

## Betrayal of the Best Kind Cold

### Cold

The biting cold wind permeated everything. The last time Harry had been warm was nothing but a distant memory. He sat dejectedly on a cold, damp sandy floor, surrounded by cold, grey, stone walls, with a view through a barred window at a desolate, drab, but above all cold, landscape. Hell must be better than this, he thought, at least you were warm there.

The screams started again. They never really stopped for long. Harry closed his once brilliant green eyes, willing the torture to stop. One despairing wail was filled with more anguish and heartbreak a person should ever have to bear. The dementors on the island made sure there was no hope for the inmates of the wizarding prison, Azkaban. Emotivores, they lived on the emotions of the prisoners, draining them of all positive thoughts and feelings.

Azkaban. The very name conjures images of suffering and torment. Only the very worst wizard criminals are sent here, Death Eaters, murderers and torturers. The final home for those deemed too dangerous to live amongst other wizards.

Most of the other prisoners housed here were insane. Few retained any semblance of humanity after a stay at the pleasure of the Ministry of Magic. The howls of anguish echoed through Harry's head, try as he might to shut them out. One of the prisoners was close to death. The dementors were getting excited. They always did.

Even now, the unholy glee exhibited by the dementors at the deathwatch of the doomed prisoner made Harry ill. He had almost experienced it first hand in the first week of his imprisonment. Having to listen over and over to his parent's murder had all but pushed him to suicide.

He hadn't been here long, compared to his godfather, but it was long enough. Sirius was the only person ever to have escaped from Azkaban. After experiencing it for himself, Harry had only admiration for his animagus guardian. How he managed to survive twelve years of this hell-on-earth was beyond him. Having remembered what Sirius told him of Azkaban, Harry was able to protect himself somewhat, but the Dementors still chilled him to his soul.

The dementors. Harry hated them. He actively forced himself to loathe them. Harry welcomed the stomach-churning bile that he deliberately felt when one came close. Feeling hatred was better than fear. Much better. The soul eaters could see hope hidden under fear (what else was fear but a

desire to be elsewhere?), but couldn't see it under hatred. One of the black-robed creatures drifted past the barred door, looking in.

Harry brought to mind every accusing look, every whispered comment, every betrayal he could remember. That was almost too easy. Having those who you loved turn on you made bitterness very easy to come by. The rush of negative emotions made him feel sick, but the dementor drifted on, unable to receive sustenance from the boy. For the last eight months Harry had protected his hopes and dreams from the dementors, by dwelling on how he felt when everyone in the entire wizarding world betrayed him.

Well, bar one.

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### **Summer, end of 4th year.**

Touching his cheek where Hermione had kissed him, Harry followed his Uncle out of Kings Cross Station. He was not looking forward to staying with the Dursleys, and hoped that the Weasleys would be able to convince Dumbledore to let him stay with them soon. The sooner the better.

The trip home was a silent one, except for his Uncle's periodic mumblings about unnatural freaks. Harry knew this was not going to be a fun summer.

*Two weeks later.*

Harry wiped the back of his hand across his forehead, trying to get rid of the sweat that was constantly dripping into his eyes. He had little time to himself these days, with his Aunt and Uncle deciding that the back yard should be remodeled and re-sculpted. Surprisingly, Harry found he didn't mind the backbreaking labor, and each evening after a meager meal, Harry would crash into bed and into an exhausted slumber.

When he was exhausted, he didn't dream.

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*Dear Harry,*

*How are the muggles treating you mate? Not too bad I hope. Things are a bit tense at home at the moment. Fred and George are dead set on the idea of opening a joke shop, and are ignoring Mum and Dad when they try to talk them out of it. Mum tried the emotional blackmail that she is so good at, telling them that they will never be successful unless they apply themselves to a real career. They asked her if she knew how much Zonko's makes. Bad move. Dad tried a different tactic and told them they need capital to start a business and no one would lend them money for a joke shop. For some reason, they thought that was very funny.*

*Percy is moving out, he doesn't believe you or Dumbledore about You-know-who, and Dad does. Ginny just about exploded when he called you a liar. I've never seen her like that. I swear, I'd*

*prefer to take on that Hungarian Horntail than face her in that mood.*

*Have you heard from Hermione? I told her I didn't want her going to Bulgaria, she told be to mind my own business! Women are mental, all of them.*

*Mum has written to Dumbledore to try to get him to let you come over soon, but he is not budging. Dad thinks that because of You-know-who's return, Dumbledore wants you to stay put and out of danger. I don't know why your place is safer than ours; Dumbledore is a bit weird though.*

*Anyway, take care, and write back. I need to know you are OK.*

*Ron*

Harry frowned at Ron's letter. He was glad the twins were going to use his tournament winnings for their joke shop, but he didn't want the Weasleys to have a family argument over it. He also felt a little guilty that Percy was moving out. Harry picked up a quill and started to write a response,

*Dear Ron,*

*Sorry for not writing sooner, but the muggles have given me the job of completely changing the backyard around. I have been completely stuffed at the end of each day. I haven't even started my essays yet.*

when the phone rang downstairs.

He listened to his Uncle answer the phone and then slam it down a few seconds later. Harry felt a sense of dread that would have made his divination professor proud.

*The phone just rang, and my Uncle doesn't sound too happy about it. Trelawney would probably be amazed at my sudden gut feeling that it wasn't a muggle on the other end.*

Over the next few minutes the phone rang again and again. Each time, his Aunt or Uncle would answer the phone, and in an increasingly angry tone, enquire who is calling, before slamming the receiver down. Harry knew what was coming.

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Trembling fingers entered the phone number for the tenth time. For the tenth time, a gruff voice answered, and for the tenth time, she hung up before saying anything.

“Damn, why can't I do this?”

Once more she entered the Dursley's number. This time, the phone rang for almost a full minute before a familiar voice answered.

“Hello? Dursley residence.”

A deep breath. "H-Harry?" she whispered.

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"Hello?" Harry enquired, his Uncle standing over him, with a glare of which Snape would be proud.

"H-Harry?" came the whispered response.

Harry knew that voice. He had only heard it a couple of times, but on hearing it, he felt the memories of the last task rush back.

"Cho?"

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"Cho?"

Harry's voice. Say something, quick!

"Harry, I - I..." Cho stammered.

Suddenly, Cho heard an argument on the other end of the line. The gruff, bear-like voice that had answered the phone before was yelling at Harry. The phone went dead.

Cho stared at the handset. She had heard rumors that the muggles that Harry stayed with over the summer didn't treat him well. He always looked OK when arriving back at school though.

But she had seen him at the Quiddich world cup last summer. She smiled at the memory of him spilling water down the front of himself when he waved at her. He was with his friends, the redheaded Weasley (though in all fairness, that described all the Weasleys), and the smart girl who should have been sorted into Ravenclaw. What was her name? Granger? Perhaps he stayed with them for a while in the summer.

Stealing herself, Cho dialed the Dursley's number again.

After one ring, Harry answered.

"Hello?"

"Harry, are you alright? Did I get you in trouble?"

"Not really" Harry replied. "My Uncle started yelling at me, but I told them that it was my godfather." She could almost hear the smirk on his face. "My Aunt and Uncle have left to go out for a while, without their wallet, purse, or car keys I might add. I should have done that a long time ago."

"Your godfather? If you have a godfather, why are you not living with him?" Cho asked, relieved to be discussing something other than what she called about.

"Um, sorry, it's a bit of a long story." Harry paused. "Are you OK?" he asked.

Cho was surprised at the sincerity in his voice. When her housemates had asked her that exact same question at the end of term, it always came across as though they were asking for lack of anything else to say.

"In all honesty, no. I haven't slept more than a few hours a night since Cedric... since..." Cho's voice became thick.

"Cho, I, I don't know what to say. I wish I did."

"I miss him, Harry. We were friends, and I miss him." Tears started running their well-known path down her cheeks.

"I know what it is like to miss someone who meant a lot to you, Cho."

"Of course you do, I must seem silly to you to be crying over someone I hardly knew a year ago."

"That's not what I meant, Cho. I understand what you are feeling. I would do anything if it would make you feel better."

For almost a full minute, neither of them spoke. Finally, Cho broke the silence.

"Harry, how did Cedric die?"

"...I.... he.... we..."

"Please, it must be painful for you, but I need to know."

Harry took a deep breath. "I suppose it started with the Goblet of Fire..."

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*I'm back. You won't believe this, but that was Cho on the phone. I'm not sure how I feel. After seeing her at the table at the leaving feast I realised I don't have a crush on her anymore. Now, I'm not sure. I need to think about this.*

*Please don't let what happened tear your family apart. Tell Percy and your Dad that it is OK to disagree, but we need to stick together. Remember what Dumbledore said.*

*Take care, and write again soon,*

*Harry.*



## Betrayal of the Best Kind Warm

### Warm

Harry shifted his legs in an effort to avoid cramping from sitting in the same position for too long. Soon a dementor would bring him his daily meal, some old, stale bread and salty water. Compared with the meals at Hogwarts, it was a pittance, but Harry had lived on not much more at the Dursleys for years. At least here he didn't have to do all the household chores.

Less than half an hour later, the food slot in his door opened, and his meagre sustenance was passed through. He would be left alone now, for the rest of the evening.

He stuffed the bread in his mouth, ignoring the hard grains of baked wheat from the badly milled flour, then washed it down with the water made salty enough that the prisoners still felt thirsty after drinking it. Once Harry had finished his pitiful meal, he brought forth a piece of parchment from the inside of his tattered robes. Reading the message on the front always made him smile, so he avoided looking at it. It would be dangerous to attract the attention of the dementors now. It wouldn't be the first time they performed the kiss when they got excited. After all, who cares what happens to the inmates of Azkaban?

Turning the parchment over, Harry placed his hand over his heart.

"I solemnly swear I am up to no good."

A swirling of ink appeared on the page, twisting and transforming into

***Messrs. Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot, and Prongs Purveyors of Aids to Magical Mischief-Makers are proud to present THE MARAUDER'S ANIMAGUS GUIDE***

"Hello Mr. Prongs, I'm ready to continue." said Harry.

*Mr. Padfoot would first like to present his compliments to Mr. Prongs, Jr. at reaching another year.*

"It's my birthday?"

*Mr. Moony is delighted to confirm that today is in fact Mr. Prongs, Jr's special day.*

*Mr. Prongs hopes that you are having a wonderful day and that there are plenty of friends to share it with.*

*Mr. Wormtail also wishes to add his birthday greetings to Mr. Prongs, Jr, and would ask that he be just as mischievous as his sire on this particular day.*

Harry sighed. He knew it was not really his father and friends he was speaking to. While the guide kept track of how he was doing with his animagus training, it was not able to understand his present state of captivity. The jovial banter between the authors of the guide was most definitely out of place here. It still warmed his heart to talk to them. Their facetious attitudes made life more bearable.

*Mr. Moony continually wonders from where Mr. Prongs, Jr. gets his studious nature. Certainly not from Mr. Prongs.*

*Mr. Prongs would like to point out that Mr. Prongs did in fact spend a lot of time in the library while at Hogwarts.*

*Mr. Padfoot agrees, though remembers that not a lot of studying got done.*

*Mr. Wormtail concurs, noting that the times Mr. Prongs' spent in the library coincided with the times that Mrs. Prongs was there.*

*Mr. Prongs insists that his friends shut up and get back to helping Mr. Prongs, Jr with his mischief.*

Harry smiled despite himself, and went back to studying the theory behind the final step of the animagus transformation.

"Still reading your father's letter, Harry?" asked a familiar voice sarcastically.

Harry jumped. Staring at him through the door was the very unwelcome form of Cornelius Fudge, the Minister of Magic.

Harry quickly shoved the parchment behind him. Affecting a high-pitched voice he shouted, "It's mine! Mine! You can't have it! Mine, all mine!"

Fudge looked at him with a mixture of pity and contempt. The boy squirming before him had almost cost him his position as Minister, after claiming that You-know-who had returned. A great many people had believed him, causing several to call for Fudge's resignation.

Fudge looked down at Harry, who was simply whimpering now, Azkaban having driven him just as mad as the other inmates. Good thing Harry had killed that boy, now no one believed him, he thought. The last thing Fudge wanted was for panic to settle into the Wizarding community. Well, the second last thing. The last thing he wanted was to have to resign.

Harry looked at the contemptuous glare the minister was giving him. He had never been a good



actor, but being filthy as he was, dressed in torn and stained robes, with wild, long, unkempt hair, it was easy to pretend to be mad. Fudge had been ecstatic when Harry had been charged with murder. It had given him a chance to completely discredit The-boy-who-lived.

Finally the minister left to continue his tour, leaving Harry alone. Harry counted to two hundred under his breath before pulling out the animagus guide again. This was the only thing that could help him get out of here. He needed to get out of here. Before he lost what remained of his sanity.

If he was still sane that is. Harry couldn't tell anymore.

Seeing things and hearing voices that are not there is a sign of insanity. Also, in Harry's case, it was a sign that dementors were nearby.

Wondering about your sanity was not productive though. If he was insane, and was imagining the horrible things happening to him, then what he was doing would not make things worse. If he was still thinking coherently, then he may just be able to escape.

"Right Mr Prongs, lets continue."

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## **Summer 1 year ago**

It was ten minutes to midnight, the day before Harry's birthday. Harry had forced himself to stay awake this evening, after a particularly physical day. A lorry carrying large rocks arrived that morning, and his Aunt had spent the day directing where Harry should carry and place them. From the comfort of her sun chair, of course.

Despite the pitiful amounts of food, Harry was slowly gaining weight. Fortified with edible gifts from his friends, he was able to perform all his required chores, while appearing (to Dudley at least) to be on a diet of heroic proportions.

Dudley had actually been bearable this summer. He no longer chased and assaulted Harry for fun, or teased him when his parents were not around. Even when they were, the teasing was half-hearted, and accompanied with an apologizing look. Dudley had apparently started noticing girls, and had realised that most of the nice ones didn't like bullies.

Harry doubted Dudley would ever be a friend, but was grateful that he was no longer an enemy.

Harry looked at his alarm clock. Almost midnight. He got up and opened the window, smiling at the line of owls coming towards number 4, Privet Drive.

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It was thirty minutes past midnight on Harry's fifteenth birthday. There was a respectable pile of unopened gifts sitting on Harry's bed, and several birds in his room, waiting for his answers to the senders.

They had been waiting a while.

Harry sat at his desk with a single piece of parchment reading it over and over.

*Dear Harry,*

*Whatever you do, do not let your mother see this! I had to promise her when you were born that I would get rid of it, since she didn't want you finding and using it. So I did. I am sending this to you on the very day of your birth, timed to reach you on your special birthday.*

*I don't know how much of my past I have told you as you were growing up, or how much you have figured out (I bet you will be a natural at finding out secrets) since as I am writing this you are being fed your first meal (lucky boy). All will be made clear, just as soon as you swear that you are up to no good.*

*I guess writing to you like this is silly, and that when you finally read this we will probably be sitting on the couch at home laughing at Lily's attempt to make you a respectable young man. Don't let that fool you though, she will laugh and enjoy anything you do that reminds her of me.*

*I love you, my son. Your birth has made your mother and I the happiest people in the world. I know you will be/are a fine young man, and we are both very proud of you.*

*All our love,*

*James (and Lily)*

Harry looked at the parchment again. The words blurred, as tears welled up yet again in Harry's eyes. His parents loved him. He knew that of course, but seeing it written down, in a letter, actually addressed to him made it all the more real.

Reluctantly, Harry put the precious letter down and started what now felt like a chore, opening his gifts and responding to the givers.

It was only as Harry was finally drifting off to sleep, with his father's letter clutched against his heart, that he realised that the parchment was very big for such a short letter...

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## Betrayal of the Best Kind Pain

### Pain

Harry set down the precious guide on the cold sand floor. A few weeks had passed since the unexpected encounter with the minister, and Harry had continued studying the guide for several hours each day. Though Harry was never top of his class in Transfiguration, his father's guide was an excellent resource, containing all the required passages from texts normally only accessible to students in the Hogwart's library.

"I think I'm ready, Mr. Prongs. I'm going to try the full transformation."

*Mr. Prongs is delighted at Mr. Prong, Jr's progress.*

*Mr. Wormtail would also like to express his admiration, and humbly suggests that Mr. Prongs, Jr have a friend nearby for when he transforms.*

Harry smiled wistfully. Why do I need a friend nearby, Mr. Wormtail?"

*Mr. Wormtail would just like to say that Mr. Wormtail recalls Mr. Prongs' first attempt at full transformation.*

*Mr. Moony also fondly remembers Mr. Prongs' first attempt, and the pandemonium that ensued.*

*Mr. Prongs would like to point out that Mr. Prongs tried it first because Messrs . Padfoot and Wormtail showed they should not have been sorted into Gryffindor, and that Messrs. Padfoot and Wormtail learned much from Mr. Prongs' discomfort.*

*Mr. Padfoot still laughs at the image, and would like to point out that discomfort is too mild a word.*

Harry's eyes widened. "What happened?"

*Mr. Padfoot recalls being given detention for a week.*

*Mr. Wormtail objects, and states for the record that Mr. Wormtail could not think of a better story to tell the headmaster at short notice.*

*Mr. Moony has not been able to think of a better story, even with as much notice as needed.*

"Let me guess. Mr. Wormtail claimed that Mr. Prongs was the butt of a failed attempt of a joke by Mr. Padfoot."

*Mr. Padfoot would like to offer his sincere admiration at Mr. Prongs, Jr's deductive ability.*

"Why didn't you say that it was not your fault, Mr. Padfoot?"

*Mr. Moony points out that with Mr. Prongs, Jr's recently displayed deductive ability, Mr. Prongs, Jr should be able to figure that out for himself.*

Harry started chuckling. "Mr. Padfoot was laughing too much to object to anything."

*Mr. Prongs would once again like to express his delight at Mr. Prongs, Jr's progress in all things mischievous.*

"So I should have a friend nearby just so they can laugh at my first attempt if it goes wrong?"

*Mr. Wormtail would like to correct Mr. Prongs, Jr, and say that it is so he can be taken to the infirmary in the likely event that Mr. Prongs, Jr is unable to get there without help.*

*Mr. Moony agrees with Mr. Wormtail, but would like to state that Mr. Moony enjoys reminiscing the utter chaos that ensued as Mr. Prongs tried to disentangle his prongs, using only his hooves.*

Fear trickled into Harry's heart. What if he messed up? What if he wasn't able to reverse whatever mistake he made? Would he die here? Would he be stuck here for good?

Harry had made significant progress with his animagus exercises. The partial transformations of various parts of his body had been accomplished successfully. All he really needed to do was to make all the individual changes at once. Sounded easy really.

"Mr. Prongs, I was sorted into Gryffindor for a reason. Let's do it."

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Pain. Confusion. Disorientation. Harry couldn't remember what happened. The tendons in his hands, arms and shoulders felt like they had been stretched beyond breaking point and then frozen. Pain from his legs made him think they had been run over by a car, slowly. His spine had been twisted out of shape, crushing his internal organs. Worst of all was his head. His eyes now reported different, non-overlapping scenes to his brain, adding to his headache. His skull pounded, feeling as though his head had been crushed. Even his jaw was painful, as though all his teeth had been pulled.

Harry tried to stand, but couldn't retain his balance. Collapsing on the sand floor, He willed the pain to stop, to end.

Instantly, the pain ceased. Harry gasped for the breath he couldn't take before. His eyes slowly focused on the stone roof of his bleak prison cell. Heart pounding, he slowly stood on quivering legs.

"What the hell was that?" Harry asked the parchment lying on the sand.

*Mr. Prongs would first like to ask if Mr. Prongs, Jr is all right.*

"Let's just say I've only been in that much pain a few times before."

*Mr. Padfoot would like to apologise to Mr. Prongs, Jr, and say that the first transformation is always painful.*

*Mr. Wormtail concurs, and would like Mr. Prongs, Jr to know that it is necessary to keep that fact from potential mischief-makers, since it is the only step that stops more wizards becoming animagi.*

"I guess that this is why so few wizards willingly do this." Harry murmured.

*Mr. Prongs would finally like to again express admiration and pride for Mr. Prongs, Jr, and say that it has been a pleasure helping Mr. Prongs, Jr to achieve his full potential as a magical mischief-maker.*

The animagus guide went blank.

"You have no idea, Dad. No idea. This will be the biggest prank since the Marauders left Hogwarts."

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## **Summer 1 year ago**

A tapping at his bedroom window woke Harry just before sunrise. Rubbing the sleep from his eyes, he saw Cho's tawny owl waiting patiently to be let in. Harry and Cho had been exchanging letters regularly over the course of this summer, Harry learning more and more about the girl he had once had a crush on for two years. She wrote about how her maternal grandparents had fled the magic intolerance of the then current Chinese government. How they had set up the apocathary in Diagon Alley, and how her father served in the British navy, before meeting and marrying her mother.

They had also exchanged photos of each other as children, though Harry had precious few of those. Cho was always careful to return them to him, after making a copy of course. Cho thought Harry was an absolutely adorable baby.

Their letters were not all happy and light. They both used the letters to pour out their grief, finding comfort in the other. Harry was glad to have confided in Cho the events of and following the third task, something he could not bring himself to do with Ron or Hermione. It was not that he didn't

trust them, but the events did not affect them personally. Cedric's death had affected both himself and Cho deeply, and that bond allowed them to grow closer.

With a smile on his face, Harry untied Cho's latest missive and began to read.

*Dear Harry,*

*Please find enclosed the last picture you sent me. I may have said this before, but you were such a cute baby! My mother thinks I am becoming clucky, and is very glad, since I have never expressed an interest in having children.*

Harry's eyes widened and his jaw dropped.

*Close your mouth Harry, I'm not interested in having kids just yet.*

Harry closed his open mouth and chuckled. She had got to know him too well.

*I know you don't receive much information on what is happening in the wizard world, though on second thought, you do probably get a bit from Ron. Nothing much has happened, officially. There is nothing reported in the papers, but there are several rumors going round. Generally it's events that a friend of a friend saw, that sort of thing. One story that is true, Professor Dumbledore sent a request to the ministry asking that students above fourth year be allowed to practice magic at home during the holidays. Apparently the minister himself rejected it.*

"Damn Fudge, you can't let anything disrupt your idyllic view of the world, can you." muttered Harry.

*It is a dangerous move on his part. He is literally staking his entire political career on the fact that you are lying. Considering everything that has happened, you'd think he was either in league with or being blackmailed by You-know-who's supporters.*

Harry blinked. That was something that had never occurred to him. The thought of the most influential wizard in Britain under the thumb of Voldemort was more than a little frightening. Perhaps he should mention it to Sirius next time he saw him.

*Anyway, enough of the depressing stuff. Are you going to be getting your school stuff for next year from Diagon Alley any time soon? I'd love to see you again, and speak to you face-to-face. My parents would also like to meet the famous Ha Li Bo Te, but don't worry, I've told them how much you hate being fussed over. They will be polite and not make a big deal, I promise.*

A big belly laugh threatened to escape Harry's control. This has got to be the first time someone's parents were more nervous than who they were being introduced to, Harry thought.

*Please let me know when you are going to be in Diagon Alley, so I can make sure I'm not working in the shop.*

*Take care,*

*All my love,*

*Cho.*

Harry stared at the way Cho had signed off her letter. The words 'All my love' kept running through his head. He was sure he was over the crush he had on her. For the last month he had been writing her letters and occasionally speaking on the phone, and since that first call had he not experienced the familiar 'butterflies in the stomach' feeling.

Now, he wasn't so sure. Those damned butterflies had returned with great gusto, as if reminding him that they had been absent for the better part of the summer. He knew she wasn't completely over Cedric, you don't have your boyfriend murdered and are perfectly fine less than two months later.

He also knew that he hadn't been totally honest with her. In one of her earlier letters, she mentioned that she told her mother everything, all her secrets. Harry was glad that Cho had such a close relationship with her parents, but it was that relationship that made him hold back. Confiding in her about Sirius would mean trusting her mother with that secret, and Harry was not about to jeopardise Sirius' safety like that.

Also, he had not mentioned his father's letter. Not even to Ron or Hermione. He couldn't articulate why he kept it from them, he just knew that it was something deeply personal and private.

Harry scrounged around on his desk for a relatively nice sheet of parchment and a quill.

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Cho stared out her bedroom window, watching the sunrise. Already the sounds of people bustling going about their business in Diagon Alley filtered up to her room. The dawn's first light had touched her perfect features minutes before, as she watched the beginning of a new day.

The summer had been a trying time for Cho. Cedric's death had affected her deeply, it had been the first time someone close to her had died. Bad enough, but his violent death at the hands of someone whose return the minister was desperately trying to cover up made it doubly hard.

Harry had helped her through the ordeal more than he suspected. He had always been there, since her second year at Hogwarts. He always got attention and recognition, even though it was clear he wanted nothing more than to be a normal boy. She smiled as she remembered one of the first times he had ever spoken to her, stammering out a offer to take her to the Yule ball last year. She had been truly sorry at that moment that she had agreed to go with Cedric.

It wasn't that he was the Boy-Who-Lived. Several girls had already asked him to the ball, just because he was, well, Harry Potter. At the time she had been angry with them, just wanting to go with him because he was famous. In one of his letters, he had mentioned that he had never before spoken to the first three girls that had asked him to the ball last year. It was the same with her, to a lesser extent. A lot of people had asked her, and none of them saw her as anything other than a

pretty face.

She had thought the same about Harry to start with. Apart from snapping at her earlier in the year when he was under a fair bit of stress, he had never spoken to her before asking her to the ball. But there was something about him that was different from the other boys she knew at Hogwarts. The way his eyes just captured hers, his beautiful emerald eyes, so expressive, yet so mysterious. His letters had contained so much she was sure only a handful of people knew about him.

Harry was certainly not just The-Boy-Who-Lived. He had faced down the most feared wizard of recent times, even dueled him, in the middle of a ring of Death Eaters, and still escaped. He had withstood each of the unforgivable curses, cast at him by You-know-who. He had faced down and flown against a dragon and helped Cedric rescue Cho from the bottom of the Hogwart's lake. He'd even survived an encounter with Sirius Black, You-know-who's lieutenant, though Harry had been curiously uninformative about that. Surprising really, since he had told her all about how the troublesome trio (as Harry and his friends are known amongst the staff, according to professor Flitwick) had beaten professor Quirrel to the Philosopher's stone, and rescued Ron's sister from the Chamber of Secrets. Even his adventure of arriving at school in a flying car in her third year.

Perhaps he still felt in danger, after all, Black was still at large, and had not been sighted even once since the end of her fourth year.

Even though he had opened up to her in his letters, Harry was still an enigma to her. She had cried when reading his description of the cupboard he lived in for ten years before coming to Hogwarts. She felt anger and hatred towards his relatives, after reading how they treated him during the summer. He was telling her the truth, she knew, but how he turned into the person he was spoke volumes about his character. His eyes hid far more than they expressed. Yes, there was more to Harry than a famous scar.

Cho's thoughts were interrupted by a snowy owl floating in through her window on silent wings. Cho made sure Hedwig had some water and an owl treat before removing the letter from Hedwig's leg and reading Harry's reply.

*Dear Cho,*

*Thank you for returning the photo of my mother and I, it is one of my favorites. I'm glad you enjoy these photos as much as I do. It means a lot to me to be able to share them with someone.*

I'll bet, thought Cho. She had sent him a few dozen photos of her taken as she was growing up, and had initially been surprised at how few Harry sent her. It was only after she had been a little upset that she realised that he had sent her nearly his entire collection. She still felt guilty at her first reaction.

*Normally I get to spend a little while at the Weasleys' at the end of the summer, but this year the headmaster has been reluctant to let me leave Privet Drive. If I don't get permission to visit them, I'll visit you on the 28th of August. I refuse to stay here any longer than necessary; I will take a room at the Leaky Cauldron for the last few days of the holidays.*



Cho let out an excited squeal. She knew it was horrible of her to think it, but she almost hoped that Harry wasn't allowed to go to the Weasleys, so he got to spend a few days living just around the corner.

*I might even end up staying in Diagon Alley even if I am invited to the Weasleys. They are going through a bad patch right now. Percy has moved out and there have been a lot of arguments apparently. The last thing I want to do is make it more awkward for them.*

*I am looking forward to meeting your parents. The only parents of people I know who I have met are Mr. & Mrs. Weasley, Mr. & Mrs. Diggory, and Malfoy's Dad. Well, that is not strictly true, I met Crabbe and Goyle's fathers too, but they had masks and dark robes on and were trying to kill me at the time. I haven't even met Hermione's parents. They are not exactly prominent in the wizarding world, being dentists, but I would like to meet them one day.*

*I hope I'm not being too forward, but in our school letters, one of the requirements is a dress robe. Using all the powers of reasoning available to me, I'd guess there is going to be at least one ball. May I have the honor of escorting you to the dance? I realise it is not the same as asking in person, but I doubt I'd make a lot of sense if I had to do that. I seem to recall stuttering and mumbling a lot the last time I tried.*

Cho's dark eyes widened. Harry was asking her to the ball. He didn't even know when it was on, but he wanted to make sure he went with her. A vast feeling of relief settled on Cho's shoulders. At least now, she would be going with someone who respected her, and knew she was not just a pretty face.

*Please let me know, I really do look forward to seeing you on the 28th.*

*Love, Harry.*

Cho grabbed a quill and started to write a quick affirmative reply.

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## **Betrayal of the Best Kind**

### **Free**

Free

Harry sat impatiently waiting for the dementors outside his door to leave. The exhilaration at realising he could now escape from his prison had attracted them like flies to a corpse. The cold aura that surrounded them attacked Harry, making it easy to bring forth the full force of his hatred. The sounds of his parent's murder was drowned out by the forced recollection of the jeers and catcalls at his trial. The image of Lucius Malfoy's triumphant smirk as Harry was led away. Fudge's self-satisfied smile. But what really drove the dementors to find other positive emotions was the memory of Ron, Hermione, Cho and Ginny, staring at him as he was led away. Each of them wearing an expression of disgust.

A few deep breaths later, the churning in his stomach was back under control. The sun had set a few hours ago. Harry made sure the animagus guide was securely tucked into his torn and filthy robes. One final look through his barred door to make sure the coast was clear, and Harry slipped into his new form.

Again, the feeling of stretching tendons in his arms, though no pain this time. His spine twisted and shortened, his pelvis reversing. His eyes drifted apart, giving him separate fields of vision. Feathers sprouted over his wings and body, while his legs thinned and hardened. Within a second, a magnificent bird stood where before there was only a thin, pitiful boy.

Harry preened himself, making sure all his feathers were properly aligned. With a musical trill, he launched himself at the small window, tucking his wings as he passed between the bars, and fought for altitude. Warmth flooded him as he left the dementors behind. Once high above the island prison and out of sight, Harry let loose a cry of success, relief and freedom. For long minutes he simply luxuriated in the sensation of total freedom, the wind flowing across his wings.

Harry turned and looked toward the horizon with eyes hundreds of times more powerful than his human ones. Easily detecting the slight glow indicating a human settlement, he started to fly towards it. There was a man he really wanted to visit.

The ministry was in an uproar. There was no other word to describe it. Cornelius Fudge stormed past his secretary and into the relative safety of his office. There were several howlers on his desk already. On the other side of his office door, dozens of journalists were demanding answers. Throwing a pinch of powder into the fireplace he yelled, "Albus Dumbledore!"

Seconds later, a face appeared in the fire. Half-moon spectacles framed his kindly face, long silver hair and beard lending him a calm, unruffled air.

"Cornelius! What on earth could bring you to my fireplace at such an ungodly hour?", Dumbledore asked.

"Potter." Fudge said flatly. "He has managed to escape."

"Really, how extraordinary. I don't suppose you are aware of how he managed to accomplish this feat?"

"No. I am not. I visited him a fortnight ago and he was hopelessly insane. He must have had help. I need to know if any of his former friends or teachers have left Hogwarts in the last day."

"Dumbledore's expression darkened. "I trust you are not implying that anyone under my supervision assisted Mr. Potter to escape."

"That is exactly what I am implying!", Fudge yelled, rising from his chair. "Harry has no other friends or allies outside of Hogwarts. He must have received assistance from someone there."

"Cornelius!", Dumbledore thundered. The headmaster's eyes blazed with a fire that had nothing to do with the method of communication used. "Sit down!"

The minister sat down before his mind registered what he had been told.

"Mr. Potter has lost all he ever cherished at Hogwarts. His closest friends found his attempts to get them to provide him with an alibi revolting. I understand that one of the students most involved in the hero-worship of Mr. Potter before the murder has destroyed his entire collection of photographs. None of the staff here speak his name without contempt. Even I could not deny the evidence that was presented. I tell you now, not a single person here would have helped him, even if they could."

"What do you mean, 'could'?"

Dumbledore sighed. "Regardless of your personal opinion of Mr. Potter's credibility, he was telling the truth about Voldemort's return. I have been active with the staff in creating wards which track the movement of people in the castle and grounds. No student or professor has left the grounds in the last few days."

"Come Dumbledore, surely you still don't believe the boy? He was shown to be a liar at the trial."

"Mr. Potter did in fact witness the resurrection of Voldemort, Cornelius. Your refusal to accept that endangers us all."

Fudge's face coloured. "That's enough! He is not back and never will be. I will need confirmation that no one has left Hogwarts in the last few days. I will also require the names and times of all who have left the grounds in the last fortnight."

Dumbledore sighed. "As you wish, Cornelius." His head disappeared from the fireplace.

Fudge slowly turned back to his desk. The howlers there were starting to smoke. He shoved them into a specially enchanted container, and closed the lid. Throwing the container to the floor, a series of muffled explosions sounded. Turning back to his desk he let loose a startled cry of alarm.

Standing before him was a tall, thin woman with ugly glasses. "Hello to you as well, minister." She said.

"Skeeter. How did you get in here?" Fudge did his best to regain his composure.

"Please, you know I get everywhere. Do you have a statement for the press on the escape of young Mr. Potter?"

"Not at this time, now I really must ask you to leave right aw..." Fudge stopped as an brightly feathered bird swooped in and deposited a letter on his desk. "...way. What is this?"

Rita Skeeter made no move to leave. She watched with interest as the minister's face changed colour several times as he read the message. Quickly, he crumpled the letter and jammed it in his pocket.

"Out!", he screamed. Rita jumped at the unexpected outburst.

"Very well, minister." She said submissively. As she slowly made her way out, Fudge turned around and threw another pinch of powder into the fire, calling the name of the head of the Unspeakables. As Rita slowly closed the door, she surreptitiously aimed her wand and the minister's back and whispered, "Accio letter."

The crumpled letter flew unnoticed from Fudge's pocket into her eager hands. Closing the door, she made her way to the designated Apparition area and quickly travelled to her office at the Daily Prophet.

With practised ease, she smoothed the sheet of parchment and read the contents. Like a sunrise, a broad grin spread over her face. "Now this is a story!", she exclaimed.

Rushing to the door, she called her editor over. Without speaking, she thrust the parchment into his unresisting hands. Lowering his eyes, an identical grin appeared on his lips.

Minutes later she was busy writing what was going to be the most triumphant story she had ever written. Her eyes kept getting drawn to the letter, and a warm glow spread through her as she wrote her column. She read the damning letter one last time.

*Cornelius,*

*First of all, thankyou for your help in getting out of there, I really appreciate it. I actually thought you had forgotten your part of the bargain until you showed up. It would have been impossible to escape without your help.*

*I am now staying at the place you specified, waiting for your response and instructions.*

*Regards,*

*H.P.*

Harry watched through Fudge's office window as he spoke to Dumbledore through the fireplace. Their conversation finished and the minister turned around and swept all the howlers on his desk into a box. Harry's powerful eyes could make out a small insect scuttle under the door of Fudge's office and transform into Rita Skeeter. Fudge turned back after disposing of the howlers, only to almost fall backwards off his chair as he saw the reporter.

Perfect, Harry thought. He launched himself through the air, and aimed for the open window. Once in the office, Harry dropped the letter he had written earlier, and retreated out the window. Quickly finding his perch, he turned in time to make out the minister's face as he read the letter. If Harry was in his human form, he would have laughed out loud. He watched as the minister dismissed Rita and trilled softly when she deftly extracted the letter he wrote from the minister's pocket. He ruffled his feathers and shook his sleekly feathered head. Fudge had proved himself adept at spreading misinformation before, during and after Harry's trial, painting Harry as a youth desperate for attention, and willing to do anything to get it.

Well, Harry thought, it probably wasn't a good idea to give the son of a Marauder such a crash course in the seedy side of manipulating public opinion. Rita acted exactly as expected, and he fully expected the demands for Fudge's resignation to be deafening by morning.

Harry mentally chuckled to himself. Rita would probably have a stroke if she ever figured out how she had been played. If only I'd discovered earlier how to use her powers for good instead of evil, he thought dryly.

Harry spread his wings and leapt from his lofty perch. If his mouth wasn't fixed into the shape of a beak, he would have been grinning as he flew towards the one place he could stay undetected, and plan how to clear his name.

The shrieking shack stood on the outskirts of Hogsmeade, and was indeed a shack. Non-descript and run down, no one had entered it for years. Harry quietly entered the largest room, looking at the scratches and other damage Remus had done to the place while a student at Hogwarts.

Harry looked around the room, noting little had changed since the last time he was here. Suddenly he felt very weary, the effort of having flown nearly the length of England twice tonight catching up. He was looking forward to the first restful nights sleep in almost a year.

Moving over to the only bed, Harry's heart nearly stopped as a hand covered his mouth from behind. Before he could even draw breath in surprise, a strong arm wrapped around Harry's thin frame.

"Fancy meeting you here.", a dry voice whispered from behind.

## Summer 1 year ago

Harry sat on his trunk, holding Hedwig's cage, in front of number 4, Privet Drive. He slowly watched the sun set, the brilliant colours lighting up the western sky. It was the 27th of August, and Harry was determined not to stay with the Dursleys any longer.

Harry had completely reconstructed the back garden from scratch, and it now looked perfect. It didn't take too long for his Aunt to start bragging about her gardening skills to the neighbours. Harry sighed, and shifted in his clothes. Dudley's cast-offs were now the right height for Harry, so he didn't have to roll up the sleeves and trouser legs. He did however need to cinch in the waist with a belt of his Uncles, after cutting it in half and punching his own holes in it.

All the hard work had made physical changes to Harry. Though still short, his body was now covered in hard, sinewy muscle. Harry had been surprised at how easy it was to lift up and carry his trunk down the stairs that afternoon. He had been collecting books, gifts and other magical items for the last four years, and the trunk was full to the brim. Yet he had no trouble at all moving it.

Finally, the sun slipped down over the horizon. Harry raised his wand to signal the knight bus. With a loud report, the enormous triple-decker bus appeared in Privet Drive, causing several dustbins to jump out of the way. Harry shook his head and smiled. The driver had not improved his driving skills.

Minutes later, Harry was comfortably reclining on one of the beds in the bus, a cup of hot chocolate in his hands. He watched through the window as the bus sped across the English countryside, stopping occasionally to pick up a wizard or witch.

A little over an hour later, Harry was alighting in Diagon Alley. Even early in the evening as it was, there was still hundreds of people going about their business. Harry lifted his trunk and walked over to the Leaky Cauldron.

"Well, bless my soul, if it isn't Harry Potter! How are you Harry?"

Harry turned to see Tom the bartender and gave him a broad grin. "I'm fine Tom, thanks. I was hoping you had a room free until the 1st of September."

"Of course Harry, no problem. I can give you the same room you were in last time if you wish.", offered Tom.

"Thanks, Tom. How much for five nights?"

"Don't worry about that now, we can discuss that later. Let's get your trunk up to your room."

Tom and Harry carried his trunk up to Harry's room, where Hedwig was already waiting.

"That's a good owl you've got there Harry." remarked Tom.

"Yeah, someday I may actually work out how she does it.", Harry replied.

Saying goodbye to Tom, Harry unpacked what he needed. He grabbed a clean set of robes, and a towel. One quick shower later, Harry dressed in his robes with a feeling of relief. Four years as a wizard had made Harry uncomfortable wearing muggle clothes for any length of time.

On a whim, Harry tied his damp hair back into a short ponytail. Tying it down kept it from flying out of control, and gave him a sense of control for the first time. It meant that his scar was visible to all, but being covered up never stopped people from looking at it.

Harry made sure Hedwig had fresh water, and some food available in his cage. Picking up the single rose he had cut from the garden, Harry walked out of his room, his heart beating wildly.

Cho returned the containers of powdered unicorn horn and dried bat's wing to their respective places on the shelves. It had been a busy day today, though not as bad as it was going to be. The busiest day of the year was the 31st of August, with students from all years clamouring for their potion ingredients.

There was a chime as another customer ignored the closed sign on the door and walked in. Cho shook her head and sighed.

"Sorry, we are closed. Please come back tomorrow.", she told the person behind her.

"Sorry." a familiar voice said. "I'll come back another time."

Cho spun round. "Harry! I thought you were coming tomorrow!"

Harry stood in the centre of the shop, with his hands behind his back. The mischievous grin on his face and the sparkle in his beautiful green eyes made her go weak at the knees.

"Surprise!" he said.

Cho smiled and walked over to him to give him a warm hug. She felt him stiffen in her arms. She looked at him in confusion.

"Sorry, um, I, I'm not, er, I've never..." he stammered.

"Shh, it's OK." she replied, holding him tighter, resting her cheek on his chest. She had got the impression from his letters that he didn't get any affection from his relatives, but she hadn't expected him to react so defensively to a hug. That simple hesitation told her more than she ever wanted to know about how he had been emotionally neglected as a child. He finally returned the embrace, holding her gently. Something in his hands tickled her back.

"What are you holding, Harry?", she asked.

Without speaking, Harry let go and slowly passed the single rose to her. Cho's eyes lit up at the unexpected gift.

"Oh, Harry! It's beautiful. Thank you." Cho moved behind the counter and found a vase. She put the rose in the vase, and tapped the rim with her wand. It immediately filled with water.

"I cut it this afternoon from the garden.", he said, not sure what else to say.

"I love it, Harry. It smells just beautiful.", she replied, breathing in the flower's scent.

She turned and looked at the nervous young man. "come here," she said, "I'd like to introduce you to my family."

Harry and Cho walked down the almost empty Diagon Alley, side by side. For Harry, the last couple of hours had been more nerve-wracking than any time during the Tri-wizard tournament.

He had been introduced to Cho's parents and grandparents, who had been excited enough at meeting Harry that Cho had to keep reminding them to be polite. The churning in his stomach kept him from eating anything offered, which caused some hurt looks from Cho's mother. Finally, after what felt like an entire year stuck in Snape's dungeon, Harry and Cho were able to escape and spend some time walking alone in Diagon Alley.

Harry had then treated Cho to dinner at a wizarding restaurant called The Witch's Brew. It had been Harry's first time in a wizard restaurant, and he was not sure what to expect. Having his name exclaimed by the doorman was not it. He spent the rest of the evening having his conversation with Cho interrupted by autograph seekers and others offering more than a good time.

"Harry," Cho broke the silence. "I'm sorry you haven't had a good evening."

"It's OK Cho, just being with you has made my evening wonderful." They both blushed.

Harry summoned his courage and took Cho's hand in his own. He was elated when she deliberately laced her fingers with his. Silently they walked down the length of Diagon Alley, back to Cho's family's Apocathery.

"Thank you, Cho. I have had a wonderful evening with you." Harry said.

"Me too. Though I didn't enjoy those twins who tried to kiss you at the restaurant."

Harry blushed at the memory. "You're not the only one." he mumbled.

Cho smiled. "Harry, I don't need to work at the shop tomorrow, would you like to get all your school things with me?"

Harry's eyes lit up. "That would be great," he exclaimed, "when can I come and get you?"

"Eight o'clock sound OK to you?", she asked with a smile.

"Perfect. I will see you then."



Cho smiled. She leaned forward and placed a petal soft kiss on Harry's lips.

Harry couldn't remember getting back to his room at the Leaky Cauldron. His first ever kiss had left him in a daze.

Harry pulled out his father's letter. Holding his hand over his heart, he said "I solemnly swear that I am up to no good."

The familiar swirling ink resolved into the animagus guide.

"Mr. Prongs, I, I need to tell you something."

*Mr. Prongs would like to ask what Mr. Prongs, Jr has to say.*

"I just kissed a girl for the first time."

*Mr. Prongs offer's his congratulations and hopes it was a special girl.*

*Mr. Moony encourages Mr. Prongs, Jr to remember this moment, as it is one of the most magical things to ever happen.*

*Mr Padfoot also offers his congratulations, and demands to know all the gory details.*

Harry smiled, and began to relate that most memorable moment.

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A/N

Jim Thanks, I'll look at it soon

Cozboz I'm glad you are enjoying it.

BigDaddy753 Wow, my first fic is on a favourite list.

SunKitten You'll find out in the next few chapters. Harry is going to have to work out why what he thinks happened, didn't in fact happen.

Spordelia Chase Thanks for your praise. Could you please send me an email explaining what you found confusing, I'd like to make my fic as enjoyable for everyone as I can.

SailorGurl Since both girls are going to spend a large part of the story hating Harry, I doubt it could be classified as either. I am focusing part of the story on Cho, since both she and Harry have to come to terms with what happened at the end of GoF.

ilikethsstory Thanks a million! I'm glad you are enjoying it.

Gryphnwnng You need to sit on your seat properly, because since I am effectively writing two

stories at once, I may just hit you with a double cliff-hanger! Glad you like it.

Kim Hang around, I'll be updating every couple of days. My wife says my punctuation is shocking, but she is a trained journalist, so she is particularly difficult to please.

## Betrayal of the Best Kind Hero

Hero

"Fancy meeting you here.", a dry voice whispered from behind.

Heart pounding, Harry squirmed all he could, but his attacker's grip was too strong.

Panicking, Harry lifted his right foot and slammed it down on his attacker's toes. He nodded his head forward before slamming it back hard enough to bring stars to his eyes. Harry felt his attacker's nose break under his assault. The arm holding him loosened enough for Harry to turn and shove the stranger away.

A tall, thin man crumpled to the floor, clutching his nose and cursing. "Nith to thee you too.", he said in a familiar voice.

"Sirius?", Harry exclaimed.

The man nodded. "I'd hade do thee how you welcomb an enemy, ib dith ith how you welcomb me."

"Sirius!", Harry yelled. He ran over and helped his godfather to his feet before embracing him. Sirius returned the hug with one hand, the other stopping blood from running onto Harry's already dirty robes.

"How did you escabe?", Sirius asked.

"I had help. Lie down and I'll fix your nose." Harry ordered.

Sirius didn't move. "Who? Who helbed?"

"You. Let me fix your nose, and that will answer your questions."

Frowning at Harry's cryptic answer, Sirius reluctantly lay down on the broken bed. He closed his eyes as the pain of his broken nose shot through his head. He felt Harry lean on him.

Something liquid fell on his nose, and the pain ceased. He could feel his nose reform and straighten. He let out a yelp of surprise and sat up.

Sitting on his lap was a magnificent phoenix. Its blood-red feathers almost glowed in the low light of the moon outside. Piercing green eyes regarded him thoughtfully. The phoenix tilted his head to one side, and winked. With a faint pop, Harry straddled his godfather's waist, grinning widely.

Sirius was speechless. He pushed Harry off him and stood up, legs shaking. "You, you..."

Harry gave him an innocent look. "Yes, Sirius?", he asked.

"That's impossible!" Sirius exclaimed.

"I'm fairly sure that other wizards have managed to become animals in the past, godfather mine. I even know someone who has done it."

"Not that Harry! Every animagi's other form is a normal animal. Until now, it was thought it was impossible for a wizard to change into a magical creature."

Harry eyes widened. "Sirius, you have to be kidding."

"Nope. It has never happened before."

Harry shrugged. "Well, no one will be able to find me then. A perfect disguise."

Sirius mentally shook himself. "How? I mean, I sure as hell didn't help you become an animagus."

Harry was still smiling. "Yes you did." He reached into his robes and extracted a large sheet of parchment. Silently he handed it to his godfather.

Sirius automatically took the sheet, and read the letter his best friend had written to the young man he considered his own son. Understanding dawned.

"The guide!", Sirius exclaimed in an excited whisper. "I thought this was destroyed when James and Lily... when they... when..." Sirius took a deep breath to hold back tears.

"I understand.", Harry said.

"That little sneak.", Sirius said. "He had already sent it to you. Wanted to make sure you got it, even if Lily disapproved. Ha. He wasn't as whipped as I thought."

"I guess it was just luck that they let me take it with me to Azkaban." Harry said.

"They let you take this with you?"

"Yeah. After they found me guilty," Harry sneered. "I asked if I could 'please take my father's letter with me'. They checked it for magic before sending it to me. Good idea, by the way, masking its magic. I doubt they'd have let me keep it if it was obviously magical."

"We didn't mask the magic, Harry."

Harry blinked in surprise. "Then how?"

Sirius frowned in thought. After a few seconds, his eyebrows shot up. "Harry, have you used the guide since you finished your transformation?"

"No, I haven't exactly had a great deal of free time since I escaped."

"Try it."

Harry took the guide from Sirius, and placed his hand on his heart. "I solemnly swear that I am up to no good." he said.

Nothing happened.

Harry frowned. Sirius grinned.

Harry gave his godfather an appraising look. "Let me guess." Harry started. "The magic only works for wizards who are not animagi."

"Your brain hasn't rotted while you were away. Good."

Harry smiled. "Professor McGonagall was the one to find and test it. She is already an animagus."

Sirius grabbed a chair and sat down. Folding up the guide he handed it back to his godson. "So, what made you choose a phoenix?"

Harry sat on the floor, and thought back. "Well, the guide taught me in the basic theory that you need to have intimate knowledge of the animal in question. I guess this is why no one has tried to become a magical creature. You need a thorough examination of the magical powers of the creature in question. I have been lucky enough to have seen Fawkes in action. My loyalty to Dumbledore was able to draw him to me. I have been healed a couple of times by him. Fawkes was even able to carry three students and a, ahem, 'professor', out of the Chamber of Secrets. I even got to watch him go through is rebirth."

Sirius' head snapped up. "You've seen a phoenix die? and get reborn?"

Harry nodded. "Scared the hell out of me, I can tell you. I was alone in Dumbledore's office, looking at this pathetic excuse of a bird when it just burst into flames. Dumbledore walked in at that moment, and I was afraid he'd hold me responsible for the destruction of his pet."

"What did he say?"

Harry snickered. "He said, 'About time!'".

Sirius laughed out loud. For the first time in nearly a year, he completely relaxed. Harry was safe and free. For the rest of the night, the pair shared stories of their adventures, deliberately ignoring the fact that they were the two most wanted men in the wizarding world.

It was almost morning before Harry finally got to sleep. Lying next to the only person who believed him made him feel safer than at any other time in his life. For the first time in months, Harry finally entered a dreamless slumber.

### **Summer, before fifth year**

The summer sun was not able to penetrate the thick cloud cover overhead. Harry didn't mind. The last few days had been the most exhilarating he had ever had. He and Cho had spent most of every day together. Even when she had been required to work in her parent's shop, Harry had helped. Over both Cho's and her parent's objections, he had put on an apron and worked around the store. Cho stopped arguing when she realised that with Harry helping, her chores were done so much faster, which in turn meant more time with him. Harry had learned more from Cho's parents about the various magical compounds they sold than he had in four years of potions.

The pair had gone into Gringotts on the morning of the 28th for Harry to make a withdrawal. Cho clambered into the cart behind the goblin without hesitation. For long minutes, the cart sped down, deep into the earth, turning corners on two wheels. Cho stuck her torso over the side the whole way, yelling with excitement.

Despite himself, Harry had been awestruck. Cho's magnificent dark silky hair had streamed out behind her, her face alive with elation. She had looked absolutely beautiful.

Once back in Diagon Alley, Cho told Harry that she had always enjoyed travelling in the goblin's carts, ever since her father had taken her to her family's vault for the first time.

The rest of the day had been spent buying their school supplies and holding hands. Harry summoned enough nerve to tell Cho how her good-night kiss had made him feel. Much of that afternoon had been spent snogging in a secluded corner of a London park.

It was now the 30th. Harry had been invited to dinner with Cho's family the night before, and the discussion had ranged over many topics. One that came up was Cedric's funeral. Harry had been trapped at his relatives house at the time, and had been unable to attend. Cho's grandfather had offered to take them both to see Cedric's grave.

Harry felt guilty holding Cho's hand while standing at the grave of her friend. No matter how many times Cho told him that they had only been good friends, Harry couldn't bring himself to feel comfortable.

Silently understanding, Cho gave Harry a quick kiss on the cheek. "Take your time, Harry. I'll be waiting for you at the car. Slowly she walked away, leaving Harry alone to finally say his goodbyes.

He looked at the fresh grave. The headstone still gleamed, flowers from previous visitors still bloomed.

"Cedric. I, I just wanted to tell you that I'm sorry. I've been beating myself up for the last couple

of months with all sorts of 'what ifs'. What if I hadn't taken the cup, what if I'd taken it for myself. Even what if I'd forced you to take it alone.

"I admired you, you know. When your name was drawn from the Goblet first, I was glad you'd been chosen as Hogwarts' champion. After my name was drawn you were the only one who didn't make me feel unwanted. Fleur called me a little boy, and Krum just sneered at me. Madame Maxine thought it was a joke, heh, and Karkaroff would have strangled me if he could have got away with it.

"No one but Hermione and Dumbledore believed me when I said that I hadn't put my name in the Goblet. It was a hard time for me. Then after I found out that we would be going up against dragons, I knew that you would be the only competitor who wouldn't have advanced warning."

Harry stared at the sky and scratched at his neck. "After I managed to get you alone to warn you what we were going to be facing, you looked at me suspiciously. I actually thought then they you didn't understand what I'd said. If you'd seen the dragons, you'd sure as hell would have told anyone who was going to be facing them.

"It actually took me a long time to work up the courage to ask Cho to the Yule ball after that. Silly, isn't it. I was the one sorted into Gryffindor, but I was too scared to ask her. She told me that she was already going with you. I hated you then. I thought you were just another pretty boy." Harry closed his eyes. "I couldn't believe you had done that to me. I'd helped you with the task, and then you go and ask Cho to the ball."

Harry stood silently for a moment, listening to the bird calls.

"I spent the entire ball shooting daggers into you. I couldn't believe how much I hated you. It all seems so petty now. I was such a child, I couldn't understand that the two of you were just friends. I couldn't get my head round the fact.

"I almost didn't follow your advice. I just couldn't bring myself to give you any credibility. I'd told you straight out what we were going to face, and you told me to take a bath. Didn't seem to be a fair trade at the time.

"Myrtle helped, of course. She told me she liked to spy on the prefects as they were in the bath. Ha. I almost swallowed a ton of water when she showed herself." Harry smiled at the memory. "I almost got caught going back to Gryffindor Tower. Snape was angry enough to have me expelled on the spot. I'll bet that had never happened to you.

"I didn't even manage to figure out how to complete the second task. Dobby woke me and gave me some Gillyweed he'd pilfered from Snape's cupboard. By the time I'd got to the bottom of the lake, I'd convinced myself that I'd get the task finished. Until I saw all my friends. Looking back, I'm not sure which of Ron, Hermione or Cho I'd miss most if they were gone. I guess that was easy for the rest of you.

"The third task was just weird. I was proud to be starting with you. When we crossed wands and

wished each other luck before heading down separate paths, I felt like I belonged for the first time. Didn't work out that way though. By the time we battled the spider at the end of the maze you had gone through far more than I did.

"There's another reason I didn't deserve to win. Hagrid and Crouch helped me with the first task. You, Myrtle and Dobby helped me with the second. Crouch told me he had hexed and cursed many obstacles out of my way during the last task. I doubt that without help, I'd have been able to complete any of the tasks, yet you managed to complete all three.

"You didn't get to witness what happened after we took the cup. It was a nightmare. Your worst enemy being reborn in front of you, using your blood to do it. Cho has theorised that the psychological effect of having my own blood used makes my subconscious believe that it is my fault. Trust a ravenclaw to use logic to help make nightmares go away.

"I'd had a nightmare nearly every night since the last task, unless I was completely exhausted. Cho has helped me, and I haven't had one in nearly a week. In nearly all of them, you would stand in front of me and tell me that I'm to blame, that I killed you. She made me see that you didn't blame me. That when your shade came out of Voldemort's wand you didn't berate me, or say it was my fault. You helped me, you fought to keep the Death Eaters and Voldemort off me, asking only that I try to bring your body back to your parents in return."

Tears were running down Harry's cheeks. "Your parents. God, how I was afraid to face them. For a couple who had just lost their son, they were more gentle and supportive of me than I felt I deserved."

Harry crouched down to touch the earth on top of Cedric's grave. "I needed to come here for a reason. I need to tell you that you will not be forgotten. I swear to you on the lives of my children and their children. Not while anyone of my blood lives. You will always be remembered, and honoured."

Harry stood, and looked at the inscription on Cedric's headstone.

**Cedric Diggory**

*Son, Friend, Champion*

"I hope you don't mind, Cedric, but there is something missing." Harry drew his wand, and etched a single word at the bottom of Cedric's epitaph.

"Goodbye, Cedric. May your sacrifice not have been in vain."

Harry turned and walked slowly to where Cho and her Grandfather waited.

**Cedric Diggory**

*Son, Friend, Champion  
Hero*



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A/N

Fallen Dragon I'm glad you are enjoying it. I'll hopefully be updating every couple of days.

Gryphnwng Good boy. Sit. Stay. No more sugar. Just for you, I'll try to keep it down to one cliff-hanger per chapter...

katrina Thanks, and well done! I wanted to put one hint in before revealing what Harry's form was. 10 points to your house.

Kim Not my wife. She has the distinction of being the only person I know to have found an spelling error in a dictionary. True! I'm truely glad you are enjoying my fic.

## Betrayal of the Best Kind Seek

Seek

It was early afternoon when Harry woke. He stretched and rubbed the sleep from his eyes.

Sunlight peaked in through the gaps in the boarded windows, forming glowing lines in the dusty air. Harry marveled at how colourful everything was. There was no colour Harry could remember in his prison cell. He made a mental note to ask Sirius if there were any differences through a canine's colour-blind eyes.

Harry looked around, noting that Sirius was not there. He rose and looked around the shack. It was the first time he had been inside during the day. It looked far less sinister than he expected.

A patter of canine feet could be heard just outside the front door. Harry opened the door to admit Sirius entrance without having to transform. The enormous black dog entered, carrying a discarded newspaper in his mouth. He dropped the paper and turned back into a human.

"You'll never guess what has happened." Sirius said, eyes twinkling with mirth.

"Let me try. Fudge has been implicated in a conspiracy to free me, having assisted me to escape from Azkaban when he visited two weeks ago, and he has had to resign in shame." Harry said, deadpan.

Sirius stood still in shock before leaping at Harry and bearing him to the floor.

"You bloody sneak. You did this! Why didn't you tell me?" he yelled, trying not to laugh.

Harry could hardly speak, he was laughing so hard. "I just...wanted...to see...the look...on your...face."

Sirius got off Harry and helped him to his feet. "Was the look on my face to your satisfaction?" he asked sourly.

"Priceless!" Harry finally got his laughter under control. "I guess it worked."

"If you wanted to embarrass the minister enough to make him resign, then yes you succeeded beyond your wildest dreams."

"Really?"

"Yep, with that letter, which I now assume you wrote, an investigation is being conducted into the good minister's performance. It was pointed out the I also escaped and haven't been captured yet. Skeeter suggested that he may have helped me escape too. Here, read it for yourself." Sirius picked up the paper and passed it to Harry.

## **ROTTEN FUDGE**

*Rita Skeeter, Special Correspondent*

*It seems something is indeed rotten in the Ministry, and the rot goes right to the top. The Ministry and Cornelius Fudge in particular have been denying the recent increase in dark wizard activity is anything more than rogue wizards out for a lark. It appears that Minister Fudge is being less than truthful about what he knows.*

*The Daily Prophet can bring you exclusive proof that Minister Fudge is in fact up to his ugly bowler hat in Dark Wizard activity. Not four hours after Mr. Harry Potter's escape from Azkaban, a letter dropped on the Minister's desk. The letter was magically confirmed to have been written by young Mr. Potter, less than two hours after his unexplained escape. The letter's contents are nothing short of Mr. Potter thanking the Minister for his help in escaping, and a request for further instructions.*

Harry looked at his godfather and grinned. "I'd say she took the bait. How do you think she'd react if she found out she had been lead along by the nose?"

Sirius laughed. "I'd say she'd put a volcano to shame. Keep reading, the best is yet to come."

Harry turned back to the paper and continued to read.

*At the discovery of this treachery, The Daily Prophet started digging into the Minister's previous movements. We can report that the minister visited the only other escapee from Azkaban, one Sirius Black, only days before his escape. It would appear that our dear Minister has been instrumental in aiding and abetting the escape of both fugitives.*

Harry looked up again. "So you had help from him too. What a naughty man."

Sirius nodded. "Keep going."

*As morality and ethics demanded, The Daily Prophet handed all evidence to the Auror Head. This reporter then followed the aurors to the arrest of the now ex-Minister Fudge. Protesting his innocence, the minister was led away and is being held in the very same cell that Mr. Potter vacated yesterday.*

Harry's eyes widened. "I only wanted him to be embarrassed enough to resign."

"That's my little Marauder, always over-achieving." Sirius laughed, ruffling Harry's long hair. "Though it is nice that Fudge is ruined, the best is yet to come."

Harry lowered his eyes and started reading once more.

*With the removal of Fudge from office, Mr. Arthur Weasley, formerly of the Misuse of Muggle Artifacts Office has been named temporary Minister of Magic. Mr. Weasley's name was put forward by Albus Dumbledore, Headmaster of Hogwarts, and was accepted by the other department heads.*

*Mr. Weasley's first action was to announce an investigation into the claimed resurrection of You-know-who. It appears that the previous minister had suppressed evidence and witness statements giving support to the claim that the most feared dark wizard of our time has returned.*

The report continued for the next several pages. Harry put the paper down and looked at his godfather, a grin on his face.

"Well, Harry, Fudge is ruined..." Sirius started.

"...the best man for the job has taken over..." Harry replied.

"...and the world will know that Voldemort is back!" Sirius finished.

Harry smirked at his godfather. "So," he said, looking at his fingernails. "What have you accomplished before breakfast today?"

Seconds later, Harry was wrestling with an enormous black dog that was doing its best to cover him with slobber.

An hour later, Harry was in the rusty old bathtub in the small bathroom. Sirius had filled it with rainwater and heated it with his wand. The sensation of being both clean and warm almost intoxicating to Harry.

Sirius knocked on the door and passed in a towel. He looked at Harry's almost skeletal frame critically. "They didn't really feed you well, did they?"

"I used to get more at the Dursleys."

Sirius shook his head. "Whoever framed you, we'll find."

Harry's eyes burned bright green for the first time in months. "Yes, yes we will."

### **Summer before fifth year**

The trip back to Diagon Alley from the cemetery was a quiet one. Harry had wiped the tears from his eyes before walking back to Cho and her Grandfather. He and Cho had held hands tightly for the whole trip home.

Cho wasn't needed in the apothecary that afternoon, so she and Harry spent the rest of the day at her home. She showed him her bedroom, and let him look through the family's enormous library.

They looked through the family photo albums, Harry particularly interested in the photos of baby Cho with her parents.

It was early evening and Cho couldn't stand the tension any longer. "Harry, are you OK. You haven't said anything about our trip today."

Harry took a deep breath and let it out slowly. He looked at Cho, and saw only sincerity in her dark eyes. "I finally got to say goodbye to him, Cho. I realised just how much I admired and respected him. I now know how much you miss him. But I feel at peace. Cedric would not have wanted me to wallow in self-pity, he'd have wanted me to live and enjoy life. If our positions had been reversed, I'd have wanted the same for him. I am not going to feel guilty any more, Cho. I won't disrespect Cedric memory."

Cho's expression was unreadable. She looked all over his face searching for something. Her eyes became bright with unshed tears, and she caught Harry in a tight hug.

For the first time, Harry didn't flinch at the contact. He immediately returned the embrace. The two of them stood there for long minutes, just taking comfort in the presence of the other.

A discrete cough interrupted their private moment. They broke apart and turned to look at Cho's father. He gave the pair a smile and motioned for them to sit. Harry rather nervously sat on the couch next to Cho.

"Harry, Cho's mother and I have been discussing your relationship with our daughter. Cho was in a very fragile state when she arrived home at the end of last term, and we watched her come out of her depression through her correspondence with you. Cho has told us of the resurrection of You-know-who, and how you are essentially in constant danger."

Harry began to say something in his defense, but Mr. Chang held up his hand. "Please, let me finish.

"Cho is very precious to us, as she is our only daughter. As her parents, we are concerned with the amount of danger you are putting her in just by being her friend, let alone something more serious. However, over the last few days we have come to know you, you Harry, not you, The-Boy-Who-Lived." He took a deep breath.

"We have heard stories of your exploits at school, and reading into the events show us that you are willing to do all you can to protect those who are close to you. Cho has been so happy in your company, and her mother and I could not have hoped for a nicer person to be her first serious boyfriend." Both Harry and Cho blushed at this. "You have shown yourself to be conscientious of her and our needs, and have given us much happiness. What I am trying to say is, we have no objection to you dating our daughter."

Harry didn't trust his voice enough to say anything other than a croaky "Thank you." Cho jumped to her feet and gave her father a tight hug and a kiss. She also gave him a whispered "Thank you" before letting go.

Mr. Chang smiled. "I know when to make a strategic withdrawal, so I will bid the both of you goodnight. Unfortunately, I will need you in the shop tomorrow, Cho. It is our busiest day of the year." Cho nodded, and her father left them alone.

Harry was still trying to swallow the lump in his throat. He was grateful when Cho caught him in a tight hug. Finally Harry got his voice under control.

"Cho, what your father said, it er, it meant a great deal to me."

"I know Harry. You should be proud though, he has scared off a couple of boys for wanting to be my boyfriend."

Harry straightened. "When?"

Cho gave him an impish grin. "I think I was seven at the time."

Harry tightened the hug. "You little minx."

Cho smiled and snuggled closer, resting her head on his chest. It was fast becoming her favourite position. "That's me." she said. They were silent for a minute before Cho spoke again.

"Harry, about tomorrow. I will need to be in the shop all day. My whole family will. I don't think there will be any room for you too, and I won't be able to pay any attention to you until we close."

"That's OK, Ron and Hermione are arriving tomorrow. I haven't seen them for two months. I was going to ask if you wanted to spend the day with us, but I understand your father needs you."

"Mmm, it will be good for you to see your friends again. How about I meet you all at the Leaky Cauldron for dinner?"

"That sounds just fine. I'm looking forward to it already."

"Me too, Harry. Me too."

Harry paced the floor in the main lounge of the Leaky Cauldron. Ron and Hermione should have arrived already. He was starting to get worried about them.

The fire in the fireplace suddenly glowed green, and Hermione stepped out. She brushed the soot off her robes and looked up at Harry's greeting. "Harry!" she exclaimed.

She ran over and embraced her friend. Harry returned the embrace without his customary hesitation. She leant back and looked into his eyes. There was something different about him. Before she could work out what it was, Ron appeared in a burst of green flame. He stumbled out of the fireplace and saw his two friends hugging. "Harry!" he yelled.

Harry let go of Hermione, and grabbed Ron in a brief, rough hug. Ron had grown a couple of inches over the summer and now towered a half foot over Harry. As they separated, Hermione

realised just what it was that was different about Harry.

It wasn't just the fact that Harry had tied his hair back in an obvious imitation of Bill Weasley. It wasn't that his scar was now completely visible to all. When she left him on platform 9 & 3/4, he had been withdrawing into depression, forming a protective shell around him, to keep out the world. She had watched him on the train, absorbed in self-pity. Now, he was more open than she had ever seen him. He was just more, well, more alive.

Hermione turned as the fire burned green once more, and saw Fred Weasley step out. Seconds later, George joined him. Ignoring the soot on their robes, they looked at Harry and simultaneously said "Bill! You didn't tell us you were entering a Harry Potter look-alike competition."

Harry blushed and said "Shut it, you two. It is the only way I can keep my hair under control."

Another burst of green flame, and Ginny stepped into the lounge. Fred and George turned to her with identical grins.

"Ginny!" Fred exclaimed. "It appears that Harry is hero-worshipping a member of our family. What do you think?"

Ginny blushed at the attention. She looked at Harry's short ponytail and mumbled something under her breath.

George spoke up, "What was that, Gin? We didn't catch that."

"I said I liked it the way it was." said Ginny, unable to look at anyone.

A final green flash, and Mrs. Weasley appeared, took one look at the mortified look on Ginny's face and immediately started berating the twins.

Harry turned to Ron in amazement. "How does she do that?"

Ron shook his head. "Don't ask. Even the twins are having a hard time escaping her notice."

Mrs. Weasley finally finished her tirade at the twins, and without pausing for breath turned and gave Harry one of her motherly hugs. "Harry, pet, how are you. I hope those muggles didn't treat you to badly over the summer. I'm sorry we couldn't get permission from the headmaster for you to visit us."

That's OK, Mrs. Weasley. I have spend the last few days here. It has been good, my time at Privet Drive is a distant memory."

"That's nice, dear. Now, you, Ron and Hermione can go and get all your school things. Fred and George, behave yourselves. Ginny, you can come with me."

"Actually, Mrs. Weasley," Hermione interrupted, giving Harry an appraising look. "Why don't we

take Ginny with us, that way you can keep an eye on the twins, so they don't burn down Diagon Alley or something." she suggested sweetly.

Harry almost burst out laughing at the different expressions the Weasleys produced at that announcement. Ron was looking confused, while Mrs. Weasley gave the twins a thoughtful look. The twins expressions could not have been described as anything other than mortified, and Ginny looked torn between apprehension and anticipation.

"Mum!" the twins exclaimed. "We don't need a baby sitter!"

"Sometimes I beg to differ. Alright, Ginny, you go with Ron. Be careful and I'll see the four of you later. Come on, the pair of you."

Throwing Hermione murderous glares, the twins were hustled out of the Leaky Cauldron under the watchful eye of the Weasley matriarch. Ginny watched the twins' exit with malicious glee.

"I take it your summer hasn't been very enjoyable with those two prats around, eh Gin?" Harry asked.

Ginny smiled bashfully and shook her head.

"Well don't worry, let's go and have some fun."

Hermione just smiled mysteriously.

Though Harry had already bought his school supplies for the next year, he enjoyed spending time with his friends. Hermione had spent the last week at The Burrow, and had refused to talk about her trip to Bulgaria. Ron had been sulky for the first few days, before Hermione had stunned him with the announcement that she had not in fact visited Krum. Apparently Ginny had almost hurt herself from laughing so hard at Ron's change in attitude.

Harry could only smile to himself as he watched the constant bickering between his two best friends. It just seemed to be one long continuous argument, moving seamlessly from one topic to the next without so much as a pause for breath. Neither of them looked as though they were taking it seriously. An image sprang to Harry's mind of an old couple he had once seen in a park as a child, the two of them obviously enjoying the argument that had to have begun several decades ago.

Finally they sat down for ice-cream ("Ron, you always have chocolate!" "So? Why do you care?") at Florean Fortescue's for a rest. Hermione deliberately positioning herself so as to seat Harry and Ginny next to each other. They both looked a little uncomfortable at this.

"You know Hermione," Harry started. "Fred and George are going to get their revenge on you somehow for tricking Mrs. Weasley into taking them around. I'd watch out if I were you."

Hermione huffed. "I'm not scared of those two."



"You sure?" Harry grinned. "They're standing right behind you."

With a shriek that drew the attention of all the wizards nearby, Hermione jumped out of her seat and spun round. The twins were nowhere in sight.

"You.. you.." she yelled, shaking her fist inches under Harry's nose. The other three at the table were laughing at her antics.

"Don't tell me there is trouble in paradise?" a familiar and unwelcome voice drawled. "Mudblood, you really shouldn't draw attention to yourself like that. No one likes a showoff."

"Malfoy!" Harry exclaimed happily. His tone surprised Ron to such an extent that he forgot about protecting Hermione's honour. "So good to see you. We could use your experience in the matter we were discussing."

Draco frowned. "What do you mean?" he asked suspiciously.

"We were discussing the aerodynamic properties of various flying rodents, and had just got round to ferrets, when you show up. Talk about good timing." Ron fell back in his seat with a laugh.

Draco's face coloured. "Watch yourself, Potter."

"You'd be the expert at that, eh Draco? After all those boils and sores the train trip last year, I bet you've spent more time in front of a mirror than anyone I know."

Draco's pale eyes filled with hatred. "You'll get your's, you and all your mudblood loving friends."

"OK, whatever. Run along back to Daddy, I'm sure he'll give you a big hug and let you cry."

Hermione was alternating staring at Harry and Draco. Harry was casually slouched in his chair, a mocking expression on his face. Draco looked as though he was choking on something.

Draco finally stormed away muttering to himself. Hermione leapt up and gave Harry a hug, much to the displeasure of both Weasleys. "That was brilliant, Harry. I'd never have thought you could be so mature to not rise to Malfoy's taunts."

Harry looked abashed. "It was just something that I had some help with over summer. I was writing to someone who convinced me to try something different when dealing with Malfoy. I'll have to let her know that it was a complete success."

"Who were you writing to, Harry?" Ron and Hermione asked at the same time.

Harry looked down at the table. "Um, Cho. Cho Chang."

The four sat in silence for several seconds. Ron looked surprised, Hermione looked faintly disappointed and Ginny sat stony-faced.

Suddenly, Ginny stood up, gathered her purchases, excused herself and briskly walked towards the Leaky Cauldron. Hermione looked at Harry meaningfully before following. Ron looked just as confused as Harry at the girl's behavior.

"What's up with Ginny?" Harry asked Ron.

"Hermione told me that she was trying to work up the courage all summer to write to you. Apparently she went through a lot of parchment. You didn't get a letter from Ginny at all?"

"Nope."

"Just as well. I'd have to hurt you if you hurt her."

"You've told me all about Ginny's temper, Ron. Do you think that if I hurt her there'd be enough left of me for you to hurt?"

"Good point. Come on, let's go find them, make sure they're OK."

"Wait. Give her a minute to compose herself."

Ginny walked around a corner into a tiny alleyway. She closed her eyes, desperately trying to stop the tear there from falling.

"Gin? Are you OK?"

Ginny spun and buried her face into Hermione's shoulder and let out a cry. Hermione held the younger girl and made what she hoped were soothing noises.

"Gin, why did you run off like that?"

"I've lost him. He's seeing that, that cow," Ginny sobbed.

"How do you know that? All he said was that he had been writing to her."

Ginny pulled back and looked at Hermione with bloodshot eyes. "Harry blushed, then cupped his hands together and looked down when he said that. Whenever he does that there is something else he is not telling you, something he is embarrassed about."

Hermione blinked. Ginny seemed to know Harry and his body language better than she did. "How long have you been looking at Harry, Gin?"

"Since my first year." Ginny sniffed and swallowed, getting herself under control. "It's not right, it's just not right."

"What do you mean?"

"In every story where the hero kills the dragon that is holding a girl prisoner, they always get

together. Well, Harry killed my dragon, and he hasn't looked at me twice since. He has said more to me today than the whole of my life. He doesn't love me, he doesn't even notice I'm there." Ginny started to cry again.

Hermione's face became thoughtful. "Right, we'll have to do something about that. Cheer up, you get to see Harry every night in the common room, Cho won't have that advantage. We'll make Harry yours by Christmas."

Ginny looked into Hermione's sparkling eyes, and couldn't help but smile.

Harry turned to Cho after saying goodbye to his friends and sending them home through the fireplace. "I will never in my life understand women."

Cho looked at him. "What do you mean?"

"Ginny. When I told them that I had been writing to you all summer, she stood up and stormed off, Hermione went after her. When Ron and I found them a couple of minutes later, she was smiling and as happy as can be." Harry shook his head.

Cho smiled wistfully at him. "You have no idea, do you?"

"No. If it is so obvious, tell me."

Cho gave him her most impish smile. "She likes you. She was all but throwing the killing curse at me during dinner."

Harry shook his head. "She doesn't know me. Apart from that time in the Chamber and today, we haven't exchanged more than a few words. I think she only likes Harry, The-boy-who-lived, the one with the famous scar."

"Well, I like the real Harry, the one who comforted me when my friend died, the one who makes me laugh, the one who infuriated my parents by refusing to stop working in their store."

Harry just looked at her, once again struck by her beauty. He leaned forward to kiss her, but she put two fingers on his lips. "Not here, Harry."

She took his hand and led him up to his room.

Cho stared at the ceiling of her room and sighed in contentment. The pair had spent a few hours kissing and petting in front of the fire in Harry's room. Cho's insides trembled with excitement as she remembered his touch.

Harry had traced his initials on her bare chest, then a heart, and then her initials. Over and over again. The gentleness of his touch combined with the burning passion of his kisses had her senses reeling. Cho placed her hand on her chest. She could still feel Harry's touch several hours after he had walked her home.

She should really try get to sleep; tomorrow she had to catch the train back to school for another year, but the memory of Harry's touch was just too pleasant.

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## Betrayal of the Best Kind Slay

Slay

### Return to Hogwarts, Fifth year

Even before Tom had come up to rouse Harry, he was up, dressed and packed. Harry had again tied his hair into its now-customary ponytail. During the last few days, his forehead had become lightly tanned, making his scar all but invisible.

Harry had not been able to sleep at all last night; the memory of Cho's warm, silky skin had him shivering with delight. Though their passionate explorations of each other's bodies had been extensive, they both felt it was not the right time for them to make the ultimate physical expression of love. Though he had not slept after walking Cho home, Harry felt energised, not the least bit tired.

Hedwig had not yet returned from her nightly hunting, so Harry left the window open and went down for an early breakfast. Tom was amused at how much Harry consumed, normally the young man ate only moderate amounts.

Harry checked his watch, noting that there was still several hours before he had to be at King's Cross Station. He decided to go for one final walk around Diagon Alley.

Mr. Chang walked through the barrier between platform 9 and 10 at King's Cross Station, in front of his daughter and her boyfriend. The pair of them had been almost offensively eager to get back to school. He could no longer contain his daughter's excitement and had agreed to take the pair of them to the station early.

Harry and Cho were almost the first students there. The gleaming, scarlet steam train stood proud and ready at the platform. They selected a compartment near the front of the train, and stored their trunks in the racks above their heads. Harry smiled and held his arms out to Cho. She returned the smile and rushed to embrace him. Keeping track of time was forgotten.

Over the next two hours, many students got on the train, and wandered around to see who else was there. Cho and Harry had to restrain their enthusiasm, as friends from many different years stuck their heads in the compartment to greet them, and ask how they both were.

"I supposed it was to be expected," Harry said, after the tenth person had asked if he was feeling OK. "I guess I was in pretty bad shape at the end of term."

"Not much better than me. I hope people don't think we are disgracing Cedric's memory."

Harry turned to face her. "I know Cedric wouldn't think that. That is all that really matters."

Cho smiled and lay her head on Harry's lap. "You know, you always say whatever will cheer me up the most. That is a real gift you have, Mr. Potter."

It was almost eleven o'clock by the time that Ron stuck his head into the compartment. "Here you are. We've been looking for you." He looked back down the passageway and called out, "Hey 'Mione, I've found them!" Ron walked in dragging his trunk and lifted it into the racks above the seats. He went and grabbed Hermione's trunk and stored it next to his. Hermione watched him from the door with a smirk on her face. She moved in and sat next to Ron.

The four of them chatted for a while, talking about their holidays. Cho and Hermione had to leave briefly for their prefect's meeting in the front carriage. While they were gone, Harry and Ron played a few games of chess. After losing for the third time, Harry noticed movement at floor level, and saw a large, elderly toad make his way down the corridor outside. Harry scooped up the toad and placed it in the box that held his chess pieces.

"Neville will be here soon." he said.

True to form, less than five minutes later, Neville stuck his head into their carriage. "Have you guys seen Trevor?"

Harry passed his friend the box. Neville's eyes lit up. "Trevor, there you are!" He picked up his pet and tucked him into a pocket. "Thanks, Harry. I missed you at Cedric's funeral. Didn't the muggles want to let you go?"

Harry sadly shook his head. "Cho's grandfather took me a couple of days ago. I got to say goodbye, and add something to his headstone."

Neville's eyes lit up. "You stayed with the Changs?"

Harry laughed. "No, I spent the last few days of the holidays at the Leaky Cauldron. Cho's family run the apothecary in Diagon Alley, and we spent a lot of time together." Harry looked down bashfully. "We are sort of, well, going out."

"That's great Harry, she is a beautiful girl. How does she feel about Cedric though?"

"They were friends. She misses him terribly, as you'd expect. I'm just making sure I'm there for her. I'd do anything to make her feel better."

"How touching." Draco Malfoy's unwelcome visage appeared in the doorway. "I'm sure she'd feel wonderful once she realises that you killed her boyfriend." His ever-present bodyguards chuckled

on cue.

Ron smiled and sat back watching Harry. Neville looked at Draco nervously.

"Malfoy! Good to see you again! You ran off before we could finish our chat yesterday."

"You think you're so clever Potter. Well you just better watch out. Insulting a prefect can cost you points."

"Ahh, we were just discussing amongst ourselves who would be the Slytherin prefect this year. The odds favoured no one being picked. Good to see you managed to beat the odds, Malfoy. Just think, you, with all your family's money and influence, have managed to keep up with someone from a muggle family."

Draco's eyes narrowed. "That sounded like an insult Potter. I think five points from Gryffindor will be adequate punishment."

"You think that was an insult, Malfoy? When did you become so thin-skinned?"

"Ten points."

"You sound like an auctioneer, do I hear fifteen?"

"Draco snarled. "Fifteen it is."

"Twenty points from Slytherin and detention, for abusing prefect's privilege." Draco spun round and faced Angelina Johnson, her head girl badge gleaming. Hermione and Cho were standing behind her. "I don't think your presence is appreciated here Malfoy, move along."

Draco and his goons were out of sight before they all burst into laughter.

"S...s...sold!" howled Ron.

After Draco's traditional visit, the friends decided to change into their robes. Cho and Hermione left to use the prefect's carriage. Ron and Harry extracted their robes and began to dress.

"So, Ron, what is going on between you and Hermione?" Harry asked.

Ron looked a little wild at that. "What? What do you mean?"

"You keep annoying her. I'd say it was deliberately."

Ron looked relieved. "Oh, yeah. I, uh, think it's funny."

"If you want to really annoy her, I know a way to really set her off," came Cho's voice from the door.

Ron looked wary. "Oh yeah? What?"

"Kiss her."

Harry almost burst out laughing at Ron's petrified expression.

"I'm serious," Cho continued, stepping into the compartment. "Next time she starts arguing with you, do what you can to rile her up. Get her really going. Then, just when she is in full voice, kiss her."

Ron's ears were almost the same colour as his hair. He was doing a good impression of a goldfish. "I couldn't do that!" he finally gasped.

"Couldn't do what?" Hermione stepped into the compartment.

"Couldn't do something to prove the Sorting Hat was right putting him in Gryffindor," said Harry.

"Fine! I will!" Ron decided.

"Will do what?" Hermione demanded, frowning.

"You'll see," said Cho mysteriously.

The four awoke when the train jerked to a stop at Hogsmeade. They stood, straightened their robes and disembarked. The enormous, hairy form of Hagrid stood out over the heads of the milling students.

"Hi, Hagrid!" Harry called out.

"Harry! See yeh at the feast. Firs' years this way!" Hagrid herded the new students towards the boats on the lakeshore.

Harry, Cho, Ron and Hermione jumped into one of the waiting horseless carriages, which then lurched and carried them up towards Hogwarts.

Harry reluctantly let Cho's hand go to allow them to head to their respective house tables. Harry and his friends were greeted by nearly all the Gryffindors at the table. Many wanted to make sure that Harry was all right after the third task last year. Harry's smile and new found confidence convinced them that he was telling the truth when he said that he was fine. He looked over and saw that Cho was putting the fears of her own housemates to rest.

The trio sat at their customary place, Harry and Ron on either side of Hermione, and enjoyed catching up with the friends they'd missed on the train.

A pearly white head rose through the middle of the table. "Sir Nick!" Hermione exclaimed. "How was your summer break?"



"Ahh, Hermione, it was fine, thank you for asking," said the Gryffindor house ghost. "Peeves did make himself a nuisance as usual though. You three appear to be in good health. Looks like the summer break agreed with you also."

The trio smiled and nodded. Ron's stomach growled loud enough to be heard from several metres away.

"Ron!" Hermione berated.

"What? You think I can control the noises my tummy makes when I'm hungry?"

"You are absolutely impossible," she huffed.

"I know what exactly what it's like when someone is being impossible," he replied, grinning at her.

Hermione's eyes flashed dangerously. "How dare you think that mmmmphhh..."

The whole table watched as Ron took Cho's advice. Ron had cupped Hermione's cheeks with his hands and planted his lips on her own.

Harry watched as conflicting emotions fought for dominance in Hermione. Shock won, and when Ron pulled away, she sat looking at him breathlessly. Ron smirked at Harry.

It was Ron's turn to be shocked into submission as Hermione threw her arms around his neck and kissed him deeply.

Instinct took over and the two of them shared a very passionate kiss in front of the entire school.

Neither of them noticed the loud cheering that accompanied their kiss until they pulled apart. They both sat blushing fiercely as even a few of the teachers were giving the pair some mild applause.

Harry looked over to Cho, and they shared a knowing smile.

The doors of the Great Hall opened, and silence filled the room. Professor McGonagall led the first year students through the hall to the front. There she placed a familiar three-legged stool and drew out the Sorting Hat. Placing the hat on the stool, the sorting ceremony began.

Harry remembered his own sorting. He had been petrified not of the hat, but of being told that there had been a mistake, and being sent home. How different his life would have been. He joined in as the assembled students cheered the completion of the Sorting Hat's song, and watched the Deputy Headmistress unfurl a list and begin reading the names of the new students.

After the four houses had been blessed with their new members, Professor Dumbledore rose and smiled as he addressed the students. "What are you waiting for? Tuck in!"

Food appeared instantly, and the hungry throng gleefully started devouring it.

Harry ate, talked, ate, laughed and ate. By the time the plates cleared, his stomach was groaning. He leaned back, basking in that most pleasant of discomforts.

Professor Dumbledore stood again. "Welcome one and all, to a new year. There are a few announcements for me to make. Firstly, as usual, the forbidden forest has its name for a reason. Secondly, Mr Filch informs me that the number of prohibited items has risen to a remarkable eight-hundred and seventy-three. A full list of the new forbidden items can be found on the purchase orders of a company called Weasley's Wizard Wheezes." He looked over and grinned at Fred and George who had slumped into their seats groaning and holding their heads.

"Next, I would like to introduce you all to the new Defence against the Dark Arts professor. She has worked for the ministry as an auror for over three decades. Please welcome Professor Pritchard."

A tall, slim woman with steel grey hair stood and nodded her head to the polite applause. She looked as though she could give the deputy-headmistress lessons on looking stern.

"Lastly, following the success of the Yule Ball last year there will be three such events held this year. The first has no age restriction and will be held on Halloween. Due to the consternation evident on the faces of the male half of the student population, it has been decided that only females can invite a partner to the ball. No date, no go. Oh, and you must go with the first girl who asks you."

This announcement had the female students buzzing. Harry was suddenly very glad that he was sitting next to Hermione. With his new hair-style and new musculature, he had been the object of more than a few stares.

Hermione grabbed Ron's hand and immediately said "You are going with me. I need to keep an eye on you." Ron looked both pleased at getting a date before Harry, and trapped that he was going with Hermione.

The headmaster held up a hand. "That will be all for now, prefects, please direct the first year students to their dorms. Good night to you all."

Harry quickly stood up and moved towards the Ravenclaw table, getting away from the dozen or so Gryffindor girls bearing down on him. Cho was already on her way over to Harry. She grinned mischievously, and grabbed a double-handful of the front of Harry's robes. Pulling him close enough to almost rub noses, she growled "You had better be going with me, Potter!"

Harry grinned, and put on a Quirrell-like stammer. "Y-y-y-yes m-m-ma'am."

She smiled and gave him a quick kiss, before letting go and helping to direct the new Ravenclaw students.

Harry watched her go, then turned to see Hermione in her element. Her silver prefect badge shining like a beacon, she quickly and efficiently gathered the new first year Gryffindors and

marched them out of the Great Hall.

Harry followed them out, completely missing the dark look being thrown his way by the youngest Weasley.

A few weeks into term the first Hogsmeade weekend occurred. Ron and Hermione had been enjoying their new explosive relationship, others had been enjoying it also. The constant arguments were a source of great entertainment to the residents of Gryffindor Tower. Seamus and Dean had been running a book, taking bets on all sorts of things, how long they would be together, what the next argument topic would be, and even the duration of the make-up session.

Breakfast that morning was an excited affair. Usually on a weekend, the Great Hall was quiet during the breakfast hours, but not today. Harry had crossed the floor, and sat at the Ravenclaw table next to Cho. The couple were silently enjoying each others company when something cold and wet was poured down Harry's back.

Harry stood and spun around, to be greeted with laughter from the Slytherin table. "What's the matter Potter? Wet yourself?"

"Ahh, Draco, there's that cutting dialog we have come to know and love. Well, when I say love, I actually mean get bored of."

Draco blinked. "Yeah, well, I'm not the one with wet robes am I?"

Harry looked down at Draco's robes and smirked. "You sure?"

Quick as a flash, Draco checked his robes. Harry laughed. "Couldn't help but look, could you."

Draco flashed him a look of pure loathing. "You need to use your potty, Potter."

Harry sighed and cast a drying charm on his robes. "You really are unarmed when it comes to a battle of wits, aren't you, Malfoy."

Draco leapt at Harry, only to land on the Ravenclaw table when Harry deftly sidestepped.

The silence in the Hall was immediate. Every student there heard Draco knock plates, cutlery and goblets to the stone floor. The teachers at the high table turned their attention on the pair.

It was with an almost palpable sense of relief for Harry that he and Cho managed to get out of the castle and down to the town with Ron and Hermione.

Ron and Hermione were in the 'post make-up bliss' phase that morning. Walking hand in hand, both couples wandered down the main street of Hogsmeade. Harry and Cho had made plans to visit the robes shop, since Harry had managed to grow out of his dress robes. The four made their way to Gladrags Wizardwear.

While Harry was measured by a floating measuring tape, Cho produced a brush and sat dreamily

brushing her long, dark, luxurious hair. Harry felt like a store's dummy as the two girls discussed the various outfits he modelled for them.

After what felt like a particularly long potions lesson, Cho and Hermione decided on Harry's new robes. Cho put her brush down, got up and held her arms out for the measuring tape.

If Harry thought it took a long time to decide on his robes, he was in for a shock. He and Ron sat for what felt like hours, watching the girls make suggestions and counter suggestions with the speed and poise of a symphony conductor.

He and Ron looked at each other and sighed as the girls tried to create the perfect complimenting robes for Harry's date. They started discussing the upcoming Quiddich trials, and speculating on who would be picked as the Gryffindor keeper. Neither of the bored boys noticed a hand appear from beneath an invisibility cloak, and pick up the discarded brush.

Later in the day, the quartet made their way to the Three Broomsticks. The tavern was full to overflowing, with nearly every student above second year crammed in. The small group joined a table with some sixth-year Ravenclaw friends of Cho. Butterbeers were ordered and consumed.

Cho pointed out Draco Malfoy in the crowd. Harry noticed that though he was staring at him with hatred in his eyes, he hadn't come over to annoy them. "Maybe he is learning." Harry suggested.

"Took him long enough." Ron replied. "Only just over four years. Average for someone with Malfoy blood I suppose."

Hermione whispered something into Ron's ear. Harry watched as Ron's entire face went pink. Ron turned to Harry and Cho and said, "Do you guys mind if we leave you here? We are going, er..."

"Elsewhere?" Cho said with a grin.

"Yes," Hermione said firmly. She grabbed Ron's hand and literally dragged him out of the tavern. Harry and Cho smiled and shared a quick kiss.

"Like something else to drink?" he asked the table. Most of the girls wanted another butterbeer. Cho nodded, and Harry made his way to the bar and placed the order.

Harry picked up the next round of butterbeers, turned and set out to cross the crowded floor. He could make out his table through the throng of people in the bar. Malfoy had waited until Harry had left before leaning over and saying something to Cho.

Cho's face coloured. She picked up the remains of her drink and threw them into Draco's face. Tears streaming from her eyes, she ran out of the bar.

Harry stood stunned for a moment. Draco looked livid, staring at the stains on his new silk robes. He turned and stormed out of the bar after Cho.

Harry's heart dropped into the pit of his stomach. Dropping the drinks, he pushed and shoved his

way through the crowd of people. As he broke through, and reached the door, professor Pritchard walked in. They collided, and fell down in a heap.

"Do you always treat your Defence teachers this way? No wonder Hogwarts seems to go through so many," the professor said as she stood, a small smile on her usually stern face.

"Professor! I'm sorry. Did you see where Malfoy was going?" Harry asked quickly, also rising to his feet.

"The stern faced auror frowned. "Yes, he was heading towards someone with long hair, I didn't recognise who."

"I have to go." Harry said as he pushed past the surprised teacher.

Harry looked around once outside. Draco was nowhere to be seen. Heart racing, Harry swore to himself. Over the noise in the bar, Harry could just make out Malfoy's indistinct voice cast a spell from behind the next building. Running faster than he ever had before, Harry sped round the corner of the building and came face to face with a scene from hell.

Cho lay on the ground quivering, her head thrown back, spine arched. Her mouth wide open in a silent scream of agony. Draco stood over her, his back to Harry, his wand pointing at Cho's heart. "Like the Cruciatius?" he sneered.

Rage flooded Harry. Never before had he been so angry. Not at Dudley's torment over the first decade of his life. Not when he had blown Aunt Marge up like a balloon. Not even when he thought Sirius had killed his parents. Harry's hair broke out of it's tie, weaving and twisting like medusa's snakes. He floated up almost three inches from the ground. The grass beneath Harry's feet smoked and charred. His robes billowed out and started to tear. All but blinded by the veil of red that had covered his vision, Harry was dimly aware of his hand drawing his wand and levelling it at Draco.

"*STUPEFY!*" he roared. Draco was blasted over Cho's form, now slumped in relief, mercifully free from Draco's magic.

Harry slowly regained control. His hair and clothes dropped. He floated back down to the ground. Breathing heavily, Harry took a step towards his girlfriend. From behind, he heard a voice say "Stupefy". Something hit him in the back of the head, and blackness overtook him.

Professor Pritchard stood over Harry with a rock in her hand. She looked at Cho and smiled. Cho smiled back and stood up. "Well done, our Master will be pleased. Very pleased."

The defence teacher nodded and turned to a nearby hedge. "Come out now please, Mr. Crabbe."

The chunky Slytherin student rose from behind the bushes. He grinned stupidly and walked out.

Cho turned to him and said, "Quickly boy, leap in front of Draco as though protecting him. I'll stun you too, it will make it look more real." Cho walked over and took the wand out of Harry's

unresisting hand.

Crabbe nodded. In a shocking display of completely unrealistic acting, Crabbe leapt in front of the slumped body of his Slytherin housemate.

Cho smiled, and cast, "*Avada Kedavra!*"

The surprised expression on Crabbe's face would stay forever.

Cho turned back to Professor Pritchard, and smiled. She bent down and placed Harry's wand back into his unresisting hand.

"Lucius," said Professor Pritchard, smiling back. "You really are a complete bastard."

Harry woke slowly, his head aching. As the fog in his mind cleared, he slowly took in his surroundings. He was lying on a stone floor. Faintly glowing manacles shackled his hands. Four stone walls formed a small cell, with a single door. Harry frowned, he was in a cell. Had Voldemort captured him?

He got up, fought off a momentary dizziness, and knocked on the door. The sound of an unfamiliar spell being cast could be heard. The door glowed blue, and swung open.

Harry sighed in relief when he saw Professor Pritchard standing in the doorway. The relief faded when he saw her face. Always stern, it now had an expression of contempt and hatred.

"Potter. You are awake. Good. Time for you to answer some questions," she said flatly, leaving no room for argument.

Harry stared dumbly as two aurors stepped in and pointed their wands at him. "Move!" one ordered.

Harry silently followed professor Pritchard from the cell. During the entire trip, both unnamed aurors had their wands firmly pointed at Harry's back. They walked through the school and up to the Headmaster's office. Not a single student was seen in the corridors.

"Canary Creams," Professor Pritchard gave the password.

Entering the headmaster's office, Harry was directed to a chair and instructed to sit. Harry obeyed, though confusion clouded his mind. What on earth had happened to make his Defence instructor act so coldly to him? Why were there armed aurors treating him like a criminal?

A minute later professor Dumbledore, Minister Fudge and professor McGonagall entered. "Professor," Harry started, and began to rise out of his chair. Two wands were jammed into the back on his neck. Harry froze and slowly sank into the chair again.

"Harry," the headmaster began, his eyes holding none of their customary sparkle. "Would you please tell us what happened today."

Looking from face to serious face, Harry began to relate the day's events. The argument with Draco at breakfast, then meeting him in later in Hogsmeade. Finally, Harry told them how he followed Draco and found him torturing Cho. "I was just so angry. I stunned him. I heard someone cast a stunning spell behind me, and the next thing I knew, I was in the cell in the dungeons," Harry finished.

The minister and the three professors exchanged doubtful looks. Dumbledore turned to the Defence teacher. "Victoria, please obtain statements from Ms. Chang, Ms. Granger, Mr. Weasley and Mr. Malfoy, once he is released from Poppy's care." Professor Pritchard nodded, and left wordlessly. Dumbledore turned to Harry and looked grim.

"Harry, a student was killed this afternoon."

Harry gasped. "Who?" He looked around at the aurors, realisation dawning. "You think I did it?"

Dumbledore's lips set into a straight line. "Your wand was found in your hand. It had been used to cast the killing curse. Mr. Malfoy was found stunned, Mr. Crabbe on top of him. Ms. Chang was not at the scene. According to an eyewitness, Mr. Crabbe jumped in front of the killing curse you cast at Mr. Malfoy, while he lay stunned."

Harry was speechless. He couldn't believe what he was hearing.

"As Crouch taught you last year, the killing curse requires a great deal of power. You were completely unconscious when found, Harry. Not even the enervation charm could wake you. That would have brought you back to consciousness if you had been stunned, as you claim. It would not have helped if, as seems to be the case, you had simply used all your magical energy."

Harry looked down and shook his head. This could not be happening. This must be a dream.

"You will be returned to the your cell," Dumbledore continued. "Unless you wish to revise your statement." The headmaster watched as Harry slowly shook his head. "Very well. The aurors here will escort you back. Consider yourself temporarily suspended from school. We will need you to answer some further questions later. Professor Pritchard has commandeered a small quantity of Veritaserum from the Ministry. You will be questioned under its influence formally."

Harry could only nod mutely. None of this was really happening.

Harry was frogmarched back to his cell, the locking charm turning the door red once he was safely inside.

What in Merlin's name was going on? he thought.

Several hours passed. Harry had earlier been taken to an interrogation room at Auror headquarters at the ministry. Harry had been answering questions fired at him by several different people. Never once had he deviated from his story.

Professors Dumbledore and Pritchard, and Minister Fudge entered, Dumbledore looking

exceptionally grave. Fudge looked pleased. The Defence instructor spoke.

"Mr. Potter, I have personally interrogated both Draco and Lucius Malfoy under the influence of veritaserum. Mr Draco Malfoy states for the record that he was not with Ms. Chang at any time after she left the Three Broomsticks and that he has never cast the Crutiatius Curse. Examination of his wand confirms this fact. He says he was with his father when you ran round the corner and stunned him from behind. Lucius Malfoy confirms his son's story, that he was with him when you appeared and stunned Draco. He then states that he saw Mr. Crabbe leap in front of his son. He wanted it specifically recorded that he did not in fact see you cast the actual curse itself, as he was looking at his son at the time it was cast. I personally found all three at the scene, and both Lucius Malfoy and I have testified under veritaserum that no one else was at the scene."

Harry looked at Dumbledore, silently pleading that this was a joke.

"There's more," continued professor Pritchard. "A charms expert in the Auror ranks, myself and Professor Flitwick all independantly examined the crime scene for traces of magic. Signatures of only two spells were found in the area, cast in the last twenty-four hours. A stunning spell, and the killing curse. Both were cast from the same wand. There was no trace of the Crutiatius curse you claim was cast at Ms. Chang, nor the stunning spell you claim hit you from behind.

"Ms. Granger, Mr. Weasley and Ms. Chang are naturally upset that their friend is a suspect. They willingly agreed to be given veritaserum to help you. Their stories fit exactly with the Malfoys'."

Harry shook his head. "Cho was there, she was there..." he repeated.

"Your version of events does in fact fit up to a point with your friend's version. It is only after you knocked me over and them bolted that the stories differ. Mr. Weasley and Ms. Granger both verify that the four of you went to Hogsmeade together. That after a few drinks in the Three Broomsticks, the pair left you and Ms. Chang alone. Ms. Chang's testimony agrees with Draco Malfoy's at this point. Mr. Malfoy admitted to insulting the memory of Cedric Diggory and suggesting that you killed him, just to get her as your girlfriend. She admits throwing her drink at him, and then ran out of the establishment. Ms. Chang claims she saw some friends of hers in the distance and ran to them for comfort. After they calmed her down, she returned to find you gone."

Dumbledore took out a vial of clear liquid. "Harry, I want to give you every possible opportunity to confirm your story. Please hold out your tongue."

Harry did so, and the headmaster placed a few drops on Harry's tongue. Harry closed his mouth and swallowed. Immediately, his mind fogged and he lost all sense of thought. Harry heard the Headmaster's voice ask him what happened. With all his might, Harry forced the fog out of his mind. He needed to concentrate.

Once his mind was clear, Harry again related the tale of the fateful afternoon. Everyone was listened in confusion. The story was identical to Harry's earlier claims.

The headmaster sat back, a deeply thoughtful expression on his face. Suddenly, Dumbledore



looked sharply at Harry. "Do you know anyone who calls himself 'Snuffles'?" he asked.

Harry looked at Fudge and panicked. "No!" he shouted. Cornelius looked at the headmaster in confusion.

Dumbledore sat back and shook his head. "He has fought off the effects of the potion."

Everyone gasped in astonishment. "Veritaserum acts like a very specific Imperius curse, Harry. That is why it is so tightly controlled by the ministry." The Headmaster turned to the minister. "Harry was able to throw off the Imperius curse cast at him by Crouch last year. In all my decades of teaching, he is the only student to accomplish that."

He looked sadly back at Harry. "Unfortunately, it also means that we cannot trust anything he says under the influence of veritaserum," he said quietly.

Professor Pritchard walked over to Harry. "Mr. Potter, you are now under arrest pending your trial for the murder of Mr. Vincent Crabbe."

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## Betrayal of the Best Kind Hate

Hate

### Present Day

"Sirius, I need to ask you something urgently."

Sirius looked up and saw the Dumbledore's face in the fireplace. He got up and moved over to sit in front of the fire.

"What can I do for you, Professor?"

"You are aware that Harry has escaped?"

"Of course. The entire nation knows."

Dumbledore took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "Has he contacted you?"

Sirius narrowed his eyes. "Yes, as a matter of fact, he has."

"Sirius, he killed that boy. He is dangerous, and appears to be able to convince himself that he is not, no matter his actions. He needs to be removed from society."

"Stop," Sirius demanded. "He is no more dangerous than I. I don't believe he killed anyone."

Dumbledore sighed. "I know. Your faith in Harry does you credit, but you must admit that the facts of the case all point to Harry's guilt." The Headmaster shook his head. "I really want to believe that Mr. Potter is innocent. He showed so much potential to be a truly great wizard. But I cannot, and will not, allow anyone else to be hurt if I can prevent it."

"Albus, you know I will always support you in any endeavor to bring dark wizards down and make the wizarding world safer. But I would walk into hell, punch the devil in the eye, and waltz out again for Harry. Do not make me choose to turn my back on you."

Dumbledore closed his eyes in resignation. "Very well. I will not ask that of you. Just tell me one thing."

Sirius raised his eyebrows. "Yes?"

"I did everything I could to keep him from Azkaban, but using the Killing Curse is an automatic one-way ticket to that place. I just want to know, is he OK?"

Sirius shook his head. "He is bitter, Albus. He feels that the entire world has turned on him. I know how that feels. I can tell you one thing, he retained his sanity the same way I did. He knew he was innocent."

Dumbledore nodded. "That is a load off my mind. Cornelius told me he was hopelessly insane when he visited him. You realise that Cornelius himself will not be released even if he can prove that he didn't assist you in your escape."

"Really?"

"Of course!" Dumbledore frowned. "Just assisting Harry to escape would be enough to imprison him."

"Oh, of course." Sirius recovered.

The headmaster gave Sirius a long stare. "Harry didn't get help from Cornelius, did he?" he guessed.

Sirius put on his best blank expression. "Harry didn't tell me of any help Fudge gave him."

Dumbledore continued to stare at him. "Sirius? You know something. You know how he escaped."

Sirius sighed and nodded. "Believe me, until he told me how, I had no idea how he managed it. I still find it difficult to believe, even now. But I can say in all honesty that if any smart wizard was put in Harry's exact situation, they could escape too."

The Headmaster shook his head in disbelief. "That prison has held the most powerful criminals for centuries. A boy who hasn't finished school would have no hope of escape. You only managed it because of your rather 'unique' status. Harry certainly doesn't have that ability. I have personally removed all relevant texts from the library here, and with Harry at his relatives all summer, there was no way for him to get the information elsewhere."

"Stop fishing for answers, I won't help. If he is caught again, I want him to have every opportunity to escape again."

Dumbledore sighed. "Very well, I will not ask you to betray Harry. I admit I was keeping you busy after his arrest and imprisonment, just to keep you from going to help him."

Sirius grinned. "I know, I was frustrated to start with, but now, you will be forced to admit Harry managed to escape without my help."

Dumbledore smiled. "Yes, I suppose I have to, at that."

"That boy is remarkable. Don't sell him short Albus, he has the potential to save us all." Sirius paused. "Could I ask a small favour?"

"You may ask, I may not be able to fulfill it."

"Could I get a copy of the transcripts from Harry's interviews and trial. We want to go over them to see if there is anything we can use to clear his name."

Dumbledore stiffened. "I'll see to it at once." The headmaster's head disappeared from the fire.

Sirius frowned at the headmaster's sudden disappearance. Suddenly, his eyebrows shot up. "Oh, damn! I said 'we'."

He jumped to his feet. "Harry! Get out of here! Now!" he yelled.

Less than a second later a red blur zipped through a gap in one of the boarded windows. Thank Merlin he didn't wait for an explanation, he thought. Sirius turned into his canine form and waited.

Within a minute, the hole that marked the start of the tunnel leading to Hogwarts was overflowing with aurors. Shouts from outside indicated that the Shrieking Shack was surrounded. Professor Snape's oily visage appeared at the tunnel's entrance. He took one look around and saw the enormous grim.

Several aurors had their wands pointed at Sirius fearfully. "Put your wands down. You are here for Potter, not to molest the local wildlife."

They looked at the potions professor, faces filled with uncertainty. Snape threw his hands up in disgust and walked over to Sirius. Looking as though he was putting his hand directly into a vat of bubotuber pus, he patted Sirius on the head. "This is just a friendly stray who lives in Hogsmeade. Potter is somewhere nearby. Find him."

After the aurors left, Snape muttered quietly, "You are becoming a liability, Black," before walking outside.

Sirius lowered his head. He had to stay free. He had to keep his secret. He had to, so he could keep Harry safe.

The auror's had been outside for twenty minutes before they all started apparating away. Snape walked back into the Shrieking Shack.

Looking at the black dog, he said, "They are all gone, Potter has been spotted in London. It would appear the headmaster was incorrect. Or did you claim he was here to throw us off the trail?"

Sirius popped back into his human form. Looking at his boyhood enemy turned ally, he said, "I claimed nothing of the sort. All I said was that I'd like a copy of the interview and trial transcripts so that 'we' could work to clear his name. Albus obviously took that to mean Harry was here."

"Potter doesn't deserve your faith," Snape said.

"Most people didn't believe you deserved Dumbledore's," Sirius countered.

The pair looked at each other warily. They had been working together reluctantly for nearly a year, but trust was earned slowly. Respect for the other's abilities had been the main reason they could work together without Dumbledore's supervision.

Snape finally shook his head and chuckled softly. Sirius was shocked, he could never remember ever hearing Snape laugh.

"I was so sure Potter was just a under-achieving student with a big head. In one night he manages to escape from Azkaban, and bring down the Minister of Magic."

Sirius smiled. "He doesn't tend to do things half-hearted."

Snape's smile faded slowly. "I just hope he doesn't kill anyone else before we can catch him." Snape turned to leave. "Don't get in the way, Black."

Sirius stood confused as he watched the potions master leave the shack. That last comment should have sounded like a threat, but it didn't.

It sounded like a plea.

Two birds arrived simultaneously. A tawny school owl dropped a stack of papers tied with string in front of Sirius as Harry's scarlet form floated in. The owl took off without waiting for a response.

Sirius bent and picked up the transcripts. He turned and smiled at Harry. "Sorry for that. A slip of the tongue and you have to flee."

Harry grinned. "Not to worry. I went to London. Tried to get into Gringotts, but 'accidentally' got seen at the entrance. Ran round a corner and into muggle London. Led a lot of robed people on a merry chase where they couldn't use magic to stop me. I ran round a corner, changed and watched them stumble around for a while from the roof. I've discovered another interesting property of the phoenix, muggles cannot see or hear them."

Sirius collapsed into a chair with relief. Then he frowned. "How did you manage to get from here to Diagon Alley and back in an hour?"

"Have you any idea how fast a phoenix can fly?"

Sirius covered his eyes. "Obviously not." He looked at his godson. "You realise that if you appear on different sides of the country, they are going to start trying to trace your apparition signature."

Harry laughed. "It's going to take them a while to find it. I don't know how to apparate."

Sirius chuckled too. He undid the string tie, and leafed through the stack of papers. "What do you want to check first? Interview or trial?"

"Neither."

Sirius looked up in surprise. "What?"

Harry looked at his godfather. "I want you to help me recreate the day. Go over what happened. I'm not interested in what was said just yet." He rubbed his temples as he spoke. "I want to show you what I experienced, and see if we can use our famous mischievous Marauder minds to work out what happened."

"You're on."

"Ah, Ms. Chang. Good of you to come at such short notice. Please take a seat."

Dumbledore watched as Cho strode over to a chair and sat down. Looking at the young woman, he wondered again whether or not Harry had killed two people that day.

Ever since she had been told that Harry asked her for an alibi, Cho had become cold to everyone. She apparently now held nothing but loathing for the boy she asked to the dance on the first day back at school. It was as though all her positive feelings had been removed.

Cho had become known as the 'Ice Queen'. She refused to speak to anyone about her personal life. In class, the professors of Hogwarts could not have hoped for a more diligent student. Outside the classroom, they were all very worried.

Cho sat and waited for the headmaster to speak. Dumbledore was sure she would sit there all day without moving if he didn't talk to her. Cho's dark eyes, for so long full of life and happiness, now gave out as much warmth as an icicle. She had resigned from the house Quidditch team without explanation, and now spent all her free time researching charms and spells in the library. Specifically, those used to hunt down, and destroy, dark wizards.

"Ms. Chang, I presume you are aware of the escape of Mr. Potter."

Dumbledore saw a flash of something in her eyes, anger? pain? She nodded, curtly.

"I have an 'operative' outside the school who has come in contact with him."

Nothing. Not even a flicker of emotion crossed her face.

"I am reluctant to request this of you, but Harry has proved adept at eluding capture."

Still nothing, not even curiosity. The headmaster could have been looking at a statue.

"I would like to request that you write to Mr. Potter. Ask to meet him, and if you can, tell him you want to help him. Tell him to name the meeting place. If you wish, you will be taken there,

escorted by a number of aurors and a pair of teachers from school, all under invisibility cloaks. When Mr. Potter arrives we will attempt to stun and capture him."

Nothing, not even anticipation appeared on Cho's exquisite features. "I'll do it," was all she said.

Dumbledore nodded. "Thank you Ms. Chang."

Sirius and Harry stood at the scene of the murder. The full moon lit the night enough to allow the pair to examine the scene, yet not enough that either of them would be identified should someone come by.

"I ran around the corner and saw Malfoy standing over Cho there," Harry said, pointing at the ground about five metres away.

"I stunned him, started to check on Cho, when I was stunned from behind." he continued.

"OK," said Sirius "The stunning spell you cast is recorded. The spell you were hit with wasn't."

Harry looked at his godfather. "Can magic be masked? Spells I mean."

Sirius nodded, then shook his head. "Yes, but that masking is easily detected. Any time a masking trace is found, it is assumed that it is covering a spell. Flitwick could find that sort of evidence in his sleep."

"A pity they couldn't wake me up here. I woke up in the cell."

Sirius' head snapped round to look at Harry. "They didn't wake you here?"

Harry shook his head. "They tried, but the ennervation charm didn't work."

Sirius started chuckling. "Well there is one reason there is no trace of the second stunning spell. It was not cast. If you were stunned, the ennervation charm would have woken you."

"I heard it being cast, Sirius."

"No, I'd say you heard the incantation. If the culprit wasn't holding a wand, no spell would have been cast."

"Then why did I lose consciousness?"

"I'm not sure. Tell me, apart from that day, have you ever been hit with the stunning spell before?"

"Never."

"What did it feel like? On the day of the murder, I mean."

"Just something slamming into the back of my head."

"Harry, the stunning spell doesn't 'slam' into you, it passes through you, disrupting your body. You don't 'feel' it hit you at all."

Harry looked at his godfather. "Someone physically hit me from behind."

Sirius just nodded. "Then used your wand to kill Crabbe."

Harry and his godfather stared at each other, working this new information over in their minds. A voice from the street startled them. "Hello, is anyone there?"

A young witch, a little tipsy from her visit to the Three Broomsticks, wandered round the corner. "Lumos," she slurred. The light from her wand illuminated a large black dog rolling around in the grass. A large red phoenix with green eyes watched her unnoticed from the building roof. "Nox," she said, and walked unsteadily home.

"Let's go, it's closing time soon." Sirius told his godson's phoenix form.

On the pair's return to the Shrieking Shack, a letter from Dumbledore waited on the table. Sirius opened the letter and took out a closed envelope. He read the message, and then passed it and the envelope to Harry.

Harry looked at the familiar looping script of Hogwarts' headmaster.

*Snuffles,*

*One student at Hogwarts has some very important things to say to your godson. I would ask that you please pass this message along to him the next time you see him.*

*Regards,*

*Albus Dumbledore*

Harry looked at envelope, his heart racing. Fingers shaking, he broke the seal, and opened the letter.

*Dearest Harry,*

*This is the hardest letter I've ever had to write. I know you must feel betrayed, that you have no one in the world who believes you. Please, I do.*

Harry's eyes glistened.

*I didn't though, for such a long time. Everyone knew you'd killed him. But, I couldn't sleep for the dreams. I had dreams, nightmares of you screaming at me, saying that you were innocent. For months, I just couldn't let myself believe that you weren't guilty.*

*My doubts had grown though. I remembered the looks you gave me, in the few precious days we*



*spent together. Looks full of love. I saw you at Cedric's grave, and I read the addition you made to his tombstone. Finally, I let myself believe that you might be innocent. My nightmares stopped that night.*

Harry looked up and took a deep breath. The pain in his stomach he felt when he saw the accusing looks on the faces of his friends was still there. The pain didn't go away now Cho believed in him. Maybe it never would.

*I want you to know that you have my support. I know I don't deserve your love, but you will always have my heart. I want to touch you, hold you in my arms again. I miss you so much.*

*I have informed the school that I would like to go home for a few days. Professor Dumbledore himself approved the request. Please tell me where and when I can meet you. I want to know that you are still real, and not just a memory.*

*All my love,*

*Your girlfriend, Cho.*

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## Betrayal of the Best Kind Love

Love

Harry wordlessly passed Cho's letter to his godfather. Sirius took it and quietly read. He looked up and stared into Harry's emerald eyes.

"What do you want to do?" he asked his godson.

Harry looked down at his feet. "I don't know. I, I had feelings for her. Deep feelings. I remember. I don't remember the feelings, but I remember having them. I honestly thought I loved her. But during my ten months in hell, I spent the entire time forcing myself to remember the look of loathing she gave me at the trial. That made me feel, I don't know, dirty? violated? Sirius, I don't know the words to describe what I felt. All I know is that bringing those memories to mind when the dementors were around protected my sanity.

"Now, looking at that letter, I'm starting to get scared that I didn't succeed."

Silently, Sirius collected Harry in his arms. The two of them stood there holding each other tightly.

Harry was the one to break the embrace. "I just don't feel anything Sirius. Nothing! When I thought of her touch, it used to give me goosebumps. Now, I'm not even sure it ever happened."

With a burst of anger, Harry spun and kicked over the table. "I'm half a man, Sirius! " he yelled. "I can't feel what I'm supposed to feel. All because some bastard decided to frame me for murder. Why? What the hell does it prove? That they can?"

Sirius didn't even blink. "Keep going."

Harry spun and looked at his godfather incredulously. "What?"

"Keep going. You might be on to something."

Harry frowned. "OK. Why frame me. To humiliate me? To get me out of the way? Did what they planned to happen actually happen? I don't know Sirius. They broke me. I can't feel anything but anger and hate. In Azkaban, that was good. But not now. Not now."

"What if they wanted to break you?"

"What do you mean?"

"Severus and I have been spying on Voldemort's new recruits. They are planning an assault on Azkaban, to release the Death Eaters there, and to offer the dementors the chance to join them. What if Voldemort wanted to have you there, so he could just walk in and pick you up?"

"Snape is spying on them? Isn't that too dangerous?"

Sirius shook his head. "Not as a Death Eater, Harry. He knows the methods of communication they use, where they meet, how they recruit people. With that information, we can keep an eye on who joins, and keep track of how many he commands."

Harry thought on this. "When is the assault to take place?"

"No idea. We don't have an ear in the inner circle."

Harry slumped down to the floor, sitting cross-legged. "Wonderful. Either he is trying to recruit me, capture me, or kill me. I don't know which is worse. Mind you, I don't know which is best either."

"If we can get your name cleared, the Ministry will probably want you to try and infiltrate the bastards."

Harry looked up at him. "The very people who wouldn't listen to me in the trial, would want me to fix things for them?"

"No Harry. To fix things for everyone."

Harry looked over at the inverted table, the transcripts now littering the floor. "Sorry about the mess."

Sirius looked around at the interior of the Shrieking Shack; at the rotting floorboards, the collapsed roof, and the boarded windows. Not one piece of furniture was fully intact. "No problem, just don't make a habit out of it. The neighbors wouldn't want this place to become a dump."

Harry started chuckling. It felt good. He laughed harder, and louder. Banishing the troubles of the past year. Clutching his sides, he rolled on the floor, tears streaming.

Sirius smiled and breathed a big sigh of relief. He started laughing himself.

After several minutes of soul cleansing laughter, Harry sat up, wiping his eyes. Occasional giggles escaped him as he composed himself. He got to his feet, and righted the table. Tearing a scrap of parchment, he started composing a letter to Cho, hoping it would help him feel again.

*Dear Cho,*

*I cannot tell you what I need to say. I simply do not know the words to describe how I feel. I doubt I'll know what to say until I see you.*

*I do want to see you. Please meet me at the lighthouse on the cliff, northwest from Hogsmeade. I will be there this Friday evening, at eight pm.*

*Harry.*

Harry looked over to his godfather. "Has Hedwig visited you recently?"

Hermione sat at the Gryffindor table eating her breakfast. Ron was yet to make an appearance. That boy was infuriating sometimes. They had had another argument last night before storming off to their respective dorms. It did not escape her notice that as she did the other Gryffindors in the tower started exchanging money.

Was her relationship with Ron just some big joke? Was everyone laughing at them? At her?

Things just hadn't been the same without Harry here. Hermione had tried to get copies of the statements that were used to convict him, but her request was denied by the ministry. Didn't matter really, when she was at the trial, the facts just seemed overwhelming. Harry killed Vincent, and tried to lie about it. Yes. Definitely.

Mind you, Professor Pritchard's questioning style left a lot to be desired. The questions she asked were very specific, and didn't really help establish what had happened. She hadn't even asked the Malfoys what they had been doing together.

She sighed. This year had just been terrible. Her revision for her OWLs had suffered. Both with the help she was forcing Ron to accept, and with her own nagging suspicions about Harry's guilt.

Ron finally wandered in, yawning and scratching like a bear after winter. His hair stuck out all over the place, and he still had sleep in his eyes. Plonking himself down next to his girlfriend, he filled his plate and started shoveling scrambled eggs into his mouth with what looked like production line efficiency.

Hermione was irritated. His appearance and behavior would be good for a fifteen minute tirade at least. Yes, that would make her feel better.

She took a deep breath to begin chastising her boyfriend, when hundreds of owls swooped in delivering the morning's mail. A flash of white caught her attention. She let her breath out explosively when she recognised Hedwig, and watched as Harry's snowy owl dropped a letter on Cho's plate.

Hermione watched as Cho looked at it expressionless. Not that that was in any way unusual. No one had seen an expression on Cho's face for months. Hermione had tried a couple of times to talk to her, but to no avail. Hermione wryly thought that she would have got more warmth and reaction

if she had spoken to an ice sculpture.

Cho looked at the letter as if wondering what it was. Eventually she picked it up and opened it. Must be a short letter, thought Hermione, as Cho stood up seconds later and walked calmly to the head table. Cho handed the scrap of parchment to Dumbledore, who read it quickly. Dumbledore looked up at Cho and nodded. He passed the note to Professor Pritchard, who in turn passed it to Snape.

All three stood up and started walking from the hall. As the Headmaster drew level with Hermione and Ron, he looked over, and, as if deciding something on the spot, beckoned them both to follow. Hermione elbowed Ron in the ribs, a little harder than was strictly necessary. ("Mmmmmph! 'Mione!") After a brief spray of eggs, the pair followed.

It took Harry and Sirius until Friday afternoon to put all the transcripts back into something resembling order. Harry still had occasional violent mood swings, but they were becoming shorter and less intense. Since the burst of uncontrollable laughter, Harry had been focused, almost to the point of obsession, on his upcoming meeting with Cho.

"I'm going now, Sirius. I can't wait around any longer." Harry said.

Sirius looked up in surprise. "Harry, it's the middle of the afternoon. Waiting here, waiting there, what is the difference?"

His godson looked at him with those deep green eyes. Eyes that reminded Sirius so much of Lily.

"The difference between waiting in a small room and waiting in the 'free' open air." he said pointedly.

Sirius nodded. "Go. I'll get started on these. See if there is anything we can find from the testimonies."

A faint pop, and the magnificent phoenix spread its wings, and launched itself through the gap in the boarded window. Sirius shook his head at the tiny gap Harry could slip through. "Another phoenix trait, I guess." he muttered to himself. He turned back to the parchment stack, and began leafing through them.

It was nearly nightfall, when he suddenly leapt up, and charged to the fireplace. Throwing a pinch of powder in the fire, he yelled "Albus Dumbledore!"

Professor Snape strode impatiently around Dumbledore's office. The headmaster had just finished organising invisibility cloaks for everyone on the manhunt. Commandeering that many on such short notice should have been impossible, but Arthur Weasley was making a good interim Minister, and had cut through red tape with such effectiveness that even Dumbledore had been amazed.

With everyone kitted out, the pair were about to leave for the designated apparation point, when

Sirius' head appeared in the fire.

"Albus! I need to meet you urgently!"

Dumbledore sighed. "Very well Snuffles, floo to my office in exactly thirty seconds." He then turned to professor Snape. "Severus, please give Victoria control of this operation. You are her second in command. I want Harry captured alive; unhurt if possible, but alive."

Snape looked at the headmaster. "You think Black may know that we have a trap for Harry? That he is trying to stop you from going?"

"It is possible, I will wait to hear what he has to say before I make a judgment."

Snape just nodded, and walked quickly from the office.

Dumbledore looked at the door, pondering the potion Professor's last words. With a green flash, Sirius stepped out of the fireplace, holding the sheaf of evidence Dumbledore had sent him previously.

Turning to face his visitor, Dumbledore gestured to a chair. "Sirius, please take a seat. I see by your stance that you have something of importance to discuss."

Sirius nodded with a grin. "Just proof that Harry is innocent."

Dumbledore immediately sat down at his desk. "Show me!" he said excitedly.

Sirius nodded again. "First of all, did you know that Fudge was so determined to get a conviction that he stacked the jury?"

"I didn't even notice who was in the jury, I was too busy trying to keep Harry from going to Azkaban."

Sirius snorted. "Good job, by the way."

Dumbledore glared at the fugitive. "Do you have anything relevant to say, other than conspiracy theories about the jury?"

"It's no theory. Look, Fudge has close ties with eight members of the jury that I could see. One is a nephew, one a cousin, one is a sister-in-law who used her maiden name on the register."

Dumbledore's anger faded. "Go on." he urged.

"Three are his main business associates, one is nothing less than his best friend from Hogwarts, and one is an undersecretary from his office."

Dumbledore could only shake his head.

"Albus, I wouldn't be surprised if the other four also knew him. If you stuck funny hats on the jury, Fudge could have been forgiven for thinking they were throwing him a surprise birthday party."

"Damning to the ex-minister though that may be, it doesn't help Harry." replied the headmaster.

Sirius spent the next quarter of an hour telling the increasingly intrigued headmaster about the excursion he and Harry had made to the scene of the murder, and how they determined that Harry had been struck from behind. "It is a scenario that fits both the physical evidence of only one stunning spell cast and Harry's story. It also explains why the enervation charm couldn't wake him."

Dumbledore leaned back in his chair, excitement fading, the tips of his fingers lightly touching each other in front of his face. "That doesn't fit with the Crutiatus curse in Harry's story." he objected.

Sirius shrugged. "He did say never saw that spell cast. How hard would it be to pretend to be under the influence of that curse?"

The headmaster frowned. "Why would Ms. Chang pretend to be under the influence of that curse anyway? Forgetting the fact that all eyewitnesses state she was not at the scene."

Sirius smiled. "She wasn't there."

"Then Harry's story goes out the window."

"You've forgotten Barty Crouch, Jr already?"

Sirius watched in amusement as Dumbledore blushed. "Point taken."

Sirius pointed to a particular sheet. Professor Pritchard claims under veritaserum that Draco followed someone with long hair. Nothing else. No gender, height, shape, even hair colour. Harry assumed it was Cho, what if it was Lucius Malfoy?"

"Assuming Lucius took something from Ms. Chang to put in a poly-juice potion, who struck Harry from behind?"

"Lucius testifies to who was there. So does the attacker."

Dumbledore's heart skipped a beat as realisation sunk in.

"You really should screen your Defense against the Dark Arts teachers better." Sirius chided him with a grin. "I believe your record is three Death Eaters, a fraud and a werewolf in the last five years. No wonder no one wants the job. It invariably ruins all future prospects."

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## Betrayal of the Best Kind Fall

Fall

Even though it was nearly eight o'clock, the late afternoon sun was yet to dip beneath the southwestern horizon. Days were long indeed in early summer in Scotland. Harry sat, his back leaning against the base of the old stone lighthouse, looking out over the cliff, just watching the simple beauty of a sunset.

The lighthouse had been build at the highest point of the shear cliffs that ran along this part of the coast. Anyone foolhardy enough to get close enough to look over the edge would see waves crashing against the base of the cliff, then receding enough to make out the floor of jagged rocks below, before the next wave covered them with white foam.

Had he ever watched a sunset? Harry couldn't remember.

Faint footfalls sounded on the grassed land behind the building. Harry stood and walked around the lighthouse.

Cho stood there, a vision of beauty. Her dark, silky hair was tied back in a long ponytail, her small frame clothed in simple school robes. Her perfect features were caught in an expression of anticipation.

"Harry?" she sounded shocked.

It took Harry a second or two to figure out what caused Cho such confusion. He was dressed in tattered robes, not having the ability to purchase new ones nor the wand to transfigure a new set. His long dark hair framed his gaunt face, making his pale skin look almost white. Harry's skeletal frame gave mute testimony to the hardships he'd endured.

He smiled and nodded. "It's me, Cho. It's Harry."

Cho made her way towards the lighthouse on the cliff. She knew behind her in a copse of trees were a dozen aurors and two professors, all covered in invisibility cloaks. Walking next to her was Harry's friends, Ron and Hermione, also invisible under a cloak.

A painfully thin tramp appeared from the far side of the lighthouse. Cho cursed under her breath, the last thing they needed was a muggle in the way when they caught Harry.



The tramp saw her and walked straight towards her. A smile appeared on his thin face. A vaguely familiar face.

Cho drew a sharp breath in shock. "Harry?" she asked.

A smile and a nod. "It's me, Cho. It's Harry."

Malicious glee flooded through Cho's small frame. Here was her tormentor, the murderer. The thoughts of the obvious trials he had gone through were delicious to her vengeful mind. It looked as if he had gone through more pain than she expected. The thought warmed her.

The murderer walked towards her, his arms outstretched. Cho clenched her jaw, and held out her arms. She had to get him away from the cliff, he may be prepared to jump rather than be captured again.

The embrace almost overwhelmed her. Harry's familiar hug sent her mind back, recalling the blissful times she spent in his arms. Without thinking she tightened the embrace holding him close. Emotions long thought buried under all the hatred she felt for this man rose painfully. She let out a quivering sob.

Harry did nothing but hold her. He felt all the barriers he had erected in Azkaban disintegrate into nothing. It felt like he had been colour-blind, and was now seeing a rainbow for the first time. Holding his crying girlfriend and feeling all the love he felt for her banished the memory of every accusing look she ever gave him.

Everything was suddenly alright in the world.

Victoria Pritchard looked at the sobbing girl in alarm. She couldn't allow Potter to forgive the girl. She had to act now, even though the pair were still only a few metres from the edge of the cliff.

Whipping off her cloak she shouted, "Good girl Cho, now get out of the way, we'll get him!" She aimed her wand at Potter's astonished face.

Cho leapt back at the Defense professor's unexpected voice. She had been supposed to lead Harry towards the trees where the aurors were waiting. Memories of Harry tracing their initials on her bare chest had set her shivering. Though she had broken her physical contact with him, she couldn't bring the loathing she knew she felt for him to invade her bliss. Wanting to hate him with all her mind, and loving him with all her heart. The pain of the two conflicting emotions was too much.

"I hate you!" she shouted at the pain. Desperately trying to regain the mask of control she had worn so well during the year, she shouted what had almost become her mantra.

"You killed him! I hate you!" she shouted, her heart not believing a word. "You killed Cedric just because you wanted me!" The poisonous story fed to her for nearly a year could not penetrate the love Harry's touch had ignited in her, the love she still felt for this young man in her heart.

Desperately, she tried again.

"You killed him! I hate you!" her voice became hoarse, she had no more air in her lungs. Cho collapsed, still whispering, "I hate you, I hate you." She was unable to draw breath. She knew she was lying.

Hermione and Ron jumped at professor Pritchard's sudden and unexpected outburst. The invisibility cloak slipped, and fell from their shoulders.

Harry looked from Cho to them, astonishment and pain evident on his already tortured features.

Professor Snape forced himself to focus on the task at hand. The outburst from the Defense Professor was inexcusable in such a situation, but dwelling on that would not make the current circumstances any better.

He took off, running directly at Potter and Chang, who was now slumped on the ground. Potter was too far away to fire a stunning spell with any accuracy. For now, he simply had to run as fast as he could. Even when confused, Potter had an uncanny way of getting out of situations like this.

Hermione recovered first. "Harry," she started.

She watched Harry flinch at her voice. He looked down at Cho, who lay quivering on the grass, still unable to breathe. The torment and pain Cho had just inflicted on her friend was too much.

"Harry, wait!" she shouted as he looked up in horror and turned to run. Hermione risked a quick look behind her and saw the aurors burst forth from the trees.

"Damn you!" she heard Harry shout. "What do you want from me? What?" His agonized voice pained her.

Suddenly, his features snapped into a mask of determination. No trace of pain could be seen.

"So be it." was all Hermione heard him say, before he ran and threw himself off the cliff.

Harry snapped his head up at the unexpected voice of his Defense Professor. His heart stopped at Cho's outburst. His mind shut down, trying to register Hermione and Ron's presence.

"Harry," came Hermione's familiar voice. Harry flinched and felt reality intrude on his private world of heartache.

He looked up and saw the potion professor appear from beneath an invisibility cloak, sprinting towards him. The idea of Snape charging in his direction shocked Harry into moving.

He spun on his heel, and ran towards the lighthouse. "Damn you!" he shouted at the top of his lungs. "What do you want from me? What?" Harry couldn't keep the anguish from his voice.

Months of bringing pain and anger to mind and banishing it just a quickly saved Harry. Like

flicking a switch, he shunted all the agony he felt to the side. He could transform, and escape, but he had to keep his new power a secret.

Turning to face his attackers, Harry simply said in a normal voice, "So be it."

He turned back to the cliff, and jumped.

Ron watched as his best friend threw himself over the cliff. Time just stopped. He heard a voice scream, "No!" as Harry slowly disappeared. With the apparent speed of continental drift, he moved to the edge of the cliff and looked over.

Hermione's heart shot into her throat as Harry lunged to his death. She screamed, "No!", and tried to run to the edge of the cliff. Her legs would not obey her. Desperately, she crawled to the edge, horrified at what she expected to see.

Snape ran like never before. He was almost within range when he watched the boy who defeated his former master willingly leap from the cliff. He didn't remember slowing to a walk, picking Cho up, or making it to the edge.

Professor Pritchard watched as all her work counted for nothing. Potter had killed himself. Her master would not be pleased. Not pleased at all. Gathering the cloak around her shoulders, she apparated away.

Four figures stood at the top of a wind swept cliff on the west coast of Scotland. They looked down at the body of a young man lying on the rocks below. His head lying on its side, arms splayed, and skinny legs propped against stone.

Slowly, twelve others wearing the same uniform joined the four at the edge of the cliff.

Cold waves washed over the body, knocking the glasses on its face askew.

Two figures apparated to the woods near the cliff. One immediately transformed into a great canine. Both ran out of the woods, but stopped when they saw all the figures looking over the cliff's edge.

The enormous dog let out a gut-wrenching howl. All the people standing at the cliff face turned and made their way towards the headmaster and the animal.

The dog sped past them and stopped at the edge of the cliff. Looking down it whimpered. Holding its head low, it turned and trotted back to the headmaster.

Professor Snape began recounting the events of the past few minutes.

"So professor Pritchard's action disrupted the operation." Snape concluded. "I haven't seen her since."

A somber group stood around in the beautiful, warming golden rays of the sunset.

Hermione was crying into her boyfriend's chest, Ron's arms gently held her around her shoulders. Cho had been taken back to Hogwarts by a couple of the aurors, suffering from shock. Sirius lay whining in his canine form.

Dumbledore sagged at the story. "I cannot believe Harry is gone. I have been so short-sighted in this that I've caused the death of an innocent boy."

"Innocent?" A collective gasp of astonishment.

"Short-sighted?" Came Hermione's voice, not accusing, but thoughtful.

Everyone looked at her. "That little ..." she started. Breaking away from Ron, she sprinted from the group back to the edge of the cliff

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## Betrayal of the Best Kind

### Soar

Soar

Harry felt the wind whip past his face as he fell from the top of the cliff. He would have to time this very well. Failure was not an acceptable option. The ground was coming up towards him very, very fast.

In a split second, Harry changed. Continuing the dive, he flared his wings at the last possible moment, slowed enough to land and changed back. Flopping down on the uncomfortable rocks, he lay his head on its side, so he could view the top of the cliff. He needed to know when no one was watching.

Looking out the side of his glasses, he couldn't make out the identity of the individuals staring down at his 'corpse'. More and more blurs appeared at the edge of the cliff, looking down.

Long minutes passed. Now the danger of dying was past, Harry could feel the cold, bitter sting of betrayal. Cho had lied to him. She had tried to get him captured. She hated him. The euphoric feelings of holding her evaporated, like water on a hot stove. The ache in his heart drew his attention away from the pain of the rocks he was lying on. One rock was jabbing into his ribs, another particularly sharp one, was sticking in just below his bladder. Harry didn't notice. A wave crashed into the rocks chilling Harry, and knocking his glasses almost off his nose.

A faint howl of anguish reached Harry. Almost immediately, the people at the cliff's edge vanished. Harry stiffened. Sirius was there. The one person he trusted was there. Did he have anything to do with this trap? A single blurred shape appeared at the cliff top. A few seconds later, it disappeared. Harry fancied he could hear a faint whining.

The pain could no longer be contained. That Sirius knew and helped to try and capture Harry made his stomach churn violently. Harry got to his hands and knees and vomited the meager contents of his belly. His heart felt as though a huge fist was squeezing it, crushing the life out of him.

Gritting his teeth, Harry leapt into the air and flew as fast as he could along the coastline. He had to get away, away from the awful heartache threatening to overwhelm him.

Hermione ran to the edge of the cliff and looked over. The rest of the group caught up and followed suit. They all stared down at the sharp, wave ravaged rocks below, noticeably lacking the

corpse of a young man.

"Harry!" shouted Hermione down the cliff. "You almost gave me a heart attack you bastard! I thought you were dead! I'm going to kill you!"

The others looked at her in astonishment. A stray thought at the back of Ron's stunned and bewildered mind suggested he not make a comment about the hypocrisy of Hermione's last statement. "He's not dead?" was all he could manage.

Hermione turned to look at him. "No, Ron, he is still alive." She sadly looked out to sea. "And probably in more pain than we can imagine."

All but one of the rest of the group stared out into the sunset stained sea, searching for any sign of, as Hermione now thought of him, The-Boy-Who-Lived-Yet-Again. Perhaps, she thought, he should be called The-Boy-Who-Just-Won't-Bloody-Die.

Sirius was looking surreptitiously to the sky, silently echoing Hermione's hypocritical and homicidal thoughts.

The aurors that had taken part in the operation had left to report on the failure to capture Harry. The rest of the participants in the failed mission sat dejected in Dumbledore's office. Cho was still in the hospital wing; Sirius was still in canine form, and whining.

Hermione and Ron sat close together, arm in arm, as they listened in horror to the real events of that fateful day. Guilt surrounded them, as they realised they had believed that a true friend and hero of the wizarding world was a murderer. Understanding of the desperation of their friend to prefer to almost end his life, rather than be captured, drove home the self-loathing they now felt.

Snape looked down at the pair. He too felt shame that he had believed Potter capable of killing Crabbe. Vincent had been a member of his own house, he thought, he should have done his own investigation, rather than rely on others. One thing gnawed at him though.

"Miss Granger?" He asked softly.

Hermione looked up at him questioningly.

"How did you know that Pott-, Harry was still alive?"

"I'd be interested to discover the answer to that mystery too, Severus," said Dumbledore.

Dumbledore looked as though he'd aged fifty years. No matter the length of his white hair and beard, he had always possessed a vitality that put younger wizards to shame. Now, he looked tired, and weak.

"Harry's glasses were still intact on his face. After a fall of that distance, they should have shattered. It was Professor Dumbledore's inadvertent use of the phrase 'short-sighted' that triggered the realisation."

Ron stood. "Professor Dumbledore?"

"Yes, Mr. Weasley?"

"May I use your fire?"

"Be my guest."

Ron walked over to the ornamental fireplace, took a pinch of powder from a small pouch and threw it in the fire. "Arthur Weasley," he said.

It was almost a full minute later that Arthur's face appear in the fire. "Ron! Where are you calling from?"

"Professor Dumbledore's office. Dad, we tried to catch Harry today."

"Yes, I know. I organised the invisibility cloaks. How did it go."

"Not good. Harry somehow managed to escape."

Mr. Weasley frowned. "How on earth did he manage that? I authorised the use of a full squad of aurors."

Ron tried to hold back tears. "He jumped off the cliff."

Mr. Weasley sighed deeply. "That is unfortunate. I would have preferred him to have been taken alive."

Dumbledore spoke up, his voice raspy. "It is more unfortunate than you believe, Arthur. I'm sorry to have to tell you now, but information has come to my attention, suggesting that Harry is in fact innocent."

Mr. Weasley stared at the headmaster with a shocked expression. "Enough to bring before a court?"

"Yes, and exonerate him. One piece of news that would have been considered good under any other circumstances, is that there is now enough evidence to arrest Lucius Malfoy for murder."

Mr. Weasley closed his eyes. "Hardly a consolation, if an innocent boy has died."

Ron shook his head. "Harry isn't called The-Boy-Who-Lived for nothing. He somehow managed to save himself, trick us into thinking he was dead, and escape while we weren't watching."

Mr. Weasley looked at his son. He again sighed deeply, this time in relief. "Molly will be pleased. I don't think she ever really believed he killed that boy."

Professor Snape coughed. "There's more. The reason he ran. He realised it was a trap. He won't

trust anyone. Even if you issue a press release proclaiming his innocence, it's unlikely that he'll give himself up. Ms. Chang broke down, and essentially accused Potter of killing Cedric Diggory for his own gain. I doubt he is thinking clearly at present."

The enormous grim's head snapped around and stared at Snape. With a bound he was out the door and into the Hogwart's corridors.

"Just a moment, gentlemen." Mr. Weasley said. His head disappeared briefly, before returning with a determined expression. "Harry has been found. At Privet Drive."

Sirius bolted through the corridors. Groups of students watched him with open mouths as he speed past. Two girls dropped their bags and screamed at the top of their lungs as he loped past. He ignored them. That bitch, the Chang girl was in the hospital wing. He wanted to have a nice long chat with her.

Lavender Brown and Pavati Patil had just finished their revision in the library for the upcoming Divination OWLs. They'd both studied death omens extensively, being one of Professor Trewlaney's favourite subjects. Giggling about her recent prediction (a student would die at the hand of a former student), they turned the corner on their way back to Gryffindor Tower.

Both stopped and stared in shock at the appearance of a Grim. Massive, black, and moving fast, it came straight at them. Both let out a scream. Then fainted.

Sirius stuck his large head through the gap in the door to the hospital wing. Sniffing deeply, he could tell there were three distinct individuals in the room. Two of them female. He sniffed again, recognising Madam Pomfrey's scent. Well that left one.

Shouldering the door open further, he trotted in. Madam Pomfrey was in her office, her two charges sleeping. Sirius padded past a short wizard with blond hair and his arm in a sling. The other patient was lying closest to Pomfrey's office. She was lying on her side, quivering slightly in her slumber. Sirius could smell the residue of the sleeping draught on her breath. He transformed, and reached into his pocket, extracting an intricately carved lion. Grabbing her with his left hand he twisted the lion's head with the fingers on his right, activating the portkey.

In quarter of an hour, Madam Pomfrey would raise the alarm, but for now, she worked in her office, blissfully unaware that one of the most wanted men in the world had just kidnapped one of her patients.

A scarlet blur sped the length of the United Kingdom in only a few minutes. Unthinking, Harry sped towards the place that he had lived for his first decade of life. He had never considered the place home, but at least there he was only treated badly. At least they had never held him in a place guarded by his worst fear.

Harry aimed at the open kitchen window, and flew into the house. He transformed back in the living room and looked around. The house appeared empty. A short scream sounded from the stairway. Harry spun and looked at his Aunt, her horse-like features fixed into an expression of



extreme fright, her bony hand covering her mouth in fear.

"It's just me, Aunt Petunia." he said.

His Aunt blinked. The shabby, painfully thin wretch in front of her was her nephew? She lowered her trembling hand. "What, what are you doing here?"

Harry shrugged, not knowing exactly what to tell her. He heard some thumping from upstairs, and then his Uncle's voice shouted, "Who's there, Petunia?"

His Uncle appeared at the top of the stairs, behind his Aunt. "You!" he bellowed, storming past his wife.

"Yes, me." Harry said in a deadly calm voice. His green eyes glittered with contempt for the couple who raised him. "Touch me, and you'll regret it."

Vernon Dursley stopped his charge at the boy. Never had he seen Harry so intense. "You can't do magic out of school boy, you'd be expelled."

The feral smile that appeared on Harry's face chilled him. Always before, his nephew had been afraid, or at least timid, in his presence. Now, the shabby creature before him obviously held no such feelings.

"I was expelled last August." he said, his chilling smile still in place. "Now, I'm a fugitive, just like my godfather."

Vernon heard his wife sigh, and then faint to the floor. Summoning his courage, he shouted, "Get out, before I call the police!"

If anything, his nephew's smile grew even more evil. "Go ahead. You can try to explain to them that I have escaped from prison, but I doubt they'd believe you, since I've never been arrested in the muggle world. They may arrest you though." His eyes glittered with glee.

Vernon's brave mask was cracking. "W... w... why would they arrest me?" he stammered.

"You are my legal guardian. They'd take one look at me and arrest you for child abuse. I look like I've been abused for years, don't I?"

Mr. Vernon Dursley, director of Grunnings, joined his wife on the floor in a dead faint.

Harry looked down at the pair of them. "Well that was fun." he said to no one in particular.

Mr. and Mrs. Jacobs, of number six, Privet Drive, were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much. They were the last people you'd expect to be involved in anything strange or mysterious, because they just didn't hold with such nonsense.

Mind you, strange and mysterious voices could be heard next door. A scream had caught their

attention earlier. The voice of their neighbor, Vernon, had been heard shouting at someone to leave or the police would be called.

Well, that was enough for Mrs. Jacobs. "They'll thank me, they really will," she said to herself, as she dialed 999.

Harry had just stepped out of the shower, when he heard the front door of Privet Drive crash open. Wrapping a towel around himself, he ran to his room. Concerned voices drifted up the stairs. Looking out the window, he could see an empty police car sitting on the road in front of the house.

Harry quickly dried himself and threw on some of Dudley's cast off clothes. One of the policemen came up the stairs, and opened his door. "Is any- Dear God!"

The two of them stared in shock at the other. The policeman recovered first. "Who did this to you? Are you alright?" Harry scooted away out of his reach.

"It's OK, son, I'm not going to hurt you."

Harry relaxed. His inner Slytherin told him that this was too good an opportunity to pass up.

The policeman continued. "Why didn't you answer the door when we knocked? We had to break in when we saw your parents were lying on the floor."

"They're not my parents, they're my Aunt and Uncle. They don't like it when I leave my room."

The policeman's eyes widened. He took in Harry's appearance, long wet hair, skeletal frame and pale skin. "Don't they feed you?" he asked.

Harry nodded. "They pass me a tin of soup through the door sometimes."

"I'm Carter. My friend Barry is downstairs looking after your relatives. Can you come downstairs with me?"

Harry nodded. He got up and followed Carter down to the living room.

"How long have you been in that room?"

Harry smiled. "Just on five years." He watched as two pairs of eyebrows shot up in disbelief. "The moved me in there after I got too big for the cupboard under the stairs." he continued.

Barry and Carter exchanged a look. It was obvious to them that Harry wasn't lying. Just one look at the haggard boy would make anyone believe he had been abused for a long period.

Barry spoke for the first time, "What's your name, son?"

"Harry. Harry Potter."

Barry turned and nodded to his partner. "Come on, Harry. Let's get you something to eat." He led to boy to the kitchen.

Carter turned a look of disgust on the unconscious Dursleys. He walked out the door and out to the car. He radioed the station to report the suspected child abuse of one Harry Potter.

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## Betrayal of the Best Kind

### Ache

Ache

Freezing cold water was thrown into Cho's sleeping face, shocking her into wakefulness. She desperately tried to get her bearings, but a lack of familiar details foiled her attempt. She tried moving, but her wrists were bound to the wall with thin strips of leather, holding her arms spread on either side of her body.

Panic surged through her. Thrashing her entire body, she found other points of restraint. A rope tied below her small breasts fastened her body to the wall. A short, thin strip of wire connected the straps around her ankles, effectively hobbling her.

A scream tried to escape her throat, muffled by the dense, foam ball shoved in her mouth.

Slowly her eyes became accustomed to the low light, revealing a tall, thin man standing in front of her, holding a now-empty flagon. Moving his face close to her own, revealing pale blue, almost grey eyes, filled with rage.

The man reached up and pulled the foam gag from her mouth. Cho was trembling with fear. "Who, who are y-you?"

The man's face split into a grin that contained no trace of humour. "I suppose I should introduce myself. My name is Sirius Black. Pleased to finally meet you."

If Cho was scared before, she was petrified now. Her mind, normally so good at processing information, simply shut down at his announcement. His name echoed in her head. Sirius Black, *Sirius Black*, **Sirius Black!** The man who was the first to escape Azkaban, who killed thirteen people with one curse, who was one of You-know-who's closest supporters. Blackness overtook her again.

More icy water struck her face. "Don't keep fainting on me, bitch. That will get me mad. You don't want that. Trust me."

Cho opened her mouth and let out the loudest scream she could manage. Black just stood there with a smirk. "Silencing charm," was all he said when her breath had run out.

Tears of powerlessness spilled from Cho's dark eyes. A bony hand grabbed her throat and raised

her sobbing face to his. Looking into his merciless eyes, Cho lost control of herself, and a dark, wet stain spread down the front of her clothes. A detached thought in the back of her mind told her that her mother would be angry with her for urinating on herself.

"You think you're in pain now? You haven't even begun to feel the pain you have inflicted on others."

His words confused her. What did he mean by causing others pain? Why did he care?"

Her confusion must have appeared on her face, Sirius let go and said, "You're wondering why a murderer like me, cares about the pain of others. Mostly, I don't. There are very few people in the world I'd bother to cross the street to piss on if they were on fire. My godson is one of them."

Cho looked at the man in front of her uncertainly. There was only one person she had pained recently. Unbidden, a memory of her very first phone conversation with Harry surfaced.

*"My Uncle started yelling at me, but I told them that it was my godfather. My Aunt and Uncle have left to go out for a while, without their wallet, purse, or car keys I might add. I should have done that a long time ago."*

Cho looked at Sirius in horror as realisation dawned. This man, this *animal*, was Harry's godfather?

"Harry?" she choked out, eyes wide with the disturbing thought.

Sirius nodded. "Excellent, it would appear your wits haven't left you just yet."

*Yet?* Cho thought. What is he going to do to me? Once more she struggled against her bonds. Futile.

"You know," Sirius continued in a tone that would have sounded normal to anyone not bound to a wall by a murderer. "I would really have liked to have met you under different circumstances. Harry told me he was quite smitten by you."

"H-Harry talks to you?" Cho asked incredulously.

"You sound so shocked."

"But, you, you killed those people. Harry wouldn't..." she caught herself. If Harry was a murderer, perhaps he did talk to this man.

"Wouldn't talk to a murderer? Why did you stop? Oh, you still think that Harry killed that boy Crabbe."

Cho's heart leapt at that, then sank when she considered who said it. "He did." Tears formed in her eyes. "I wish he didn't, I love him, but he did."

If Black's statement had surprised Cho, her statement stunned her captor. An almost gentle expression crossed his face. "You wish... You love..." He shook his head to clear it. The frightening visage returned. "Dumbledore has evidence exonerating him. Harry has never killed anyone. He even prevented me from committing the crime I was imprisoned for."

"If the headmaster had any evidence like that he would have used it!" she shouted. How could Harry have prevented him from killing those people, she thought. Harry would have been just a baby.

Sirius snorted. "He only received it a couple of hours ago. I gave it to him myself. We were on our way to stop you from springing that damned trap on him, only to arrive just in time to see you all standing at the edge of the cliff off which he'd thrown himself. Because you HURT HIM!" Sirius shouted.

A fresh wave of guilt flooded Cho. The knowledge that it had been her words that pushed Harry to suicide tore through her. Again, she had trouble breathing, and sobs wracked her small frame.

Sirius' next words struck her like a bolt of lightning.

"Now, he'll never trust any of us."

Harry sat outside in the front seat of the police car, chatting with Barry and a child psychotherapist named Mabel. He enjoyed himself telling her his 'fantasies' of flying on a broomstick and changing into animals. He almost laughed when she told him that his fantasies were his mind's way of expressing its desire for freedom.

Carter finally brought Harry's Uncle out of the house. Vernon had several bruises on his face, a lip cut in two places and, Harry noticed during his uncle's tirade about police brutality, three missing teeth. He looked questioningly at Barry.

"Probably fell down the stairs. A couple of times," Barry smirked. Mabel gave him a stern look, but Harry's appearance convinced her that whatever happened to his Uncle was probably richly deserved.

Vernon was placed into a police car and taken away. Every resident of Privet Drive was out, watching with interest as the events of the evening unfolded. Harry supposed that the Dursleys would never be considered 'normal' anymore.

"Harry?" Barry tried to get Harry's attention.

Harry looked over to him. "Yes?"

"Apart from your Aunt and Uncle, does anyone else live here?"

Harry nodded. "My cousin, Dudley. He goes to a school called Smeltings. He was upset when I got to have his second bedroom."

Barry just shook his head. The more he heard about these Dursleys, the more he hated them.

"Where do you go to school, Harry?"

As Harry opened his mouth to answer, a hand lightly gripped his shoulder and a gentle voice from behind said, "To a boarding school for talented individuals, in Scotland."

Harry almost got whiplash from spinning round so fast. He looked into the serene face of Albus Dumbledore.

"He'll never trust us? Harry is alive?" Cho's heart became lighter.

"Bah! Are you kidding? Harry has survived attempts on his life by the most powerful dark wizard of recent times, and more often than any other wizard. You think that jumping off a cliff would stop him?"

"How? Please, is he OK?"

"Why the hell do you care? It's because of you that he jumped and fled in the first place." her captor snarled.

Cho flushed with shame. Tears ran down her cheeks, dripping off the end of her chin, falling onto her already wet clothes. Fear had filled her on realisation of her predicament, now the awesome weight of responsibility for Harry's situation crashed down. Months of repressed emotions broke through the dam of her denials. She opened her mouth to reply, but couldn't get the breath to say anything.

Sirius watched the girl, and her unexpected reaction. She was trying to say something, but had started to hyperventilate. "Take a deep breath," he said.

Without thinking, Cho obeyed. She dragged in a quivering lungful of air and let it out. "I said some bad things to him. I wish to God I hadn't. Draco Malfoy used to tell me that Harry killed Cedric just so he could go out with me." Cho took another breath. "Then Harry kill- then Crabbe was killed. Harry went to that awful place." Her voice choked up again.

Sirius watched her as she struggled to release the pain she had buried.

"I believed it. It was too painful not to. I couldn't face anything that reminded me of Harry. I quit Quiddich, and avoided his friends."

"Did you lie in the letter?"

"No. Yes. I mean, I meant what I wrote now. I mean, what I wrote is what I feel now. But not when I wrote it, I was still angry with him." Cho looked at Sirius pleading him to understand. "When he held me, on the cliff, I just couldn't imagine leaving him again. But it hurt, I didn't want to believe that I still loved him, and I said all the bad things to him. I wish I hadn't. I just need to be able to make things right." Cho wept quietly for a few minutes, while Sirius regarded her, a thoughtful expression on his face. Cho suddenly looked up and gave him a bewildered look. "How did you

know about the letter?" Her eyes widened. "You're professor Dumbledore's operative! The one in contact with Harry!"

Sirius nodded. Cho pleaded with him, "Please, you have to believe me! I need to make things right! I didn't mean to say those things to him, please! Let me go, I need to help him!" She started crying again.

Harry leapt up and backed away from the headmaster. "Not anymore!" he shouted at Dumbledore. "You expelled me, remember?"

Dumbledore made no move to follow. "Yes. I do remember, Harry. But things have changed since then."

"Not enough!" Harry turned and ran from the headmaster. He ran towards the ring of bystanders, still watching the events at number four. The neighbors moved out of his way. Except for one man.

Harry skidded to a stop. "Professor Snape?" Harry turned to run in a different direction, heart racing, desperate to escape again.

Professor McGonagall appeared and stepped in front of him. "Harry, please stop." she said.

"No!" Harry shouted. "I won't go back there!" Turning, looking for an escape route, Harry could see professors Vector, Flitwick and Sprout spaced through the crowd. He turned back towards the police car, to see professor Dumbledore looking flustered at being restrained by Barry. Harry saw no other option, he ran straight into number four, Privet Drive.

Snape was the first to react. He ran straight after Harry, dodging the second policeman, and entered the house. From the front door, he saw a flash of movement at the top of the stairs. Racing up them three at a time, he rounded the landing and raced down the corridor to the bedrooms. Only two doors were open. Looking in one, he saw an sparsely furnished room with a plain, empty bed.

Running further down the corridor, he entered a larger bedroom, one filled with muggle gadgets and toys. An open window looked out over the backyard. Snape ran over to the window, and looked out into the yard. Harry was nowhere to be seen.

"How in Merlin's name do you do that, Potter?"

Snape turned and made his way back downstairs, only to be confronted with an angry police officer. A quick memory charm later, Snape walked out and over the Dumbledore, who looked rather affronted that he was wearing a pair of handcuffs. "Better organise for the ministry to clean up here, get memory charms on these people." Snape pointed his wand at the cuffs and they fell to the ground. "Potter got away. Again. That's rather a nasty habit he has."

Dumbledore rubbed his wrists. "A habit of which I'm glad he has when it comes to Voldemort." Dumbledore looked at his potion master. "Severus, I'm beginning to wonder if Mr. Potter isn't



hiding something that we should know about."

The potions master snorted. "Since when has that not been true?"

Dumbledore smiled. He pulled out a small blob of what looked like putty. It moved and twisted in his hand, finally turning red and pointing in a northerly direction. "Come, Severus. Harry is not too far away. The beacon I placed on his clothes is working perfectly."

Sirius looked at the wet, limp girl tied in front of him. She had been crying non-stop for almost ten minutes now. She only responded to his questions with repetitions of the same thing, that she needed to help Harry, to fix what she did wrong.

The interrogation had not gone the way he had expected. For someone to write that letter, and then yell those things at Harry, he had expected the girl to have hated his godson. It appeared that Lucius Malfoy had almost killed another person that day. Cho's feelings for Harry were now very apparent. Sirius shook his head. It would appear that, indirectly, Harry had once again stopped Sirius from committing a crime.

"What will you do to help Harry?" he finally asked the girl.

Cho looked up at him, and in a voice croaky with tears replied without hesitation, "Anything."

Cho felt her arms fall to her sides, and the other restraints disappeared. Unable to balance, too weak to keep herself upright, Cho fell forward into the strong arms of Sirius Black. She felt his arms surround her, and hold her tightly. Rather than be alarmed, Cho felt oddly safe.

"Me too." she heard him say, as she cried into his shoulder.

Harry flew over only two houses before changing back. Hiding between two cars parked in an empty street, Harry sat and tried to slow his heart rate. Occasionally, a car drove down the quiet street.

After a while, Harry slowly peeked over the roof of one of the cars and he looked around. The street was deserted, with the exception of a man walking his dog on the other side of the street, and a cat watching him cautiously in the semi-darkness. Harry waited until the man had rounded a corner. Standing up, he brushed the dirt off the seat of his pants. A frown crossed his features. "How the hell did they find me so quickly?" he said out loud.

"The wards placed around your relatives house are still there." A voice said from behind him. Harry almost jumped out of his skin. He spun and stared at the head of Gryffindor house. "Harry, please wait. You are safe."

Harry gave her a disbelieving look. "Oh, I beg to differ," he scoffed, backing away.

Professor McGonagall didn't make a move towards him. "When the police broke down the front door, the wards alerted the ministry." she continued in her lecturing voice.

A faint pop, and professor Snape appeared beside her. Another, and suddenly professor Vector was there too. More apparitions occurred.

Harry looked nervously at the growing number of Hogwarts' teachers appearing. Most of the faculty had come to collect him. A final pop, and professor Dumbledore stood amongst them, smiling at Harry.

"I must admit, Harry, you're skills are improving at an extraordinary rate." the headmaster remarked. "The ability to apparate usually take weeks of study and assistance to learn."

"You think I can apparate?"

The headmaster frowned. "I did indeed believe so. Is that not the case?"

Harry shook his head, still slowly backing away. None of the teachers moved to follow.

Dumbledore chuckled. "Then it is a mystery indeed. Harry, since your escape, which is an incredible feat in itself, you have survived the fall from a cliff, without breaking your glasses, as Miss Granger pointed out, appeared at the other end of the country less than half an hour later, and managed to escape a ring of teachers with several centuries of experience between them." The Headmaster's smile widened. "Without the ability to apparate, I'd say you have some other secrets."

Harry swallowed. Something was wrong here. Something bad.

"Snuffles came to see me earlier this evening," Dumbledore continued. "He brought me som-"  
Dumbledore's eyes widened, staring at something behind Harry. As one, each of the teachers grabbed their wands and pointed them in Harry's direction. "Harry! Run!" he shouted.

Harry spun on his heel, ready to transform. The sight of several hooded and masked figures aiming their wands at him shocked him into inaction.

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## Betrayal of the Best Kind Join

Join

Harry looked back at the teachers. They had spread out, holding their wands at the ready. Harry turned again, and looked at the group of over a dozen Death Eaters. Everyone stopped moving, and the tension was palpable. Two groups, facing the other down, a thin, ragged boy between them.

"Harry," The headmaster said in a strained voice. "Walk slowly towards us."

"Now why on earth would the boy want to do that?"

Harry stiffened. He knew that voice. The voice that filled his nightmares. The voice that joked and laughed at his pain in the cemetery. The voice, that cold voice, that ordered Cedric's death.

Harry watched as a single tall figure made his way through the ranks of the Death Eaters. The speaker was neither hooded nor masked, though his face was terrible to behold.

"Voldemort," Harry whispered

"Yes, young Harry," Voldemort said smiling, stopping at the front of the group of Death Eaters. "It is good to see you again."

Dumbledore spoke. "Tom, leave him be. I will not allow you to harm him in any way."

"Ah, but I don't think he believes you, Albus," replied Voldemort. "I wouldn't either, if I was in his position."

Harry prepared to transform. He couldn't fight Voldemort, he had no wand.

"Besides," Voldemort continued. "I have no wish to harm the boy. On the contrary, I have a proposition for him."

Harry couldn't have moved if he wanted to. Lord Voldemort was standing no more than two dozen paces from him, yet was not offering any sort of threat.

"Harry! Don't listen to him. Come to us," pleaded professor McGonagall.

"So you can put him in prison again? Why on earth do you think he would do that?" sneered Voldemort.

"We know you are innocent, Harry. Snuffles has given me information that exonerates you. Come with us," Dumbledore said to him.

"Is that why you set a trap and ambushed him not more than two hours ago? Tut tut, lying to a student, what would the other parents say?"

"It is no lie, Harry. Here, catch!" Dumbledore pulled a second wand from his robes and threw it to Harry. With one hand, Harry caught it. A sudden warmth flooded up his arm and the wand hummed, driving away the pain and fatigue of the last few hours. Harry stared at the wand in his hand. His wand.

"Y-you didn't snap it?" he asked.

Voldemort snorted. "Of course not, it wouldn't do to snap the only brother to the wand I possess."

Dumbledore was radiating power as Harry had only seen him a couple of times before. "Enough lies, Tom. I tell you one last time, leave him be."

"Oh, Albus. You are amusing at times." Focusing on Harry, Voldemort said, "You could go back with them. Even if they don't put you in Azkaban, you'll still be an outcast. Look at your godfather; completely innocent, yet cannot show his face. Dumbledore hasn't exactly been lightning quick in having him pardoned now, has he?"

Harry shook his head absently, almost hypnotised by the gaze of the dark lord.

"Or, you could come with me. I will personally teach you things that no professor at Hogwarts would dream of showing a student. You will be able to show all those who abandoned you that you are better than them. That they made a mistake in not trusting you. Just think, Harry. You could have vengeance on the people who claim to be your friends, yet forced you into a tiny cell in the most hellish place on earth."

Professor McGonagall spoke up. "Harry, don't listen to him. He cannot be trusted to keep his word."

"Ah, note if you will, please Harry, that the first point your former professor made was that you cannot trust me. Not that you can trust them." Voldemort looked at Harry's bewildered expression. "Interesting slip, don't you think?"

With a giant mental shove, Harry forced himself to focus. Turning back to the teachers, he said, "You think that just by giving me my wand back will make me trust you again?"

Dismay clouded the features of the teachers. "No, Harry, but please, trust us this once. Do not throw the chance to clear your name away," Dumbledore begged him.

"Well, Harry?" Voldemort continued, as if he hadn't heard the professors. He waited until Harry turned to face him. "What do you say? Stand with them, untrusted and reviled, until my victory. At which point you will die with them." He gestured to the unmoving Death Eaters around him. "Or join me. Realise your true potential. Understand the meaning of power. With our victory, you will be able do anything you want to those who betrayed you. Never again, would you be alone."

"Please, Harry. Come with us," an unfamiliar croaking voice pleaded. Harry turned in surprise to see tears running down professor McGonagall's stern face. "Don't let the mistakes of the past cause you to make mistakes now."

Harry's head turned from one group to the other, indecision clearly showing on his gaunt features.

Cho's sobs eventually subsided. Raising her face from Sirius' neck, she looked into his now gentle eyes. "You wouldn't have hurt me, would you?" she asked.

Sirius sighed. "I don't know. I was ready to, but your feelings for Harry stopped me. I remembered that Harry would never want me to ever hurt someone, even in revenge. He already stopped me once."

Cho frowned. "You said that before. You said that Harry stopped you from committing the crime you were imprisoned for. How? Harry was a baby then."

Sirius looked at her with a sad smile. "I never killed those people. I never killed Peter Pettigrew. I never betrayed Harry's parents, though I blamed myself for their deaths for over a decade. Do you think Dumbledore would let me anywhere near Harry if I'd done any of those things?"

She shook her head. "Then when?"

Again, a sad smile appeared on Sirius' face. "It was at the end of Harry's third year. I had escaped and had made my way to Hogwarts."

Cho nodded. "I remember. All the students had to sleep in the Great Hall the night you attacked the painting in front of Gryffindor Tower."

Sirius blushed in embarrassment. "Yes, I did a lot of things I regret now. I was still mentally unbalanced from my stay in Azkaban. Most people think I had come to Hogwarts to kill Harry. I actually came to kill his best friend's rat."

Cho blinked in confusion. "You escaped the inescapable prison, just to kill a rat?"

"Not just a rat. An illegal animagus."

Cho frowned in thought. "Pettigrew," she blurted.

Sirius looked at her in surprise. "Exactly. You're pretty smart."

Cho smiled shyly. "I'm in Ravenclaw," she explained.

Sirius nodded. "That would explain it then." He smiled and continued. "I found the stinking rat, and managed to bring him and his owner Ron here. Harry's reaction was, of course, predictable."

Cho's smile turned sad. "He tried to rescue his friend."

"Yes. Almost succeeded. Managed to disarm me. Shocked me a bit I can tell you. A pair of third year students, managed to bring down the infamous Sirius Black."

"Harry is extraordinary."

"I agree. Anyway, professor Lupin arrived and talked Harry out of killing me. Not that he would have!" Sirius said quickly, looking sharply at Cho. "Lupin and I are old friends. Peter had betrayed one of our best friends, James Potter. We forced Pettigrew out of his animagus shape, and into a man. Remus and I were going to kill him, but Harry stopped us."

Cho looked into Sirius' eyes. "Thus stopping you from committing the crime you were imprisoned for."

"Exactly. I swear that boy worries as much about me as I do about him."

Cho smiled, then wrinkled her nose, looking down at her robes. "Do you have a bath here?"

Sirius immediately looked embarrassed. "Yes! Sorry, let's get you cleaned up." He stood, and helped Cho to her feet.

Minutes later, Cho was seeping in a hot bath, while Sirius cast cleaning charms on her clothes in the main room. Once she was clean, she rose, and wrapped a towel around her body. She walked out into the main room. "Mr. Black?"

Sirius smiled. "Mr. Black was my father. Call me Sirius. Or Padfoot. If you need to talk about me with Harry or Dumbledore, call me Snuffles."

Cho frowned. Is 'Padfoot' your nickname?"

Sirius nodded. "Harry's father gave it to me, a long time ago." He looked down at the floor. "I'm sorry for scaring you before. I was just so angry that you'd hurt Harry."

Cho suppressed a shudder. It would be a long time before she forgot how scared she had been. "It's OK. I must admit, most of the fear I felt was of your reputation."

Sirius nodded sadly. "My reputation isn't deserved. But it is useful for scaring people you want information from."

"It worked. May I ask you a question?"

He nodded. "Ask what you will. If we are going to work together to help Harry, there should be no secrets between us."

"You said you brought Ron and Peter 'here'. Where are we? What is this place?"

Sirius looked around the derelict interior of the shack. "When Moony was a student, this place was set up for him, he would come here during the full moon."

"Moony? Are you talking about professor Lupin?"

Sirius nodded. "He would come here to change. His howls gave the place its name. This is the Shrieking Shack, near Hogsmeade."

Cho looked around. "How did he get in here?"

"See that hole over there?"

"Yes"

"That is the start of a passageway to Hogwarts, that ends at the base of the Whomping Willow."

Cho turned to face him, and asked him a question she had been dying to know for a couple of years. "How did you escape?"

Sirius looked at her with an odd expression. "You will probably not believe it unless I show you." he said cryptically.

Cho almost fell over in surprise, as Sirius turned into a black hound, easily the size of a pony. Sirius trotted over to her and looked at her with dark, liquid eyes. Cho knelt down in awe, and reach slowly out to touch the fur on the back of Sirius' head."

"Snuffles, indeed." she said.

The dog disappeared, and Sirius stood in it's place. "'Mr. Padfoot', Harry's father used to call me."

Cho looked at him. He bent over and picked up her now clean clothes. He passed them to her and turned around. Cho dressed quickly. "I'm done," she told him.

Sirius turned to face her again. He took the damp towel from her and hung it over a chair.

Cho sat down and hugged her knees to her chest. "Sirius, both you and Peter are illegal animagi, and professor Lupin is a werewolf." He nodded. "Was Harry's father an animagus too?"

A broad grin split Sirius' face, making him look ten years younger. "Indeed. Mr. Prongs was a particularly impressive animagus."

Cho grinned. "Mr. Prongs, huh? Impressive, eh? Let's see. He was a creature with horns?"

Sirius nodded.

"But impressive. That rules out things like cows and goats." She sat in thought. "What horned animals are impressive?"

Sirius looked at her in amusement.

"There are plenty of impressive magical horned creatures. Unicorns and so forth, but in Tranfiguration we learned that animagi can only turn into normal animals."

Sirius almost hurt himself keeping his face straight at this.

"Actually, there are a lot of the magical horned creature's heads as trophies in one of the rooms at Hogwarts." Her eyes widened in realisation. "Trophies! Hunting! Was he a deer? A stag?"

Sirius looked pleased. "Very good, Ms. Chang. Very good indeed."

Cho looked at him speculatively. "Harry is an animagus too." she guessed.

"What makes you say that."

"He escaped from Azkaban too, and survived falling from a cliff."

"How could he possibly have learned to be an animagus?"

"I'm sure there are books in the library that he could have read."

"Dumbledore has removed all the relevant books from the library at Hogwarts, he told me himself."

"Then you must have taught him."

"When on earth would I have had time to teach him to be an animagus?"

She smiled victoriously. "That's not the same as 'no', is it?"

A/N



## Betrayal of the Best Kind Used

Used

Ron and Hermione raced along the tiny tunnel, often bent double. Madam Pomfrey had been hysterical, desperately trying to find someone to help look for her missing charge. For some reason, most of the teachers had disappeared. It was only her desperate need to tell someone, anyone, what had happened, that the pair had found out that Cho was missing.

After Hogwart's nurse left them, still searching for a professor, Hermione turned to Ron.

"You know, when we were all discussing what had happened, Snuffles bolted from the room. That was just before your Dad told us that Harry had been found."

"Why did he run out of the room?"

"Snape had been saying that because of Cho's outburst, Harry wouldn't be thinking clearly."

A look of trepidation crossed Ron's features. "He wouldn't!"

Hermione looked at him in despair. "When it comes to Harry's safety, what wouldn't Sirius do?"

As one, they turned and ran towards the exit to the grounds. Now, they were rushing along the passageway that took them towards the Shrieking Shack.

"That's not the same as 'no', is it?"

Sirius regarded the pretty student in front of him. It was obvious to him how Harry could be attracted to her. Her mind was quick and sharp, and Sirius was of the opinion that that was her most attractive feature.

"OK." he replied. "No, I have not had time to teach Harry to be an animagus."

Cho's eyes narrowed as she regarded him. "Hmmm."

Both of them jumped as a loud voice yelled, "Cho!" from the passageway entrance. They spun round, Sirius already in his animagus form, to see the determined faces of Harry's friends, their wands pointing at Sirius.

Sirius changed back and sat down heavily, hand on his heart. "You little bastards! You almost killed me!" he said to them.

Hermione and Ron looked from kidnapper to kidnappee. "Cho, are you OK?" Ron asked.

As Cho smiled and nodded, Sirius took an affronted tone. "What? Did you think I'd kidnapped her to tie her to a wall or something?"

Hermione blushed. She was about to stammer an apology, when Cho couldn't contain herself anymore. Her peals of laughter rang out. Ron and Hermoine listened in wonder. It had been such a long time since anyone had heard the sound of Cho's laugh.

Harry stood frozen between the two groups. Voldemort stood, arms crossed, a dozen or more Death Eaters spread behind him. "Well, Harry?"

Harry's expression changed to one of almost inhuman determination. He turned to face Dumbledore and the teachers. "You don't want me, you just don't want me to join him."

Dumbledore swallowed, an almost pained expression on his face. "You know that is not true, Harry. You know it in your heart."

Harry looked at his feet, shaking his head. "Voldemort is right, I won't be trusted, ever, if I go with you." He looked up at the teachers, and stared into Dumbledore's eyes. "This will fix things for everyone."

Harry turned to face the man who had killed his parents. "Let's go." Harry walked up to the Dark Lord.

Voldemort smiled at him, then looked over his head at Dumbledore. With a smirk of victory, he said, "Well, old man, it would appear that Harry has made his choice. Go back to your castle, and ponder your fate." With that he passed Harry a small globe. Harry turned around to face the teachers. He felt a small twinge of guilt at their expressions of shock, sadness and defeat. He felt Voldemort place his hand on his shoulder, and then the familiar hook behind his navel signalled the activation of the portkey.

Sirius led the three students back down the passageway to Hogwarts. They were almost at the end, when the sound of the Whomping Willow above stopped. They froze. Someone had pressed the knot that would pacify the aggressive tree.

Sirius, Ron and Hermione drew their wands. Cho wished that Sirius had taken hers from the bedside table in the hospital wing. Silently the four waited for the person who stopped the tree to show themselves.

A tired, but determined Dumbledore appeared in front of them. On catching sight of the group, he visibly sagged in relief. "It would appear that Mr. Potter's presence is not required for his friends to go out of their way to help another."

"What made you think anyone needed help?" asked Sirius, in an embarrassed tone.

"Just the fact that the last person to hurt Mr. Potter was kidnapped from the hospital wing in the same evening as an enormous grim was spotted running through the corridors of Hogwarts."

Sirius just hung his head in shame. Cho spoke up, "It's alright, Professor. Nothing happened, and now Snuffles and I have an understanding. We are going to do everything we can to help Harry."

Dumbledore just nodded his head sadly. "An admirable sentiment, but poor timing. Come, let us retire to my study, there are a great many things to discuss. It has been a most eventful evening."

"What has happened, Albus?" asked Sirius, as soon as he had changed back into human form in the headmaster's study. He sat in one of the armchairs. The three students followed suit.

"After the incident at the lighthouse, Harry somehow made his way to Privet Drive. We were able to discover his location, after wards were broken at his relative's home. Apparently, some policemen broke the front door down after seeing Harry's relatives unconscious inside."

Hermione looked shocked. "Harry didn't attack them, did he?"

"We are not sure what happened to them. His Aunt was unharmed, but his Uncle was sporting several cuts and bruises when we arrived. I would hazard a guess that Harry was not responsible for his Uncle's condition though."

"Why?"

Dumbledore shrugged. "The policemen at his home were comforting Harry. They were giving the Dursleys looks of contempt. It is possible that Harry finally told someone of the abuse he has suffered at their hands. Looking as he does now, it would not be difficult for someone to jump to the conclusion that the Dursleys are responsible for the suffering he endured in Azkaban."

"So, what happened then?" Ron asked.

"The policeman was asking Harry about his relatives. Harry had just told them about his cousin, and that he was still at school for the term. I walked up behind Harry and made my presence known." Dumbledore shook his weary head. "He reacted worse than I expected. Paranoid and scared. He ran, first into the crowd that had gathered, but ran into several of the staff. Then into the house. Severus followed him. A few moments later, Severus returned, and informed me that Harry had managed to escape again."

It was Cho's turn to shake her head. "He must be an animagus. Some sort of bird, probably."

"I suspected as much, Miss. Chang. But I have not been able to identify where Harry received the required months of specialist training." He glanced in Sirius' direction, watching for any flicker of guilt. Nothing. "As such, I am forced to believe he has some sort of magical transportation device. From your use of the name 'Snuffles' earlier, I assume you know of Sirius', er, unusual ability?"

Cho nodded. "He told me everything."

"Good. That will make things easier. Harry had escaped to a nearby street, where a beacon I placed on his clothes led us. Most of the teachers here followed professor McGonagall's apparition to him. It would appear that having several apparitions to the same spot gave Voldemort our location."

The hearts of the four all skipped the same beat. "No," Sirius whispered.

Dumbledore held up one hand. "It is not what you think, Sirius." He waited for Sirius to calm down before adding, "It is worse."

The three students looked confused. Sirius' face paled.

"Voldemort gave Harry the opportunity to join the ranks of the Death Eaters. In an effort to create trust, I gave Harry back his wand. It was not enough to sway him, however." Dumbledore looked at the four shocked faces. "Harry willingly joined Voldemort, and left with him."

"No," Hermione said, not wanting to believe.

Cho buried her face in her hands. "What have I done?" she cried.

Ron sat stunned. Sirius stood and walked between the girls. Putting his arms around them both, he pulled them into a tight embrace. Looking at Dumbledore, he said, "You're trying to tell us that you were unable to persuade Harry that he was better off with the people who love him, and not with the bastard who killed his parents?"

Dumbledore nodded sadly. "If only it had not happened tonight. We should have been able to work through the confusion surrounding the events of this evening, if only we could have talked longer. We were making no move towards Harry at the time. He was listening to us. I have no doubt that Harry would have come with us if we had just a few more minutes."

Hermione spoke, her voice thick. "What about the beacon you used to find Harry? Can't you use it to find where he is?"

"I'm sorry, Miss. Granger, the beacon only works over a relatively short range, no more than about twenty miles. Wherever the portkey took them, it was outside that range."

Sirius looked thoughtful. "It would appear Harry was right." He held his hand up as the others gave him accusing looks. "Not about joining Voldemort. The fact that Voldemort wanted to recruit him."

Sirius spent the next few minutes telling the others about Harry's ponderings during his temper tantrum. "It would appear that Voldemort has managed to succeed in his plan to recruit Harry, even after he escaped from Azkaban."

"Welcome, Harry, to your new home."

Harry looked around the richly decorated room. A large four-poster bed dominated the left-hand side of the room, flanked by gold plated bedside tables. Two closed doors were in the left wall, one on either side of the bed. A huge walk-in wardrobe opened to the left of the main entrance. Priceless paintings and other artworks decorated the walls, spaced between magnificent arched, stain-glass windows. The rug on the floor was so thick and soft that Harry's bare feet sank into it up to his ankles. Opposite the door, a huge fireplace was lit, filling the room with a glow and a comforting heat. Several large and very comfortable looking armchairs and couches were arranged around the fire. A large desk ran the length of the right-hand wall, several hundred magical books and tomes lined the shelves above it. At the far end, the desk's design changed, obviously to be used to brew potions. Dozens upon dozens of both normal and magical compounds were lined in a glass-covered cabinet above that end, all labelled and catalogued. A half-dozen house elves stood unobtrusively nearby, looking at the pair of wizards nervously.

"This is mine?" asked Harry in awe.

"Of course, those who serve out of fear will betray you as soon as they can. Those who follow for the rewards of service are far more loyal."

Harry walked around the spacious room, finding a large and well-appointed bathroom through one of the connecting doors. Looking through the door on the other side of the bed, Harry froze.

A single table sat in the middle of the room. Shackles and restraints were present on both the table and one wall. On the other walls hung various tools and implements, with an obvious and terrible purpose. "Ah, I see you are interested in the room for 'entertaining' guests," Voldemort smirked.

Harry turned to face him. "Well, there is one girl I wouldn't mind entertaining in here," he said, keeping his voice as steady as possible.

Voldemort raised his eyebrows, clearly surprised at Harry's lack of disgust. A self-satisfied smile formed on his serpent-like face. "We'll have to see what we can do to extend to her an 'invitation'."

Harry just nodded, not trusting his voice. He walked back out into the main room.

"Look around, Harry." Voldemort said, gesturing vaguely towards the house elves. "They will bring you whatever you desire." He looked with a sneer at Dudley's old clothes that Harry was wearing. "Burn whatever you do not want to keep. You will find clothes in the wardrobe there."

Harry nodded and walked over to the wardrobe. Opening the door he gasped at the contents. Robes of all colours, and styles hung within. The only thing that they all had in common was the quality of the material. Harry turned back to Voldemort.

"I'm going to have something to eat, then I think I'll turn in. I'm quite tired."

Voldemort smiled at Harry. "You will be summoned in the morning, to begin your training."

Harry returned the smile and handed the portkey back to Voldemort. "I look forward to working for you, My Lord."

Voldemort nodded, turned and left the room. Harry turned to the nervous house elves, and said, "I'm hungry, could you please get me something to eat?" Harry walked over to the lavish bed, and placed his wand on the ornate bedside table.

With a confused look at each other, they disappeared with tiny pops. Seconds later, a table appeared in the room, laden with food. Roast pork, beef, lamb and vegetables. Steaming loaves of bread. Eggs, bacon, pies, pastries, even pasta and rice dishes. Harry smiled, and sat down to gorge himself.

During his solitary meal, he summoned the house elves and requested they draw him a bath. They scuttled off to fulfil his request, still confused at his polite requests, and lack of physical abuse to punctuate his demands.

Once his stomach was groaning, Harry stood and stripped. Hurling the clothes into the fire, he moved into the bathroom, and sank into the hot water. Luxuriating in the enormous bath, Harry almost dozed off. It was only when one of the elves nervously interrupted his doze to enquire if he would like the water reheated that he decided that he'd probably been in the water long enough.

He dismissed the trembling elf, and rose from the bath. After drying himself, he put on a robe spun from Acromatula silk. Wandering back to his new lavish bedroom, Harry walked over to the desk, and scanned the titles in the bookshelf. One caught his eye. With a wry smile, he extracted the tome and walked over to the fire. He summoned an elf, and asked that he be told when it was midnight. Sitting in one of the large, soft leather armchairs, Harry started to read.

Voldemort entered a dark room, the only feature a stone pillar standing chest high, a large spherical crystal ball on top. One of his Death Eaters had been staring into the crystal ball's depths, and was startled when he noticed his master at his side.

"What happened? Did he burn the pin with the location charm?"

"Yes, my Lord, but not straight away."

"Explain."

"He settled down to eat first. As soon as he finished, he removed all his clothes and threw them in the fire without hesitation. I do not believe he knew the tracking charm was placed on him."

Voldemort nodded. "Excellent. Potter will make a valued addition to our army. Until we no longer need him."

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## Betrayal of the Best Kind

### Obey

Obey

Harry woke slowly. Bright sunlight streamed in through the exquisitely detailed windows, splintering the light, and sending colours dancing around the room. Harry groped for his glasses, and put them on. Delicious smells focused his mind.

Sitting on a table that had not been there last night, was breakfast. It had to be breakfast, but Harry had never seen such a delicious array of food, even during the Hogwarts' feasts. Slipping the silk robe on again, Harry exited the comfortable bed, made his way over to the table and sat down to fill himself up. He just finished his meal when there was a knock at the main door.

Harry stood and opened the door. There in the doorway was someone Harry had only seen once in his life. Tall, blond, slim and haughtily beautiful, Narcissa Malfoy still had that 'something just below my nose stinks' expression.

"Good morning, Harry," she said to the surprised boy. "Are you ready to begin your lessons?"

Harry swallowed, and nodded. Opening the door wide, he politely gestured for Draco's mother to enter. "Would you care for something to eat?" he enquired.

Narcissa looked at him blankly. A slight smile graced her aristocratic features. "No, thank you, Harry. I will set up for your lesson, please get dressed."

Harry nodded and closed the door. As Narcissa walked over to the end of the desk made for brewing potions, Harry selected some work robes from his wardrobe. He went into the bathroom, splashed some water on his face and then dressed.

Narcissa had set up two cauldrons and had selected some of the ingredients from the shelves above the desk by the time Harry returned. He sat next to her at the desk, and looked at her expectantly.

"Before we begin, Harry, I notice that you have already begun studying the books in your library. What interested you in that book?" she asked, pointing to the book Harry had been reading the evening before, still sitting on armrest of the chair he had used.

Harry smiled. "In my third year, I was given a piece of parchment that some former students had

instilled with some information about Hogwarts, along with their personalities. That tome discusses how to instill various properties into paper and parchment."

Manicured nails tapped on the desk thoughtfully. "What information did this parchment contain?" she asked.

Harry gave an evil smirk. "It was a map. Every secret tunnel, every password, every room. When combined with my father's invisibility cloak, my friends and I managed to do quite a lot of rule-breaking."

Narcissa's perfectly plucked eyebrows rose in surprise. "That map would be invaluable to our master's cause. Do you happen to know where it is?"

Harry shook his head sadly. "All my belongings were confiscated. My wand is the only thing I have left. I'm sure Dumbledore would know."

Draco's mother nodded. "Very well, let's begin. I know Severus is your potions master. He was a brilliant student in his time. However, his teaching methods leave a lot to be desired." She frowned. "My son regularly gets top marks in potions, yet his skills are barely adequate. From what I understand, students in Gryffindor house are harshly marked. Neither of you receive an accurate rating of your skill." She sneered. "Severus lets his personal feelings for events in the past to affect his actions now."

Harry snorted. "Snape hated my father, and simply loathed my godfather. Dumbledore told me that my father once saved Snape's life, and that that really rankled him."

Narcissa nodded, and waited for Harry to continue.

"Because of that, he has made my life a living hell, at least during potions lessons."

Narcissa smiled. She opened a tome she selected earlier, and opened it to a marked page. "I am here to instruct you and to grade your true skill with potions. I would like you to study this one, and brew two cauldrons of it. One will be used today, the other as necessary."

Harry nodded and looked down at the open book. The recipe marked was a powerful healing potion. Simple enough to brew for someone of even his skill. What sprang out at him were the administration details.

"It says that this potion only works for the brewer, and that is how it is so powerful. It is directed specifically at the brewer's body." He looked up at his new instructor. "Yet you said one cauldron would be used today. What do I have to look forward to?"

She smiled, pleased at the boy's attention to detail. "Your tuition here will not only cover magical schooling. This afternoon, you will be instructed in the art of fencing. Believe me, you will want a full cauldron of this healing potion at that time."

Harry looked excited at the prospect of learning to fight with a sword. He reached for one of the



gold-handled knives in a drawer, and proceeded to cut off some hair, an eyelash, trim a fingernail and nick his finger to get three drops of blood. Reagents necessary in the healing potion aimed specifically at one person.

After a quick lunch, Narcissa and Harry left his room, and for the first time, Harry got a look at the rest of the building that had become his new home. Artwork of the highest quality lined the corridors. Suits of brightly polished armour stood at regular intervals. Crystal chandeliers emitted light that was reflected and refracted by the crystal prisms.

Harry could only stare in awe at the flagrant display of wealth and privilege. Careful not to spill the precious potion, the pair entered a large hall, with a vast array of weapons displayed on the walls.

A large man turned to face the pair upon their entry. Harry didn't recognise the man, though he looked vaguely like Macnair, the Death Eater who had been sent to execute Buckbeak. "Quickly, boy!" he said. "Get over here, we have a lot to do."

With a nod and a farewell smile, Narcissa left Harry with his new teacher. Harry turned, and with an apparent bravery he did not feel, made his way over to begin his instruction in the art of sword fighting.

Narcissa Malfoy made her way through the richly furnished palace to her husband's suite. Both he and the master were there, waiting for her return.

Lucius turned to her. "Well?"

"At first glance, his potions skill is average for someone of his age. That in itself is remarkable for someone who has spent the better part of a year without practice. It would appear that our old friend Severus has been systematically destroying his desire and will to learn that particular subject. Once he realised that I would answer all questions without berating him however, he performed admirably, even eagerly. All he needed was a supportive learning environment. His attention to detail is remarkable."

"Evaluation?"

"If he had been given the correct encouragement, he could have rivaled his mother and I in skill. With a few months of my tutelage, he will be on par with the top of his year level. A few months more, and he will rival the top seventh years."

A look of surprise crossed her husband's features. "Are you sure? Draco has nothing but scorn for Potter's abilities."

"Draco's head is filled with undeserved praise by Severus. Without the advanced tomes at Malfoy Manor, I doubt he'd have passed potions these last few years."

Lucius looked upset at this. Voldemort, still silent, looked thoughtful.

Narcissa continued. "Your son has a burning ambition, but little will, and no spine."

Lucious gave her a threatening look. "He is your son too."

"Enough," their master said.

Immediately they fell silent, waiting for their master to continue.

"Narcissa, continue the boy's education. Focus on poisons, and mind control formulae. But give him time to pursue his own interests. That in itself will be interesting, to see what he feels he should know. Keep us informed as to his progress."

"Yes, my Lord." curtsied Narcissa. She backed out of the room, and closed the door.

Cho had been forced back into the care of Madam Pomfrey after the discussion with the headmaster the previous evening. The nurse had been almost apoplectic at not having been informed immediately by Dumbledore of Cho's safe return. Though Cho physically felt fine, it was easier to allow herself to be led back to the hospital wing than argue with the tyrannical woman.

Ron and Hermione had left the headmaster's office to return to Gryffindor Tower. Hermione insisted that the pair had study to do. She had waved off Dumbledore's offer to have any upcoming tests postponed, much to Ron's annoyance.

Sirius and Dumbledore had spoken long into the evening. It was in the early hours of the morning that Sirius had made his way back to the Shrieking Shack. Lying down, Sirius tried to sleep. Visions of tortures and torments swam through his head, bringing to mind the fears he had for his godson.

Hadn't they discussed this? Harry had not been sure at the time, which was worse between joining Voldemort or being killed. Obviously, Harry's mind had been changed by the events at the lighthouse, and later at Privet Drive.

Shafts of light were lighting up the dust air by the time Sirius managed to fall into a restless slumber.

Harry collapsed for the tenth time, blood running from a gash on his left shoulder. His instructor gave him a spoonful of Harry's potion, and the cut closed.

Harry stood on wobbly legs. He was glad he'd only had a light lunch. Had he eaten the amount he had for breakfast, the house elves would definitely be cleaning it off the floor. Sweat ran from all over him, into his eyes, darkening his clothes, dripping onto the floor.

For the past two hours, Harry had been embarrassed over and over again at how easy it had been for his instructor to both disarm and injure him. Even though Harry had held a sword in a fight only once before in his life, he still felt self-conscious at how poorly he had performed.

His instructor (Harry didn't even know the man's name) had initially told Harry to select a sword for him to practice with. He had laughed at Harry's first choice, a Japanese daikatana, and told him

with no room for argument to select a weapon he was unlikely to kill himself with.

Not that that seemed to bother him, Harry thought. He had eventually selected a sabre, a light, slightly curved fencing blade with an edge. After two hours of drills and finally sparing, Harry's right arm felt as though it had lead bones. Harry had been seriously wounded several times while practicing, and only the presence of the healing potion had saved Harry from serious danger.

As Harry tried to focus, and stand solidly on trembling legs, his instructor finally called a halt. They both stripped off their training shirts. The instructor's was still white and unspoiled. Harry's was cut and stained red in several places. Enough so that anyone looking at it for the first time could be forgiven for thinking that the shirt itself was red, and that it had white stains in places.

"You have performed admirably, Harry," his instructor said in his deceptively soft voice. "But while that potion heals you of the wounds you sustain, it does not restore the blood you have lost. Go rest now, you will be summoned later."

Harry nodded wearily. He cleaned his blade, wiping his own blood off from where it had splattered the sword. Thanking his instructor, he made his way back to his room.

A few minutes later it became obvious that he was lost. Room after room, hall after hall, Harry tried retracing his steps, only to become even more confused. In one corridor, he found windows allowing him a view out of the building, rather than to the inner courtyard, as had all the windows he had seen so far. He looked out, and with a shout of surprise, he recognized where he was. He could see an enormous park, where there were people walking pets, jogging and eating picnics. The skyline held familiar buildings. Harry was in London.

He looked from side to side, taking in the entire vista. Harry was stunned that the most evil wizard of modern times had set up a permanent residence in the middle of England's largest city, and undetected!

A squeak of surprise startled Harry, and he spun to see small House elf, dressed as usual in a dirty pillow case, holding a rag. "You is not meant to be here!" the elf squeaked in surprise, in a high pitched voice.

Harry smiled, which only increased the elf's nervousness. "I know. I'm lost. Could you lead me back to my room?"

The elf nodded quickly, and sped off in the direction from where Harry had just come. Harry followed, but had trouble keeping up with the speedy thing. Finally, after what felt like a hundred turns, Harry arrived back in his room. He thanked the helpful elf, which made her run in fright, then went into the bathroom, shaking his head at the treatment the elves must suffer to react like that.

After a long, hot shower, entered his room, and went to lie down. He noticed on the potion desk ten small flasks. Moving to take a closer look, Harry found the little flasks were filled with the other cauldron of healing potion he made that morning. Smiling at the fact he now had several

doses of healing in convenient packaging, Harry climbed into bed for a rest. After just two lessons today, he was exhausted.

The last thought to go through Harry's mind before sleep claimed him was, I'm in London.

Harry awoke a few hours later, a gentle hand lightly shaking his shoulder. Harry opened his eyes, and could make out the blurry shape of the elf who had led him back to his room.

"Mister is needing to be getting up. The master is sending for you." she said in her high pitched voice.

"Thank you."

Harry sat up and stretched. He reached for his glasses on his bedside table. Once the world was in focus again, he could get up and dressed. He slipped a couple of the healing flasks into a pocket, and picked up his wand. Once Harry was ready for his next lesson, the trembling elf lead him from the room.

This time, Harry was required to climb three flights of stairs. His legs had not yet fully recovered from today's exercise, by the time he reached the required floor, he was feeling decidedly unsteady.

The elf took him to a room, obviously designed for tutoring. Several blackboards adorned the front of the room. No more than six desks were arranged in the room, each designed for only one student. The lecture podium and instructor's table were plain, but sturdy and of good quality. Cages lined the walls, holding a variety of magical creatures, bound in stasis.

Without a word, the elf bolted from the room. Harry started wandering around the edges of the room, examining the creatures stored in the magical cages. He recognised several from his DADA class with professor Lupin. There were imps, pixies, even minor demons, all caught in cages that froze them in time.

"Do you always enter a room before the teacher, Potter?"

Harry turned to the source of the clearly enunciated voice to see Lucius Malfoy standing in the doorway. "My apologies, the elf that showed me the way here, lead me into the room."

The elder Malfoy waved the explanation away. "See that it doesn't happen again."

Harry gave a slight bow. "As you wish, sir."

Lucius sneered at him. "I am here to instruct you in the use of the Dark Arts. I know that at Hogwarts you are expected to take a course called Defense against the Dark Arts. Well, I will teach you both how to use it and defend against it. This will involve dueling to some degree."

Harry gave a smile of anticipation. "Excellent!" he exclaimed.

Lucius Malfoy gave a slight smile at Harry's enthusiasm. "Let us begin." he said, before sending a stunning spell at Harry.

Harry was glad that he had taken two vials of the healing potion with him to that lesson. Lucius Malfoy had been just as malicious as Snape, but without the strict laws and school rules on conduct to restrain him. Harry had managed to jump aside in time to dodge the first spell, but many of the subsequent curses and hexes managed to connect.

His only consolation was also the source of his greatest anxiety. He had managed, toward the end of the lesson, to hit Lucius with a combination of the laughing hex, and the tickling charm. That combination had managed to get past Malfoy's iron determination to withstand Harry's attacks. Harry had managed to stun the Death Eater.

Harry had no illusions that his victory over the experienced wizard was anything other than luck. Lucius had been holding back, not using full power in his spells. Also, he had stood in the same place in the room, allowing Harry the benefit of cover and changing angles.

After Harry's final stunning spell managed to penetrate Lucius' defenses, Voldemort applauded. He had come in unnoticed by Harry, who had been busy at the time, performing counter curses to remove the effects of the spells that had hit him during his duel.

Voldemort had then summoned an elf, and instructed her to take Harry back to his room, and gave Harry the night off from lessons to eat, and study what he wished.

Harry had been led away before Voldemort had cast the ennervation charm on his servant. Therein lay Harry's nervousness. He wasn't sure how Draco's father would react in their next lesson.

Once Harry entered his room, he asked for some food to be prepared. Again, he sat down to gorge himself.

As he did the previous night, Harry studied the tome that detailed the charms and requirements for enchanting parchments.

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## Betrayal of the Best Kind Work

### Work

Over the next couple of weeks, Harry became used to his new routine. In the morning, he would be visited by Narcissa, and would study various poisons, dangerous, offensive potions and draughts. Once a week, Draco's mother would allow Harry to choose the potion they would work on, and answered any questions he had. Harry found himself enjoying learning about potions, and was now even able to offer suggestions that could in some cases improve the potency, or duration of a particular formula. Much to his surprise, he found himself looking forward to the early morning lessons.

His routine for late morning, and early afternoon could only be described as chaotic. Some days, his nameless weapons instructor would attempt to cut him to ribbons, other days he was made to learn combinations of moves by performing them over and over, while using a practice sword at least three times heavier than the one he used to fight with. Some days Harry would be taught unarmed combat; sometimes the pair would don boxing gloves.

All the exercise and plentiful food agreed with Harry, and he found himself filling out. While not as tanned as he was the summer he and Cho got together, he was now more muscular and toned than ever before.

Harry often looked at himself critically in the mirror in the evenings. The starved, wild looking boy had definitely been banished.

Late afternoons and early evenings were filled with danger and tension for Harry. Charms, curses, hexes and jinxes were hurled at him from various people. Sometimes he would be attacked by one person, sometimes by several people, sometimes he would be part of a team, attacking one person, other times two teams would attack each other.

These practical combat sessions did not have any formal instruction. Harry had to observe and remember the incantations others used. He found that the dodging and prediction he learned here, aided him in his physical combat training.

After a late meal, Harry would have the evenings to himself. While he missed the outdoors, he knew better than to suggest a friendly Quiddich match.

Generally, Harry would curl up in front of the fire, and read. His research into the charms used to create magical parchments had progressed to a point where he had created several simple objects.

The first object he made was a notebook. Though not exactly original, he had created a book where anything written on the page was stored and disappeared at the tap of a wand. The book had only one page, bound between dragonhide covers, and had the ability to recall anything written previously. Harry had used it extensively in his potions lessons, allowing him to take copious notes, without the bother of having to sort through a stack of parchment to find the required data. Narcissa had been pleasantly surprised as his ingenuity, and had requested he make a second notepad for her.

It was this request that allowed Harry to design and test another item. Harry created a separate sheet that reacted to Narcissa's entries. Anything she wrote in her notebook, appeared on the other sheet, until she tapped her wand to store her entry. As the spysheet had no memory, he couldn't read what she had written previously, or even if she recalled it to her own page, but Harry had been able to sometimes discover what potions they would be working on in future, as well as her own personal feelings towards her husband. It had been a struggle to maintain a straight face after that.

Satisfied that he had mastered the basic skills in enchanting objects, Harry began to delve deeper into the more complex spells, allowing him to create more powerful and useful items. There was one he really needed to create.

In the pitch black of a cloudy night, a large black dog moved slowly through damp grass, its body held so low that its belly almost dragged on the ground. The wards around Malfoy Manor sounded if anyone came within a kilometre of the main building, but a stray dog didn't so much as make them twinge.

Sirius kept his ears pricked though. He wasn't sure that Harry or Wormtail had informed Voldemort and his Death Eaters of Sirius' illegal ability, so extreme caution was called for. In his heart, Sirius knew that Harry wouldn't have done so, if he had the choice. Being in Voldemort's clutches for the last month or so, Harry may have been broken, and forced to reveal everything he knew.

Sirius shook his head to clear it, driving the depressing thought to the back of his mind. He needed to focus. If Harry had divulged his godfather's ability, Malfoy may have added some subtle wards to detect animals. He wouldn't put it past the bastard to have set them up to allow entry a couple of times, and then set off another time, once complacency had set in.

There was no way Sirius would be considered complacent.

His canine ears managed to pick up several voices, at different locations around the ground. All the people here were low-level minions of Voldemort, though some of them were dull enough not to be aware of that fact.

A shrill giggle reached his sensitive ears. Had he been human, he would have sighed and shaken

his head in resignation. The wife of one of the Department heads was again being entertained at the Manor. The woman was as giddy as they came; Sirius had personally overheard the stupid bint discuss sensitive ministry business with Narcissa Malfoy over tea and scones. He supposed that the idea of discussing things of importance with a member of the cultural elite made her feel like she belonged to the ruling class.

Careless talk costs lives, he thought. Sirius looked around and noted which guards were where. He crept around the edge of one of the outer buildings, peering into the distant manor, desperately trying to differentiate by scent the number of people who had come this way recently.

In his dog form, Sirius had real trouble linking events and extrapolating conclusions from what intelligence he gathered. A canine mind wasn't incapable of forming conclusions, but it was not something a dog did frequently or well. At a genetic level, a dog was simply a wolf with a thin layer of manners.

Several loud (to Sirius' ears) displacements of air signaled the arrival of more guests. Slinking further back into the shadows, he watched as a half dozen Death Eaters in robes and masks escort a young man from the outer building to the main manor.

Sniffing cautiously, he let out a small yelp of surprise. The person being escorted to the manor was Harry! He looked so different!

His godson's head spun round and looked straight at the shadows where Sirius hid. His escort stopped and looked at him, their masks covering their expressions. Two of them took out their wands, and turned to look where Harry's attention had been drawn.

"Thought I heard something, came from over there," Sirius heard Harry say, gesturing several metres to Sirius' right. A half dozen beams of light lit the area, completely missing the dark canine. Sirius' heart beat wildly, loud enough that he was sure the Death Eaters could hear it.

After fifteen tense seconds, the Death Eaters put out the lights from their wands. The small group continued to the manor. Sirius heard Harry tell one of his escorts to bring the regular search of the entire grounds earlier than usual. One of the robed men nodded, and started jogging towards the manor.

"Make sure you start from where we heard the noise!" Harry said loudly to the man's retreating form. Under his breath he said, "We don't want anyone who shouldn't be there in the Three Broomsticks tonight, do we?"

Harry's murmur was soft enough not to be heard by his companions. Sirius sat dumbfounded. His ears had only just managed to pick up Harry's comment.

Without regard for secrecy, Sirius bounded back towards the perimeter of the Malfoy estate. He was less than halfway there before wizards emerged from the manor and started casting tracking spells. Desperately, his claws throwing up grass and dirt as he ran, Sirius made for the exit portal in the wards he had made earlier.



"Are you positive he said the Three Broomsticks?"

Sirius rolled his eyes at the question, since it has already been asked four times in the last ten minutes. "Yes, Albus. I'm positive."

Dumbledore shook his head. "All our other intelligence points to an attack on the Ministry offices. With Arthur putting such an enormous amount of financial and social pressure on him, Voldemort's influence and strength of numbers is not increasing. None of your other activities had pointed towards Hogsmeade."

Sirius sat down heavily. "He warned me, Albus; Harry is not working for Voldemort. He told one of the Death Eaters to bring forward the scheduled sweep of the grounds. He could not have made it clearer if he had shouted for me to get out of there."

Professor Snape regarded Sirius cautiously. "You could also make the case that he was doing his best to ensure you were caught."

"How so? I could hear everything he said, the warning was as much for me as it was an order to the Death Eater."

"You said he heard you when you recognised him. That he directed his companions to search nearby."

"Yes! But he directed them to look in the wrong place."

"Or he was simply mistaken." The headmaster pointed out.

Sirius shook his head. "Harry was trying to tell us where the next attack was to take place."

Dumbledore sighed, and leaned back in his chair. "We simply do not have the resources to set up defenses both in Hogsmeade and in London. All the research you both have completed up to now indicates an attack in London. It is only one overheard mumble that indicates anything different."

Sirius stood and paced the room in irritation. Dumbledore looked at him intently.

"Your interpretation of events is clouded by your bias that Harry is working against Voldemort."

Sirius spun to face Dumbledore. "Yes, I kno-"

Dumbledore held up a hand to interrupt him. "I'd like you to consider another interpretation of his actions tonight, also assuming he is working against Voldemort."

"And that is?"

"He is worried that his godfather may be hurt in the upcoming attack, and has done his best to ensure his godfather is as far away from the danger as possible."

Sirius sighed in defeat. "So either way, we set up defense in London."

"Yes. We cannot afford for the ministry to be crippled by an attack. Not when it is finally working effectively against the Death Eaters. It probably wouldn't have been a problem if Cornelius was still Minister, since it would convince everyone that Voldemort had in fact returned. But with Arthur in charge, we need the Ministry functioning normally."

Sirius looked up wearily. "What ever happened to Fudge?"

"I..." Dumbledore stopped and frowned in thought. "Do you know, I have no idea."

Snape and Sirius shared a look, and both chuckled.

"Is there anything else?"

"Actually, yes, Albus. Will you need me at the ministry? Would you miss me in any defense?" Sirius asked.

Dumbledore looked at him, a small smile playing across his lips. "Not to my knowledge. You have always demanded to be included up til now, and it always annoyed you that you had to stay in canine form. You have a desire to be somewhere else tonight?"

Sirius simply nodded.

"I suspect that I shall find you patrolling Hogsmeade in the morning then."

Sirius nodded again. He stood up to leave.

"One last thing, Sirius." the headmaster said.

Sirius looked at him questioningly.

"How was he?"

Sirius smiled. "He looked good, Albus. He has grown. Not in height perhaps, but he has filled out. They are not treating him badly."

As Sirius left, Snape and Dumbledore gave each other a look that needed no translation. If Harry was being treated well, then he had probably been lost to Voldemort.

A strong hand covered Ron's snoring mouth, waking him in a panic. "Quiet down and stay still, sleeping beauty, don't wake anyone," a voice whispered in his ear.

Ron nodded. Sirius removed his hand from Ron's mouth, and stood up.

"Where are we going?" Ron whispered.

"Into the sixth year's girls dorm," Sirius replied softly.

Even in the little light that came in from the moon, Sirius could see Ron's blush. "You mean you haven't been in there before?" he whispered to the younger wizard, mock surprise in his voice.

"Shut it you. Why are we going in there?"

But Sirius just beckoned him to follow. The pair made it out to the Gryffindor common room before Sirius answered. "I think I know where Harry will be tonight, and I thought you'd want to try and convince him to come back with us."

Ron's eyes widened enough that white could be seen all around the iris. "Does Dumbledore know about this?"

"I've told him," Sirius replied evasively. "Now, go get your girlfriend and meet me in the corridor. Oh, bugger. Do you have the Marauder's Map?"

"No, why?"

"Cho will probably want to go too, but I don't know the password to her common room."

"The Map shows the passwords for the common rooms?"

"Of course. It wouldn't be much of a map if it didn't."

"I wish we had it in our second year then," Ron muttered. Sirius looked at him, clearly waiting for an explanation. Ron shook his head.

"Never mind that. I think 'Mione knows what it is. They have become friends, and Cho told her to come and get her if she ever heard anything about Harry."

Sirius nodded. "Good, now scoot. Grab what you need, and meet me at the Shrieking Shack." He turned and walked through the portrait opening.

Ron steeled himself, and crept as silently as he could up the stairs, and into previously forbidden territory.

Sirius had just finished activating four portkeys of his own design, when angry voices could be heard from the passageway going to Hogwarts. Frowning, he turned and tried to make out the voices.

Ron's deep baritone was easy to spot, raised as it was in anger. Ah, there was Hermione's also angry. What had Cho done?

Sirius stiffened, that was Cho's voice, and it was angry too. But it was the forth voice, with its defensive tone that shocked him.

Moments later, a quartet of students reached the end of the passageway. Hermione was the first to exit, and spotted Sirius lying in the corner, his long tail thumping on the dusty floor. She visibly sagged with relief.

"It's OK, Ron," she said.

At that, Ron's voice changed from yelling to muttering, as he too entered the shack.

Sirius watched as a girl he hadn't seen before stepped into the room, Cho right behind her. Colour-blind as he was in this form, Sirius couldn't see the flaming red hair on the girl, but he could see the similarities in complexion between brother and sister.

"Ginny followed us out onto the lawn and down to the Whomping Willow. Apparently, she heard her git of a brother enter the girls dorm and wake me," Hermione said, apparently to thin air. Ginny looked around to see who she was talking to.

"It wasn't my fault!" hissed Ron.

"Shut up, the pair of you!" came Cho's authoritative voice. "She wants to help Harry too, and though it's not exactly the best time for certain secrets to come to light, we may only have a small window of opportunity to help Harry."

Ginny turned to Cho. "Thank you for sticking up for me."

Cho gave Ginny a sour look. "Don't thank me. I agree with them, you shouldn't be here. Your actions have endangered someone very dear to Harry."

Ginny looked as if she wasn't sure whether to explode with anger or tears.

Cho turned to the grim. "Snuffles, go get your master for us."

Sirius looked at Cho with relief, wagged his tail and trotted out the door. Once outside, Sirius transformed. A sly grin appeared on his handsome features. He apparated into the shack, behind Ginny.

With a swift movement, he covered her mouth with one hand, and wrapped his other arm around her slim waist, pinning her arms to her sides. The others watched in amusement as she struggled.

Sirius kept his nose carefully out of range of Ginny's thrashing head, and lifted her off the ground. He wanted no repeat of Harry's actions at their first meeting after his escape.

With a wink the others, Sirius pulled Ginny's head to him and he whispered in her ear, "Good evening, my name is Black. Sirius Black."

Ginny's eyes almost popped out of her head. She looked at her brother pleadingly, and then in shock as he just stood there, doing nothing but smiling.

Hermione rolled her eyes. "Sirius! Don't give the poor girl a heart attack. Let her go."

He grinned at her. "But it was just so much fun!" he said.

Unable to move her head, Ginny's eyes betrayed her confusion, fear, and not a little anger. Sirius again put his mouth near her ear. "Well, my little bunny, are you going to be a good girl and be quiet, or am I going to have to eat you?"

Cho walked forward and slapped him on the back of the head. "Enough, we don't have time to clean her clothes."

Sirius immediately looked ashamed. "Sorry," he mumbled and let the youngest Weasley go.

Ginny collapsed to the floor, skidding and slipping in the dust and dirt, desperately crawling away from her tormentor. She reached the far wall, climbed to her feet and spun around, her trembling wand aimed at Sirius.

She looked in disbelief at her brother and his friends. They were just standing round, arms crossed, looking at her in amusement, right next to **Sirius Black!**

Cho broke the silence. "Enough, Ginny. He won't hurt you."

Sirius strode forward, walking right up to the petrified girl. He held out his hand. "Sorry for the fright. Harry has told me your twin brothers take after me. I'm Sirius Black, Harry's godfather."

Unthinking, Ginny shook his hand.

Cho spoke up again. "Like I said Ginny, by following us, you endangered someone Harry cares for a great deal. Sirius here has been trying to clear Harry's name, and get him out of Voldemort's clutches."

Ginny's eyes hadn't left Sirius' face. "Y-y-you h-h-have?"

"Y-y-yes." Sirius mocked Ginny's stutter.

As he expected, the infamous Weasley temper flared, driving away fear to be replaced with indignation.

"Right, here you are. I only prepared four of them, so each of you will have one. I'll make sure I'm not caught."

"What are they?" asked Hermione, taking one of the small glass globes.

Sirius looked at her, one eye closed, puffy and turning black. "A portkey. My own design."

"Where do they go?" "What do you mean your design?" Cho and Hermione asked curiously.

"They take you here, to the shack, twelve hours after you activate them."

"So we just carry them?" asked Ron.

"In a manner of speaking," Sirius replied with a grin.

Ron gave him a long look. "Meaning?" he said eventually.

"You swallow them."

Ginny spoke up, still looking sullen, and still rubbing her stinging knuckles. "Why swallow them?"

"If you are captured, you will be searched for any charmed object, they'll take everything magical away from you. Your own aura masks these."

"Fine." said Cho, taking one and putting it in her mouth. Sirius passed her a flask, from which she took a swig, and swallowed the portkey. Handing the flask to Ron, she said, "Come on, let's get Harry."

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## Betrayal of the Best Kind Grab

Grab

Harry stood, unmasked, next to five other young witches and wizards, in a room almost pitch black. Only the lit candles he and his companions carried gave off any light. He recognised only two of the other people from his time at Hogwarts, both of them witches who had been in Slytherin, a couple of years ahead of him. Arrayed around them in a circle was Voldemort's inner circle, his Death Eaters.

Harry had been surprised to discover that only Voldemort's most trusted servants had the dark mark burned into their arms. He had assumed that all the Dark Lord's minions had it. Not even Narcissa Malfoy had it on her arm.

His other companions were shifting nervously. Harry gave them a sneer.

There were still gaps in the ring of Death Eaters, Harry assumed that either they were yet to be replaced, or they were not all here yet.

As one, the Masked Death Eaters stood straight. Voldemort appeared at the edge of the circle. Striding in with the smooth grace of a snake, he looked at the nervous group holding candles. Only Harry's candle didn't waver, he wasn't shaking.

Harry's progress had surprised the Dark Lord in the last month. Not only had his skill with potions surpassed the expectations Voldemort set, his magic and non-magic combat skill growth had been impressive. But what stunned him the most was Harry's ability to create magical items. The few he had constructed in his room had without fail been useful, effective and safe. Not safe to create, that always carried a hint of risk, but safe to use.

In short, Voldemort was having second thoughts about his plans for Harry.

"I understand you suggested a change in the routine searches for the manor grounds here tonight," he said to Harry.

Without blinking, Harry stepped forward and replied, "Yes. I heard a noise from the grounds. Our quick examination of the area revealed nothing, but I thought it best to be thorough."

Voldemort nodded. As he turned to speak to the Death Eaters, Harry's voice interrupted him.

"There's more."

Each of the Death Eaters visibly stiffened. Harry wryly thought that no one spoke without being spoken to more than once in Voldemort's presence.

"Go on," the Dark Lord said, threateningly.

"It may have been an animagus. If so we need to find out. I muttered softly the name of the tavern in Hogsmeade. If anyone turns up there tonight, then we need to set up the wards around here to detect animals too."

The piercing red eyes regarded him thoughtfully. "What makes you think an animagus would be here? They are very rare."

"They are not that rare. McGonagall is an animagus, so is Wormtail there," said Harry gesturing with contempt towards the short man with the silver hand. "Last night was the full moon, if Remus Lupin had taken the Wolfsbane potion, he'd have been capable of sneaking in as well."

"All of whom's whereabouts are documented."

"And of the illegal animagi?"

Voldemort smiled. He had been wondering how long it would take Harry to give up this information.

"Illegal animagi? Are there any?" He asked.

Harry snorted and replied, "Don't tell me Wormtail hasn't told you who helped him become an animagus?"

Voldemort looked slyly at Pettigrew. "No, he has not," he lied.

Harry wasn't fooled. "That rat couldn't work out how to transfigure a matchstick to a pin without help." Harry said. Nearly all the masked Death Eater's shoulders shook with suppressed laughter. Pettigrew shook with anger, but stayed silent. "My father and godfather had to help him. They were both illegal animagi before leaving school."

"But your godfather is in hiding, surely he couldn't be out there spying for the Ministry?"

Harry shrugged. "It was just an example of an illegal animagus. I was actually thinking of some of the current students. Granger, for example, was an excellent transfiguration student, and would be very capable of becoming an animagus with the right help. McGonagall is her head of house. If she was doing reconnaissance, you wouldn't know."

For the first time in the conversation, Voldemort actually looked interested. "Really? You think Dumbledore would allow a student to spy for him?"



Harry smiled evilly. "I didn't say that she would have permission to do it. Granger tends to do things that she thinks need to be done."

"This is the girl you wouldn't mind entertaining?"

Harry's smile vanished. "No. That's Chang."

"I see," Voldemort nodded, and pondered Harry's suggestion. "You would like to go to Hogsmeade, instead of help attack the Ministry?"

Harry shrugged. "It makes no difference to me. I'll go where you order me. All I suggest is that someone stakes out the Three Broomsticks to see if anyone goes there tonight."

Voldemort nodded. "I will consider it. For now, we will continue with the ritual."

Harry bowed, and stepped back into place.

The four students waited patiently inside the Three Broomsticks. They each nursed a bottle of butterbeer, listening intently for a howl from outside. Madam Rosmerta had given them a look of concern, silently suggesting that they should be in school, but served them anyway.

Ginny had finally got over her anger at the shock Sirius had given her. Ron and Hermione had given her a quick rundown of their adventures involving Harry and Sirius. Ron looked wistful at the thought of flying on a hippogriff, but Hermione looked ill at the memory.

Cho smiled and listened, she loved hearing about Harry's life, wishing that she had been a part of it earlier.

The long howl echoed through the tavern. The friends stood up and quickly said to the occupants, "We may be under attack by Death Eaters. Be ready," before running out.

Sirius had been padding around the Three Broomsticks for a couple of hours now, and he was glad that Albus had not split the defenses. Hogsmeade was just as quiet and still at this time as it normally was.

One more lap of the Three Broomsticks later, Sirius was starting to get worried. What if Harry had known that the attack was happening on the Ministry, and that he threw out this as a diversion to him? He shook his head to clear it of the disturbing thoughts. He would wait until he was back in human form before examining and forming conclusions from his thoughts.

A faint, familiar scent wafted in front of his nostrils. Sirius turned, and saw a short, robed figure heading towards the tavern with a person with an unfamiliar scent. He froze.

Did he silently attack, and rid the world of Wormtail once and for all? Or howl to warn the others, and perhaps lose his chance.

Sirius cursed to himself and raised his muzzle to howl. How could he think of not warning Harry's

friends.

Wormtail and his companion looked at each other and froze. Looking around for the source of the howl, they didn't see a dark shape slink towards them, getting closer every second.

Harry listened to his godfather's howl with a grin. Wormtail was not happy at being put in charge of the diversion to Hogsmeade, what with the danger of meeting a vengful Mr. Padfoot. Harry grinned at the thought that the silver-handed wizard would be trembling the whole time.

The ritual that had occurred had been stomach turning. One of Harry's unmasked companions had been singled out by Voldemort for, according to him, not having enough loyalty. It seemed to Harry that the older Slytherin witch had simply not afforded the Dark Lord enough respect.

What happened next made Harry ill to think of it. The witch had been stripped, then repeatedly and violently violated. The poor girl had been humiliated and defiled, made to service each and every Death Eater in ways Harry couldn't even believe someone had thought up. She had been kicked and beaten. Clubbed and burned. In one final act of shocking psychological brutality, Voldemort had made the girl grovel naked in front of her torturers and thank them for punishing her, cleaning their shoes with her tongue.

Those who were not Death Eaters had not been asked to participate, for which Harry was grateful. He could not have done anything to help her, nor think of anything brutal enough to do to her to satisfy the Dark Lord. Harry shook his head. The witch had put her robes back on and was now participating in the attack on the ministry. Hopefully, she will be caught and removed from his awful control.

From his position, Harry watched four students run out of the front door of the Three Broomsticks. His eyes widened in shock. No, damn them. What the hell were they doing here? His friends moved as one, towards the howl. Harry crept along, watching them. Spells started going off, hitting near his friends and other patrons exiting the tavern. It would appear they had been warned of an attack, since the people exiting the tavern were ready for combat.

Harry watched them round the corner of the tavern and run towards his godfather's position. Harry then leapt down from the roof where he was keeping an eye on events. The four were shocked to hear someone land behind them, and Harry had stunned Ginny before the others had finished turning round.

Ron reacted first and raised his wand, but Harry didn't even bother with magic. His left fist connected sharply with the tip of Ron's chin, snapping his friend's head back. Ron's eyes rolled up in his head and he too slumped to the ground, out of the fight.

Both Hermione and Cho looked at him, both stunned and dismayed at his actions. Harry stood between them. "Get out of here!" he whispered sharply to them, looking in Cho's direction.

Harry heard Hermione's whispered " Stupefy" and ducked to the side. Her spell struck Cho on the arm, spinning the poor girl around, numbing the righthand side of her body. Harry spun, rolled and

came to his feet casting "Expelliarmus!"

Hermione had been taken aback with Harry's agility and speed, and the spell struck her full on. Her wand flew out of her hand, straight to Harry, while she flew back and connected with the outer wall of the tavern with a heavy thud, then sank to the ground. Harry ran over and checked his friend. He sighed in relief, she was OK.

Harry dropped Hermione's wand at her feet, and walked over to Cho. His girlfriend was looking at him in terror. She had just watched him disable four people, who thought that they were alert and ready for anything, in less than five seconds. "Dammit, get out of here!" he whispered fiercely to her.

Cho looked down at her paralysed side. "I-I can't," she slurred.

Harry cursed. At that moment, a short robed figure ran around the corner. "Let's go!" the figure shouted, panicking. Harry stood, looking at the man with contempt.

Wormtail looked down at the bodies of Harry's friends. "Oh. Is one of them the girl you want?"

Swallowing, Harry nodded, and pointed at Cho. Wormtail quickly stunned her.

"Well, grab her and let's go!" his father's betrayer said, taking out a portkey and tossing it to Harry. Harry caught it in one hand and grabbed a handful of Cho's hair. The tugging from behind the navel told him they were no longer in Hogsmeade.

Hermione woke a few seconds after Harry and Wormtail left with Cho. Shaking her head to stop the ringing in her ears, Hermione tried to stand on wobbly legs. Looking around, she saw Ron, lying on his back, mouth open. With a cry, she rushed over to him, and held him close.

That was how Sirius found them a few minutes later. After running at Wormtail, his companion had been ordered to attack Sirius. Wormtail would do anything to save his skin; but his companion had not lasted long against such a skilled wizard as Sirius.

Sirius knelt down and checked Ron. "He'll be fine," he told a distressed Hermione. "He's just out cold. If you throw some water on his face, he will wake up, with a headache mind you, but he will wake up."

Hermione could only smile at him in thanks, tears still streaming down her face. Sirius went over to Ginny, and cast "Ennervate!"

Ginny's brown eyes flickered open. She sat up and looked around fearfully. Sirius put his hands on her shoulders and said, "Don't worry, they are all gone. You are safe."

Ginny relaxed and nodded. "Where's Cho?" she asked looking around for her. Hermione also looked around with growing alarm.

"She was right there! With Harry. He told us to get out of here," Hermione said.

"Harry was here?" Ginny and Sirius asked together.

Hermione nodded. "He took all of us down without any trouble. I, I accidentally hit Cho with a stunning spell and Harry disarmed me. He had already knocked out Ginny and Ron."

"Damn!" shouted Sirius. He looked up and saw some townsfolk coming over to the group. "There is a stunned wizard with black robes behind the pub. Make sure he is taken to Dumbledore and questioned. See you back at the Shack in the morning," he said before transforming.

Hermione and Ginny nodded, and turned to Ron, trying to wake him. Hermione was desperately hoping that Cho was OK.

Dumbledore was furious. He paced back and forth, almost sizzling with radiant magical energy "**How could you?**" he thundered at Sirius.

Sirius paled but didn't have the chance to answer before the headmaster continued with his unusual outburst.

**"You deliberately put four students in danger, allowed one of them to be kidnapped and two of the others to be put in the hospital wing!"** the Headmaster continued. **"They could have been killed! All for a boy who for all we know has sold us out!"**

It was Sirius' turn to anger. "If he has sold us out, then he sure as hell got his money's worth! From the way you and everyone else has acted, I'm inclined to think we don't deserve loyalty!"

Dumbledore stared at him, breathing heavily in anger. With a mammoth effort, he regained his temper. "I would very much like to believe that Harry has not joined Voldemort willingly, but unfortunately, I have no choice, and I must act as though he has joined our enemy." Dumbledore ran his hand over his tired face. "Harry, why? This doesn't fix things for anyone."

Sirius looked at the headmaster with an indecipherable expression. "What did you say?"

Dumbledore sighed. "The last thing Harry said to me, before going with Voldemort."

Sirius nodded in encouragement. "Yes? What was it?"

"Harry said, 'This will fix things for everyone.'"

With a roar that Dumbledore was sure could be heard at the other edge of the forbidden forest, Sirius leapt up and grabbed Dumbledore by the front of his robes. Without apparent effort, Sirius lifted the most powerful wizard in the world and slammed him into one of the stone walls of Dumbledore's office.

**"Why didn't you tell me he said that?"** Sirius roared.

Albus Dumbledore, the only man Voldemort feared, the man who defeated the dark wizard Grindelwald was shaken around like a child's doll. "Sirius!" he croaked. "Calm yourself!"

Sirius slowly lowered the headmaster to the floor, but was still looking at him with anger.

"That means something to you, doesn't it?"

Sirius nodded and let go of Dumbledore's robes. "It only means that Harry has not joined Voldemort as a servant. It means he has not joined him because he thought that he didn't have a future with us. It means that he didn't join him because he was afraid of him. What it means is that Harry had decided to become a spy for us. He is going to help bring Voldemort down."

Dumbledore looked more hopeful and excited than he had in months. "Are you sure?"

Sirius nodded. "Let's go down to the Shack. I'll explain on the way. It is almost time for the portkeys to activate, bringing the four of them back there."

"Portkeys?" Dumbledore asked.

Sirius chuckled. "Yes, portkeys. You think I'd let them out there without a portkey that would bring them home if they were captured?"

Dumbledore shook his ancient head. "No offense, Sirius, but the first thing they will do with a captive is remove all magical items."

Sirius just gave Dumbledore a grin the old wizard remembered too well from the Marauder's school days.

"You think I didn't know that?"

Sirius and Dumbledore sat in the Shrieking Shack, nervously waiting for the return of the four students. Ron, Hermione and Ginny were, as far as they knew, in the Hospital wing, Ron and Hermione having sustained blows to the head the previous evening.

Sirius had explained to Dumbledore that he and his godson had had a conversation about Harry being asked by the ministry to infiltrate Voldemort's Death Eaters. About how Harry had asked why he was fixing things for the people who turned their back on him, and how Sirius had said that it would fix things for everyone.

"So, Harry has simply used the apparent hatred the world has for him as a reason he will work for Voldemort. And that boy didn't think he belonged in Gryffindor," Dumbledore said.

Sirius looked up in surprise. "Why didn't Harry think he belonged in Gryffindor?"

"Apparently the Sorting Hat considered putting him in Slytherin. He certainly has the deviousness to be in that house."

Sirius smiled. "So did his father, but James was put in Gryffindor too."

With a sudden pop, Ron appeared horizontally in the Shack, dressed in a white hospital gown,

about three feet above the ground.

He landed with a thud, at which both Sirius and Dumbledore winced, and continued to snore. Sirius looked at Dumbledore appologetically, picked Ron up, and lay him down on the dirty bed against the wall. Sirius then contritely moved a mattress a few feet to the left of where it had been waiting, to where Ron had landed.

"Good thing Mr. Weasley was the first to come. He didn't even wake up." Dumbledore remarked.

Sirius nodded.

A few moments later, Ginny landed on the mattress, looking around. She saw Sirius and the headmaster sitting at the small derelict table and gave them a small smile. "I didn't get to say sorry for last night," she appologised to Sirius.

Dumbledore looked from the red-haired student to Harry's godfather, and at the enormous black eye he sported. He had been too polite to enquire as to its origin before now, but now he felt no such inhibition.

"Let me guess, you were given that when you grabbed her to keep her quiet and she struggled?"

Sirius shook his head. "No, I'd let her go at that point."

"She gave it to you before you were able to introduce yourself properly to Miss. Weasley?" the headmaster guessed.

"No, he'd introduced himself by then," Ginny said.

"Then when?" Dumbledore asked Sirius.

Ginny answered stonily. "He made fun of my stammer."

Nothing could have prepared the pair for Dumbledore's belly laugh was. Neither of them had ever heard him laugh so hard.

"Let me get this straight," Dumbledore said around his laughter. "You hit the most wanted man in the wizarding world because he made fun of you stammer?"

Ginny blushed and nodded.

Dumbledore laughed harder. Sirius spoke up. "Shut up, Man! If the place was called the Laughing Shack, it wouldn't keep people away!"

It was at this point that Hermione appeared, also horizontal. Unlike Ron, she woke as she landed on the mattress. She looked up at the still chuckling headmaster, the sullen Sirius, and a blushing Ginny. "What did I miss?"

Dumbledore finally managed to get his laughter under control. "Later, Miss. Granger. First we must get you all back to the hospital wing, before Madam Pomfrey starts to think that has become kidnap central. Please each of you take one of Mr. Weasley's hands."

The pair of witches obeyed, and watched as Dumbledore placed a portkey on Ron's chest. The trio disappeared.

"I hope you have another one of those for Cho. I hate to think what she has been through."

Dumbledore immediately sobered, and nodded. "You never told me how you designed these portkeys."

"You swallow them. Your body's aura masks them, since because they are only one way, one shot portkeys, they don't have a large magical signature. They transport you twelve hours after activation, meaning that you take them before a mission, guaranteeing you will be sent back here afterwards."

"Ingenious. Perfectly ingenious. I must say, you hav-," Dumbledore stopped in shock.

Cho had appeared, also horizontal. Her nude, burned, battered and bloody body crashed into the mattress, shocking them into action.

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## **Betrayal of the Best Kind**

### **Hurt**

A/N - I usually don't put notes at the start of a chapter, but this chapter is rated R, and should be read only by those who can handle it.

Hurt

With Cho's hair gripped tightly in Harry's hand, the pair arrived back in the London palace. Harry looked down at the young woman who had caused him so much pain that evening on the cliff top. He had tried to not think of her since, well no, that was a lie. What he had tried not to think about was his feelings for her. He had often thought of her, of how he would take his revenge on her, make her pay for how she had hurt him. In the dark recesses of his mind, Harry had fantasised about what he would do to her if she was in his power.

Looking down at the beautiful girl lying helplessly in his arms, images of the horrors he witnessed before transporting to Hogsmeade filled his mind, and he knew he was not capable of doing those things to her. Fantasising about revenge was one thing, it gave him a plausible excuse for his continued service to Voldemort. Now he had her, what would Voldemort make him do to her? Harry gave Cho to a pair of elves and instructed them to take her to his room, and shackle her to the table.

The thought of watching any of that done to Cho, or even doing it to her, made him dry retch.

As Harry waited for hours for the return of Voldemort and the Death Eaters, he went over in his mind what he should do with Cho, both to convince the Dark Lord of his service, and to give her the best chance of survival.

He, Wormtail and four other wizards waited the return of their master. One of the wizards, the one sent as Wormtail's bodyguard, hadn't returned. Harry did not find this surprising. Since all they had been sent to do was find if an animagus had been spying on them, the loss of a potential Death Eater would not sit well with Voldemort.

It was almost sunrise when, between heartbeats, Voldemort and his Death Eaters appeared. One glance told the story of the evening. Nowhere near as many wizards returned as left for the raid. Not one of the Death Eaters who returned from the raid was unscathed. Voldemort was in a rage. All followers were dismissed quickly, the Death Eaters summoned to council.



With a sigh of relief, Harry made his way back to his room. If things had gone poorly on the raid, it may be some time before his 'guest' was entertained.

Cho groggily opened her eyes, and dreamily wondered if she was blind. As her senses returned, she realised she was not blind, but in a dark room. Small, four walls. Low ceiling. Some metal objects on the walls, she could tell by the slight gleam on the metallic edges.

Cho tried moving, but was obviously restrained in her current position. Starting to panic, Cho thrashed about, trying with all her adrenaline-aided might to break her bonds. Finally, she ceased her struggles, a thin sheen of sweat on her forehead mute testament to her efforts.

How long she was in there Cho had no idea. It felt like days, but the portkey in her stomach had not yet activated, so less than twelve hours had passed since taking it. Cramps in her legs and shoulders distracted her from her thoughts.

Finally, like a vertical sunrise, a thin sliver of light appeared in one wall, slowly widening to reveal an open doorway, the light temporarily blinding her sensitive eyes. A short, well toned man stood in the doorway. Cho's heart began beating wildly again, she started thrashing against her bonds.

The man came closer, and Harry's familiar voice commanded, "Stop it! Stop panicking."

Slowly her eyes became adjusted to the light, and she could make out Harry, standing over her bound form.

"Harry! Please let me go."

Harry shook his head. "I'm sorry Cho, but I cannot do that." He looked out the door, checking that they were alone. "Do you have a portkey? Anything to get you back to Hogwarts?"

Cho bit her lip, weighing up her options. Harry noticed her hesitation, and relaxed. "Good. How do you activate it? Is it in your robes?" he asked, patting her down, checking the pockets of her robes.

"I didn't say I had anything."

"You didn't say no immediately. You were wondering whether or not I could be trusted." Harry paused as he finished rummaging through her pockets. "There's nothing here."

"Harry, please come back with me, please. Don't stay here, don't abandon your friends, and the people who love you."

He sighed, and brilliant green locked with dark brown eyes. "Not yet, Cho. There is still a lot I can do. I know where we are, I'm learning a lot. With tonight's debacle, Voldemort will be relying on his remaining underlings more than ever, enough so that he could forgive me if I show some compassion to a 'guest'."

Cho swallowed. "You, you're spying on him?"

Harry looked at her with a surprised expression, then looked down and shook his head in dismay. "Bloody Dumbledore. I told him something the night I went with Voldemort. If he had told Si-, someone about it, they would have known I'm spying on him," Harry stopped, looking at Cho, a thoughtful expression on his face.

Cho raised her perfect eyebrows. "Sirius? Your godfather?"

It was Harry's turn to be surprised. "You know about my godfather?"

Cho nodded. "We are working together to try to bring you back."

His green eyes narrowed. "Don't," he said flatly. "I'll make my own way back, in my own time, on my own terms. When what needs to be done, is done."

"Harry, please?" Cho begged.

He shook his head. "No. This needs to be done. It is not open for discussion. Now, how are you going to get back?"

"I can't tell you."

Harry didn't look upset. "Fair enough. Can you leave at any time, or is there a set time?"

Cho again swallowed, and took a gamble. "A set time."

"Damn. When? How long?"

"About noon."

Harry's shoulder's slumped. "Damn, still six more hours." He looked into her eyes once more. "You are going to be tortured, Cho. There is nothing I can do to stop that. I may even be asked to torture you. In six hours, you could be broken."

Cho started trembling. "Please, Harry! Untie me, let me go, I can hide until I get taken back!"

"I'm sorry, Cho." he turned and left, plunging the room into darkness once more.

"Harry!" Cho screamed. "Harry, please! Come back!"

It was a dismayed Harry Potter who entered his luxurious bedroom, closing the door on his bound and terrified girlfriend. He raced over to the potion desk, and faster than he had ever before, brewed a potion. It was a simple recipe, and within an hour, he had finished. Harry then cleaned up the evidence of its creation. He took the single dose he had created and carried it into the torture chamber.

Cho had tear stains on her cheeks, and looked up in fear at the door opening. Seeing Harry, she broke down and cried in relief. "Harry, please. let me go, please." she whispered, her throat raw

from her shouting.

Harry moved to her side and held the glass to her lips. "Drink this, it will mask pain for a full day."

Quickly, Cho gulped down the vibrant purple potion. It settled in her stomach, and immediately felt a numbing effect flow through to her extremities. She calmed, and took a deep breath. "Will that stop me feeling pain?" she asked.

Harry sadly shook his head, "It will only make pain less intense, you won't feel minor injuries, and the pain from harsh wounds is lessened. The potion is given to pregnant witches by medi-wizards to make labour pains more bearable. It is very quick and easy to make; I had to make something quickly, I didn't have time to make a real pain killer."

Cho nodded in thanks. The numbing feeling made her feel calmer.

Harry left briefly to remove any remaining evidence of his creation. Finishing his cleaning, Harry grabbed his latest magical parchment creation. Casting the final few charms took him about an hour. Writing a short note on the parchment, he then crushed it into a small crumpled ball. He slipped it into his pocket, and went back to Cho.

She had managed to calm down, and compose herself. "What time is it?"

"Still over four hours til midday." Harry moved closer and drew his wand. "Forgive me, Cho. This may hurt a bit."

Cho fearfully backed away as far as her bonds would allow. "Harry, what are you doing?" she squeaked.

Harry didn't answer, he just placed his wand against her robes and muttered a quiet curse. Cho gasped, and felt an aching warmth spread through her side. She looked at him questioningly.

"You should have a large bruise there now. I need to give you more of these, it will look like I have treated you exactly as Voldemort would expect."

Cho nodded, and relaxed. "Getting those is... uncomfortable." He looked at her, eyebrows raised. "But bearable." she continued.

He nodded, and cursed her several more times. Finally, he placed the tip of his wand against her left cheek. Muttering the curse one last time, Cho at last cried out at the sharp, tingling pain of thousands of capillaries bursting under her skin. Her cheek swelled and coloured.

Both jumped at the door to his room bursting open and Voldemort charged in, flanked by two masked Death Eaters. Cho's face paled, and she screamed. Harry spun and struck her across the undamaged side of her face with his fist, shocking her to silence. A thin trail of blood trickled down from the corner of Cho's mouth.

"I see you have already started to enjoy yourself, Harry." Voldemort said, face still livid. "But I need you to tell me what happened at Hogsmeade. Why did everyone not return from such an easy mission?"

"All but Wormtail's bodyguard returned, my Lord. I understand my godfather was there, and probably recognised him. I was not with him at the time, but I assume he told his guard to protect him. My godfather would have made short work of him otherwise."

The Dark Lord's eyes blazed with an inner fire. "You presume too much. Wormtail has had twelve years more experience as a wizard than your pitiful godfather."

"He spent those twelve years as a rat, my Lord. Hardly the best way to increase your skills."

Voldemort's breathing began to slow. Never taking his eyes off Harry, he allowed his temper to finally cool. After several unblinking minutes, a smile spread across his face.

"As always, you are the voice of calm and reason, Harry." He turned to one of his masked henchmen. "Goyle, go and find Wormtail, tell him I want to see him in my chambers. Tell him that his version of recent events has some... inconsistencies."

The larger Death Eater bowed, and left. Voldemort turned to Cho for the first time. Taking in her swollen cheek and bleeding mouth, he said, "Harry. You started having fun without me. I'm disappointed in you."

"My apologies, my Lord. You were distracted upon your arrival."

The laconic grin never left Voldemort's face. "You are forgiven my boy, just don't do it again. Now, where were you?"

"I have checked her clothing and body for any magical items, no portkey was found. I do not know enough to be positive that she doesn't have anything though, would you please check for anything I may have missed?"

Voldemort smiled at Harry, then turned and nodded to his remaining Death Eater. The Death Eater extracted his wand, and passed it over Cho several times. Finally he shook his head.

The Dark Lord gave Harry an indulgent smile. "It would appear that you performed your search in a satisfactory manner. What were you doing before I arrived?"

An evil smile crossed Harry's features. "I was saving something rather special for you to watch, my Lord. Please bear with me a moment." Harry left the room and walked over to his library. Selecting a particular book, a slim, ancient volume, he headed back to the room where Cho was bound. "I found a rather nice curse in here, it was used a few thousand years ago to brand criminals."

"A branding curse is simple enough, why not just use that?" asked the remaining Death Eater. Harry recognised the dulcet tones of Lucius Malfoy.

Voldemort held up a hand, and gestured for Harry to continue.

"This curse was used by the ancient Egyptians, by the Royal Dispenser of Justice. He had a phoenix as a familiar. Should a criminal with a brand be found innocent after the fact, there was only one way to remove the scars. The Royal Dispenser of Justice used the tears from his phoenix to remove the scars."

Voldemort's features darkened. "That fool Dumbledore has a phoenix."

Harry nodded. "Yes, my Lord. But the tears must both be willingly shed for the person who gave the brand, not the branded person, and then willingly given to the person branded. While Fawkes is likely to shed tears for her, he is unlikely to willingly shed those tears for me. And after trying to trap me, I have no desire to give her anything. In order to become whole again, she would have to convince a phoenix to give tears to the person who betrayed its master, difficult in itself, then convince the person who hates her to forgive and cure her."

A slow, malicious grin appeared on the Dark Lord's face. "My boy!" he said to Harry. "You really are developing a taste for psychological torture, aren't you?"

Harry returned the smile. "Better than physical torture, since you can do it over and over again."

Voldemort nodded. "By all means, please continue."

Cho had been rendered speechless by the sudden change in Harry. "Please, Harry, no..."

Harry struck her across the face again. "Shut up, bitch."

Cho desperately tried again. "Harry, you don't have to do this. I've forgiven you. Please! I love you!"

Harry stopped, his eyes shining. He shook his head, and the compassion she was in his emerald eyes disappeared. "You. You have forgiven me? What on earth makes you think that this is about your feelings for me?"

"I didn't mean to say those things at the lighthouse."

"For someone who didn't mean it, you sounded very sincere at the time." Harry's voice became harder. "I told my Master when I first arrived that I would like to 'entertain' you here."

Tears started streaming from her dark, almond eyes. Cho shook her head rapidly. "Harry, no. I didn't mean it, I promise! I was so hurt."

"You were hurt?" Harry shouted. "Which of us spent months in Azkaban? Which of us spent months being guarded by our worst fear? Which of us has had the entire world turn against us for nothing?" Harry's face was a mask of pure rage.

Cho was shocked and scared. The Harry that had calmed her, given her a pain killer, and wanted

her safe was no longer standing before her. That Harry was simply gone. The Harry who towered over her bound form was frightening, so very frightening. She needed to get the Harry she knew back.

"Harry, we know you are innocent. Professor Pritchard hit you from behind, knocking you out. Lucius Malfoy was in my form after taking polyjuice potion. Crabbe was killed by-"

Harry struck her across the face for a third time. Cho was thankful for the pain-numbing potion, without it she was sure she would have passed out.

"I don't care. The fact that you know what happened just means that you should have believed me in the first place."

"Harry, I love you. Please don't do this." She looked at him, pouring all the love she felt for him into her gaze. With elation, she watched as his beautiful green eyes glistened with unshed tears.

Suddenly, Harry reached to the neck of her robes and tore them apart, revealing Cho's naked breasts to the room. He put his hands in his pockets and with a smirk, stood and watched his struggling captive.

Cho had never felt so ashamed in her life. "Harry! Pl-" she was prevented for speaking by Harry's hand over her mouth. He tore off a large strip of her robes, balled it up, and shoved it in her mouth.

"You have nothing to say, that I want to hear." he said. Drawing his wand, he muttered the incantation for the ancient branding curse. The tip of his wand glowed bright red. "Do you remember what I used to trace on your chest? My initials, a heart, then your initials. You used to love it. Well, now, I'm going to do it again."

Gagged as she was, Cho started thrashing around, desperately trying to get away from that terrible glow. Harry sighed.

"Cho, you really must not jerk around so much, it will ruin my masterpiece. *Petrificus Totalus* ."

Cho's body stiffened, hard as a board. "Much better. Now, where were we?"

Cho's eyes watched in fear as the glowing wand came closer and touched her skin. Sizzling and popping, Harry slowly dragged his wand across Cho's unblemished skin. Unable to scream, Cho was silent as Harry etched into her flesh the very letters that had captured her heart.

It was four hours after Harry had first started branding her skin. He had dragged a great cross over the first inscription, telling her as he did so that he no longer loved her. Her eyes had initially looked into his, silently begging him to stop, but were now unfocused.

Still gagged, Cho had been in a full body bind for the entire session. Only Harry had touched her, Voldemort and his masked companion had stood by watching with glee as he had first stripped her, then etched and branded images all over her body.

"Harry, I must admit, you have put on a great show for us. I think she has had enough for now, since she doesn't seem to be paying attention to us."

Harry nodded and took the bind of the poor girl. Cho slumped in her bonds. She looked wearily up at him. He undid the straps holding her wrists to the table, and pulled her forward. He redid her bonds behind her back. "You only lasted four hours. Never forget how I feel about you." was all he said to her.

Voldemort turned to Lucius. "Take her down to the dungeons, we'll enjoy her company later."

Harry turned to face the Dark Lord. "One last request, my Lord." Voldemort raised an eyebrow. "I'd like to be the one to, well, pluck her flower."

Voldemort nodded. "Of course. Get some rest, you are excused your lessons today."

"Thank you, my Lord." Harry bowed. He watched as Cho was dragged out of the tiny room by Draco's father, still mumbling faintly through her gag.

Cho was taken into a dirty cell by the Death Eater, still gagged. He removed her restraints and tossed her to the ground. Cho curled up on her side, quivering in fear now Harry wasn't there to protect her. Her captor closed the iron door, then started removing his robes, betraying his arousal. She looked at him in dismay.

"You think my Master cares about you or Potter? Potter is spying for Dumbledore. I know this. I just need proof. His reaction to your rape will be perfect."

Cho squirmed across the filthy floor, bursting some of the deeper burns, staining the floor with red smears.

"Mind you, what he did to you today will make convincing my Master more difficult, though convincing the world he has gone over to our side will be easy. Once I reveal his treachery to my Master, he will be reviled by everyone. A fitting punishment." he said moving closer.

He grabbed her leg and dragged her along the cold floor towards him. Cho struggled, kicking out with her free leg.

The door swung open, and Lucius let her go and spun around in shock. Voldemort stood in the doorway, a mildly curious look on his face.

Cho felt the familiar tugging of a portkey behind her navel, and disappeared from the cell.

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## Betrayal of the Best Kind Talk

Talk

Madam Pomfrey's shriek of alarm on seeing Cho had managed to wake Ron, and, Sirius thought, damage his eardrums.

Dumbledore had grabbed hold of Cho and Sirius and transported them to the infirmary, seconds after Cho's dramatic arrival. Sirius had transformed the instant they arrived, and just before the school nurse had laid eyes on them.

Cho had been rushed to a hospital bed, charms on the mattress and sheets allowing her to lie without discomfort, and was being fussed over. Dumbledore gently removed the gag, and a crumpled piece of parchment fell out of her mouth. Placing both the gag and parchment on the bedside table, he drew his wand and prepared to assist Madam Pomfrey. "Poppy, will she be OK?"

Madam Pomfrey didn't answer, focused as she was on determining Cho's condition. Cho mouthed something to the headmaster. He lowered his head to put his ear near the injured student's mouth. "Water," he heard Cho whisper.

Nodding, he went and grabbed the water pitcher from beside Ron's bed, holding up his hand to stop the trio from following him. He carried it back to Cho's side, and poured her a glass. As gently as holding a baby, Dumbledore cupped Cho's head and brought the glass to her lips. She took a few sips before coughing, and spraying Madam Pomfrey. She mouthed an apology.

Poppy waved the apology away. She finally stopped her frenzied examination, and relaxed enough to start making her charge comfortable. "You look worse than you are, dear."

Cho nodded. "I know," she whispered.

"Miss. Chang, do you feel up to telling me what happened?"

"Albus!" Madam Pomfrey interrupted, sounding outraged. "She needs rest! I need to heal those burns. She has bruises all over her body."

Cho looked at the nurse. "Thank you," she croaked. "But I need to tell the Headmaster what happened."



Dumbledore gave her a grateful look. "Poppy, I believe Mr. Weasley is awake. Would you see to him?"

Madam Pomfrey went from outraged to furious. "Now see here, Albus. This girl has been through an ordeal the likes of which you have no idea. She needs medical attention."

"Is she in any immediate danger?"

Madam Pomfrey looked troubled. "Well, no. Her heart is strong, her breathing is fine. All her internal organs seem to be functioning correctly. But look at her!"

"I will allow you as much time as you need, but first it is imperative that I get as much intelligence from her experience as possible. Since it involves some sensitive information, I need to ask you to attend to your other charges."

With lips pressed together so firmly, you could use them as an anvil, Poppy Pomfrey stormed off to see to Ron. Dumbledore cast a quick silencing charm around Cho's bed.

"Now, Miss. Chang, what happened last night?"

Cho proceeded to relate the events of the previous evening, from being woken by Hermione, to Ginny's introduction and assault of Sirius. The swallowing of the portkey, and Harry's attack on the four of them.

"It was so fast, Harry just appeared, and dropped the Weasleys so fast I doubt they registered his arrival. A stunning spell grazed me, and Harry disarmed Hermione. He told me to get out of there."

Dumbledore gave a great sigh of relief. "So he is truly still on our side."

Cho nodded and smiled. "I told him I couldn't, and he swore. A short Death Eater arrived, sounding very scared." At this, the great black dog at her bedside gave an almost human snort, letting his tongue loll out of his mouth in silent self-satisfaction. "He told Harry that they needed to get out of there, then asked if I was the one he wanted. Harry nodded and I was stunned."

Cho took another sip of water before continuing. "I woke, shackled to a table. I had no idea how long I had been there, when Harry entered. He told me that I'd been there for a few hours. I tried to get him to release me, but he refused. He asked me if I had any way of getting back to Hogwarts, and I hesitated. He took my hesitation as a positive answer and looked very relieved. I told him I would be taken back at about midday, and that he should come with me. He looked happy that I was going to go back, but refused to come with me.

"He left for a while, and I got so scared. He eventually came back though, told me I had four hours to go until I was brought back to the Shrieking Shack, and gave me a potion." she paused for another sip, her voice getting stronger.

Dumbledore raised his eyebrows. "What was this potion?"

Cho shrugged, when winced in discomfort. "I don't know its name, it was bright purple, and he said it was given to women to help with labour pains."

Dumbledore nodded. "I know the one. Very easy to make, and quite a potent pain killer."

Cho smiled. "Once he gave it to me he started giving me bruises, he'd put his wand against me and mutter a curse. With the pain relief potion, it felt nothing more than the ache after bumping into something, but the bruises are very large and convincing."

Dumbledore nodded again, regarding Cho's cheek, swollen and purple. "Very convincing indeed."

Cho stopped smiling. "Then You-know-who came in, with two Death Eaters. I screamed, and Harry hit me to shut me up."

Dumbledore frowned, and asked, "He hit you? Did it hurt?"

Cho shook her head. "He didn't have his fist clenched tight. It felt little more than a slap."

"It would appear that Mr. Potter was walking a fine line between keeping you safe, and blowing his cover."

"I agree. I wasn't sure at the time, but I know now that he is trying to find out everything he can to help us. He shoved something in my mouth before gagging me, something for me to bring back I suppose."

Dumbledore nodded and turned his attention to the two articles on the side table. Poking the parchment with his wand, he muttered a spell Cho didn't recognise. It glowed blue. "This will bear examination, once we have time. For now, please continue."

Cho continued. "You-know-who was..."

"Say his name, Miss. Chang."

Cho swallowed nervously. "Vol-Voldemort was furious. Apparently, on the mission to Hogsmeade a wizard was captured. He thought that the mission there would be simple and easy. Someone called Wormtail was in charge and had messed up."

The excited yaps from Sirius could only indicate his joy at this news.

Cho smiled at the dog. "One of the Death Eaters, who answered to the name Goyle, was sent to get Wormtail. V-Voldemort turned to Harry and told him to continue hurting me."

Dumbledore reach over and gently took her small hand in his.

"Harry showed them a branding curse from Egypt, one that was used on criminals. Apparently the only cure for the brand is-"

"-Phoenix tears." Dumbledore answered for her. "Willingly given phoenix tears. I'm sure Fawkes will be delighted to give some tears to Harry for him to give to you. Once I've explained the situation to him of course."

Cho nodded in thanks. "I tried to stop him from branding me, pleaded and everything. Nothing worked. He ripped my clothes open and put his hand in his pockets. That was when he put something in my mouth, and gagged me."

"He said some things to me that made me so scared at the time. I really thought the Harry I love had disappeared, and a different Harry had taken his place. I struggled, trying to stay away from his wand. He put me in a bind so I couldn't move a muscle. Then he started to burn me."

Dumbledore looked furious. "He branded you? Harry did this?"

Cho nodded. "But it isn't what it seems. For some reason, I felt no pain at all. He kept saying to me that he could see the pain in my eyes. For hours he burned me, but even when he burned over the bruises, I felt no pain at all. I think that is why he tried scaring me. To get me jerking around enough that he had the excuse to cast a full body bind on me. That way, I couldn't give away the fact that I was not in any pain."

Dumbledore sat back with a sigh. "I had forgotten that particular spell could let you modify the amount of pain it caused. That was so children born to parents sentenced to multiple lifetimes could be branded too, to complete the sentence of their parents."

Cho shuddered at the thought of such a barbaric act. "Voldemort and his other Death Eater stood and watched. Harry kept them entertained enough that they didn't have a go at torturing me. Harry would tear off some of my robes, and would then burn patterns into my skin. Then he would remove more of my clothes, and burn me some more. For four hours, he slowly burned me. He then stopped, and handed me over to the other Death Eater. I think he knew what time it was, and didn't want to be the one I was with when I was taken back."

"Did the other Death Eater harm you in any way?"

Cho shook her head. "He took me to a cell, then threw me in. He said he knew Harry was spying for you, but he needed proof for Voldemort. He was going to rape me, to get Harry's reaction as proof that he still felt feelings for me, and didn't follow the Dark Lord. But the portkey I swallowed brought me back; just as Voldemort walked in on us, and just before he assaulted me."

"Harry timed his theatrical torture of you well then."

Cho nodded. She looked under the light sheets at her scarred body. "I hope Harry comes back to us soon, then I can be healed."

Dumbledore nodded, releasing the silencing charm. "I also, Miss Chang, hope for Harry's safe return. For now, please accept my apologies for making you relive your ordeal, and try to submit to Poppy's ministrations with good grace."

Cho smiled at him. "Thank you, professor."

A rather huffy Madam Pomfrey stormed over. "May I now help the poor girl?" she demanded of the headmaster.

"Yes, Poppy. Thank you for your understanding." With a flick of his wand, Dumbledore levitated the two items he had removed from Cho's mouth. "Come, Snuffles, we have work to do."

The headmaster and large black dog left the infirmary, leaving a furious nurse to finally attempt to heal Cho's battered body.

Harry lay aching on his soft bed. After Cho had disappeared, Voldemort had flown into a rage. Lucius had been lucky to escape with his life, since he had been the last person with Cho before the portkey took her away. Harry had been next, after Lucius had lost consciousness, and had been placed under the Cruciatus curse several times.

It was while he was under the Unforgivable curse that Harry felt a large black pit in his mind, filled with the horrors of Azkaban. Oblivion had called, seducing him with its pleasant and enticing nothingness. Harry wanted to let go, to fall into the gaping chasm; it was only his memory of what happened to Neville's parents that prevented him from submitting to his desire.

It had threatened to swallow him, making him lose whatever shreds remained of his sanity. He had been tempted, the pain had been excruciating.

In truth, Harry was extremely worried about his mental health. Several times when he was painlessly branding Cho, he had to fight down the temptation to actually cause her pain.

Now, lying down in the comfort of his bed, Harry thought back, and felt a deep burning shame at his body's reaction to his naked girlfriend being branded. He had become erect near the beginning of Cho's ordeal, and for the full four hours, he had tried everything he could think of to keep himself from forcing himself onto her.

Was he sane, was anyone sane if they become aroused at causing pain in the person you loved?

Harry winced as he swallowed. Even that hurt. The only reason Voldemort had finally given up torturing Harry was because Harry managed to point out, between painful episodes, that he didn't know how to make a portkey, and that none of the books in his room gave him instructions.

Well, he wouldn't be here much longer. He had learned nearly all he thought he needed. In the practical fighting he did with the other Death Eater's recruits, he had excelled. Though he was younger and less experienced than the rest, Harry had managed to not only hold his own, but had become proficient. He was not the best, there were a pair of recruits who had been duelling experts, but he was proud of his accomplishments.

Harry looked at the time, and noticed that it was almost eleven o'clock. Forcing his aching body to its feet, Harry trudged over to his desk, and picked up his notebook and a quill. He made his way

back to his bed and lay down.

He opened the notebook, and from the lining, extracted a sheet of parchment he had enchanted earlier. Smiling at the recollection of the cooking shows his Aunt used to watch with the chefs on TV, Harry smoothed the enchanted sheet, and started to write on it.

*Professor Dumbledore?*

It had taken Dumbledore and Sirius half an hour to uncrumple the sheet of parchment Harry had hidden in Cho's mouth. They had been paranoid enough not to touch it, and had uncrumpled it using tiny summoning and banishing charms to unfold it.

Once flat, Sirius had cast a drying charm, to remove the last traces of Cho's saliva.

There was a single time written on the parchment, in Harry's handwriting. *11 pm.*

The pair now sat in the headmaster's office, waiting for the allotted time to arrive.

As Dumbledore's clock chimed out the hours, the parchment made a scratching noise, and writing appeared.

*Professor Dumbledore?*

Sirius looked at Dumbledore, who nodded. He picked up a quill and replied.

*No, this is Snuffles.*

*Sirius! How is Cho?*

*She is fine, Harry, though the burns you gave her are not healing.*

*They won't. Not until I give her some phoenix tears.*

*We know. Albus knows the curse. How are you?*

*OK, V wasn't too happy with Cho's disappearance. He put most of us under the Cruciatus.*

*Us?*

*The Death Eaters and the recruits. Are you ready for names?*

*Yes.*

Harry's parchment began listing the names of all the Death Eaters, and all the recruits he had seen. The look of triumph in Dumbledore's eyes returned at this intelligence.

*Any more, Harry?*

*There are a couple of people who aren't Death Eaters, but are higher in rank than the recruits. Narcissa Malfoy for one.*

*Any others?*

*Only another of my instructors here. I still don't know his name, though he looks like Macnair. Younger brother or cousin I'd guess.*

*Instructors?*

*I'm being taught here. Potions is fun, Narcissa teaches me that. According to her notes I am nearly rivalling Snape at my age, though I have a way to go before getting as good as my mother.*

*She shows you her notes?*

*I didn't say that...*

*Dumbledore shook his head. "It would appear that even the son of a Marauder is more than a match for the Dark Lord's minions when it comes to sheer deviousness.*

*Sirius gave him a grin and turned back to the parchment.*

*Your mother was one of the most brilliant potions students in Hogwarts' history, along with Draco's mother. She and Narcissa had a rivalry similar to yours with Draco, and they competed with their potion skills.*

*So Draco's mother and mine hated each other, and our fathers hated each other too. I suppose it stands to reason we were never going to be friends.*

*Harry, Cho told us that the Death Eater who took her to the dungeon knows you are spying for us.*

*Malfoy. I think 'suspects' would be a better term. Maybe 'hopes' would be even more accurate. Until today, V has been very happy with my performance.*

*Happy?*

*With my progress. He even thought my idea to stake out Hogsmeade last night was a good idea. Wormtail messed up.*

*Why did you warn them about me?*

*I saw you in the shadows. There was a scheduled sweep of the ground coming up in a few minutes, I had to warn you away.*

*Oh. Hogsmeade was your idea?*

*Yes, I wanted to try to talk to you, or even pass a message to you, but I didn't see you at all.*

*I tried convincing Albus to split the defences between the ministry and the Three Broomsticks because of you.*

*Good thing you didn't, V was in a rage when he got back from the ministry.*

*That is good news, we only lost three aurors, and captured a dozen of Voldemort's minions.*

*Sorry for the loss. Tell me, did you capture a girl, dark curly hair, dark eyes and pale skin. Badly injured?*

*Sirius looked up at the headmaster. Dumbledore frowned and nodded.*

*Yes, why?*

*V did that to her before the raid. I don't really want to talk about it. Suffice to say that I'm glad she is out of his hands.*

*How long can we talk like this?*

*Til midnight. It is a one shot, so after tonight, it will go blank and unmagical.*

*You couldn't make it permanent?*

*Of course, but this discussion can be detected and read at a later stage if it is permanent.*

*But then we could talk at other times.*

*Not necessary.*

*Why?*

*I'll be out of here soon.*

*Where is here?*

*Somewhere in London.*

*London? Are you sure?*

*Saw a window once. Recognised the skyline.*

*Can you describe the view?*

*Far right of view had a large gate, made of vertical bars in the shape of an arch. Oriented so I saw it almost side on. It opened onto a park. They were high bars, gold tips. Very near this building.*

*OK.*

*Central view was of a large park, lots of people.*

*In London? That doesn't help much.*

*About halfway to the left, a large arch, but further away. I think I remember it from primary school. Wellington's arch.*

Dumbledore created a map of London on one of the walls of his study with a wave. Looking for Wellington's arch, he found it at the intersection of Hyde park and Green Park. Rolling his head from shoulder to shoulder, Dumbledore tried to determine what Harry's point of view was. In an instant, Dumbledore's eyes widened in shock. "He's here. Right here."

Sirius looked up and paled at what Dumbledore was pointing to. "If Voldemort has infiltrated them..."

"We may have more trouble than we expected."

Sirius went straight back to writing to Harry.

*We know where you are now.*

*Really? I didn't think I saw enough to pinpoint my location.*

*Harry, you are in Buckingham Palace.*

For almost a minute, no writing appeared from Harry.

*Harry?*

*I'm here. That actually makes sense.*

*What do you mean?*

*The room I've been given in is fit for royalty. I actually thought that myself after moving in, without making the connection.*

*Harry if you are in Buckingham Palace, then the Royal family may be supporting Voldemort.*

*Don't think so. We are pretty tightly controlled. More likely is that they have been charmed to ignore this wing, and since the Ministry leaves the Royals alone, it is the perfect hiding place for V.*

*We need to get you out of there, before we raid the place.*

*As I told Cho, I'll go when I'm ready. There are still things I need to learn.*

*When?*



*Soon. But I need you to get some things for me.*

*How are you going to get these things from us?*

*Leave them in the cave where you and Buckbeak stayed. I'll get them once I'm out of here.*

*What do you need?*

Harry started listing items, nearly all of them muggle made, and non magical. Dumbledore made a list on a separate sheet.

*Got it Harry, just one question.*

*Yes?*

*What the hell is fluoric acid?*

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## Betrayal of the Best Kind Plan

### Plan

Arthur Weasley arrived home in a burst of green flame. The Burrow was, as usual, quiet and cluttered but immaculate. Well, it was only like this when the younger children were at Hogwarts, but it was normal for at least ten months of the year. Even the ghoul in the attic didn't seem as loud now as when the children were home, probably because it didn't have to compete with the constant explosions coming from the twin's room.

Arthur sighed. The twins had moved out a couple of months ago. He kept forgetting. Even Molly seemed to think there was something missing from the home, though she said she didn't miss their pranks. He grinned at the memory of his wife sobbing over a photo album full of the results of jokes the twins had pulled over the years. He didn't believe her for a minute.

Things had been hectic at work for the past day, the ministry had found out about an assault planned on the offices by Voldemort, and had fought off the Dark Lord just over twenty-four hours ago.

The interim Minister of Magic heard voices from the sitting room. One voice he would recognise anywhere was that of his beloved wife. Another was vaguely familiar, tickling some distant memory. Finally, the ever calm and gentle voice of Albus Dumbledore reached his ears. He frowned; it was past three in the morning, what were Albus and his companion doing here?

"Good morning, Molly. I'm sorry I'm so late, but work was jus-" he said entering the room. His voice failed him as he saw, sitting next to the headmaster, Sirius Black. All three turned to face him in the doorway, and stood up.

Arthur looked to both his wife and former Professor, now advisor. Though many had dismissed Arthur as a bit slow for his obsession with muggle artefacts, he was anything but stupid. "Mr. Black. From the company you are in, it would appear my wife has been keeping secrets from me. I trust you are aware that I am required to place you under arrest." Looking at Dumbledore's amused expression he continued, "But I've had a really busy day at work, would you mind if I didn't bother with that for now? I just want to put my feet up for a while."

With a brilliant smile, the first person ever to escape from Azkaban replied, "Not at all. I'd be delighted to be arrested by such a civilised person. Please, make yourself comfortable, and I shall

place myself at your disposal when you are fully rested."

"Arthur, I'm sorry I have kept this from you," his wife said.

"How long have you known his whereabouts?"

"Molly didn't know anything of Sirius' location, Arthur. Remember I told you of an operative of mine with a special gift for infiltration and espionage?" Dumbledore asked.

"Of course, you were always so insistent that I not know the man's identity. I think it is safe to assume that Mr. Black here is your mystery agent."

"Indeed. Sirius has been working with me since the end of Mr. Potter's fourth year and the events of the Triwizard Tournament. Molly was in the hospital ward with Mr. Potter's friends and my Potions master when he revealed himself. They were the only people who knew he was working for me."

"What of his crimes? No disrespect to your decisions Albus, but recruiting criminals will not make our job easier if this information is released."

"If I may, Albus?" Sirius interrupted. Dumbledore nodded. "Mr. Weasley, I was sent to Azkaban without benefit of a trial. Even a simple chance to tell my story would have exonerated me."

Arthur nodded. "Very well. I'd like to know the facts."

Sirius and Albus spent the next half hour explaining to the Weasleys the true events of the Potter's last days, of Pettigrew's escape and framing Sirius for the murders, and of his escape and activities since. "I asked Molly to keep this from you because I need you to be able to deny all knowledge should Sirius be seen in our presence or captured."

Arthur waved away the explanation. "I understand the reasons, Albus. It was not necessary for me to know at the time. Since you have rather spectacularly made the rest of my day seem dull and uninteresting in comparison to the last half hour, I assume that something has changed that requires Mr. Black's presence to be known to me."

Dumbledore nodded, and passed a sheet of parchment to him. Arthur looked at the list of names. Some were known Death Eaters, others suspected of involvement with Voldemort. A couple were operatives of the Department of Mysteries. About half were unknown to him. He looked at Dumbledore, eyes questioning.

"That is a complete list of Death Eaters, and other willing participants to the Dark Lord's plans."

That simple statement made Arthur's heart race. "If this is true, have you any idea how long we have been searching for this information?"

"It is true, Arthur. A recent recruit of Voldemort's has been able to pass us this information. Along with another big bonus. The Dark Lord's location. His London residence."

"His what?"

"His headquarters. Nothing short of his Headquarters."

"Where?" Arthur whispered in shock.

"The north wing of Buckingham Palace."

Arthur blinked. "Out of respect for the crown, no ministry, magic or otherwise, interferes with the Royal family." he said softly, realisation dawning. "They have a perfect base of operations."

"Indeed. Quite ingenious."

Arthur nodded. "Can you tell me the name of this recent recruit? Can we trust this person?"

"I believe so, as do Sirius and Molly for that matter."

"Molly knows who it is?"

"Yes, we informed her this evening."

Arthur sat back in his chair. "I have a feeling I know who it is too, and I'm not happy about it."

Dumbledore nodded. "Mr. Potter."

"And I'm not happy. Albus, he willingly joined the Dark Lord, he stood between the pair of you and made his choice. You yourself told me that you thought he'd sold out."

"It appears I was premature in my assessment of the situation. Mr. Potter used a phrase at the scene I neglected to tell Sirius here about. When it came up in conversation, it became apparent that Mr. Potter did indeed mean to infiltrate and spy for us."

"Not only that, Harry managed to warn me away from one of my stakeouts, before I was captured." Sirius said. "He also managed to organise a split in Voldemort's forces on the night of the Ministry assault, tricking him into sending six of his minions to go to Hogsmeade. If Voldemort had six extra wands at his disposal that night, the result would have been different."

Arthur reluctantly nodded. "True. I'd really like to believe you. I'd like nothing more than for Harry to be really on our side. But after how we treated him, and how he reacted to the mission to capture him, I just don't know if his information can be trusted. I don't blame the boy if he has in fact left us."

"He can be trusted, Arthur." Dumbledore said. "Last night a student was captured by Pettigrew and taken back to London."

Arthur's eyes widened. "No!"

Dumbledore held up his hand. "She is fine, and has returned. One of Sirius' recent inventions is a portkey that transports the user twelve hours after activation. You swallow the portkey, and your body's aura masks the magic. It cannot be detected, and as such, will always bring you back home."

Arthur nodded his head in Sirius's direction. "Keep this up, and I may wait a few decades before arresting you."

"I appreciate it." Sirius replied with a grin. "But the intelligence that student brought back reinforces the evidence that Harry is in fact working for us. He did everything in his power to keep her safe until the portkey brought her home."

"Very well. Did Harry give you any other details of the Dark Lord's plans? Does Harry himself have any sabotage planned?" Arthur asked.

"No to both. Harry is being trained by Voldemort. He is being taught dark and combat magic. Harry told us that he still had things to learn. That he was going to leave on his own terms, on his own timetable." Dumbledore gave a great sigh. "I fear I know what he is planning, and I am very worried about him."

Sirius gave the headmaster a surprised look. "You think you know what he is planning? He didn't tell us that!"

Dumbledore nodded gravely. Arthur interrupted.

"Excuse me? Harry told you? You have spoken to him?"

Dumbledore shook his head. "Harry managed to slip the captured student a piece of parchment he had enchanted. Harry retained its twin. Using both at a specified time, we were able to converse, writing messages to each other. More proof that the boy is learning fast."

"Did he have anything else to say?"

"Not much. He gave us the list of names, asked for a list of objects to be acquired and left at a certain location, and then enquired into the wellbeing of his friends. After that, the time ran out, and the parchment burst into flames."

Arthur stood up. "I will contact the head of the Department of Mysteries. Get him to organise wards set up to cover Buckingham palace. If the Dark Lord is there, then we need more intelligence on his capabilities."

Molly stood too. "Contact him if you want, but after that you are going to bed! You need your rest Arthur, you haven't slept in nearly two days."

"I'd do as she says." said Sirius. "If her daughter is anything like her, you'd know not to argue with her."

Both Weasleys turned to face Sirius with eyebrows raised. "You've met Ginny?" Arthur asked.

Sirius nodded. "Gave me a black eye after I politely introduced myself. She's not too ladylike when she gets angry."

Arthur grinned. "That's my girl. Only Ginny would thump a fugitive. You know that everyone of her brothers is wary of her temper."

"I'm not surprised. Once you have the wards in place, and you confirm that it is in fact Voldemort's HQ, what will you do?"

Arthur's grin vanished. "We will need to conduct the raid very carefully, preferably under the cover of night. Some aversion charms should keep the muggles away, though that in itself may be suspicious."

Dumbledore nodded and stood. "We should leave you to it, Arthur. Good luck, and let me know if there is anything I can do for you."

Molly spoke up. "Albus, are you sure you wouldn't like something to eat before leaving?"

"Molly my dear, as much as I'd love to indulge your instinct to feed everything, man or beast, that enters your home, I'm afraid I must decline. Your husband has people to speak to, and will probably need some gentle encouragement to get some rest."

"Thank you, Albus. Do come again soon."

"I will. Thank you Arthur for your time."

Arthur waved the comment away. "I'd be delighted for people to give me news this good at any time of day."

Later that night, as Arthur was just finally drifting off to sleep, he realised that he never asked Dumbledore exactly what he thought Harry was planning.

Harry gently mixed two potions together. He had experimented with various different mixtures, something inherently dangerous in itself, hoping that this final combination would work to his satisfaction.

For once, the mixture did not bubble up and spread a thick, corrosive goo over his workbench. The elves had been getting irritated with him, so much so that he actually heard one sigh when he asked it to clean up the mess for the fiftieth time.

Carefully, Harry picked up the cauldron and slowly carried it over to where he had placed some carefully created containers. Harry spent the next hour siphoning off small amounts of the potion mixture and filling the tiny containers.

Once finished, he again summoned the elves and got them to clean up. A quick shower later and

Harry collapsed into his bed, exhausted and mentally drained. Only a few more days to go, and he would be gone from this place.

As usual, Harry was soon caught up in a nightmare from which he could not awake.

Lucius watched as the boy climbed into his bed. Once more, Harry had waited until after midnight before working on a project in secret. Lucius had documented Harry's nocturnal activities for the last week, watching him from the scrying crystal ball.

Harry had risen in the Dark Lord's favour quickly. Voldemort had decided that the boy should be inducted into the inner circle of Death Eaters soon. That hadn't sat well with most of the other Death Eaters, especially Malfoy and Wormtail.

The Dark Lord had initially wanted to use Potter, teach him flawed ideas, and then turn him loose. With the ministry after him, wanting to return him to Azkaban, he would have fought with everything he had, weakening the ministry's forces.

Now, Voldemort had decided that with his performance and apparent loyalty, Potter should be given the mark.

Lucius had voiced his opinion to the idea, but had been unable to produce any evidence to support his claim. Every one of Potter's actions could be interpreted as loyal service, or a very desperate spy. Watching him torture that girl had been an experience. It had almost convinced him that Potter was indeed loyal, until he saw the compassion in the boy's green eyes.

Voldemort had been most displeased with Lucius at that bitch's escape. Lucius himself had checked her for magic, and had found none. His leg still twitched constantly, a vivid reminder of the pain he had been subjected to. Potter was to blame, he was sure.

The problem was that Potter was right; there was no way he could have learned to make a portkey. All forms of magical travel charms and information had been removed from Potter's library. Besides, Voldemort himself had seen the fact that Lucius had been holding her just before her disappearance. Not a good impression by any means.

Now, Lucius simply watched, and made notes. Soon he would have enough to bring before the Dark Lord, showing him that Potter may not be what he seems. Just a few more days, and he'd be able to show that Potter was a traitor.

*The two Harrys watched Cho's struggling form. One tried to comfort her, calm her, hold and love her. The other took glee in burning the poor girl, marking her forever.*

*Cho thrashed as one of the Harrys wand etched her skin, the sizzling and popping of burnt flesh echoing in the small room.*

*The other Harry watched in dismay, and did what he could to comfort her. But he didn't stop the torture from taking place. He couldn't. No matter what he did, the other Harry was able to*

*continue to hurt Cho.*

*Cho looked at the Harry causing her pain. "I love you." she whispered.*

*That Harry grinned, and burned his initials into her chest.*

*Cho turned to look at the other Harry. "I hate you." she said, in the same voice he heard on the cliff top.*

Harry desperately wanted to wake from this nightmare, but something inside him wanted to keep watching, becoming aroused, excited. Nothing could keep him from watching the sight of that beautiful girl contorted in pain.

He had to do something. Something that would fix things for everyone. For good.

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## Betrayal of the Best Kind Flee

Flee

"My Lord! There is something you need to see."

Voldemort looked up at Lucius Malfoy. "It had better be important, Malfoy. I dislike being interrupted."

"Only treason, my Lord."

Voldemort leapt to his feet. "Who?"

"See for yourself, my Lord." Lucius said, and passed a mirror to his master.

The Dark Lord peered into the rather dainty hand mirror, watching the scene of Harry Potter emptying the shelves of his room into a backpack. "Damning, and something that will require Potter to explain his actions, but hardly treasonous."

"Potter has been brewing potions without the supervision of my wife. I am curious as to why he feels it necessary to keep things from you."

Voldemort gave his longest serving minion a steady look. "I know you feel that Potter has never been as loyal as he should be. You have warned me before of possible inconsistencies in his behaviour. For that, I'll let you question him."

"Thank you, my Lord."

Harry stuffed the last book into his enchanted bag. Looking around, the empty shelves and potion cabinet looked almost forlorn. He hefted his bag onto his shoulder, grunting a little under the weight. One last check of his pockets, and Harry summoned the elves.

They looked confused at all being summoned at once, but all stood silently as Harry rummaged through his wardrobe.

Their confusion turned to dismay as Harry passed each of them a robe. "Don't worry. This is just to get you out of here. I want you all to go to Hogwarts, ask to speak to Professor Dumbledore."

The expression on the faces of the elves went from dismay to terror. Harry realised that asking these elves to approach a wizard was a frightening concept.

"If you don't feel you can talk to him, ask to speak to Dobby or Winky, they're house elves too. They'll make sure you can work at Hogwarts, it is the best place for a house elf. Imagine, mess everywhere, and three meals a day need to be cooked for one thousand people. There is even a poltergeist there who throws water balloons around. You'd have to clean it all up, and the best thing is that no one will hit you. Hell, no one would even see you."

The looks of delight crossed the features of all the elves. Dressed in their new robes, they snapped their fingers and disappeared, presumably to go to visit Dumbledore.

Smiling at the obvious joy he had given the elves, Harry gave his room one last look. He had created a backpack that was larger on the inside than the outside, combined with a major lightening charm. With it, he could literally pack the entire contents of the room, and carry it on his back.

Harry opened his door and looked up and down the corridor. Removing a pair of tiny flasks of the potion mixture he had finally created correctly a couple of nights ago, Harry opened the flasks, and poured one into the other. He then placed the full flask gently but strategically behind the door. For the mixture to be explosive, it needed double the amount held in one small flask. Harry smiled to himself. His own invention was safe to carry, and deadly to use.

Making his way down the dimly lit corridor, Harry was startled by voices from behind him. Ducking behind one of the suits or armour, Harry peaked through the chinks in the metal plates and gaped at the sight.

Voldemort and a handful of Death Eaters has come from the opposite direction and stood outside Harry's door, less than twenty feet away. Harry recognised Lucius Malfoy from the wand one of the Death Eaters carried. The wand was levelled at the door.

Harry covered his ears. The concussion wave knocked the suit of armour over and on top of him. He felt the various pieces of metal armour land around him, bouncing off his head and shoulders.

Leaping to his feet, Harry fought off a momentary wave of dizziness. Voldemort and his cronies were lying in front of him, stunned, but not unconscious. He turned and bolted just seconds before he heard his name shouted. A white-hot curse grazed his arm as he ran.

This was not how he expected his escape to start.

Wormtail watched with anticipation as Lucius drew his wand and aimed it at the door to Potter's room. James' son had embarrassed him several times since Voldemort offered him a place at the Dark Lord's side. Now Wormtail looked forward to payback.

As Lucius' curse hit the door and blew it open, Wormtail had a faint premonition that something was very wrong. He watched as the wall around the door exploded and hurled him backward into

the opposite wall. Just as the sound of the explosion registered in his mind, blackness overtook him.

Macnair raced down the richly furnished corridor, towards the explosion that shook the wing. Ahead at the sharp right turn, Potter appeared, running the other way. He was running so fast that he bounced off the left wall, making a complete turn, unable to make the corner completely at his speed. The backpack he carried seemed to be weighing him down. Blood ran down his face from a couple of cuts in his scalp, and splattered his clothes

"Watch... out! Min...is...try... raid!" he shouted between ragged breaths as he passed the Death Eater.

Macnair sneered at the rapidly retreating back of the boy. He was supposed to be a Gryffindor? The Death Eater faced the corridor's turn, hearing several wizards running towards the bend from the other direction. He raised his wand and prepared to show that coward what a Death Eater was made of.

Macnair's first curse crashed into the wizard that first rounded the bend, laying him flat. His second and third also found their mark, before his Master's furious magical assault lifted him off his feet and sent him flying back down the corridor towards the vanishing figure of Harry Potter.

Harry had no idea how his instinctive blurted claim of a ministry assault affected the chase. He had seen Macnair, and the idea just popped into his head. Hopefully, Macnair would slow the other Death Eaters down. For now, Harry simply ran. The corridors he ran down did not look familiar, nor did they appear to open onto any room with windows to the outside.

There was a stairwell coming up, and a T-intersection in the corridor. Which way should he run?

Shouts coming from the direction he was running towards. Harry couldn't tell from which direction after the intersection ahead the voices were coming from. Well, that left up.

Launching himself up the marble staircase four steps at a time, Harry was silently thankful for the physical training he had been forced to go through for the last couple of months. He rounded the top of the stairs, and fled down yet another corridor. There had to be a room with a window somewhere around here.

Think, Harry, think! Where are you? Right, north wing of Buckingham Palace. Not helpful. Wait, yes it was!

Mentally slapping himself, Harry drew his wand and cast the spell he used in the third task, charming his wand to point due north.

The wand pointed directly to his left. A corridor wall. Harry silently cursed and continued to run down the empty hall. Up ahead, there a door in the left-hand wall! Reaching it as Death Eaters appeared at both ends of the corridor, Harry prayed that the room within would have a window.

Bursting through the door, Harry's heart dropped. It was an enormous ballroom, doors on all four walls.

Harry sprinted directly across the room, his shoes sounding remarkably loud on the polished floor. He was less than two strides from the door in the opposite wall when it opened, Wormtail appearing in the way, blood running down his face, his expression changing to one of anger to surprise.

Harry lifted his elbows, and crashed into his parent's betrayer, knocking him over. Harry made sure he trod heavily on the Death Eater's face for good measure as he sped on, into the new corridor.

At least this corridor had several doors. Harry reached the closest one and wrenched it open. A vista of high, arched windows greeted him. Through them, Harry could see the lights of the London skyline.

With a yell of triumph, Harry ran straight at the window. He was halfway across the room when he swung the bag off his shoulder and hurled it at the window. The heavy bag smashed through the window, taking out several panes of glass. Harry leapt through after the bag and transformed in mid leap. Diving down, he grasped the bag in his claws before it hit the ground, and with powerful beats of his wings, a beautiful phoenix sped north. Faster than even magical eyes could see, he was gone from sight in an instant.

Seconds later, several robed people burst through the door, firing curses and hexes to all corners of the room. One stormed to the broken window, and looked down, expecting to see the body of a young man lying on the ground below. All he saw was the uniformed members of Her Majesty's personal bodyguards, running around below. Amusing as it was to see them befuddled by the anti-muggle charms on the wing, the serpent-featured man didn't laugh.

Snapping his head from side to side, Voldemort couldn't make out even a simple escape route Potter could have taken. He turned to Wormtail, who was flinching from his Master's almost incandescent rage.

"Bring Macnair to me. I want to find out why he was protecting Potter," he snarled.

"Yes, my Lord!" Wormtail screeched, and bolted. He was inordinately glad to be out of the Dark Lord's sight.

"Oh, Wormtail?" Voldemort's deceptively calm voice said.

The short Death Eater was almost at the door, but stupidly turned around to face his Master.

*"Crucio!"*

For several seconds, Peter Pettigrew thrashed on the floor in agony.

"That is for letting Potter through your fingers twice tonight," Voldemort said after releasing his

servant from the curse.

"Yes, my Lord!" Wormtail gasped, desperately trying to regain his breath.

"Master! We must flee!" Avery shouted, entering the room.

"What? I want Potter. I'm going nowhere."

"No, Master. The ministry! It's a raid!"

Arthur Weasley was a satisfied man. He had an absolutely wonderful wife, who he thought was the greatest woman in the world. He had seven children, all of whom he loved to distraction. From casual Bill and danger-loving Charlie, to serious and studious Percy. Fun-loving Fred and George, who of course did try his patience at times, and Ron, who seemed to be a combination of all his brothers. And Ginevra, dear little Ginny, his beloved daughter, he doted on her, he would have spoiled her rotten if he had the chance.

Now, the interim Minister of Magic sat at his office after a particularly productive evening, feet on the massive oak desk, leaning back in his chair, hands clasped behind his head. The self-satisfied smile on his face made him appear a decade younger.

Harry Potter, he thought, you are the greatest gift to the wizarding world.

Since his (very) early morning discussion with Dumbledore and Sirius Black, Arthur had organised secret and subtle wards to be extended over the whole of Green Park, and overlapping Buckingham Palace. At once, magical activity was recorded, most of it dark in origin.

It only took a few hours to gather enough evidence to organise a raid, and only two days to organise that raid. In a massive yet discrete operation, hundreds of Ministry officials deployed themselves to Buckingham Palace, and launched an assault on the headquarters of the Dark Lord.

From the start, it was obvious that the Death Eaters within were distracted. Only moments before signalling the start of the raid, those on the scene heard a massive blast from the north wing. With the Queen's personal regiment on the scene in seconds from their barracks across a street, all physical escape routes were sealed.

Fighting had been sporadic at best. Many rooms, crammed to the ceiling with damning dark objects, were found, all without guards. That explosion, which the muggle press was speculating was a terrorist attack, had caused all of Voldemort's forces to leave their posts, leaving them hopelessly out-manoeuvred during the Ministry's assault.

It was quite apparent from early on that the Death Eaters were not going to win this encounter. With only two days preparation, no word of the raid had managed to leak back to Voldemort's ears.

Quite unexpectedly, the muggle soldiers had forced the dark wizards within to use magical means to escape.

Except that with the new extended wards, apparation and portkey usage could be tracked and traced.

Over half a dozen safe houses and hideouts had been identified. Tens of millions of galleons worth of magical items, equipment and funds had been impounded. At least a third of the people on Harry's list had been arrested or killed. Only two aurors had been injured in the raid, one had been showered with glass from a breaking window and was being treated for multiple cuts, the other had tripped and fallen down a flight of stairs, spraining his ankle, for Merlin's sake.

Reporters had been in the Ministry head office when they started bringing those captured in. Even Rita Skeeter, vengeful parasite that she was, had been rendered speechless at the astounding success of the evening's raid. He had felt a warm glow at the faces of the assembly, as one after the other, a seemingly never-ending line of Voldemort's supporters had been traipsed through the building.

Yes, Arthur Weasley was a very satisfied man.

Harry flared his wings and slowed to a hover, dropped his bag and transformed. The feeling of joy at flying for the first time in months still flooded through him, giving him a smile he was sure that not even the Cruciatus curse could wipe off.

He had flown due north from London, without looking back. His sharp eyes had managed to pick out all sorts of details on his journey, useful sites he would need to investigate further.

For now, Harry looked around the rocky cavern where Sirius and Buckbeak had stayed during Harry's fourth year. It was almost completely undisturbed, Harry could even make out the distinctive tracks of a hippogriff in the dirt floor.

In one corner, there was a large container, covered in a tatty blanket. Harry felt his eyes grow unfocused and had difficulty thinking about it. Shaking his head to clear out the feeling of lethargy, he realised that Dumbledore must have placed an aversion charm on it. If he didn't know it should have been here, Harry doubted he would have seen it.

Harry moved over and was about to remove the dirty blanket, when he stopped, arm outstretched. Thinking quickly, Harry spent several minutes setting up some short term anti-apparition jinxes. Small scale, they extended little further than twenty metres from the cave entrance, and would last little more than an hour. Still, it would give him enough time should anyone try and ambush him.

Harry smiled wryly to himself, mouthing the words 'constant vigilance'. He wondered if the real Moody was this paranoid at his age. He doubted it, this sort of paranoia comes from everyone really being out to get you.

Harry removed the blanket, and felt the aversion charm being broken. Harry made his way to the cave mouth and waited to ensure he didn't need to flee.

Several minutes later, Harry went back into the cave to examine the contents. A letter from Sirius

and a quill were placed on top of the carefully wrapped packages inside.

*Bambi,*

*I hope you manage to read this. I worried myself silly after you decided to infiltrate those bastards. The old man didn't tell me what you said as you left, so thought you'd actually joined him.*

*I've got no idea why you want all these weird things, or what you intend to do with them. I didn't recognise most of the stuff, that fluoric acid is bloody potent, eh? Next time you see the greasy git, don't be too upset if he's a little pissed at you. For someone who knows all about handling dangerous liquids, he squeals like a girl when something eats through his shoes.*

*A special friend of yours wanted me to thank you on her behalf, for taking such good care of her recently. There's someone here who resembles you occasionally who is ready to cry for you, I'm sure you can use that.*

*If you can, come by and visit. I'm still here, though a rather high ranking minister now has been introduced to a large dog. I doubt we'll need to keep the dog hidden from the world much longer.*

*You are safe where you are, since a grand total of two people know your whereabouts. Four others are interested, one especially wants to meet you. Prongs was a bit of a ladies man himself, but he never had three beautiful girls desperate to hug him at once. Lucky lad.*

*Once you open this letter, an owl will be on its way. If you want privacy, just send it back, but please tell us how you are.*

*Snuffles*

Harry read through the letter a couple of times. Cho wanted to thank him? She had been hurt and scarred, and almost raped because of him. Hermione and Ginny wanted to hug him? He had rendered both of them unconscious the last time they met.

Harry hoped that Sirius was telling the truth. Not that he thought that Sirius would ever lie to him, but he may have been given false information.

No, he had better write to his godfather, but tell him not to let anyone come near. That would be too dangerous. With any luck, there would be an end to this once and for all.

Harry turned the parchment over, and picked up the quill and began to write.

*Dear Snuffles,*

*I wasn't going to write, but I need to let you know that I am now OK. I left tonight, I even managed to take a small amount of revenge for you. (Not full revenge of course, but if you see Wormtail before I do, ask if the boot print on his face hurt much. I slammed my elbow into his nose too, so he may have trouble with sibilant sounds now, don't laugh too much.)*

*I learned a lot over the last few months. Not much of it would be useful in a peaceful world, but I'll put it to good use soon. With any luck, things will finally be at an end for the world, and you can go have puppies.*

*Don't worry about me, I'm not staying here. I won't endanger you or my friends like that. Please give this vial to my special friend, along with my heartfelt apologies. I wish I'd never brought her back with me that night.*

*There isn't much more to say. I have been proud to know you, and I hope you have been proud of me.*

*Please do not try to contact me. I doubt you will ever see me again, there is just one last thing for me to do.*

*Harry.*

Harry put down the quill, and a snowy owl drifted in.

"Hedwig!" Harry exclaimed. His snowy friend landed on his shoulder and nipped his ear. "I have a letter for you. Just wait a moment."

Harry looked in the chest of goodies, and extracted an empty fist-sized vial. He spent the next half hour crying into it as a phoenix.

Harry tied the letter and vial to Hedwig's leg. He traced the tips of his fingers over Hedwig's beautiful feathers. "Farewell girl. Do me a favour, and take care of Hermione. She needs to be able to write to people, and you are the only owl around intelligent enough to give her a run for her money."

Hedwig just stared at her owner. Harry remembered all the times he only had her to talk to while stuck at the Dursleys. "Thank you girl, I'll miss you."

Without waiting for Hedwig to leave, Harry turned back to the chest of items he requested, and began to charm the contents, beginning with the Snape-eating fluoric acid.

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## **Betrayal of the Best Kind**

### **Meet**

Meet

It was early morning when Sirius and Dumbledore looked up and watched as Hedwig floated into the headmaster's office on silent wings. Harry's owl clutched a large vial in her claws, and had a letter tied to her leg. Sirius' excitement level dropped when he saw the sadness in the snowy owl's large eyes.

Dumbledore watched Sirius' face as he read the letter. A broad smile appeared initially, but he quickly became serious, and even a little frightened.

"What is it?" Dumbledore asked.

Without answering, Sirius threw the letter to him. "I have to go to him, Albus! He's not planning on returning, ever."

Dumbledore quickly scanned the letter. The headmaster stood, and looked Sirius in the eye. "He has specifically requested that you not contact him."

The look on Harry's godfather's face showed his obvious betrayal. Before he could make a word of protest, however, Dumbledore continued.

"He has said nothing of his other friends, however." Dumbledore picked up the fist-sized vial Harry had sent. "Since he has gone out of his way to acquire a truly remarkable amount of phoenix tears, it appears that he still has feelings for Miss. Chang." Dumbledore stared into the depths of the pearly, viscous liquid. "An incredible amount of phoenix tears. Yet another mystery young Mr. Potter has given us. If I didn't know better..."

Dumbledore regarded Sirius out of the corner of his eye. Sirius looked uncomfortable at Dumbledore's train of thought.

"So we, ah, get Cho to meet him? I'll go get her," Sirius said quickly, and sped to the door.

Dumbledore held up an ancient hand. "Just a moment, Sirius."

Harry's godfather stood at the door, obviously wanting to leave.

"Harry managed to escape from Azkaban. Managed to make his way from one end of the country to the other, in a short space of time. He cannot apparate. Doesn't use a portkey, or at least, doesn't use one with a traceable signature. He survived falling off a cliff. Now, less than a few hours after a raid on Voldemort's headquarters in London, where he was known to be staying, Harry has made his way to a cave near Hogsmeade, escaping detection when one of the most powerful wizards of all time didn't manage to."

Sirius swallowed. "Your point?"

"And now," Dumbledore continued, as if Sirius hadn't spoken. "Harry appears to have given Miss Chang the largest amount of phoenix tears I, or any other wizard in history for that matter, has ever seen in one place, which I must assume he has been given willingly." Dumbledore looked straight at Sirius. "He has a phoenix as a familiar too, doesn't he?"

Sirius smiled at the headmaster and gave a great sigh, feeling his heart rate slow in relief. "Very good, Albus. I am impressed. You are almost completely wrong, but that was a very good interpretation of events."

Sirius transformed and left the office, leaving an extremely baffled and bemused headmaster behind.

Dumbledore turned to his own phoenix. "Fawkes, that is one of the most irritating wizards I have ever had the opportunity to meet." He stood deep in thought for a moment. "Yes, even the Weasley twins don't irritate me that much."

Fawkes looked at his master, fluffed his wings, and shook his beautifully plumed head. Fawkes gave Dumbledore a trill of agreement.

Dumbledore turned and looked towards the doorway through which Sirius had just left. "Another thing, what in Merlin's name did he mean by 'almost completely wrong'?"

Since being discharged from the hospital wing following her return from Voldemort's lair, Cho had made it her habit to rise earlier than all her friends. It was the only way she could bathe in peace, without having the other female prefects gasping at her body.

Only Hermione had treated her with anything other than pity. Cho thought it interesting that while the other prefects had tried to sneak surreptitious glances at her scarred body, Hermione had insisted on examining her scars daily, in minute detail, to ensure they didn't get infected.

Cho sighed at the thought. Madam Pomfrey had been at her wit's end trying to heal the burns. Nothing had worked. It appeared that Harry's research into the branding curse was excellent, and that the brands could only be healed by the tears of a phoenix, willing given to and given by the brander. Ironic that an ancient curse could defy all modern magic healing methods.

Cho reached the female prefect's bathroom. Whispering the password, she entered the well appointed room. From Harry's stories about the events of the Triwizard Tournament, she could tell

that this room was an exact mirror image of the male prefect's bathroom. The deep bath in the floor looked very inviting, but Cho knew she only had a limited time before the other prefects started arriving.

She made her way over to a shower, and turned on the tap. Checking the temperature of the water with her hand, Cho nodded in satisfaction and proceeded to undress. She folded her clothes and then entered the blasting water. Cho winced as the warm spray hit her still tender skin, though that was more pain than she felt when Harry had initially given her the brands.

A loud bark from behind her made her scream in alarm. Cho spun round to see a large, black dog, standing inside the door and looking at her with its tongue hanging out the side of its mouth.

Cho snatched a towel and covered herself. "What the hell do you think you are doing?" she hissed at Harry's godfather.

Sirius trotted around the bath and transformed with an enormous grin on his face. "What? You don't remember how you arrived back? It's nothing I haven't seen before."

"Shut it you." Cho said, wrapping the towel round her slim frame and tying it securely. "What is so important that you need to spy on a teenage girl in the shower?"

The grin hadn't left his face. "You think something needs to be important for any man to want to do that?"

"I can call Ginny around, I'm sure she'd just love to give you a matching eye."

"Yes, well," Sirius said as he straightened his clothes and tried to look serious. "I got a letter from Harry this morning, he has left Voldemort's employ. Rather spectacularly I understand."

"Is he alright?"

Sirius nodded, then frowned and shook his head. "The fact that he wrote a letter means that he is physically fine, but the contents make me think otherwise. Oh, he included a gift for you."

Cho frowned. "A gift? For me?"

Sirius nodded. "The biggest container of phoenix tears anyone has ever seen."

"Well, what are you waiting for? Let's go!" Cho yelled at him.

Sirius turned and prepared to change into a dog. Suddenly he was flying forward, his buttocks stinging. He landed face down in the bottom of the deep bath, and from the sound of it, breaking his nose in the process.

He clutched his nose, and looked up in shock to see Cho standing over him with a smirk on her face. "You know what that's for." she said, before locking herself in a cubicle to dress. Sirius just tried to stop his bleeding nose, wondering if Hermione was as violent as Harry's other two female

friends.

Cho held up the vial of precious tears to her nose, inhaling the sweet, fresh scent. Before using the tears, she held out her hand. "May I see the letter he wrote?"

Sirius still had his head held back, Dumbledore's phoenix standing on his shoulder and crying onto his nose. He passed her the parchment. She read through Sirius' letter to Harry.

"Bambi?"

"A muggle movie about a baby deer."

"Ah, right. Son of Prongs." Cho then turned the parchment over and read Harry's reply, still smiling at the image of Snape screaming as something ate through his shoes.

Her face fell as she read how Harry finished the letter.

Cho looked up at Sirius and Dumbledore with worry plainly evident in her eyes.

"What is he planning? What does he think he has to do?"

Sirius looked at her, and shrugged his shoulders, but Dumbledore looked thoughtful.

"I believe, Miss. Chang, that he intends to challenge Voldemort."

Cho ran up the side of the hill. Sirius had taken her into Hogsmeade, and shown her the trail to take her to Harry's hideout. She had wanted Sirius to apparate there to talk to Harry, until he mentioned that Harry's letter asked that Sirius not contact him.

Now, Cho just ran. She stumbled occasionally and had bruises on her knees and shins to show for it. It seems to her that she had been running for hours. How far away was this cave?

As Cho rounded a rocky bend, breathing hard, an exhilarating musical trill sounded above her. She looked up and saw Dumbledore's phoenix, perched on an outcropping of rock over her head. Again the phoenix song sent shivers of delight through the small girl.

"Hello, er, Fawkes! Yes, that's what Harry called you. Have you seen Harry? Is he nearby?"

The phoenix regarded her with piercing green eyes. After a moment of seeming indecision, the phoenix spread his wings and floated through a narrow fissure in the rock face. Cho followed and found herself in a cool cave with little light. An almost empty container sat in one corner and a tatty blanket lay next to it. Fawkes dropped a backpack on the floor and flew over to the container, where he began lifting things out with his beak, then dropping them on the floor.

Harry was nowhere to be seen. Cho moved over and helped the phoenix empty the container. There was little of interest in it, well, of interest to Cho, who had grown up in an apothecary. Bags of rare and magical powders lay next to bags of muggle and ordinary stuff. Once she emptied the

container for Fawkes, the phoenix started putting the packages into a backpack.

Cho rolled up the sleeves of her robe and helped Dumbledore's familiar to fill the backpack. She was shocked at the size of the bag's interior. Someone had spent a lot of galleons buying such a large backpack.

Cho turned to face Fawkes when she was done, and saw the bird staring at the brands Harry had given her on her arms. She watched as the brilliant bird stepped closer and lay its head on her arm. A tear began to form.

Cho gently pushed the phoenix away. "Thank you Fawkes, but I have phoenix tears from Harry to use to heal my scars. The tears need to be given to me by the person who gave me these burns.

Cho looked around the cave. It had obviously been used in the last few days, scraps of food littered the floor in one corner, a fire pit held the charcoal remains of a recent fire. She looked back to the beautiful phoenix, still regarding her with its vivid eyes, eyes that seemed to look right through her.

"Looks like he has stepped out. Should I wait for him, do you think?"

With an almost human shake of his head, Fawkes turned and gripped the straps of the backpack Cho had helped to pack. With one last unearthly trill, the blood-red feathered bird launched itself at the fissure, and flew through it without difficulty.

Cho sprinted outside to follow, but the bird was no longer in sight.

Sighing, Cho pulled out the portkey Dumbledore had given her, and activated it.

Dumbledore looked up from his writing as Cho flashed into existence in front of him. He stood and smiled at her warmly. "Did you meet with Mr. Potter?"

Cho shook her head. "He wasn't there. I-" Cho stopped, staring at the scarlet and gold phoenix sitting at his perch. "When did Fawkes get back?" she asked.

Dumbledore gave her a look of polite incomprehension. "Get back, Miss Chang?"

"Fawkes was up there on the mountain, in Harry's cave."

Dumbledore smiled. "You must have been mistaken, Miss Chang. Fawkes has not left my office this morning."

Cho looked from the headmaster to the beautiful bird gazing at her serenely. "But, I, he was..."

Dumbledore's eyes twinkled with amusement and excitement. "Did you see another phoenix at the cave?"

"Yes. Though now I look more closely, Fawkes here has a lighter coat, the one I saw had darker

red feathers, and less gold."

"Miss Chang, this is fantastic news. There are so few of them in the world."

"My parents once told me that the first sighting of a phoenix brings good fortune to the viewer."

Dumbledore nodded. "I'm not surprised. Can you describe the phoenix? His exact colouring?"

Cho nodded. "Apart from his plumage, which was mostly one solid blood-red colour, he had a streak of black feathers down the back of his head. His feathers almost glowed, he looked so colourful in the dim light of the cave. And the eyes the phoenix had were green, so very green."

Dumbledore's eyes widened at this. "Green? No phoenix has green eyes, Miss. Chang."

"Then wh-" Cho stopped. Realisation dawned in the eyes of both wizard and witch at the same time.

"Harry!" Cho shouted.

"Almost completely wrong!" Dumbledore shouted, and started to howl with mirth. Cho watched as the headmaster wiped tears of laughter out of his eyes. She had never seen professor Dumbledore like this. The ancient wizard fell back into his chair, holding his sides.

A grim trotting through the halls of Hogwarts had become a common sight recently. Even some of the other students that had no idea an animagus was in their midst had started referring to him as Snuffles. Sirius found this rather amusing.

He passed the pair of Gryffindor sixth-year girls, the pair that had fainted the day he had kidnapped Cho. They gave him a look of awe mixed with irritation. Last week, they had seen him in the Gryffindor common room, sitting with Ron and Hermione. Their announcement that he was 'the bringer of death and destruction' would have gone over better for them had Sirius not jumped on them, and covered both girls with a large amount of slobber.

The rest of the Griffindors had just about laughed themselves sick at that, and Snuffles had found acceptance there.

Now, even the other houses were calling him Snuffles. He supposed that it didn't really matter much any more. Since last night's raid, Voldemort's forces were in an uproar. If Sirius Black handed himself over to Arthur Weasley, the interim Minister would get the credit for the arrest of a dangerous fugitive, making it almost impossible for his detractors to convince others to stand against his permanent appointment.

The fact that he would now get a proper trial gave Sirius a sense of security that he hadn't felt in years.

Sirius reached the entrance to Albus' office, he could hear the headmaster laugh inside. Looking around to see if there was anyone nearby, Sirius transformed and entered.

The scene that greeted Sirius inside confused him to say the least. Dumbledore was holding his sides and laughing, while Cho had crossed her arms and was looking at the headmaster with an unamused expression.

Dumbledore was finally able to take notice of Sirius' entrance. "Ah, Sirius! Almost completely wrong indeed."

Cho whirled to face Sirius. She waved a delicate finger under his nose. "And you! Why didn't you tell me? Why didn't Harry tell me?"

"Um, tell you what?" Sirius closed his eyes at the lame comeback.

"That Harry is an animagus! When did you teach him?"

"I told you! I've never had enough time to teach him to be an animagus," Sirius protested.

Silence. Sirius' comment even managed to stop Dumbledore's laughter.

"Then how?" asked Cho.

Sirius sighed. From his robes he withdrew the Animagus Guide, and placed it on Dumbledore's desk. "That." He said flatly.

Dumbledore rearranged his glasses on his nose, and looked at the parchment. "This is the letter Harry's father wrote to him. Minerva and I examined it before he was sent to Azkaban."

Sirius snapped his head up and stared into Dumbledore's eyes. "You examined it too?"

Dumbledore nodded. "Of course. I had to make sure it was not magical."

Sirius grinned. Without taking his eyes from Dumbledore's face. "I'd say Harry and I are not the only ones keeping secrets." He pushed the parchment along the desk towards Cho. "Put your hand on your heart and say, 'I solemnly swear that I am up to no good', Cho."

Cho frowned, but complied. The familiar swirling of ink signaled the activation of the guide.

Dumbledore and Cho stared at the parchment as the writhing ink formed itself into words.

*Mr. Prongs would like to welcome the latest young magical mischief-maker to find this guide.*

*Mr. Padfoot also offers his congratulations, and looks forward to assisting in more magical mischief.*

*Mr. Moony offers his condolences that you have to put up with Messers. Prongs and Padfoot during your tuition, but Mr. Moony would like to point out that the rewards are worth it.*

"Hi guys, it's me. You were activated by Mr. Prongs, Jr's girlfriend," said Sirius

*Mr. Prongs gives his most lavish praise to Mr. Padfoot for allowing Mr. Prongs, Jr to corrupt such a lovely young lady.*

Moony, Padfoot and Wormtail all offered their own congratulations, and Cho blushed at the silent cheering the four Marauders gave her.

"This guide teaches you to become an animagus?" she asked Sirius.

He nodded. "It started out as our notes, storing all sorts of library texts and so forth. After a while Prongs got the idea of using it as a tutor, since Wormtail was having trouble keeping up with our studies. We put our personalities at the time into it. We used the skills we learned from that to create the Marauder's Map."

"I see. Why did neither Minerva or I manage to detect the magic in it?"

Sirius wiped the guide, and passed it to Dumbledore. "You try activating it."

Dumbledore made the pledge, but the guide stayed obstinately blank.

"I haven't seen you on the Animagus registry, Albus. Naughty, naughty boy." Sirius grinned.

"Ah, so it doesn't work for people who are already animagi."

Cho looked at him in shock. "You are an animagi, sir?"

Sirius grinned with delight. "An unregistered animagus at that."

Dumbledore looked at the pair. "Who said I'm not registered?"

Sirius stopped smiling. "But, I've seen the list of registered animagi. There have only been seven this century.

Dumbledore kept smiling, not changing his expression at all.

"This century. You wouldn't be on that list, would you? You'd have registered in the late eighteenth hundreds," said Sirius.

"There, that wasn't too hard, was it?" Dumbledore asked, eyes twinkling.

"Look, interesting as this is, we need to work out where Harry is. I need to convince him not to challenge anyone, let alone You-know-who, and to come back to us," said Cho.

Dumbledore nodded. He rose and walked over to a wall, at which he waved his hand. Immediately, the wall was covered in shelves filled with magical items. Another wave, and a different set of shelves appeared. Again and again. Dumbledore was obviously looking for something in particular. Sirius stood and asked what he had in mind.



While the two wizards were talking, Cho surreptitiously read the letter Harry's father had written when Harry was less than a day old. With tears in her eyes, Cho quietly folded the page and placed it within her robes. She turned back to the pair, watching them discuss the method of sending Cho to Harry.

Harry wiped the sweat from his eyes, and sat back on his heels. He was on the edge of a large forest clearing, and had finally finished carefully burying some of his creations. Overhead, muggle power lines entered and exited from a power substation a few kilometers from his position. He had spent a lot of time trying to find the perfect ambush spot, and this looked like one.

It didn't provide much cover, except for the trees. It didn't provide clear fields of fire, or even high ground. That didn't matter, because this was going to be a magical ambush. Mostly.

Harry opened his enchanted backpack and pulled out several pouches of powders. He carried them over to his 'workbench', a large fallen tree, with the top flattened by magic. Mixing them together, careful not to bump them or breath too deeply, Harry put the mixture into a large, but fragile pouch.

Harry smiled. One more defense done. He pulled out a plastic bag of short nails, and began fusing four of them together at a time to form basic caltrops. He was halfway done when a pop from behind startled him.

Harry spun, his wand drawn from his pocket before he could think. The person standing before him made his mouth go dry.

"Hello, Harry."

Cho appeared in a clearing, behind Harry, where he was working busily on something. Less than a second after her arrival, Harry gave a small yelp and spun round, his wand seeming to appear in his hand.

She smiled at him. "Hello, Harry."

He swallowed. "Hello, Cho. How did you get here?"

Cho walked up to him, and pushed his wand away to the side. "Sirius and Dumbledore managed to scry your location, by tracking the spells you have been using, and used a variation of a portkey to send me to you. Why didn't you show yourself at the cave this morning?"

"C-cave?" Harry stammered.

Cho smiled. "Yes, the cave in which you were trying to pack that backpack there as a phoenix."

Harry swallowed. "You know?"

Cho nodded. "Yes. Your godfather managed to keep it a secret for a while. Each time I brought up

the topic that you may be an animagus, he rather skillfully persuaded me that you were not. Without lying directly either, he is a rather devious man."

"Yeah, well, he created a rather cool guide for me."

Cho nodded, and pulled out the Animagus Guide. "What is written on this is for you. Do you think your parents would want you to throw your life away like this?"

"My life ended when I jumped off that cliff."

"What? Harry, no!"

He waved her response away. "I've felt dead since that day. You killed me."

"No, no please, let me explain!"

"You think you could explain that? What I yelled at you when you were captured was true. You really hurt me."

"I know. I hurt me too. I desperately tried to hate you for what you did, but my heart just wouldn't let me. The pain of trying to betray my love for you made me say those things Harry. I will never let you go again."

"Cho, you don't understand. I'm not Harry. At least, I'm not the Harry I was. I keep having these thoughts, desires of hurting you. When I was branding you, it took all my will power to keep the spell from hurting you. Seeing you lying there naked, I wanted to take you, to rape you. I'm turning evil, Cho. I can't help it."

Cho placed her hands lightly on Harry's shoulders. "Harry, it is OK. I'd be upset if you didn't get desires to have me if I was lying there naked. But whatever you are going through, you are not turning evil."

Harry placed his hands on Cho's own, and gently removed them from his shoulders. "Please, just leave. I need to do one last thing, and I don't have a lot of time in which to do it."

Cho stepped forward and wrapped her arms around him. At once she felt him stiffen, just as he did when she first hugged him. This time, she was almost shocked at the tone and definition of Harry's muscles under her arms. "I meant what I said, I'm not letting you go. Ever. I saw the look of compassion in your eyes when I was shackled to that table. I was petrified, but you managed to--"

Harry placed two fingers on her lips. "Enough. I can't go back with you. I'm having nightmares of you, telling me you hate me. I can't go through that again. Please, just go, and leave me."

Cho let go and stepped back, looking Harry in the eye. From her pocket, she withdrew the large vial of phoenix tears. "I haven't used this yet. I still have scars all over me. If you don't come back with me, I won't use it."

"What? Cho, you have to use it. I needed to get that to you before I finish things."

"I know that is what you thought. I don't want this if I can't have you."

"No. I can't take that chance. I might hurt you, or worse. I won't let that happen to you."

"Really?" Cho asked, and hurled the container at the nearest tree. It shattered on impact, the thick liquid in it oozing down the tree, absorbing into the bark. Cho looked Harry in the eye. "Now you have to come back with me. Either you need to get Fawkes to give you tears, or you need to give me them yourself. It doesn't matter to me, either way you come home."

"Home." Harry sounded so very wistful.

Cho again put her arms around Harry, luxuriating in his presence. She looked up, and stared into his beautiful green eyes. "I love you, Harry Potter."

"I love you, Harry Potter."

The words struck his heart, paining him again. Cho had said things that caused him pain on the cliff top, but what she said now almost made him buckle at the knees. He stared back into her deep, dark, expressive eyes, looking for that one tiny hint of trickery. Nothing. She was telling the truth.

He felt his mouth form words without being aware of it, saying something from deep within his heart.

"I love you, Cho."

Their lips met. Harry felt a hot, burning, cleansing fire race through him. Even the feeling of joy at holding Cho for the first time that day at the cliff top was nothing compared to the totally euphoric sensation coursing through him now.

He had told Cho to leave, she had told him she would never leave him again.

He had told Cho he had awful desires for her, she simply held him tighter.

He had given her one last gift, she had thrown it away because he didn't come with it.

She loved him, and he would never doubt it again.

Their kiss deepened. The love Harry felt for this young woman burned away all the hurt, the pain, the mistrust and the hate. One of the Harrys died, he was sure. Never again would he have a nightmare about not being loved. There was only one thing he was sure about now, more than anything else, he was loved by Cho.

For long minutes the pair kissed, their entire consciousness devoted to the other. Nothing else in the world mattered. They were together, they were in love, everything was just right.

Finally, they separated, and again lost themselves in each other's eyes.

"Thank you Cho. For saving me."

Cho smiled, her perfect face radiating nothing but love.

Before she could speak, a voice Harry knew all too well came from behind Cho said, "Hello, Harry. Ready to die?"

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## Betrayal of the Best Kind Duel

Duel

"Hello, Harry. Ready to die?"

With a startled yelp, Cho broke away and spun to face the owner of that sibilant voice. Voldemort stood there, his robes blackened and torn in places. Arrayed behind him were dozens of people, including several of his Death Eaters and other followers.

Harry had clutched his scar and was moaning in agony, one hand on her shoulder supporting him.

Wormtail was there, sneering, dried blood caking his nose and chin. His left arm was in a hastily constructed sling. Lucius stood to the right of his master, his own robes bearing the evidence of the previous evenings excitement. Harry fancied that he could still see a tiny tendril of smoke rising from a burned patch near the hem.

Macnair looked almost dead on his feet, though his eyes blazed with anger. Obviously, Voldemort had not been happy at his unwilling assistance in Harry's escape. Harry's eyes swept over the assembled throng, Avery with a bandaged head, Nott on a crutch. Goyle had lost a hand in the assault, and obviously had not had time to get a silver replacement from his master.

Even Narcissa was there, surrounded by the other recent recruits. In all, nearly half the people on Harry's list were here. Less than a handful were uninjured.

With a supreme effort, Harry stood and pushed the unexpected pain in his scar away. "Hard night?" he asked, a forced smirk on his face.

With a flick of his yew wand and a snarl, Voldemort sent Cho flying into the trunk of a nearby tree, where vines roped themselves around her. "You didn't answer my question. Are you ready to die?"

"Of course I'm ready to die, you idiot!" Harry yelled. "What the hell do you think I've been preparing for?"

Whatever reaction he had been expecting from Harry, an explosion of anger and affirmation of a willingness to die was not it. Not one of Voldemort's followers had anything other than surprise registered on their faces.

Harry was glad he already had his wand in his hand. He could feel the comforting weight of a few of his defenses resting in his robe's pockets, but he needed time to get to them.

The echoes of Harry's surprising revelation could still be heard as Voldemort recovered from his surprise. He opened his mouth to respond, but Harry beat him to it.

"Took you a while to finally come after me. Did the tracking charm you placed on me not work? Or did it take you a while to torture Macnair first?"

"You know about the tracking charm?"

Harry gave the Dark Lord an evil smile. "Not until just now, but it is what I would have done." He watched as confusion and anger fought for dominance in the Dark Lord's eyes. Just as Voldemort was about to say something else, Harry again interrupted.

"And now you are here. Nice isn't it. Just perfect for an ambush." Harry watched the reaction of Voldemort's followers as he cranked up the paranoia a notch or two. "You came earlier than I expected though, I'm not quite finished with the booby traps. There should be enough to finish you all off though."

"You're bluffing."

"Of course. A mere *Gryffindor* couldn't come up with a scheme to trap and kill a devious *Slytherin* now, could he? Oh, I did mention that the Sorting Hat wanted to put me in Slytherin first, didn't I?"

Harry felt a surge of victory as the assembled minions all started silently, but nervously, looking around for signs of traps. Several whispered "*Finite Incantatem!*" charms could be heard, fired in random directions, as the assembly tried to disable the traps Harry had hidden from view.

"You are here to kill me, but you just can't resist torturing me first. Pity. If you'd killed me straight away, you would have managed to escape. Not now though." Harry gave Voldemort his biggest smile.

"So be it." Voldemort raised his wand and shouted, "*Avada Kedavra!*"

But Harry was already moving, his scar had sent a bolt of pain through him an instant before Voldemort cast the spell. He leapt at the makeshift table holding his creations, feeling the shockwave of the curse as it sped past him. He grabbed a handful of the caltrops, not feeling as the sharp metal points dug into the palm of his hand, and threw them into the air towards the Death Eaters.

But Harry had landed on the wrong side of the log, and was hit by three of the dozens of curses fired at him by the other minions. One smashed into his shoulder and numbed his left arm. The second struck his right leg, buckling it under the weight of his landing, while the third grazed his temple, stunning him.

Harry collapsed in a heap at the base of the log, moaning. Laughter spread through the throng of minions, taking pleasure in his predicament.

Voldemort's voice rang out over the laughter. "Well, Potter. It seems that you may not be such a chall-" when the world went white.

Avery had moved forward to get a better look at the pitiful boy. On his third step, he put his foot down on some freshly dug earth. Freshly dug earth concealing a muggle mechanism, transferring the pressure of his step directly onto a double volume of a potion mixture Harry had prepared earlier...

Since Harry was already lying on the ground, he was relatively protected from the massive explosion that rocked the clearing. Avery had indeed followed normal protocol when stepping on a mine, which was to leap twenty feet in the air and scatter oneself over a wide area.

At least six of Voldemort's nearby minions were killed instantly by the blast, which stunned the rest.

What they, or Harry for that matter, didn't expect, was the shockwave traveling through the ground managed to set off the other half dozen potion mines hidden around the clearing.

Harry covered his head with his arms for almost a minute before the soil landing on him stopped falling. In that time the pain in his scar pushed the fog away and he had recovered his wits. He managed to stand by holding his weight entirely on his left leg.

The scene resembled nothing short of a battlefield; seven large holes in a forest clearing, surrounded by robed bodies. The ringing in his ears rendered him effectively deaf, but Harry felt a surge of triumph.

Until the bodies started to move. Though less than one in three of Harry's attackers were struggling to rise, he was still outnumbered by more than twenty-to-one.

Harry climbed onto the log table and stood, tall as he could. He aimed his wand at the closest wooden pole he could make out, holding up the power lines, and shouted, "*Radicitus Recro!*"

Immediately, the wooden power pole thrummed with vibrant life. It thickened and grew roots, which delved deep into the earth. Branches sprouted from knots in the wood, and the pole became a tree once more. Growing ten years of height in ten seconds, the power lines tightened under the strain, then snapped, and fell to the ground.

Right in the middle of the slowly rising Death Eaters.

Harry was profoundly glad he was deaf, the sight of the robed figures dancing as the high voltage flooded through them was terrible enough. Knowing that some of the twitching was done by corpses didn't help matters. Suddenly, the twitching and dancing stopped, smoking corpses again fell to the ground. Obviously, the sub-station had stopped the flow.

Harry shook his head, he was still outnumbered. Reaching into his robes, Harry withdrew a bag of powder and hurled it at the figure of Voldemort.

The Dark Lord had managed to find his feet, and was far enough away from the fallen lines not to have been affected. The look on his face showed his murderous fury. He waved his wand and conjured an almost impenetrable magical shield. Only the strongest curses and spells would have a hope of penetrating it. No spell a measly sixteen-year-old could cast could harm him.

Which is exactly why Harry didn't use a spell.

The bag of powder crashed into Voldemort's shoulder, after passing through the magic shield like it was smoke. The Dark Lord's quick inhalation of breath in his surprise drew a lungful of a potent hallucinogen into his lungs.

Harry saw a flicker of movement in his peripheral vision, and he was blasted from the log by a curse he didn't hear. It crashed into his chest blowing him over like a leaf. Harry felt a number of wet snaps in his chest, signaling the breaking of several ribs. His troubles were not over though, as he smashed into the trunk of a tree, spinning round, and feeling his right arm wrenched from its shoulder socket.

Harry swooned in agony. His hearing was slowly returning, and he could hear Voldemort's voice, shouting in fear, firing curses in all directions. A half dozen "*Finite Incantatem*"s could be made out. The Dark Lord's minions obviously thinking he was under the effect of some sort of spell.

Another curse sped Harry's way, and struck him in the chest again, making him gasp at the fresh wave of white hot pain that flooded through him. Looking up, Harry could make out the figure of Lucius Malfoy limping his way towards the tree Harry slumped against.

Malfoy had not escaped Harry's traps. The whole left side of his face was bright with burn, his long white hair now shriveled and smoking. His left arm hung loosely at his side, covered in blood and grime.

Harry reached into his robes once more, and closed his rather numb left hand around a block of clear ice, the frozen liquid charmed to stay solid. With a smile, revealing teeth ringed with blood, Harry tossed the ice into the air towards the evil man with an under armed motion. He whispered "*Finite Incantatem*", aiming his wand at the ice with his wrist.

Harry's ending of the freezing charm turned the ice block into liquid immediately. A small core of pure water mixed quickly with the larger outer layer of fluoronic acid.

The water instantly heated to the point of boiling, spraying concentrated fluoronic acid all over the approaching Death Eater.

For one precious moment, Lucius had no idea what Harry had done. It soon became apparent however, as the drops of acid began to eat their way through his clothes, wand, flesh, muscle and bone.



The Death Eater squealed louder than Harry had ever heard someone under the influence of the Cruciatus curse. He swatted the holes appearing in his skin, in a vain hope of killing whatever was causing the agony. He scratched at his clothes, he rolled on the ground. Malfoy even managed to cast a spell, jetting water over himself.

Nothing worked. The highly corrosive acid ate its way through Draco's father. Harry watched dispassionately as gaping holes appeared in his scalp, face and arms. Lucius' robes smoked and disintegrated around him.

Again and again, Malfoy tried everything his panicking mind could think of. In his thrashing, the lower half of his left arm fell off, dissolved through above the elbow.

Harry struggled to rise, his mouth fixed into a grin. 'To dilute, always put acid into water, not water into acid.' the warning label on the fluoric acid had said. "They were right." Harry said, blood bubbling in his mouth.

The last vision the pain-ravaged mind of Lucius Malfoy registered was that of the Boy-Who-Lived, grinning at him in satisfaction.

Cho had watched the events of the ambush with alarm. After being flung against the tree and restrained, Harry had collapsed under the barrage of hexes and curses fired at him by the assembled Death Eaters and Dark Lord's supporters.

The first concussion had hit her before she registered the explosion. Powerful wizards, whose mere presence inspires terror into most of the wizarding world, were flung around like muggle toy dolls. One robed figure had been thrown left from the first blast, then to the right and finally backwards by subsequent blasts before he actually hit the ground.

Cho had closed her eyes and mouth, turning her head away from the rain of dirt, small rocks and twigs. The scene looked as though from one of her grandfather's stories about the muggle war. Bodies lay everywhere in various states of repose. Harry was struggling to rise next to the log he'd been using as a workbench.

Cho's heart leapt with the realisation that Harry was alive. She watched as he climbed onto the log and cast a spell at a pole, holding up some thin cables.

Her mouth opened in amazement as the wooden pole became a tree again, forcing the cables held by it upwards, stretching them too much, and making them snap and fall to the ground.

An obscene puppet show then took place, a dozen of the slowly rising figures jerking around to some omnipotent being's will. After what felt like an hour, they finally were released from the manic grip, and collapsed to the ground, smoking.

She screamed a warning to Harry, but he couldn't hear her. Horrified, she watched helplessly as Lucius Malfoy took aim at her love. Harry tossed a bag of something at the Dark Lord, before being struck by the curse.

She screamed as Harry flew backwards and connected sharply with a tree, spinning around and obviously dislocating his shoulder. Her heart skipped a beat as a thin trickle of blood emerged from the corner of Harry's mouth.

Lucius Malfoy stepped forward, making his way towards Harry. Behind him, Voldemort was panicking, screaming, and firing curses in all directions. In less than ten seconds he had killed or wounded seven of his followers. The rest were desperately trying to end the magic obviously controlling their master. The dispelling charms aimed at him were either bouncing off the shield he erected, or if they hit from behind, having no effect.

Malfoy sent another curse at Harry, striking him in the chest yet again. Harry's face showed his obvious pain at this new assault. Cho thrashed at her bonds, using every last shred of strength to get free. She missed Harry removing a block of what looked like ice, but saw the effects of his final trick for Malfoy.

What looked like a short burst of rain landed on the Death Eater, but it was soon obvious that it was not water. Malfoy squealed like an animal being eaten alive. It was not far from the truth really.

Holes appeared in the aristocratic features of the blond Death Eater. He thrashed about in agony, wiping the acid around, to do even more damage. Cho closed her eyes, and was grateful that the explosions had temporarily deafened her. Even so, Malfoy's screams echoed in her mind.

It was not long after the screams stopped that Cho felt the vines loosening and dropped to the ground. Harry stood before her, swaying. His wand was still clutched in his right hand, but his right arm was noticeably longer than the other. Blood ran from both his scalp and his smiling mouth, staining the front of his clothes. He turned around and slowly limped over to the log containing his traps.

Harry was able to cast a dispelling charm at Cho to release her from her bonds. Smiling at her in a light headed way, Harry turned and made his way over to his makeshift table. The explosions had scattered almost everything. One package was still there though, filled with a substance with the same viscosity as the jelly they served at Hogwarts.

Harry looked up. Voldemort was still in the grip of the hallucinogen, but wouldn't be for much longer. Only three wizards still stood against Harry.

A spell finally brought the Dark Lord out of his frenzy. The three turned to face Harry, anger beyond imagining behind the serpent-like eyes. Again, the blazing pain in his scar pushed the fatigue and numbness from his mind. Unable to raise his wand, Harry aimed with his wrist and cast a banishing charm on the package.

The thin wrapping burst as the jelly was hurled at the three remaining enemies. Three curses struck Harry together, spinning him round, shattering his lower spine and tearing at his internal organs. He fell to the ground one final time.

Voldemort stood over him, a terrible expression on his face. "Now you die, Potter."

"I'm already dead," Harry mouthed at him. He coughed, spraying blood over the three wizards.

"But your girlfriend is not," Voldemort threatened.

Harry weakly shook his head. "You haven't learned anything, have you?" he whispered.

Voldemort looked at the wreck of a boy. Every time he had tried to torment him, Harry had got the upper hand. Not this time.

"Very well, a quick painless death. For both of you."

Harry nodded. "Just stay for a few more seconds."

The smiles on the Death Eaters vanished. One by one, they desperately scraped off the gloop clinging to them like glue.

"Here they come," Harry whispered.

From every direction, a buzzing sound grew louder. First a couple, then dozens, then hundreds and thousands of insects flew straight towards the only standing wizards. In seconds, insects covered them, biting, sucking, feeding.

Harry and Cho watched as Voldemort and his two remaining Death Eaters ran around swatting at the tiny assassins and screaming. Uncontrolled magic burst forth from the trio as they danced and fought.

For long moments, three wizards danced and ran, rolled and slapped.

A loud thunderclap, and all the insects in the area dropped to the ground, stunned. Voldemort stood alone, his last minions having fallen to the tiny killers Harry had summoned.

Not a single patch of the Dark Lord was free of blood. It looked as though he had no skin. He swayed, unsteady from loss of blood. Cho ran forward and grabbed Harry's wand. She aimed it at Voldemort, and shouted, "*Stupefy!*"

The Dark Lord snarled, and apparated away before the spell reached him.

An unreal silence covered the clearing.

Cho's wail broke the silence, and she fell to her knees cradling Harry's head. "Harry! Please! Stay with me! Don't go!"

Harry looked up at the girl who had saved his soul. With an effort, he gave her a smile. The gaps between his white teeth were stained red with blood. "I love you, Cho," he said, his voice nearly inaudible. "I always will."

Cho watched in agony as Harry's emerald eyes began to lose focus.

For a long time Cho held Harry close to her chest, crying. She didn't notice the arrival of several wizards dressed in Auror robes, who stood stunned at the carnage.

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## Betrayal of the Best Kind Rise

Rise

"Poppy! POPPY! Help!"

Madam Pomfrey's head jerked up at the panicked exclamation of her name. In a flash, she had risen from her desk and bolted into the ward. The headmaster had appeared in the hospital wing, holding onto the wrist of a floating corpse. It had to be a corpse. She had seen what damage a person could withstand. There was no way the mangled body hovering in front of her could hold life, she thought.

Until it coughed.

Within a heartbeat, Madam Pomfrey had the body on a bed, and with a practiced flick of her wand, began cataloguing the injuries. The eyes slowly opened, and two startling green orbs focused on her.

"Hello, Madam. Good to see you again." Harry whispered.

"Quiet. Save your str-," began the nurse, before recognising her patient's eyes. "Albus! This is Potter!"

"Yes, I know Poppy. Can you save him?"

Madam Pomfrey shook her head, but continued to work. "Any one of a half-dozen injuries should have killed him by now. He needs to be in St. Mungo's."

"We cannot afford the time to explain that he is innocent."

"Innocent?"

"Yes, he has been spying for me."

"I'll do what I can, but I'm amazed he is still alive."

Dumbledore moved around the bed and took hold of Harry's hand.

Madam Pomfrey continued to desperately try and keep her patient alive. "Mr. Potter, I've seen you battered and bruised before, but this is definitely your personal best." Looking up at the headmaster she said, "He needs strength, Albus. I can't spare any."

Dumbledore let go of Harry's hand, reached into his robes and extracted his wand. He placed the tip of his wand over Harry's critically injured chest and muttered, "*Fulcio* ."

The headmaster sat down heavily as a surge of strength left him and entered the injured young man. Harry's breathing became a little less laboured. "Stay with us Harry. You have one hell of a story for us."

Bill Weasley was a little disgruntled at being raised so early from his home in Cairo, and transported to a small clearing in the English midlands without so much as a by your leave. At least twenty aurors were milling around one edge of the clearing; the rest of the clearing was covered in robed bodies. Or at least, parts of robed bodies.

"Bill!"

Bill turned and came face to face with his father. His irritation vanished and he gave his father a big hug.

"Good to see you, Dad. Tell me, are you the one who authorised my trip? Because if so, I have a bone to pick with you, you know how I need my sleep," he said with a grin.

"Guilty, son. Believe me, I know how much you need your sleep. Your mother nearly had a fit getting you and Charlie out of bed in time for you to apparate to the Quidditch World Cup if you recall."

Bill's grin widened. "True. Why the urgency?"

Arthur Weasley made a broad gesture to the battlefield-like scene. "One of the ministry's most top-secret spies set a trap for You-know-who. Lots of traps really. According to an eyewitness, about seventy Death Eaters and minions attacked the spy here. The eyewitness is being interviewed now, she is quite distressed."

Bill looked around at the once pristine ground, a look of disbelief on his face. "One spy managed to kill this many Death Eaters?"

Arthur nodded. "He set several traps and made a number of lethal 'toys'. One of the aurors first on the scene went straight into the middle of that field, to check for any survivors, and collapsed in agony with a spike in his foot. We need someone with experience at curse-breaking and avoiding muggle booby-traps to make sure the field is safe."

Bill sighed and drew his wand. "Tell you what, I'll make sure the place is safe if you do me a favour just as difficult."

"And that is?"

"Get Mum to stop going on about my hair."

Arthur's face split into a broad grin. "Done."

Bill moved slowly out into the carnage, casting detection spells for all he was worth. Less than a minute later he sighed and straightened. "There are no spell-traps here, just ordinary items with either potions or charms on them." he called out to his father.

On hearing the news, the aurors busied themselves retrieving the bodies, casting levitation and summoning charms. With the threat of magical counter attacks confirmed gone, their work began in earnest.

Just under an hour later, Bill walked from the now clear field. On the makeshift table, he had deposited all the caltrops detected, along with the bags of powders and other items dispersed by the initial explosions.

"All clear." He told his father. "Whoever set up these traps did a good job. I'm not surprised the auror with a caltrop in his foot was in pain, they have been coated with a potion designed to heighten the amount of pain you feel." He held up a caltrop and pointed to the slight discolouration at the four points. "Puts you in so much pain, it stops you from casting spells."

He pointed at the remains of a fine powder in a burst bag he had retrieved from the field. "There are also traces of a drug out there that the Ancient Egyptians used that caused hallucinations. Made you think you were being attacked from all sides by your worst nightmares. Also, all the insect bodies are bloated with an enchanted form of Royal Jelly. Anyone with that stuff on them would have been eaten to death by millions of insects. Flies, bees, wasps, anything that runs around on six legs really."

Moving over to where a particularly grisly and unidentified corpse was lying, Bill pointed to nearby dark, smoking bare patches on the ground. "Some sort of acid trap was sprung on this poor bastard. The only way you may be able to identify these guys is to ask Ollivander who he sold the wands to."

Bill looked once more over the carnage and shook his head in awe. "Whatever you are paying this spy, it isn't enough; you'd best be giving him a raise."

"He's not on the payroll. As I said, his identity is top secret. Except for the Department of Mysteries, I'm the only one in the entire Ministry who knows who he is."

Bill gave his father a sidelong glance. "And how many people outside the Ministry know who he is?"

Arthur looked uneasy. "You always were too smart for your own good."

"And you were never a good enough liar to be the Minister of Magic before."

Arthur smiled. "Actually, his identity will probably become public knowledge soon. Thanks to his

efforts, there are probably no more than a handful of You-know-who's supporters left who are both free and alive."

Bill nodded. "Good news indeed." He looked again at the collection of items on the flattened log. "Keep an eye on him anyway. I'm guessing he was in Slytherin to have come up with some of these ideas." He pointed to a pile of unopened powders. "Look, he hadn't even finished setting up his defences. I have no idea what he wanted some of this stuff for, but I'd not have liked to be anywhere nearby when it became apparent."

"That makes two of us. Come on, let's go home, have some breakfast, and I'll convince your mother to ignore your hair."

Bill nodded and smiled. "This I've got to see."

Cho sat and stared blankly into space.

For what had seemed like eternity, she had been subjected to an interrogation by aurors who thought that since she was cradling the head of a wanted man, she was a Death Eater.

Dumbledore's arrival had put an end to that, but he had grabbed Harry's wrist and disappeared. This startling display of apparent treason had culminated in the summoning of the interim Minister of Magic.

Cho's first meeting with Ron and Ginny's father had not gone as she had expected. This was the most powerful political wizard in the UK, yet he had dropped the name Snuffles in his first sentence, and had then authorised her transportation back to Hogwarts.

Now she sat, emotions writhing inside her. The Minister, the bloody Minister himself, knew about Sirius and his innocence, yet Sirius was still a wanted man. The Minister also knew about Harry, since he had gone out of his way to reassure the aurors present that Dumbledore was working for him and that he had taken Harry for a good reason.

Harry. Harry was just on the other side of that door in front of her. Cho could hear Madam Pomfrey's voice as she cast healing charm after healing charm on him.

Cho had entered the hospital wing at a flat run on her arrival at Hogwarts, only to be escorted out of the infirmary by the headmaster immediately. In that one glimpse of him, she had learned all she needed to know.

Harry was not going to make it.

Cho buried her face in her hands and wept.

Cho was still crying a while later when a cold, wet nose touched the back of her hand. She jerked up to see Snuffles standing in front of her, sympathy and shared pain in his dark, liquid eyes.

With a cry, Cho threw her arms around the grim's neck and continued crying.



An hour later, it was a sombre group that stood silently around the bed. Madam Pomfrey had done all she could, but Harry had slipped away. She was now sound asleep on a chair, completely exhausted.

Dumbledore stood at the foot of Harry's bed, looking down at the body of the brave young man who had sacrificed everything he had to protect the world. Sirius and Cho stood on either side of the bed, each holding a hand, tears running down their faces.

Hermione and Ron stood together, clutching each other fiercely. Ginny stood stunned, a hand on Harry's leg, desperately willing him to sit up.

For long minutes they looked down at Harry's body, still mangled beyond help. Madam Pomfrey had kept him alive for longer than was humanly possible, but in the end, nothing could help. Harry had gutted Voldemort's ranks, but had given his life to do it.

Dumbledore wasn't sure what he was seeing, but tendrils of smoke slowly started rising from Harry's corpse. He was about to mention it when both Sirius and Cho gave a startled yelp and dropped Harry's hands as though they were burning.

With a great flash of heat and light, the body on the bed was consumed by fire. A raging flame that caused all those present to avert their eyes at the intense brightness.

Just as it had come, the fire and heat quickly disappeared. On the now blackened and smoking sheets was a pile of ashes. Hermione, Ron and Ginny were looking at Dumbledore, alarm had overtaken curiosity on their features.

In the middle of the pile of ashes, a small round object rose. A baby's head slowly appeared, covered with the dark ashes.

A smattering of dark, downy hair adorned the top of its head, a small lightning bolt shaped scar was clearly evident on its forehead. Emerald green eyes looked from one astonished face to another. The baby's face screwed up with intense concentration, and gave a sneeze, scattering the ashes across the bed.

"H-H-H-," stammered Sirius.

"Harry!" shouted Cho, finishing Sirius' sentence for him.

Baby Harry gave Cho an enormous, toothless grin, and held out his tiny arms. With a cry of relief, Cho swept up her boyfriend and held him in her arms. A definite baby chuckle came from his mouth.

Hermione was the first to find her voice. "Damn you Harry! If you're not dead, I'm going to kill you!"

Excited squealing woke Madam Pomfrey from her deep slumber. She stood on shaky legs and moved out into the ward, expecting to have to deal with some more trivial injuries. The sight of

Professor Dumbledore hoisting a baby boy over his head and laughing made her pause. Miss Granger and Mr. Weasley were shouting and jumping for joy in each other's arms. Miss Chang and Miss Weasley were also crying and squealing while dancing with joy.

A strange man was sitting in a chair, laughing and crying at the same time.

"What on earth is wrong with you people?" Madam Pomfrey screamed. "Mr. Potter is not dead for a few minutes and you are all dancing for joy?"

"Poppy!" Dumbledore exclaimed. "I'd like to introduce you to someone very special."

Madam Pomfrey frowned. "Who?"

Dumbledore gestured to the baby in his arms. "Poppy, this is, as named by the esteemed Miss Granger, The-Boy-Who-Just-Won't-Bloody-Die-No-Matter-What-Anyone-Does."

Poppy Pomfrey's eyes flicked from the baby in the headmaster's arms to the blackened bed and back again. She took in the tiny scar on baby Harry's forehead, his piercing green eyes, and his mischievous grin. With a flash of recognition, Madam Pomfrey did something she would never in her life live down, and fainted.

Voices slowly intruded on her conscious. The darkness gently receded, allowing the nurse to become more aware of her surroundings.

"Good thing she fainted, Snuffles would have had a hell of a time explaining himself."

"Ron! Mind your language!"

"Very true, Mr. Weasley. Though I think that Harry will have a more difficult a job explaining how he managed to loose sixteen years of his life."

"I don't care how he did it, he is such a cute baby!"

"I think we'd better leave it to Harry to explain, but you better stop drooling over my boyfriend Ginny, before I get jealous."

"You can't be his girlfriend yet, he isn't old enough for a relationship."

"Yeah, Cho! You really are attracted to younger guys, aren't you?"

"Hey! He is sixteen years old. He is just in a baby's body."

Madam Pomfrey sat up in a flash. "Where is he?" she demanded.

"You're awake!" Dumbledore said in surprise.

"Yes, yes, yes. Now where is he?" she replied, waspishly

Wordlessly, Cho brought over Harry, wrapped in a sheet. She passed him to the nurse, who was herself lying in one of the infirmary beds.

Madam Pomfrey started giving Harry an examination, checking the baby's health. After the seventh time Harry's flailing leg knocked her hand out of the way, she said, "It is definitely Mr. Potter. Only one person I know is this difficult a patient."

"That is hardly a grounds for definite identification, Poppy."

"How did you manage this, Mr. Potter?" the nurse asked Harry, ignoring the headmaster. "I watched you take your last breath myself."

Harry just looked up at the nurse and smiled the most evil smile ever seen on a baby's face. A vague expression of concentration and a damp stain spread over Madam Pomfrey's sheets.

"Mr. Potter!" she shrieked, holding him up.

Harry just laughed his baby laugh.

Ginny snatched Harry from Madam Pomfrey and cradled him in her arms. "I'll clean him."

Cho snarled at the redhead. "Let him go! You'll hurt him!" Cho reached for Harry.

"Ladies, please!" said Dumbledore, his soft voice somehow heard over both their yells. "Mr. Potter will be put in the custody of Poppy here. I have no idea how fast he will grow, but until his is declared fit and well, *and aged sixteen*, no one is to know of his condition."

Ginny and Cho stared daggers at each other as Ginny handed Harry back to Madam Pomfrey. Harry seemed rather distressed at the headmaster's proclamation.

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## Betrayal of the Best Kind Live

Live

"Go on, Albus! Please!" Sirius begged.

"No. For the last time, no," the Headmaster replied.

"You're no fun anymore."

"Was I ever 'fun'?"

Ron piped up. "Of course. I remember your reaction to, I mean, your revenge on Fred and George for giving you a Canary Cream."

Dumbledore smiled and glanced at Ron with twinkling eyes. "Well, yes. I suppose that was fun."

"You do know that they are marketing a line of sweets that mimic what you did to them, don't you?" Ginny asked.

"Really? What are they called?"

"Animal Attraction Appetisers," Ron supplied. "You become rather, ahem, attractive to all animals for about half an hour. I'd imagine Sirius should avoid his animagus form around someone who just ate one. I'd hate to see the mess such a big dog would make trying to hump someone's leg."

"Ron!" exclaimed Hermione, covering her flaming cheeks. "Language!"

He ignored her. "Watching my brothers running from an amorous Mrs. Norris was one of the funniest things I have ever seen."

"You didn't ask Hagrid what happened after they made it out of the castle?" asked Ginny, a smirk on her face.

Ron frowned and shook his head. "No, why?"

Ginny's face lit up, and her eyes took on a dreamy look. "Once out of the castle they ran out onto

the grounds. Let's just say they ran too close to Hagrid's 'pets'."

The headmaster's office suddenly became perfectly quiet. Ginny's expression while examining her blissful memories was serene.

"What was Hagrid teaching us about at the time?" Ron asked.

"Bunyips. He somehow managed to import them from Australia," replied Hermione.

"Damn, I was too busy laughing at them in the castle to follow them. I'd imagine that an eight foot carnivore makes an interesting mating call."

The headmaster's office was filled with laughter for several minutes.

"Still, I'd like to see the look on the Dursley's faces when you dumped Baby Harry on their doorstep again."

Dumbledore shook his head, still chuckling at the image of the Weasley twins on the run from an amorous Australian monstrosity. "I said 'no', Mr. Weasley."

"Besides, think of how Harry would feel." said Hermione, having finally managed to get her laughter under control.

"With the shock he gave us, I'd say it was fair payback," said Sirius.

"Yes! How did he do that? Have you any idea?" Hermione asked the headmaster.

Sirius and Dumbledore gave each other a steady look. It did not go unnoticed.

"You know!" Shouted the three students together.

Dumbledore held up a hand. "I have a suspicion. That is all. Once Miss Chang finishes in the infirmary and arrives here, we will discuss it."

At that, the door opened and Cho walked in. "He is sleeping. I think. It is entirely possible that he decided to just lie quietly still with his eyes closed to stop Madam Pomfrey from fussing over him."

"That sounds like Harry. Has he had anything to eat?"

Cho nodded, but blushed furiously.

Dumbledore's eyebrows rose. "Miss Chang?"

"He kept, um, while he was eating, he, um..."

"Yes Miss Chang?"

Cho's blush deepened. "He had a big smile on his face, and he, um, kept looking at my breasts," she finished quickly.

Sirius snorted, desperately trying to keep himself from laughing. "He's definitely got the mind of a sixteen year old."

Wormtail limped along a dark overgrown path. A gardener's shack lay ahead, with a candle in its solitary window. He reached the door and knocked hesitantly, almost hoping that the occupant would not hear.

"Enter, Worm."

Swallowing, Wormtail used his good silver hand to turn the handle and enter. His left arm was still useless, even more so now. At the ambush Potter had set, one of his mines had exploded to Wormtail's left. Nott had cushioned the explosion, but had slammed into Wormtail's left side. His shoulder was still dislocated, had been for hours.

Peter was not brave enough to try to set it himself.

"Master, I've arrived."

A sole woman knelt on the floor, tending the bleeding mass of flesh on the old bed. Voldemort turned his head with difficulty and faced the pitiful man. "So I see. You always make these inane comments when you are nervous," he said with a sneer.

"Please don't move, Master. I'm trying to staunch the bleeding."

"Pritchard? What are you doing here?" Wormtail gasped.

Voldemort's sneer remained as he looked at his carer. "She returned to seek forgiveness, since she will get no mercy from Dumbledore and that idiot Weasley."

"Surely you cannot trust her? She disappeared when she thought she had failed you."

The former Defence teacher rose and spun to face the shorter man. "You disappeared for thirteen years, you little worm."

"Enough!" Voldemort shouted, and then started coughing. Pritchard again began tending the Dark Lord.

"You disappeared from the ambush. You ran yet again. Why should I trust you now?" Voldemort calmly asked Wormtail once his breathing was under control.

"Master, I-"

"You seem to have a remarkable habit of disappearing from a fight, but turning up for the victory party." Voldemort continued.

Wormtail looked around, panicking.

"No matter. Though it galls me to say it, I need both of you." The Dark Lord took a deep breath. "We will stay here for now, to regain strength."

"Can we not go up to the manor? There is still no one living there."

Voldemort shook his head. "Those incompetent fools at the Ministry placed detection wards on my father's house, but not the surrounding grounds. This hut belonged to that stupid muggle who interrupted us, and is not of any interest to them."

Wormtail sighed, and limped over to a battered chair. Wincing, he sat and carefully withdrew his left arm from its sling.

Pritchard looked over at him in disgust. "You'll have to wait, I must see to our master first."

Voldemort gave a vicious grin. "No, Victoria. Please set Wormtail's shoulder for him."

With an equally evil grin, the former auror stood and made her way over to the now trembling little man. With a deft flick of her wand, she cast a silencing charm on the walls of the cottage.

"Why didn't you just cast a silencing charm on me?" Pettigrew asked.

Grasping the small man's arm, Pritchard gave him a hate filled look. "But then we wouldn't hear you scream when I do this!"

With an extremely vicious wrench, Wormtail's shoulder popped back into place. The ear-splitting scream brought a smile to the Dark Lord's face.

Aiming his wand at the exposed back of Pritchard, Voldemort whispered, "*Crucio* ."

As his wayward servant joined Wormtail in screaming, the Dark lord lay back, and contemplated the future. How he was going to rebuild his forces, and get his revenge on Harry Potter.

Harry woke clutching at his burning scar. After a moment, the sharp pain ceased. He lay there, bemused at the resumption of obvious hatred Voldemort now had for him. Without opening his eyes, Harry stretched. Restrictive clothes split and ripped with a long tearing sound.

He opened his eyes in surprise and looked down at the remains of the baby clothes Madam Pomfrey had put on him. Harry examined himself in minute detail. He was growing remarkably fast.

Rolling off the bed, toddler Harry took a pillowcase off a pillow and made his way to the nurse's office. He entered and looked at the nurse writing notes fervidly. "Hello Madam Pomfrey," he said.

With a startled yelp, the nurse spun and looked at astonishment at Harry. "Mr. Potter!" she cried.

"What are you doing out of bed?"

Harry made a face. "I'm young, not sick."

"And relieving yourself on me was an accident too?"

Harry gave her the most innocent look he could manage. Coming from a face that looked only three years old amplified the effect. "Of course. I had no control over my actions."

"I've seen that look on you too often, Mr. Potter. It doesn't work on me."

Harry smirked and shrugged his little shoulders. "Worth a try."

"Right," she huffed. "Up on the bed, I've more tests to run."

"Oh joy," he said, walking back towards the bed, pillowcase still wrapped around him.

"Quiet. The Headmaster has decided that I am to be your guardian for now."

"I don't need a guardian. I'm old enough to take care of myself."

Madam Pomfrey smirked. "Have you looked in a mirror lately?"

Harry turned and gave her another smirk. "So it's my fault for peeing on you because I'm sixteen, but I have to submit to your guardianship because I'm a baby?"

Poppy sighed and shook her head. "Even at sixteen, you need a guardian. You are still a child."

Harry's smile disappeared. "That didn't stop them from putting me in Azkaban."

Madam Pomfrey looked at the serious expression on Harry's small face. She nodded in agreement. "You were too young for that place. No matter what crime you committed."

"And what crime did I commit?" he snarled at her.

Madam Pomfrey stopped and thought. The headmaster had told her Harry was innocent and that he had been spying on the Dark Lord for Dumbledore. She could feel a blush of shame start to show on her cheeks. "You were found guilty," she whispered, hanging her head.

Harry walked forward, reached up and took her hand. "You think the fact I am innocent will make a difference to the world?"

Madam Pomfrey looked into Harry's deep green eyes. "I don't know."

Harry smiled. "Me neither." he said brightly. "But I don't care either. The people I love know." Harry let go and climbed into his bed. "Now, before you start poking and prodding me, could I get something to eat?"



"Now, Miss. Granger, tell me what you have surmised about Mr. Potter's 'rebirth'." the headmaster said.

Hermione looked around at the group. "Well, Harry has managed to do a lot of incredible things since he managed to escape from Azkaban." She paused. "That's not to say that his escape wasn't incredible either," she added.

"Perhaps if you were to tell her what we know?" Cho prodded.

Dumbledore shook his head slightly. "I'd like to see if Harry's friends can figure this out for themselves," he said with a smile.

Ron sighed and looked over to Hermione and Ginny. "OK. What has he managed to do. Escape from the inescapable prison..."

"...survive falling from a cliff..." added Ginny.

"... and escaped from Voldemort," finished Hermione.

"Don't forget travelling the length of the country in minutes," added Cho.

Hermione, Ron and Ginny started tossing theories around. Sirius sat back and listened with a grin.

"Is Harry Potter still hungry?" Dobby asked as the toddler in front of him devoured his fifth plate of food.

Harry nodded, still chewing. Dobby sighed and disappeared with a pop.

"You're just saying that to delay the tests I want to perform," Madam Pomfrey said irritably.

Harry swallowed. "Right again," he said sarcastically. "I transfigured an extra stomach for myself just to avoid having my temperature taken."

"Your attitude is not helping, Mr. Potter."

Harry rolled his eyes and was about to make another sarcastic comment when the door to the infirmary burst open and Hermione stormed in, closely followed by Ron and Ginny.

"You litt-," started Hermione, before stopping in shock at Harry's three years of growth in three hours.

"Ah, you've figured it out then," said Harry, a humourless smile on his face.

Cho, Dumbledore and a large black dog entered the hospital ward after the angry trio, and they too stopped in shock at Harry's growth spurt.

"Professor! I need to tell you, I just woke before with a pain in my scar."

"Really? What did you see, Harry?"

"Wormtail and Professor Pritchard were tending to Voldemort." Harry frowned. "She's a Death Eater? I didn't see her at all during my training."

Dumbledore nodded. "She disappeared the night you infiltrated Voldemort. No one has seen her since you jumped off that cliff."

Harry smiled. "If Voldemort was trying to recruit me, I'd imagine that my death would throw his plans out a little. She must have run from both sides."

Dumbledore nodded again. "Anything else you can remember? Their location?" What they were doing?"

"They were in a place I didn't recognise. Small, and rundown. I think they are his only Death Eaters remaining. He had her set Wormtail's shoulder, and then put her under the Cruciatus. That's when I woke up.

"What are you talking about, Mr. Potter?" Madam Pomfrey asked.

"Mr. Potter here gets visions of Voldemort when he is either close, or particularly emotive. It has been rather useful in the past," explained the headmaster.

"Why didn't my scar hurt when I was training with him then?" asked Harry.

Dumbledore frowned in thought.

"When did your scar start hurting again?" asked Cho.

"Right after we, um, kissed."

"How did you feel then?"

Harry's expression became dreamy. "I felt wonderful. Like everything was all right in the world. I felt like I was never in Azkaban."

"Maybe that's it then. Azkaban does affect people differently after all."

"Stop changing the subject," Hermione snapped. "How did you become an animagus? And a phoenix at that?" she demanded.

Madam Pomfrey clutched her heart. "You are an animagus?"

Harry nodded. "How did you think I survived? I died in front of you, burst into flames and then sit up as a baby in a pile of ashes. Surely that would have given you at least a clue."

"How, Harry?" Hermione demanded. "How did you learn how to become an animagus?"

Harry looked questioningly at Cho, pointedly ignoring Hermione. "Do you still have it?"

Cho nodded and pulled out the animagus guide. Silently she passed it to Hermione.

Hermione read the letter James wrote to his son. She read through the letter, and looked up at Harry. "You never showed us this."

"You don't think it is a little private?" his eyes narrowed dangerously.

Hermione nodded. "This is the letter you asked to take with you to Azkaban?"

Harry nodded once. "Treat it like the Marauder's Map."

Ron raised his eyes in surprise, whipped out his wand and said, "I solemnly swear that I am up to no good."

Once more, the familiar swirling of ink signaled the activation of the guide.

As one, Hermione, Ron and Ginny looked from the guide up to Harry. He shrugged. "So I got some help."

Dumbledore looked up at the ceiling, and scratched his neck thoughtfully. "I wonder what Minerva's reaction to this achievement will be."

Harry smirked at the headmaster. "You mean will she be proud of me for managing to become an animagus, or shocked at me for not registering?"

Dumbledore smiled at him. "Exactly."

Harry's smirk was mirrored on the faces of his friends, each of them having an expression of anticipation.

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## Betrayal of the Best Kind Grow

Grow

The false dawn sunlight brought Harry out of his slumber. Fumbling on the nightstand for his glasses, he clumsily put them on, bringing the world into focus.

The hospital ward Harry was in was quiet and deserted. He had been moved there after a Hufflepuff student had come to see Madam Pomfrey, supported by two of his friends, his ankle shattered.

Harry had slept naked that night for obvious reasons. He stretched and looked down at his again-sixteen-year-old body. He smiled to himself and rose. Rummaging through the backpack Arthur Weasley had brought back from the ambush site, he pulled out a set of work robes. Soon, Harry was dressed.

Debating with himself over whether or not to inform Madam Pomfrey of his leaving, Harry threw the backpack on over one shoulder and left the private ward. In the main ward, the Hufflepuff student with the ruined ankle was tossing in his sleep. Harry recognised the remains of a Skele-grow potion on the student's nightstand. Madam Pomfrey must have removed the bones, rather than fix them.

Quietly, Harry made his way to the nurse's office. Knocking quietly on the door, he entered her work area. "Madam Pomfrey?" He whispered.

In the next room, Harry heard movement. The adjoining door opened, and a dressing gown clad Madam Pomfrey appeared. "Mr. Potter!" she said in surprise. "Do you have any idea what time it is?" she asked irritably.

Harry gave her a smile. "Time for me to leave."

The nurse huffed and pouted a little, but Harry was adamant he was leaving. He thanked her and left, walking as quietly as possible, so as to not wake up the other occupant.

As Harry closed the door behind him, he thought back to the events of yesterday. Snuffles had not been too happy with him.

*Harry watched dispassionately as Hermione, Ron and Ginny trudged despondently out of the*

hospital wing. Dumbledore gave him a disapproving look and also stood, taking Madam Pomfrey out of the ward with him. Cho and his canine godfather shared a look, before she also got up and left.

Sirius popped into his human form and looked down at his godson, now looking about six years old.

"That wasn't a very nice way to treat your friends, Harry." he said, his voice neutral.

"You think they are my friends? Hermione came charging in here demanding answers. Ron hardly said a word to me. Sure they were happy when I was reborn, but they abandoned me. I should just welcome them with open arms?"

"You did with Cho."

"That's different. Malfoy fed her lies about me killing Cedric. She loved me in her heart before she found out I was innocent. Hermione and Ron wanted me back in Azkaban before they knew I didn't kill Crabbe."

Sirius sighed and sat down. "So you are going to just punish them the way they punished you? By abandoning them? By ignoring them?"

Harry looked at his godfather. "You think that doing that makes me as bad as them."

Sirius shook his head. "I think that makes you less than them. Look, Hermione came in here demanding to know what had happened, right?"

Harry nodded. "Nice way of trying to patch up a friendship."

"Harry, most people are angry at those they love when they hurt or frighten them. When you died, Hermione and Ron and even Ginny were crushed. They knew you were innocent and that you had just given your life for them and the whole world. They knew they didn't deserve it. Then you pop up, a grin on your face, and piss on the nurse, like nothing happened."

Harry frowned. "So?"

Sirius sighed. "You scared them, Harry. You petrified them. For two hours until they were given the news of your death, they were outside crying and berating themselves."

Sirius stood and started pacing the length of the ward. "Then you appear alive as if it was all a joke, and they feel angry at you for it. If they didn't love you, they wouldn't be angry."

"Seems a strange way of showing love."

His godfather looked Harry in the eye. "You once scared your mother almost senseless. She was making an enormous pot of soup in the kitchen, when she was called out by James to give him a hand with something. She checked on you, and went to help him. You crawled into the kitchen."

Harry swallowed. As much as he loved stories about his parents, he wasn't sure he wanted to hear this.

"Your parents heard the pot of boiling soup crash to the kitchen floor, and then a scream. They ran out expecting to find you on the kitchen floor, burned and scalded, probably fatally. You looked up at them when they found you. You'd caused the pot to fall because you could smell what was inside and wanted to eat it. You actually summoned it, but it fell on the floor instead of you, on the other side of the room."

Harry blushed in shame. "I don't remember."

Sirius nodded. "Lily yelled at you for hours. You cried the whole time. Do you think your mother didn't love you?"

Harry shook his head, still blushing.

"Do you recall how I treated Remus when he figured out that I was innocent?"

Harry's eyes burned with tears. "Yes," he croaked.

"Your friends love you. They know they were wrong, and want to make it up to you. I'd suggest that they think that it will take a lifetime to do. Pushing them away from you is not going to make the past better, but it will make your future worse."

"I'd better go and apologise," Harry said, starting to get up.

Sirius held him down. "Not just yet. I want you to think on it. Apologise tomorrow."

"But, what if..."

"They aren't going anywhere Harry. Think on what your life would be like if you didn't have your friends."

Harry nodded and sat back in the bed, thinking hard.

Harry made his way through the empty corridors of Hogwarts. It had been over a year since he had walked this path, from the hospital wing to Gryffindor Tower.

All bemused at his thoughts, Harry was in front of the Fat Lady before he knew it. She looked up at him in surprise.

"Hello, dear. I haven't seen you for a long time."

"Hello. Um, I don't know the current password."

The Fat Lady smiled sadly at him. "Then I can't let you in, dear."

Harry frowned in thought, then smiled as he realised he didn't need to enter through the portrait. "That's OK, I'll get in another way. Thanks."

He ignored the painting's gasped objection, and made his way outside. He put the backpack down, and shimmered into his animagus form. The glowing red phoenix grasped the straps of the backpack and launched into the air.

Flying once again brought an exhilarating rush to him. Harry easily gained enough height to look into the windows of Gryffindor Tower. He located the sixth-year boy's dorm, Ron's snore easily identifiable to the incredibly sharp ears of the phoenix.

Harry tossed the backpack through the open window, and landed on the ledge. He strutted through the window and transformed.

A pang of homesickness flooded Harry as he surveyed the room. From Dean's non-moving soccer posters, to Ron's Chudley Cannon's orange decorations, everything in the room reminded Harry of all he had been denied.

Finally, he made his way over to Ron's bed. Harry gently shook Ron's shoulder.

"Geroff!" Ron mumbled, flaying his hands at the unwelcome intrusion. Harry persisted.

"What?" Ron asked, rolling over, his voice thick with sleep. "Harry?" he exclaimed at seeing his friend, sitting up abruptly in his bed.

"Shhh!" Harry said, holding up a finger to his lips. But it was too late.

Mumbled voices asking "What?" came from all over the dorm, followed by shouts of alarm. Dean and Seamus had leapt out of bed and were frantically searching for their wands. Neville had squeaked, but had his wand out and pointing it straight at Harry.

"Relax guys. It's OK. It's just me." Harry tried to calm them down.

Neville broke the stunned silence. "H-Harry? B-b-but you joined V-" he started.

Seamus and Dean had managed to finally get hold of their wands and had leapt out towards Harry with them extended. "*Stupefy!*" They yelled together.

Harry had been standing still in front of Ron's bed as the first syllable was uttered, but had ducked, rolled and launched himself at the pair by the time they'd finished the incantation.

Ron was hit by the pair of stunning spells, and immediately fell back in his bed unconscious. Harry had closed the distance between himself and Dean in a crouch. He spun and extended his leg, kicking in a wide, low circle. He struck on the side of Dean's right leg, slamming both his friend's ankles together and dropping Dean onto the floor.

Harry leapt up and grabbed Seamus' wrist, forcing it up, pointing his wand at the ceiling. Twisting

deftly, the Irish wizard's wand dropped from nerveless fingers. Harry spun again, pulling on the captured wrist to put Seamus' body between himself and Neville, just in time for Neville's stunning spell to strike the middle of Seamus' back.

Harry tossed Seamus down onto Dean, knocking the wind out of his old friend. He quickly stooped, and scooped up both wands. Again, he moved sideways and rolled. Crossing both wands, Harry fired a stunning spell at both the dismayed Neville and the gasping Dean.

Harry stood slowly and let out a deep breath. "Bugger. That could have gone better." he said.

Ron woke suddenly, feeling a flood of energy flow through him. Harry stood over him, a smile on his face.

"Welcome back."

"What happened?"

Ron watched as Harry got off the bed and gestured towards the other three beds in the dorm. Ron looked around and saw his three dorm mates asleep in their beds. He looked questioningly at Harry. "Didn't they stun you?"

Harry shook his head. "I learned too much from Voldy's henchmen to be taken down by surprise. Hopefully, they'll wake up and think they had a dream."

Ron coughed. "Voldy?" he exclaimed. He then shook his head. "Don't bet on it." He looked into Harry's eyes. "Are you speaking to me now?"

Harry nodded bashfully and beckoned Ron to follow him downstairs to the common room.

Hermione, Ginny and Ron sat in one of the lush couches in front of the fire as the sun slowly rose. Harry sat in an armchair, facing the trio.

"I want to apologise for how I treated you yesterday. I-" he began.

"Oh, Harry." Ginny interrupted. "You have no need to apologise. It is the three of us who need to say sorry, for not believing in you."

Harry bit his lip and looked at his hands in his lap. "Sirius pointed out that when Remus figured out that he was innocent, he didn't spend time trying to punish him. They hugged and forgave each other straight away."

Suddenly, a crying young lady crashed into him, hugging him so hard he had trouble drawing breath. "H-Harry! I'm so sorry!" Hermione sobbed, her face buried in his chest.

Harry carefully put his arms around his friend, hugging her back. Two other pairs of arms encircled him and Hermione. "I thought about what it would be like to live my life without friends." said Harry, feeling totally at peace in the confines of the arms of his three friends.



"Nothing would be worth doing if that was the price."

The four sat still for several minutes, softly crying at the relief of forgiveness and friendship.

None of them heard the portrait door swing open.

"Ah, Mr. and Miss. Weasley!" Professor McGonagall said. "Good to see you are up. The Fat Lady has informed me that someone looking like Mr. Potter has tried to gain entry to Gryffindor Tower. I would be-" her eyes widened as Hermione got off Harry and she saw who was sitting in the chair.

"Potter!" she exclaimed and whipped out her wand.

Harry rolled his eyes as his friends jumped in front of him, protecting him from his former head of house.

"Get out of the way, Granger, Weasley! Now!" McGonagall yelled.

"Do as she says, please." Harry told his friends.

Reluctantly, the three stepped aside, allowing Harry and Professor McGonagall to lock eyes.

"How did you get in here?" she demanded.

Harry raised an eyebrow. "Do you mean 'in here' the common room, or 'in here' the school?"

The stern professor's lips pressed together tightly. "The common room first."

Harry nodded his head towards the boy's dormitories. "Through an open window into the sixth year boy's dorm."

"And how did you get to the window from the outside?" she demanded.

Harry grinned. "You'll love this." he said, and transformed.

Harry ruffled his feathers in front of the stunned professor and flew slowly towards her. He flared his wings just before reaching her and transformed back. Reaching out with one hand, Harry deftly removed Professor McGonagall's wand from her unresisting hand.

"How many OWLs would I have got for Transfiguration, do you think?" he asked cheekily.

Professor McGonagall blinked and stood statue-still, unable to speak. Harry silently offered her wand back. A shaking hand took it from him.

"H-h-h-" she stuttered.

"How?"

McGonagall nodded, still speechless.

"My father was an animagus too. He left me his notes magically stored in the parchment he wrote my letter on. I spent the ten months in Azkaban studying it."

The normally reserved professor gave a soft, startled scream and clutched her hand to her mouth. "He didn't register?" she exclaimed, in the tone of voice which suggested that Harry's father had committed genocide by not doing so.

Harry grinned, and heard Ron laugh behind him. "No, he did not." He turned and gave Ron a thumbs up.

He turned back to the Professor. "As for getting into the school, Professor Dumbledore brought me here. Voldemort almost killed me, but I managed to wipe out nearly all his Death Eaters before he ran."

Professor McGonagall had started to collect her wits before this announcement, but now stood staring at him, a look of profound confusion on her face.

Harry took her unresisting hand. "Come over to the fire, Professor. I'll explain everything once you are sitting down."

Professor McGonagall finally managed to shake off her confusion. "No, I think my office would be a better idea. We won't be interrupted there."

Harry nodded and turned back to his friends. "Why don't you guys get dressed and meet us in the Professor's office." They nodded and went up to their respective dorms. Harry again faced his former teacher. "There may be some people in the corridor at this time of morning. Do you mind if I travel on your shoulder?"

"Travel on my shoulder?" Professor McGonagall echoed, confused.

Harry smiled and transformed. One strong beat of his wings, and he settled on the stern teacher's right shoulder.

Professor McGonagall's hands trembled as she poured herself a stiff drink. With two large gulps, she tossed it down. Coughing a little, she turned back to her former student sitting in her office.

"You are the spy for the ministry who killed all those Death Eaters yesterday. You. My student." she said, trying to wrap her mind around the concept.

"Former student." Harry replied with a wry grin.

McGonagall swallowed and sat down. "I thought... When you left... I didn't..."

Harry leaned forward and took her trembling hands in his. "Professor. If Voldemort didn't show up that night, I would have gone with you. But we thought that if the Ministry found out I was innocent, they would probably keep it a secret and want me to infiltrate his inner circle."

McGonagall shook her head. "I would never condone an action that would put a student in such danger. I wouldn't let the Ministry do that."

Harry smiled. "I know. But when I told the headmaster 'This will fix things for everyone' I hoped he'd tell my, er, our mutual friend. To let him know that I was joining him to spy on the Death Eaters."

"Mutual friend? And before you said 'we thought' when talking about the Ministry. Who is this person?"

Harry smiled. "Someone who never doubted me."

Professor McGonagall tried her best to look stern. The effect was spoiled by her still trembling hands. "Their name, Mr. Potter. What is this person's name?"

Harry sat back and considered his response. He supposed it didn't matter, since Sirius was now in the custody of Mr. Weasley and would be presented to the aurors this morning. He would be given the opportunity to tell his story under veritaserum, and had Dumbledore at his side to testify for him.

"My godfather." he said.

A long pause. "Your godfather?" she finally shrieked.

Harry nodded. "You met him a bit over a year ago." he said slyly.

"Mr. Potter, Sirius Black is a murderer and a follower of You-know-who!"

Harry shook his head. "I just killed all but two of his followers, Sirius was never one of Voldemort's Death Eaters."

"He betrayed your parents! He was their secret keeper!"

Harry held up his hand. "Professor, please just listen." He waited until his former professor calmed down. "Sirius Black is currently in the custody of the Minister. Mr. Weasley is taking him to the aurors today, and will organise to give him a trial, something he was denied fifteen years ago."

"He's been captured?"

Harry smiled and shook his head. "No, he has given himself up now that his story can come out. He will be a free man by this evening."

"What? Free?"

Harry nodded. "He will exonerate himself, and implicate Peter Pettigrew."

"Peter? Peter died fifteen years ago."

"No, I broke Pettigrew's nose less than two days ago. Perhaps it would make more sense if you knew that Pettigrew's nickname is 'Wormtail'."

"Wormtail? That was the name of the Death Eater who helped Barty Crouch kidnap Alastor Moody."

Harry grinned broadly. "You remember. I told you that my father was an animagus, he was a stag. His nickname was 'Prongs'. Peter was also an animagus, he took the form of a rat. His nickname was, of course, 'Wormtail'."

"Peter didn't have the talent to become an animagus without help." McGonagall said.

"Do you remember who my father was friends with? Close friends I mean."

McGonagall nodded. "He hung around with Peter Pettigrew, Remus Lupin and Sirius Black."

Harry raised his eyebrows. "What do they all have in common?"

A frown crossed the face of Professor McGonagall briefly, before her eyes shot wide open in realisation. "Sirius Black is an animagus too!"

Harry grinned and nodded. "Remember the end of the third task of the Tri-Wizard Tournament, the big black dog Professor Dumbledore asked you to get from Hagrid's hut?" Harry watched as more realisation dawned in the professor's eyes. "The three of them would join Remus, or 'Moony', on his monthly excursions. They were able to keep control of him so he didn't hurt himself or others, and kept him company. Sirius and my father helped Pettigrew to become an animagus."

McGonagall looked even more shaken. "And how did you learn?"

Harry reached into his robes and extracted the guide. "Do you remember this?"

She nodded. "Your father's letter. You wanted to take it to Azkaban. I checked it for magic."

"It only works for people who are not already animagi."

McGonagall stared at him. "I gave you the means to learn to become an animagus?"

"Yes." he said simply.

A knock on the door interrupted them. McGonagall said, "Enter!" and Harry's Gryffindor friends entered.

Hermione looked as though she was about to burst into tears. "Harry!" she cried. "Something bad has happened to Sirius!"

Harry leapt out of his chair and grabbed the copy of the Daily Prophet from her hand.

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## Betrayal of the Best Kind Exit

Exit

Harry quickly scanned the story, noting in passing that even the capture of the infamous Sirius Black was pushed off the front page by the events of Harry's successful ambush. He sighed in relief.

"Hermione! You nearly killed me!" he exclaimed.

His friends looked at him as though he had suggested they go and pat Hagrid's latest pet.

He laughed. "It's OK. Skeeter is probably annoyed that she can't write anything bad about Mr. Weasley, so she didn't name him."

"What about my Dad?" asked Ron.

Harry put the open paper on Professor McGonagall's desk and pointed to a part of the story. "Listen to this. '*A ministry official yesterday dragged the convicted murderer into the headquarters of the Ministry's Auror division.*' Ha! Ron, your Dad is the interim Minister, yet he only rates as a 'ministry official' when no bad press can be hung on him."

"My Dad captured Sirius?" Ginny squeaked

Harry smiled at her. "No, Gin. Your father came to see me yesterday in the hospital wing. He and Sirius had been introduced before by Dumbledore, and they decided that with all the good news recently, why not add to it by giving himself up and getting a trial." Harry turned to Ron. "By handing himself to your Dad, he is going to be safe, get a trial and his name cleared. Not only that, your Dad will get the credit for bringing in the 'Infamous Sirius Black', and will get enough support behind him to be formally declared Minister."

"How can you be sure he will be cleared?" asked Hermione, concern evident in her voice.

Harry smiled. "I understand they contacted Remus and Professor Snape. The two of them will join professor Dumbledore to give testimony." Harry again sat down and faced professor McGonagall. "While I was at Voldemort's 'lair', I managed to send information back to the headmaster, a list of all the Death Eaters and minions. Mr. Weasley will also be able to use that to further justify that Sirius was never a Death Eater."

"How?" asked the professor.

"By matching up the names on the list with the prisoners they took after the ministry raid and from the corpses from the ambush I set." replied Harry.

"But Harry, they are having trouble identifying some of the remains." said Hermione. She blushed as Harry turned to face her. "It was in the story on the front page." she finished.

Harry shook his head. "They shouldn't be now. I suggested using poly-juice potion. Pluck a hair from the remains and drink the potion. You should be identifiable then."

Hermione's blush deepened. "I should have thought of that."

Harry laughed. "So should have Mr. Weasley. He was blushing as much as you when I suggested it to him yesterday."

The four students laughed, while Professor McGonagall tried hard not to let amusement show on her face.

It was several days later, and Harry watched as his godfather was escorted out of the holding area. Sirius was pushed into the very seat in which Igor Karkaroff, Barty Crouch, Jr. and Ludo Bagman had sat during their trials, which Harry had watched in Dumbledore's pensieve.

Harry shuddered as the cold from the dementors touched him, even from this distance. Sirius didn't struggle as he was shackled to the chair. His godfather looked around and saw Harry perched on the back of Dumbledore's chair. He smiled weakly.

Harry took a deep breath and gave a long, beautiful, musical and unearthly trill. Immediately all murmuring in the chamber stopped, as the phoenix song washed over all those present. Sirius visibly straightened as his heart swelled with courage and love, fortified by the beautiful sound.

Dumbledore turned and gave Harry a smile. Though everyone's eyes were on them, Harry didn't care. To the world right now, he was Fawkes, Dumbledore's familiar.

To the world indeed, Harry thought. He was shocked at just how many people had come to see the belated trial of the mass murderer, Sirius Black. The chamber was full beyond capacity, to the point where wizards were standing shoulder to shoulder in the aisles between the seats. Harry turned his head all the way round like an owl to see the selected students who had been invited to attend the trial. Harry's friends sat next to each other, Ron and Hermione holding hands in the middle, Ginny and Cho on either side of the couple. Most of the other prefects were present too, including Draco Malfoy. The mood of the crowd seemed to have a rather vindictive edge. These people had been glutted recently with tales of Voldemort's rather spectacular loss of power, and were desperate for more.

Mr. Weasley himself stood in front of the crowd and began the proceedings.

"Sirius Black, you have been brought here in front of the Council of Magical Law to answer

charges relating to your activities of fifteen years ago. At the time, you were placed into Azkaban without trial. Though you escaped and have evaded capture for three years, I have decided that you should stand trial now, to show the wizarding world what justice really means."

Harry smiled to himself at Mr. Weasley's carefully chosen words. He had never suspected Ron's father of being so duplicitous.

"May I request to be given veritaserum?" asked Sirius, his voice easily carrying all over the chamber. "I wish to ensure you all hear the truth."

A soft, surprised murmur drifted through the chamber at this request. A prisoner could not be forced to take veritaserum, and most refused to do so. Only those who were giving testimony were required to take it. Asking for it at the outset of a trial was unheard of, since the interrogator could in theory ask anything of the prisoner, bringing out any deep secret from their lives.

Mr. Weasley struggled to keep his face passive, but Harry's sharp eyes picked out a slight turning of the corner's of his mouth. "Granted. Would the potion master of the court administer the requested potion."

An elderly wizard, clean shaven, but with hair longer than even Dumbledore slowly made his way towards Sirius. He asked Harry's godfather to tilt his head back and poke out his tongue. Sirius complied, and three drops were placed on his tongue. Sirius swallowed and his expression became peaceful.

Mr. Weasley started questioning Sirius, starting with a run of simple questions, dealing with the events leading up to the night they were murdered. Finally, he got to the start of the questions designed to clear Sirius' name.

"Sirius Black, it is documented that the Potter's were to be placed under the *Fidelius* Charm and that you were to be their Secret Keeper. Albus Dumbledore has testified to this. Do you dispute any of this?"

"No, I do not."

"So you were their Secret Keeper when the charm was cast?"

"No, I was not."

Mr. Weasley managed to put on quite a respectable expression of surprise, but the reaction from the rest of the chamber distracted attention from the interim Minister. Everyone was staring at Sirius in disbelief.

"How is that possible?" asked Mr. Weasley, once the chatter in the chamber had died down.

"A few people knew that I was to be their Secret Keeper. Everyone else could quite easily guess that I would hold that honour. That made the choice a stupid one. Over James' objections, I suggested that another friend of ours become their Secret Keeper. I was going into hiding, so any



of Voldemort's forces who wanted them would come after me, leaving the real Secret Keeper safe."

Murmuring in the crowd increased at this, most expressing disbelief, but annoyed at having to accept it as truth, while some few were nodding their heads at the reasoning.

Mr. Weasley again waited for the crowd to settle down. "Did you inform anyone else of this decision?"

"Of course not. That was the point. No one was to know, that way, no one could betray them. Not even Professor Dumbledore knew of the change."

"But they were betrayed."

Sirius nodded. "Yes, the Secret Keeper we selected betrayed them."

"Who was their Secret Keeper?" Mr. Weasley thundered.

Immediately, the crowd silenced, waiting for Sirius' answer.

"Peter Pettigrew."

For a second, no one in the audience said anything. Suddenly, an enormous roar of mixed anger, disbelief and surprise filled the chamber. Sirius sat calmly as the noise washed over him, his eyes locked on Mr. Weasley.

Harry swept his eyes over the crowd. With that one question, Mr. Weasley and Sirius had forced everyone in the chamber to change their perceptions. The 'monster' Sirius Black had done everything in his power to keep the Potter's safe, while the hero Peter Pettigrew was made out to be a villain.

The shouts and taunts continued for several minutes. Through it all, Mr. Weasley and Sirius stared straight at each other.

Finally, a single demand seemed to take up through the crowd. Everyone wanted to know that Sirius was indeed under the influence of Veritaserum. One of the aurors stepped forward and waved his wand over Sirius. Harry's godfather glowed silver. The auror turned back to Mr. Weasley and nodded. "He is still under."

Ten minutes later, order was still not restored at this announcement. Items were being thrown down at Sirius, but bounced off a shield surrounding the chair. Most looked outraged that not only had a hero been slandered by such filth, but Sirius was allowed to get away with it. Harry searched for Rita Skeeter and surprisingly, found her with a wicked smile on her face, scribbling furiously.

It took several aurors together casting silencing spells over the crowd to finally restore at least the illusion of calm. For show, Mr. Weasley authorised another dose to be given to Sirius, making his testimony beyond reproach, no matter what.

"It was Peter Pettigrew who betrayed the Potters to the Dark Lord?"

"Yes. I was to go into hiding that night. I went to his hiding-place to check on him after the charm was cast, but he had disappeared. I felt something was terribly wrong, so I went to Godric's Hollow. But I arrived too late. The James and Lily were already dead, and Harry was crying, a cut on his forehead."

For the first time, Sirius looked around the room. "Hagrid had arrived before me, and was carrying young Harry out of the ruins. I was crushed, but I knew my duty. Since I was his godfather, I asked Hagrid to give Harry to me; but he refused, saying that he had orders to bring the boy to Dumbledore. We argued briefly, but no one argues to much with Hagrid." Sirius chuckled.

Harry looked around. If it wasn't for the silencing charm over the crowd, dry laughter would have been heard from everywhere. Several witches and wizards were openly grinning at Sirius' last statement.

"I gave him my flying motorcycle, I certainly didn't need it any more. Then I went and hunted down that traitor, Pettigrew."

Mr. Weasley again spoke up. "Several eye witnesses claim to have seen you and Peter duel, and claim that you killed him."

Sirius shook his head. "I finally cornered him, well, I thought I'd cornered him. It was actually an elaborate trap. Peter called out 'Lily and James, Sirius! How could you?' before cutting off his own finger and setting off an explosion, then escaping down a drain."

Harry again looked around, and again saw disbelief and confusion on the faces of the crowd.

"How in Merlin's name did Peter manage to escape down a drain?"

Sirius looked Mr. Weasley in the eye. "James Potter, Peter Pettigrew and I all gained a special ability we learned at school. We are animagi. Unregistered animagi. I am a large black dog. James was a great stag. Peter is a rat."

Most of the rest of Sirius' trial didn't hold any other bombshells of that caliber. Sirius was removed from the witness chair, and Remus was called up to testify that, yes, Peter Pettigrew, James Potter and Sirius Black were in fact illegal animagi.

It came out that Sirius' wand had been snapped before a prior incanteum spell had been cast. That he had been thrown into Azkaban without even a cursory investigation. That in the fervor that swept the wizarding world in the aftermath of Voldemort's first defeat, Sirius was overlooked, and forgotten. Sirius had finally become to be seen as a victim, rather than a criminal.

Sirius sat back into the chair, though now without the shackles. He took some more veritaserum, and prepared himself to be interrogated once again.

Mr. Weasley again stood. "Sirius Black, you infiltrated Hogwarts after your rather famous escape.

Up until now, it was assumed you did so to find and possibly kill Mr. Harry Potter. What was your motive?"

"Before I escaped Azkaban, the then-Minister Fudge visited. He spoke with me briefly, and I asked if I could have the paper if he was finished with it. I wanted to do the crossword. On the front page was a photo of a family that had won a competition, and had spent the winnings on a trip to Egypt."

Mr. Weasley coughed, blushing slightly. "I am familiar with the issue in question." he said.

Sirius gave him a smile. "The photo showed a large family, I know now it was your family, Minister. But what caught my attention was the pet your son Ron had on his shoulder."

Mr. Weasley frowned. "Scabbers? Percy's old rat?"

Sirius nodded. "The rat had a missing toe on his right front paw. I had seen Peter transform often enough that I could recognise him easily."

Mr. Weasley stood stunned. "Scabbers was Peter Pettigrew?" he asked, trembling.

"Yes. Peter had himself adopted into a wizarding family with contacts to the Ministry, so he could keep an ear out for the return of his master. I escaped from prison by squeezing through the door in my animagus form when I was fed one evening, and swam to the mainland."

With the end of the silencing charm, murmuring could now be heard throughout the chamber, though the general tone was no longer disbelief and abuse. Now, interest and curiosity was the dominating tone.

"Hogwarts had not yet started, and there was one thing I really wanted to do first. To lay eyes on my godson, to make sure he was safe and well."

Sirius' eyes flickered over to Dumbledore and Harry. "I think I may have startled him. I met him near his Aunt's home one evening. He was dragging his trunk after getting into an argument which resulted in the Magic Reversal squad being summoned. After I saw him get on the Knight Bus, I made my way up to Hogsmeade, where I stayed in the Shrieking Shack, Remus Lupin's old monthly home."

Mr. Weasley seemed uneasy. "You met up with Harry before he reached Diagon Alley that night?"

"I didn't meet up with him, I just saw him, and I think he saw me. He looked thin and abused. My heart went out to him, but he was safe, and I needed to get to Hogwarts to get Wormtail."

"Wormtail?"

"Peter's nickname."

Mr. Weasley nodded and continued. "Can you tell us about your attempts to enter Hogwarts?"

Sirius spent the next half hour detailing the events of Harry's third year. He told of his abduction of Ron and Peter, and how Harry and Hermione tried to rescue their friend. Of Snape's interruption and threat to have the dementors administer a kiss. The audience visibly shuddered at this, realising that a possibly innocent man could have been given an irreversible punishment.

"Harry and Hermione saved my life that night." He told the court after his account of the dementors attacking both him and Harry. "They somehow managed to save a hippogriff who was scheduled for execution, and flew on his back up to the office I was locked in. I climbed on Buckbeak, and flew off. Harry and I wrote to each other occasionally over summer and got to know each other better."

Harry turned his feathered head to look at Professor Snape. The potion master's eyes were bulging, his lips pressed into an almost invisible line. His head snapped around and stared at the headmaster. Dumbledore simply nodded sadly in confirmation. Snape coloured, and looked back at Sirius in anger.

What he did next stunned Harry. With a deep breath, Professor Snape hung his head and began to chuckle quietly to himself.

Harry's thoughts whirled through his head. The working relationship built between Snape and Sirius must be stronger than he thought.

Sirius was still talking. "Ever since that time, I have been working for Albus Dumbledore and with Severus Snape. He has had us infiltrate meetings of Death Eaters and eavesdrop, examine new recruits for patterns and trends to help identify possible new potential recruits and other espionage activities. My animagus form gives me the ability to scent people after the fact, giving the Professor intelligence that he would not otherwise have."

Dumbledore stood. "Indeed. Since Sirius told me his story at the end of young Mr. Potter's third year, he and Severus have been instrumental in keeping me informed of Voldemort's activities and plans as well as keeping Harry safe."

Mr. Weasley asked Sirius one final line of questions. "What made you give yourself up now?"

"Voldemort's power structure and minions have been crushed, because of a spy for the ministry. It was due solely to this person that we could identify the Dark Lord's London headquarters and training base. This person managed to give us a comprehensive list of Death Eaters and minions. With this intelligence the ministry mounted its highly publicised and successful raid. Less than twelve hours later, the spy sprung a trap that killed all but two of Voldemort's followers, and crippled Voldemort himself. With such success against him, there is no need for me to stay undercover. I would like nothing more than to be free, free to complete the duty a friend asked of me."

Harry again turned round to look at his friends. In his wide field of vision he saw Draco colour with anger. His parents had both died at Harry's ambush.

"Do you know the identity of the two surviving followers?" asked Mr. Weasley

"Yes. Peter Pettigrew and Victoria Pritchard."

Mr. Weasley appeared to think something over. Smiling with his decision, he asked, "Are you aware of the identity of the spy?"

Sirius raised his eyebrows in surprise, but had to answer. "Yes, I am."

An excited babble spread through the crowd, now firmly intrigued in the events of Sirius' past. Mr. Weasley took a breath to steady himself. "I believe it is time that the identity of the heroic spy be revealed. Could you please name that person."

Complete silence filled the room.

Sirius smiled in understanding. "Harry Potter." he whispered, his voice somehow carrying across the room.

There was an incredibly raucous party that night. The jury had taken just seconds to determine that Sirius had been wrongfully imprisoned. That was good news in itself, but with the announcement that Harry was single-handedly responsible for the death of seventy dark wizards had sent the audience into what could only be described as a frenzy.

Harry was dancing with Cho, laughing at one of Fred and George's pranks. He looked around the room. The Great Hall of Hogwarts hadn't seen so much fun before. In recognition of Draco Malfoy's contribution to Harry's freedom, the twins had released a new line of just tested sweets, aptly named Ferret Funnies.

Several people had inadvertently eaten one, and had spent the next few minutes bouncing around in the form of a white ferret.

Every single student and teacher at Hogwarts were enjoying themselves to the limit. Hundreds of former students had returned for the night's festivities. Half the Ministry officials were also there, chatting away, all desperate to get to speak to either Harry or Sirius.

Colin Creevey, new camera in hand, had started desperately restocking his collection of photographs of Harry, snapping him from every angle.

The middle of the dance floor was dominated by the massive figures of Hagrid and Madam Maxine. Dumbledore and McGonagall were rosy cheeked and laughing, the normally stern professor's pointed hat slightly askew.

With his arms around Cho, Harry thought back to the events of the day, and watching through phoenix eyes as first Dumbledore, and then Snape gave testimony of Harry's innocence.

Draco had to be dragged down by aurors to give testimony, and had been, remarkably, forced to take veritaserum. Everyone else had willingly taken it and had presented evidence that suggested

Harry's innocence. Now Draco's account of the day of the murder shed new light.

Draco testified that he hadn't known that his father intended to kill Crabbe, and that was the only thing that kept him out of Azkaban. The Slytherin student had been grilled at why he had not come forward to tell of Harry's innocence, Draco repeating over and over that he was afraid of his father.

Draco now sat sullenly in a corner, shunned by all, while the wild party flowed around him.

Someone tapped Harry on the shoulder. He turned and came face to face with Hermione. "May I cut in?" she asked.

Cho smiled at her and pushed Harry into her arms. Leaning forward Cho whispered, "I'll get us some drinks." into Harry's ear before leaving the two friends alone.

Harry put his arms around Hermione's waist and holding her close, started a slow dance. "Productive day, eh?"

Hermione just smiled at him. "Yes, and profitable too. Do you think you and Sirius will fit in at Malfoy Manor? He is going to fulfil his final 'duty' to your father isn't he?"

Harry laughed. "I think the name has officially been changed to 'Black's Pad'. The way Sirius is flirting with those witches over there, I'd say it was an apt change."

"Did you see Draco's face when the jury decided that you and Sirius would get Voldemort's and Malfoy's impounded fortunes split between you?"

Harry shook his head. "I missed the announcement. I was just too happy at the news that both Sirius and I had been exonerated. It was only when Mr. Weasley asked me when I planned to move in to the Manor that I realised I'd missed something."

"So suddenly being one of the richest wizards in England means nothing to you?" she asked slyly.

He smiled fondly. "Of course not. It doesn't change who I am, or how I feel about anyone."

Hermione rested her head on his shoulder. "That's what I love about you Harry. No matter what happens to you, no matter the fame or fortune, you will always be Harry."

The pair danced in silence for a while before Cho returned with three bottles. The trio left the dance floor and found some empty chairs. For about the hundredth time, Harry declined to be interviewed by yet another reporter who had managed to infiltrate the party.

That's starting to become very annoying." Cho mused, sipping her butterbeer.

"Better get used to it, Chang." came a familiar voice from behind. The trio turned to see the smiling face of Ron Weasley. "If you want to be the girlfriend of 'The-Boy-Who-Lived', you are going to have to learn to put up with that."

"Where have you been?" hissed Hermione.

"You just can't help yourself, can you 'Mione?" Ron replied.

Just before Hermione started berating her boyfriend, Ron leaned forward and planted a tender kiss on her lips. Leaning back, he turned to Cho and said, "You were right, it is better to start the making up during the argument."

Hermione narrowed her eyes, and leapt at Ron, tackling him to the ground where she proceeded to cover his face with kisses. Harry and Cho just laughed at the pair.

"Miss. Granger! Mr. Weasley!" came the shocked voice of Professor McGonagall, who had made her way over to the group of friends. "Show some dignity!"

Harry jumped to his feet and bowed to his head of house. "Professor, may I have the honour of a dance?"

The surprised expression on McGonagall's face made Harry smile. "I-, Well-, Very well, Mr. Potter." she said finally.

Harry took the professor onto the dance floor and started a slow waltz.

"I've been meaning to thank you, Professor, for keeping my location a secret for the last few days." he said.

A rare smile touched McGonagall's face. "You are welcome, Mr. Potter. I did want to ask you something. You are going to register your, ahem, ability?"

Harry smiled. "I have a special dispensation from the Minister himself. I don't need to publicly register until Voldy is gone for good."

The professor frowned. "Your rather flippant use of a nickname for You-Know-who is not entirely appropriate."

"I disagree. I am not trying to be disrespectful to those he has killed or had killed. Rather, I am trying to dispel the aura of fear the mere mention of his name generates. Professor Dumbledore agrees with me. Hopefully, people will start to again use his name, rather than perpetuate the fear."

Again, a smile touched the stern teacher's face. "You do belong in Gryffindor."

Harry blushed at the compliment. "That is another thing I need to talk to you about."

A momentary flicker of alarm crossed her features. "You are coming back to school, aren't you?"

"Yes, of course. But the Headmaster had decided that I need to be placed in fifth year, if only so that I get my OWLs." Harry took a deep breath. "I was hoping to stay in the sixth-years dorm though,

with my friends."

Professor McGonagall nodded. "I'm sure I can make those arrangements." She raised her eyebrows suggestively. "Speaking of the sixth-year dorm, Mr. Longbottom came to me a few days ago with a rather fantastic story. Apparently, each of the boys in that dorm with the exception of Mr. Weasley had the same dream. Someone matching your description appeared in the dorm. They all tried to stun him, but were all stunned themselves. When they woke, their wands were on their bedside tables, and they were tucked into bed."

Harry swallowed. "Sounds like a coincidence."

"Yes, well, I think you'd better have a word with Messrs. Thomas, Finnegan and Longbottom before your sleeping arrangements are finalised." For the third time in a minute, a smile appeared.

That must be a record, thought Harry. "Thank you, I will." The song stopped, and Harry bowed to the professor.

Professor McGonagall curtseyed, and said, "Thank you for the dance, Mr. Potter. I enjoyed it very much."

"Likewise, Professor." Harry replied. As they went their different ways, McGonagall was collected by Sirius and whirled out onto the dance floor again, here eyes wide with surprise. Harry smiled to himself, until he also found himself captured and dancing again, with none other than Rita Skeeter.

"Harry! Lovely to finally get a chance to speak to you." she gushed, gripping Harry's hand tightly.

Harry's mind briefly debated transforming in order to escape, but his common sense overrode that instinct. He sighed and started to dance.

Skeeter's face lit up. "I know you weren't at the trial today, so you probably don't realise exactly what went on when your godfather was being interrogated." she started.

Harry smiled evilly. "I thought your reaction to when my godfather was confirmed under the influence of veritaserum was interesting; the smile on your face was almost scary."

The expression of shock on her face was priceless. Harry continued before she could regain herself.

"You had almost the same smile as when you were covering Ludo Bagman's trial. That green pen you had then, where did you get it?"

Rita Skeeter stood still, absolutely speechless.

"Well, if you want to keep it a secret, I don't mind. I liked the way you had your hair then, short and blonde."



If Harry had been a goldfish, he could have been excused for thinking it was looking in a mirror. Rita's mouth opened and closed, but nothing came out.

"I am sorry, however, I understand my godfather has organised for an exclusive interview of both of us. He told me he didn't want a 'rag' like the Daily Prophet from twisting our stories. Thank you for the dance." Harry disentangled himself and left the shocked reporter on the dance floor.

Harry finally made it back to his friends, having managed to politely decline dance offers from both Patil twins, Blaise Zabini, Professor Trewlaney and Hannah Abbott. He plonked down with no grace at all and sighed.

Cho looked at him fondly. "At least you can dance with your head of house. Professor Flitwick is too short to dance with."

Harry made an adoring face. "I'd rather dance with you."

Cho giggled and the pair stood. Ron and Hermione joined them and the four friends went back to join the party.

Cho lay dreamily on soft white sand, watching as the sun slowly dipped into the ocean. Harry knelt next to her gently rubbing the tears he just shed as a phoenix into her smooth, firm legs. The brands she had carried for weeks flaked off, leaving smooth, unblemished skin behind.

The party at Hogwarts had gone on through the night, and into the morning. No one seemed ready to quit. Harry had allowed himself to be dragooned into dancing with only a few other selected people, including Mrs. Weasley, Ginny, and the three Gryffindor Chasers who had graduated at the end of last year.

Finally, Harry had managed to sneak off with Cho. He grabbed a basket Dobby had prepared for him, and transformed. Cho took hold of his tail, and less than half an hour later, the pair had landed on a deserted beach, an hour before sunset.

"This is beautiful, Harry. Where are we?" Cho had asked.

"We are on the western coast of Australia, just in time for sunset."

Harry had suggested removing their clothes so he could finally heal Cho's scars.

"But what if someone comes by?"

Harry had smiled. "There isn't a single person for about three hundred kilometers."

Now, the naked pair sat on towels, looking out to sea. Gently, Harry continued to rub his tears over Cho's taut skin, removing the final reminders of that horrible time.

As the last of the scars disappeared, Cho looked deep into Harry's eyes. "I love you, Harry Potter. I love you with all my heart."

Harry slowly ran the back of his fingers down Cho's beautiful cheek. "I love you too, Cho. Never forget that."

Harry slowly lowered his face to Cho's, and they shared a chaste kiss. Pulling apart they looked at the love evident for each other in their gaze. The next kiss was passionate.

As the sun dipped below the red-stained Indian Ocean, the pair lovingly gave their virginity to each other. They lay in each other's arms and lightly dozed as the warm, gentle wind from the vast inland desert caressed them.

Nothing could disturb their peace; nothing could intrude on the feeling of safety they felt, holding each other close. If betrayal brought them to this place, then it was betrayal of the best kind.

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