. Then he remembered that they wanted the Northern Line.

“Edgware, that's what we want,” Remus muttered, staring up at the timetable by the platform.

“One in a couple of minutes,” Sirius said.

“Where are we going?” Harry asked. “What's at Edgware?”

“Haven't the foggiest,” Remus said. “It's just the branch we need.”

After the train doors closed at Hampstead, Harry was led to the doors of the Tube. With his free hand, Sirius drew out his wand, and Harry's heart leapt to his throat. What was about to happen?

Time seemed to slow for a second as the darkness of the tunnel was broken. His guardians gripped his hands tight and Sirius swiftly placed the tip of his wand against the doors. Then they were sucked through, like a sci-fi portal, and stumbled on the platform outside while the train finished speeding past behind them. Harry shook his head.

“What just happened?” he asked.

“It's one way to go to the Northern Markets,” Sirius said.

“The what?”

“It's a hidden magical shopping district, like Diagon Alley,” Remus said. “This station, North End, was supposed to be built eighty years ago, but the Ministry of Magic convinced the Muggles that they wouldn't get the passenger numbers. They took it over. Muggles have tried to do things with the site, but we've kept out of their way.”

“The station isn't used by the public, so it's a good place to hide,” Sirius said. “It's the deepest station underground. Close to some ley lines, too.”

“So there's just this magical marketplace, hidden in an abandoned Tube station?” Harry asked, feeling somewhat hysterical. It was ridiculous, but so like wizarding-folk, that he couldn't believe he was all that surprised. Still, the *risk* they'd taken, and the selfishness of making public transport less accessible. Not to mention how they got there. “How do we get back on the train?”

“We'll have to walk to another station,” Remus said.

“Or apparate there,” Sirius said. “There are safe points.”

“What does the market sell?” Harry asked, as they walked through the eerily quiet station. They reached a spiral staircase, and he gasped when he looked up and saw how high it went. He lost sight of the top. “How many stairs are there?”

“A couple of hundred,” Remus said airily. “Come along.”

“This is *not* wheelchair friendly,” Harry said.

“Relax,” Sirius remarked, following him. “It's not far.”

Not far, he says, Harry thought, glaring back at his godfather, who merely smirked at him.

At the first landing, ten or so steps up, Remus tapped on a sign with his wand. It hinged open and he tapped the brick behind it. There was a creak as the whole wall swung inwards, and he led the way in, Sirius following behind Harry, who was growing increasingly nervous.

“There's a lift inside, like the ones in the Ministry of Magic, which we'll take to return to ground level,” he explained. “We don't have to tackle all those stairs.”

“Good,” Harry said. His legs were much shorter than they used to be, and definitely shorter than his guardians'; he'd find it hard to keep up with them at this age, in this body.

As they walked along a tunnel, Harry could hear voices. He was almost reminded of his second year at Hogwarts, with that damned basilisk, when the light grew brighter and he realised that it was human voices. They were nearing the marketplace.

It looked like someone had taken an outdoor market and put it inside a Tube tunnel, to be honest, with yellow candlelight magically brightened, the smell of butterbeer in the air, and people chatting as they bartered over goods. Unlike the practical potions ingredients and other school supplies to be found in Diagon Alley, this place had what looked like hand-crafted goods. Carved wooden figures, freshly-brewed mead straight from a cauldron, paintings, jewellery, bespoke cloaks. It was all so different from what he usually saw being sold in the magical world. This was *artisan*.

“Wow,” he whispered, looking around. He didn't know where to start.

There was a confectionary stall, which Remus made a beeline for. Chocolate figures, shaped biscuits with icing and glitter, and at least a dozen different flavours of fudge. Harry tried not to go overboard, so he wouldn't risk hurting Mintzi and Dobby's feelings. But he also wanted to help the witch, who said that she had barely qualified to go to Hogwarts, and spent all her time in the kitchens because she was bullied by the other students for not being magically gifted. She took her talent for cooking and baking, and used that to earn a living instead. She even had business cards, and Harry took one, promising to visit sometime.

He decided there was no harm in getting carved figures for the house elves. He knew how brave Dobby had been, so he bought him a lion, and Mintzi was a caring sort, a provider and protector, so he bought her a bear. She'd secretly told him how much she liked the polar bears at London Zoo. It wasn't quite shaped like a polar bear, but it was close enough.

After shopping for awhile longer, Remus got a gleam in his eye.

“I know one more place I want to show you before we head home,” he said. “Harry, Sirius, let's go to the apparation point.”

Once there, he took their hands, focused, and they spun away. They appeared at the end of an alley and he led them out. As soon as they were in the main street, or whatever it was, Sirius groaned loudly and covered his face.

“I really hoped you'd forgotten, after all this time,” he said, his words somewhat muffled by his hands. Harry looked at him with mild concern.

“Never,” Remus said, far too affectionately. “Harry, your godfather – your Dadfoot – used to be an auror for the Ministry of Magic. But he wasn't quite suited for the quieter parts of it. Paperwork? He hated it. Sitting around on a stakeout? It bored him to tears. That's when he'd get reckless.”

“Not reckless,” Sirius mumbled, tagging behind them as Remus led them down the lane. Harry finally saw a road sign: Philpot Lane.

“Performing magic in a Muggle area? Always reckless. And leaving the evidence behind? Sheer stupidity. Good thing you're so handsome; you have to have *something* going for you.”

“What did Dadfoot do?” Harry asked, accepting that he had a new name for his godfather. Sirius looked at him with teary eyes and a beaming smile.

“*This*,” Remus said, hoisting Harry up to sit on his shoulders. Then he pointed. “See that?”

“That... what?” Harry asked, looking at the wall.

“Up there.”

He squinted.

“All I can see are a couple of mice,” he said. “But... they're still. Dadfoot, did you *freeze the mice in place*?”

“Not quite,” Sirius said.

“He was inspired by a visit to the Northern Markets, seeing those same wooden sculptures. While he was waiting around, he partially-transfigured some broken stonework into a pair of mice fighting over a piece of cheese. He got the shape right, and coloured them. Showed it off to us later. No one at the Ministry found out, thank Merlin. We wouldn't let him take it down, because some of the neighbourhood children had found the mice, and rumours were already circulating about how they came to be there, why no one had noticed them before, et cetera. It was a complete ruckus. If they'd been removed it would be impossible to explain. Besides, it was harmless, we figured.”

“Then things got a bit mucky after that,” Sirius said. “You were born soon after, and...”

“Oh,” Harry said.

“So your godfather is responsible for a Muggle urban legend,” Remus said, trying to lighten the mood again. “Whatever made you choose mice?”

“It was nearly Peter's birthday,” Sirius said softly. “They were supposed to be rats.”

“Oh.”

They all stared silently at the mice for several minutes. Then Harry's stomach grumbled, and they laughed off the strange mood as they headed back to Grimmauld Place for tea.

Chapter End Notes

When I found out about the Philpot Lane Mice Sculpture, I had to work it into the story somehow. I have no regrets whatsoever. Aside from the emotional stuff that happened there. Oops.

I've been reading about abandoned and disused London train stations recently, which is how I found out about North End. Figured it'd make a good place for witches and wizards to hide out and sell their wares, away from prying non-magical eyes.

Please review!

Chapter Forty-Three

Chapter Summary

Confrontation.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Igor Karkaroff had cut his hair sometime during the holidays. Those who saw him afterwards said it made him look quite different, though it was hard to tell with the very large, warm hat he was wearing. He was used to warm hats, of course; that came of living in a cold climate.

If anyone had touched his skin they'd have found out just how cold it had become; however, he was already so pale that an almost deathly pallor didn't look out of place. And when people asked him how he was, it also wasn't out of place that he'd snap that he was fine, while rubbing his arm.

This, Harry learned later from his reaper, through a series of memories borrowed from the reapers of other people. Karkaroff's reaper was still sulking over the negative write-up he'd received.

When Karkaroff turned up at the Ministry of Magic, demanding an audience with the new head of Hogwarts about the possibility of student exchange, he was taken into custody. Amelia wanted to question the known former Death Eater about why he was so interested in such a scheme now, when Durmstrang was notoriously secretive. Was he taking advantage of Dumbledore's death in some way, or was he simply more confident that a student exchange would be more acceptable to a new person? Had he heard about the changes Hogwarts wanted to make and was in Britain to offer his advice, or seek theirs?

She wanted the answers to these questions. Since he was a former Death Eater, she even made sure that his hot tea contained the truth-revealing potion she'd been using on others.

He sniffed it carefully first, and then put the mug down without drinking from it.

"I do not appreciate being slipped potions," he said.

"Potions?" she asked indignantly. "You're an international visitor. The tea is meant to calm you down and settle your stomach after such a long portkey journey."

He narrowed his eyes and said nothing. When Amelia sighed and asked the tea to be taken away, he made no move to drink it. When an auror came over to remove the mug, however, he grabbed their wand, Stunned everyone else in the room swiftly, and used the Ministry worker's wand to assist in apparating into Diagon Alley.

Which happened to be the day that Harry, and many of his contingent, chose to show Hermione and her parents around Diagon Alley, especially the bookshop. They were inside, while she pored over the pre-Hogwarts section, when a fuss began outside. Dark spells were cast, and Sirius shouted at everyone to stay inside the store, while he stormed out, back into an auror mindset.

Harry, in his own self-sacrificing mindset, ran outside as well and saw Highmaster Karkaroff.

Sirius, facing forward, didn't see Harry. But Remus bolted out after him, and so did Neville, crying out Harry's name in fear and telling him to come back. Mrs Longbottom shrieked at her grandson to come back this instant, while the other children also tried to get out of the bookshop to rescue Harry. But he'd nearly reached Sirius's side. His godfather was calmly telling Karkaroff to drop his wands and surrender. Seconds later, aurors apparated into the alley. But Karkaroff only had eyes for Harry.

"The Boy Who Lived," he hissed. "I heard that's what they call you."

"Who are you?" Harry asked. Sirius swore when he realised that Harry was right beside him, and tried to stand in front of him. But Harry nimbly ducked around. "Who *are* you?"

"Harry, get *back* here!" Remus shouted, pulling at Harry. Karkaroff flicked a wand casually and a red Stunner knocked Remus off his feet. Sirius fought back with a growl, but his agitated movements were sloppy, and the aurors were busy getting people to safety inside their stores. Even Harry saw that Sirius had gone feral when his mate was struck down.

There was a sudden heat and a shrill note of birdsong. Harry looked to the side and saw Professor Snape letting go of Fawkes's legs.

"Igor?" he said.

Sirius glanced at him, a sneer already on his lips, and one of Karkaroff's spells connected, knocking him off his feet, too. Harry winced when he heard his godfather's head connect with the paving stones, and hoped one of the aurors would help soon. He didn't have a wand.

"Severus," Karkaroff said.

There was something about the way he said it that caused Snape's face to drain of blood.

"It *can't* be," he whispered.

"Yes!" Karkaroff exclaimed, whipping off his hat. Whoever could see the back of his head cried out in horror. Aurors tried to fight, but with the second set of eyes in the back of his head – because this had to be who Voldemort was inhabiting now – he was able to counter the attacks with one wand while fighting Snape with the other. Snape shoved Harry behind him, and told him to get back to his parents.

"He has no parents!" Voldemort's voice said, coming from the back of Karkaroff's head. "I killed them both seven years ago."

Snape took a moment to look down at Harry, recognise him, pale further, and resume fighting.

“You already took Lily, you will *not* take her son!” he said. “All you had to do was spare her, but you chose *not* to.”

“And you were selfish enough to want her husband and son dead, as long as she lived, so you are no better than I am, Severus,” Voldemort replied. Karkaroff spun on the spot, so that Voldemort could get a look at his former servant, who was still doing his best to block Harry from view.

“Let me deal with him,” Harry said. “Dumbledore told me I had to.”

“No!” Snape snarled.

There was another flash of heat, and Harry looked around, realising that it was a signal that Fawkes was there. He saw the bird hovering, an important wand clutched in his claws. Harry took it, felt it respond to him. How could this be?

“I don't understand,” he murmured.

Fawkes flew over his head, trilling, and Harry turned in time to see a green Killing Curse heading his way. Fawkes took the full impact and fell to the ground. In anger, Harry lashed out with the Elder Wand, using his signature Disarming Charm. Voldemort/Karkaroff lost one wand, since technically most only fought with one wand, so that's what the charm was designed for.

Snape put himself between Harry and the next curse, raising a shield too late, and was struck down where he stood. Harry jumped out of the way of his falling body. The aurors tried to help, but Harry knew there was only one way to end this, so he stepped forward.

He realised that while he shouldn't have known the charm to disarm his opponent, he hadn't even spoken it. Did accidental magic really work with wands?

Well, the Elder Wand was hardly a normal wand.

Voldemort's next spell was the Killing Curse, again aimed at Harry. Harry didn't speak a word; he raised the Elder Wand and let it defend, just as it had the last time he handled it. The two spells connected, and Harry stared at Voldemort's face, surrounded by a choppy haircut. It looked far more ridiculous and less intimidating than Quirrell-mort. Harry actually smiled, trying to keep from laughing out loud at how stupid it looked. The longer he looked at it, the more amused he was, and he snorted in suppressed laughter.

Voldemort looked alarmed by that, and his spell faltered slightly as it fought the Elder Wand for dominance. That was all it took. The rebounded Killing Curse – or whatever the Elder Wand was doing to defend its master – surged into Karkaroff's body, and he fell to the ground, stolen wand dropping from his hand and rolling away. Harry lowered the Elder Wand. He heard groaning behind him, and turned to see that an auror had revived the three

men, one a childhood enemy of the other two. He grimaced, knowing that he was in for a scolding.

“Harry Potter did it again!” someone cried out, and Harry closed his eyes.

Sometimes he hated his life.

That evening, after much questioning by the DMLE and the only reporter Sirius allowed through – Xenophilius Lovegood – Harry was released. He'd apologised for cutting short the shopping trip, and told the others to go ahead without him, but they refused. They were, truthfully, a bit shaken up by the whole thing, especially Draco and Hermione. And Mrs Longbottom, who tearfully berated her grandson for foolishly charging in – “Just like your father, no guessing which house you'll be in at Hogwarts” – and almost ending up face-to-face with Voldemort.

There was still a lot of testing that needed to be done before the Ministry of Magic would admit that it was indeed Voldemort, or at least his spirit, which had latched on to Karkaroff. They also had to trace when and where it may have occurred, to ensure that no other horcruxes had been made in the interim. Amelia's hands trembled a bit as she explained this.

Harry was glad for the opportunity to tell his story, and help *The Quibbler* sell a record number of issues again, especially if it kept Luna's mother out of trouble while she helped her husband. He said that he couldn't have done it without Fawkes's help.

Fawkes, being a phoenix, had reverted to freshly-hatched form, and Harry was going to nurture him to full health again. He owed the bird his life. He'd already decided that it was something Dobby could help with, to give him something extra to do.

He promised Mr Lovegood another exclusive interview at some point, to make sure that the story of his childhood was accurately reported. And during his initial interview, about the battle against Voldemort, he made sure to speak warmly about 'the strange man with black hair' who appeared with 'the bright bird', as they'd both done their best to protect him. He also told Mr Lovegood that he was formally apologising for not doing as he was told and staying out of danger; that worrying about losing his godfather was no excuse for risking his own life, “since I'm only seven years old.”

That would mollify his guardians, and hopefully discourage other children from trying to copy his foolish actions.

The prophecy was fulfilled. But he was still curious about one thing, and asked to see the letter that Dumbledore had written to him.

Remus and Sirius hadn't actually read it yet, since they thought it wasn't necessary at this stage. But they agreed that it probably held at least some answers. One paragraph stood out:

I will not fail you again. I have asked Fawkes to follow you where you go and get help when you are in danger. He is to fetch one who has an interest in saving your life: Severus Snape.

He was a friend of your mother's, and I am sorry to say that I failed him as well. Fawkes is also to bring you the Elder Wand when you have need of it. I hope you do not run into trouble until you are prepared. Your life has been difficult, and you will face more difficulties in the future. For now, though, I must insist that you be a child, and enjoy it. Never miss the opportunity to make friends, no matter how unusual, and love with your whole heart. Make the founders proud. Make your parents proud.

Most of all, make yourself proud.

Chapter End Notes

Yes, Harry deserves a right royal ticking off, but it would probably be quite repetitive out of sheer agitation. You can bet that Mintzi also scolded him. And the other children. Lavender probably cried, and that would be sufficient to make Harry feel guilty.

I've had plenty of suggestions about what they could all do for fun. Diagon Alley was one of them, but as you can see I've somewhat interrupted that. They'll go back when things have calmed down. Weekends only, since Hermione is still in school.

So. Anything you think they should learn at a newly-run Hogwarts? I mean, in addition to what Harry has mentioned? Also, what would you like to see happen to the Dursleys?

Please review!

Chapter Forty-Four

Chapter Summary

It's ten to eleven at night and author needs to get this stuff done EARLIER, damn it.

Also, Harry sees his reaper again and Sirius receives an unwanted letter.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Harry's reaper visited that night, because of course he did. He told Harry about what had happened to Karkaroff, from his sudden possession while doing a perimeter check of Durmstrang, Voldemort finding out that Karkaroff named all the followers he could to save his own skin, the punishment Voldemort dealt out for renouncing him, to their planning.

Diagon Alley wasn't meant to be the original place of attack. Voldemort planned to use Karkaroff to get into Hogwarts and check the student register at the first opportunity, to find Harry's address, and then go and attack him while he slept. So... same as last time, really. But when he saw Harry the plan was forgotten in favour of something more public. He'd spied him from a distance, entering the bookstore, and decided to draw him out. He also knew, from the newspapers, that Sirius would likely be with him. It wasn't a foolproof plan, but...

“Voldemort was foolish anyway,” Harry concluded. His reaper nodded.

“Had he continued to fight, the Muggles would have noticed one day. They came close too many times during the second war. As soon as they brought out the army, with machine guns and hand grenades and perhaps even nuclear bombs, many witches and wizards would die. He could never have hoped to eliminate or rule them.”

“Which makes his followers foolish as well.”

“Quite.”

“So,” Harry said, “should I remind the Ministry of Magic about the Cold War? I know it's coming to a close, but the atomic bomb still exists. They probably don't even know about machine guns. Would they attempt to get rid of Muggles first, or would they realise the folly of trying that?”

“It is difficult to say,” his reaper said. “If they are too scared of non-magicals, they will hate them because of their fear. They will never wish to understand people who deliberately create such devastating weapons of mass destruction. On the other hand, they must know that they cannot win a one-sided fight.”

"I don't want any more fighting," Harry said softly.

"There will always be fighting," his reaper said, his tone gentle. "That cannot be avoided. But you do not have to be a part of it."

Harry sighed.

"I'm done ten years early," he said. "What do I do with my life now?"

"Learn. Educate others."

"The Dursleys?"

"Have lost custody of their son," the reaper said. "They are living frugally; Vernon Dursley has lost his job and spent a great deal in legal fees. Petunia Dursley has tried to find work using her maiden name, but she is too easily found out. Most would not hire a woman who looks down on honest work as something only the lower classes should do, so they were unlikely to hire her in the first place."

"I suppose 'Petunia' isn't a very common name," Harry mused.

"And the suburb of Little Whingeing has become well-known."

"They're still living there?" Harry said, surprised.

"Once they were cleared to return, supervised at all times by police. Their son protested that they treated him well, so he should not have to leave. But he was taken away. He would be too much of a drain on their limited resources. They should have moved weeks ago; they might have had a hope of finding work further away, and accommodation would be cheaper. They, however, are determined to stay at their own home."

"Do you think they've suffered enough?" Harry asked tentatively.

"For the way they treated you?" His reaper's expression darkened. "They can stand to suffer a little more. They go on trial next week."

"Really? Where? When?"

"Do you wish to go?"

"I want to make sure Remus and Sirius aren't suspected of being kidnappers," Harry said. "And I want to testify – *with* medical records – in court about how the Dursleys treated me."

"Do not you mean Moomy and Dadfoot?" his reaper asked with faux innocence. Harry blushed, but he tried to cover it by rolling his eyes.

"Whatever," he said. "Once the heat is off my *guardians*, and me, we can go places without being reported. I don't want them to get into trouble when they're my legal guardians."

“Make sure that you bring your parents' wills and other documentation to prove it,” his reaper said.

“I'm sure Auntie Amelia... uh, I mean Madam Bones will help.”

His reaper smirked and said nothing.

“The bloody *cheek* of the woman!” Sirius exclaimed.

“What's the matter?” Remus asked, and he mildly sipped his tea, not even looking in his partner's direction. Harry stopped munching on his marmalade toast so he wouldn't miss a thing.

“Molly bloody Weasley! She heard about our group outing and asked why her youngest children weren't invited along. She says – the *audacity* of the witch – that Harry should associate with the right sort of people.” Harry's eyes widened, remembering Draco's 'offer' when they started out at Hogwarts. At least things would definitely go differently this time. “She's shocked that I'm getting to know my cousin again, and her son.”

“Correct me if I'm wrong,” Remus said, sitting up properly now. “But when she was pregnant, and Harry was just a baby, didn't she suggest at an Order meeting that if she had a daughter Harry or Neville could marry her one day?”

Harry hastily swallowed his mouthful of toast while Sirius contemplated this.

“I think so, yes,” he said. “She claimed that all the children would be best friends, because they were all on the same side. And I *think* she implied that they wouldn't need any other friends, as long as they had each other. Which would exclude Muggleborns like Hermione, of course.”

“Good thing James and Lily had taken Harry into hiding by then, and Alice and Frank with Neville, or there would've been trouble,” Remus remarked.

“There *should've* been trouble. Who match-makes that early? What if the children have conflicting personalities? There's no guarantee they'll get on or be friends. And if she *ever* tries to shove her daughter... what's her name?” He checked the letter. “Ginevra. What a mouthful. If she *ever* tries to push that girl in Harry's direction, just because he's been proclaimed a hero... sweet, merciful Merlin, she even calls him that here. Says that Ginevra would love to meet a real live hero.”

“Introduce her to Snape,” Remus said. “He was heroic, too.”

Sirius snorted.

“I wouldn't wish Molly Weasley on *anyone* as a mother-in-law,” he said. “Not even Snivellus.”

“What's wrong with her?” Harry asked.

“First of all, she believes everything written in *The Daily Prophet*, even when she knows it to be untrue,” Sirius said. “She believes any woman who doesn't become a housewife is a scarlet woman, unless she's a celebrity. She smothers her loved ones and ignores or verbally abuses anyone who's not in her favour. I'll bet her children are relieved that they have boarding school.”

“Molly means well,” Remus said, ever fair-minded. “She was at school while war was brewing, then producing children and keeping house while the war was actually on. She would have spent every day wondering whether her husband would come home, whether her children had a safe and happy future ahead of them, or whether she'd lose them early to Death Eaters.”

Harry remembered Fred's death and winced.

“It wouldn't be nice,” he said. “Living like that, I mean.”

“I suggested that she get a job, so she can help provide for her family and keep her mind off the war for a bit, maybe write a column for *The Daily Prophet* so she could work from home. Do literally *anything* that would keep her from stewing in her own worry, and stop her pressuring Arthur from leaving the job he loves for something higher paying but misery inducing,” Sirius ranted. “She said that being a mother was the most important job in the world for a woman to do. McGonagall looked like she wanted to strangle her. I pointed out that having children during a war was selfish, especially since the stress she was under could be bad for the child she was carrying. She called me irresponsible and childish.”

“To be fair, you often are irresponsible and childish,” Remus said.

“Not as much as I used to be,” Sirius said. “The point is, she's a busybody who pretends that gossip is beneath her. And I know for a *fact* that they only live over the hill from the Lovegoods, but there's no mention in her letter that she's ever encouraged her children to play with them. The girl is the same age as Luna. So what's all this nonsense about her children never having the opportunity to spend time with others their age? She knows Augusta Longbottom. Arthur knows people through the Ministry of Magic. Even if he felt he couldn't approach Amelia Bones, due to her rank, there are other parents who work there. No. Harry's got better companions at the moment. Except that Macmillan child.”

“Well, don't worry your pretty head about it right now,” Remus said. “Harry, do you want to invite any of the Weasley children on our next outing?”

“I don't know them,” Harry lied. “How would I know who to invite?”

“She says the twins don't deserve such a treat,” he said, studying the letter again. “Something about them being trouble-makers. Hmm.” He grinned widely.

“No,” Remus said. “We're not taking them under our wings.”

“Why not?” Sirius whined.

“No, Sirius.”

He huffed a sigh.

“Fine,” he said. “Then there's the one Harry's age; a fussy baby, I think. Demanded a lot of his mother's attention. She missed some meetings because of him. Then the girl, Ginevra, who seems determined to become the next Mrs Potter.”

“Ew,” Harry said, remembering how children his (physical) age reacted to romance. “I don't want to marry *anyone*.”

“You probably will, one day,” Remus said. “You have a great capacity for love, Harry. I'm sure you'll find the right one someday.”

“Unless he already has,” Sirius said slyly. Harry blushed and looked down at the tablecloth, before grabbing his slice of cooling toast.

“I want to find out what's happened to the Dursleys,” he said. He needed someone to find out the information he already knew, and soon, if he was to convince his guardians to let him go to court as a witness.

Sirius and Remus looked grim, but promised to find out what was happening as soon as possible.

“In the meantime,” Remus said, “how would you like to meet my parents?”

Chapter End Notes

Okay, so this might have explained things a bit more, about Voldemort's actions in Diagon Alley. Also mentioned the Dursleys and the Weasleys now.

Good old Remus, not insisting that Harry will fall in love and get married one day.

Please review!

Chapter Forty-Five

Chapter Summary

The Dursleys are on trial.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Amelia gathered together the required documents, Andromeda rewrote her report on paper, Sirius and Remus made sure they had respectable Muggle clothes, and they all went to the trial. Dudley had obviously taken the day off school for this, and was loudly complaining to everyone that his parents 'didn't kill the freak', words which made the magicals glare at him. Most people were looking at Dudley with distaste.

Some of Harry's new friends were able to be there, to support him and his guardians. Harry had no idea how they were going to pull this off, but he was putting his trust in the adults for once. And if they let him down, those who'd taken vows still wouldn't die, because he wouldn't be going back into the Dursleys' care. He had to believe that.

As people began to recognise Harry in the courtroom, the word spread, and the judge had trouble getting order. Vernon and Petunia looked around, and leapt up when they spotted him. Harry considered giving them a little wave, but that wouldn't help his case, so he buried his face in Remus's sleeve, clutching his arm tightly.

"He's there!" Petunia shrieked. "Just over there! The freak's alive!"

"We *told* you we didn't kill him," Vernon said loudly. "I want my job back and our reputations intact again."

"Why do you call your nephew a freak?" the judge asked.

"He's my *wife's* nephew, not mine," he said.

"Or mine," Marge Dursley said loudly from nearby. Harry jumped when he heard her booming voice and turned to hide his face in Sirius's sleeve.

"Is she the one with the attack dogs?" Amelia asked, leaning around Sirius to address Harry.

"Yes," Harry mumbled, nodding against his godfather's arm.

"Thank you," she replied.

He was called up to explain why he had run away and how he'd managed to hide for so long.

"I've been to the London Zoo and the museum of natural history, as well as the pantomime and the beach," Harry said. "I haven't been hiding. Except from them." He pointed to the Dursleys. "I didn't know my name until I went to school. They only called me 'boy' or 'freak'. I wasn't supposed to go to them, anyway. My parents wanted me to go to my godfather. They listed *heaps* of people who could've taken care of me."

"Why were you placed with your family instead?" the judge asked.

"I don't think of them as family," Harry said. "Family is nice to you. Family doesn't lock you in a cupboard under the stairs when you get better marks at school than your cousin."

"Where have you been all this time?"

"I don't want to say," he replied. "I don't want to be taken away from my *real* family. If I tell you where I'm living, you might take me away from there. I have a real bedroom and a real bed. I have books of my own now. I have toys. I get to eat real food, not the leftovers Dudley didn't want. I'm not bitten by Marge Dursley's dogs. They're mean dogs, not nice ones."

"I see," the judge said. "I cannot take your word for it, however."

"Uncle Ted has some paper stuff," Harry said.

"You have another uncle?"

"He lets me call him that. His wife is my godfather's cousin. She was the one who checked over me when I escaped the Dursleys."

The judge called forward the Tonkses, who provided documentation. It looked fairly legit, but the paper was also embedded with a few charms so that no one would look too closely at any possible inconsistencies. Amelia had had to gain special permission for them to use it. As it was considered necessary to preserve the Statute of Secrecy, the permission was easily granted. It helped that Harry was seen as a hero, and people were determined to keep him in the magical world and away from those who had abused him. Which made a change.

The judge looked over the medical records, his mind sliding over words such as 'diagnostic spells'.

"This seems in order," he said, and Andromeda was sent back to her seat.

Next were copies of the wills. The Gringotts referenced were also ignored, as were the currencies and other magical references. The judge's mind allowed him to notice that Sirius was Harry's legal guardian, as requested by both of his parents. He nodded, and handed those documents back.

"And is Sirius Black here?" he asked. Sirius stood up in acknowledgement. Petunia gasped.

"Of course he brought more of those *freaks* here," she hissed to Vernon. Harry glared at them, his wand fingers twitching. They paled when they saw his deadly stare. Ted was also giving them a menacing look, which probably contributed to their agitation.

“Why did you not look for Harry Potter after his parents died?”

“I was detained from reaching him immediately,” Sirius said. “By then one of the wills' witnesses had handed him to Lily's sister. The same witness has since died, so we have no real idea why he chose them, when there were others who could have looked after Harry until I was able to.”

“You were detained six years?” the judge inquired, raising a single eyebrow.

“No,” Sirius said. Technically correct; it wasn't six years yet, and he'd been released some weeks ago. “I was told that Harry was better off growing up in a stable household with his blood relatives; that's what we were *all* told. And that his cousin was the same age, so it would be good for him. I have never settled down myself, and I worked in the security industry. I told myself he was better off in someone else's care. Safer. But his parents have left enough money that I can look after him without having to undertake dangerous work, and he is now spending a great deal of time – nearly every weekend – with others his own age. He has already had two sleepovers in the last two months since he left his abusers, and been to many places he was never allowed to go before.”

“Why were you not allowed to go to places such as the zoo and the museum?” the judge asked.

“Freaks aren't allowed nice things, like new clothes and a bed and food,” Harry said. “Definitely not the zoo or the beach or the pantomime. I built my first sand castle nearly two months ago! It was my first time at the seaside.”

There was much scandalised muttering with each revelation of the Dursleys' neglect. It didn't help that Dudley and Marge both complained loudly about Harry being a 'freak' who didn't deserve to be treated nicely. The judge had to ask that they be escorted out. The security blokes were even more burly than Marge, and managed to get her out. Dudley trembled at the sight of them and meekly followed, not giving them any trouble. It seemed he could learn.

“You see now why your son was removed from your custody,” the judge said.

“There's nothing wrong with Dudley!” Vernon said. “He's just like me when I was his age.”

“I'm sure,” the judge said drily. Harry snickered, but covered it with a cough. The judge noticed, however, and smiled kindly at him. “I believe that the original finding must stand. Vernon and Petunia Dursley are not to have any contact with children. Having seen the behaviour of their only child, I will amend that part of the finding. He is to serve at least one year at a military school. His health is at risk from being dangerously overweight, and he needs to learn discipline and respect.”

“Dudders is too young for the army!” Petunia said, bursting into sobs.

Harry could tell that the judge wanted to roll his eyes, but had to maintain decorum.

“Now that Harry Potter has been found alive, I order that case to be considered closed. Vernon and Petunia Dursley are no longer considered suspects in their nephew's

disappearance. I do find them guilty, however, of child neglect and child abuse, as well as unlawful imprisonment as confirmed by the police's original findings in regards to that cupboard under the stairs. They are also guilty of trying to obstruct a police investigation, as well as verbal and physical abuse of the officers sent to investigate their nephew's disappearance. They failed to report his initial disappearance, leaving the responsibility with a concerned neighbour. This neighbour, Arabella Figg, also told the authorities numerous times about the abuse young Mr Potter suffered. We extend a formal apology to Mrs Arabella Figg, for not following up on her claims, and to Harry Potter, for the same. I hope you are able to continue to enjoy a happy childhood and safe environment, Mr Potter.”

“Thank you, your honour,” Harry said. He made sure to look as small and helpless as possible by taking Ted's hand to return to their seats.

It was all over quite quickly after that; faster than Harry expected, at least. He watched with some restrained glee as the Dursleys were given relatively short prison sentences. He noticed Amelia's expression of dissatisfaction, and the way her hand inched towards her wand.

“They're bound to make enemies in jail as soon as they get there,” he whispered. She hesitated, nodded, and moved her hand away from her wand.

In the end, it was only a few years each. A harsher sentence may have been applied if Harry hadn't shown up, proving that they'd told the truth about not murdering him. But he didn't care. He knew that they valued their reputation above all else, which was now well and truly shot. They'd screw up in jail, talk down to the wrong people, and end up being punished more than enough. And their son being sent to military school must have offended their middle class sensibilities. People like them bought ranks, if they had any interest in the military.

It would be torture for Dudley at first, and he was generally too stupid to see how to make things better for himself in a bad situation. If he couldn't bully his way out of it, he'd crumble, and make his parents do everything for him.

No wonder he'd originally seen Draco Malfoy as just another Dudley. But he held out some hope for Draco in this new timeline.

Hermione's school had a half day, so they were going to try Diagon Alley again, with the hope that it would be less busy than on the weekend. Harry was looking forward to ice cream at Florean Fortescue's. They also planned to show Hermione the bank, since she'd need to learn about the magical currency system. They hadn't had time the other day, since she made a beeline for the bookstore, and the others were happy to go along with it.

This time, though, at least they wouldn't have to deal with Voldemort or any Death Eaters.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, hope this is good enough. I'm still not feeling energised, and I have my four week appointment with the sleep specialist tomorrow, to talk over how I've been going with

the CPAP machine. I'm not sure how much longer it might take for me to feel the affects. Losing weight would help, of course. The internet also suggests sleeping on the side, though I don't think my chiropractor would approve. I don't know. I've read about an under-the-skin thing called Inspire? Tonsillectomy is another option, and I do have huge tonsils, but it's also hecking dangerous. One of my sister's friends nearly died a couple of years ago after having her tonsils removed.

Of course, having been suicidal before I don't care so much about that; but I want to finish this story before risking death.

Please review!

Chapter Forty-Six

Chapter Summary

Gringott's holds surprises.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Again, they went to the bookstore first. Harry was surprised by how many of his friends were equally interested in browsing the children's book section; then he realised that they were looking for new stories, but there just wasn't much to be seen. He heard Mrs Brocklehurst asking about any new children's fiction releases, but there was nothing.

“Sounds like we should take them to a Waterstones,” Harry remarked to Hermione. She smiled, but she wasn't paying much attention.

“I wish there was something to help prepare for Hogwarts,” she said.

“I have some books,” Harry said. “I've asked the publishers if they'll print more. They haven't for years. The books used to be on the school list, but they haven't been for a long time. But the publishers promised that they'll print more again. I can let you borrow mine for now, if you want?”

“Oh, yes please!” Hermione exclaimed. “If you won't miss them?”

“I've nearly finished them all. I can lend you the ones I've finished.”

“Thank you, Harry! You're the best.”

He liked that. He liked being the best because he wanted to lend Hermione books, not because he fought Voldemort or caught the snitch. It was nice to be praised for doing a small thing that meant a lot to one person.

Hermione had brought money to change at Gringott's, so she could buy something at the bookshop, since she didn't want her friends giving her so many gifts. (She had conveniently forgotten about buying them the first Winnie the Pooh book.) So they walked up the alleyway. Her head swivelled back and forth as though she were at a tennis match, trying to take in everything at once. Luna was holding one of her hands and Mrs Greengrass the other, to rein her in. Harry was chatting with Neville about joining him for one of his classes, and trying to ascertain which was the least boring. Neville, naturally, preferred to study plants, but he was trying to be fair about the others.

“They've tried to get me to fly, but I don't want to fall off and break my arm,” he said. Knowing how Neville's first flying encounter went in the other timeline, Harry didn't blame him.

“I can fly,” Harry said. “I've got a practise broom. You could come to our place, or I could go to yours, and I can show you how easy it is. We could spread out the mattresses of the beds no one's using so you'll have something soft to fall onto. But it's a practise broom for kids our age, so it's really safe anyway. I haven't fallen off it yet. I think there's something which holds me on.”

“Yes, there'd be a Sticking Charm on the broom which activates in flight,” Remus said. “Now that Harry's not in danger of going back to his relations, you're welcome to visit us, Neville. We just had to be careful before, especially after...” He glanced at Lavender and fell silent. The boys nodded. She was lamenting to Astoria and Daphne that she hadn't seen the museum, but they were keen to go back there again, and said that Hermione had promised to take them back.

It was mostly the girls that day. Harry didn't miss Ernie, and he still wasn't close to Anthony. But Draco was there. He and his mother had skipped the courtroom, since they weren't sure how many would be allowed in, and had instead spent the time in a Muggle park instead. Draco was telling anyone who'd listen about the antics of the squirrels they'd watched, and a strange flying disc some Muggles had been throwing around. Which led to Sirius explaining frisbees.

When they reached Gringott's, there were a few raised eyebrows, due to the unusual group. Remus took Hermione to see a teller and get her money exchanged there. When he let slip that she was a Muggleborn who'd been brought into the magical world early by accident, the goblins began to get excited. At least until they found out that she wasn't an orphan. But they were satisfied that her parents weren't there, which made Harry suspicious.

“I think I understand why,” Mrs Brown said, when he voiced his concern. “They like to check people new to wizarding Britain for their family histories, to see if they are due to inherit anything. Muggles never like to have their children's blood tested.”

“Why not?” Harry asked. “People use blood tests all the time in the Muggle world.”

“Probably because they draw the blood with a dagger,” Sirius said. “It would put anyone off.”

“Why can't they use a needle?” Harry said.

“It has to be goblin-made. They don't make needles.”

“Not even for embroidery,” Mrs Brown sighed.

“They want to do a blood test,” Hermione said, looking confused as she and Remus returned to the group. She was now clutching a purse which jangled with coins. “And they don't think that paper money is necessary.”

"It would fly away too easily," Draco said. "And the goblins have shares in mining. If paper money was used instead, they wouldn't get as much money from that."

"Oh," Hermione said, nodding. "That makes sense. Should I get the blood test done?"

"I wouldn't," Lavender said, wide-eyed. "They use a *dagger*."

"But that's barbaric! How much blood do they need?"

"I've never had a blood test done at Gringott's," Remus said. "How about I try it, and if you'd like to do it as well then you can? I didn't want to when I was younger. But it's an interesting piece of magic I've never seen before."

"Oh!" Hermione repeated, looking far more interested. "I'd like to see it!"

So they all crowded into a separate room. The goblin attending them looked somewhat pained to have so many witnesses. But the fact that Remus was willing to undergo a full family history check, in hopes that Hermione would do the same, mollified him somewhat.

"Mr Potter would have had a minor version of this blood test done to ensure his identity," the goblin, whose name hadn't been given, told them.

"It hurt a little," Harry said. "But not much. I've felt worse." Mostly at Hogwarts, truth be told.

"The tip of this dagger is very fine," the goblin said. "It should not hurt an adult, but a child whose hands are unused to much work may have more trouble."

"I have callouses on some of my fingers from reading," Hermione said brightly.

"Good," he said. "Now, Mr Lupin, your hand."

He chose the ring finger and slid the dagger at an angle, to cause the least damage. Instead of being dripped directly onto the parchment, his blood was added to an inkwell. There were many on the shelves behind the desk. The ink glowed when the blood was added, and Sirius healed the cut for Remus to save the goblin time.

An empty quill was produced, dipped into the ink for several seconds, and then set at the bottom of the parchment.

"Eight seconds for eight generations," the goblin said, and he let go of the quill. "We should not need to look further back than that."

Instead of writing the letters individually, the quill waited until Remus's name and date of birth were produced, then instead drew lines, running back and forth along the same lines easily and spreading its ink as it drew the direct lines of the family tree. It began with Remus, went up through his parents – who they were due to visit tomorrow – his grandparents, and so on. The ink shimmered on Remus's name, but remained dull and dry on his mother's name. His father's name glittered, as well as most of the ancestors on that side, with enough Muggle blood to add some variety. But Remus clearly knew about his father's side.

“My father went full Muggle when I was a child,” he explained. “He used to work for the Ministry of Magic. He quit. I’m interested in seeing my mother’s side.”

“There’s something from her side, as you can see,” the goblin said, tapping the shining name. “I will summon the register to see who else is of that family.” Mrs Malfoy leaned over Remus’s shoulder to have a look.

“I know that name,” she said. “Look, your maternal... great-great-grandmother? She was a witch from a pureblood family. Nocturna... Rowle, I believe, was her maiden name.”

“I’m related to a Death Eater?” Remus asked.

“So am I,” Sirius grumbled. “And Narcissa’s married to one.”

“Oh yes,” Remus said, blushing. “Sorry. I forgot.”

“Why did you pretend to be Muggleborn?” Mrs Greengrass asked.

“I didn’t want to answer awkward questions about my father,” Remus replied. “I didn’t mind being seen as Muggleborn.”

“Gringott’s has always known that Muggleborns do not exist,” the goblin said, interrupting this awkward by-play. “What a ridiculous thing to go to war about. We believe that magic simply lies dormant after too much in-breeding among the purebloods, and once enough Muggle blood has been introduced to the line it becomes active again.”

“Like DNA!” Hermione exclaimed. “We were talking about that one day. Was it at the zoo? I think it was. My parents have much tidier hair than mine. We’re not sure where I get this mess from.”

“Nocturna was indeed from the Rowle family, exiled because she chose to marry a Muggle,” the goblin said, pointing to one page of the register. Then he flipped through to find the other glowing names from Remus’s parchment. “Here’s an interesting one from your father’s side. The only child of a pureblood family, born a squib, mother killed by father for producing a squib, father ended up in Azkaban. I cannot reveal all of their names. Their nearest *magical* relations, who inherited instead of the squib, can be traced to... the Brown family.”

“We’re related?” Lavender squeaked.

“Yes, Miss Brown,” the goblin confirmed.

With a squeal, she launched herself at Remus and hugged him tightly. He looked bewildered as he hugged her back. The goblin duplicated the parchment and handed Remus the copy, before setting aside the original. Then he looked expectantly at Hermione. As soon as Remus was standing, she was in the seat, nearly bouncing with excitement.

“I don’t care if it hurts, I want to know,” she said.

“If it does hurt, it will not be for long,” he said.

The same cut was performed, and Hermione didn't even flinch. Harry supposed there had to be an advantage to having parents who were dentists, since she wasn't allowed many sweets.

When the quill began to move, Hermione watched it, mesmerised. Lavender was chatting in the background to her mother, asking if they could contact her father as soon as possible, and then have her Uncle Remus over to tea. Harry was glad that there was someone who would still call Remus their uncle, since he was now Moomy to Harry.

"I must say, it is nice to have someone willing to undergo this test," the goblin said. "Most only use it for legal claims. We prefer those born to Muggles to discover their heritage, in case there are any unclaimed vaults due to lines dying out. Hmm." Two names glimmered on the completed family tree, right near the top. Hermione was the first magical in several generations.

"Who are they?" she asked, looking from one to the other.

"Corvus Lestrangle," the goblin said, and Narcissa gasped. "Not sure which one; there was one in every generation. Not terribly creative with names, purebloods. They resorted to constellations."

Draco frowned at him but didn't deny it. Hermione tilted her head.

"But what does it mean?" she asked.

"The Rosier line is well-known for curly masses of hair," the goblin said.

"Yes," Mrs Malfoy said. "My sister, Bellatrix, was one of them. And she married a Lestrangle. Corvus the Fifth married twice. He had two known children, but the son died very young. He may have produced another child after the son."

"Those look like his dates," Sirius said. "I don't recognise the woman's name."

"Then you and Draco are distant cousins," Mrs Malfoy told Hermione. "I would need to study the Rosier family tapestry to discover the connection. It has not been checked in many years."

"We're cousins!" Hermione said, delighted, and she reached out to squeeze Draco's hand. "I'm an only child; I've never known any more family."

"I'm an only child, too," he said softly. He gave her a small smile.

"What about this person?" Hermione asked, pointing at the top of the tree. "On my father's side. A Granger."

"Ah yes." The goblin flipped through the register. "Yes, Hector Granger. A half-blood who married a Muggle. He chose to live in the Muggle world, it seems. Used to have an account here, but removed his assets. His family have still been clients over time, however. One of his brother's descendants is a well-known potioneer, Hector Dagworth-Granger. Must have been named after his uncle."

“Why didn't I think of that?” Sirius said. “I'd forgotten there was a Granger in our world already! Haven't heard much of him, though. Didn't he die?”

“He did, with no further descendants,” the goblin said, grinning widely. “Leaving the vault dormant until now. Miss Granger, you are a very wealthy young lady.”

“Wow!” She blinked. “Are there any books in the vault, or only money?”

“There are many potion books, but they are too advanced for you now,” the goblin said. “You need a grounding in the basics first. However, you may withdraw more money if you wish to purchase anything.”

“You need robes,” Draco whispered.

“But I'm not going to Hogwarts yet,” Hermione said.

“You are still our family, and we will make sure you have the right clothes for special occasions,” Mrs Malfoy said firmly.

“Could I check my mother's side of the family?” Harry asked.

“Certainly,” the goblin said, eyes gleaming at the prospect of yet another fee.

Chapter End Notes

Edit: This chapter has been edited to change Hermione's ancestry so she isn't too closely related to Harry. Also, Remus is half-blood. His mother's maiden name is my surname, so I am sufficiently freaked now.

What do you reckon?

Please review!

Chapter Forty-Seven

Chapter Summary

Harry has some surprise relatives, and it's time to meet Lyall Lupin.

Chapter Notes

In case anyone reads this note, I edited the results of the family trees for Hermione and Remus, and added Harry asking to get his own test done.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“You know who your parents are,” Sirius said, confused.

“But my mother was Muggleborn,” Harry said.

“Ah.”

“We can do nine seconds to ensure the additional line,” the goblin said. “Your mother never had a blood test done at Gringott's.”

“Yes, please,” Harry said. Pleased with his polite manner, the goblin was particularly careful when drawing blood, and personally repaired the skin before anyone else could. Harry waited eagerly as the quill perched in the inkwell, and then on the bottom of the parchment.

The writing produced was slightly smaller, to accommodate the extra line at the top, which would be very wide. Harry ignored his father's side, like Remus, and studied his mother's side. Dull, dull, dull... wait a moment.

“Look!” he exclaimed, pointing. “One of the... no, *two* names are glowing!”

Sirius and Mrs Malfoy, the experts on pureblood families, leaned over his shoulders.

“Oh, you poor boy,” Sirius said, patting Harry's shoulder. But he was grinning. “It seems your mother got her red hair from the Prewett family. I'm fairly certain that Matilda Prewett was Ignatius Prewett's grandmother. We're distant cousins... less distant than I thought. And you're related to the Weasley children by Molly Weasley.”

Harry nearly gagged at the thought of having snogged Ginny Weasley while being a cousin to her, no matter how remote. But at least Hermione didn't seem as closely related. Still, she

might not see it that way. If Harry was a cousin to Sirius, and she was a cousin to Mrs Malfoy, and Sirius and Mrs Malfoy were first cousins, and all treated each other like family...

Maybe she'll just be my best friend, and that's all I need as a soulmate, he thought, trying to ignore that his reaper had said they'd marry. After all, Harry had changed the future. Maybe he'd end up marrying someone else? Maybe a Muggle?

Maybe he wouldn't get his happily ever after of being married to Hermione, but that didn't matter. He'd never thought of her that way... much... in the previous timeline. He could go without thinking of her that way this time around, too.

When speaking with his reaper that night – who appeared to tell Harry that many of the imprisoned Death Eaters were close to death, and that Bellatrix Lestrange went catatonic when she heard that the Dark Lord briefly returned, only to be snuffed out *again* – Harry asked about his new future.

“It is still set as originally intended,” the reaper replied.

“But Hermione and I are really, really distantly related,” Harry said.

“As are most people. It is the nature of human beings travelling around the world and spreading their progeny all over the place. It is the nature of giving children up for adoption and cutting all contact with them. These things happen. That is why blood tests used to be compulsory before two people could be wed, to ensure that they were not closely related. Once geneticists proved that close relations produced birth defects, that is. You and Hermione Granger share very little genetic material. Your magic comes from different sources. Your magical core has nearly one hundred percent Celtic strain, while hers is at least sixty percent French, more than twenty percent Anglo-Saxon, and some amount of Germanic influence as well.”

“How reassuring,” Harry said drily. “Unfortunately, I don't think she'll see it that way.”

“She will come to understand more about the science of genetics as she grows older, especially as her parents intend to keep sending her to Muggle school until she is ready to start Hogwarts. May I recommend that you do the same? It may not be as enjoyable as frolicking around the countryside and conversing with snakes, but you need more education to help your pureblood friends.”

“Okay, okay,” Harry said. “I'll talk to Dadfoot and Moomy about it.”

“Good boy,” the reaper said, and he smiled a toothy smile.

Harry wasn't sure what to expect when they arrived on the doorstep of the home where Remus's parents lived, but a man holding a portrait hadn't occurred to him.

“Hello, Father,” Remus said. He looked at the woman in the portrait. “Hello, Mother.”

“It is so good to see you, son,” Mr Lupin said, while Mrs Lupin waved from the portrait. “Come in, come in. This must be young Harry. Sirius we remember, of course. How could we forget?”

“Good afternoon, Mr Lupin,” Sirius said, and Harry wondered if he was on his best behaviour now that he was dating Remus. Trying to make a better first impression on the parents, and all that.

“Hello, Grandfather Lupin,” Harry said formally, holding out his hand. Mr Lupin shook it while Mrs Lupin grew tearful and waved a handkerchief at him.

“Call me Grandfather Lyall,” Mr Lupin said. “And this is your grandmother, Hope.”

“Hi, Grandmother Hope.”

“I wish we could have met when I was still alive,” Mrs Lupin said, as they walked into the house. Remus took the portrait from his father and hung it back up in the living area. It was a small place, with bells to be rung in case of medical emergency.

“Moomy didn't say you were dead,” Harry said.

“I'm Moomy,” Remus clarified, when his parents looked confused.

“Ah, well, he doesn't talk about us much,” Mr Lupin said. “I don't blame him, after what I did.”

“What did you do?” Harry asked, immediately feeling protective of Remus.

“We don't have to talk about this,” Remus said, while Sirius began to pour out tea.

“No, no, we do,” Mr Lupin said. “You see, Harry, I lost my temper with Fenrir Greyback. He was a very bad man and I wanted him put away. He pretended that he wasn't a werewolf, but I could tell that he was. I... am *not* proud of the things I said, but no one was listening to me. He should have been put away forever. Instead, he's still out there, somewhere.” His gaze drifted to the window. Harry noticed with a start that there were bars on the windows, taking him back to that one summer at the Dursleys when his room became a literal prison cell. “He came for my boy, my poor Remus. He was only a child.” Tears crept down his cheeks, while Remus looked uncomfortable. “I riled a monster and my son paid the price for it. Be sure never to lose your temper with a dangerous person, Harry. It isn't worth it.”

“Yes, Grandfather Lyall,” he said, feeling uncomfortable himself now. He'd never known that about Remus, only that he'd been attacked by Greyback as a child. Now that he knew the circumstances, he'd have to ask his reaper to ensure that Greyback was found by the auror department and put away. Or put down.

“I suppose you know all about this magical television set Remus has developed,” Mr Lupin said, finally sitting down, on the edge of the seat, and trying to appear normal. His hands trembled a bit, and Sirius waited for him to calm down before taking his drink order. Harry sipped his already prepared tea and nodded.

"I think it's my fault he went around playing with the set in the first place," Harry said. "But we're looking forward to watching movies. Hermione's descended from someone called Eglantine, so she said we have to watch *Bedknobs and Broomsticks*. And then I'm going to teach her how to ride a broomstick, and Neville too. And we're planning a trip to the British Museum and maybe go to an amusement park, too. I haven't been to Brighton Pier before, but Dadfoot says there are better places to go. But I have to go back to school now that the papers know I'm alive."

"Sorry about the end to your holiday," Remus said, ruffling his hair. Harry beamed up at him.

"I'm going to work really hard and get good marks again," he said. "I want you to be proud of me."

"I already am," Remus said.

They had sandwiches, which were cut a bit wonkily, obviously made by Mr Lupin. And the tea was lukewarm. But he was desperately trying to make a good impression on Harry, and absolve Remus of any blame for not bringing him to visit earlier. He also said that he didn't mind Remus and Sirius being a couple, since they weren't sure whether Remus would father a human child or a werewolf child, and how dangerous the pregnancy might be for the mother.

"I could still marry a woman and *not* have a family with her," Remus pointed out. Sirius looked wounded, so he quickly added, "But I'm very happy with Sirius. This is the happiest I've ever been, even without James and Lily around. We still have Harry."

Eventually they had to leave; they'd planned to be there for afternoon tea, so that it would be a short visit in case anything went wrong. As soon as they arrived back at the manor, Harry hurried upstairs to his study to check on Fawkes. He was nearly grown into his feathers and out of the tufts of down, but the glow was still weak.

Harry ran back down and out the garden, where he and *Whisper Scales* had a deal: any rats she couldn't finish eating, he would take for Fawkes, and Sirius maintained wards which drew an unnatural amount of rats to the land so there'd already be an excess. *Whisper Scales* squeezed the pray she kept aside for Fawkes, in case her poison had an adverse effect on his recovery. Harry's end of the bargain was to ensure a safe place for her to hibernate when winter came. Since that was months away, he had plenty of time to create a warm, comfortable and safe enclosure for her within the manor, somewhere she wouldn't be disturbed, and could even keep eggs one day if she chose to be a mother.

Whisper Scales showed him her latest store of rats. He picked them all up by the tails; a disgusting task, but necessary. He took them upstairs, holding them far away from his body, and took them to Fawkes's enclosure. It had a decent splash zone, though he rarely made a mess. Probably because the hearts of the mice had been still for long enough that there was no pressure left in the blood vessels. Dobby cleaned the enclosure and surrounding area every day, just in case.

Harry took some pictures of Fawkes to send to Mr Lovegood, who was helping Harry ensure that Fawkes returned to full health. He was able to develop the photos on his own by now, and used his bathroom, since the light could be completely cut off at any time of day.

While he waited for the pictures to develop, he washed his hands thoroughly, not just of excess chemicals but the crawling feeling he had from touching rat corpses in the last couple of hours. He wondered how much of it was squeamishness over the dead bodies, and how much was lingering revulsion over Peter Pettigrew.

Chapter End Notes

You may or may not have received a notification to say that chapter forty-six has been edited, due to a suggestion from Kimberley_T. Basically from Remus doing his blood test onwards, since his background has also changed. Or, to be more accurate, become canon. His mother's maiden name is my real surname. Freaky.

Please review! You see, I haven't forgotten Fawkes, or the Lupin parents.

Chapter Forty-Eight

Chapter Summary

A few time skips in this chapter. We may end very soon!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Harry, where are your mother's diaries?” Remus asked at the study door, while Harry was reading aloud to Fawkes.

“Oh, Mintzi has the copies,” Harry said distractedly. Fawkes was intrigued with the story of the hidden dinosaur nursing a toothache.

“Copies?” Remus repeated.

“I got her to make copies and sent the originals to that Mr Snape. It was in my mum's will. Her portrait told me she wanted him to find a cure for you. I also wanted to thank him again for helping me in Diagon Alley.”

“Ah,” Remus said. Harry glanced at him, putting a bookmark back in *A Dinosaur Called Minerva*.

“What's wrong?” Harry asked. “It was in the will. Remember when Dumbledore didn't follow my parents' wills? What happened to *me*?”

“Oh yes, quite. I'll ask Mintzi about the copies. Thank you.”

“You're welcome, Moomy.”

Whatever had dismayed Remus, his expression melted into fondness at Harry's name for him. He wondered if his guardians would ever stop reacting like that.

His reaper had reassured Harry that Professor Snape had taken on an assistant, using the bargaining power he gained from fighting Voldemort in Diagon Alley to protect Harry Potter. He was teaching the assistant how to run a class and was now getting them to mark the younger years' work, giving him more time to run off Lily's notes and create a potential cure for lycanthropy. He would likely leave Hogwarts as soon as it proved successful, and continue creating new potions, while leaving a much kinder professor behind to teach Potions.

Harry breathed a sigh of relief for Neville's sake.

Parseltongue lessons had begun. Since it wasn't a written language, it was something which could only be taught in person. And because it was so sibilant, the desks and chairs that Sirius rustled up had to be spaced apart. There was enough room in the former ballroom, current portrait gallery, so Harry instructed his friends there. Sirius even bought a video camera, intending to record the lessons. Once Remus made it work on magic, that is. He was concerned about the stigma around being able to speak Parseltongue, and wanted to start an educational network for children.

“Lessons on another language will be just the thing,” he said. “I wonder if we could get Newt Scamander to give lessons on Mermish?”

People had pre-ordered the TV sets like mad. It started with the half-bloods who missed being able to watch *Doctor Who*, and when Narcissa Malfoy declared that she had ordered one, it became the done thing to buy a set. Remus often made a trip to the factory to oversee production and ensure that the runes were all still being applied correctly, and the best materials being used.

Harry wasn't sure that he liked the idea of being on TV; but as his reaper pointed out so long ago, he'd be well known for a very long time, if not the rest of his life, so it was his responsibility to use that fame for good.

After Parseltongue lessons, they'd all need a good long drink of water, due to the amount of saliva lost while practising. Then they'd go to the forest behind the house and look for snakes and lizards to practise on. The females tended to be more patient, as they understood the need for young ones to learn. It helped that the migrating rat population had drawn more snakes. *Whisper Scales* would sometimes complain about having too many neighbours, but not too much. Harry knew that she'd been eyeing some of the males as possible sires for her children.

Then after being in the shade of the forest, they'd return to the yard. Sirius had bought more of the practise brooms for their age group, and Harry was teaching some of them to fly. Hermione and Neville had both been reluctant at first, until they saw that no one could fall off the brooms. Harry performed tricks, and even rode at fast speeds, to prove how safe it was.

Still, they started out slowly, and low to the ground. Sirius had brought mattresses from Grimmauld Place, since he intended to refurbish the whole place one day. The stables were a good storage place for when the mattresses were not in use. And eventually the mattresses were no longer needed, as the children grew in confidence.

Draco, naturally, could already fly. Ernie boasted that he knew all about it, but he certainly didn't mean to flip upside down on his first ride. Mintzi had to provide a Calming Draught. Anthony had little interest in flying, but he thought it was a good skill to have before they began at Hogwarts.

The girls had varying levels of skill. Daphne and Astoria had had basic lessons when they were younger, in case they'd ever need to fly, but it was generally understood that they would not be flying for fun. However, Daphne in particular was a speed demon, and Astoria's

obsession with outer space had her wanting to fly as high as possible. Fortunately, the brooms wouldn't fly any higher than a standard one-level house, otherwise she'd have shot off into the clouds.

Luna saw the practicality in being able to fly, and managed to do it, but said that she'd prefer a winged horse over a broom any day. Megan and Mandy both performed well. Lavender was more timid, like Hermione, but she had also had lessons at a young age, for a short amount of time. She was a smooth flyer, but yelped and panicked if she went too fast. Hannah and Susan were both capable, and Hannah spent a lot of time at Neville's side, helping him gain confidence, while Susan mainly kept Luna company.

"We have too many for a Quidditch team," Sirius remarked to Remus. "We need more kids, so they can have a proper match."

"Daphne, Draco, and Harry are the only ones I'd put on a team at the moment," Remus said. "The others are either too nervous or too distracted by other thoughts. Besides, Harry doesn't even know the rules of the game yet, unless he's read James's copy of *Quidditch Through the Ages*."

Harry smirked to himself as he overheard their conversation.

Now that the Ministry was tracking Muggleborns, Amelia tentatively suggested bringing some of them into the group.

"You already have Hermione Granger," she pointed out. "I thought a few boys might do well, since you have so many girls already. There are a couple of boys, one of them Luna's age, the other a year younger than Astoria. The older one has already shown some accidental magic, but we're not sure how much of it might be caused by the younger one as well."

"This is getting out of hand," Sirius said, scratching his head.

"What about that children's Quidditch team you wanted to start?" Remus asked. "Giving up on that idea already?"

"Ooh," Sirius said. "Yes. Send more children over. The more the merrier! Harry needs to learn how to socialise."

"I'm right here, and I can talk to people," Harry said, from one of the armchairs. Amelia's head peered over from the fireplace.

"I'm sorry, Harry, I didn't know you were there," she said. "Your guardians have yet to learn good manners, it seems."

"Sorry, I didn't realise the angle meant you couldn't see him," Remus said, blushing.

"Did you hear about the updated versions of the children's guides?" Sirius said.

“Susan's parents have pre-ordered copies,” Amelia said. “But it's for Christmas, so don't spoil the surprise.”

“How many children will be getting school books for Christmas?” Sirius said. “That's the kind of thing *Remus* would like, and young Hermione. Would Susan really want that?”

Amelia rolled her eyes.

“Of course her parents would *only* give her books for Christmas,” she said sarcastically. “That's the kind of thoughtful people they are.”

“I'm looking forward to having presents for once,” Harry said, as Sirius floundered for an answer.

All the adults looked at him again with that pitying face.

“We'll make it the best Christmas *ever*, Harry,” Remus said.

The video camera was finally working. The opening shot of the first episode of Harry teaching Parseltongue began with him sitting on a stool, with *Whisper Scales* draped around his neck.

“Hello,” he said. “I'm Harry Potter, and I can speak to reptiles. This is *Whisper Scales*, an adder. She lives nearby. I'm a natural Parselmouth; I was born being able to speak to snakes and lizards and turtles. But not everyone is. I don't know how I know Parseltongue, but it might come from my mother's side of the family.

“Anyway, I wanted to tell you that *you* can learn how to speak to snakes, too! You might want to keep some water handy, because your mouth will dry out really quickly. But it's lots of fun and really useful. If you ever meet a snake who doesn't know you, and could bite you, then you can ask it not to. Snakes are usually really surprised that humans can talk to them. *Whisper Scales* was surprised when I spoke to her.”

The snake nodded while looking at the camera.

“But remember, reptiles are our *friends*. They don't work for us. If you ask them to do a favour for you, you have to do one in return. It's only fair.

“So, welcome to your first lesson in Parseltongue.”

They cut there, so that Harry could return *Whisper Scales* to the forest. It was slowly creeping towards hibernation time, and he'd mostly brought her up to the manor so she could see the setup they had ready for her. She was pleased with the heated stones, and Dobby would be checking on her every day. Sirius would put up charms to monitor her health, which Dobby could check, and he'd keep the enclosure clean.

“And there's plenty of room for eggs as well, just in case,” Harry added.

Whisper Scales told him not to be so cheeky.

It had taken a lot of research into how to create a broadcasting station for the wizarding television network. There would only be one channel at first, while everyone got used to it. A special switch on the back of the set would turn it from Muggle TV to the Magical Broadcasting Service. Harry's lessons in Parseltongue were a gamble, but scandalous enough to the prejudiced public that they'd tune in out of sheer curiosity.

Hermione had a guest spot in Harry's first episode, where she talked about snakes, and how they helped the environment and were important in the food cycle. She spoke about how excited she was to be learning a language so few people could speak, and that no one took the time to learn.

Susan also spoke in the first episode, to give extra integrity. Being from a well-known Light family and with her aunt high-ranking in the Ministry of Magic, she gave legitimacy to Parseltongue being simply another creature language, like Gobbledegook and Mermish.

The first day was so successful, and Harry's Parseltongue lesson so interesting and wholesome, that people begged for more. Gringott's even reached out, asking to have their own program to educate wizards and witches on goblin culture. When they learnt that Muggle TV presenters often spoke about finance as well, they decided to tack that on at the end.

Rita Skeeter tried to get her own show. Harry asked how such an important, truth-seeking journalist could possibly interview, write and check her sources, and still have time for her own show on the channel. She was so flustered by his false praise that she discarded the idea, and decided instead to write a daily column on the previous day's entertainment instead.

Soon, another channel had to be added, dedicated to languages, as a goblin taught Gobbledegook, Harry continued his Parseltongue lessons, and other experts such as Newt Scamander recorded their own programs on how to communicate with non-humans. The underwater demonstrations of Mermish were trickier to film, but manageable, thanks to some carefully placed Bubblehead Charms and wireless microphones.

Soon, private lessons were no longer required, when a children's educational channel was created. The usual lessons that purebloods received, in etiquette, government, and traditions, were instead broadcast on the television.

The original channel remained in use for news bulletins and miscellaneous documentaries. One person who got a kick out of it was Xenophilius Lovegood. He kept producing *The Quibbler*, but also did a documentary on the history of the magical printing press, and now video recorded his interviews with people... including Harry.

The network nearly had to shut down when Harry's interview about his childhood was broadcast.

Many letters of support were sent in. Harry made sure to talk about the nice Muggles he knew, to stress that the Dursleys were simply the worst example that he could talk about from personal experience. Some were grateful for his balanced statement; others were angry that too many had sat around and done nothing while Harry suffered in anonymity. He was glad for the public support, which had been sorely lacking in the previous timeline.

When a new curriculum for the next Hogwarts year, starting in 1988, was decided upon, Professor McGonagall herself gave an overview of it in a television broadcast, live. Harry waited until it was over before he asked her to sign his copy of *A Dinosaur Called Minerva*.

“Dadfoot told me to ask,” he said, pointing to Sirius, who promptly looked horrified.

“No, I didn't!” he exclaimed.

“You're setting a poor example for this child,” McGonagall said. Sirius sulked. Remus looked at Harry with great suspicion.

“You saw our reaction to you buying the book,” he said slowly. “And you know that Professor McGonagall's first name is Minerva. Harry, did *you* decide to do this and try to pin the blame on your godfather?”

“Well, I *tried*,” Harry grumbled.

“Sweet Merlin, there's another one,” McGonagall said, staring at him with the same horror that Sirius had displayed. “Will I never be free from the Marauders?”

Harry gave her his most charming smile.

Chapter End Notes

Whoa, longer than I expected. Oops. Hope I get enough sleep tonight.

Please review!

Chapter Forty-Nine

Chapter Summary

Author wanted to write an easy chapter, so you're getting the characters going to THE THEATRE!

Spoilers for 'The Phantom of the Opera' abound, in Harry's usual vague fashion.

Chapter Notes

Warning: various plot points of The Phantom of the Opera (the musical) are mentioned from Harry's perspective. So if you want to avoid those, skip the rest of the chapter from when the musical starts. The chapter will end with them going back to Grimmauld Place to sleep.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Since the television network was proving so successful, and they're recorded many of Harry's Parseltone lessons in advance, the family decided to go out to celebrate. They flooded to Grimmauld Place, which was coming along nicely. Two new mattresses had been installed – a single for Harry and a double for Sirius and Remus – with nice, bright new furniture. It was more modern, and Harry particularly liked the bookshelves built into the head of his bed, and the trunk at the foot.

Dobby and Mintzi promised to take good care of Fawkes. *Whisper Scales* still had time before her hibernation. There was food at Grimmauld Place, not that they needed it. They were planning to go out for dinner. Mintzi would pop over to cook breakfast for them the next morning.

They were all set, with their best Muggle clothes freshly laundered and pressed, to go to Andrew Lloyd Webber's *The Phantom of the Opera* .

“I feel like I should've worn purple,” Sirius muttered, looking down at his black suit.

“And risk looking like Albus Dumbledore?” Remus said.

“No, you're right. It's better this way.”

“Why purple, though?”

“Because it's the Phantom, Moony!”

Harry and Remus exchanged confused looks when Sirius turned to check his appearance in the full-length mirror once more.

“What does that have to do with... you know what, I'm not going to ask, I'm just not,” Remus said.

They found a fancy restaurant on Haymarket, which served Italian food. Harry decided not to risk pasta with a white shirt, and chose a pizza which had a white cheese sauce, slices of potato, garlic, rosemary, sliced mozzarella and caramelised onion. He was intrigued that they used different potatoes: white ones, orange ones, even purple ones. And the menu said that the onions were all different, too. Spanish, red, and white. He wasn't sure if they were supposed to taste different, but the potato slices made the whole dish very colourful.

Sirius risked spaghetti bolognese, and offered to recreate that scene from *Lady and the Tramp* with Remus. Remus refused to do so in public, especially in a meal for three. Harry was more interested in this movie reference he didn't know, and Sirius promised to find it on VHS for him.

“It's even funnier, because they're two *dogs*,” he said, and he winked. Harry giggled around a mouthful of garlic and mozzarella. Remus rolled his eyes, but he was smiling.

After they all ate – Remus had a steak, though it wasn't yet close to the full moon – they left the theatre into the night air, which had cooled since they went inside. Harry shivered and burrowed deeper into his coat, while his guardians held his hands. They walked the short distance to Her Majesty's Theatre.

“Is this like the pantomime?” Harry asked.

“Not quite,” Remus said. “There's singing and dancing and talking, but the audience doesn't get to boo or cheer. You can clap at the end of songs, though. Just follow what the rest of the audience does; they probably know how to behave.”

Harry nodded, taking his words to heart.

Sirius, naturally, had obtained box seats for them. Harry wondered why such seats were so expensive, when they were forced to sit at an angle. He didn't want to see half the audience; he wanted to see the whole stage. Sirius, realising that Harry's size meant it was more difficult to see, moved him closer to the edge of the box, added a silent Sticking Charm both to the chair and to Harry, and handed him a box.

“Opera glasses,” Sirius said, pressing a button on the side. With a loud SNICK they popped open, and Harry was surprised.

“Binoculars!” he said.

“Bit fancier than that, but essentially. They'll let you see what's happening on stage a bit better.”

“Do you both have some?” Harry asked.

“I have exceptional senses,” Remus said.

“If we enjoy the music, we can come back again, maybe sit towards the front instead,” Sirius said.

“Okay,” Harry conceded. He glanced out at the auditorium. He hoped they wouldn't sit under that thing suspended above the audience, though. With his previous luck, it would probably fall.

“I thought Michael Crawford was a comedian?” Remus said, and Harry could hear him flicking through the program. “Must be a different one. It can't be Frank Spencer.”

“Could you imagine the reactions if we got *Some Mothers Do 'Ave 'Em* onto the network?” Sirius said, chuckling.

“Not a bad idea. There isn't much content yet. A movie channel would be good, if the network could get the licensing to show various films. The same for television shows.”

While they continued to murmur over what they could try to wrangle onto magical TV, Harry spied on people from his perch in the box, until the lights began to dim. He remembered that it meant the show would soon be starting, or at least that's what it meant at the pantomime. He looked back at Remus and Sirius, who were now looking towards the stage in readiness. So Harry turned his attention to it, too.

At first he was confused. Were they accidentally watching a rehearsal of the show? But no, those blokes were new managers. And the conductor was different from the one who'd conducted the overture. The leading lady threw a tantrum, which he thought unprofessional. But then something fell at the back, and he wondered why no one was running to fix it.

Then people sang, and he was even more confused. Wait... was this the plot?

He nearly smacked his own face when he remembered the title of the show. *The Phantom of the Opera*. They were watching a fictional rehearsal, an opera inside a musical.

As the plot continued, he heard Remus quietly explaining that this phantom wasn't the same one from the comics, and Sirius's groan of disbelief.

“You still love me, even though I'm an idiot, don't you?” he asked.

“Of course,” Remus whispered back.

Harry grew concerned about the young woman, Christine, who was being stalked. There was no other word for it: she was being stalked and no one would believe her. This Meg character clearly thought it all-too-romantic. Remembering his brush with Romilda Vane's love-potioned chocolates, he shuddered. It was *not* romantic.

He was looking through the opera glasses when the phantom's face was finally revealed, and he nearly dropped them in shock. Some parts swollen, some shrunken, some otherwise straight up deformed, and awkwardly singing through semi-mangled lips. He knew it was

probably makeup – he *hoped* it was makeup – but he quickly handed the opera glasses back to Sirius. He didn't need to see *that* closely.

When a body fell from the rafters and the phantom's voice rang out, Harry jumped in his seat. His nerves were shattered by the screams of the chorus, and as the phantom made his threats, he realised that *they were sitting in box five* .

“Shit,” Sirius muttered. He darted forward to squeeze Harry's shoulders. “It's just make believe, remember? He can't get us. If he tries, both Sirius and I are armed. And you took down a Dark Lord, twice. You're safe.”

Harry nodded, still on edge, and Sirius moved back to his seat. But he could tell that his guardians were now sitting closer behind him.

The act ended when the chandelier crashed downwards, and half the audience seemed to scream as well. Harry desperately needed ice cream at the interval, as well as a glass of water. Remus quietly summoned Mintzi and asked for a Calming Draught. She scolded them for making Harry anxious, and brought two vials of the draught, in case he needed another by the end.

The second act started out calmly enough, though Harry hated that the phantom hadn't been heard from in so long. It was like after Pettigrew escaped in his third year, and he kept waiting to hear about his capture, only for Voldemort to return. And then waiting for Voldemort to make a move during his fifth year, only for him to keep a low profile while the Ministry denied his return and labelled Harry and Dumbledore liars. Then the long days when they tried to work out what and where the horcruxes might be. And the breaks between the basilisk attacks in his second year.

In general, Harry was used to that uneasiness, and it returned in spite of the draught he'd taken.

He knew it was too good to be true when the phantom turned up again. Then there were more rehearsals, just as at the start of the play, only this time with a definite feeling of dread and the murder of a stagehand hanging over everyone's heads. Harry took the opera glasses back just so he could scan the faces of the cast for anything or anyone out of place.

Stop treating them like suspects , he told himself.

The newest opera-within-the-musical began, and Harry was fairly certain this wasn't for children; though at his physical age, it should be going over his head. He was sure someone sang about 'bodies entwining', and he blushed, glad the theatre was dark enough to cover it.

He was so overcome with embarrassment by seeing these two people sing about preparing to... you know... that he was taken by surprise when the masked figure turned out to be – surprise, surprise – the masked figure they'd already met. The phantom ran off with poor Christine – Harry felt that no one was quite good enough for her, since they didn't listen to her concerns, except Meg – and yet another body turned up. He sighed. At least they wouldn't really kill actors on stage. The two 'corpses' would be there to take a bow at the end, he was sure.

Raoul, the designated hero, went to the rescue and immediately screwed it all up. Also familiar to Harry.

Yet a show of love – like his mother, and like Harry in the final battle – was all it took to dispel the evil. In this case, the young lovers were able to go on and live normal lives together. Harry could understand why the phantom would feel bitter and sad about constantly being alone, but he'd allowed his isolation and the abuse of others to turn him into a murderer, like Voldemort, rather than making him a self-sacrificing hero, like Harry.

Not that Harry wanted to think of himself like that; but it was hard to escape the parallels, especially with Voldemort's altered visage and Harry's all-too-famous scar, drawing attention wherever they went. Unless they hid away. Hid from unkindness.

If only Voldemort had learnt the same lesson as the phantom.

He didn't need the second Calming Draught by the end, and clapped for the performers. And he clapped even harder for the orchestra. The music had sounded hard to sing, but even harder to play, and he thought they deserved recognition and thanks as well.

He was yawning by the time they left the theatre. The ice cream had worn off and the darkened room and late night had done their job of making him sleepy. They apparated back to the park across from Grimmauld Place, made their way inside, and Sirius carried Harry upstairs to his bedroom.

As soon as he was under the covers, he was out like a light.

Chapter End Notes

Didn't even think of the story parallels until the end. I don't know if this is a demonstration of how symbolism and patterns can be found everywhere, or whether I simply chose an apt musical to send them to. Of course, it also happened to be running at the time, and I know it fairly well (and the music REALLY well).

Always applaud the orchestra! I've been in school orchestras and it's hard work. In operas and musicals the singers get a break while others perform, but the orchestra and conductor are working the whole time, especially in operas and sung-through musicals.

Please review!

Chapter Fifty

Chapter Summary

Harry muses and worries.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

After another day of spending time with his friends – the much larger group had gone to the seaside at Weymouth, built sand castles, then returned to Potter Manor on the bus – Harry was feeling very conflicted. Luna mentioned that the Weasleys had pestered her to wrangle an invitation, and Harry didn't have a good enough reason to keep putting them off, except for Sirius's dislike. He wanted to meet the twins, especially Fred, whose death had hit him hard.

But he remembered what they were all like at school. He remembered Ron and Hermione dancing around each other angrily. Now he wondered whether that anger was Hermione fighting against the love potion and Ron being angry that it hadn't worked right away. But could the Ron of right now grow up to be that same jealous boy?

And more than that, if Harry was *supposed* to marry Hermione one day, that meant he'd grow feelings for her all over again, presumably while they were at school. But his mind was ten years older than his body. Even though he was due to lose the memories of the previous lifetime in less than ten years, it was unfair.

But what could he do?

“You are conflicted,” his reaper said, when Harry fell asleep that night.

“I am,” Harry said. “What do I do about Hermione?”

“This is no longer about the two of you being *very* distantly related, is it?”

“I'm seventeen in my mind. In my mind, I look like... like *you*, not me! Not as I am right now. It's been hard enough keeping this secret, especially my suspicions and feelings. But the Hermione I knew won't be the same Hermione I'll grow up with. She'll know more before attending Hogwarts. She'll have established friends. She won't be attacked by a troll or a basilisk or Bellatrix Lestrange. She won't deal with Umbridge, and hopefully no other idiots like Gilderoy Lockhart, either. She won't have had the same experiences. With any luck, there won't be bullying or prejudice to deal with at Hogwarts, either. She'll have Slytherins on her side, not all against her. She'll have become known to purebloods over the TV network. She'll get the recognition in Potions that Snape denied her, or I'm getting a potions tutor for more

than just me and Neville. I don't want the old Hermione and the new Hermione getting confused in my head.”

“I could remove the memories of the previous lifetime now, if you like,” his reaper said. Harry stared at him for a moment, processing this.

“Just like that?” he asked.

“Yes. How do you think we removed your memories in the past?”

Harry ignored that.

“But how will I know to be on my guard against love potions? How will I make sure the Weasleys won't try to use potions on us?”

“Sirius will teach you better, and you have far more friends to notice if you behave differently. And as the menu will change at Hogwarts, it will be more difficult to administer potions. Hogwarts will also be more strict when it comes to such incidents. I believe you have nothing to fear.”

“You have *seen* my life before now, right?” Harry said, raising his eyebrows. His reaper looked back at him, unmoved.

“Do you have any other concerns?” he asked.

“Yes! My behaviour could change noticeably if I no longer remember being seventeen, and who to be cautious of.”

“You have good instincts,” his reaper said. “Use them. You have fewer enemies now. The defeat of Tom Riddle when you were an infant is no longer seen as a fluke, now that you defeated him at the tender age of seven. With a wand you had never wielded before, and no training in magic. With no one like your mother to defend you. There are already rumours that it was my master's wand.”

“Your master...? Oh.”

“Yes. But since you broke it in the middle of Diagon Alley like that, no one will challenge you for it. What use is a broken wand?”

“I didn't want it getting into the wrong hands,” Harry mumbled.

“My master has retrieved the pieces and repaired them for his own use,” the reaper said. “You do not need to worry about that, either.”

“What about Greyback?” Harry asked, thinking of Remus. “Snape's working on a cure, but that doesn't matter when monsters like Fenrir Greyback are at large, ready to bite unsuspecting children. Like Lavender.” He shivered when he remembered seeing her body hit the floor from a height, and Hermione's shriek of “NO!” when she blasted Greyback away from Lavender. If she'd survived that fall, there was no guarantee she would survive *him*.

“He will be dealt with in time. Now stop worrying. If you worry yourself into an early grave-”

“I know, I know, you lose your job. I remember.”

His reaper studied him.

“So what do you want me to do about your memories?” he asked.

Harry fidgeted in his seat as he thought about it.

“Maybe... make them fade away, very slowly,” he said. “Give me time to grow used to truly being a kid, while still having that knowledge. But then make it less distinct. Maybe remove the stuff which will definitely be different now, like Voldemort's return. Then make them feel more like I just dreamt them, like they were part of a nightmare. And one day they'll be so faded that I won't think about them at all. And then... gone. Leaving me free of them.”

“That can be done easily enough,” his reaper said. “When would you like me to begin?”

“Tonight. Now. Please.”

Harry was attending a school in Dorset. With most of the threats in his life removed, many of the wards could be lifted on Potter Manor, which meant he had an address. He would rather have gone to school with Hermione, but with her group of friends and the knowledge that her strangeness was magical power, she'd grown in confidence, and she wasn't the only one. They all had fewer incidents of accidental magic. They had better emotional control, especially knowing that there were so many others who could relate.

The Ministry of Magic was telling magic-wielders earlier, and establishing contact between Muggleborn children and nearby witches and wizards. They were forming their own groups according to district, and Light pureblood children were introduced to them. Ernie drifted away from their group, which was a bit of a relief. He undoubtedly felt less special as more people joined the group, and was still prejudiced about Harry's ability to speak Parseltongue naturally.

He wasn't missed.

Many of the other pureblood children started school, after getting a crash course in what they should have known by now. Since they'd all been home-schooled, it was a legitimate excuse. With Hermione's help via owl and Sunday study sessions, they'd caught up. A few were lucky enough to attend school with identified Muggleborn students, who were all too happy to explain things.

Harry sometimes found himself struggling to remember how he acted towards Draco at Hogwarts in the previous lifetime, but most of those interactions had disappeared. He remembered their rivalry in Quidditch, and wondered why that existed, considering that he preferred flying for its own sake, not in the context of a dangerous sport.

He'd also forgotten most of the ways he'd previously died. He knew he'd died as an infant, the first time, due to being left on the Dursleys' doorstep. But none of the other deaths.

And he remembered the Dursleys. Too well for his liking.

He finally met the Weasleys, which couldn't be helped. He'd gone to visit the Lovegoods, and a stray red ball – what was it called again? – flew rapidly towards them. Sirius caught it before it could hit anyone, and began to stroll up the hill to return it. But a bunch of redheads barrelled over the hill. As soon as Harry was recognised it was all over, and he was practically dragged into their house, while the Lovegoods were left behind without a glance. Remus hurriedly apologised, while Sirius hexed the children away from Harry, shouting that they were not to kidnap his godson.

Mrs Weasley was all fervent apologies, but her eyes were on Harry. She reached out for a hug and he ducked behind Remus, who'd finally joined them.

“I haven't seen you since you were a baby,” she cooed. “Come here, Harry.”

“I don't like strangers touching me,” he said petulantly.

“But I'm not a stranger!”

“Hi, Harry, I'm Ron,” said one of the children, holding out his hand. Harry couldn't believe that someone could blatantly ignore what he'd just said about not touching strangers.

“How do you know who I am when we've never met before?” he asked. “Are you a stalker? We watched a musical about a stalker. He nearly killed someone. He tried to force someone else to fall in love with him and wanted to make her marry him!”

“I wouldn't do that!” Ron protested, wide-eyed.

“What kind of things have you been teaching this poor boy?” Mrs Weasley demanded.

“Not to throw balls at people,” Harry said. “And to *listen* when someone says that they *don't like to be touched by strangers*.”

“This is Ginny,” Ron said, gesturing to his sister. She blushed when Harry looked at her, and her mother cooed yet again, and winked at Harry. He baulked at it.

“Were you Molly Prewett?” he asked.

“Why yes, I was!”

“Ah, I see,” he said. “We're cousins.”

“What?” she asked.

“We're related. My mother was from the Prewett family. From a squib?”

“Yes, that's right,” Sirius said. “Harry's quite closely related to your children, Molly. *Too* closely.” He tilted his head blatantly towards Ginny, who looked crestfallen. “Now, if you're done trying to mother my son--”

“Our son,” Remus corrected firmly.

“Of course,” Sirius said. “We'll be leaving. Harry already has family, and plenty of friends. True friends, who like him for who he is, not his money or his fame. He needs a normal childhood, not blatant admiration. And not whatever you were cooking up years ago. You think we weren't paying attention at Order meetings, when you were trying to match-make?”

“We'll not let anyone harm our son or try to use him, not after Albus Dumbledore tried to do the same thing,” Remus said. “I wonder that any of your progeny could have manners when your children *ignored* their neighbours in favour of manhandling a *victim of abuse* who had no idea who they were. Harry probably thought he was being kidnapped! He has nightmares of being taken away from us, and you've probably made things worse.” The twins looked ashamed for their part, but Ron was scowling. Ginny had hidden her face in her mother's skirt. Harry couldn't dredge up any pity for them.

“I did,” he said. “That's why I shouted for help, or did you miss that?”

“We heard it,” one of the twins said.

“We're really sorry,” the other added.

“But why would you want to spend time with them?” Ron asked, gesturing towards the Lovegoods. “They're *weirdos*.”

“They've been *kind* to me, and haven't treated me like a... a... museum exhibit!” Harry said. “They treat me like family *should*. I feel safe and loved when I'm with them. All *you've* made me feel is fear and disgust!”

He turned on his heels and walked back down the hill, hurrying to get back to Luna's side. She smiled up at him and he gave her a quick hug.

“You said you painted something?” Harry asked. “Can I see it?”

“It's an artist's impression of what a hinkypunk's spirit looks like,” she said. Harry boggled at her use of the phrase 'artist's impression', but then Luna was destined for Ravenclaw, so he shouldn't have been in the least surprised.

Remus and Sirius joined them as they were heading inside. Sirius was grinning.

“You told them, Harry,” he said, nudging Harry's shoulder. “Well done.”

I think that Fred and George would see a pretend-kidnapping as a good prank, because at that age they won't have learnt what's appropriate and what isn't. And not being scolded by their mother for once? Must've seemed too good to pass up.

I hope you like how I've dealt with Harry's memory problem.

Please review!

Chapter Fifty-One

Chapter Summary

Time skip!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

First of September, 1991

Harry strode through the wall with confidence, head held high, shoulders back, and just a little under the average height for his age. But Moomy was confident that he'd have a growth spurt within the next few years, which Harry was looking forward to.

He was still riding a bit of a high from their last visit to Brighton Pier before the end of the holidays and the start at Hogwarts. It was so nice to be tall enough to go on the roller-coasters. Hermione's parents had even bent enough to allow her fairy floss. Dadfoot made a joke about it being the only kind of floss she'd never been allowed before.

Astoria's latest phase was a determination to be the first brain surgeon who also happened to be a witch. Harry blamed that on their trip to the Hunterian Museum. At this rate, and with magical longevity, they'd make their way through all the museums of Great Britain before they died, and probably all of the tourist spots, too. There were lots to get through, and more popping up all the time. Magical ones, too, which the Muggles of their acquaintance always enjoyed.

Anthony was helping Lavender and Hannah onto the train when Harry pulled up beside them.

"We're really going!" Harry exclaimed.

"You've been before," Draco pointed out from beside him.

"Yes, but we're all going together," Harry said, bouncing on his heels. Hermione was busy saying goodbye to her parents and Aunt Narcissa. Draco had gotten the emotional farewell out of the way already, since he claimed it would be unmanly to do that in front of everyone else. Harry chose not to remind him that they were still boys.

"Don't forget to look for the map while you're there," Dadfoot whispered to Harry, helping him lift his luggage on board.

“Just study and do your best, and make some more friends if you can,” Moomy said. “Don't forget to look after *Whisper Scales*.”

She poked her head out from beneath Harry's collar and hissed at them.

“She says--” Harry began.

“To look after the babies, we know,” Moomy said.

“Even if we didn't speak Parseltongue, we'd still know, from the number of times she'd said it,” Dadfoot said. “And they're not babies anymore,” he added in Parseltongue. “They're grown up.”

She replied that they were still her babies. No one would argue with that.

“I can't wait until Luna comes along next year,” Susan said. She'd grown very close to Luna. They all had, but Susan enjoyed helping Luna to write junior editorials for *The Quibbler*. “Do you think she'll bring Fawkes?”

“I think Fawkes will be where he needs to be,” Harry said.

Once the phoenix had recovered, and *Whisper Scales* came out of hibernation with a clutch of baby snakes, it was decided that *Whisper Scales* would go to Hogwarts with Harry as his familiar one day, and Fawkes would go to the Lovegoods. They were the best possible caretakers, and he could get them to remote places without trouble. He could also get them out of trouble. Harry couldn't quite remember why he'd thought that Mrs Lovegood would need the most protection, but decided that it was probably because she did so much experimental stuff. She'd had a few close shaves so far, justifying his decision that Fawkes should stay with her.

The previous week, Auntie Amelia had told Harry about how his old neighbour, Mrs Figg, not only knew about magic but had made numerous attempts to tell people how the Dursleys treated him. He had a vague recollection of an apology to her at the Dursleys' trial, but a lot of that time had grown fuzzy to him. Moomy said he was probably repressing it so he could move on with his life.

Harry had no problem with that.

The children managed to get on board and squeeze into a couple of cabins. They were eleven, so it wasn't too difficult; they mainly needed the extra space for their trunks and familiars.

They all greeted *Whisper Scales*, before Harry put her in her small enclosure – they didn't use the word 'cage' – so she could sleep for the journey. Hermione had an orange kitten Mrs Figg had raised, and insisted on giving to Harry when they met. It was kind of awkward having tea at Harrod's with a kitten in a travel basket, occasionally yowling for attention. It settled much more with Hermione, who named it Crookshanks. Besides, she didn't have a familiar, and Harry did, and he couldn't bring more than one animal to Hogwarts with him. So it made sense to give him to her.

“You're always so generous to me, Harry,” she said. “You're the best friend I've ever had.”

Aside from Crookshanks and *Whisper Scales*, there was Trevor, Neville's toad, and Annie, Hannah's frog. Draco had a pet snake as well, which he called Tobias after his godfather. It was a going-to-school present from him.

Harry was happy to see Severus Snape again. The man had come to help him in Diagon Alley, after all, even if it was on Dumbledore's posthumous instructions. He'd had no reason to do that, except the goodness of his heart. That was Harry's opinion, and he was sticking to it. The man had used both his intellect and Harry's mother's notes to cure lycanthropy, after all.

So Severus Snape was a good person, in Harry's mind. He'd always been polite in his letters, and was even happier when Harry gave him some old, unfinished potions notes from his ancestor who'd invented the Sleakeasy hair potion.

Neville was reading over his favourite children's guide, the one on herbology, and as conversation petered out they all began to read what they'd brought along. Lavender was reading something by Judy Blume, her current favourite author. Hermione was deep in a newly-updated book on the history of magic. Draco was curled up reading *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, which Newt Scamander had actually signed for him. Anthony was reading a Roald Dahl book, but Harry couldn't see the title from this angle.

They all swapped seats from time to time, so that everyone had a chance to look out the windows and see the scenery going by. They'd also change cabins, and Harry found out that Megan and Susan were working their way through *The Babysitters' Club* series, Justin Finch-Fletchley was halfway through the Narnia books, and Mandy and Hannah were reading their school books. Daphne was re-reading *Quidditch Through the Ages*, though sometimes she'd sigh and say how much she missed Astoria.

They were joined by a pair of twins named Padma and Parvati, and Harry found out that they were vegetarians.

“I hope there'll be lots of vegetable dishes at Hogwarts,” he said. “Do you want to sit with us for awhile? We're not very good company, since we're mostly reading at the moment.”

“I think the food trolley is coming along,” Parvati said. “We saw it going into one of the other compartments further down the train.”

“Must be nearly lunchtime,” Hannah said.

“Mintzi made plenty for all of us,” Harry said.

“So did our elf,” Susan said, looking up. “He wanted me to pass on his best wishes, Harry.”

“Thank you! Send my best wishes back to him, would you?” He dug out the picnic basket that Mintzi had provided and opened it up. “Do you two like cucumber sandwiches?” he asked the twins. “They're my favourite.”

They had a few more visitors, some staying longer than others, some only coming to stare; but they mostly read in silence as the Hogwarts Express trundled through the countryside, steam puffing out the chimney and billowing past the windows. As they got closer, Harry woke up *Whisper Scales* and lifted her so she could see the school come into view. She'd have to be back in her carrier before the train pulled up, and he didn't want her to miss it.

The castle was far more magnificent than he remembered, probably because this time he hadn't mindlessly charged into the castle – through a hidden passageway he didn't know *how* he knew existed – to confront Albus Dumbledore. Sometimes he still felt a stab of anger over how Lavender had suffered because of her association with him.

But he had told himself not to think about it; he couldn't have every day at school ruined by this.

An absolutely ginormous man called for the first years. Their group tried to stay together as they chose boats to get into. Harry was thrilled to be beside Hermione as they took their first trip up to the school where they'd spent the next seven years.

"It's really happening!" she exclaimed softly, clutching his hand. "I'm so glad you found me that day in Hay-on-Wye."

"You would've ended up here anyway," he said.

"But not with you beside me."

He didn't know why he'd run over to Hermione that day, but it didn't matter. It was probably the best thing he'd ever done, maybe only second to running away from the Dursleys.

"You don't think there are sharks in this lake, do you?" Neville asked, looking into the depths. "Like the ones at the aquarium? Those were *huge*."

"I don't think they're likely to be hanging around a Scottish loch, Neville," Hermione said. "Don't worry about it."

"Alright," he said, looking relieved. "You always know these things."

"I just read a lot," she said, looking a bit bashful.

"Besides, sharks can get a lot bigger than the ones in the aquarium," Daphne said. "Just look at the whale shark. It's *huge*. But," she quickly added, when she saw Neville's expression, "they're saltwater creatures. They live in the ocean. They couldn't possibly get here, even if it's a saltwater lake. And I'm sure it isn't. Besides, this is a magical place. There are more likely to be mermaids and grindylows."

"That doesn't make me feel better," he muttered.

"We'll be learning how to protect ourselves against them, won't we?" Harry asked the tall man, who was in a boat all to himself.

“O' course you will, `Arry!” he boomed. “I knew yer parents, did ye know tha'?”

“A lot of people did,” Harry said. “But I think their portrait mentioned you. You're Hagrid, right?”

“Yep, tha's me,” he said. “Caretaker o' the grounds an' keeper o' the keys. An' if any of you have problems with yer pets, bring `em to me.”

“That's very kind of you,” Draco said, likely thinking about Tobias asleep in his carrier. They hadn't had much time to bond, though speaking Parseltongue helped enormously.

“An' now it's time fer you all to meet the deputy-headmaster, Professor Flitwick. In you go, now. An' good luck! I'll be watching from the head table.”

“I'll be glad to get out of this chilly air,” Padma said, rubbing her arms.

“I'm shocked I didn't die when Dumbledore left me on a doorstep in the middle of the night,” Harry said. “If it's this cold in the summer, just think how much worse it was in autumn! And they didn't find me until morning. Surprised I didn't have pneumonia.”

“Don't think about things like that, Harry,” Lavender said, looking upset.

But not nearly as stricken as Hagrid looked.

Chapter End Notes

So Hagrid will no doubt tell McGonagall and they'll both wallow in guilt over the fact that Harry could've died because no one alerted the Dursleys.

Also, Harry's memories of the previous timeline are now gone, leaving him with some minor confusion over his past actions.

Crookshanks has shown up two years early. I know there was a theory going around that he was raised by Mrs Figg, so I decided to incorporate that into this story. Moomy (sorry, but I couldn't keep using their first names when Harry doesn't think of them like that anymore) is no longer a werewolf. Whoever was getting money from the Wolfsbane patent probably hates Severus Snape, and Snape doesn't give a damn.

Right. Sorting and first night/day next, probably.

Please review!

Chapter Fifty-Two

Chapter Summary

The first night continues.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Hannah was the first of their group to be sorted. She went to Hufflepuff. Susan was sorted not long afterwards, and joined her at the Hufflepuff table. After what Harry had learned about badgers, he knew it would be a bad idea to get on their bad side, no matter how sweet both girls were.

Since they realised the students were being called in alphabetical order, they tried to sort themselves out, so that when the Gs came Daphne, Anthony, and Hermione were all waiting near the front, while other first years straggled off to their respective tables. Daphne held her head high and smiled as she was accepted into Slytherin House.

“My whole family has been there, and I know I have the same qualities,” she'd told him. “But we'll still all be friends, won't we?”

“Of course,” Harry said. “And Moomy said we'd share some of our classes.”)

Harry knew he should have been supporting everyone equally – he'd clapped as Lavender went into Gryffindor, though she looked sorry to be separated from her other friends so soon – but he hardly paid attention to Anthony's Sorting. He was too busy watching Hermione, who'd become a bundle of vibrating energy as they walked through the hall, seeing the floating candles and the ceiling that reflected the real sky. He'd heard that they'd study Astronomy outside, which made no sense if there was a perfectly good way of studying it inside. He'd have to ask their professor about it.

Hermione looked nervous as she sat on the stool and Professor Flitwick placed the Sorting Hat on her head. She looked thoughtful for several seconds, which seemed to stretch on, until the hat announced that she would be in Ravenclaw.

Dadfoot was right about that. Harry would have to tell him when they spoke over the magic mirror.

“Aren't you on the TV?” someone asked Harry. He looked at the boy next to him and nodded. “I'm Dean Thomas.”

“I'm Harry.”

“You're the one who can talk to snakes,” another boy said, this one with a distinct Irish accent.

“If you've watched those videos, then you should know how to talk to them, too,” Harry said.

“Why would I want to?” he said. “That's Dark stuff, that is.”

“Yes, being anything other than monolingual is terribly evil,” Draco drawled. Harry nearly cheered, but his friend's name was then called by Professor Flitwick. He knew that Draco always had that line prepared to defend Harry, though he rarely got a chance to use it.

Harry only knew that Draco was nervous about the Sorting because they'd talked about it; otherwise no one would've known. But Draco came from a long line of Slytherins, and knew his late father – who'd died in Azkaban a few years ago – would have expected him to be Sorted into the house of snakes. And so would his mother. Draco, however, worried that he might lose Harry's friendship, no matter how often he was reassured that it wouldn't happen.

The Sorting Hat sat in place for nearly an entire minute, as Draco got impossibly paler, until the seam finally opened.

“RAVENCLAW!” it announced.

Harry couldn't read Draco's expression, and really hoped he hadn't asked for a different house just to keep his friendships. He'd have still had Daphne, and likely Astoria. He was also acquainted with others who'd been sorted into Slytherin house before him, like Millicent Bulstrode.

His own nerves grew after the Patil twins were sorted into Ravenclaw and Gryffindor. Padma sat beside Draco and put a hand on his arm, and started talking to him with enthusiasm. Harry hoped it would help to settle Draco's nerves.

When his name was called, a lot of people fell silent. He wasn't sure if it was because he'd defeated Voldemort twice before the age of ten, or if it was from his Parseltongue lessons. Opinion had been mixed at the start, but most people ended up not expressing their negative opinions once the last of Mr Lovegood's interviews with Harry aired on the network. People were very unwilling to say anything bad about an abused child who put his life on the line for others when they'd never shown him kindness or come to his rescue.

He trembled as he sat on the stool. He gave Professor Flitwick a small smile, which was returned, and then the Sorting Hat half-covered his face, trapping him with his own thoughts.

“What an interesting mind you have.”

Who's that ? Harry thought, alarmed. He didn't want someone else in his head.

“I am the Sorting Hat. You have the bravery and temper of a Gryffindor, and you displayed some unwitting cunning in the past. You are loyal to those you love and you have a desire to learn. I know you wish to be with your friends, but they are spread over different houses. Where should I put you?”

You're the expert, Harry thought. I don't think I want to be near the Weasleys. They've been really weird whenever they've reached out to me.

“Very well. I think you could do quite well in any house. But for your safety, I think it best if you go to RAVENCLAW!”

Harry sagged in relief. While he'd miss Neville, who'd gone to Gryffindor – as his grandmother predicted – at least he'd be with Hermione and Draco. They weren't his oldest friends, like Neville, but they were still close. And Neville would still be in their lives; just at a different table. Harry would see more of him than he would his parents.

He was kind of disappointed that Draco's godfather had left Hogwarts; it would've been nice to have someone he knew there among the adults, since he'd only met the headmistress once. But since Mr Snape never liked teaching, Harry didn't blame him leaving as soon as he could. He seemed to do that a lot. When Harry met him again, so he could cure Moomy, he didn't talk much and left as soon as Moomy was sleeping off the effects. He only spoke briefly to Harry about his mother's journals. The man was clearly better as a pen pal, but that was okay. Some people were shy. When Harry said as much to Dadfoot, he agreed that that must be it, and they didn't talk about it again.

There were standard announcements about making friends, helping others, doing homework and paying attention in classes, sport try-outs, and the like. No teacher introductions, but he supposed they'd learn their teachers' names in class. Then food appeared on the tables, and he wondered if it was house elf magic or school magic unique to Hogwarts. He knew that house elves could do this, but that didn't mean that humans couldn't.

Padma was delighted that there was vegetable stew, curried vegetable pasties, cheesy arancini balls, and other meat-free options. There were also roasts and some seafood. Anthony also happy; he'd been reassured, by letter, that the staff were all trained to prepare food in the kosher way.

Harry was more interested in finding out whether there was marmalade at breakfast and cucumber sandwiches at lunch. Dadfoot reassured him that if Hogwarts didn't provide those things, he and Moomy would move to the Potter's Scottish property and send them to Harry on the weekends. They could use their new snowy owl. Harry wanted to call her Hedwig, but when Moomy misheard and thought he said Hedwing, Dadfoot laughed endlessly and said that it was perfect for a bird.

At the end of the meal, their prefects led them upstairs. Harry was sad to see his friends going in other directions; he waved as they separated from the Gryffindors at the base of a staircase. Neville was reassuring Lavender, and Parvati was already trying to make friends with her. Harry liked the Patils; they seemed kind. Padma was talking about her few years at a Muggle school, at her parents' suggestion, with Hermione. She also realised that Hermione had been on the TV as well, and was asking about what it was like to make episodes for a television program.

“I wonder what my father would think of this,” Draco said softly, while Harry walked at his side.

“He'd be grateful that you weren't in Gryffindor,” Harry quipped. Draco snorted in quiet laughter.

“Thanks,” he said. “Do you think Daphne will be alright?”

“She's tough,” Harry said. “And they're having Quidditch try-outs soon. Maybe she could try out for the team?”

“Weren't you listening? First years can't try out.”

“She should have a chance. She's better than *any* of us on a broom.”

“Keep up, firsties!” called the prefect. Harry had missed their names, but he wasn't concerned about that. He needed to keep distracting Draco.

“I hope there are bathrooms close by,” Harry said. “And I hope we get maps. This castle is *huge*. How will we remember our way around? I haven't seen signs on *anything*.”

“The signs only appear during the day,” an older boy explained from behind them. “Or anytime classes are on. Since first years aren't usually supposed to be out this late, it's to make sure you're not tempted to go sneaking around at night. Of course, Hogwarts didn't used to have signs until a few years ago. There aren't any maps, I'm afraid. It's too difficult with the changing staircases.”

Harry thought about the Marauder's Map his Dadfoot had mentioned, wondered how difficult it could be to make a map of the place, and how hard anyone had actually tried.

“What's your name?” Harry asked.

“Roger Davies. I'm on the Quidditch team. Say, what do you think about the sports channel on the Magical Broadcasting Network? I was so excited when my parents got a set. It really helps to see professionals on the pitch, especially with all the close-ups. I've got heaps of ideas to bring to the team when practise starts.”

“Good luck,” Harry said politely. Draco looked far more interested. As long as it took his mind off disappointing his ancestors.

“I'm going to try out this year,” one of the girls, around their age, said. “I'm Cho.”

“Harry.”

“Draco.”

“Of course! I think I've seen you on the TV. And everyone knows that scar,” she added, looking at Harry's forehead pointedly.

“It's nice to be left with a reminder of my mother giving her life to save me,” Harry said. It was his way of subtly telling people that he didn't like his scar being pointed out, and that they were being rude, without coming out and actually saying so. She blushed and looked down.

“Sorry,” she said.

“It's better than the other scars,” he said, in his usual matter-of-fact way. Most of the students weren't used to this, and winced.

Oh dear. He hoped he'd make a better first impression in the morning.

“It was a good point about the toilets, though,” Draco said when they reached the Ravenclaw common room, and the prefect had to solve a riddle to get in. Harry hoped his brain would prove up to the task. “Are there any in the common room?”

“Each dorm has an en suite,” Cho said. “And there are other ones throughout the castle. There was some fuss a couple of years ago, but I wasn't around for it.”

“I was,” Roger said. “One of the girls' bathrooms has been haunted for decades. Some people from the Ministry came along and spoke to the ghost, then they found a secret passage down to a place called The Chamber of Secrets. And there was a *basilisk* down there. It gives you shivers to think of it. But they got rid of the basilisk. And the groundskeeper, Hagrid, was cleared of being responsible for the ghost's death.”

“He was working at the school while under suspicion of murder?” Hermione said incredulously.

“Apparently Dumbledore knew he was innocent,” Roger said, shrugging. “So he kept him on. Didn't do anything else to help him, though.”

“From what I've heard, that sounds right,” Harry said.

“But could you *imagine* if it got loose? A snake, running about the castle.”

“They can't exactly run,” Parvati said. “They don't have legs.”

“You know what I mean,” Roger said.

“We both have snakes for familiars,” Harry said, indicating Draco.

“And you're in *this* house?” Cho said, astonished.

“Hermione has a cat, but she isn't in Gryffindor, even though lions are called big cats,” Draco said.

They all had to quieten down as the prefects expanded on the rules of the common room and dorms, how much freedom pets were allowed – it was strange they weren't called familiars here – and what time they'd have to be at breakfast tomorrow to get timetables. They also showed off the Ravenclaw library. It carried many of the same books as the school library, as well as extras which expanded on various subjects to give a better understanding, for the especially curious. These were less needed than in the past, since the children's guides Harry advocated for had become so popular. The first run had sold out so quickly that many more had to be published. Mr Snape even edited the latest potions edition himself.

Once all the talking was over with, Harry and his friends hugged each other, wished each other a good night and then parted ways. Anthony, Draco, and Harry traipsed up the stairs, followed by a few boys Harry didn't know. While Hermione, Padma, and Mandy followed some other girls up to their own dormitory.

Harry quickly learnt the other boys' names. He didn't remember Terry's Sorting, since he'd been distracted by Mandy and Lavender's nerves, but he vaguely remembered seeing Michael sitting opposite them at the Ravenclaw table, followed closely by Stephen. It was odd to have so many sorted into the same house so closely together, but no one commented on it. They were more interested in the Patil twins being in different houses, which Harry thought a bit invasive of them. Why couldn't people mind their own business?

He and Draco took the time to write to their families about the Sorting, of themselves and their friends. Harry only briefly mentioned the train ride, promising to write more in another letter.

It was getting too late to keep writing much more, so he sealed the letter and used a special whistle they'd found in the Potter vault. It would call however many owls you needed, and the Ravenclaw common room was probably close enough to the owlery for it to work. So he piped on the whistle twice, to summon two owls. When they arrived, he and Draco gave them their letters and the directions.

Once *Whisper Scales* was fed, and had bunked down for the night in her warm carrier, Harry climbed into the four-poster bed. He wished the others a good night, and made sure to lie on his side facing towards Draco, in case the other one needed him during the night.

Chapter End Notes

I was going to do the first day but, just as with Harry – how meta – it's too late to write much more tonight. I'm glad that I was at least able to work in a few things which were mentioned, like what happened to Hedwig, the basilisk, Hagrid, and the lycanthropy cure.

So I guess the next chapter will be their first day, maybe a summary of their entire first week at Hogwarts? And do you think Harry will learn to survive without the occasional cucumber sandwich?

Please review!

Chapter Fifty-Three

Chapter Summary

Harry's initial first weeks at Hogwarts.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

By the end of their first week, Harry wrote a bunch of letters, including one to Mr Snape. He told him all about the potions lessons they'd had, and said that he'd taught the new professor well, but that he would've liked to learn from Mr Snape himself, since he seemed really smart. Mr Snape didn't have much to say about it when he wrote back, but thanked Harry for the compliment and also for keeping an eye on Draco.

Hermione was torn between wanting to join all the groups at Hogwarts and wanting to leave plenty of time to study. Their whole group – now expanded to include the Patil twins – planned to study in the library together on the weekends, but it would depend on the groups that they joined.

Harry definitely wanted to join the photography club; he enjoyed taking pictures, and he knew that the boy he'd met, Colin Creevey, would be interested as well, and would want to see someone he knew there. Harry was sure that Luna would also join. She would also likely join the arts and crafts group next year, as well. But Harry knew that art wasn't his strong point.

There was a club for students interested in caring for animals. If they were in the club for two years they would get it as credit towards Care of Magical Creatures, if they chose to take that subject. Harry wanted to see how many magical creatures he could learn to talk to. Mr Hagrid ran that group along with the professor for Care of Magical Creatures. Hermione wanted to take the class for the future extra credit it granted, and to learn more about Kneazles.

Harry had heard that Ron Weasley was joining the chess club, so he steered clear of that; and the Muggle board games group as well. But he enthusiastically joined the book club, as did most of the group. Professor Quirrell, their Defence Against the Dark Arts professor, ran the group, on the understanding that the students would lead the discussion, and he would just monitor it. He also made copies of the books. Since such a wide range of students had joined, they broke off into smaller groups based on what they wanted to read, and what they *could* read in their age group.

Neville joined the choir, which surprised Harry, until he heard how angelic his friend's voice was. Neville had never taken lessons, but he was used to listening to music on the magical

wireless when his grandmother wanted time to herself. He said he was sure his mother used to sing him to sleep, and that that's where the passion for music came from.

There were also Muggle-focused groups, for those who wanted to learn how they coped without magic. Since there were certain circumstances where they couldn't use magic – a magic-null area, the laws regarding underage magic, some illnesses – it made sense to teach students how to do things the Muggle way. Harry already knew how to do chores and make food, so he didn't bother with it; but some of his friends did. Trouble-makers were automatically assigned to the class to learn to be more efficient when they had to clean for detention.

Harry was fairly confident about his first week at Hogwarts. He quickly adjusted to sleeping in a new bed, and found that he didn't deal with nightmares much. Not that he'd had them on the regular for a long time now; but he felt calmer. Settled. It was nice.

The Ravenclaws were slowly getting used to having snakes in their tower. Some of them were fine with it from the start, as it gave them an opportunity to practise Parseltongue. For many, it was simply more knowledge that should be acquired. *Whisper Scales* was happy to oblige, since the students were so enthusiastic about her and she loved the attention. Harry got the impression that Tobias was bored with the attention, and would rather nap. That's pretty much how Harry felt about the unwanted attention he received.

One thing that sobered him was when he referred to one of his fathers as Moomy and some of the older students called it childish. One even accused him of sounding American, which was really going too far. *Whisper Scales* rose up from his shoulders, and they fell silent.

"I *am* a child," Harry said. "In case you've forgotten, my parents died. So I gave my guardians special names. Because I'm an orphan. Who else here has lost both their parents?" There was awkward silence from everyone. "I thought not. Bully me again and I'll report it. I hear that Hogwarts takes bullying very seriously nowadays."

They left him alone after that. Draco offered to say 'Uncle Moomy' in solidarity, instead of 'Uncle Remus', but Harry refused. He had this under control. And if they stepped out of line, he'd report them. Or possibly bring out his Marauder side. He wasn't sure which yet.

He was disappointed to find that tracking down the Marauder's Map was impossible. He'd checked Mr Filch's office, with Mandy and Hermione standing guard, but there'd been nothing. And since Mr Filch wasn't likely to supervise another long detention during the day again anytime soon, they wouldn't have another chance. He'd have to hope that it turned up on its own somewhere.

Harry's favourite time of the week was getting letters. He didn't send as many as he used to, now that he was at school full time with his friends. But he still heard from some of their relatives, as well as his own guardians. They always kept him updated on what Mintzi and Dobby were up to. Harry fed Hedwing generously each time she brought a letter full of news from home, and she'd pecked him affectionately on the sleeve before taking off to the owlery to rest and await his reply.

He also enjoyed the Saturday night movie. Well, it was Saturday evening for the younger students; the students who were fifteen or older had another movie after that. Harry loved hearing all the students talk about how amazing Remus Lupin was for giving them the ability to watch movies.

“That's my Moomy,” he said, loudly enough for those who'd bullied him to hear. When they made the connection between 'Uncle Remus' and 'Remus Lupin', they blushed and apologised.

Harry knew he shouldn't watch *The Land Before Time* ; he'd seen it when it came out at the movies and cried. But he watched it anyway, since most of them had bonded at the natural history museum, and only cried a little. Lavender was sobbing against his shoulder and Hermione was weeping on his other side. And the sound of the movie covered it pretty well.

They all enjoyed *The Princess Bride* , which he'd seen at the cinema. They cheered on Inigo Montoya the loudest as he defeated his foe, and clapped as the heroes all journeyed off together, ready for the next adventure.

Many were initially confused by the Muppets, when they watched *The Muppet Movie* . It had to be paused so that puppetry could be explained to them. So did ventriloquist dummies when Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy made a cameo appearance in the film. Harry remembered them from a war film he'd watched with Dadfoot and Moomy. Something about a canteen.

Sometimes there was also a musical, and the concept of people bursting into song and dance had to be explained as well. That didn't stop Harry from enjoying *Annie* and bopping along to the songs in *Labyrinth* and *The Care Bears Movie* .

He was surprised when the Weasley twins approached them. He couldn't remember their names, but he knew their reputations as trouble-makers. Dadfoot had said that they were probably bored, and that the magical innovation class might be right for them, if they knuckled down to get the marks needed for it. At the moment, they seemed more interested in pranking people. Harry looked at them warily, and his friends who were nearby gathered around him. They were about to go into book club, but had to wait for Professor Quirrell.

“I know we behaved badly when we met you a few years ago,” one of the twins said.

“We wanted to say we were really sorry about that,” the other said.

“One day someone tried to snatch our baby sister.”

“That really got us thinking about how you must've felt.”

“So we wanted to make it up to you.”

“Professor McGonagall said we'll be taken out of our favourite class and kicked off Quidditch if we don't do better in class.”

“We're removing temptation and also helping you, so it's win-win.”

They handed over some old parchment to Harry, who stared at it in confusion. Until the first twin tapped it with his wand and said a phrase which had been drummed into Harry's memory.

“I solemnly swear that I am up to no good,” he said.

Names and lines formed, and the map of Hogwarts appeared. Harry unfolded it to see the whole school being laid out before him.

“When you're done, tap it with your wand and say 'Mischief managed',” the second twin said.

“Thank you,” Harry replied. “That's very kind of you. Are you joining the book club? We're going in soon.”

“We've got to study,” the first twin said, making a face. “Haven't got time for other books.”

“And we've got to think of something simple to start out with for our innovation class,” the other added. “All our ideas are too big, according to our teacher.”

“I know something!” Hermione said. “Chalk.”

“Chalk?” the twins said, looking confused, but not yet dismissive.

“A chalk which goes on invisibly, but when it's warmed up it turns bright pink,” she said. “I read about it in one of the *Malory Towers* books. I don't know if it ever existed, but if anything could make it reality, magic could. You can put it on a chair where someone's going to sit for awhile. Then their body heat warms it up, and the chalk gets attached to their clothes, so when they stand up they're covered in pink dust where they've been sitting!”

“That's *ingenious*,” the second twin said.

“I brought all the books with me,” Hermione said. “I'll bring them down to you at breakfast. Give me a couple of days to go through and mark where all the joke items are mentioned. That's the only one I can remember off the top of my head.”

“It's *brilliant*,” the first twin said. “Thank you.”

Chapter End Notes

There. Harry's made up with the Weasley twins, they're going to stop causing so much mayhem, he has the Marauder's Map two years earlier than in canon, and you've heard about some of the groups Hogwarts has.

The last two chapters will probably be summarising Harry's time at Hogwarts, something about the Dursleys, and so forth. And the last chapter will be about life after

Hogwarts. Unless I keep writing long chapters, in which case this may stretch out to 60 chapters.

Sorry this is a little late. Please review!

Chapter Fifty-Four

Chapter Summary

How does Harry's run at school go this time around?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Harry worked hard, as he'd promised everyone. He found that hard work wasn't really necessary, since he had such a good grounding in the basics from the children's guides. He did his best, but knew that relaxing was important. Hermione didn't seem to understand that; she wanted to learn everything at once and not take a breather. Through conversation with older students, however, she was reassured that she had plenty of time, and that the curriculum was designed to prevent the students from wearing themselves out with too much too soon.

But she was easily proving herself the smartest witch at Hogwarts. Harry was relieved that the teachers liked this, rather than resenting it. Some students resented it, even though Hermione was generous enough to offer help to anyone who needed it. But after being rebuffed a few times, she contented herself with doing her own work and giving herself the free time to devote to the groups she had joined.

Harry was delighted to see Luna one day, when her father came to give a guest talk on fieldwork to their magical creatures club. Her mother came along, too, though she was spending the night to talk to the magical innovations class on Monday. Luna had to go back, since she had school. She didn't have friends at her school, but she didn't mind, since she had so many others she would be joining at Hogwarts the next year.

Most of the group went home for the holidays, but Dadfoot and Moomy told him that he should spend his first Hogwarts Christmas at Hogwarts. It occurred to him later that they might have wanted to spend Christmas with each other, without supervising him. He decided that it was for the best, since it would give him a chance to get to know other people.

Many of the presents he sent to people were photographs from around Hogwarts, especially of the children they knew and loved. He'd even get the people in the pictures to sign the backs of them, and went along to the Christmas craft group to make frames which would expose the backs. While he enjoyed it, he knew that he was already part of enough other groups that doing craft wasn't practical. He associated things like crochet and embroidery with Petunia Dursley, and didn't want to think about her.

Although he had a strange dream that first Christmas at Hogwarts. He didn't know what prompted it, didn't know what it meant, and had no intention of finding out whether or not it

was true. If he turned out to be some kind of Seer, he didn't want that attention.

He dreamt of the Dursleys. But it wasn't a nightmare. Not for him, anyway.

He saw Dudley at age seven, being enlisted at some military school. He tried to throw his weight around, and was immediately taken down several pegs. The laziness he'd gotten away with before was no longer excused; it was punished, usually with chores and/or exercise. Both of which he hated and tried to get out of. Harry was kind of surprised that no one shot him; he could tell that many people were tempted. And Dudley was too stupid to learn what he was doing wrong, that he should keep his head down and work, like Harry had to when he was trapped in that poisonous household. So he kept making the same mistakes over and over. Harry wondered what Aunt Marge would do if one of her dogs have proved so impossible to train.

As for Marge Dursley, he dreamt that her home had been invaded, her dogs taken away, and all her neighbours interviewed. There were horrible tales of dogs frightening children but the council doing nothing because the dogs would never be *quite* within snapping distance. But combined with her brother being accused of child abuse and murder, the reports were suddenly taken seriously, and her dogs were confiscated. Those which couldn't be trained out of being aggressive had to be put down, sadly enough; though if the alternative was being used in dog fighting rings, it was better that they be put out of their misery. Some were able to be adopted, but couldn't be around children, especially those who wore glasses.

Vernon Dursley, much like his son, tried to exert some kind of authority in prison. He especially got up people's noses by talking badly about tattoos and men with piercings. But when he wanted his own room with a comfortable bed, and threatened a guard with unemployment if he didn't arrange such a thing... he discovered what a fatal mistake it was to threaten a prison guard.

Within five hours every prisoner knew that Vernon was in jail for child abuse. No specifics were given, which allowed imaginations to run wild. And with many of the men in jail considering child abusers to be the worst kind of people, Vernon spent more days in the infirmary than out of it. He stopped asking his sister and son to visit, and started spending most of his time in bed, or in corners, not speaking to anyone. He'd learnt quickly and his spirit had been crushed with it. It was very satisfying to see.

Petunia was the last one he dreamt about, appropriately enough. The first one to find him on the doorstep, he'd heard, and his one living close blood relation.

She had maintained a dignified silence, making her displeasure known through sneering over the poor prison conditions and the occasional cutting remark about the food quality. But otherwise she didn't bother anyone, and they didn't bother her. Even when they found out why she was in jail, it was generally assumed that her husband was the culprit, and her only crime was not stopping him, so she wasn't targeted as such. If sometimes her toothbrush went missing, or her prison slippers, or the water was cold by the time she got to shower, she knew better than to complain.

It was almost disappointing that she was still treated better than Harry had been. She didn't have to do chores or make meals; she got an actual bed and space to roam; no one laid a hand

on her or talked down to her much, or called her a freak. She was honestly having a much better time in prison than he'd had as a so-called member of her family, and the injustice of it rankled. But he couldn't have everything, he supposed.

End of year exams were not as tough as Harry feared, though Hermione's study timetables helped a great deal in making sure he was prepared. But he felt confident in his abilities. More confident than Hermione felt. He bribed Padma to French braid her hair so that she couldn't tug it all out from worry, and would order chamomile tea every night before an exam so that Hermione would de-stress and get some proper sleep.

While Slytherin won the Quidditch cup – Daphne wrangled a try-out and blew them all away with her skills, helping them to victory as a Chaser – Ravenclaw won the house cup overall, partly from the points Hermione had gained with her performance in classes, and the high-quality potions that Harry and Draco brewed during the flu season to help the infirmary. Mr Snape had given them tips on how to make the potions extra effective, and Madame Pomfrey was extremely grateful.

During the holidays, they went on a long-promised trip to Scampton's RAF base to see the Red Arrows fly. Daphne watched with eager eyes as the pilots performed stunts. Hermione could hardly look, since she still had some fear of heights. Dadfoot was incredibly excited, and Moomy used the video camera to take footage of the aerial stunts, in case the network was interested. It was shown a few months later, after the children were back at school.

They made their annual trip to the natural history museum, and brought more friends along this time. They had to split into four groups to go around the whole museum, without clogging up the halls and doorways. The Weasley twins were invited along, and Hermione bought them dinosaur models to make up, like the one Harry had bought for her. They were already chatting about the possibilities of making magical ones.

Ron had apparently been cross that they got an invitation to the museum; but he'd been mean to Hermione when she tried to help him in class once, called her a know-it-all, told Draco that he'd been Sorted into the wrong house and should've been with 'the other snakes', and certainly never apologised for bruising Harry's arm when he'd grabbed hold of him four years previously. That was why he didn't warrant an invitation on an outing. Fred and George were told this, and looked eager to explain it to their younger brother when they got home.

“And if your sister doesn't turn out any better than him, she won't be invited, either,” Harry said.

“Oh, we know,” George said.

“It's driving Mum and Percy mad,” Fred added.

Second year continued much like the first ended. It was the same classes, the same groups; but this time Luna and Colin were with them. Colin was an eager addition to the photography

group, and Luna latched onto the art club. She had undeniable skill and made friends with some of the other artistic folks, including Dean Thomas from Gryffindor. He later confided in Harry – who wanted to make sure the other boy was genuinely being nice – that at first he thought Luna's spaciness was just an act, to seem more like an *artiste*. But when he realised that she really did have another way of looking at the world, he realised that they should all be listening to her, because she was a true artist. She knew how to find the beauty in everything, even when other people only saw ugliness.

There was excitement partway through the year when some famous writer turned out to be a fraud, and Dadfoot rejoined the Ministry of Magic to track down the truth and reverse the Obliviations he'd placed on people. The bloke had a poncey name, and Harry immediately forgot it out of complete disinterest. But he was pleased that Dadfoot was keeping busy, and making life easier for Aunt Amelia at the same time.

Of course, they had to choose which subjects to do the next year. Harry knew he was doing Care of Magical Creatures, and he also wanted to do Runes, like Moomy. He hadn't yet decided on whether or not to do Arithmancy, or instead try his hand at Innovations. He could probably get the marks for it, but he didn't have any real plans to try creating spells or magical objects. He didn't know what he wanted to do after Hogwarts, but he knew it probably wouldn't involve the Ministry. He liked to help people, and the Ministry of Magic wasn't exactly known for doing that until forced to.

Third year, Astoria joined them, and Daphne was delighted. Astoria ended up in Slytherin, where she was perfectly safe due to Daphne's skill on a broom winning her all sorts of protection within that house, despite her choice to associate with Muggleborns. Astoria was less inclined towards brain surgery now, and more interested in trying her hand at art, since they'd visited the National Gallery at Trafalgar Square. Luna had given her some lessons during the holidays, and what Astoria lacked in natural talent she made up for in hard work and a desire to learn.

Harry had chosen to do Arithmancy after all, since it would afford him more opportunities, and supported his other learning. He and Draco, and some of the others, still brewed potions for the infirmary from time to time. He did his best to comfort injured students whenever they took the potions to the hospital wing, and Madame Pomfrey said that he had an excellent bedside manner. Harry figured that people needed to be talked to the way he liked to be talked to when he was hurt, like when Aunt Andromeda examined him the first time.

Mr Snape gave a talk in potions once, emphasising how important it was to understand how potions were created, the properties of the ingredients, and the safest ways to experiment in getting the most out of an ingredient. He handed out points to the students several times. The older Ravenclaw students were surprised to hear this. Neville nearly fainted in shock when he got points for correctly answering questions about plant ingredients, since he hadn't been expecting the stoic former professor to acknowledge him: he had such a fierce reputation in Gryffindor.

Fourth year was the same; there'd be the occasional guest lecturer, more films at movie nights, and Harry was delighted whenever his fathers met him at Hogsmeade. They moved

into the Scottish Potter residence shortly before the end of fourth year, to make it easier to meet Harry (and for Mintzi to send him cucumber sandwiches). Though they spent the summer holidays in London, since that was easiest for everyone.

Dennis Creevey started at Hogwarts, and was Sorted into Hufflepuff like his older brother. He and Astoria had to stay behind while the others all went to Hogsmeade, but they'd always bring back some sweets from Honeyduke's for the younger ones.

And then came fifth year. OWL year.

Hermione. Was. Manic. Harry had never seen her like this before. She rarely relaxed, and nearly dropped out of the groups she felt weren't contributing to her education.

"They're contributing by giving you time to relax and *forget* schoolwork," Luna scolded, before Harry could even open his mouth. "You *will* keep going to them, Hermione. Or... or I'll stop doing my own homework."

"You can't do that, Luna!" Hermione said. "What would your parents say?"

"They'd understand that I was busy looking after you when you land yourself in the infirmary from overwork," Luna said.

"And I'll stop doing my homework, too," Harry said.

"So will we," Fred said. George nodded. Hermione looked horrified.

"But you're in your NEWT year," she said.

"Shows how serious we are," George said.

"You? Serious?"

"Harry's dads are helping us set up our shop once we graduate, so we don't need the marks," Fred explained. "But Luna shouldn't have to look after you all on her own. Or Harry."

Hermione glared at them as Draco and Neville and Padma and *all* of them added that they'd stop studying if Hermione didn't take a break.

"Fine!" she snapped. "But if I fail my OWLs I'm blaming every last one of you."

She scored higher than anyone at the end of the year, though she fretted through the holidays until they received their marks. Harry took her out for a dinner for two to celebrate, to the same fancy French restaurant his fathers took him too. She hissed that it was outrageously expensive, but Harry was stubborn.

"You got the best scores out of anyone," he said. "Why shouldn't I take you on a date to celebrate?"

"A... date?" she asked. "But we're not dating, Harry."

He blushed and looked down.

“Maybe we could start?” he said tentatively. “If you want to. But you don't have to. We're still here to celebrate. Just... think about it?”

She beamed at him, and after they left the restaurant she kissed him on the cheek and blushed mightily. Then she took his hand as they walked to the Tube station.

“I'd like to,” she said softly.

Sixth year was uneventful, now that Hermione had proven that she didn't need to panic study. Now Harry was focused on a career in healing. He wanted to work with children in need, having been in their place himself. He wanted to help children who were first encountering magic and didn't understand what was happening; he wanted to help children whose terrified parents thought that beating them would get rid of the magic; he wanted to help children who were scared and lonely and vulnerable. He wasn't sure if he would focus on physical or mental health, so he was studying both. Better to be over-prepared than under-prepared, as Hermione would say.

They sometimes went to Hogsmeade on a date, usually with Harry's fathers nearby. At first Harry thought they were being monitored; but then they explained it was to make sure that the dates went uninterrupted by people who might want to pester Harry. He appreciated that.

In their seventh year Hermione was head girl and Neville was head boy. They'd both been prefects, as had Harry. But he preferred to spend his time learning from Madame Pomfrey and taking the medical elective, so he waived away the offer of being head boy.

“Hermione can compartmentalise, but I'm not very good at that,” he explained to Headmistress McGonagall. “I don't want to lead anyone. I want to be available to help those who need someone in a more... discreet position. I'm honestly just happy to be here for my seventh year.”

“Did you ever think you wouldn't be, Potter?” she asked.

He frowned.

“Sometimes... I felt like it might not have happened,” he said. “I don't know why.”

“Your marks are comparable to your parents',” she said.

“That's what Dadfoot says!”

She opened and closed her mouth, and he realised that she'd meant his birth parents.

By the end of the year, Harry had arranged to apprentice under his Auntie Andromeda for a year, to see if physical healing was for him. Neville was going to continue his studies in

Herbology, and Draco potions, so they would all be in close contact. Hermione was going on to the Ministry and would be studying law by correspondence part-time.

Daphne had already been chosen for a professional Quidditch team. Her parents were somewhat horrified, and blamed Harry's influence; but she was determined, and told them that Harry helped her find her passion in life, so they apologised to him. He shrugged it off; he'd learnt enough about the magical world to know that Daphne was expected to marry a pureblood boy right out of Hogwarts and become a mother and socialite. Quidditch was never meant to be an option.

Anthony was studying education and writing; he wanted to teach the magical world about other cultures, and how they could fit in with magic. His initial focus would be Judaism in the world of magic, and he would branch out as he made a name for himself. Justin had joined him in studying education, with plans on becoming a teacher to Muggleborn students, either at Hogwarts or one of the pre-Hogwarts schools springing up around Britain.

Lavender had taken up Innovations briefly, but decided that it wasn't for her. She instead was more interested in starting a business. She intended to employ Colin, once he finished Hogwarts, to help her with marketing. She wanted something by the seaside, possibly on the Isle of Wight. Megan had no idea what she wanted to do with her life, so she agreed to join forces with Lavender to help her get the business off the ground. Parvati was Lavender's new best friend, and was thinking about starting a bed and breakfast nearby with Padma, for people who didn't eat meat or use other animal products. There wasn't much of a market for it yet, but there'd be enough people interested in the novelty to check it out.

Mandy had joined the choir with Neville, but had no interest in following a musical career. She had discovered a love of food in the Muggle cooking group, however, and wanted to open a bakery in Diagon Alley. At Daphne's begging, she promised to create a kind of filled doughnut with lemon cream in the middle, golden edible dust on the outside, and carved chocolate wings, to represent a Snitch. It would be part of a range for the Quidditch season. Moomy was planning to invest, as long as Mandy made some chocolate pastries as well. The Weasley twins, whose shop was already proving a success, kept her informed of property opportunities in the alley.

Hannah chose to work in administration at St Mungo's, though Harry partly suspected that she made that decision knowing that Neville would deliver healing plants there from time to time. Harry knew that she wanted to be a mother, and he respected her choice. She was kind but fiercely protective, and she'd make a wonderful parent. So would Neville.

Susan planned to go travelling for a year. She didn't want to go straight into the Ministry, worrying that her name would lead to accusations of nepotism. That had never been a problem at the Ministry before, which practically ran on nepotism. Harry imagined that by the time she returned to Britain, she'd be in an excellent position to work with international travellers, but she may very well put that to use by joining forces with Lavender or the Patils, rather than the Ministry.

As they climbed onto the Hogwarts Express, *Whisper Scales* ready to retire to the Potter Manor garden and reunite with her children, Harry felt a pang at leaving the place which had

become a second home to him. But he had an exciting new future to look forward to, and he had nothing about his time at school to regret.

Chapter End Notes

Wow. Longer chapter than usual. Uh, but at least there's one chapter remaining?

Let me know who else's future you want to know more about. I'll mention the Dursleys again, since Petunia really should face some kind of punishment, and Dudley will be out of school by now (assuming he didn't drop out early). We'll also learn about the younger ones. But I'm really trying to focus on who Harry cares about the most.

Please review!

Chapter Fifty-Five

Chapter Summary

What is life like after Hogwarts?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Year 2000 AD

Harry had been attending a lecture in mental health at Cambridge University, and was walking from the train station to the nearest apparation point, when he spotted a group of homeless people. It wasn't unusual to see them around London, sadly. He always made sure to have cash to give them, and check to see if they had a safe place for the night. It wasn't supposed to rain that evening, so they would be safe from that at least. But it would still be chilly.

"Here," he said, beginning to hand out twenty-quid notes. There was a bit of a murmur, and the people began to look up hopefully.

One face looked up at his and he didn't hesitate before ignoring that one and passing money to the others. A woman beside her objected.

"Her situation is of her own making," Harry said firmly. "She and her husband went to prison for abusing me from infancy. I owe her *nothing*."

The others looked at Petunia Dursley with disgust and moved away from her. She pursed her lips.

"You must be doing well for yourself," she said.

"Yes, I no longer have to hope for scraps of food from your table, or work myself to the bone doing chores, or going around in baggy secondhand clothes," Harry said. "Had the situations been reversed, my mother would have taken in your child and treated him kindly, no question. But you chose to be cruel. Had you been kind, you wouldn't have been in prison and I would've made sure you and your husband and son were looked after. But you brought this on yourself by being an abusive bitch to an orphaned child who was left in your care. Goodbye."

He marched away, head held high. What he'd dreamt at Hogwarts didn't matter anymore; she had been brought down in the world to the lowest possible point, and it felt good to snub her,

the way she'd refused to show him any affection.

Closer still to the apparation point he found another group of homeless people, and realised that a new soup kitchen or shelter must have opened nearby. He fished out more money and began handing it out. He nearly jumped in shock when he saw another familiar face, though it took him a good few seconds to recognise it. The jowls were pronounced, in the style of somewhat who'd been overweight and lost a lot of weight in an unhealthily short period of time.

“What are the odds?” he said to the man. “I just passed your wife back there. Did you both manage to get out of jail at the same time? I'm surprised Marge didn't take you in.”

Vernon Dursley glanced down the street, as if he could see Petunia from there. But he lacked the haughtiness of long ago, and Harry remembered seeing the man become broken in prison. Had that really happened?

“Marge blamed me for her problems,” Vernon mumbled.

“Sounds familiar,” Harry said. “Why didn't you pass me onto an orphanage? Did you really just want a child to do all the weeding and vacuuming and cooking for you, so Petunia didn't have to?”

“We were told to look after you,” Vernon said.

“Oh yes, you did such a stellar job of 'looking after me' that you ended up in jail for child abuse! Have you seen Dudley?”

“No. I wanted him to forget us. Get on with his life.”

“Pity you never treated *me* that kindly,” Harry retorted.

“...I'm sorry.”

Since he'd received an apology, Harry gave him a one pound coin. It would only provide a very little amount of help, but at least Vernon displayed some contrition. And it showed that he still held contempt for the older man.

Harry made it to the apparation point without trouble, though he was trembling a little when he arrived in the foyer of Grimmauld Place.

Draco enjoyed experimenting with potions. He'd invited his godfather over, but Mr Snape refused to set foot inside the Black family home. They all got fed up with his stubborn resentment and stopped inviting him. Draco and his mother visited him at his own home. He was looking after himself less and less, ever since he finished using Lily's notes. Like he felt that he'd done what he could and had nothing left to give. Fiddling about with potions kept Draco's mind off it.

He'd put his skills to work in the kitchen, which was where Harry found him, along with many of the other London lot. Hermione was there, as were Anthony, Justin, Daphne, Astoria, Mandy and Hannah. Neville was still living with his grandmother, growing his own plants. Mandy was a temporary addition, since the flat over her bakery was being updated. She was adding a computer and internet, which meant a lot of work. But the goblins were talented and efficient.

Hannah was also temporary, since she and Neville were going to marry soon. But she'd been living at Grimmauld Place since after Hogwarts, like the rest of them. It was Daphne's preferred residence while she wasn't on tour, since it was so central. Usually it was a male-heavy household; Hermione must've been glad to have so many girls around. And Astoria was delighted to have her sister back.

"Hi," Harry said, trudging into the kitchen. Hermione jumped up and pecked him on the lips.

"You're not happy," she said.

"Met Petunia and Vernon."

"Sit down," Anthony said. He was the mother hen of the group; when they pointed out how much he mothered them, he blamed it on his grandmother's influence. He immediately placed a plate in front of Harry and shoved the bread basket close. "Eat something."

"Thanks," Harry said. "They're both homeless. Don't seem to be together anymore. But I wasn't expecting it. Seeing them, I mean. And after being flayed open emotionally by today's lecture." He sighed heavily. "It was on child abuse. There were survivors there. I didn't speak up to say that I was one, too. But it was tempting."

"Oh, Harry," Astoria said. "Where was this?"

He opened his mouth to reply, then narrowed his eyes.

"Why?" he asked, drawing out the word. "What would you do if I told you where they were?"

"Nothing," they all chorused. It was suspicious. He smiled tiredly.

"I won't have any of you risking the Statute of Secrecy," he said. "Like I said, they're homeless. Never on their own. Besides, they're in a bad enough way. They never made their house feel like a home to me; now they no longer have a roof over their heads, something they probably wished on me numerous times."

"We can talk about it later," Hermione said, patting him on the shoulder. "Or talk to Hannah."

"Forget the Dursleys," Harry said. "How are the renovation plans coming along?"

"Mine?" Mandy asked.

"Yours. The manor. I don't care. Just take my mind off... things. Please?"

They all hurried to talk about anything they could while Draco stood over the stove, Daphne mixed drinks, and Justin set the table. The internet had been established at the bakery; now everything only had to be put back in place, so Mandy would be back at Diagon Alley soon. She told Harry about the latest additions to the Weasley twins' Enid Blyton range.

Hannah spoke about the patients Harry knew at St Mungo's. He exchanged looks with Draco while she spoke, and Draco nodded back with a smile. Harry grinned.

"Might pop `round tomorrow, then," he said.

Since he looked cheerful again, no one commented on this.

The next day he and Draco went to St Mungo's together. Draco had a potion to try out, and Harry had an experiment of his own. He blamed Justin for introducing Draco to sci-fi; but if this worked, it would be amazing.

They went to the Janus Thickey ward. No one questioned Harry being there, as a former member of staff. They went to the Longbottoms' room. Harry cajoled Mr Longbottom into taking a sip of the potion, and took a sip himself. Then he held Mr Longbottom's face in his hands and maintained eye contact with him. The potion made it easier to establish a mental connection, similar to Legillimancy, but less intrusive.

"Hello, Frank," Harry murmured.

Hello, Frank replied in his mind.

"Let's talk about what happened to you, shall we?"

They went over the extensive trauma Frank had experienced. Tears fell from his eyes, but Harry held his head in place, no matter how much the man whimpered and whined. He used his training in dealing with symptoms of PTSD and gave Frank some mental exercises to try.

That done, he left Frank's mind, went to Alice, and they both had a sip of the potion again. He made contact with her, just like a Vulcan mind meld, and did the same treatment.

After contact with both, Draco gave them memory potions to help their minds remember to do the exercises Harry had given them. Their theory was that the Longbottoms were trapped in their own minds by the trauma, but that giving them ways to deal with it might un-trap them someday.

They visited each day, making sure that no one was around or could interfere with them. And none of the other patients were in a state to tell on them.

After nearly a week, the Longbottoms were awake. They demanded that Harry continue to treat them, but now Neville and his grandmother sat nearby, shedding tears of joy.

When Hermione and Harry married, they chose to travel around the parts of Britain they had yet to see. They stayed at the Patils' bed and breakfast a couple of nights, naturally, and visited the art gallery Lavender and Megan ran. Dean was their artist in residence that week, while Luna ran art classes for children. The charms Lavender had employed allowed them to see the paintings move, while the Muggles didn't notice it at all. The gallery was known to guarantee exposure for Hogwarts alumni, showing all kinds of artwork. Colin had a lot of his pictures in the photograph section, but he also ran the gift shop.

Luna had paintings on display, and Dean had many sketches on display as well. One of Astoria's works from Hogwarts was on display, but she had moved on from art to writing. She was happy writing about anything and everything under the sun – and some in outer space – with multiple series in the works at once. She had yet to be published, but her stories were a riot, and Harry had told her he'd be there at her first book signing.

“Hello!” Lavender hurried over to them, and threw her arms around both. Hermione hugged her back fiercely, but Harry disentangled himself as soon as he could.

“Is that a new photo?” he asked.

“It is,” Lavender said, beaming. “I helped Colin take it.”

It was a large panoramic photograph of a dolphin, which occasionally threw back its head and laughed, bobbing in place with flicks of its tail. Coral and seaweed undulated in the background.

“Bubblehead Charm on the camera?” Harry asked softly. She nodded, bouncing in place.

“And... did you know...” She looked side to side, and Harry and Hermione leaned in. “Dolphins understand *Mermish*?”

They gasped. Hermione's eyes gleamed with the possibilities.

“They can't speak it,” Lavender continued. “But I found that when I asked it to look towards us, and to stay in place, *it did*.”

“That's *amazing*, Lavender,” Harry said.

“Mr Lovegood's going to do an article for *The Quibbler* on it,” she said.

“Harry, we *have* to go scuba-diving,” Hermione said.

“Yes, dear.”

Within a few years, the renovations at Potter Manor had finished, and it was now a refuge for people who needed help. Hannah was the head of nursing; Neville donated ingredients for potions – free for life, in gratitude for his parents' return – and Harry made the potions. And Susan, who spent longer abroad than intended, became the magic-Muggle liaison and lived

on site at the manor; she was also the official carer of the therapy cats, descended from the ones Mrs Figg left to Harry in her will.

Neville was training to take over from Professor Sprout. Draco ran an apothecary and provided potions exclusively for the refuge. Justin was teaching at a pre-Hogwarts academy. He'd already asked Professor Sprout to come and teach with him. It would be less stressful than teaching at Hogwarts. (Hogwarts hadn't been all that stressful for Harry, but he supposed that he'd only been a student, not a teacher.)

Padma had moved from the Isle of Wight to expand the business, and had opened on the outskirts of London. She got baked goods for the weekend from Mandy's bakery.

Dadfoot and Moomy continued living in Scotland, even after Mr Lupin Senior died. When abused Muggleborn children were removed from their households, they spent time recovering at the refuge, under Harry and Hannah's care. But once the court cases were over with, Harry's fathers were granted guardianship of them, and they moved to the Potter property in Scotland.

"Potter Manor was a refuge for me, just as it was for you," Harry told Dadfoot, who got emotional over his words.

Not as emotional as when Harry told him and Moomy that they were going to be grandparents.

At breakfast one day, before work, Hermione placed a Muggle newspaper in front of him.

"It's from last week," she said. "Justin wasn't sure whether you'd want to read it. But I think you should. Here." She turned to the obituaries section.

"'Private D Dursley killed in action'," he read aloud. "Huh. Didn't think Dudley would actually enlist. 'Joined military school at the age of seven.' As if he had a choice. 'No family. Died while driving over a hidden IED'."

"It's a kind of bomb," Hermione said. "Improvised explosive device."

"Yes. 'Death was not immediate.' *Good*."

"Harry!"

He frowned at her. She frowned back.

"At least he died serving his country," she said.

"Discipline probably did him good," Harry said. "Studies show that psychopaths and sociopaths do better under discipline, like in prison or the military. Something with rigid order. It's the only way to keep them in line. And I can't see him getting a good enough character reference to do anything else. Or the marks."

“He managed to learn how to drive a car,” she said drily. “I trust you're not actually upset?”

“No. He bullied me. If he didn't take the opportunities given to him by the military to get a higher education and make something of himself, the way his parents would've wanted, then it's on him. If he'd behaved himself in foster care he wouldn't have been sent to military school by the judge. I have nothing to do with what's happened to him, and I couldn't care less.”

“And do you really think he was a sociopath or psychopath?” Hermione asked, refilling her teacup.

Harry shrugged.

“I'm probably biased,” he said. “Dudley didn't know how to think for himself, because he never had to. Given a chance, he would've remained a bully, like Vernon, and would've made plenty of people's lives miserable as their boss. If he'd chosen another path, maybe he could have one day led a respectable life. At least the Dursley line has ended with him.”

“As long as you're not upset,” she said, touching his hand. He smiled at her.

“No, I'm not,” he said.

Hermione's parents lived long enough to see their grandchildren, but not their great-grandchildren. Their funerals were well-attended by many from the magical community. Draco and Neville were among the pall-bearers at both funerals. Harry read the eulogies, since Hermione was too choked up on both occasions. Daphne even got a match rescheduled so she could attend Mrs Granger's funeral. There was a bit of a fuss, but it died down quickly.

Daphne sometimes played against Ginny Weasley; the Weasley girl had made the reserves in the Harpies. (Dadfoot said it was an appropriate team for the daughter of Molly Weasley.) Harry clapped politely for her, as a cousin, but otherwise he was there for Daphne.

He ran into the Weasleys at a match once, before he married Hermione. Ginny tried flirting with him, but he glared at her stonily and she stuttered to a blushing halt. The twins snickered when they saw it, and told Harry that Daphne was the best professional player on the circuit, even better than Viktor Krum. Ron Weasley refused to acknowledge Harry. The twins told him that he barely got passing marks, and only had work because he was working under his father at the Ministry. Even then, he was usually on thin ice; only the threat of divorce kept Mr Weasley from firing him.

Harry attended Mr Snape's funeral. So did his fathers. They said they were surprised he'd held out for so long; privately, so was Harry. He'd tried to help with what was obviously clinical depression, but Mr Snape kept pushing him away, saying he didn't need pity from Lily's son. Harry wondered if he'd inhaled too many potion fumes over the years, giving him some kind of dementia, and made sure that Draco's laboratory was always well-ventilated. The Weasley twins, too.

Mr Snape wasted away. He didn't look much paler than he had during life. Draco didn't come out of his room for nearly twenty-four hours after hearing the news. Harry was sure to help carry the casket, since his friend was in no state to.

Dadfoot and Moomy were naturals at parenting, and were extremely well-practised by the time Hermione began popping out grandchildren for them. Moomy was also considered a grandfather by Lavender and Dean's children, due to his relation to the Brown family. Both men would entertain the children by turning into their Animagus forms and telling them about the adventures they had at Hogwarts with James and Lily.

The years passed. The next generation went through Hogwarts and began their own families. More anniversaries passed. At every major anniversary, when Harry and Hermione could be convinced to host a party instead of having a private dinner, Moomy told the story about how they met.

“He saw her across the street, and without even checking for cars, he ran over the road and nearly bumped into Hermione. I don't know *what* her parents thought, but I had no idea he was about to compromise the Statute of Secrecy.” He used pretty much the same words every year, but as he recounted their conversation he imitated Harry and Hermione's young voices fairly well, always getting a laugh.

They both spoiled the children rotten, and enjoyed being foster parents for those who needed a place to stay. Dadfoot had known their situation all too well, and Moomy related to the fish-out-of-water feeling he'd experienced due to constant moves during his childhood. They could empathise with their charges. Mintzi and Dobby did their best to keep the two remaining Marauders out of mischief; but it seemed old age wasn't enough to slow them down.

Aunt Amelia became Minister for Magic eventually, and began to groom Hermione to take over for her. She was replaced as head of the DMLE by Auror Nymphadora Tonks, who was excellent at strategies but too clumsy to carry out more delicate operations. She could also do an uncanny impression of Madam Bones when necessary, using her Metamorphmagus ability.

Within a few years, Amelia Bones retired and Hermione replaced her as Minister for Magic. No one dared run against her, and with so many of her friends having seats in the Wizengamot, it was a clear majority. She fretted to Harry that it might have been favouritism, but he assured her it wasn't.

“You'd have been Minister sooner if it wasn't for the fact that Aunt Amelia wasn't ready to retire,” he said. “At least you've had plenty of time to build a good name for yourself, also have children and raise them all to Hogwarts age. You now have the bonus of plenty of life experience. No one can deny that you have more authority with age. And you didn't get the position because you're married to me, or descended from the Rosier and Dagworth lines. You got here on your own merits. You've put through all the legislation that meant the most to you. You've put in the time and the work, and now you can take your rightful place at the head of our world.”

“You never wanted to become Minister for Magic?” she asked.

Harry made a face.

“Not bloody likely,” he said. “I’ve got enough fame. I’d rather keep working as a mind healer, thank you. You’re more of a crusader than me.”

A few months after his one hundred and twenty-second birthday, Harry saw someone who looked exactly like him, sitting across a desk.

“*Finally* you are here at the right time,” the man said.

“Who are you?” Harry asked, and he glanced around. Something was niggling at the back of his brain; something about this was familiar.

“I am your personal reaper,” the man said. “Welcome to the afterlife. I am sure you will be happy here. Hermione will follow soon. It will be soon to you, anyway. A few more months in her time, but probably a few minutes here. I am sure she will badger her own reaper with questions.”

“So I’m dead,” Harry concluded.

“Not for the first time,” his reaper said.

Some of the memories flooded back. Previous visits, which had once been erased, now floated to the front of his mind for a few seconds, before vanishing again. The last time, when he was seventeen, played out in full. He couldn’t remember this previous timeline his young self talked about with the younger reaper, but it sounded unappealing.

“Do you have any questions?” the reaper asked.

“I wouldn’t mind hearing about other people’s experiences in the afterlife,” Harry said. “But I could ask them in person, I suppose?”

“Albus Dumbledore keeps to himself,” his reaper replied. “Once it became clear that he could not go back and fix things himself, he chose seclusion over interacting with others. Perhaps he was concerned that they would blame him? Let me see, who else? Ah yes, Tom Riddle. His soul was too fractured for us. The pieces of it remain in purgatory, and he searches endlessly for them.

“Some of your foes went straight to the place you would call Hell. Dolores Umbridge, who caused you a great deal of pain in the other timeline, has an eternity of getting her just rewards. Fenrir Greyback as well. Many of the Death Eaters. Some spent time in purgatory, to give them a chance to enter Heaven. Most failed that test.

“You, however, are bound for Heaven. You can wait here until your wife is done, and enter paradise together. We still have time.”

“Is anyone waiting for us?” Harry asked.

“Your fathers, your biological parents, the elder Longbottoms, Arabella Figg, *Whisper Scales*--”

“*Whisper Scales*?” Harry exclaimed.

“Snakes have souls, too,” his reaper said. “Of course she is here. Hedwing, too. Some of your professors are waiting. Various honorary aunts and uncles. Draco Malfoy, Justin Finch-Fletchley, and Lavender Thomas are there, front and centre out of your fellow students. Pandora and Xenophilius Lovegood. Pandora's reaper told her that she had initially died young, and that your actions in guilt-tripping her and providing her with Fawkes's protection kept her alive for many more decades. They're both eager to thank you. The Weasley twins--”

“But they're still alive,” Harry said, dismayed.

“Will be joining you soon, since you and your wife have taken so much of our time,” his reaper said, frowning at the interruption. “You will reach the gates soon before them. If you wish to avoid their parents and younger siblings, I suggest you move away from the entrance to Heaven as soon as you get there.”

He stood up. Harry hastily stood as well, and was glad that the aches and pains in his body had disappeared. There was no pain here for the good people.

“Thank you for fulfilling your end of the bargain,” the reaper said, holding out his hand. Harry shook it firmly.

“Thank you for giving me the chance,” he said.

Then he stepped out of the office and into Hermione's arms.

“Let's go and see our family,” he whispered into her ear.

And so they did.

THE END

Chapter End Notes

Right. Not crying. Surprising, I know.

I tried to fit in what people had asked for. If anyone wants to write a 'missing scene' from this story, I could start another story, an open one maybe, and you can post your scenes there. Just bear in mind the rating. But there are plenty of things you can write about.

I need to try to get back into writing original fiction, so I don't think I'll be contributing anything. But if you need ideas, there are various museums they would have visited, there was a lot of interest in going to an amusement park, some of the dates Harry and Hermione went on, wedding scenes, names of their children, etc. Really, they lived such long lives that there's plenty to write about, if any of you are interested. You could expand on the characters we didn't see, only heard about.

Anyway. Please review! And thank you to all the readers who had faith in me from the beginning, enough to follow this story. I hope I have given satisfaction.

End Notes

Uh, yeah, it's been awhile, hasn't it? I lost my desire to write MCU fan fiction after the travesty that was 'Endgame', which has left me a bit adrift. But I've been reading a bunch of stories based on Reptilia28's Don't Fear the Reaper Challenge, and it inspired me to get back into the Harry Potter fandom and try writing again. Good lord, anything to break me out of this dry spell I've been going through, writing-wise.

(Is it blasphemous that I started this on Good Friday? Or just strangely appropriate?)

Please review!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!