

Mr. Intel
FanficAuthors.net

Making it Right

Prologue: The Burrow Again

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A thick blanket of pre-dawn fog covered the ground where Harry stood, drowning out all sound, and swallowing every light source. He trudged up a well worn lane until he fell into a ditch that marked the property line of the estate he was looking for. It had been almost three years since he'd been there – at his wedding to Ginny. It hurt to think of those days, when the war was still manageable, and so many lives hadn't been taken. A distant explosion rocked the ground, urging him on.

He stumbled up a small hill, his feet catching on loose rocks and low, invisible hedges. He was alone, the last of the Order of the Phoenix that had survived the year-long purge of all resistance to Voldemort's onslaught of destruction. It had all started before Harry turned eighteen; the year he'd taken off from school to search for the Horcruxes.

He'd destroyed every one of Voldemort's soul containers but the snake, Nagini. As he lay on the ground in front of Voldemort during the Battle of Hogwarts, he had watched through the millimetre slit in his eyes as Neville was killed outright. It had taken every ounce of control for Harry to not leap up and destroy Voldemort right there. Then, while they were battling in the great hall at Hogwarts, Harry had been disarmed in his fight against Voldemort and lost the Elder Wand's allegiance. Harry had escaped with this life, but the outcome of the war had been determined from that moment on.

The fog lifted slightly as he crested the hill and in the dim distance, he could make out the broken shell of his favourite place in the world. The Burrow's roof had been torn off, but one section remained dangling precariously on the last shred of magic left. Ron's old room lay open to the elements and Harry used his magic to leap to its worn wooden floor.

He turned and looked out over the fog. The sun was trying to peek above the horizon, but the fog held its light at bay. Another explosion rocked the ground, this time closer. Harry sat cross-legged on the floor and waited.

Soon, the fog began to part as if a giant scythe had ripped it in half. Thousands of Death Eaters and Dementors flooded the once tranquil grounds of The Burrow. In the very centre, Voldemort floated across the dying grass, his snake, Nagini trailing behind him.

"You have lost, Harry Potter," he yelled and was answered by a chorus of cheers from the encircling Death Eaters. "You are alone in the world, now, Harry. I am merciful, however, and I will send you to the ones you love." Voldemort pointed the Elder Wand at Harry.

Harry screamed. "NO!" There was a sound like a thunder clap and the Death Eaters were silenced. Harry stared at the pair of gleaming red eyes that had menaced him for his entire life. "It ends here!" Before Voldemort could react, Harry reached inside himself and with all his might, wrenched his magic from inside his body. He pulled it into a ball of crackling blue power, feeding it until every ounce was extracted.

His opponents looked around in confusion. Voldemort sent several Killing Curses at Harry, but they were simply absorbed by the pulsing ball of energy. Then, with his last ounce of strength, he compressed it into a microscopic point and let go.

The explosion was massive – the equivalent of a ten megaton nuclear weapon. It ripped across the landscape, decimating everything in its path. The Death Eaters, Nagini, and Voldemort were all instantly incinerated.

Harry was ripped from his body by the force of it, but his spirit lingered – drawn to his exploding magical core. As the magic continued to flow into the night, Harry saw a hole open beneath him, where his core had been. He floated down to look, unaware that it was pulling him with relentless pressure. All eternity seemed to stare back at him and as he crossed into the void, his last thought was how much he just wanted to hold his Ginny one more time...

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There was a deafening snap and Harry's eyes shot open. He was breathing heavily, trying to force the nightmare out of his mind. He lay, staring at a familiar ceiling, smelling scents that crept out of long forgotten memories. He was in the Burrow, except, it wasn't the Burrow from his nightmare. It was whole. He sat up.

Ron lay in his bed, snoring softly. He looked too young – younger than the man that had been killed a year before Harry had exploded his magical core.

Harry rubbed his eyes under his glasses and looked around. It was definitely the Burrow. What had happened? *Had* he been dreaming? It all seemed so real and yet, he felt like he didn't belong here, like he was living someone else's life again.

The nightmare had been so vivid; vivid enough that he could remember whole months of life from it better than he could remember what he'd eaten the day before in this Burrow. He remembered the hole left from his magic exploding in the ruins of the old Burrow. It drew him in and now he was here, obviously in a different time, but was he real?

He held out his hand and gave his leg a solid pinch. *Ouch*. Yep, definitely real.

He crept quietly from his bed and as he stood, he marvelled at how big everything seemed. He measured himself against the doorway and shook his head in wonder. Whatever age the Ron in the bed was, Harry seemed to be the same. Careful of the creak in the third stair from the top, Harry tiptoed down to a room he'd only been in twice. A sliver of moonlight illuminated a sleeping form in the small bed. She was young, too, but Harry knew that face anywhere. It was Ginny – his Ginny.

Climbing back into his camp bed, Harry's mind whirred with a million questions. How was it possible? He was certain that he'd killed Voldemort and himself with that last ditch effort to end the war, but what had happened after? The only explanation he could come up with was that his spirit had somehow gone back in time to inhabit this body. But what happened to the Harry that lived now? And when was now, anyway? It was definitely before his wedding, and judging by the size of Ron and Ginny, he guessed it was sometime during his school years.

Exhaustion stole over him, so Harry lay back down, content to work out these questions in the morning. The most important things would have to be determined soon, however. He decided that he'd been given a gift. For whatever reason, he'd been placed in a time before Voldemort had begun to destroy in earnest with all his memories and knowledge from his future life. With a grim smile, Harry resolved then that he was going to do everything he could to make things better this time around.

Making it Right Ginny

Chapter One – Ginny

When Harry awoke the next morning, he blinked unseeing at the blurs of seven people in garishly orange clothes flitting around their posters. He felt for his glasses and shoved them on his face, bringing the players for the Canons into focus. Ron was no longer snoring but was face down on his bed, his duvet wrapped around his legs in a tight knot.

Stifling a yawn with his fist, Harry sat up and his eyes instantly found a small rusty cage in the corner of Ron's room. His vision went red as he stared at the man that had betrayed his parents to Voldemort. In all his thinking last night, Harry hadn't considered Peter's presence here. That meant it was just before Harry's second year, as he'd stayed in the Leaky Cauldron before his third and Scabbers was revealed to be Pettigrew before his fourth.

Harry's vision became less clouded as he focused on his plan. This was just one more thing to consider. In fact, it was one more thing that he could put to rights. If he could expose Peter this year, Sirius could be freed a year early and he could live with him instead of the Dursleys. It would also mean Harry's third year would be unencumbered by Dementors, or a paranoid Wizarding world determined to protect Harry from a known murderer. He could use that extra time to collect Horcruxes....

This line of thinking led to more complicated thoughts and what to do with the consequences of tampering with the timeline as he knew it. Harry desperately needed to write things down, but didn't dare trust anything he hadn't personally charmed himself. He would have to acquire a diary of his own and then wait until he was at Hogwarts to make the necessary safeguards before he would feel secure putting any foreknowledge on paper. He just hoped his thoughtful planning could wait that long before it was clouded over with other thoughts.

Ron rolled over in his bed and yawned long and loud. He sat up and rubbed his eyes with the points of his fists. "You smell that?"

The scent of bacon and toast wafted into their room from the kitchen three floors below. "Breakfast?" asked Harry and they grinned. "Race you there!"

Harry was out the door before Ron reacted. "Oi!" he yelled but Ron's lanky legs soon caught up with Harry's short ones.

They thundered into the kitchen together and found Mr. and Mrs. Weasley and Ginny already sitting at the table. The moment she saw Harry, Ginny sent her bowl of porridge off the table with her elbow. When she emerged with her bowl her face was on fire. Harry smirked internally. He knew exactly what day it was. He scanned the table and sure enough, their Hogwarts letters were in a pile by Mr. Weasley. Ginny's was already opened and sat by her juice. She was about to take her first trip to Diagon Alley as a prospective student.

"Letters from school," said Mr. Weasley, and he passed envelopes to Ron and Harry. "Dumbledore already knows you're here, Harry – doesn't miss a trick, that man. You've got them, too," he added as Fred and George shuffled in, still in their pyjamas.

Harry pretended to read through his letter as he considered his plan for the day. He deliberated with himself about Ginny, who was carefully eating her toast. She was the most important person in his life whether she was eleven or not. The tricky part was that she didn't know him at all at this point in their lives, and so apart from the stories she'd heard from Ron about their first year at Hogwarts, her feelings for him weren't based on anything real.

They were talking about Lockhart's book list and Harry sighed at the memory of his lessons with the pompous git. At least the defence teacher was mostly harmless.

Mrs. Weasley was speaking now. "I expect we'll be able to pick up a lot of Ginny's things second-hand."

This triggered something in Harry's memory. "Oh, are you starting at Hogwarts this year?" he asked Ginny as convincingly as he could manage.

She nodded, a blush spread from her cheeks to the roots of her crimson hair, and she put her elbow in the butter dish. No one saw because Percy walked in, but Harry winked at Ginny, who gaped at him.

Percy sat on Errol, bringing Harry out of his reverie. They discovered Hermione's letter, which Ron read and they agreed to meet on Wednesday in Diagon Alley. That gave Harry some time to think about his course of action.

Ginny would be getting the diary soon. That was something he could deal with immediately and he planned on saving his future wife from that torture as soon as he could. He would also be missing the Leaky Cauldron for Borgin and Burkes, which would put him into the same Vanishing Cabinet that Malfoy would later use to gain access to Hogwarts – another opportunity for Harry to prevent future deaths.

For now, Harry was determined to push his relationship with Ginny forward in simple, easy steps. It was going to start immediately.

Harry?" asked Ron after he'd finished breakfast. "Wanna play Quidditch with me, Fred, and George?"

"Sure." He swallowed his toast and chased it with the rest of his orange juice. Ron, Fred, and George left to find their shoes. Ginny was still sitting in her seat, her breakfast hardly touched. "You want to come, too?" he asked softly so her mum didn't hear.

Ginny stared at him, like a deer caught in the headlights of an automobile. "Me?" she squeaked.

Harry gave her a reassuring smile. He leaned toward her and in a conspiratorial whisper, said, "I understand that you've been keeping your Quidditch skills hidden. Maybe you can make your debut with us?"

She didn't move a muscle as he waited for her to answer. Maybe he was rushing things and she just wasn't ready for him to be in her life yet.

Suddenly, a huge grin spread across her face. "Can I ride your Nimbus two-thousand?"

Harry's smile matched hers. "Definitely."

She gave a whoop and dashed up the stairs, returning in thirty seconds dressed in a jumper, a pair of jeans, and her trainers.

Ron clomped into the kitchen at the same time. "You ready? Hey, what's Ginny doing?"

"I invited her," said Harry, challenging Ron with his gaze.

"But she's never flown before. Mum'll go spare if she gets hurt."

Ginny straightened beside Harry, sending her best Mrs. Weasley glare at her brother. "I bet I can fly circles around you, Ron."

Ron took a step back, seeming to surrender. "Okay, okay," he said, waving his hands in front of him. It appeared to Harry that Ginny's reputation as a powerful witch extended back at least this far and that Ron wanted none of her kind of retribution if he pushed his luck. Then, the redhead smiled at his sister. "But I get first ride on Harry's broom."

They flew for the rest of the morning, Fred and George on their Cleansweep Fives, Ron on his ancient Shooting Star and Harry and Ginny trading turns on his Nimbus. They threw apples instead of using an actual Quaffle because they couldn't risk being seen by Muggles in the village. Ginny turned out to be the surprise of the day, easily outmanoeuvring her brothers and setting Ron into fits of shock.

"How come I never knew you could fly like this?" he whinged. "Think of all the times we could have beaten Charlie..."

Ginny huffed. "I've been stealing your brooms from the shed since I was six. Even if I would have asked, you wouldn't have let me play."

Ron glanced at Harry. "Yeah, well, you can thank Harry for that."

She blushed, seemingly involuntarily at the mention of Harry's name, but recovered quickly. "Thanks, Harry," she said softly.

Fred and George waggled their eyebrows at their exchange but blissfully, they didn't say anything.

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Harry feigned confusion at the mention of Floo powder that Wednesday. He also winked at Ginny when her dad asked about escapators, and was rewarded with a giggle. Finally, after wading through the mounds of advice Ron and Mrs. Weasley heaped on him, he deliberately mispronounced the name of Diagon Alley and threw down his handful of gritty powder.

Strangely, the sensation of travelling by Floo felt just as it had when Harry honestly had first used it. He felt strangely sick and dizzy as he spiralled toward London. It was as if his body had its own memory and the newness affected Harry despite ten years of memories to the contrary. Harry concentrated and when the right grate appeared, he stuck his feet out and skidded to a stop in a familiar, dark shop.

He crept quietly out of the stone fireplace and instead of trying to make a break for it, he made a beeline for the Vanishing Cabinet. The Malfoys entered and a familiar scene played before Harry once more. Draco petulantly whined about Harry's racing brooms and position on the Quidditch Team while Lucius bartered with Borgin about the illegal items he wanted to sell. At last, the Malfoys left and Harry was alone.

He pulled out his wand and ran the tip of it over the cabinet. The spells that linked it to the one at Hogwarts were still intact. He poked his wand at the points of magic that bound it to the wood and undid them one by one. Soon, it was rendered as normal as any cabinet you might find at a flea market.

Satisfied, Harry stepped carefully out of the store and into Knockturn Alley.

He ignored everyone he met, intent on making it to the lighter and more welcoming Diagon Alley when his way was blocked. "Not lost, are you dear?"

Harry muttered under his breath and took out his wand. "No. Now if you don't mind, I'll be on my way."

The witch with the fingernails eyed Harry's wand suspiciously. "What's this? Going to hex me with a Tickling Jinx?"

Harry growled, something a bit worse than a Tickling Jinx on his lips when he heard a familiar voice.

"HARRY! What d'yeh think yer doin' down there?"

The witch jumped and her basket of fingernails fell with a clatter down the stairs. Harry raced toward Hagrid and followed him into the alley.

After explaining himself to Hagrid, they were reunited with Hermione and the Weasleys. Fred and George were especially jealous of Harry's trip into the seedy side of the Wizarding world. As they were walking to Gringott's, Harry filled Ron and Hermione in on everything the Malfoy's did in Borgin and Burkes. Mr. Weasley was especially interested in his report.

While Hermione waited for them in the Gringott's lobby, the Weasleys and Harry set off for their respective vaults. Harry took his normal allotment for his school purchases, but was surprised when he looked at the pile of Galleons. It was far larger than he had remembered and almost towered as high as his family vault, which became available to him after he turned seventeen. This puzzled him, but he rationalized it as Goblin magic possibly recognizing Harry's more mature spirit. Seeing the gold, he decided that he was going to make another change in this new timeline. He scooped another pile of gold into a separate bag and stuffed it into his robes.

They set off together from the bank, excitement alight in everyone's faces at the prospect of spending money. When they arrived at Madam Malkin's, Harry pulled Mr. Weasley aside as everyone fanned out into the shop.

"What can I do for you, Harry?" asked the elder Weasley.

"Well," Harry explained. "I'd like to do something for you for keeping me over the summer."

This seemed to take Mr. Weasley aback, but he did not immediately decline as Mrs. Weasley was certain to do. "What were you thinking of?"

"Well," began Harry, "I couldn't help overhear that you wouldn't be able to afford buying Ginny's robes this year. Maybe I could make a donation?"

Mr. Weasley rubbed his chin in contemplation. "Why would you do that?" he asked sincerely. "You've only known Ron for a year and the rest of us for a few days. What would inspire such a spirit of giving?"

Harry pulled out the extra bag of Galleons. "Ron's the first friend I ever had that's my age. Your family helped me get on the platform at King's Cross, and you rescued me from being imprisoned at my relatives for the summer. How could I not be grateful?"

This seemed to have affected Mr. Weasley.

Harry shoved the bag into his hand, knowing there would be enough to pay for all of Ginny's books, robes, wand, and other required supplies. The way he figured it, Ginny was as good as his wife anyway, so it was already hers to spend. He just needed to supply a more acceptable excuse to her father, who likely wouldn't take such a declaration with a warm embrace. "I don't have a lot of ways to show how much I appreciate your family, Mr. Weasley. Let me do this for you this one time."

Mr. Weasley nodded mutely and Harry ran off to get his own robes before the older man could change his mind. As he caught up with Ron, he looked back at his future father-in-law and saw him speaking with Ginny. She pointed to the bag and he nodded. Ginny looked up and locked eyes with Harry. He smiled and she smiled back, mouthing the words 'Thank you'.

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Flourish and Blotts was as crowded as Harry remembered. Lockhart was signing his books at the back of the store, much to the delight of the witches, both old and young. Harry quickly added a simple diary to his stack of books, but was otherwise deliberate in making sure he didn't have a run in with the incompetent professor. The only drama of the afternoon was when they ran into Lucius and Draco.

Harry knew that he'd have to let Lucius give the diary to Ginny because there'd be no other way to obtain it and destroying the Horcruxes early was very much part of Harry's plan. Saving Ginny from the effects of possession by Voldemort was almost as important, so it was with restrained anxiety he watched the confrontation unfold.

Harry was paying close attention this time, as Arthur and Lucius fought. When Hagrid broke them apart, Lucius slipped one hand casually into his robes and extracted the diary, placing it carefully under Ginny's copy of *A Beginner's Guide to Transfiguration*.

"Here, girl - take your book - it's the best your father can give you -" Lucius said and strode out of the shop. Ginny tucked the books into her cauldron and didn't give a hint of recognition that she'd been given more than he'd taken.

Hagrid and Mrs. Weasley traded turns scolding Mr. Weasley for fighting while Harry began to think of ways to get the diary from Ginny. Knowing her as he did, she wouldn't simply give it to him if he asked about it. She would probably start writing in it that very night, and so would be reluctant to give it to the very subject of her likely first entry. Therefore, Harry spent all of his effort in thinking of a way to get Ginny to give up the diary, when every day that passed made that more and more difficult.

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It was a week later that Harry found an opportunity to speak with Ginny alone. He'd used that week to continue building up their friendship, while maintaining his relationship with Ron, who was still prone to jealousy at this stage of his life. Still, Ginny had been very close to Ron before he'd left for Hogwarts, so it made for a ready excuse for Harry to include her. Over the course of their time at The Burrow, Ron had slowly grown accustomed to Harry's insistence that she be invited to anything that Harry and Ron did together.

The three of them were playing chess when Mrs. Weasley called Ron to sort his laundry, leaving Harry blessedly alone with Ginny.

"You're pretty good at chess," commented Harry as he slid his rook over two squares. Her hair was held back in a tight ponytail by pink and purple ribbons and he had to fight to not say the leave off the last three words.

Ginny's eyes darted across the board, calculating her next move. "Ron used me as his guinea pig to test his strategies on," she said as she deliberated between moving a pawn or her bishop. "Some of it must have rubbed off on me."

He waited for her to finish before he spoke again. "Are you nervous about going to Hogwarts?"

She tore her eyes off the board to stare at him. He noticed that they were already starting to puff out underneath the rims and realized suddenly how her mother must have failed to notice – she probably chalked it up to Ginny being wound up about starting Hogwarts.

"A little," she replied and resumed calculating moves in her head.

"You seem a little more than just nervous," observed Harry shrewdly, hoping that Ginny didn't think he was being too forward. "Are you sleeping well?"

Harry realized that this probably sounded strange coming from his mouth, and stranger still being directed at Ginny, but he couldn't help himself. He was, after all, a twenty-two year old in a twelve year old's body.

"Why?" she asked, a different, more desperate kind of nervousness creeping into her voice.

Harry shrugged, trying to calm her down. "I just noticed that you've been having nightmares the past couple of nights."

She dropped her eyes again, but this time, she wasn't plotting how best to capture his king. "It's nothing."

Harry frowned. There was a muffled explosion from the twins room that set Mrs. Weasley muttering in the kitchen. He decided it was time to be bolder with her. "Ginny," he began, "does this have anything to do with your new diary?"

Her head shot up, panic etched on her face. "Wha – What?"

Harry tried to offer a reassuring smile. "I just noticed that you've been holed up in your room a lot and I was worried, so I peeked in last night and saw you writing in your diary. I hope I'm not being too nosey."

Red crept across her cheeks until it made its way to the spotted flesh of her nose. She seemed to hold her breath, brown eyes darting between his green ones. Then, she seemed to deflate. "Yeah," she said, hanging her head as if in defeat. "It's... It's really weird."

"What is?" Harry prompted. "The diary? Is it magical?"

She nodded, the hair spilling from her ponytail around her shoulders. "It writes back to me."

"Oh," said Harry. He reached out a hand and took hers. "Do you trust me?"

She made eye contact again, and Harry was relieved to see that the fear was gone from her face. She nodded.

"Will you let me see the diary? I think I might be able to help."

She hesitated and then gave another stuttering nod. Without a word, she sprang up the stairs and brought it back just as Harry was moving the chess board off the table between them. She clutched it to her chest as if it were her most prized possession and Harry winced internally at how much Tom's soul must have already dug into Ginny.

He held out his hand. "I promise I won't read anything you've written."

This didn't seem to placate her, because Harry knew that the diary absorbed everything that was written and Ginny's main concern was that Tom would tell Harry her secrets. Still, she seemed to win her internal struggle and placed it on the table.

"Good," said Harry reassuringly. "I'm just going to write my name. You can sit next to me to make sure I'm not doing anything weird."

Again, she seemed to be fighting an internal struggle, but she came around the table and sat on the floor by Harry. Harry dipped his quill into the ink well and hovered it over the diary. As with his first experience, he let the ink drop and watched it soak in. Then, he began to write.

My name is Harry Potter.

The ink was sucked in and then new words appeared.

Hello, Harry Potter. My name is Tom Riddle. Howdid you come into possession of my diary? Where is Ginny?

Harry gave Ginny a reassuring smile before he wrote again.

Ginny is next to me. She is afraid of you, Tom. Will you tell us howyou came to be created?

There was a pause as the ink absorbed and then new words flashed across the page.

That's not something I'm willing to divulge just yet. Perhaps you can tell me about yourself, Harry. I can teach you many things about magic and I only ask that in return you help me understand the world you live in.

Harry put the quill down and looked at Ginny.

"That's exactly what he told me," she said in a quiet voice. Then, her jaw clenched and determination stole across her face. "I don't want it any more. Can we get rid of it?"

Harry smiled. "Yes, we can get rid of it, but I think this one will be harder to get rid of than an ordinary diary." He picked it up and aimed it at the fireplace. It landed in a bed of coals, sending a cloud of ashes swirling up the chimney. The fire sputtered momentarily around the cold book before it continued to burn. Harry beckoned Ginny to follow him and they knelt beside the fire. After five minutes, the diary wasn't even singed. Harry used the fire tongs to extract the diary and place it on the hearth.

He turned the pages. "See? Not even a bit warm."

Ginny touched the diary with her fingers, and then recoiled. "It's evil, isn't it?"

"Yes," replied Harry. "It's my guess that whoever created this diary, put a little piece of their soul inside."

Ginny's face contorted in horror. "Why would someone do something so *awful*?"

Harry shook his head. "We can only guess." He thought for a second and then looked up to Ginny again. "I'd like to show this to Dumbledore. He'll know what to do with it, but we need a way to keep it out of everyone's... curiosity." He gave her a wry smile, which she returned with a grimace. He reached up to her ponytail. "Do you mind?" She shook her head a tiny bit and he untied the ribbons holding her hair in place. When her hair fell out, her familiar scent washed over him. It was a very intimate moment for a twelve and eleven year old, and Harry struggled to not reach out and touch her face. She wasn't ready for that yet.

"Here," he said, his fingers trembling. "Tie one of these around the diary." Harry bound the book with the purple one while she used the pink one. "Now, take your wand and tap it to the ribbon you tied." They both tapped their wands. "Now say, *Compingo Strictum*." As he said it, the ribbon glowed and tightened its hold on the book. Ginny repeated his words and her ribbon fastened itself like Harry's had. "Good," said Harry. "Now, no one can open the diary unless both of us undo our spell."

She looked at him in wonder. "Really?" she said, awed. Then, she flung her arms around Harry's neck. "Oh, thank you, Harry." She held on longer than strictly necessary and just as Harry was about to reach his own arms around her, someone cleared their throat.

Ginny sprang back, leaving Harry feeling bereft. "What's going on here?" asked Ron, who was eyeing them warily. "What are you doing with my sister?"

Harry spread out his hands. "I'm just helping Ginny work through a personal problem."

Ginny was blushing furiously, but she still seemed grateful. Harry stood. "It's all taken care of. You done doing laundry? Wanna play some more chess?"

Ron narrowed his eyes again. "Nah, I'm about ready to kip for the night."

Harry shrugged and took the diary. He whispered to Ginny as soon as Ron left the living room. "We'll go to Dumbledore first thing when we get to Hogwarts."

She nodded and reached out a hand to Harry's. "Thank you, Harry," she said and then ran after her brother.

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September first came more quickly than Harry had anticipated. He relished his time with the Weasleys, unencumbered by Voldemort, an interfering Ministry, or any other dark threat. Having time to build up his relationship with Ginny made it especially sweet.

The Weasley family plus Harry navigated their trolleys through King's Cross station, careful not to attract too much attention. Nervousness radiated from Ginny, so Harry took up a position directly next to her. Ron stayed on his other side until they reached the barrier.

"Fred, George, Percy," called Mr. Weasley. "You first. Your mother and I will go through with Ginny, then Ron and Harry will follow."

The older Weasley boys slipped through the barricade and Mrs. Weasley beckoned Ginny while her husband eyed the throng of Muggles. Just as Ginny pushed her trolley forward, one of her bags fell. "Oh drat," she said and stopped to pick it up.

"You go on then, boys," said Mr. Weasley, who waved them forward. "We'll catch you up on the other side."

Ron didn't hesitate and disappeared through the portal, but Harry frowned. "I'll wait with you, Ginny," he said and was rewarded with a warm smile. She stowed her purse again and they followed Mr. and Mrs. Weasley toward the barrier.

Ginny's parents went in first and as soon as their feet left the Muggle side, Harry saw the barrier shimmer. Even though Harry'd been expecting it, there wasn't any time to react. Their trolleys slammed into the now solid bricks, sending their contents flying. Harry was only just able to put himself under Ginny to break her fall.

"Sorry," she said, apologizing profusely, her cheeks slightly pink. "I didn't think it would close like that."

One of the guards was coming over. "It's not your fault," he said quietly and helped her up.

"What in the blazes d'you think you're doing?" the guard said loudly.

Lost control of the trolley," said Ginny meekly as Harry picked up a squawking Hedwig. The guard gave them an incredulous look, but stalked away.

"What do we do?" asked Ginny, who was looking very uncomfortable as she probed the gateway with her hands. "What if Mum and Dad can't get back?"

Harry checked his watch. They still had five minutes. "Stay here. I'll be right back." He darted between the Muggles that were still zooming from destination to destination and into a restroom. He locked the cubicle in the back and took out his wand, hoping that the Ministry wouldn't come down on him for this little bit of magic.

A stag erupted from his wand tip and flew off to the platform, easily bypassing Dobby's charm. He rushed back to Ginny and tried to console her by pointing out some of the more outlandishly dressed Muggles. "They're more conspicuous than any of our kind," he said and she giggled when a woman with bright blue hair and a dozen nose-rings sauntered by.

It wasn't long before Mr. Weasley appeared behind them. He gave Harry an appraising look and seemed to struggle with himself. Instead, he probed the barrier with his wand and then gave it a good solid tap. "There," he said. "All fixed. Hurry along before the train leaves."

Harry waited for Ginny to cross and then he followed, but not before he gave Mr. Weasley one more glance and knew that he'd be getting a visit from Dumbledore before the night was out.

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The train ride was both a new experience and more of the same. The biggest difference was that Ginny sat next to Harry in the compartment they shared with Ron and Hermione. Even Malfoy was more subdued, and looked somewhat surprised that Harry was on the train at all. Harry was growing more and more nervous as the countryside slipped past them. Not only was he about to visit Hogwarts for the first time since it was destroyed by Voldemort in his formerly future life, but he was also on the verge of speaking with Dumbledore about several uncomfortable subjects.

As such, Harry was very distracted through the sorting and feast, only able to focus when Ginny was sorted into Gryffindor. His fears were realized when a note was handed to him from Marcus Belby.

"It's from Dumbledore," he said in answer to the questioning glances he'd been getting from Hermione, Ron, and Ginny. "I've got to speak with him before I turn in."

"Rotten luck," said Ron. "I don't suppose you'd be in trouble for what happened with Malfoy in Diagon Alley?"

"Not a chance," said Harry. He turned to Ginny and patted a bulky object inside his robes. "You probably will want to come with me."

She pinched her lips in determination and nodded. Ron and Hermione shared a look, but didn't press for answers as the crush of students began to flood the door of the Great Hall. Harry led Ginny to a back way and soon, they were clear of all people in the seventh floor corridor. They approached the Gargoyle, which leapt aside as soon as they drew near.

Ginny was trembling and Harry took her hand. "Don't worry, Gin. Dumbledore is a great wizard. He won't punish you for anything; especially for writing in a diary you didn't know was evil."

When they approached the door to Dumbledore's office, Harry didn't even raise a fist to knock before they heard his kind voice say, "Come in."

Harry swallowed and opened the door with his free hand, keeping Ginny's tight in his other. It was bittersweet to be in the Headmaster's office again. Bitter because of the tidal wave of unpleasant memories that assaulted him, but sweet because it was exquisitely wonderful to see him again.

The Headmaster raised his eyebrows when he saw Ginny with him and his eyes flicked to their entwined hands. "Welcome, Harry. It's good to see you alive and well after your summer holiday. Please have a seat."

"Thank you," said Harry, his throat growing tight.

Dumbledore steepled his fingers. "Might I inquire why Miss Weasley accompanied you tonight?"

Harry took out the diary. "She's here because of this." He placed it on the Headmaster's desk. "It was given to her by Lucius Malfoy when we were purchasing our books in Diagon Alley."

The Headmaster carefully turned the book over and there was the barest glint of recognition as he read the name emblazoned on the lower corner of the cover.

"It's Lord Voldemort's diary," said Harry matter-of-factly.

Dumbledore's sharp blue eyes narrowed as they regarded Harry. "You seem very well informed, Harry. About this and about other things..."

Harry didn't have any illusions about which things the Headmaster meant. Sending Patronus messages was the special tool of members of the Order of the Phoenix. No one outside of that organization knew how it was done.

"There are some things that I need to tell you, Professor and then there are some things that I need to tell Ginny. I'm not sure how everything will play out after I'm done speaking, but I'm going to ask both of you to help me by not overreacting."

Dumbledore kept his gaze steady while Ginny's brow was knit from the effort of holding back a thousand unspoken questions.

"It all started five years from now," he began, deliberately mixing his verb tenses. "Lord Voldemort had returned and it was the final battle at Hogwarts. Or... it *should* have been the final battle, but something went wrong and it set me on a course that landed me here." Harry stopped, not wanting to go into the whole discussion about Horcruxes in front of Ginny. He also needed to give Dumbledore some bonafides *after* he dropped this very large bombshell on him.

Ginny was holding her breath and was squeezing Harry's hand to the point of pain. "Ten years from now, I caused an explosion with my magical core that wiped out the Death Eaters and Voldemort, and... my own body. It happened in the ruins of The Burrow, at the topmost room, exactly over the spot I used to spend the night on a camp bed.

"Immediately after the explosion, a hole formed where my magical core used to be. Somehow, it drew my spirit (or whatever I was when my body was obliterated) into it and when I woke up, I was in this body, in this time, with every bit of the memories I had from ten years in the future."

The silence that followed Harry's words was stifling. Dumbledore didn't move, but Harry could feel the tendrils of Legilimency caress his mind. Harry didn't resist, because he had nothing to hide. Ginny's fingers relaxed slightly, but her eyes were wide and vulnerable. He didn't want to hurt her by lying, but he knew that he'd just given her a very large piece of mental meat to chew on. It would take a while for her to digest it all.

"I see," said Dumbledore at length. "Perhaps there is something else you wish to share?"

Harry nodded at the diary. "That's not just something Voldemort used to keep track of his exploits at school. It's a Horcrux. Tom made several of them and inside each is a bit of his soul. It's what anchored his spirit to the earth after he killed himself when I was a tot, and... I know where they all are and how to destroy them."

Dumbledore rocked back in his chair. The normally unflappable Headmaster stared unabashedly at Harry. But it was Ginny that broke the silence.

"V-Voldemort's been talking to me through a diary?" she squeaked. "He's been trying to get into my head for a week and you didn't say anything?" she said accusingly, but her hands still gripped Harry's arm.

"I'm sorry, Ginny," he said. "I'd wracked my brain that whole time to figure out a way to get the diary away from you, but I just couldn't until the night we were alone." The stricken look on her face was heart wrenching. "Imagine I approached you right after we came home from Diagon Alley? How would you have reacted if I would have just demanded it from you or tried to tell you any sliver of the truth?"

Ginny's eyes fell to her lap. "Oh," she said and tried to withdraw her hands, but Harry took them gently into his own.

"I don't blame you for being angry, Gin. But considering how badly it could have gone, I'd say we're doing all right."

Dumbledore had stood while Harry was absorbed with Ginny and was engaged in probing the diary with his wand. "Harry, would you mind unlocking this clever charm?"

He complied and urged Ginny to do the same with her ribbon, who then shoved them in her pocket.

Dumbledore waved his wand more vigorously and then the diary shook and glowed a sickly green. "Indeed you are correct, Harry. This is a Horcrux and I would be foolish to believe that Voldemort was not involved in its creation."

"So what do we do now?" asked Harry. "We need to get rid of all the Horcruxes before..." He looked tentatively at Ginny. "Before he finds another way to gain his body back. When he does, I'll be able to defeat him."

Ginny sucked in a breath. "Why?" she asked sharply and Harry was touched by her protectiveness. "Why does it have to be you? Dumbledore's the most powerful wizard in the world." She immediately blushed upon saying this, but the glint in her eye defied Dumbledore from denying it.

"I'm quite flattered, Miss Weasley," he said with no hint of embarrassment. "I'm certain that Harry is referring to a prophecy that was given just before he was born, wherein he was named as the one who had the power to defeat the Dark Lord."

Ginny's eyes grew large again and tears pooled at the bottoms.

"It's okay, Ginny," he said soothingly. "I've fought him loads of times and I'm still here. Technically," he mused, "I've even killed him a couple of those times."

Harry pointed to the diary, which still lay open on the Headmaster's desk. "You'll need a goblin made blade, a basilisk fang, or Fiendfyre to destroy that and the rest of the Horcruxes."

Dumbledore's eyes twinkled. "Then I suspect we'll be having future meetings on this subject."

Harry nodded and turned to Ginny. "Let's get you to bed. You have a long day ahead of you tomorrow, and I don't want to be the one responsible for you getting a detention."

Harry led Ginny down the stairs and over to Gryffindor Tower. She was getting more and more sleepy with each step, but Harry could still feel her unasked questions fluttering around like butterflies. He left her at the foot of the stairs leading to the girl's dormitory, where Hermione dutifully waited for them. Ginny gave Harry a meaningful look before yawning widely and allowing the older girl to drag her to her room. As Harry tried to allow sleep to claim him that night, he wondered if he'd opened a bigger can of worms than he could handle.

Making it Right Back to the Chamber

Chapter Two – Back to the Chamber

The next morning at breakfast, Harry handed a note to Ginny telling her that he would speak to her about anything she wanted after dinner. He didn't want to lay too much on her shoulders just before she began her first day of school. Judging by the way she barely touched her porridge, however, it looked like his efforts to spare her unwanted stress weren't making much difference.

"Hermione," said Harry as she perused *Voyages with Vampires*. "I was thinking about McGonagall being an Animagus."

"I wish I could be an Animagus," said Ron wistfully. "Being a dog would be wicked."

Harry smirked, thinking of his godfather. "What about the fleas?"

The frown on Ron's face caused a spate of laughter from the surrounding Gryffindors.

"What I was thinking," resumed Harry, "was that it would be valuable to know what the process was and how to identify one. I can't believe that dark wizards would voluntarily register themselves once they've completed the transformation."

"Hmm," said the brunette, her eyes lost in thought. "That might be very useful."

She closed her book and they were pelted by the delivery of the morning's mail.

Harry gave Ginny a supporting wave as they left the Great Hall and trudged down to Herbology under a gloomy gray sky.

Lockhart was as predictable as ever, and spoke animatedly to Professor Sprout, who looked very put out. Even though his excuse of helping Sprout fix the Whomping Willow was not a factor in this timeline, Harry was somewhat amused to discover that Lockhart just couldn't help being a git. Harry thought about Disillusioning himself to avoid detection, but that was N.E.W.T. level and he would gain more attention from using it than he would from letting Lockhart have his way with him.

Luck was with Harry, however, and they were able to slip into greenhouse three undetected, leaving a sour-looking Sprout to shake off Lockhart's meddling.

The Mandrakes were as hideous as ever, but it was a source of reassurance to Harry that the restorative they would provide at the end of the year would still be available – just in case. He was still dithering about doing something with the Basilisk to prevent its possible use by Voldemort.

Transfiguration was extremely boring. Out of sheer frustration to do something with his magic, Harry transfigured his beetle into a button before Hermione had even finished practicing her wand movements. Ron's eyes grew wide as Harry turned it back into a beetle and then into a more extravagant gold button, complete with engraved Griffin.

"Blimey," said Ron. "Where'd you learn how to do Transfiguration like that?"

Harry realized his mistake immediately and before McGonagall could make her way back to their seats, he flicked his wand and the beetle was back, meandering around his desk as if nothing had happened. "Must have been an accident," he lied casually, but resolved to tell both of his friends the truth with Ginny that night.

As the end of the lesson grew neared, Hermione lined up her row of coat buttons on her desk and frowned. Harry had noticed that she'd picked up a new book from the library entitled *Animagi: Discovering Your Inner Animal*. It was propped in her lap and she had been stealing glances at it throughout the lesson.

Five minutes before the bell rang, Hermione packed up everything but her new book and began to tap her foot anxiously. When the bell finally sounded, she shot over to McGonagall's desk and began to pepper her with questions. Harry was deliberately slow cleaning up, much to Ron's frustration, and Hermione was pointing at something in her book.

"Come on. I don't want to be late for lunch," said Ron.

He waited for a few more seconds and then hoisted his bag. "Let's see what's bugging Hermione first," he said and Ron gratefully followed him to the front of the class.

They approached McGonagall's desk just as Hermione finished her questions. McGonagall gave them curious looks as Ron and Harry trailed a gleeful Hermione to the Great Hall.

"What was that all about?" asked Harry knowingly.

"Oh I was just asking her how to recognize an Animagus," she said loftily. Harry forgot how annoying Hermione was at this age. He briefly wondered if her many adventures in his future had given her a better respect for her peers and if missing most of those would make him desire her less as a friend.

Ron's eyes grew hungry and Harry knew that it wasn't because of his stomach. "Did she give you any tips on how to become one?" Ron said.

"Not exactly," she replied as they arrived in the Great Hall for lunch.

Harry's eyes immediately searched for Ginny, but the first years hadn't arrived.

"What does that mean?" asked Ron, whose attention was now divided equally between filling up his plate and extracting details about the Animagus transformation from Hermione.

What Harry was bursting to say was that he was already an Animagus, having completed the process just before Ginny died. She was one, too, but she had become pregnant soon after and was unable to use it to escape Voldemort during their fateful encounter.

Harry pushed away the melancholy that tried to suffocate him and felt it dissipate completely when a small sun of happiness arrived in the form of Ginny.

"Hi," she said breathlessly and plopped down between Harry and Ron, the latter of which was still engaged in conversation with Hermione. Ginny ignored them and cast her happy gaze to Harry. "Flitwick reckons I've got a gift for Charms."

"Yeah?" asked Harry. "Don't tell Hermione," he said with a small smile. "She's a bit insecure right now."

Ginny looked at Hermione again and they watched as she scolded Ron for his poor table manners before flipping her hair back and excused herself to go to the library – something that was sure to inflame Ron's curiosity about Animagi even more.

"I can't believe that girl," he said, but Harry knew he was nursing the beginnings of a crush on her. One that led him into the darkest part of a spider infested forest in the old timeline. Would he be able to prove his affection for her in the same way this time?

Ginny gave Ron's leg a pat. "You shouldn't provoke her like that."

"She deserves it," he replied, shoving another bite of sandwich into his mouth. "Sheeth a ni'mare."

Ginny simply shook her head and selected a turkey sandwich from the stack. "Whatever, Ron."

Harry grinned, but the joy of seeing a first-year Ginny unencumbered by the diary was tempered with the knowledge that he was about to tell the three most important people in his life that his spirit was from the future and that the pretty redhead beside him was his wife in that future. So it was with a mixed sense of peace and dread that he finished his classes that day. Not even the excitement of a class full of errant pixies could keep Harry's attention for long.

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After dinner, they retired to the Gryffindor common room. Harry surreptitiously cast the Muffliato Charm and waited for one of them to bring up his strange behavior.

Ron had convinced Hermione to get slaughtered at Wizard's Chess while Ginny doodled on her Lockhart assignment. Fred and George were huddled together with Lee, Katie, and Alicia in the far corner of the room no doubt cooking up plans for what would be the beginning of Weasley's Wizard Wheezes – or maybe they were just figuring out another way to prank Filch.

After three straight losses, Hermione finally gave up. "I don't know why I keep playing against you," she said. "We really should be doing our homework anyway."

Ron made a frustrated noise. "I've only got to practice McGonagall's lesson tonight and I can do that anytime," he said.

"Well that's fine for you," replied Hermione disdainfully, but before she could get a full head of steam, Ginny cut her off.

"Aren't we all forgetting something?" she said, casting Harry a significant look. Ron and Hermione both turned, their argument evaporating in an instant. "Didn't you want to share something with us, Harry?"

He searched her face, which was still girlish but was showing some of the signs of maturation that would one day capture his fancy. As it was, Harry was still every bit in love with her soul as he was the day she died. "Yeah," he said softly. He straightened up in his chair. "I've been meaning to tell you this for a few weeks, but I wanted us all to be together, and I wanted to make sure a few things were going to happen the way they should before I told you what I'm about to tell you."

Hermione's eyebrows were knit together in thought. Harry could tell that some things were slipping into place in her mind.

"There's really no good way to say this, so I'll just explain what happened to me. Ginny's already heard part of this, but I think she's got a few questions now that it's sunk in."

Ginny nodded once, her face very serious, which caused Harry to sit on his hands in an effort to not reach out for her. "Right," he said. "I'm from the

future. Well," he amended, "my spirit is from the future."

"But," said Hermione, her eyes blazing with curiosity.

Harry held up his hand. "No questions until after I'm done."

She pulled her lips between her teeth and clamped them tight.

"When I was fourteen, Voldemort returned to his body. When I was twenty-two, he had killed everyone that opposed him but me. Each of you," he said, his voice oddly husky as he held their eyes in turn. "Each of you had died." He had to swallow a few times to get his emotions back under control. "I came back to the Burrow to end it. I was tired of running and I knew there was only one way I could end the war. I lured him there and waited for him in what was left of Ron's room – the only place outside of Hogwarts that I really felt at home."

Ron's face was screwed up with some unidentifiable emotion that Harry guessed was a mixture of fear and happiness. Ginny continued to listen with rapt attention, while Hermione began to chew on one of her fingernails.

"They surrounded me – Voldemort and all of his followers. He threatened to kill me and I snapped. I don't really know why I did it, or what caused me to even consider it, but somehow, I pulled all the magic in my body into a single sphere of power." Hermione sucked in her breath. "Somehow I knew that exploding my magic would be able to bypass whatever enchantments or rituals he'd undergone and kill him forever." Again, he did not bring up the Horcruxes, choosing to broach that subject when they had been given a chance to absorb what he was in the middle of telling them. "Since it was *my* magic, I could still control it, even though it was outside of my body. I compressed it into a single, tiny point and then released it.

"The explosion was huge – bigger than I imagined. It killed everyone within miles, I'd wager, including me."

Hermione was almost jumping in her seat with the effort to not ask questions. "I'm almost there, Hermione. One more thing and then you can ask as many questions as you like, but Ginny gets the first crack at me." He caught her eye and she nodded, still regarding him with those intense brown eyes.

"Something else unexpected happened. As soon as the explosion was finished, a hole appeared in the middle of the air, just underneath me. I stared at it forever, thinking I had lost my mind, when I realized that it was pulling me – my spirit, I guess – until everything turned pitch black and then... I woke up in the Burrow in the middle of the night in this body. I figured out that I had gone back in time somehow, but that I also remembered everything from my past... future... whatever... life."

Harry took a deep breath and waited for the questions to start. Hermione immediately jumped in to fill the quiet.

"Oh," said Hermione excitedly. "I bet the explosion created a tear in space-time. That's how you came back..."

"Hold on," said Ginny. She turned to Harry. "Are you done? Because I have a question for you."

Harry nodded, holding his breath and dreading the worst.

She pointed at him and then jerked her thumb at her chest. "What were we in the future? Were we friends?"

Harry felt something pinch his heart. He wanted so badly to hold her. "Yes," he said in a small voice that for once since he fell into this body, matched his age. "We were the best of friends."

Ginny held his gaze for a moment and with the same intellectual alacrity that Harry loved about her, said, "Were we more than friends?"

"Yes," he admitted. "We were married."

Ron's eyes darkened and Hermione's lips quivered just a bit, but Harry saw only Ginny's face. Nothing changed on it, but she stood abruptly and turned her head so her eyes were hidden. "... I have to go."

Harry reached up a hand to stop her, but she was already on the stairs. She didn't even take her book bag.

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For the rest of the week, Harry watched Ginny. He knew that approaching her directly would only force her muddled feelings to solidify into anger and resentment. He didn't know everything that was going through her mind, but he could tell what he'd said upset her and a large part of him couldn't blame her in the least. If she had come to him as an eleven-year-old and declared that they were going to be married one day, he'd have thought she was mental. As it was, he reasoned that a few days of isolation from her was easily justifiable and a small price to pay if she would be able to accept his story.

Hermione and Ron, however, couldn't ask him enough questions. He answered them the best he could, but explained that there were some things he wouldn't tell them because the timeline had already changed and he didn't want to set them up for failure. For example, he didn't tell them who they married in his life. Not that he thought they wouldn't eventually gravitate together, but he simply didn't know how it would work now that he'd meddled with the events he knew would lead his friends down that particular path.

Ron seemed a little distant at first and Harry knew that it was his relationship with Ginny in his past life that gave Ron pause. It was still very odd to him to think about Ginny that way considering her age. Nevertheless, as time went by, Ron's frosty exterior seemed to slowly melt and his friend appeared once more.

On Friday night, Luna Lovegood brought Harry another note from Dumbledore that explained he should meet the Headmaster in his office after

dinner. Harry excused himself as soon as the last of his lamb stew had been mopped up with his bread and chewed as he walked slowly to the exit. Ginny caught his eye and offered him a small smile, the first he'd had in days and it invigorated him in a way he hadn't experienced since he'd held her as his wife.

Dumbledore was already in his office. Fawkes raggedly stood on his perch behind the Headmaster's desk and Harry remembered that his burning day was approaching.

"You wanted to see me, sir?" asked Harry, unable to restrain the twelve-year old from coming out a little more than normal.

Dumbledore surveyed him once again from across the large oak desk. He tapped his hand on the still-intact diary. "We have some unfinished business that I'd like to discuss with you. There is also the matter of how your spirit came to be here. I believe I may have discovered a little more on how that occurred and what it may mean for our world."

"It all comes down to Voldemort and the prophecy, doesn't it?" Harry asked.

The Headmaster's face betrayed the barest hint of surprise. "Sometimes I forget that you already know so much. I had intended to keep the contents of the prophecy away from you for as long as possible."

"With all due respect," said Harry tiredly. "You can't protect my childhood any more. I may be twelve physically, but I'm twenty-two mentally and emotionally."

With a nod of affirmation, Dumbledore drummed his fingers on the leather-bound horcrux. "As sorry as I am to hear it, I do understand. However mature you are, I hope that you will take into account the very delicate structure of events that make up our world." He paused to select a lemon drop and offered one to Harry, who took one gratefully. "Each action and every choice we make has far-reaching effects."

"The butterfly effect," said Harry idly and when Dumbledore didn't offer his usual twinkle of understanding, Harry explained. "They say a butterfly can flap its wings in Africa and the disturbed air can turn into a Hurricane in America."

The twinkle returned. "Exactly, Harry. That's precisely what I mean. Take for example your Aunt and Uncle. As much as I know you do not like to stay with them each year, changing that arrangement can have repercussions that reach out not just in your own life, but in their lives as well."

"I don't..." said Harry, but Dumbledore continued as if Harry hadn't interrupted.

"You are undoubtedly influenced by them, even though you fight valiantly to distance yourself, but consider for a moment that the opposite circumstance is just as true." Harry's mind jammed. In all the years he had lived with the Dursley's, he'd never once considered that he had even a minute effect on them. Now that he was forced to look back on his last interaction with them, he could see things that hadn't been there before. The look on his aunt's face as she dithered with telling him good bye... The fact that his cousin was decent to him for the first time in sixteen years... In a sickeningly strange way, he actually missed them.

"I see what you mean," Harry finally said. "But that doesn't mean I'm responsible for making them better people. No one should have to carry that burden, least of all me."

Dumbledore's beard twitched and Harry imagined that under the wiry whiskers, his mouth was turned into a frown. "I don't believe anyone has the right to add to your burdens, Harry and you certainly have more than your fair share, but I've always believed that some responsibilities fall upon uniquely-gifted shoulders for a reason. It may be that you are the *only* one that can help them be more responsible citizens and better human beings."

Now it was Harry's turn to frown. How could anyone expect the Dursleys to change simply because Harry lived with them? Why should he even be bothered by this strange twist in their conversation? It was Hermione's words from his old fifth year that answered his question. It was his 'saving people thing' that made him worry about everyone – even the very relatives that ruined his childhood.

"Alas," said Dumbledore, "I do not think you came here to be lectured on the effects of time-travel tampering. Instead, I think we should focus on the present problem of this diary." He held it up for inspection. "It is not affected by most kinds of magic and the Tom held within its pages is as skillful in deception as the Tom that went to school here fifty years ago."

"Shouldn't we just destroy it?" asked Harry. Why did he feel the need to poke and prod at everything that resisted discovery? As soon as the question passed across his mind, Harry knew that this was Dumbledore's 'thing'. He was cursed with an insatiable appetite for learning and discovery. He thought of the blackened and burned hand from his old sixth year and the stories of his dealings with Grindelwald.

"Indeed we shall," Dumbledore said. "But I confess I lack a method. Fiendfyre is a dark spell that I will not cast unless I absolutely have to. The only known goblin-wrought sword obtained by a wizard was the one owned by Godric Gryffindor and it has not been seen for over a millennia. Finally, the Basilisk is a dark creature that takes many years to develop from an egg – it would be devilishly tricky to contain considering its particular deadly qualities."

Harry smirked. Now they were getting somewhere. "There just happens to be a Basilisk in the castle as we speak."

Dumbledore's eyebrows arched high on his forehead. "If I may ask, how is it that I am not aware of it, Harry?"

"You are," he replied. "It's just that the last time it killed, it's owner felt it too risky to use again and he hasn't been back at the school for... oh, about fifty years." Harry gave Dumbledore a knowing smile.

"Ah," said Dumbledore. "Salazar's Chamber of Secrets."

Indeed,” said Harry, with inflected humor. “Only a parseltongue can open it.”

“And you are?” asked Dumbledore.

Harry tapped a finger to his scar. “Voldemort put a bit of himself in here when he died. We’ll have to think about how to deal with that one as well, actually. It seems I’m his accidental horcrux.”

If Dumbledore was surprised at Harry’s revelations before, it was nothing compared with the reaction Harry witnessed then. “Extraordinary! I always suspected something of his was transferred to you, but a horcrux?”

“Indeed,” said Harry again, smiling. “But we can plan for my death another time. I’ve already done it twice and I’m in no hurry to repeat it – I might not get a chance to come back this time.”

Dumbledore stood, disturbed by Harry’s latest revelation for only a fraction of a second. “Very well. It’s late and you’ll need your sleep before we visit the Basilisk. Shall we arrange to meet after breakfast, then?”

“Yes,” said Harry, who, now that Dumbledore had mentioned it, was feeling very sleepy. He silently cursed his young body and wished he could keep going. “It’ll go a lot better this time if you just bring a rooster. I’ll call the Basilisk out and we’ll let the rooster do the rest.”

“An excellent plan, Harry,” said Dumbledore affectionately. “Where shall we meet?”

“In the girls’ lavatory off the second floor where the Basilisk’s last victim died.”

“Myrtle,” said Dumbledore with a grim smile. “Tomorrow, then?”

“Good night, Headmaster,” said Harry, who unsuccessfully stifled a huge yawn.

As Harry left Dumbledore’s office and began to take the stairs, he heard the familiar tired voice behind him. “Good night, Harry.”

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At breakfast, Harry noticed Dumbledore was not at the head table. He chalked it up to the Headmaster getting ready for their visit to the Chamber – something Harry hadn’t really had time to do since their conversation the previous evening. But it was someone else’s absence that made Harry realize the real reason he felt so distracted – Ginny.

“Anyone seen Ginny this morning?” asked Harry as casually as he could. Ron shook his head, but he was so busy piling bacon, sausage, and eggs onto his plate that he probably didn’t hear anyway.

“She said she’s not feeling well,” said Hermione.

“Oh,” replied Harry. He pushed his eggs around his plate for a while before he felt Hermione nudge his arm.

“What’s the matter, Harry?” she asked.

He sighed. “Nothing.” He tried to keep his voice casual, but something must have tipped Hermione off. She *was* an intelligent witch after all.

“Listen,” she said and put her fork and knife on her plate. “Ginny’s a little upset right now. She has a lot to digest, as you can imagine.” Hermione smiled reassuringly. “Just give her some time. She’ll come around.”

Harry tried to smile back, but couldn’t make it reach his eyes. “I guess,” he said and waited for breakfast to end. “I’ve got to do something with Dumbledore this morning. I might be gone for a while.”

Hermione nodded.

“Watch yourself,” said Ron, whose expression told Harry that he could tell he was about to miss out on an adventure.

Harry smiled, thinking of the adventure in the Chamber Ron almost missed in Harry’s other second year. “Thanks.”

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The Chamber was as dank and morbid as Harry remembered it. Dumbledore’s presence made the trip a little easier and the older man didn’t seem to have a single smudge of dirt on his midnight blue robes when they were deposited at the base of the pipe. Harry, however, was even more messy and unkempt than the first time.

The door to the Chamber proper opened to Harry’s hissed command and he followed Dumbledore through the door, holding a brass cage in his hand and his wand in the other. The rooster inside had been charmed to be temporarily blind, but was otherwise unharmed. Dumbledore explained on the way down that they would simply prod the bird to crow when the time was right.

“Why not just use a Spell to create a rooster’s crow?” asked Harry, who knew there were spells that could produce all kinds of animal sounds.

“Unfortunately, it takes the pure sound of a rooster’s crow to kill a Basilisk,” explained Dumbledore.

Slytherin’s statue loomed above them. Dumbledore pointed his lit wand around the Chamber and muttered to himself things like ‘remarkable’, and ‘fascinating’. When Dumbledore was satisfied with his survey, he Conjured two blindfolds and handed one to Harry. “It will be difficult to peek, but

you must not make eye contact with the Basilisk.”

Harry rolled his eyes and tucked the bit of cloth in his pocket. “I think I’ll manage, thanks.”

Dumbledore pursed his lips, but did not repeat his request. Instead, he tied the blindfold tightly around his head and assumed a ready stance; his wand held loosely in his hand and pointed in the general direction of the statue’s mouth. “You may summon the Basilisk whenever you are ready, Harry.”

Harry looked into the eyes of the Hogwarts founder. “Speak to me, Salazar Slytherin,” said Harry in the hissed snake-language. The mouth slowly gaped open to reveal a large hole. Harry shut his eyes and focused instead on his hearing. There was a thud that sent tremors through his legs. Harry was about to prod the rooster when the snake began to hiss.

“Who calls me from my slumber?”

Harry froze. Should he stick with the plan and simply kill the giant snake? What if the Basilisk was more useful to them alive? What if he could convince it to aid them in fighting against Voldemort? The king of serpents was bound to be handy somehow.

He decided to hedge. “My name is Harry Potter.”

“Harry,” said Dumbledore softly. “Now would be as good a time as any to induce our rooster to crow.”

Harry gripped his wand more tightly and was about to do exactly that when the snake spoke again.

“Why do you call me, speaker and yet have a rooster with you? Do you intend to kill me?”

Harry was taken back. He hadn’t expected the Basilisk to be intelligent, let alone capable of restraint around humans. He remembered distinctly the sound of it slithering through Hogwarts saying, ‘Kill’ and ‘I smell blood’. How could he even consider trying to tame it?

“I’m afraid that you pose a great threat to the students at my school,” Harry replied, his decision made.

“I’m sorry to hear that,” said the Basilisk. There was a sound like a great body being dragged across a wet floor. “I’m afraid I can’t let you kill me quite yet.”

“Harry,” said Dumbledore more urgently.

He risked a peek at the floor and saw the shadow moving swiftly toward him. The head was lifting higher, ready to strike. Harry jammed his wand at the rooster who let out giant squawk which turned into a keening crow. The sound echoed around the Chamber until it died, the rooster itself seeming surprised that it had made such a loud noise.

Harry’s eyes were riveted on the shadow. It swayed in place, seeming to vacillate between striking Harry or Dumbledore first. Then, as if it had been held up by a string that was suddenly cut, the shadow drooped and fell.

“Look out!” yelled Harry, who dropped the cage and sprang at Dumbledore. The head crashed into the stone floor in front of them, sending shards of broken rock sailing at them. Harry felt something hard nick his face and hand as he connected with the Headmaster and they fell together in a heap.

“Are you all right?” asked Harry, who took a chance and looked up into the dull yellow eyes of the now dead Basilisk. The rooster was clucking hopelessly in its cage as it rolled around on the floor.

Harry looked back to Dumbledore, who was sitting up. “Is it safe to look?” he asked and Harry pulled the knot of his blindfold loose.

“Yes, the Basilisk’s dead.”

Dumbledore’s eyes swept across the room and then he winced and brought a hand to his face. “Ah,” he said. “I appear to have been hit with a piece of one of the fangs.” Protruding from his cheek was the broken tip of one of the giant snake’s teeth.

Harry blanched. “Fawkes!” he yelled and in a burst of fire, the bird appeared above them, circling and trilling soothing notes of eerie music. “Down here. Dumbledore’s hurt.”

The Headmaster pulled the fang tip free and Fawkes swooped close, tipping his head over the wound. Soon, the tears closed the injury and Dumbledore was on his feet. “Thank you,” he said to his familiar, who hopped up onto his shoulder. He turned to Harry. “And thank you, for your quick thinking.”

“Not a problem,” he said.

“Now, let us retrieve a few fangs and be on our way.” Dumbledore produced a large glass phial. With his wand, he extracted all the fangs that were not broken and placed them in the phial, closing the lid with a Sealing Charm.

“These should fetch a high price at the local Apothecary,” he said and with a twinkle in his eye, added, “I imagine the Quidditch teams could benefit from some new brooms this year. I’ve always believed that sports should be a show of courage and skill, not of deep pockets.”

Harry smiled, wondering how Dumbledore knew about Lucius’ ‘donation’. “Malfoy won’t be happy about that.”

"No," agreed Dumbledore, I suspect he won't."

Making it Right Rat and Dog

Chapter Three – Rat and Dog

Dumbledore was not seen for the next two weeks and Harry was concerned that he'd had a terrible reaction to the Basilisk fang which had penetrated his face, or that something had gone wrong with the Diary. He was reassured, however, when Hedwig delivered a note during breakfast at the end of the second week from Dumbledore himself.

Harry,

Do not be alarmed at my absence. I have been isolated from the rest of the school by Madame Pomfrey for a resurgence of my childhood Dragon Pox. Unlike my first bout with the Pox, I have not been adversely affected by my illness. However, Madam Pomfrey is concerned that it could transfer to the students, who would not be as lucky as I have been.

We will carry on with our project as soon as she determines I am not a risk to the students.

Ever yours,

Albus Dumbledore

Harry read the letter aloud to Ron, Hermione, and a still distant, but neutral, Ginny.

"How long does Dragon Pox stay contagious?" asked Hermione.

"When I had it," said Ron, "I was in bed for a month. It was horrible."

Harry handed the letter over to Hermione for another read, as she always did. "Still, have you ever heard of anyone having a recurrence?" she asked.

Harry shook his head. Even with ten extra years as a wizard, Harry hadn't heard of anyone getting Dragon Pox, let alone someone having it twice. He was also secretly concerned about this new development because Dumbledore was never sick in his old timeline – that is, until his sixth year and he was forced to drink that awful potion.

"Well, it seems like Madame Pomfrey has things under control," said Hermione dismissively. She looked up to the Head Table as it was beginning to thin of teachers. "We'd better get to class."

*

October approached in much the same manner as it had in Harry's memories, wet and windy. Oliver Wood was as maniacal as ever and got his team together for a crack-of-dawn training session as before. This time, however, the revelation that the Slytherin team was sporting new Nimbus 2001s was blunted by the fact that every team had a set of the gleaming, speedy brooms. Malfoy was maligned by Flint because the only reason he was on the team was the advantage they'd have had from the brooms. Since they didn't have another Seeker, the blond Slytherin was allowed to remain on the team, but his strutting was kept at bay.

During their second practice at the beginning of October, Hermione, Ron, and Ginny sat in the stands to support Harry and the twins. Hermione had a large tome open on her lap and Ron and Ginny cheered loudly each time Harry circled close to their seats, Scabbers snoozing as he perched on Ron's shoulder. Harry found that since he already knew the plays they were practicing, and had a firm command of his position as Seeker from many years of experience; his eyes didn't want to pay attention to anything but the smiling redheaded first-year that screamed his name whenever he came near.

"Oi, Potter!" said Wood, who had just finished working with their Chasers on a variation of the Porskoff Ploy. "Get yer eyes off Weasley's sister and back on the pitch."

Harry pressed his lips together and, in a fit of pent up frustration, flew his broom right at Wood, dodging to the left just in time to avoid hitting his captain and zoomed through the middle hoop. He ignored Wood's indignant yelling as he pulled the quick 2001 straight up and then over into a dive that few players could manage. He was dimly aware of the silent stares from his teammates and friends as he urged his broom on to its top speed, pulling out of his dive in time to brush the toes of his boots along the tips of the foot-long grass that filled the middle of the pitch.

Letting his speed bleed off naturally, Harry sat up and arced around the stadium in a lazy circle. The 2001 was a bit faster than his 2000, but nothing compared with the Firebolt he hoped to still acquire next year.

His musings were interrupted by a loud shout and the rumble of several heated voices. Hermione was red-faced with shock, while Wood and Ron were extolling his brilliant flying.

"That was a perfect Wronski Feint!" said Wood and Ron together. Then Wood, who was closer, went on, "I've only seen it done once where the

Seeker didn't plough into the pitch, and that was from a Puddlemere match two years ago. Why have you been holding out on us? I'm going to have to revise our plays now..." He continued to praise Harry, but Harry tuned him out, for up in the stands, Ginny had taken George's broom and was rocketing across the pitch toward him.

Harry landed on the wet grass and no sooner had he dismounted when he was tackled by a red blur, sending them both sprawling in a tumbled heap across the pitch. When they stopped, Ginny was straddling his middle, pounding on his chest.

"Don't. You. EVER. Do. That. Again!" Each word was punctuated by a fist. Her eyes and hair were wild, her face red from yelling, and despite the beating she was giving him, he smiled.

Ginny growled and leapt off of him, stomping back to her stolen broom. "You're impossible, Harry Potter!" she screeched.

Harry got to his feet and in three long strides, pulled her around by her shoulder. "Ginny," he said softly. She was still glaring at him, her chest heaving as she caught her breath. "I'm sorry." She didn't look like she believed him, so he pressed his case. "Really, I am. I didn't mean to scare you and I certainly didn't think I was doing something dangerous."

Her mouth opened to protest, but he held his hand to her lips. "I know *you* thought it was dangerous, and that's why I promise to never do it again if you don't want me to." Over her head, Harry saw the rest of the team plus Ron and Hermione waiting a respectful distance from them.

Ginny's face changed from hot anger to tender remorse in a second. "Oh, Harry," she said gently. "That's not what I meant." She rubbed her arms with her hands and searched his eyes. "I wouldn't keep you from doing what you love. Just promise me you'll be safe."

Harry nodded. "As much as I can control it, I'll stay safe for you."

Ginny took a step forward and tentatively reached out a hand, letting it rest on his elbow. "I've been thinking a lot about what you said that night."

Harry glanced at the team again and nodded.

"I think that what you said is a lot for a girl to handle, but if you're willing to wait for me...", she swallowed and pinned him with her bright, warm eyes. "If you'll wait for me, I think we could have something together."

His heart swelling with joy, Harry's face split with the biggest smile. "I can wait as long as it takes."

She squeezed his elbow. "Until then, I think we can at least be friends."

He took her hand. "Friends," he repeated and they bent to pick up their brooms before rejoining the onlookers and heading back to the castle.

As they walked through the school's oak front doors, Harry noticed Hermione giving Scabbers long searching, sidelong glances as he clung to Ron's shoulders. Finally, when they were about to climb the stairs to Gryffindor tower, Hermione stopped. "Ron," she said in a way that told Harry she'd figured something out. He pulled his wand from his pocket just in case. Ginny stood on his left side, surveying their friends.

"Ron, can I see your rat for a second?" she said with what Harry could tell was a forced calm.

"Why d'you want Scabbers?" Ron asked, but had plucked the rat from his shoulder and held him in his hands.

Hermione flipped her hair nonchalantly with her free hand. "I wanted to try a spell I learned in this book." She placed it on the bottom step and produced her wand. Holding out her hand, she repeated her request. "It won't hurt him." Harry glanced down for a second and caught the title of the book, *The Animagus Compendium*.

Ron eyed her suspiciously for a second and then shrugged. "Yeah, all right," he said and handed him to Hermione.

Scabbers shifted in her hand, squirming uncomfortably as if he knew what spell Hermione was about to cast. Hermione pointed her wand at him and Harry realized what would happen if Scabbers turned into Peter while he was in Hermione's hand – she would be crushed.

"Hermione, wait!" said Harry at the same time Hermione said the spell and a dim white light connected with Scabbers.

It happened before Harry could react. Scabbers turned into Peter and his new weight pushed Hermione onto the marble floor with a crunch.

"What the—?" said Ron in shock, while Ginny jumped back in fright. Harry didn't waste another second. A nonverbal Stunner hit Peter before he'd even jumped to his feet and he slumped back onto Hermione, who was moaning in pain.

Harry Levitated Peter off Hermione and knelt at her side. "Ginny, go get Pomfrey!" yelled Harry as he looked over their friend.

Ginny's retreating foot steps told him she had left as he worked to stabilize Hermione. "Where are you hurt?" he asked and she answered with another moan. Harry ran a diagnostic spell that revealed several broken ribs and a cracked wrist. He flicked his wand again and cast a mild pain-killing charm. Then, he conjured a stretcher and Levitated her onto it.

When he was satisfied that she was as stable as he could make her, Harry turned to Ron. "Find McGonagall, Ron."

When he didn't get an answer, Harry looked up at his friend. "Ron?" But Ron wasn't paying attention to Harry. He was staring at Peter, who was turned over on his side, his pointed face pressed flat into the cold stone floor. "Ron!" yelled Harry and his friend snapped his head up. "Go get McGonagall. We'll explain everything when you get back."

Ron nodded numbly and turned to run down the hall.

*

The revelation that Peter Pettigrew was alive sent shockwaves throughout the Wizarding world. Sirius Black's legally dubious imprisonment was now called into further question. Hermione recovered quickly from her injuries and was back to classes the next day. Ron, however, was haunted by the knowledge that he had kept a grown man in his room for the past year and a half.

"I can't believe I used to *pet* him," Ron said as they made their way from Charms to the Great Hall for the Halloween feast. "He slept in my bed and everything." He gave an involuntary shudder and turned to Harry. "Did you know who Scabbers was?"

Reluctantly, Harry nodded. "We found out in our third year, when Sirius Black escaped from Azkaban and came here to find him."

Ginny, who had been listening silently from her place next to Harry, shivered.

"Why didn't you say anything?" asked Ron hotly as they sat in their usual places.

"Honestly, I was a little worried about what would happen if he was discovered earlier than he should have."

Ron didn't seem to like that answer. "But he's a murderer," said Ron, drawing stares from the nearby Gryffindors.

"He is," confirmed Harry. "I couldn't let Sirius rot in jail either, so I compromised." Harry looked at Hermione pointedly.

She nodded. "You planted that Animagus stuff on us, knowing that I'd research it and come out with the answer."

Harry smiled.

"Really tricky, Harry, but what if something worse had happened?" Hermione asked. Ron still seemed put out by Harry not acting sooner.

"Look," Harry began, "just because I know what happens in my old life, doesn't mean I can control what happens in this one..." He was about to explain what Peter's role in Voldemort's rebirth was when he decided against it. "I decided to be open with my friends and Dumbledore about this whole time-travel thing, but if the public or Voldemort learns about it..." He trailed off. "It's better if they believe that Hermione's just a really smart and observant witch who put two and two together. It's called 'plausible deniability'."

Hermione's cheeks were pink and she looked like she wanted to respond when an owl dropped onto the table. She pulled the *Daily Prophet* from its leg but there was no pouch for her to pay the required Knut. It flew off, leaving Hermione to shrug at Harry. "The *Prophet* doesn't usually get delivered until morning and I've already had one today."

She didn't get a chance to so much as glance at the front page before a disturbance at the Head Table attracted their attention. Gliding in as graceful as ever, a man with half-moon spectacles and flowing silver robes took his place behind the middle chair. Dumbledore was back.

Applause broke out across the Hall and he waved merrily to everyone before motioning for everyone to be still.

"Thank you," he said in a strong voice, despite the fact that his face was pale and his eyes twinkled less than they were accustomed to. "I thank everyone who has sent cards and chocolates while I was quarantined. I'm certain that they contributed to my speedy recovery." There were a few chuckles from the students. "And now we all have more important things to attend to."

As with the opening and closing feasts, food appeared on the golden platters along every table and students dug in with their usual gusto.

"I'm glad he's back," Hermione said, still holding her unopened *Daily Prophet* while Ron loaded his plate full. "It was really nice of people to send him cards. I wish I'd thought of it."

Harry was glad the Headmaster was back as well. Things weren't right with him out of the castle. Harry was also glad that he was eating real food instead of watching ghosts float through moldy and rotting plates in an attempt to taste it. This time around was definitely much better than his last run through second year.

As Harry selected some Beef Wellington, Hermione opened the paper and a note fell out. She let out a gasp and, with trembling fingers, handed the paper over to Harry. "You'd better read this."

Harry scanned the headline as Hermione inspected the note. Ginny leaned over his shoulder and read along. Harry's frown had deepened to a scowl by the time he reached the end of the article. "Bloody, Bollixing..."

"Harry!" said Hermione sharply. "Language."

It was difficult to remember that he wasn't a twelve-year-old but that he was supposed to act like one. "Sorry," he said sincerely and handed the paper to Ron.

"Blimey," said Ron after a moment. "Pettigrew escaped! How'd that happen? It only says that he was being moved to Azkaban following his trial."

Hermione offered the note to Harry. "This might explain things," she said. "It's addressed to you."

Harry opened the wax-sealed parchment and quickly read the letter. It was from Sirius.

Dear Harry,

You don't know me, but I am your godfather. Your parents asked me to look after you if anything happened to them, but as you know, I've been in prison for the past eleven years. Now that I'm free, I would very much like to meet you. Dumbledore has offered that with your permission, I would be able to see your next Quidditch match. If you would like, we can talk after the game.

I've sent along a copy of tomorrow's Daily Prophet so you would know before anyone else that Peter has escaped. Dumbledore found out that he was able to use a split-second gap in the Anti-Animagus field between his holding cell and the transport cage that was going to take him to Azkaban. They are looking for him everywhere, but as you know, he can hide very well in plain sight.

I look forward to seeing you again, Harry.

Sincerely yours,

Sirius Black

Harry pocketed the letter, feeling a lump of emotion clog his throat. Peter had escaped again, and while Harry didn't know what that meant for Voldemort's return, he certainly hoped things would align better this time around.

With one lingering look at Ginny, Harry finished his food and went to bed.

*

Double Potions fell on Wednesday of the following week. Harry had been reluctant about his approach to Snape given what he knew about the Potion master's past, but he found that this time around, his hatred was much improved and he was able to keep his temper in check. This, combined with Harry's startling new aptitude for Potions, and the news of Sirius' release, seemed to drive Snape to attack Harry with greater fervor.

"I've shuffled the syllabus to accommodate the advanced nature of the students in this class," said Snape with a gleam in his eye. "Since you all seem so able to keep up with the curriculum, we can skip some of the less-advanced potions and take on the highly tricky Strengthening Solution."

There were murmured groans throughout the class, mostly from the Gryffindor side because the Slytherins could always count on a good grade regardless of their performance.

Snape flicked his wand at the board and the instructions appeared. Harry remembered that this was the potion he'd blown up to allow Hermione to sneak ingredients for the Polyjuice Potion. He'd mis-stirred halfway through in nervousness and his potion turned out to be too runny. Having all but memorized Snape's own recipes from *Advanced Potion-Making*, Harry knew exactly what needed to be done with this potion.

They began chopping puffer-fish eyes, grinding Runespoor scales, and slicing tubeworms, the latter of which made huge slimy messes of the tables.

The only problem arose because Snape had taken to hovering over his desk for the majority of class.

"Why did you add an anti-clockwise stir, Mister Potter?" Snape asked, his large nose looming over the lip of Harry's bubbling cauldron. "Are you so stupid that you can't read simple instructions, or merely arrogant enough to believe that you know better than your teacher?"

Harry bit his cheek and continued to stir. "Adding an anti-clockwise stir on every seventh allows the puffer-fish eyes to more fully dissolve and, therefore, to not react as harshly with the tubeworms."

Out of the corner of Harry's eye, he could see that Snape knew he was right, but that only caused the man to become more irate.

"Who taught you to do that?" he asked. "The Muggle-born you associate with has no doubt been tutoring you outside of class."

From behind Harry, he heard Hermione suck in her breath.

"No, sir," said Harry as meekly as he could. It was terribly difficult to be so pliable, especially when Snape'd just insulted Hermione and because Ron was gaping at him as if he'd grown two heads.

"Then how do you explain your advanced knowledge of potions? You were clearly a dunderhead in this subject last year and yet you display..." Snape stopped speaking suddenly, as if admitting that Harry knew so much about potions would burn his tongue.

Unable to fight back the counter-attack that he'd been practicing in his mind, Harry let it loose. "How about you explain why you're holding back on us, sir? If you know there's a better, safer way to brew these potions, why don't you teach us how it's done? You should be instructing us instead of picking out every single tiny problem with potions that could never measure up in the first place."

A deadly silence filled the class. Malfoy's eyes shone in triumph as he was surely certain that Harry would be given a very harsh set of punishments. Hermione was wringing her hands in worry, while Ron's smile creased from ear to ear.

The bell rang, snapping everyone out of their trance. "Sample flasks should be turned in to me before you leave. Be sure to label them," Snape said loudly and slowly. There was a noisy shuffle and amid the clanking of glass and din of chattering, Snape lowered his head to Harry, his eyes burning embers of hatred. "Stay. Put."

The vein in Snape's head was pounding ominously by the time the last student left the room.

"Tell me, Potter," said Snape slowly, clearly having a hard time keeping his composure. "Why do you insist on being either as an insufferable know-it-all as Miss Granger or as arrogant as your father ever was?"

Harry frowned from behind his table. "I really wish you could look at me for who I am, and not for who my father was. I am not James Potter."

"No," said Snape frostily. "You're not; which is why I take great pain to make sure you *earn* your grades in my class."

Harry snorted. He'd had enough. It was time to set Snape straight. "I know what's *really* bothering you, Professor. I've seen it all in your memories. You were in love with my mum and she didn't love you back. When she married my father and they had me, you couldn't handle it. You became unhinged and joined Voldemort. Only... Voldemort went after me *and* my parents, driving you back to the light." Harry paused, seeing that his words had had the desired effect. He couldn't help but wonder if the pain he saw reflected in Snape's eyes was worth it. "You have one thing going for you, Professor, and that's loyalty. You've been loyal to my mum and loyal to Dumbledore – for that, I thank you, but you have to see me as my own person, and not as an incarnation of your spurned love for Lily Evans."

Snape rocked back onto his desk as if physically struck. He stared back at Harry in wonder and fear. It was a full minute before the silence was broken. "Scrub every desk. I don't want there to be a single tubeworm left before you leave for lunch."

With that, Snape swept into his office and slammed the door.

*

Late Saturday morning, Harry found himself eating breakfast with the rest of the Gryffindor Quidditch team, huddled around the end of one of the long, empty house tables. Wood stoically ate his porridge while Fred and George were quietly showing each other variations on their new Beater maneuvers. Katie, Angelina, and Alicia were spelling their nails different colors and giggled when Fred or George noticed. Things were much less uptight than they been in Harry's memory of this day. Having an even playing field tended to make the match seem winnable, Harry decided.

As the hour of the game approached, they joined the rest of the students thronging to the pitch. The air was steamy for a November day in Scotland, and a row of low, dark clouds on the horizon spoke of thunder and wind. Harry breathed deep, relishing the thought of being back on a broom in a real game. It had been too long. Still, he couldn't help but wonder if there was something he was forgetting.

Wood did give him a speech, but the words, 'or die trying' didn't feature in it and Harry was very happy to notice the omission. He spelled his glasses to repel water and as a bonus, did his uniform as well before tucking his wand into a special pocket in the left side of his trousers.

Sirius was in the stands, waving a huge red and gold banner that said, "Give 'em hell, Harry!" With a smile, Harry waved and smirked when he saw that the only two students within a ten-foot radius of the recently freed prisoner were Hermione and Ron – the former of which was attempting to spell the banner to a less vulgar variation.

As soon as the whistle blew, Harry sped upward at top speed to search for the Snitch. Malfoy approached him from behind. "How many of Dumbledore's boots did you have to lick to get those brooms, Scarhead?"

Harry ignored him and shot off for Wood's end of the pitch. He hadn't made it ten yards when he was nearly unseated by a Bludger.

"Got it," said George, who batted it away toward Malfoy, but it arced wide and flew back at Harry at top speed. "What the..?"

That's when Harry remembered what it was that he'd been forgetting. In all the time and effort he'd spent on changing important things about this time line, he'd completely ignored Dobby, who didn't know the Basilisk was dead and the Diary ruined.

Executing a perfect Sloth-Grip-Roll, Harry dodged the Bludger, letting it zoom out over the hoops before it turned back for another attack. Knut-sized raindrops began to fall, restricting vision to the pitch, but not much beyond. His hair, the only part of him that wasn't protected by the Impervious Charm, was soaked in a second.

"Forget me," he yelled at George. "Keep the other Bludger off our Chasers!"

Harry gritted his teeth and dove for the grassy bottom of the stadium.

The whistling of the Bludger told Harry it was right behind him and he pushed his broom harder, flattening his body to the Nimbus for maximum speed. He aimed for the base of the center goal post and pulled up and around at the last second. He smiled when the Bludger crunched hard into the thick wood of the hoop's base and he shot off into the sky.

"That's another score for Angelina!" yelled Lee Jordan. "It's now tied at thirty all as Pucey takes the Quaffle."

The Bludger was still embedded in the goal post, but Harry knew it wouldn't be long before it was free and pursuing him once more. Harry used the time to fly directly after Malfoy, who was making slow circles around the Slytherin goals. Fred and George were going toe to toe with the Slytherin Beaters with the untampered Bludger, leaving the Chasers free to attack the opposing Keepers. It was a real match and Harry smirked at the havoc he was about to cause.

As Harry caught up with Malfoy, he zoomed directly at the boy's head, missing his face by an inch as the Slytherin careened wildly to his left to avoid contact.

"You're mental, Potter!" Draco yelled.

"You have no idea," said Harry, who flew after him again. This time, Draco sped off, Harry following in close pursuit.

A movement in Harry's peripheral vision informed him that the rouge Bludger was free again, curving up to meet Harry's speeding broom. Malfoy dove and turned jerkily to his right. Harry smiled at his poor flying and moved to close the corner; his timing would have to be just right.

The whistling of the Bludger was different as if its contact with the goal post had damaged it somehow. Harry didn't pay too much attention to it,

except to time a strike. As Malfoy pulled out of his turning dive, Harry was directly in front of him. Malfoy screamed like a girl and pulled his broom up to stop it. Harry sped around him, putting Malfoy in the direct line of the Bludger. Malfoy probably didn't even see it coming.

The crunch and sounds of shocked surprise from the stands told Harry that he'd been successful. It wasn't the nicest thing Harry'd ever done, but it wasn't against the rules, and Malfoy certainly would have done the same to him. Still, the Bludger sailed after Harry.

Unable to assist Malfoy, Harry resumed his search for the Snitch.

Finally, after two more revolutions of the pitch, Harry spotted it hovering *in* the hole left by the Bludger in the middle goal post on the Gryffindor end. Flying swiftly, Harry tipped his broom over in a steep dive, sending the Bludger lurching around to try to catch up with him again. Five seconds later, Harry had the Snitch in his left hand and his wand in the other.

There was an uproar of applause as Harry held the Snitch aloft.

The Bludger caught up with him and with a swish, Harry Banished it. It came around for another attack and Harry knocked it away with a swift movement of his wand. Finally, Madame Hooch captured it herself and wrestled it back into the box.

"Brilliant flying, Harry!" said Wood. "I knew you'd do it."

Fred, George, and the Chasers were there, too, each alight with happiness at their win, but there was someone else Harry had been waiting to see.

He stood on his tiptoe and there, through the swirling rain, a man was parting the crowd as if he were a locomotive. Sirius' beaming smile met Harry's.

"Well done, Harry. I'm Sirius Black, your godfather."

Harry took his offered hand. "I know," he said strongly and was pulled into a manly, back-slapping hug.

"I can't stay, but I wanted to meet you face to face."

"Thanks, Sirius," said Harry. "Can we write? Do you have an owl?"

The older man smiled. "I'll get one; now get inside before you catch a cold."

The rain was making it unpleasant to stay outside, and soon, the Gryffindors were singing and drinking butterbeer in the warm common room.

Harry smiled as Ron and Hermione flanked him on one of the sofas across from a grinning Ginny. "Great Match," said Ron. "I can't believe that Bludger, though. A bit dodgy, don't you think?"

"Yeah," said Harry as he took a swig of his drink. "I reckon someone's jinxed it."

"But they can't have," said Hermione, who was flushed red. Beads of perspiration were gathered on the tip of her nose and cheeks and she was fanning herself with a folded piece of parchment. "The balls are always locked up before a match."

"She's right," said Ron, who looked a bit red himself. "No one but Hooch has access to the crate between matches."

"Could someone have hexed it during the game?" asked Harry, noticing that Hermione's fanning was growing slower and her eyes were drooping.

"That's possible," said Ron, who stifled a huge yawn. "Are you hot?" he asked sleepily.

Hermione tipped over and fell flat on her face; her limbs sprawled uncomfortably on the floor.

"Hermione!" yelled Harry. She groaned and Ginny knelt with him at Hermione's side.

"Here," Ginny said. "Let me help."

Ron teetered uncertainly on the sofa as Harry and Ginny hoisted Hermione to her feet. Hermione's skin was on fire everywhere Harry touched her.

"Hospital wing," said Harry. Together, they half-drag, half-carried their friend out of the portrait hole with Ron shuffling slowly behind them.

"So hot," said Ron, who, despite the cool castle air, was stripping off his jumper.

It was a long walk, but they eventually made it.

"Madam Pomfrey," called Harry as they deposited Hermione onto the nearest bed. Ron was swaying dangerously, so they helped him into the next one.

The matron emerged from behind a screen that enclosed one of the other beds. "Ah," she said knowingly. "Two more?"

"Two more?" Harry repeated, his confusion mounting, and then he saw them. There were six other beds occupied and all of them were sweating profusely, a half-dozen wet cloths magically turning themselves on their foreheads before dipping and wringing themselves in nearby bowls of cool water.

"Er, yes," he said. "What..?"

“Dragon Pox,” Pomfrey replied. “At least I think so.” She frowned. “I’ve never seen it spread so fast or to this many people.”

Ginny glanced nervously at Harry. It was clear that she wanted to be as far away from the hospital wing as possible, but Harry had a bigger concern. There was never a Dragon Pox outbreak at Hogwarts in his memory. That meant this was something he had caused and from the look in the matron’s eyes, it looked like it would be a bigger impact on the Wizarding world than the Chamber ever was.
