

Title: Harry Potter – Slytherin: The Order of the Phoenix

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Summary: Harry Potter, sorted into Slytherin House, joins the Order of the Phoenix.

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Chapter 1 – A New Normal

Professor Dumbledore arrived at number Twelve, Grimmauld Place, just a few days after the start of the summer holiday. He was there on business with the Order of the Phoenix, but also spent a good deal of time talking to Harry.

“When school resumes, Harry, I will begin conducting personal lessons with you from time to time to prepare you for what lies ahead,” said Dumbledore. He explained that it was one of the reasons he was not going to make Harry a Prefect -- so he could focus on more important things.

Harry had not even thought about Prefects being appointed starting fifth year. However, he was somewhat disappointed when he thought about how much he had done... But then he remembered his near catastrophe last year because of his foolish, willful, and reckless disobedience.

Before Harry could dwell on it, Dumbledore said, “However, I am delighted to inform you that Professor Snape has selected you as Quidditch Captain.”

“Wow! Professor Snape selected *me*?” exclaimed Harry questioningly.

Professor Dumbledore nodded, saying, “Yes, Harry. You were the logical choice. I had nothing to do with it.”

Then Dumbledore informed Harry of some things the Order of the Phoenix were doing, including protecting Harry's aunt and cousin. "Harry, I am very sorry for what happened to your uncle. His murder was a shock to us all. Because of it, we are increasing our efforts to ensure the safety of your family and friends. Number Four, Privet Drive will now be guarded continually, and your aunt and cousin looked after."

"We have also reevaluated our plans for Miss Granger's parents and have arranged for them to be moved to a safe house in France, courtesy of Madam Maxime. Miss Granger will be staying at Grimmauld Place for the rest of the summer under Sirius' personal protection. In fact, she should be here in a few minutes."

Dumbledore smiled and added, "I know you and Miss Granger are very fond of one another. Enjoy your company. By all means have fun. But I would also encourage you to spend a great deal of time working together to grow your abilities and practice your skills."

"I will, sir," said Harry. He meant it.

Dumbledore also told Harry he was planning to allow at-risk students, particularly Muggle-borns, to remain at Hogwarts during the summer holidays beginning next year if the situation did not improve. He lamented that the Order could not keep everyone safe.

Harry asked Professor Dumbledore why his scar had not hurt, but had only occasionally prickled, since the night Voldemort returned.

Professor Dumbledore speculated that Lord Voldemort might be aware that Harry was seeing into his mind and was using Occlumency to block his thoughts. He said Harry's occasional insight into Lord Voldemort's emotions, and recently, his visions could be very useful, but they could also be equally dangerous. It could be a two-way street, and another reason why Harry was not allowed to sit in on Order meetings. They had to be careful until they knew more about the connection.

Regardless, Dumbledore again reminded Harry to report any dreams or visions he had about Lord Voldemort to either himself or Sirius without delay.

Harry was about to say he had started having dreams about a long dark corridor, but just then Hermione arrived.

Before he left, Dumbledore conducted a meeting of the Order. At the end, he had Sirius invite Harry and Hermione to join them. With Sirius' approval, Professor Dumbledore had Sirius perform the Fidelius Charm and made Dumbledore the Secret Keeper to protect the location of number Twelve, Grimmauld Place as Headquarters of the Order of the Phoenix.

This added considerable protection to the townhouse, which already had an extensive list of protective spells and enchantments on the place, many for generations -- including old and unknown Dark Magic protections. Unbeknownst to their Muggle neighbors in the adjoining townhouses, a number of the basic magical protections had bled over into them. For example, a person not of or befriended by the household could not enter unless they were invited in. There had never been a burglary in their row of Grimmauld Place.

Harry and Hermione had not previously met several of the Order members. These included Kingsley Shacklebolt, Elphias Doge, Emmeline Vance, Hestia Jones, and Mundungus Fletcher. Another, Dedalus Diggle, Harry had met years before in the Leaky Cauldron when Hagrid had taken him to Diagon Alley to get his first-year school things.

Of course, Harry and Hermione did know Sirius, Snape, McGonagall, Mr and Mrs Weasley, Bill and Charlie Weasley, Alistair Moody, Nymphadora Tonks, and Fleur Delacour, the newest member. They also knew Lupin and Hagrid, who were on secret missions. Later, Sirius told them the only other missing original Order members still living were Sturgis Podmore, who was in St Mungo's but apparently close to recovery, and Aberforth Dumbledore. But Sirius was not sure he remained active.

"Aberforth Dumbledore!" exclaimed Harry and Hermione.

"Right, he's Albus' younger brother," said Sirius.

"But we've never heard of him," said Harry.

"Few have... outside of his generation," said Sirius. "He's nothing like Albus -- almost the opposite -- completely ordinary and unaccomplished. You may have seen him. He's the innkeeper of the Hog's Head Inn in Hogsmeade."

Harry and Hermione were flabbergasted.

“Unless Professor Dumbledore offers to tell you, I don’t recommend you ask about Aberforth... or the rest of his family,” advised Sirius.

“You mentioned *original* Order Members. Who were they?” asked Harry.

Sirius retrieved a photograph. “Mad-Eye brought it last meeting. I hadn’t seen it since it was taken.” He showed them the photo, naming each person. They now knew the members still living: Dumbledore, of course, Moody, Diggle, Vance, Lupin, Podmore, Hagrid, Doge, Aberforth, and Sirius. The rest were all dead -- or as good as dead. Poor Alice and Frank Longbottom had been tortured into madness by the Lestranges.

The dead included Marlene McKinnon, Benjy Fenwick, Edgar Bones, Caradoc Dearborn, Gideon and Fabian Prewett, Dorcas Meadowes, and Harry’s parents. Most had died fighting. Several had been killed by Voldemort himself.

Sirius’ voice had cracked when he said James’ and Lily’s names. And the last figure in the photo... Sirius would not say his name.

It shocked Harry to see Peter Pettigrew standing next to his smiling and happy looking parents. Pettigrew... the school friend who had betrayed them to Voldemort. Harry was glad Pettigrew was dead.

Since Hermione would be staying the summer, Sirius offered to give her a tour of the townhouse, which she accepted. Harry tagged along.

Hermione was already familiar with the drawing room and kitchen, where the Order held its meetings. The kitchen was enormous and, including pantry and boiler room, occupied the entire basement. The ground floor consisted of the entry hallway and small reception parlor, plus a large unused dining room. The door at the end of the hallway led to the stairs to the kitchen. Past the dining room was the central staircase to the upper floors. The first floor contained the drawing room, a bathroom, the main guest room, and the master suite.

Hermione asked Sirius about his family while examining the Black family tapestry in the drawing room. Sirius told her about his parents and their pure-blood mania. He said his hatred of it was probably why he ended up in Gryffindor and why he ran away from home when he was sixteen. He also told the sad story of his younger brother, Regulus.

He had accepted his parents pure-blood beliefs and joined the Death Eaters. But for some reason had changed his mind and then ended up dead.

Harry noticed that Kreacher teared up when Sirius told the story of Regulus. It was obvious the old house-elf had loved Regulus -- and just as obvious, only tolerated Sirius, who “broke his mother’s heart.”

The second floor contained three bedrooms and a bathroom. The third floor contained two bedrooms and a door concealing a tight set of stairs to the attic. The bedrooms had been Sirius’ and Regulus’ from childhood. They were currently unused. Sirius’ bedroom showed clear signs of rebellion -- Gryffindor accoutrements, wild colors, posters of motorcycles and Muggle bathing beauties. Whereas Regulus’ room was subdued and dignified with Slytherin colors and decoration -- nothing out of place in the wizarding world.

The attic was a surprise. It was neat and organized. Everything that was not outsized had been stored in boxes stacked along the walls. There was still enough room down the center for several couples to dance.

Sirius said he had the townhouse cleaned by house-elves provided by the Magical Services Contracting Agency in Diagon alley. Hermione wondered how that worked, since apparently Dobby was the only house-elf who ever wanted to be paid. Sirius did not know or care. But he did point out that Kreacher had not seemed capable of doing anything useful until Harry had shown up. Of course, now Kreacher was doing everything perfectly.

Sirius had the cleaning elves gather up many of the Black family heirlooms, nick knacks and generational detritus, box them up and store them in the attic. Other things -- some of which were dangerous dark objects or poisons -- Sirius had thrown out. He did it because they reminded him too much of his unhappy childhood at home.

Sirius had, however, left in place in the first-floor stairwell, the mounted heads of previous house-elves because they were Kreacher’s ancestors. He thought it would have been going a bit too far to remove them where Kreacher was concerned.

There was one heirloom Sirius had been unable to move to the attic -- the portrait of his mother in the ground floor entrance hallway. It had been attached to the wall with a permanent sticking charm. The curtains covering the portrait would bust open whenever there was a loud noise in the hallway -- which unfortunately was anytime the

doorbell rang. Mrs Black would rage and curse at the trespassers in her house until someone could close the curtains.

Hermione came to the rescue. She simply used another permanent sticking charm to stick the edges of the curtains together. Everyone was extremely grateful and marveled at the simple solution. Kreacher could still visit with his mistress by lifting up the curtains, but Sirius restricted his visitations to after everyone had gone to bed.

Sirius did not like living in his family's townhouse, but had nowhere else to go. He liked that it was being used by the Order, which helped make it tolerable. And it was probably the safest safe-house in England with all the protections it had.

Draco, Ginny, Fred, and George came by with Mr and Mrs Weasley one day. Fred and George gave Harry and Hermione some of their Wizard Wheezes products to try, including Extendable Ears. Harry and Hermione planned to test them by listening in on the meeting of the Order later that afternoon.

Fred and George said they were working on new Wizard Wheezes and were still developing their Skiving Snack boxes, which still needed a few final "goodies." Their joke shop was in the early planning stage. Diagon Alley was their preferred start-up location with an eye to the future on Hogsmeade. They had just started a mail order business from the Burrow and were advertising in the Daily Prophet.

Fred and George told them they had passed their Apparation tests and demonstrated inside the house. Sirius warned them they would hurt themselves if they tried to Apparate into the house from outside or vice versa.

Ginny mentioned that Bill was working in Gringotts now and had his eye on Fleur. Hermione advised her that Fleur had been seeing Sirius a great deal -- she was visiting almost every day after work and all day on most weekends -- and someone, perhaps Mrs Weasley, ought to tell Bill.

Ginny also said Percy did not like his new boss at the Department of International Magical Cooperation because he did not keep Percy as his personal assistant. This meant Percy was now just another staff nobody. Percy complained he had not gotten the job he had applied for on the Minister for Magic's personal staff because Scrimgeour had replaced Fudge. So, now he was thinking of transferring to another department.

Later, they used the Extendable Ears to listen in on an Order meeting, but they did not hear much. The Order was continually looking for new Order members, especially within the Ministry. Lupin was due to report in by the end of the month. And Hagrid was overdue from his secret mission, which was a concern because Maxime had returned to France two weeks ago.

Voldemort was thought to be focused on infiltrating the Ministry via the Imperius Curse. The Order did not think the Death Eaters had realized Podmore was a member of the Order, or they would have used him differently -- not just having him try to enter the Department of Mysteries. Podmore was due to be released from St Mungo's next week, but he would still need to rest at home. Sirius suggested he come to Order headquarters to recuperate; it would be safer.

There were also a lot of boring administrative issues that almost put them to sleep. Overall, it was quite disappointing -- not the danger and intrigue they had been expecting. Draco and the Weasley's went home after the meeting, but not before Harry saw Fred and George talking furtively in a corner of the kitchen with Mundungus Fletcher. Sirius had told Harry that Mundungus was a crook who was indebted to Dumbledore for unknown reasons, and his contacts were very useful to the Order. If you needed to 'procure' or do something illegal, Mundungus was your man. Harry could not imagine what Fred and George were up to, but fomenting mayhem was probably the objective.

Harry had resumed his training to become an Animagus. It was the thing he had asked Hermione to help him with the day they arrived in number Twelve at the end of fourth year just the week before. He was not sure he had made any progress after almost a year of practicing. He told Hermione about it after dinner. "I want to do it because of my father, but also because I think it could be important."

Hermione warned him of the risks of not notifying the Ministry -- prison not the least. But at the same time, she was intrigued. "You worked on this *all* of last year?" asked Hermione.

"Well, whenever I could... everyday sometimes, but at least twice a week before I... got hurt," explained Harry, adding. "It's really difficult. That's why I want your help."

Hermione thought for a minute, then said, "OK. I'll help you, but only if I can try to become one too."

“I’d hoped you’d say that,” said Harry.

“So, how do you do it?” asked Hermione.

“You don’t know?” asked Harry. “I mean, you haven’t already read about it?”

“Only in *general*... in first year after we first found out Professor McGonagall was one. I had no real interest until now. So, you’ll have to help *me* get started,” said Hermione.

“...for once,” added Harry.

They agreed that if they managed it, they would ask Draco and Ginny if they wanted to attempt it too.

Harry told her what Sirius had taught him about the incredibly difficult potion-making process and incantation requirements. He explained how the Marauders had simplified both and figured out potion-making and incantation were independent... plus the fact that Sirius believed the potion was not even necessary.

“Hmm... That’s interesting... no potion,” said Hermione. “And Sirius thought you only needed to take the potion once, if needed. But from everything he told you, it looks like he and the others took the potion at least twice -- once near the end of fourth year and then at the beginning of fifth year -- months apart.”

“Right,” said Harry, “but he said Pettigrew didn’t take the potion again after that and still succeeded in transforming after maybe three more months of performing the incantation.”

Hermione was clearly thinking about what she had heard, because her brow was knitted, and she did not say anything for about half a minute. Then she said, “I’m inclined to agree with Sirius, *but*... taking the potion obviously doesn’t *hurt*. And I’d hate to spend a year or more just performing the incantation and never have it work by itself.”

“So, you’re going to make the potion,” concluded Harry.

“Unless *you’d* prefer to do it,” said Hermione teasingly.

“Hermione, you *know* I only get by in Potions because of you and Draco,” reminded Harry.

“Not to worry... I’ll start gathering what we need... but there’s a problem. The next full moon is in three weeks, which may not be enough time to be ready. But the one after that will be just about when we need to return to school. So, the timing isn’t good. It may have to wait until we’re back in school -- maybe October -- particularly to collect condensation from a dark place. Right now, I have no idea where we’d get that here,” explained Hermione.

“OK. Then let’s just start practicing the incantation,” suggested Harry.

It required persistence, mental focus and, always for him, the headache. Harry admitted he was having real difficulty because of the headaches. To Harry it felt like something was resisting or pushing back. “For me, it’s like hitting my head against a wall expecting *it* to break first,” he told Hermione. He had asked Sirius about it, but Sirius said he had never encountered that sort of feeling. As it turned out, Hermione did not get headaches either, and that concerned Harry.

Hermione said she would do some research on the problem when they got back to school.

The Daily Prophet had been very critical of the Ministry and Scrimgeour for not doing enough to stop the murders and disappearances. No new Death Eaters had been caught since Easter. The Prophet was especially angry that nothing had turned up on the disappearance of Rita Skeeter, their top freelance reporter.

“Good riddance,” said Hermione.

Professor Dumbledore visited again, having called a meeting of the Order, and this time invited Harry and Hermione to sit in at the beginning. Before the meeting started, Dumbledore took Harry and Hermione aside and told them not to mention anything about the meeting to their other friends -- meaning Draco and Ginny -- and also not to mention that the crystal Prophecy sphere was destroyed. It was a vital secret.

Hermione gave Harry the eye but did not say anything.

Snape reported that the Dark Lord was obsessed with obtaining the Prophecy from the Hall of Prophecies. Dumbledore said the Order would place a guard near the door into the Department of Mysteries during non-business hours. The guard would wear an invisibility cloak. And the duty would rotate among members of the Order who worked for the Ministry in case they were discovered there. The purpose was to be able to alert the Order and spring a trap if Voldemort or his Death Eaters attempted to steal the Prophecy. Finally, Dumbledore informed them Sturgis Podmore would be coming to Grimmauld Place tomorrow to recuperate.

After the meeting, Harry explained to Hermione that Dumbledore had told him not tell *anyone* about the Prophecy being destroyed. “Maybe Professor Dumbledore assumed that I’d tell you anyway... or that you’d figure it out. I don’t know. But notice he didn’t tell the rest of the Order it was destroyed,” said Harry, “so, we can’t tell Draco or Ginny.”

Hermione agreed. “If it *is* a critical secret, it’s better we keep it between us... at least for now.”

Harry was still having dreams about a long dark corridor that made his scar prickle, but there was nothing in it about Voldemort. And he again forgot to mention the dreams to Sirius or Dumbledore.

Sirius hosted a birthday party for Harry. But this year it was very subdued. Only Draco and Ginny attended with Hermione and Harry. Some Order members who happened to be there also joined in. Kreacher served all of Harry’s favorite foods and made a fabulous birthday cake.

On the first of August, Hermione and Harry got their Hogwarts letters. Hermione was made a Prefect. Harry told her Snape had selected him to be Quidditch Captain, which was confirmed in his letter. Draco arrived at Grimmauld Place to spend the night and go to Diagon Alley with them the next day. He also had been made a Prefect.

The three got their new school books and supplies in Diagon Alley for the start of school. Sirius and Tonks escorted them. Sirius left to meet Fleur at Gringotts and take her to lunch. They saw many indications of increased security. People looked nervous and mostly traveled in groups.

Harry and Hermione did Animagus training together several times almost every day in August. They worked at it for fifteen minutes each time, based on Sirius’ suggestion that more practice would likely produce faster results. Hermione admitted it was the hardest thing she had ever done that yielded so little reward. “It *is* like hitting your head

against a wall and expecting the wall to break first. Focusing on a desired outcome while saying the incantation is much harder than it sounds. I hope I can find something in the library to help speed this up,” she finally declared after their final session of the summer.

The night before they returned to Hogwarts, Harry had yet another dream about walking down a long dark corridor. This time he reached a locked black door at the very end of it. For the first time, Harry sensed something familiar but could not put his finger on it.

Perhaps it was just the fact he was having the same dream so often.

Chapter 2 – Hogwarts Under Guard

Harry and Hermione returned to Hogwarts via the Floo Network connection from Grimmauld Place to the Staff room.

Professor Snape was waiting for them and took the opportunity to lecture them on not telling anyone else about the Order of the Phoenix. He informed them that Professor McGonagall would be reminding the Weasleys as well.

Draco elected to accompany Ginny on the Hogwarts Express because she wanted to travel with her older brothers. Draco tried, but failed to talk her out of it. On the train, he was happy to see there was an Auror assigned to each train car to provide security. When they arrived at school, there were more Aurors than ever stationed inside and outside the school.

Harry, Hermione, Draco, and Ginny met up in the Great Hall with the rest of the students for the Start of Term Feast. Harry noticed immediately that all the Slytherin students who had not returned after Easter break last year, including Warrington, Crabbe and Goyle, were now back and sitting with the pro-Voldemort students at the rear end of the table.

Mad-Eye Moody had returned as Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher, even though last year he told them he would only be teaching for one year. Draco pointed out that Hagrid was missing and Professor Grubbly-Plank was again sitting in his place.

The Sorting Hat sang of unity in dark times. Harry could hear the pro-Voldemort students muttering.

After the sorting, Professor Dumbledore welcomed all the students and introduced Professor Grubbly-Plank as temporary Care of Magical Creatures teacher. He then announced the usual rules about the Forbidden Forest, etc. He also said Aurors would continue to augment school security and enjoined all students to be careful and obey any Auror instructions regarding their safety. The feast was as excellent as ever, which provided a comforting bit of normalcy.

After the feast, Dumbledore made several more announcements. This year all classes would focus on defense and security where applicable. Hogsmeade weekends for third-years and above were to be closely supervised. The Dueling Club was being revived under the direction of Professor Moody and all students were encouraged to participate. All those interested in Quidditch should provide their names to their heads of house. But those who were not selected for or were not interested in the house teams could participate in the Intramural Quidditch Leagues established the previous year by Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy. Dumbledore was proud to declare that the Intramural Leagues had been adopted as the first new tradition at Hogwarts in over three hundred years -- the Gobstones Club being the last.

There was a huge cheer from the students -- the Quidditch Intramural Leagues had been immensely popular during the year of the Triwizard Tournament.

Dumbledore answered with his own cheer and then dismissed everyone to bed.

When Draco and Harry entered their dormitory, Crabbe, Goyle and Nott were standing side by side with arms crossed waiting for them. It was obviously meant to be a confrontation.

Crabbe spoke first, "You two have picked the *wrong* side."

Draco ignored the taunt and served his own, "Why did you come *back*... the Dark Lord wouldn't accept you as Death Eaters? Too *picky*, is he?"

"Watch yer mouth, Draco," warned Goyle, "Mockin' the Dark Lord is a good way to get yerself killed."

"Why are you still hanging around with these two, Theo?" said Harry, "You're not like *them*."

“You don’t *know* what I’m like, Potter. My father’s in *prison* because of people like you,” sneered Nott.

Draco then iced the confrontation, “So *here’s* how it’s going to be. Either you clear out *now* or you’re dueling with me and... the *Chosen One... here and now*. Are you *game?*”

Draco and Harry both slowly positioned their hands making ready to go for their wands if the other three did.

The two sides stared at each other for several seconds, until Nott said to his two british roommates, “Come on. We don’t want to room with *Muggle-lovers* and *blood traitors*.” Then to Draco and Harry, “Just *stay* out of our way.”

Crabbe, Goyle and Nott grabbed their trunks and moved to leave. Harry and Draco held their ground, forcing the others to go around them to get to the door. The two slowly pivoted to make sure they were not attacked from behind.

When the door slammed shut, Harry said, “That was *brilliant*, Draco! It was just like a movie scene from the American Wild West.”

Draco did not understand, and Harry had to explain about the West, cowboys and Indians, gunfights, then guns and finally even movies. By the time he had finished, the door opened and three sixth-years came in hauling their trunks.

It was Pucey, Urquhart and Vaisey. They said Warrington and Montague had asked them to leave when Crabbe, Goyle, and Nott had showed up crying about being kicked out of their room by Draco and Harry.

Draco told them what happened.

“Brilliant!” said Pucey.

“Right!” said Urquhart, speaking for the others, “We’d much prefer rooming with *you* than any of those fanatics.”

The next morning, they learned that there had been other room changes. The pro-Voldemort faction, both boys and girls, were now in four rooms by themselves. Of the seventy Slytherin students, twenty were openly declaring for the Dark Lord. Draco estimated there were probably at least a dozen or more ‘undecided’ Slytherins waiting

to see which way things were going before committing. He suggested these undecideds could be *more* dangerous -- ready to stab you in the back at any moment -- than the in-your-face Dark Lord supporters.

“Just what we need to worry about -- another Peter Pettigrew,” said Harry glumly.

Chapter 3 – Combat School

At breakfast the next day, students continued the mixed house seating arrangements started the previous year. And all the pro-Voldemort Slytherin students remained at the rear end of the Slytherin table.

Harry, Hermione, Draco, and Ginny alternated days between the Slytherin and Gryffindor tables. When they were at the Slytherin table, the pro-Voldemorts, or the “*pro-V’s*” as Ginny suggested they call them, would quietly mutter insults and threats, but nothing worthy of a confrontation.

Classes the first week were noticeably different, not only because of the new focus on defense and security, but also because they were more serious and somber. Professor Moody had them working again on combating the Imperious Curse the very first lesson in Defense. By the end of the first week of classes, they had covered protective spells in Charms including shield and disillusionment charms, appearance transformation in Transfiguration, and restorative draughts in Potions. Ancient Runes had focused on secret codes, and Herbology had dealt only with plants with healing properties. History of Magic had covered the rise and fall of previous dark wizards along with magical warfare strategy and tactics. Harry had not realized how many infamous dark wizards there had been, about two per century. Only Astronomy and Care of Magical Creatures seemed unaffected by the new emphasis.

At lunchtime, Harry and Hermione overheard some third-years saying that in Divination, Professor Trelawney had predicted that *everyone* was in danger of dying this year.

Hermione just shook her head.

When the four met up at dinner, they all agreed that things had significantly changed. Hermione said it made sense because they needed to be ready for what was coming.

Ginny asked, “Isn’t there *any* chance the Ministry will catch Voldemort?”

Draco shook his head and said, “They didn’t last time. And this time, he came back from being practically dead. So, his supporters think he’s even *more* powerful.”

Hermione disagreed, “*Except*, Harry has sown a lot of doubt about Voldemort. He’s beaten him *three* times, not even counting when he was a baby.”

Ginny changed the subject to lighten the mood by saying she was going to try out for Chaser on the Gryffindor Quidditch team.

Draco observed it meant they would be playing against each other, and he did not like the idea.

Ginny teased him about it. “Are you afraid I’ll *outscore* you?”

“Not a bit,” he replied confidently, “You just might, but *we’ll* win because we have Harry as Seeker. The Quidditch Cup is a good as Slytherin’s again.”

“We’ll see,” said Ginny teasingly.

The Dueling Club held its first meeting in the Great Hall on Wednesday right after dinner the second week of term. It met for ninety minutes. The first half-hour consisted of instruction and demonstrations by Professor Moody. The last hour was used for practice.

Harry thought it might have been better to start the class a little later in the evening. A number of students were soon losing their dinners when hit by stunning spells in the stomach. The instruction was intense and seemed even more ‘dark’ than the coursework in his Defense Against the Dark Arts classes. But everyone said it was great.

The turnout was huge -- at least fifty percent at the first meeting and nearly eighty percent by the second meeting due to enthusiastic word of mouth. However, none of the pro-V Slytherins attended any of the Dueling Club meetings.

The biggest surprise was Neville Longbottom. It was like he was *possessed*. Since their first year, Neville had always been very shy and retiring -- in addition to being quite bumbling and accident prone. However, now he practiced intensely and dueled ferociously. Few students were willing to partner with him other than Luna Lovegood.

Harry and Hermione continued their individual Animagus training. They determined the best time to do their training together was after the Dueling Club meetings. Everyone else was usually worn out and returned to their dormitories, so they were less apt to be seen and under less pressure to be with Draco and Ginny -- who just assumed the two of them were off somewhere romancing.

Professor McGonagall stopped Harry, Hermione, Draco, and Ginny after breakfast the next week and told them even though Hogsmeade visits would be under Auror and teacher supervision this year, the four of them would not be allowed to go. Of course, the directive had come from the Headmaster and was for their own safety.

They were not surprised.

However, Harry suspected the others did not yet realize, as he did due to his own experience, how depressing it was to see everyone else being able to go. Well, perhaps Hermione would be happy spending Hogsmeade weekends in the common room or library, but the rest of them would not.

Harry was desperate to find some place of their own in the castle to hang out and have fun. The empty classroom they used for spell practice and private meetings just would not do. Harry momentarily contemplated defying the order and sneaking into Hogsmeade using the secret tunnel to Honeydukes -- before coming to his senses. His last rule breaking foray had almost gotten him killed.

Harry roamed around the castle after dinner that night by himself -- followed by his Auror shadow, of course. He found the attics; they were too cold, dusty, and drafty. He again located the big room in the dungeons that Nearly Headless Nick had used for his five-hundredth death-day party -- but it had a very serious damp problem (and turned out to be the best place to collect condensate water). He also checked out the once Forbidden Corridor on the third floor and the room with the trap door where Fluffy had stood guard -- only there was no longer a trap door. The floor was now solid, but the room was not that big -- though it had seemed so to an eleven-year-old facing a giant three-headed dog. His last hope was one of the several guest quarters, one of which Sirius had stayed in. Sirius said it was very nice. Unfortunately, they were all locked magically and he could not get in.

Harry thought the Auror was going to ask him what he was doing, but he did not. They usually never said anything.

On his way back to the common room, Harry checked out the room off the Entry Hall where first-years waited before being led into the Great Hall for the Sorting Ceremony. It was a good size but just not private enough. Anyone could see their comings and goings. Disappointed, Harry had finally given up when he noticed the stairway to the basement, Hufflepuff house... and the *kitchens!*

Harry raced all the way to the large portrait of the silver fruit bowl and tickled the green pear. He turned the door handle that appeared and entered. The Auror waited in the corridor. There were not that many house-elves about. Dinner cleanup appeared to be over and the tables were already set for breakfast. The night-bakers were there and getting ready for a long night. One elf broke away and asked him if he wanted something to eat.

“Uh, is Dobby around?” asked Harry.

“Ah, sir, we house-elves is all knowing Mr Harry Potter can be calling Dobby. Why isn’t you calling him, sir?” squeaked the small elf, who had flour on the end of his long nose.

“Um, right. Thank you. I will...” said Harry feeling somewhat foolish.

The small elf bowed and went back to his baking preparation.

“Dobby!” called Harry softly.

Pop. Dobby was standing in front of him with dripping soapy hands.

“Dobby is answering Harry Potter’s calling,” said the tiny elf.

“Thank you, Dobby. Um, did I catch you at a bad time?” asked Harry.

“Dobby is just doing school laundry, sir. Dobby is having all night to finish so is always having time to be talking to Harry Potter,” he explained.

“Right then,” said Harry, amazed by the house-elves enormous workload. “By the way, where *is* the school laundry anyway?”

“Students and teachers cannot usually be getting get there, Harry Potter,” said Dobby evasively.

“Oh... Are there places where students *can* go that we don't know about, Dobby? I'm looking for a place where I and my friends can hang out and have fun when we want to get away from studying... but not in the common rooms,” explained Harry.

“Dobby is thinking of the ‘Room of Requirement’, also being known as the ‘Come and Go Room’. It could be what Harry Potter is needing,” said Dobby helpfully.

“I've never heard of it,” said Harry. “Where is it?”

Dobby proceeded to tell Harry all about a mysterious magical room on the seventh floor, not very far from the entrance to Gryffindor tower. The room would answer to the needs of the seeker and reveal its door. Dobby explained how to gain entry.

Harry was quite doubtful, but thanked Dobby. He then went up to the seventh-floor corridor. He found the tapestry of Barnabas the Barmy and faced the wall opposite it. He closed his eyes and thought, “I need a place to hang out and have fun with my friends.” Then he walked back and forth in front of the wall three times repeating the thought.

Unexpectedly -- because he really had not believed it -- a large heavy door appeared in the wall.

The Auror standing away from him said, “What just happened?”

Harry laughed, “I'm not sure yet, but I'm going to find out.”

He walked over to the door and went in. He could not believe his eyes.

He was standing in a large well-lit room. It had game tables and chairs, a bar with stools, a wizard radio, a dance floor and, through an archway at the back... a swimming pool and hot tub -- with showers and changing rooms. Harry took a quick look around. He thought it would be nice to have some big floor cushions and they appeared before his eyes.

“Wow!” exclaimed Harry. He mentally requested snacks and drinks for the bar, but nothing happened. He tried again several times but failed. He figured Hermione could figure it out. Finally, he said, “This can't wait,” and ran back into the corridor.

The door disappeared behind him, which spooked him a little, but it seemed to make sense -- the Come and Go Room goes when you leave it. But he preferred the name, Room of Requirement, because it had definitely met his requirements.

The Auror looked relieved and said, "I thought I should follow you through a *magic* doorway, but I couldn't get in. What's in there, Potter?"

"It's a student club," said Harry. "You have to know what it is or you can't get in."

"Well, *that's* a neat trick," said the Auror. "Wish we'd had one when I was here."

"I think it's *always* been here," guessed Harry, "but little known."

"That so? How did you find out?" asked the Auror.

"One of the Hogwarts house-elves just told me when I was in the kitchens," said Harry, smiling.

"Hogwarts has house-elves?" The Auror seemed quite surprised.

"Right. Who'd ever guess that?" laughed Harry. "Excuse me, but I've got to tell my friends right away."

Harry ran to get Hermione from the library. Then they got Draco, Ginny, Fred and George from the Gryffindor Common Room. After Harry made the door reappear, he told them, "To get in, just think, 'I need a place to hang out and have fun.'" They were all amazed, including the Auror, whom Harry had included. But he did not tell them how the Room worked.

Fred and George went and got snacks from the kitchens. On the way back, they saw Tonks patrolling the corridors and invited her to join them. She was impressed but said she could not stay because she was on patrol duty. The other Auror graciously offered to trade duty assignments with her and left. They all had a great time and were sure they would not miss going to Hogsmeade, though Fred and George said they could make quick runs into Hogsmeade to get them anything else they needed -- like Butterbeer.

Harry then told them how the room worked.

Draco kept track of time on his wrist watch so as not to miss curfew. Hermione said it would be better if the room had a wall clock, and one appeared right above the door.

Harry asked, “Why can’t the room provide food too?”

Draco and Hermione then explained Gamp’s Laws of Elemental Transfiguration.

“But you can *vanish* food; why can’t you *conjure* it?” argued Harry.

“Because it’s an *elemental law*,” responded Hermione, as if it were obvious.

“Even magic has its limitations,” said Draco.

“Just imagine if it didn’t,” said Harry.

The next day, the Daily Prophet reported that Stan Shunpike had been arrested as a suspected supporter of You-Know-Who.

The four of them did not believe it. They knew Stan from dozens of trips on the Knight Bus. It was simply ridiculous. Draco said the Ministry was just using him as a scape goat.

Later that week, Fred and George showed them their final prototype *Skiving Snack Box* in the “Student Lounge” -- as they had come to refer to their hangout in the Room of Requirement. Now all you had to think was, ‘I need to enter the Student Lounge.’

As a Prefect, Hermione declared that Fred and George’s so-called “snacks” could not be sold to students. Still, she and the others were very impressed, when not otherwise nauseated. The effects of many skiving snacks were quite disgusting, which Fred and George gamely demonstrated... on themselves. They said they would *not* demonstrate their “post-digestive” snacks in polite company, which everyone was quite thankful for.

At breakfast on Monday the following week, Harry received a note delivered by a timid first-year girl. It was an invitation from Professor Dumbledore for his first personal lesson that evening at eight o’clock in his office. The note asked Harry to bring ‘licorice wands’. The four spent the rest of breakfast speculating what the lesson would be about.

That night when Harry entered Professor Dumbledore's office, having used the password the headmaster had indicated to get past the gargoyle guarding the spiral staircase, he saw the Pensieve sitting on the Headmaster's desk. To Harry's surprise, the lesson was not about advanced defensive magic. Instead, Dumbledore told him they would be exploring Lord Voldemort's past through memories Dumbledore had been able to gather over the years.

The first memory was from Bob Ogden. He was a Ministry official who visited Marvolo Gaunt, and his two children, Morfin and Merope. The three lived in absolute squalor in a small ramshackled old stone cottage in the woods. Harry thought most people would call it a shack. Marvolo was a tyrannical pure-blood fanatic, who believed he was descended from Salazar Slytherin. Morfin was a sadistic half-wit. Poor Merope was a very plain looking and timid wretch, terrorized by her father and tormented by her brother.

Harry was surprised that he had sympathy for Merope even though he soon learned she was Voldemort's mother. But quite shocking, Voldemort's father turned out to be a handsome and wealthy Muggle that Merope was besotted in love with and bewitched into marrying her.

But the key things Professor Dumbledore pointed out in the memory were Marvolo Gaunt's ring and Merope's locket, both of which Marvolo claimed were family heirlooms handed down for generations. The ring had the Peverell family coat of arms etched into the stone, and the locket supposedly belonged to Slytherin himself.

Before he dismissed Harry, Professor Dumbledore again explained that he did not want Harry and his friends going into Hogsmeade because of the security risk -- despite the protection and supervision of the teachers and Aurors. The four were all obvious targets and needed to remain safely inside the school grounds. Harry *now* understood completely. He told Dumbledore he would never forget what happened to him last year -- but it still did not make him completely content, even knowing they now had the Student Lounge to enjoy.

The next morning, Harry told the others about Voldemort's ancestry, and they were quite fascinated by the strange story. Draco had real trouble believing the Dark Lord was a half-blood. "It goes against everything I learned from my father," said Draco, shaking his head, adding, "But it's another thing you have in common with him, Harry." Harry did not like hearing that, but did not say anything.

That night, Harry resumed having the dream about the long, deserted corridor ending in the black door. His scar still occasionally prickled, but it had not yet hurt. This time he promised himself he would mention the dream to Professor Dumbledore at their next lesson.

Harry held Quidditch tryouts early in October.

Draco again made the team as a Chaser. The other two were Pucey and Warrington. Montague, who previously had been a Chaser, was put out when Professor Snape did not name him Quidditch Captain -- especially since he had been elected Captain by the house Intramural Quidditch League team last year -- so, refused to try out. Crabbe and Goyle tried out for Beaters and were favored by Warrington, but Harry picked Urquhart and Harper instead. Harry did not want two stupid thugs -- besides being pro-V's -- on his team. This made Warrington quit, so Harry picked Tracey Davis, who was nearly as good. She was the first girl on the Slytherin team in many years according to Bletchley, a seventh-year, who made Keeper for the fifth time.

This meant there were no pro-V's on the team, which was just fine with Harry and Draco.

Later, Ginny told them she made the Gryffindor team as *Seeker* rather than Chaser, beating out Zabini, who would be her backup. Draco was very happy Ginny was not going to be a Chaser. Ginny winked at Harry over Draco's reaction.

Ginny also said Ron had tried out for Keeper but was beaten out by Cormac McLaggen in two rounds of trials. Fred and George were the Beaters again. And Angelina Johnson -- chosen as team Captain -- Katie Bell, and Alicia Spinnet remained the Gryffindor Chasers. Ginny added that Ron was sulking worse than ever, and Fred and George were making it worse by teasing him about it. She said she told them to back off or she would write to mum about it.

Fred and George had also gotten on the wrong side of Hermione. At breakfast, she ranted that she had caught Fred and George testing some new "snacks" -- intended for their Skiving Snack Boxes -- on some first-years. "Those two said they wanted to try *simpler* snacks. It was really awful stuff -- Puking Putty..."

"Puking *Pastilles*," Ginny corrected.

“...and Fainting Furies...”

“Fainting *Fancies*,” corrected Ginny again.

“Whatever...” said Hermione. “And they didn’t even tell their test subjects what was going to happen. When I told them to stop, they asked, ‘What if we *paid* them?’ Honestly!” said Hermione indignantly.

But Ginny quite cheerfully said, “You should see the ‘Nosebleed Nougat.’ It’s *really* nasty. But my favorites are the ‘Canary Creams’ -- very harmless and funny -- without involving *any* bodily fluids.”

“Ginny!” exclaimed Hermione, “It isn’t *funny*.”

But Harry and Draco both laughed out loud.

“Anyway,” continued Hermione, “they said they’d resume testing on themselves, and I can’t stop them from doing that.”

“Hermione,” said Draco, “maybe you’re taking your Prefect duties a little too *seriously*.”

Hermione just folded her arms across her chest and glared at him.

Near the end of October, just as they were about to start their Animagus training session after Dueling Club, Hermione said, “Before we start, I want to show you something...” She reached into her robes and pulled out two crystal phials. One had a small red ribbon attached to the stopper, the other a green one.

Harry gaped, then exclaimed, “Hermione, is that the *potion*? Why didn’t you say anything?”

Hermione smiled, “I didn’t want to get your hopes up in case it didn’t come out right. The full moon was last night. After class today, I made the spark using an ebonite rod and a rabbit’s fur. I did it many times... just in case. When I opened the box I stored them in, the phials’ contents were blood red. It’s unnerving having to wait *so long* just to see if it worked, especially since I used the mandrake leaves we prepared right before we left Grimmauld Place. When you discovered all the damp in Sir Nicholas’ deathday

party room in the dungeons, it allowed me to put everything together at the end of September's full moon."

"You are *so amazing*, Hermione," said Harry appreciatively.

Hermione beamed.

"So, what do we do again?" asked Harry.

"We drink it while we perform the incantation," instructed Hermione. She kept the phial with the red ribbon and handed Harry the green one.

"OK. Let's do it," said Harry. They got their wands out, un-stoppered their phials, drank the contents, and then started reciting the incantation, '*Amato Animo Animato Animagus*,' with the wand tip over their heart. The potion really burned Harry's insides as Sirius said it would. They continued their routine of repeating the incantation for fifteen minutes. When done, they looked at each other.

"Anything?" asked Harry.

Hermione shook her head and said, "It felt like my insides were on fire for a minute. Quite scary. But nothing else."

Harry nodded. "Right... OK. Well, it's a good thing we won't have to do *that* again... I hope," concluded Harry.

The Dueling Club continued to meet every Wednesday after dinner. Students by now had learned not to eat a heavy meal beforehand.

Harry began to wonder what the pro-V Slytherins were doing during the Dueling Club meetings, and many other evenings as well. They were not in the common room very much and he rarely saw them in the library. When they did not show up for the first Quidditch match against Gryffindor in early November, Harry became concerned. It was a violation of Slytherin house rules, but Professor Snape did not do anything about it.

The Quidditch match had been an absolute slaughter because the Gryffindor Keeper, McLaggen, was a complete and utter disaster. Instead of minding the goals, he would

not stop telling the other Gryffindor players what to do. He even left his position to have an argument with the team captain, Angelina Johnson. Slytherin would have won even without getting the Snitch, but Harry got it anyway. Harry said Ginny was an excellent Seeker, but she had found it difficult to concentrate with McLaggen constantly badgering her. Johnson kicked McLaggen off the team and replaced him with Ron immediately after the match.

Harry pointed out that the pro-V's had missed the match and asked Draco if he knew what they were up to.

Draco said, "No, but who cares?"

Hermione and Ginny nodded in agreement.

"Well, something's *not right* and I'm going to find out," declared Harry.

Chapter 4 – Hagrid Returns

On the second Hogsmeade weekend at the end of November, the four of them were in the Entrance Hall saying goodbye to their friends going to the village. Then they went to the seventh-floor corridor and the portion of blank wall where the door to the Room of Requirement would appear.

This time, however, the door was already there.

"Someone must have come ahead of us," said Harry. "Who didn't we see going to Hogsmeade? Maybe Fred or George?"

But no matter what they did, the door would not open.

Finally, Hermione said, "It means the Room is already in use for *another purpose*."

"For what?" asked Draco.

"There is no way of knowing. It could be *anything*. If we *knew*, we could get in," said Hermione.

"So, we can't open *another* room?" asked Ginny, hoping she was wrong.

“No. There’s only *one*. All we can do is wait until everyone who’s using it now comes out and the door disappears... or if someone comes out and tells us what it’s being used for,” explained Hermione.

Trying to be helpful, Ginny said, “We could go spend some time outside in the grounds and check back later. It’s a bit cold but nice and sunny.”

Draco and Hermione agreed, but Harry was angry. He wanted to go somewhere his shadow Auror was not going to be hanging around. A common room would be better. However, he told the others to go without him because he wanted to wait and find out who was using the room. The others left.

Harry and his Auror waited for more than an hour. During that time, Harry tried imagining every possible use for the room until he finally gave up. Harry could not stand it anymore and left. But instead of going to join his friends, he returned to his dorm room and got the invisibility cloak. Then he snagged a first-year in the common room and told her to go out into the corridor and distract the Auror.

“Ask him about what it’s like to be an Auror,” suggested Harry. “But make sure he’s facing away from the door.”

Harry donned the cloak, waited half a minute and then left the common room. The first-year was listening attentively to a story the Auror was telling. In two minutes, Harry was back in the seventh-floor corridor. The door was still there.

First, he tried getting into the ‘Student Lounge’ in case his friends had returned, found the door gone, and created the Lounge. But the door would not open. So, he sat down on the floor a short distance away and waited. It was a long wait. After nearly three hours, his rear end was quite numb. Finally, right before lunch, the door opened and out walked all the pro-V Slytherins. The door to the room disappeared, so Harry knew there was no one left inside.

Harry waited until they were out of sight and then asked for the Room to become what it had been for his bigoted pro-V housemates.

Nothing happened.

No matter how he rephrased his request, the door did not appear. After another thirty minutes, he gave up. He returned to the Slytherin common room, pocketed the

invisibility cloak, picked up his Auror shadow on the way out, and met Hermione, Draco, and Ginny at lunch. He told them what happened and how frustrated he was.

“I’ve already told you,” Hermione reminded Harry, “Unless you *know* what the pro-V’s asked the Room to become, you won’t be able to get in.”

“But I needed it to become what *they* needed it to become,” said Harry in exasperation.

“That is not a *direct* need. It’s one need removed. Don’t you see?” explained Hermione.

“I suppose,” said Harry. But he was not convinced.

After lunch, he left the others, employed the same strategy as before using the cloak to evade his Auror, and then followed Crabbe and Goyle.

He watched them open the room and go in. He reasoned; it should be easier *opening* the door than creating their room -- even though it had not worked earlier. Harry again tried multiple times to get the door to open, but failed. Then Warrington showed up, obviously late for whatever the pro-V’s were up to. Harry carefully matched steps with him right on his heels and tried to follow him into the room...

Womp!

Harry was bounced back into the corridor as if he had run into an invisible rubber barrier.

It was infuriating.

That night at dinner, Harry walked over to the pro-Voldemort group at the rear end of the Slytherin table and said, “I know you’re using the Room of Requirement. What are you up to?”

For a moment he could see surprise and even alarm on most of their faces, but then Pansy Parkinson answered snidely, “Wouldn’t *you* like to know, you *nasty* little Slytherin *traitor*.”

“It’s none of your business, Potter,” said Montague. “It’s better for you and your *filthy* friends to keep clear of us. You won’t always be under Dumbledore’s protection. When he’s gone, you’re *finished*.”

“Why don’t I just tell Professor Dumbledore what you’re doing?” asked Harry feeling his blood begin to boil.

“And what exactly would that *be*, Potter?” challenged Warrington.

“Up to no good,” said Harry through clenched teeth.

All the pro-Voldemortes laughed derisively.

Then Crabbe said, “You go *tell* ‘Dumble-ass’... Go ahead; have us *expelled*. We don’t *care*. We’re only here because the Dark Lord wants...”

“SHUT YOUR MOUTH, CRABBE!” shouted Warrington, cutting across him.

“That’s *interesting*,” said Harry triumphantly.

“Get *lost*, Potter,” said Warrington, “We’re not talking to you anymore.” And they all turned away from Harry.

Harry returned to sit with his friends at the Gryffindor table and told them what happened.

“Do you believe Crabbe?” asked Hermione.

“Yes,” replied Harry, “Warrington was very angry over what Crabbe let slip. We’ve *got* to find out what they’re doing for Voldemort.”

Hermione sighed, “There is just no way to know unless they *tell* you. Regardless, you need to tell Professor Dumbledore what Crabbe said.”

Draco and Ginny agreed

Harry said he would tell Professor Dumbledore at his next lesson. He did not have long to wait.

Harry received another familiar rolled up invite note two days later. Hermione dutifully reminded him to tell Professor Dumbledore about the pro-V’s using the Room of Requirement and doing something secretive for Voldemort. It was the first thing Harry said when he entered Dumbledore’s office later that night.

Dumbledore seemed neither surprised nor concerned. “*Pro-V’s* you call them? Well, Harry, even Death Eaters want their children to be safe. If you were being hunted by Aurors, would you not want your children where they would be out of harm’s way?” asked Dumbledore.

“But what about Voldemort wanting them to *do* something?” asked Harry.

“I’m sure it is nothing more than to keep their eyes and ears open about anything happening that could affect their side,” assured Dumbledore.

“It didn’t sound like that to me,” said Harry, unconvinced.

“What would you have me *do*, Harry? They have done nothing wrong,” said the Headmaster.

“Not *yet*,” said Harry. “I don’t trust them.”

“Let us not discuss this anymore now. Speculation is pointless. But I *agree* we should find out. That will be *my* homework assignment,” said Dumbledore with finality.

“However, as to the second matter... what is this ‘*Room of Requirement*’ you spoke of?” asked Dumbledore, sounding quite curious.

“*You* don’t know about the Room of Requirement?” Harry asked with complete astonishment.

Professor Dumbledore knew more about Hogwarts than anyone Harry knew. But then again, Harry remembered Dumbledore had not known where the Chamber of Secrets was, and had not known about every secret entrance to the school before Harry showed him the Marauder’s Map. So, Harry explained how he learned about the Room from Dobby and how it operated.

“Fascinating,” said Dumbledore with a big smile.

Dumbledore then told Harry an amusing story about really needing to go to the bathroom many years ago. It had been when he was patrolling the dark corridors late one night. He had unexpectedly happened upon an amazing bathroom full of every conceivable size and shape of chamber pot, but he was never able to find it again.

“I must have a look sometime. It may be the very same place from all those years ago... But you seem surprised, Harry,” said Dumbledore. “I would never claim to have

discovered *all* the secrets of this school. That was quite obvious in your second year -- the Chamber of Secrets. I shall have to speak to Dobby to learn more. Who knows what else he may know?"

Dumbledore smiled and then said, "And what, may I ask, are you and your friends using this remarkable room for?"

Without any embarrassment, Harry told him about the Student Lounge he asked for to make up for not being able to go into Hogsmeade.

Dumbledore nodded while saying, "Ah. I see. Yes, very good. The school does lack a facility for teenage merry-making. If these dark times continue, I shall have to consider adding one." Then he asked, "How many students do you think know about the Room of Requirement other than your friends and the... 'pro-V' students, as you call them?"

"I don't know, sir," said Harry, "probably just those... and a couple of Aurors."

Dumbledore raised his eyebrows slightly at the mention of Aurors, but then asked, "How do you think the pro-Lord Voldemort group found out?" asked Dumbledore

Harry just shook his head.

He had not thought about that before and the oversight concerned him. He doubted they learned about it from a Hogwarts house-elf -- pure-bloods would never consult an elf. And his friends would never have told them. He was not sure about the Aurors, except for Tonks. But the Aurors rarely talked to the students. To Harry, it meant the Pro-V's had access to someone who knew more Hogwarts secrets than Professor Dumbledore. Harry could think of only one person -- the person who had found the Chamber of Secrets just over fifty years ago.

Dumbledore leaned back in his chair, placed his fingertips together in front of his face and said, "Well then, let us return to our exploration of Lord Voldemort's past..."

They relived the memory of Caractacus Burke, of Borgin and Burks in Knockturn Alley. It was a pathetic story of Merope Gaunt being swindled by Burke when she pawned Salazar Slytherin's locket. It was clear to Harry the importance of the memory related to the locket and not to Voldemort's mother.

When Harry left, he realized he had again forgotten to mention his recurring dream to Dumbledore.

Harry told Hermione, Draco, and Ginny about his meeting with Professor Dumbledore at breakfast.

Hermione asked, “How do you think Professor Dumbledore is going to find out what the pro-V’s are doing?”

“Professor Dumbledore will certainly find a way,” said Draco confidently. “There’s no way they’re going to get away with anything once he’s onto them. It’s not even a contest.”

Harry was not so sure given the grave perils he had faced so far -- in fact, every single year at school -- even with someone as brilliant as Professor Dumbledore in charge. Harry agreed that anyone would bet on Dumbledore in a duel, but ferreting out schemes and conspiracies had definitely not been the Headmaster’s strong point.

Two weeks went by without another lesson with Professor Dumbledore.

Then at dinner, Hermione rushed in to say she had seen smoke coming from the chimney of Hagrid’s cabin from her dorm room window. After dinner they all rushed down to Hagrid’s cabin. Harry’s shadow Auror remained outside in the dark and cold even though Hagrid invited him in.

Hagrid told them he had just returned from his secret mission for the Order of the Phoenix. He was in a terrible state. His face was cut and bruised in several places, one eye completely closed and blackened. He told them a harrowing tale. He had traveled with Madam Maxime and they had met with the giants in the mountains of Eastern Europe as envoys of Professor Dumbledore. Their mission was to persuade the giants not to align with You-Know-Who, as they had the last time he had tried to take power. But they were not successful.

Death Eaters were already there on the same mission for the Dark Lord. Most of the giants decided to align with him. They killed or beat down their fellow giants who wanted to align with Dumbledore. Hagrid and Madam Maxime had been lucky to escape with their lives.

Hermione asked Hagrid if he sustained his injuries fighting to escape, but he said no. Both he and Madam Maxime had avoided any fights with either the giants or the Death Eaters, but he would not explain the cause of his injuries.

Harry finally had another lesson from Professor Dumbledore in mid-December.

This time they relived Dumbledore's own memory of meeting young Tom Riddle at his orphanage. The memory chilled Harry. Even as a child, he saw that Voldemort was evil. They discussed Voldemort's personality and proclivities at length. When they were finished, Harry expected to be dismissed, by Dumbledore said, "Regarding *my* homework assignment..."

Harry perked up instantly.

"...the Slytherin students using the Room of Requirement have formed their own Dueling Club. The room is where they meet, practice and talk of pure-blood domination should Lord Voldemort take power. They call themselves *The Dark Lord's Army*, or the '*DLA*' for short."

Harry was incensed, but asked rather calmly, "Sir, how did you find out?"

"Oh, I have my sources," Dumbledore replied matter-of-factly, but did not elaborate. "Suffice to say, it is probably a good outlet for their... energy."

Harry was about to protest when Professor Dumbledore held up his hand and added, "And we need not concern ourselves any more than we would about the official Dueling Club overseen by Professor Moody. So, goodnight, Harry."

Harry understood the dismissal. He said goodnight and left. This time he did not even remember he had once again forgotten to tell Dumbledore about his dream. He was focused on only one thing.

The Dark Lord's Army!

It made Harry's blood boil. He seethed all the way back to his dorm room -- Auror in tow. He told Draco immediately, but instead of being angry, Draco just thought it was mental that the pro-V's thought so much of themselves. "What a bunch of puffed-up lamebrains -- thinking they could contribute *anything* to the Dark Lord's power."

"But it shows they're going to *fight* on his side when it comes down to it," said Harry.

“Well, that’s obvious. I mean, we’re going to do the same for *our* side and we’ll probably make about the same difference, well... except for *you*... and *Hermione*, of course,” said Draco objectively.

“OK. I *get* it. I just don’t *like* it,” Harry said angrily.

Harry went to bed and forgot to tell Draco about seeing Professor Dumbledore’s memory. At breakfast, Harry told Hermione, Draco, and Ginny everything that had happened at his lesson the night before.

He was the only one who seemed concerned about the DLA. Hermione was instead fascinated to hear about young Tom Riddle. She said she was going to try to find out everything she could in the library about his time at Hogwarts.

Harry said, “I’m going to sneak into one of their meetings -- now that I know what they’re using the room for -- and find out what’s really going on.”

Hermione said, “Harry, no. It could be dangerous. Let Professor Dumbledore deal with them.”

Harry shook his head, “I’m guessing Professor Dumbledore got the information from Professor Snape... and I want to be sure he’s got the *whole* story.”

Chapter 5 – The Eyes of the Snake

That night, Harry dreamed again about the long empty corridor ending in the locked black door. This time was different -- very different.

He was different.

He tasted the air with his tongue. He sensed a man but could not see him. The man was somehow hiding under a covering along the side of the corridor near the door. The man was breathing deeply and slowly -- asleep -- easy prey, easier than an ambush victim -- no long wait.

He struck violently, where his tongue sensed the man was.

The man screamed.

He tasted blood and struck again and again, feeling his venom pump into the man's torso.

The man was making too much noise -- flailing clumsily in self-defense but hopelessly caught up in the strange covering. Only his head had appeared and seemed to be floating in air.

The man would die, but his screaming would draw attention. It was necessary to leave without completing the reconnaissance beyond the door.

Harry woke abruptly, yelling, "NO!" He was sweating and panting. Harry heard grumbling and snoring from the other beds.

Draco said groggily, "Wassa matta, Harry?"

Harry, sounding quite panicked, exclaimed, "Draco, Mr Weasley's been *attacked* by a *snake!*"

"Whaaat? A... snaake? ...It wazza *dreeam*, Harry... G' baack ta sleep..." groaned Draco.

Harry heard Draco collapse back onto his pillow.

'No!' thought Harry. Mr Weasley was *dying*. He had to get help.

Harry jumped out of bed and dashed out of the dormitory in his pajamas and bare feet. He ran all the way to Professor Snape's office, ignoring the calls of the Auror stationed outside the Slytherin common room. The Auror followed but did not interfere.

Harry pounded on the office door and called out Professor Snape's name as loud as he could. He had kept it up for at least a minute when Peeves the Poltergeist showed up and began echoing whatever Harry said in a mocking tone. But Harry was too focused and ignored him. Then the Bloody Baron floated into view, scowling and pointing at Peeves, who immediately took off without saying another word. Finally, after another minute, the office door opened, and Snape stepped out fully dressed in his usual billowing black robes.

He held up his hands and said, "*Enough*, Mr Potter. I heard you the first time. You do not need to wake the rest of the castle."

Harry began talking as fast as he could. “I was asleep and had a dream of a huge snake attacking Mr Weasley... only it *wasn't* a dream.”

As Snape was about to speak, Harry added, “It was a *vision* -- I saw it through the *snake's* eyes. Mr Weasley was under an invisibility cloak in a torch-lit corridor near a black door...”

Snape's eyes narrowed and his brow became furrowed. He seemed to be weighing what Harry was saying rather than just automatically taking over the conversation as he usually did.

Harry suddenly realized the black door in his dreams was the door to the Department of Mysteries in the Ministry of Magic! He remembered it from when Professor Dumbledore had taken him there last school year to retrieve the Prophecy.

He shouted, “IT HAPPENED JUST OUTSIDE THE DEPARTMENT OF MYSTERIES!”

A respectable distance behind him, Harry heard the Auror say, “Where?”

But Harry did not answer.

The somewhat skeptical look on Professor Snape's face vanished. He grabbed Harry by the arm, spun him around and said, “We are going to see the Headmaster immediately,” and ushered him down the corridor taking long fast strides. As he passed the Auror, Snape said, “I'll take Mr Potter from here.” The Auror followed but soon stopped and resumed his post outside the Slytherin common room.

Somehow, the Gargoyle was already standing aside and the revolving stairway in operation. Professor Dumbledore was waiting with his office door open when they arrived. Dumbledore listened to Harry's rapid retelling and immediately sent Everard -- the portrait of a former Hogwarts Headmaster with another portrait in the Ministry -- to get help. Everard soon reported that Mr Weasley was found alive, but gravely injured, and taken to St Mungo's Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries.

Professor Dumbledore then sent a note to Mrs Weasley using Fawkes the Phoenix, who vanished in a flash of golden light. Sometimes it seemed like Fawkes could perform Apparation like a hose-elf, but Harry was sure that Dumbledore made it happen.

Dumbledore then spoke to Professor McGonagall through the fireplace and instructed her to collect the Weasley children and inform them of what happened. He used Phineas Nigellus Black -- the portrait of another Hogwarts Headmaster with a family portrait at Grimmauld Place -- to contact Sirius and ask if the Weasley's could stay there until the situation resolved.

When the Weasley children arrived with Professor McGonagall, Professor Dumbledore told them they must wait at Grimmauld Place until they heard from their mother. He made a portkey out of a goblet and sent them on their way.

For reasons he could not understand, Harry felt hostility, even hatred, toward Professor Dumbledore as he stood near him watching him in command. He also felt repulsed, even dirty, that he had seen the attack on Mr Weasley through the snake's eyes. No, it was worse...

He had *been* the snake!

When the Weasley's departed, Professor Dumbledore told Harry that Mr Weasley had been on guard duty for the Order of the Phoenix to alert the Order of any attempt by Lord Voldemort's followers to enter the Department of Mysteries. Unfortunately, Mr Weasley must have fallen asleep, which allowed the snake to attack him.

Harry cried out, "*I* attacked Mr Weasley! *I* was the snake! I must have been *possessed* by Voldemort... No, I'm *still* possessed. I want to attack *you too!*"

Professor McGonagall gasped. Professor Snape did not react.

But Dumbledore said very calmly, "Harry, Harry. You are *not* being possessed. It is almost the opposite. Remember, I have already told you about the connection between you and Lord Voldemort. As we have discussed, it is getting stronger and we believe Lord Voldemort is now aware of it." He let his words sink in a bit and then added, "Harry, in this instance, *Lord Voldemort* was possessing the *snake* when you saw into Lord Voldemort's mind... so you saw everything from the perspective of the *possessed snake*."

Dumbledore looked Harry in the eyes and placed his hands on his shoulders. "You have *nothing* to worry about, Harry."

Then he stood back and said, "We must be ready to take action. Lord Voldemort sent Nagini on a scouting mission. He is obviously putting a plan into motion to obtain the

Prophecy and it involves you, Harry. Tell me now truthfully, this is *not* the first time you have had visions of this door, is it?”

Harry could not help but look embarrassed, but only nodded his head.

Dumbledore looked disappointed. “Harry, I asked you to tell me about *any* visions or dreams. I *beg* you to tell me about them from now on.”

“I’ve been meaning too, sir, honestly, but I kept forgetting because the dream wasn’t about Voldemort,” said Harry lamely.

“But you felt your *scar* react, I am sure,” sighed Dumbledore, disappointedly.

“Yes, sir,” said Harry apologetically, “but it only *prickled* a bit; it didn’t hurt.”

Dumbledore shook his head. “Harry, Lord Voldemort is attempting to exploit the connection between your minds as we suspected he might. However, now he knows the Order has guessed what he is trying to do. We will have to revise our plans. Now we need to make you *less* susceptible to Lord Voldemort’s thoughts -- just as he has been blocking your access to *his* for some time. Tonight, I think he let down his guard while he was in possession of Nagini and you slipped in... to our *great* benefit... *and* Mr Weasley’s, I might add.”

Dumbledore turned to Snape and said, “Severus, I want you to train Harry in Occlumency.”

Snape nodded.

Dumbledore turned back to Harry and said, very seriously, “I expect you will continue to have dreams about the door to the Department of Mysteries. Let these dreams lead you where they may, but *do not act on anything you see without consulting me*. I say again, *do not act* without seeing me. Is that *clear*?”

“Yes, sir,” said Harry, but by now he was thinking it was not enough, so he said, “I want to be more *involved*.”

Dumbledore smiled and said, “Harry, you are *already* more involved than you realize. You are going to help the Order set the *trap* for Lord Voldemort that we discussed last year... And you will be the *bait*... *if* you are willing.”

“Only if I can *join* the Order,” said Harry firmly, sensing an opportunity.

Professor Dumbledore looked at Snape, then McGonagall, and then Harry again.

“You *may* join. ...No one deserves it more than you,” said Dumbledore almost sadly.

Harry grinned and clapped his hands together, “Yes!”

But then Dumbledore added, “However, you may *not* tell your friends about this, *even* Miss Granger. If you do, I will cut you out. If you agree, you must keep Order secrets.”

Harry thought for a moment and then said, “I agree.”

Dumbledore continued, “It also means you must *follow* orders -- no more acting out on your own. You must always consult with me or another Order member at school -- that is, either Professors Snape, McGonagall, Moody, or Hagrid -- before acting for the Order. Do you understand and agree?”

Harry could tell Professor Dumbledore was deadly serious.

“Yes. I agree,” said Harry, now looking quite serious himself.

Harry was wondering if there would be more to it, like a secret oath or an initiation ceremony.

But Dumbledore just said, “Fine. Professor Snape will start your Occlumency lessons next week. This weekend, I shall arrange for you to visit number Twelve, Grimmauld Place. I am sure Mrs Weasley will want to see you.”

“Sir, may Draco and Hermione go too? They’ll want to see Ginny,” asked Harry.

“Let us wait on word concerning Mr Weasley,” said Dumbledore wisely. “We should know soon. If he is well enough, then, yes. But I will let you know. Regardless, be in my office after classes on Friday afternoon. You shall return on Sunday in time for the feast.”

“Now, before you go, I am going to inform you of some pertinent Order intelligence,” said Dumbledore.

Harry was all ears.

“Last month Broderick Bode, whom you met last year, was found unconscious in the Hall of Prophecies. His mind was addled and he was speaking gibberish. He is currently in St Mungo’s receiving treatment, but remains incomprehensible. However, the Healers are optimistic of his eventual recovery. Our other contact in the Department of Mysteries says his condition was consistent with having touched a Prophecy globe. We believe he had been acting under the Imperius Curse because otherwise he would have known what would happen to him...”

Harry began, “But we saw him replace the Prophecy I took with yours, so...”

Dumbledore cut in, “Correct, Harry. As you recall, he moved it *magically* without touching it. That is how all the prophecies are placed in the Hall. The person who cursed him either gave him poorly worded instructions or was not aware, as you are, that only the person or persons a prophecy is about can be the first to physically touch it...”

“What if they *learned* from their mistake...” started Harry.

“...And that is why we have been keeping the entrance to the Department of Mysteries under surveillance,” finished Dumbledore. Then he added...

“Harry, I am not being rude in cutting your questions short. It is just that there are some very great minds in the Order, not to mention my own, who have been analyzing the situation. We will keep you informed. Now it is time for you to return to bed,” said Dumbledore patiently.

When Harry arrived back in his dorm room, he found Draco awake and waiting.

“You were gone a *long* time. What happened?” asked Draco.

Harry told him the story -- minus the part about his new Order membership and the intelligence information.

“I’m *sorry* I didn’t believe you, Harry,” said Draco.

“Forget it; you were asleep,” said Harry.

“No. I *mean* it,” continued Draco. “That’s *not* how a friend should react... It won’t happen again.”

Harry just nodded. He appreciated Draco's support.

Draco went on, "I'm sure I would have reacted differently if it had been *my* father that had been attacked... *or at least a relative I care about*... Tonks or Uncle Ted or Aunt Andromeda. And poor Ginny... How is she doing? Is she OK? And her brothers?"

"They were all pretty shaken up," said Harry.

"I'd like to be with her..." said Draco. "She's really got to be scared for her father right now."

"Professor Dumbledore said he would let me know as soon as he got any news. Let's get some sleep," said Harry who suddenly felt exhausted.

At breakfast, Hermione was shocked to hear what happened. All she knew was that the Weasleys were gone.

Professor Dumbledore stopped by the table to personally inform them that Mr Weasley was expected to live and make a full recovery... in time. However, it had been a near thing. And Mrs Weasley definitely wanted them all to come on Friday afternoon.

When Dumbledore returned to the High Table, Hermione encouraged Harry to learn as much as he could from his Occlumency lessons with Professor Snape. She had always been very worried by Harry's connection to Voldemort's mind. However, Draco disagreed. He said it was a major strategic advantage that the Order of the Phoenix should exploit. He encouraged Harry to talk more about it with Professor Dumbledore.

Harry pretended to be non-committal.

Draco and Hermione argued about it through the remainder of breakfast.

Chapter 6 – St Mungo's Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries

On Friday afternoon, Harry, Hermione, and Draco arrived in Professor Dumbledore's office with a change of clothes in their school bags. Hermione, of course, also carried all of her schoolbooks.

Dumbledore sent them to Grimmauld Place via portkey. Hermione asked how a portkey could get them into the Black house. Dumbledore winked and said, “I’m the Secret Keeper.”

Sirius met them in the hallway. He welcomed them and said, “Dumbledore said you were on your way.”

“Hey, Sirius, are you ever going to tell us how the Order communicates?” asked Draco.

Sirius laughed and said, “Lots of ways,” without elaborating, but Harry made a mental note to ask Sirius later.

Sirius told them the Weasley’s were all at St Mungo’s but would be back for dinner. “I’m sure Dumbledore has told you Mr Weasley will recover -- thanks to *you*, Harry,” said Sirius, clapping him on the back.

Draco whooped and Hermione cheered.

“So, what was Mr Weasley doing at the Ministry at two o’clock in the morning?” asked Draco casually.

“That’s Order business,” said Sirius.

“Ah, so he was doing Order business. I thought so. You know you’re going to need our help before too long. Admit it,” challenged Draco.

Sirius just said, “We’ll let you know...”

Harry and Hermione felt guilty they had not been allowed to tell Draco or Ginny about the Order meeting Dumbledore had invited them to attend during the summer.

When the Weasley’s returned from St Mungo’s -- minus Bill and Percy, who had their own apartments in London -- they swarmed Harry to thank him. Mrs Weasley would not let go of her hug for two full minutes while she sobbed onto his shoulder.

Harry noticed that Ginny looked to be holding up the best, though she still welcomed Draco putting his arm around her in sympathy.

Mrs Weasley told Harry that Mr Weasley was anxious to see him, and they would all go back to visit him in the morning after breakfast.

As planned, Sirius and Kingsley Shacklebolt escorted Harry, Draco, Hermione, and the Weasleys to visit Mr Weasley in St Mungo's the next morning.

Mr Weasley thanked Harry profusely.

After a long and lively conversation, Sirius said he and Kingsley needed to talk to Mr Weasley about Order business. Mrs Weasley remained as well, while Harry, Hermione, Draco, Ginny, Fred, George, and Ron left the ward to get some tea. Fred and George wanted to eavesdrop using extendable ears, but Harry insisted they not -- at least not at the hospital, where they might be caught. In truth, he was concerned they would hear about Professor Dumbledore allowing him into the Order.

In the stairwell on the way to the teashop on the fifth floor, they unexpectedly ran into Gilderoy Lockhart. He did not seem to remember any of them. They soon learned Lockhart had escaped from a closed ward on the fourth floor. The pursuing matron from the ward, seeing they knew Lockhart, misunderstood their relationship with him and corralled them into returning with Lockhart to the ward for a visit.

The matron explained that Lockhart had mysteriously lost his memory. The official investigation had determined that his own wand had been cursed to erase his own memory -- but only if he tried to perform an illegal memory charm on another witch or wizard. No one had ever heard of such a thing, but it must have been a *very* powerful wizard to overcome a wand's allegiance to its master.

When the matron left them alone with Lockhart, who was now very childlike, though still quite self-centered -- the matron said it was the core of his personality -- they speculated on who could have cursed his wand and why. The consensus was Professor Snape. But without saying so, Harry suspected it had been Professor Dumbledore himself. Harry thought Snape would have acted more directly, while Dumbledore was more... subtle. If Lockhart had *not* tried to illegally wipe someone else's memory, he would not have come to harm himself.

After returning from a final visit with Mr Weasley on Sunday morning, Harry, Hermione, and Draco returned to Hogwarts on Sunday afternoon via the Floo Network connection to the Staff room. The Weasleys remained behind because there was only one more week of school before the Christmas holidays; Professor Dumbledore had insisted on it.

Back at school, Harry expected everyone would be talking about the Quidditch match between Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw, which Hufflepuff won with a spectacular diving catch of the Snitch by Summerby over Cho Chang. Instead, word had gotten out that Harry had somehow saved Mr Weasley from You-Know-Who's giant snake by taking control of it and stopping it from crushing him to death. Harry suspected one of his roommates had not been asleep when he had talked to Draco that night.

It was taken as further confirmation that Harry was the Chosen One -- destined to defeat the Dark Lord.

It enraged the pro-Voldemort.

Harry refused to answer any questions about it. But Draco, to Hermione's dismay, would tell anyone who would listen, that the Dark Lord's days were numbered.

The pro-V's now openly shouted epithets and threatened Harry whenever they could -- that is, when no teachers or Aurors were around. Fortunately, that was not too often. But Draco responded by ensuring that either he or another member of the Slytherin Quidditch team always accompanied Harry. So, when an Auror was standing *outside* the common room, classroom, library or wherever, Harry had friendly protection *inside*. Draco also arranged with the Gryffindor team Chasers and other friends of Hermione, to provide the same protection for Hermione when she was not with Harry during the school day.

At Christmas break, Harry and Hermione went to number Twelve. Draco went to Tonks' parents' house but spent most of his days at Harry's to be with Ginny and the rest of the Weasleys.

Sirius invited everyone over for Christmas including Tonks, Ted, Andromeda, Bill, Percy and Fleur. As a surprise, Hermione's parents had been secretly delivered from their safe house in France. Hermione had a tearful reunion and kissed Sirius for his thoughtfulness, but he said she should thank Professor Dumbledore for making it happen. The house was bursting with guests. Every bedroom was at least doubled up.

To everyone's delight, Mr Weasley was released from St Mungo's on Christmas eve and celebrated Christmas at number Twelve. He toasted Harry and everyone joined in. Mrs Weasley cried and hugged Harry again saying, "First Ginny and now Arthur. Our family owes you so much."

Harry felt more embarrassed and self-conscious than he ever had in his life.

Later, during dinner, Mrs Weasley said they happened to see Neville Longbottom and his grandmother as they were leaving the hospital. Hermione asked what they were doing there. Mrs Weasley hesitated but then Andromeda spoke up. She said Neville's parents had been tortured into madness by her sister, Bellatrix Lestrange, and they were permanent wards of St Mungo's.

Hermione and the other Gryffindors were shocked to hear it. Sirius was surprised that Neville had not told them. Harry revealed that Professor Dumbledore had told him. He also said he knew that Barty Crouch Jr had also participated. However, Dumbledore had asked him that Neville be allowed tell his friends in his own good time.

Draco admitted his father had told him years ago. "He told me it was what should happen to all blood-traitors. That's how Death Eaters think," said Draco angrily.

Mr Weasley expressed his outrage at Lucius Malfoy so vehemently that Mrs Weasley had to intervene to calm him down.

They all agreed to keep Neville's secret.

Draco finished by saying that this was obviously the reason why Neville worked the hardest in Dueling Club. "He has a *mission*."

Chapter 7 – Occlumency

The day after Christmas, the Weasleys went home. Two days later, Hermione's parents returned to France. After that, Harry and Hermione had the house pretty much to themselves. Sirius was always going out with Fleur. She liked going shopping and eating out, especially at French restaurants in Muggle London.

Harry and Hermione resumed Animagus training together. Hermione said she was beginning to feel 'different', but she was not sure how describe it. This was at least something, if not progress. It frustrated Harry because he knew he had practiced a year longer than Hermione. All Harry felt was a headache.

"What are you *feeling* when it happens?" asked Harry.

Hermione thought about it again for a few more seconds and then said, “Like my senses are becoming more acute.”

“I just feel like I’m pushing against a wall that’s pushing back,” said Harry sounding discouraged.

“Didn’t Sirius say it took them years to accomplish it?” asked Hermione.

“Yes, but they didn’t know what animals they were going to become,” said Harry.

“What do you mean?” asked Hermione sounding surprised, “No one knows.”

“But I’m supposed to become a *stag*, like my dad. My Patronus is a stag like his.”

“Harry, that doesn’t mean a thing. All this time you’ve been *trying* to become a stag? That’s probably why you’re being blocked. You *can’t* pick what animal you’ll become; it’s something innate and never changes. A Patronus can *change*; it’s tied to your consciousness and emotional state. Once you’ve become an Animagus, your Patronus *might* change to match it, or it might not. The Animagus form is derived from something much deeper -- in your *subconscious*. I’ve read about it and Professor McGonagall confirmed it when I asked her.”

Harry was stunned. “So, you’re *not* trying to become an otter?” asked Harry.

“No. I’m just doing the incantation and willing myself to transform, waiting for the animal to appear in my mind, like the instructions say will happen,” said Hermione.

“I’ve *wasted* so much *time!* ...Why didn’t Sirius *tell* me?” exclaimed Harry. Then he paused and added, “Or maybe he did, and I forgot...”

“If he didn’t, you’ll have to ask him, but I assume it’s because he learned to be an Animagus *before* he learned to cast a Patronus,” said Hermione. “He had no preconceptions.”

“Well, at least I didn’t spend *another* year pushing against the wall,” said Harry with a laugh. “I’m worn out now. Let’s go have something to eat.”

When they returned to Hogwarts at the end of the Christmas holidays, Harry found a note on his pillow. Occlumency training with Professor Snape would take place every Monday evening at eight o'clock.

Harry had no idea what to expect, but he knew from experience that any instruction from Professor Snape was going to be hard and without joy. The only bright side was that it would enable him to help the Order, so he was determined to succeed.

When he went to Professor Snape's office, a Pensieve was sitting on his desk. It looked just like the one Professor Dumbledore had. Harry wondered if it were the same one and involved in the training. He soon learned it was Professor Dumbledore's but not part of the training.

Professor Snape proceeded to penetrate Harry's mind at will.

The lesson did not go well. Harry only managed to block Professor Snape once using a Shield Charm. Snape assigned Harry mind-calming exercises to be performed every night in bed before going to sleep. As he left the office, Harry saw that Professor Snape was using his wand to return wisps of memories from the Pensieve to his temple.

Harry wondered what he was hiding.

The next morning, he discussed it with Hermione, Draco, and Ginny.

Draco speculated it had to be things from his days as a Death Eater.

Hermione was less condemning. "Everyone has personal secrets they would never want to share, not necessarily Death Eater activity."

"Oh, yea," replied Draco, "What kind of secrets do *you* have, Hermione? That you got a 'T' grade once?"

Ginny snorted.

Hermione turned red but said, "I'm not sharing *my* personal secrets with anyone..." and turning toward Harry, added, "...except maybe *you*." She winked.

Harry turned red, Draco wolf whistled, and Ginny grinned.

Just then, Owl Post arrived.

Harry and Draco both received their Daily Prophets as usual. Harry handed his to Hermione, who usually read the headlines aloud and then summarized the stories as she read them, adding her analysis.

This time, as soon as she unfolded the paper, she gasped, “Oh, NO!”

Harry, Draco and Ginny all stopped eating and looked anxiously at her. Rarely a day went by without a story of a murder or disappearance. So, it had to be something *really* bad for Hermione to exclaim out loud.

Hermione continued, “It’s *awful*.” As she said it, she turned the paper toward them to reveal the four-inch headline and the photos of the escaped prisoners below them.

MASS BREAKOUT FROM AZKABAN

Draco’s eyes were trained on the photo of his father, who had been one of the few Death Eaters rounded up by the Ministry after Voldemort’s return. But Harry’s eyes were drawn to the photo of a dark-haired heavy-lidded woman who looked a lot like Andromeda Tonks. The name underneath was Bellatrix Lestrange. So, this was the woman who tortured Neville’s parents. Unlike her sister, Andromeda, Bellatrix looked demented and evil. It was even apparent in her body language as she appeared to be reveling in her infamy when the prison photo was taken.

Draco noticed Harry’s gaze. “Yes, that’s my Aunt Bellatrix. She makes my father look like a Muggle-lover. She’s a pure-blood fanatic -- completely *insane*.”

Hermione flipped the paper around and began to read the full story aloud. As she read, they could also hear murmurs and gasps from other students in the Great Hall.

Suddenly there was a great cheer from the rear end of the Slytherin table -- the Dark Lord’s Army had heard the news.

Fourteen Death Eaters had escaped. However, Aurors killed one by the name of Augustus Rookwood. He was a former Ministry official from the Department of Mysteries. Several Aurors had arrived by chance during the breakout.

The mass breakout was unprecedented. The Ministry could not explain it, but Harry was pretty sure he knew how. The Dementors must have gone over to Voldemort’s

side, just as Professor Dumbledore had warned. He told his friends and they agreed. It was a bad sign of things to come.

The story dominated student talk in the castle for days.

Harry saw that Neville Longbottom was particularly disturbed by it. At the next Dueling Club meeting, Neville seemed to be possessed in his training exercises. Professor Moody had to rein him in several times until no one wanted to partner with him, not even Luna. So, Professor Moody took him on and Neville held his own against the famous ex-Auror. Most students stopped making sport of Neville after that.

Harry now found himself with the biggest time management problem since coming to Hogwarts. Occlumency training with Professor Snape, Dueling Club, Animagus training with Hermione, lessons with Professor Dumbledore, and Quidditch practice made it very difficult to keep up with homework. Without Hermione making him use every spare moment to work on assignments -- plus her considerable help completing them -- he doubted he would have been able to manage.

In the first lesson with Professor Dumbledore after Christmas, Harry asked him how the Order communicated, wondering if they had something like the Dark Mark.

“Oh, in the usual ways most of the time. I can assure you we have no cursed tattoos,” he added with a chuckle. “However, in emergencies, we use messenger Patronus. You need to learn how. I suggest you work with Miss Granger.”

Dumbledore then began the subject of the lesson -- Tom Riddle as a student at Hogwarts. It made Harry remember what he had seen in Tom Riddle’s diary and when Riddle himself had come out of it in the Chamber of Secrets. However, seeing the memory of Morfin Gaunt set Harry on edge.

Tom Riddle had *killed* his own father -- and his grandparents for good measure -- and then framed Morfin for the crime. Yet, he was only one year older than Harry was now. Clearly, Voldemort was capable of the most monstrous evil even before adulthood.

Right before he dismissed Harry, Professor Dumbledore told him that Morfin’s missing ring -- inherited from his father -- and the locket that Merope had taken would become very important later, and that they would discuss it at the next lesson.

When Harry mentioned this to Hermione, Draco, and Ginny the next morning at breakfast, Hermione was intrigued. “The *ring* and *locket* are very important? I wonder why.”

“Well, the only thing I remember about them,” said Harry, “is that Marvolo Gaunt told Bob Ogden from the Ministry that the ring was an old family heirloom with the Peveril coat of arms on it and that Merope’s locket had originally belonged to Salazar Slytherin himself.”

Harry was not surprised when later that evening Hermione told them, “I did some research in the library. The Peveril’s were an ancient pure-blood family who claimed to be direct decedents of Salazar Slytherin. It just adds more evidence that Voldemort is actually *‘the Heir of Slytherin.’*” She held her fingers in the air to indicate quotation marks and then continued. “That’s obviously why he took the ring from Morfin. He felt entitled to it. I bet he’s after the locket too -- if he doesn’t already have it,” concluded Hermione.

Draco nodded and said, “I bet you’re right, Hermione.”

“Of course, she is,” said Ginny. “When has she ever been wrong?”

Hermione beamed.

As Hermione was scanning the Daily Prophet, she stopped and said, sounding shocked, “Bode is dead!”

“No!” said Harry. “They said he’d recover for sure.”

Hermione read a line from the article, “‘*St Mungo’s is investigating why no one recognized the deadly plant.*’ He was strangled to death by a Venomous Tentacula plant delivered anonymously as a Christmas present.”

“It had to be *murder*,” said Draco, “to keep him from eventually talking.”

“Well, it’s no secret who did it,” said Harry. “I feel sorry for Bode. Professor Dumbledore said he helped the Order a lot.”

Harry was only slowly improving in his Occlumency lessons with Professor Snape.

Harry discovered he seemed to be predisposed, for some unknown reason, *not* to close his mind. Professor Snape commented on it too, saying that most people were the opposite, inherently secretive. Harry was unusual and therefore had to work harder to keep his guard up. But Snape would not allow Harry to use it as an excuse. He said now that Harry understood the problem, he could focus on it and must learn to suppress it.

Still, it took considerable effort.

Harry's calming exercises before bed were complex because they were designed to allow him to dream about the corridor and door to the Department Mysteries -- because Professor Dumbledore wanted the dream to take Harry where it would -- but disallow anything else.

Harry had his doubts about Occlumency training.

He wondered whether his limited success had more to do with what Voldemort was doing on his end than what Harry was doing on his. What gave him some confidence of improvement was that when he was especially tired and used a particular calming exercise designed to shut *everything* out, he had *almost* dreamless sleep -- though Hermione was *always* in his dreams.

Harry was so busy; he had not had much time to try to sneak into a Dark Lord's Army meeting. The times when he was able to check for the wooden entry door, it wasn't there. He finally concluded the meeting was now only being held at the same time as Dueling Club. It was a perfect cover. Harry was stymied.

But it also meant the Room of Requirement was now always available for Harry and his friends to use as the Student Lounge. On the third and subsequent Hogsmeade weekends, Harry made sure they got into the Room of Requirement first in case the DLA members ever again tried to use it then.

Quidditch was going very well. Practices were very efficient and the team had really jelled. Slytherin handily beat Ravenclaw in their match in February.

Things were *not* going well for the Gryffindor Quidditch team.

Ginny said that Ron was sometimes almost as bad as McLagan. Ron had practically come to blows with Angelina Johnson after a practice where he had a running argument with Fred and George. Angelina wanted to kick Ron off the team, but Ginny persuaded her to give him another chance.

Ginny said Ron could be *really good* at times, but he felt intimidated by his older brothers. If they said anything negative, it set Ron off. Ginny warned Fred and George to lay off Ron or she would use the Bat Bogey hex on them. It seemed to have worked; she said things had been a lot better in recent practices.

But Gryffindor still lost to Hufflepuff in March. Ron had done quite well for most of the match. But then Fred and George made derogatory comments after Ron had badly missed defending one shot on goal. After that, he fell apart. Unfortunately for Ron, Summerby got the Snitch an instant before Ginny, otherwise she would have pulled out the win. Ginny was incredibly angry at herself. She hated to lose as much as Flint had.

Everyone agreed that Ron had the potential to be a great Keeper, but he always seemed to bugger it up at some point. He just lacked the necessary self-confidence to recover after a slipup.

Before the Easter Holidays, Professor Snape finally complimented Harry at the end of an Occlumency lesson.

“You are finally showing *real* improvement, Mr Potter. I had to make a concerted effort to get past your defenses tonight. Perhaps with a few more years of training, you will be accomplished enough to be earn the title of Occlumens.”

“A few more *years!*” exclaimed Harry. “You only beat me *once* tonight when I wasn’t concentrating enough.”

Snape adopted his most imperious posture and said, “This is not a *game*, Mr Potter. In the *real* world, your enemy will not *wait* for you to get ready. You may not even know he is there. You must be ready and focused *at all times!* I am sure you are aware of Professor Moody’s catchphrase, ‘Constant Vigilance.’ The same applies here. You need to expand your practice time to include school hours.”

“But I won’t be able to concentrate in class,” complained Harry.

“*Now* you understand what it takes to become a *true* Occlumens. You must be able to focus on *two* things at once,” snapped the Potions master.

Harry just shook his head. Maybe this was the reason Professor Snape was such a stiff.

“Starting tomorrow, you will practice during breakfast. I will *know* if you don’t. We will expand your practice time each week. You may go,” Snape finished.

As Harry walked to the door, he again saw Professor Snape retrieving memories from the Pensieve. With a sudden reckless impulse, Harry turned and asked, “What are you always hiding in the Pensieve?”

The savage look on Professor Snape’s face made Harry regret his question. Snape seemed about to explode, but then he suddenly calmed himself. He stared intently at Harry for several seconds.

For a moment Harry thought he should take the opportunity to leave, but then Snape said, “Are you prepared to see the *truth*, Mr Potter? Can you accept that some of the beliefs you hold most dear might be *lies*? If so, look into the Pensieve... if you *dare*.”

Harry was intrigued. Why was Professor Snape offering to share his secret memories? Harry could not resist and walked back to the desk.

Snape had a strange look on his face that Harry could not read.

Was it satisfaction?

Harry did not sleep that night. He could not stop thinking about what he had seen. He realized he was *not* ready for the truth about his father and Sirius. He would never forget the look on Professor Snape’s face when he had pulled back from the Pensieve. It was triumphant. Snape had not said anything.

Harry had been in shock and just left.

In the morning just after getting up, Draco said, “You look *terrible*. What’s wrong?”

“I don’t want to talk about it now,” Harry said miserably.

“Did something happen with Professor Snape?” asked Draco presciently.

Harry nodded.

“OK. Whatever you say... But maybe you should talk to Hermione,” suggested Draco.

Harry realized that was what he needed to do.

They went down to breakfast. Hermione and Ginny were already there.

Harry wanted to talk but did not know how to begin. So, he just sat there while Hermione read the Daily Prophet aloud as usual. When Harry did not say anything, Draco said, “Hermione, Harry needs to talk to you about something that happened at his Occlumency lesson with Professor Snape last night.”

Hermione stopped reading and looked at Harry expectantly.

Harry said, “We need to go to the empty classroom.” He got up and gestured for Draco and Ginny to follow.

Once there, Harry began immediately, “I saw some of Professor Snape’s memories when he was a student at Hogwarts... I saw my father attack him without warning for no reason... well, actually because Sirius was... bored. Lupin just stood by and ignored it. My mother came to Snape’s defense, but Snape reacted foolishly in his anger and humiliation and called her a Mudblood. I never knew it, but my mother and Snape had been best friends for years. I saw other memories of her. I think he *loved* her. Snape sincerely apologized to her that day, but it ended their friendship. He was completely devastated and no longer had anyone to help guide him away from the dark side.”

Harry took a deep breath. “It was obvious my father was just trying to impress my mother by attacking Snape.” Harry then said very quietly, “He said he would stop the attack on Snape if she went out with him.”

No one said anything.

Harry sighed and then continued. “I know I’m not explaining it very well, but it was... *bad*. My father was just as bad as the people in the DLA. He acted just like they do... not like people on our side... not like *us*.”

“Oh, Harry. I’m so sorry,” said Hermione sympathetically. “But you *can’t* judge your father from a couple of Professor Snape’s memories. You *know* Sirius. That one memory shouldn’t erase everything else. Sirius is *good*.”

“Absolutely,” said Draco. “Professor Snape was messing with you. We know he didn’t like your father. He just picked a memory that showed you the *worst*.”

“Well, it worked,” said Harry matter-of-factly. “You didn’t *see* it. My father *enjoyed* attacking Snape, humiliating him, hurting him. Snape only tried to *defend* himself.”

Hermione said, “Let’s go see Hagrid after dinner. You need to talk to him about it. Please try not to dwell on it today.”

She kissed him on the cheek before leaving with Ginny for classes.

As he left with Draco on their way to class, Harry said, “Professor Dumbledore told me Snape and my father detested each other. But I had always imagined it was all *Snape’s* fault... It *wasn’t*.”

Despite Hermione’s advice, Harry could not think about anything else all day. He could not concentrate in class. At dinner, Harry stayed out of the conversation, still brooding.

Hermione said she needed to go back to her dorm room and would meet Harry at Hagrid’s.

They said goodbye and Harry headed down to Hagrid’s -- with his usual Auror escort -- in the long shadows of the approaching sunset. As he neared the cabin, he could see Hagrid outside at the edge of the Forbidden Forest talking to three centaurs that stood just inside the tree line.

Harry could not hear what they were saying, but the conversation was quite animated. The middle centaur was waving his arms and stamping his rear hooves. Hagrid shook his fist and then pointed his finger right in the centaur’s face. Before Harry reached them, one of the centaurs noticed him and his Auror escort. A few seconds later, the three centaurs turned and disappeared into the forest.

Hagrid turned and waved to Harry, saying, “Hello, Harry, by yerself?”

Harry replied, “I came to talk to you about something. Hermione is supposed to meet me here.”

“OK then. Come inside an we’ll ’ave a spot o’ tea,” said Hagrid cheerfully.

Hagrid also invited the Auror in but she declined and waited outside.

Once Hagrid had the kettle on the fire he asked, “So, what’s on yer mind, Harry?”

“Well, I want to wait for Hermione...” Harry answered as he glanced out the window, and then asked, “So, what were you talking to the centaurs about?”

“Oh, that? Nuthin’ at all. Just a friendly conversation,” said Hagrid innocently.

“It looked like an argument to me,” said Harry.

“Never ya mind. Sometimes them centaurs think the forest belongs ta ’em. I was jus’ settin’ ’em ta right,” said Hagrid righteously, then, “Here’s yer tea,” and he set down a large steaming mug in front of Harry and then looked out the window, adding, “I don’t think Hermione’s comin’.”

“I guess not...” said Harry disappointedly. “She must have been held up...” Then he looked intently at Hagrid and said very deliberately, “I saw some of Professor Snape’s memories when he was a student at Hogwarts... you know, in Professor Dumbledore’s Pensieve. I saw my father attack Snape without warning or provocation while Sirius and Lupin looked on. But my mother defended Snape against my father.”

Hagrid looked concerned but he did not speak.

Harry went on, “Hagrid, you and practically everyone says my father was good and brave... He wasn’t.”

Hagrid shook his head and said, “Perfessor Snape were sorta a special case... Yer father an ’im hated each other, like you an...”

“And who?” challenged Harry.

“Well, I don’t know...” said Hagrid, searching for an answer, “...um...like You-Know-Who.”

“Voldemort?! Hagrid, *he killed my parents!*” exclaimed Harry. “Snape didn’t do *anything*. His ‘*crime*’ was reading an exam paper under a tree!”

“Harry, yer father was *good*. Ya can’t judge ’im from *one* incident,” Hagrid said almost pleadingly. The conversation had clearly upset him.

“I thought that’s what you’d say,” said Harry angrily.

He got up, walked out and slammed the door behind him.

Harry went to the library to find Hermione, but she was not there. He then went to the Gryffindor common room, where he found Draco and Ginny. They had not seen Hermione.

Harry told them visiting Hagrid had been a waste of time and complained that Hermione had not shown up.

Ginny checked Hermione’s dorm room, but she was not there. “You probably just missed her... bathroom or something. Check the library again,” advised Ginny.

Harry did, but she was still not there. All he could guess was that Professor McGonagall had intercepted her and had her doing some Prefect business.

He waited until the library closed.

In a very bad mood, Harry returned to his dorm room. He did not feel like talking to anyone else and went to bed early.

Still upset about Professor Snape’s memory of his father and aggravated by Hermione’s absence, Harry did *not* do his nightly calming exercises for Occlumency or his Animagus incantations before going to sleep.

He was standing in the Hall of Prophecies.

He was not alone. A small shrouded figure was curled at his feet on the stone floor in obvious pain.

“You will retrieve the Prophecy for Lord Voldemort,” said his high-pitched voice as he pointed his wand at the pathetic figure beneath him.

“No, please. I *can't*,” came a pitiful cry.

Her bushy brown hair was now barely discernable beneath her hood in the dim light.

“Nevertheless,” responded his merciless voice, “you *will*... or you shall *die*... A little more *encouragement* then... We have *all* night... *Crucio!*”

The young girl screamed in agony.

Harry jerked awake. “HERMIONE!”

Harry’s shout woke everybody.

Draco exclaimed, “What’s the matter, Harry?” as he scrambled out of bed, joined by their roommates.

“Voldemort has *Hermione* in the Hall of Prophecies! HE’S TORTURING HER!” yelled Harry.

“Harry...” began Draco, but Harry cut him off.

“It was a *vision* -- just like with Mr Weasley!” exclaimed Harry, pleading his explanation.

“I believe you, Harry,” said Draco, “but this one we can *check*.”

“Draco, I never found her after dinner,” Harry continued to plead urgently.

He had already pulled on his shoes was on his way to the door when Draco exclaimed, “Harry! ...the *Marauder’s Map*. Check it. It’ll show you she’s still here. This has to be a *trick*.”

Harry looked angry at the delay, but he swore and dashed to the foot of his bed and threw open his school trunk. Things went flying in every direction until he had the map

in his hands. He opened it and spread it out on his bed and began a frantic search. He hastily put on his glasses so he could read the tiny names by the small dots.

Draco illuminated his wand and held it above the map. He scanned it too. Pucey, Urquhart and Vaisey stood silently by but watched with great interest. Draco checked every room in Gryffindor tower, the library, all the girls' bathrooms, the Prefects' bathroom, the other houses, all the classrooms, the Great Hall, the hospital wing, McGonagall's office, the Staff room, the grounds, and even the kitchens.

"Draco, I don't see her..." moaned Harry as he continued to search frantically.

She was not there.

Draco looked at Harry and said, "OK. What do you want us to do?"

Harry stopped searching and said, "You four go get McGonagall, Snape, Moody and Hagrid and meet me in Professor Dumbledore's office. I'm going see him *right now*."

Harry grabbed the map and was gone, with the others right on his heels. Harry and the others raced past the Auror who was posted outside the Slytherin house entrance, and split up. The Auror, of course, followed Harry.

Harry shouted the most recent password at the Gargoyle, who seemed to take forever to move out of the way. He took the spiral stairs two at a time and before he could raise his fist to pound on the office door, it opened. Harry raced through and stopped in front of Professor Dumbledore's desk.

Dumbledore sat behind it looking as if he had been waiting for Harry. Seeing Harry gasping, he said, "I *know* it is important, Harry; you are wearing pajamas. Please catch your breath."

Harry croaked, "Sir, Hermione's missing," not waiting to catch his breath.

He threw down the Marauder's Map in front of Professor Dumbledore and then gasped, "...and I just had... a vision of her... being *tortured*... by Voldemort... in the Hall of Prophecies."

Harry seemed to slump after getting it out.

Professor Dumbledore blinked and started to point his wand at the fireplace when Harry added, “I’ve already sent for... Professors McGonagall, Snape... Moody and Hagrid.”

Dumbledore looked slightly surprised, but then said, “Good work, Harry. However, I doubt very much that Miss Granger, or any student, has left the school in the last twenty-four hours.”

“But sir... the *Map*...?” said Harry questioningly.

“The Map is a remarkable piece of magic, but we teachers have ways of keeping track of the comings and goings of people in and out of Hogwarts -- when we *need* to. Miss Granger has *not* left the school.”

“But a Portkey or the Floo Network or...” said Harry anxiously, by now having mostly caught his breath.

“Harry, *trust* me,” said Dumbledore calmly, “I will admit I could *possibly* be wrong, but I very seriously doubt it.”

As Harry was about to protest, Professor Dumbledore held up his hand and said, “Harry, you *must* trust me. This is what we have been waiting for... your vision of Lord Voldemort torturing Hermione in the Hall of Prophecies -- a vision designed to draw you there. I *commend* you for coming directly to see me instead of trying to act on your own. We have an opportunity to strike a serious blow against the Death Eaters and possibly Lord Voldemort himself,” declared Dumbledore.

Then in a softer voice, he added, “And we will do our best find Miss Granger. Your friends will be able to help. As an Order member, you will play a vital part, but you *must* obey my orders.”

Harry said, “Yes, sir,” but he still felt anxious and helpless.

Professor Dumbledore raised his wand, waved it and a ghostly white Phoenix shot out of it and hovered in front of him. Dumbledore said, “Omega.” The Phoenix Patronus glowed much brighter and then split into a dozen or more pieces before it vanished. Dumbledore then waved his wand at a cabinet along the wall. It opened and out floated an open box which appeared to contain a complete set of clothes, including Slytherin school robes. It settled on Dumbledore’s desk.

Dumbledore glanced at it and then said, “Now, while we wait for the teachers and your friends to arrive, I must brief you on our plan. But first, Harry... I need to borrow your glasses for a moment.”

“My *glasses*, sir?” said Harry uncertainly.

Chapter 8 – The Hall of Prophecies

Harry walked slowly down the center isle in the Hall of Prophecies holding high his illuminated wand.

The Atrium at the Ministry of Magic had been completely empty, even the Security Desk. He had made his way down to the Department of Mysteries without seeing anyone. Now in the Hall of Prophecies, he passed rows ninety-five, ninety-six, ninety-seven. He stopped and looked around.

He called out, “Hermione.”

Nothing.

Again, louder, “Hermione!”

Then he heard quiet laughter, from just ahead in the center aisle.

Harry pointed his wand where the sound had come from.

A masked figure suddenly appeared out of the darkness no more than ten feet away. The person must have been using a disillusionment charm.

“You need to learn to tell the difference between dreams and reality, Mr Potter,” said a voice Harry recognized as Lucius Malfoy. “The Dark Lord put that vision into your mind. You only saw what he *wanted* you to see.”

“Where is Hermione? She is missing,” demanded Harry.

“You are in *no* position to make demands, Mr Potter. You are *surrounded*,” said Malfoy harshly.

At that moment, masked figures appeared all around him, but they were standing further back. There were at least ten in all -- two on either side in row ninety-seven, more in the center isle and the rows in front and behind. Harry clearly was surrounded.

Seemingly unfazed, Harry shouted, "WHERE IS HERMIONE!"

"Shouting? How *rude*. Don't they teach *manners* at Hogwarts any longer?" mocked Malfoy.

Many of the masked figures laughed.

"What do you want?" asked Harry softly.

"That's *better*," said Malfoy in a condescending tone. "We want you to retrieve the glass sphere on the shelf just in front of you and to the right -- the one with your name and the Dark Lord's on the label beneath it."

"You only want the Prophecy about me and Voldemort? Are you *serious*?" asked Harry boldly.

This statement seemed to surprise Malfoy even as several of the masked figures hissed at hearing their Master's name.

When Malfoy did not immediately reply, Harry continued. "Professor Dumbledore *told* me the Prophecy. It says I am the Chosen One. He also told me that Voldemort has already heard it. *I know* that only the subject of a Prophecy orb can be the first to touch it, but that does not mean it cannot be moved *magically*. How do you think all these prophecies were placed on the shelves? You could have *easily* stolen it a long time ago and given it to your master."

Harry laughed and then slowly plucked the Prophecy from the shelf with his left hand.

Malfoy seemed unnerved, but recovered. "You are in *no* position..."

"Is that *so*? *I* have nothing to lose now. *I* am *surrounded*. *I* am *desperate*. But *I* have the Prophecy. Your master *wants* it... But *I* will *smash* it if you do not tell me where Hermione is," said Harry threateningly.

"He *knows* how to *play*," said a sarcastic female voice coming from a masked figure next to Malfoy.

Without warning the female voice shouted, “*ACCIO PROPHECY!*”

But Harry had been ready. The glass sphere barely moved in his hand.

Harry slowly raised his left hand in a position to cast the Prophecy onto the stone floor. “For the *last* time, where is Hermione Granger?” Both his hand and his voice were strong and steady.

“She’s being held in Hogwarts by the students loyal to the Dark Lord,” said Malfoy reluctantly.

“Where?” said Harry.

“I don’t know,” said Malfoy, “Someplace secret.”

Harry raised his left hand even higher.

“I don’t *know!*” insisted Malfoy, sounding anxious. “Perhaps... the Chamber of Secrets.”

Harry could tell that Malfoy was guessing.

Harry lowered his hand and said, “Thank you.”

But without waiting for Malfoy to respond, he tossed the Prophecy at Malfoy in a very high arc. It automatically drew the eyes of all the masked figures.

Harry closed his eyes and a brilliant blinding light burst out of his wand and hit the sphere, which seemed to amplify it even more -- reflecting it in every direction.

The masked figures all cried out in pain from the searing light that temporarily blinded them.

Harry dropped to the ground as several of the enraged and panicked Death Eaters cast spells and curses in his general direction. A few hit their fellows who either crumpled or were blasted aside. Hundreds of prophecy spheres were blown off the shelves. They rained down and shattered on the stone floor. Ghostly images of diviners and prophets rose up and somberly uttered a confusing chorus of overlapping prophetic words, which together were completely unintelligible. Among those still falling was the Prophecy orb Harry had tossed into the air.

Even though blinded, Lucius Malfoy desperately tried to catch it -- his hands cupped where he gauged the sphere's trajectory would take it. The glass sphere glanced off his wrist and shattered on the stone floor.

Harry could hear Malfoy's groan of anguish even through the cacophony of sound.

Harry looked up to see one Death Eater running down the center isle for the exit. Long black hair trailed behind her.

Bellatrix!

As Harry got to his feet to pursue her, he heard his fellow members of the Order of the Phoenix responding to his signal -- the flash of light. They had emerged from their hidden positions and were stunning and apprehending the blinded Death Eaters.

As he sprinted after Bellatrix, he shouted, "Round them all up and bring them to the Atrium."

When the elevator door opened in the alcove of the Atrium, Harry hung back and threw his robes out ahead of him. There was a flash of green light, which hit the robes.

But Harry was already diving out of the elevator at the same time. He rolled to his side and fired a stunning spell, which hit the arm extending around the corner of the alcove wall.

Bellatrix howled in pain and dropped her wand. She reeled backwards, spun around and headed for the Floo Network exit fireplaces in the Atrium.

Harry hit her with a stunning spell and she went down in a heap, losing her mask.

She was groaning as Harry approached her cautiously.

Suddenly she rolled onto her back and threw a silver dagger straight at Harry's chest.

He causally deflected it with a shield charm.

Bellatrix had a look of shock on her face.

Harry could see that her left eye had been shielded from the blinding light by the long hair which hung down one side of her face.

“Where is your Master tonight? Afraid to face me? Is that why he wanted the Prophecy? To find out more? Well, there *is* no more... and the Prophecy is *smashed*. Malfoy didn't catch it. You *failed* your Master, and you have *all* been captured,” Harry said insultingly.

Bellatrix laughed, an insane cackling laugh, and then teasingly taunted, “*I called him...*”

Harry whirled around and raised a shield charm just in time to stop an incredible blast of fire. Voldemort was striding across the Atrium toward him, wand raised.

Without a wand, Bellatrix scrambled away and dashed into an exit fireplace.

“We meet *again*, Harry Potter. This time will be the *last*,” sneered Voldemort. “My Death Eaters have failed *yet* again, but *Lord Voldemort* shall not.”

“Too much talk, *as always*,” taunted Harry, but he did not attack.

This seemed to enrage Voldemort, who sent a series of rapid-fire curses at Harry, which he parried easily. Voldemort was now within twenty feet of Harry. He paused.

Without a trace of irony in his voice, Harry said, “I see you are beginning to have *doubts* -- maybe Harry Potter *is* the Chosen One... The Prophecy is *destroyed*. You will *never* know.”

Harry felt something try to enter his mind, but he repelled it easily with little effort. “That will not work on *me*. I have been trained by Albus Dumbledore.”

Voldemort looked like he was going to scream and then his eyes went wide. “You are using... *Dumbledore's* wand...”

Just then, the entry fireplaces started to light and Ministry Aurors began emerging in force into the far end of the Atrium.

Voldemort looked quickly around, then back at Harry... and was now facing what seemed like a vast *army* of Harry Potters standing in a forest of tall mirrors.

“And what *illusion* did you see in the Mirror of Erised with Quirrell...?” echoed the many Harrys.

Voldemort screamed a curse and the mirrors exploded into a dense cloud of suspended glass fragments which caused all the Harrys to suddenly vanish.

But a small fragment of mirror drifting close to Voldemort suddenly zoomed forward and slashed his right cheek, making him cry out in pain. “Aaahh...”

“*That* is for taking my *blood* in the graveyard, *Riddle...*” came Harry’s voice from within the cloud of glass fragments.

Voldemort screamed, “*You dare to say my filthy Muggle father’s name!?*”

The only response was laughter from within the cloud of glass.

Voldemort searched in vain for Harry and then snarled, “This is only the *beginning*, Harry Potter.” Then he Disapparated and all the floating glass suddenly fell to the floor.

The Aurors rushed up to Harry and asked him if he were all right.

Harry told them the Order of the Phoenix had captured ten or more Death Eaters in the Department of Mysteries and were bringing them up to the Atrium. He also said Professor Dumbledore would be along in a few minutes and wanted to talk to the Minister for Magic. Finally, he said he *desperately* needed to use the bathroom and headed off toward the elevators.

Several of the Aurors laughed.

Before he was out of earshot, Harry heard one of the Aurors say, “Did you see that? He bested You-Know-Who *again* and he isn’t even of-age. He *must* be the Chosen One.”

Harry smiled.

Professor Dumbledore met with Rufus Scrimgeour a half hour later.

Scrimgeour was irate that the Order of the Phoenix had conducted an operation in the Ministry of Magic without his knowledge or consent. Dumbledore said it was necessary because, if anything, this operation proved that the Ministry had been infiltrated and compromised. Otherwise, how was it possible there were absolutely no security

personnel at their posts -- allowing both the Death Eaters and the Order members to gain unhindered access to the Department of Mysteries?

Dumbledore recommended a full investigation.

Scrimgeour told Dumbledore not to tell him how to do his job and that using Harry Potter as bait to lure the Dark Lord into a trap was irresponsible. He declared he would bring it to the attention of the Wizengamot in addition to the way Dumbledore was running Hogwarts.

The meeting went downhill from there.

Scrimgeour demanded that Dumbledore allow the Ministry to use Harry Potter for propaganda, especially in light of what had just occurred.

Dumbledore refused and walked out.

Chapter 9 – Harry In Charge

Harry sat nervously with his friends in the Gryffindor common room.

Also there were Draco, Ginny, the rest of his Slytherin roommates and Quidditch teammates, minus Tracy, the rest of the Weasleys and the Gryffindor Quidditch team. Plus there were many other Gryffindor's including Neville, Dean, Seamus, and Hermione's roommates, Lavender, Parvati, Lily and Sophie. The latter four still fretted that they had ignored Hermione's absence. They assumed she was either off somewhere revising for her OWL exams or, preferably, enjoying a clandestine midnight rendezvous with Harry.

They had all been briefed by Professor McGonagall on Hermione's disappearance. McGonagall had departed to organize a search by the teachers. She had insisted the students remain in the common room and wait for instructions.

Harry had the Marauder's Map in his pocket. Now his other roommates besides Draco knew about it, but that could not be helped -- it had been an emergency. He also had the invisibility cloak. They had gone back to their dorm to get dressed after Professor Dumbledore dismissed them.

The plan was, ostensibly, to wait together in the Gryffindor common room for news. Only Harry knew the *real* plan. Professor Dumbledore explained it before his roommates, and the teachers they had awakened, had arrived in Dumbledore's office. Harry did not like it, but he understood it.

The buzz of conversation had died down considerably over the last hour, but not entirely. Most of it continued to be speculation on Hermione's whereabouts. The consensus was the Chamber of Secrets, but Harry did not believe it. You had to speak Parseltongue to open it and he was the only Parselmouth in the School -- as far as he knew. True, the Chamber did not show up on the Marauder's Map, but it was just too unlikely.

The same was true for the rooms that had been under the trap door that Fluffy had guarded in his first year. Now that the trap door was gone, Harry was not sure how you could get to them, or if they were even still there. Other popular theories were the Shrieking Shack, the Forbidden Forest and the Quidditch stadium, which were all being checked by the teachers and staff.

The only thing that gave Harry hope that Hermione was still at Hogwarts was that Professor Dumbledore said he had put in place ways of knowing who went in and out of the castle. And Dumbledore had promised Harry he would find out where Hermione was.

All of his hope now centered on a small mirror clutched in the palm of his hand.

It suddenly coughed softly.

Harry quickly held it up to his face. He could barely make out Sirius' face in the dim light coming from the mirror.

"Harry," Sirius whispered. "Can you hear me?"

"Yes," Harry whispered back.

They actually did not need to whisper -- the mirror's enchantment made it impossible for other people to hear the conversation.

Still, the Gryffindor common room had gone silent.

“Hermione is being held by the Dark Lord’s Army in the castle, but I’m sorry to say, we don’t know where. Good luck, Harry. I have to go,” was Sirius’ short message.

Harry’s blood flash-boiled. He had never been so enraged in his life. He could barely speak, but managed to croak, “The DLA’s got her somewhere in the castle.”

Draco stood up and called out to the room, “The Slytherins who support *Voldemort* have taken her, but we don’t know where. But we’ll find them and make them talk.” He sounded almost as angry as Harry felt.

The room erupted in angry shouts and calls for vengeance. Some had already started for the portrait hole.

But Ginny stood up and shouted at the top of her lungs, “WAIT!”

Everyone paused, including Harry who had already thought of a hundred things he was going to do to the traitorous Slytherins if they had harmed just one hair on Hermione’s head.

“Rushing out without a plan could put Hermione in danger. Let *Harry* tell us what to do. He’s already discussed this with Professor Dumbledore,” explained Ginny.

No one said anything for a moment, then Draco said, “Ginny’s right. What’s the plan, Harry?”

Ginny’s interruption had allowed Harry to come to his senses instead of running off like a maniac with the mob. He did not want to put Hermione in danger, but also did not want innocent Slytherins hurt by rampaging Gryffindors. He had worked too hard to help bring the two houses closer together.

He put the mirror back into his pocket and climbed up onto a low gaming table so everyone could see him. He began, “They must have her concealed somewhere.”

“An invisibility cloak,” Parvati called out.

“Possibly,” said Harry, even knowing the Marauder’s Map saw through them. But then he said, “We’re looking for one or more of the Slytherin’s who support *Voldemort*. They are -- Crabbe, Goyle, Nott, Montague, Warrington, Bulstrode, Parkinson...” He rattled off the rest of their names -- twenty in total.

Harry continued his instructions, “If you didn’t know, they call themselves the Dark Lord’s Army, the DLA for short. All the other Slytherin students have absolutely *nothing* to do with it; *leave them alone*. Now, I and the other Slytherins here are going down to check Slytherin house from top to bottom.”

“Ginny, I want you to go find either McGonagall, Snape, Moody, or Hagrid and tell whoever you find first what we’re doing. But don’t leave the castle. That applies to everyone.”

“Neville, you and your roommates will be runners. Get the school ghosts to help you if possible. Position yourselves outside the teacher’s Staff room; it’s central. If anyone develops critical information, get the runners to deliver it to whoever needs it.”

“Fred and George, organize the rest to cover the castle doors and exits -- *all* of them.” He gave them a wink as he said it. “They may try to bolt once they know we’re on to them. Don’t let any get away.”

“And everyone, be warned, they are *dangerous*. This is *not* a game. Use your most powerful and best spells from the start.”

Harry paused for a moment and then said, “If you complete your task, check in with the runners. If there are no further instructions, wait in the Staff room. If you catch any of the bastards, tie them up and take them to the Staff room. And finally, if you find out where Hermione is, notify a teacher immediately and get the runners to spread the word. If you find her safe, get her to the Staff room. Any questions?”

There were none.

“Then let’s go!” said Harry with determination.

There was a cheer, and the rest of the group began organizing as Harry left with his roommates and teammates. As they passed through the portrait hole, Draco said, “Well done, mate.”

“Did you know you said, *Voldemort*, a minute ago instead of the Dark Lord?” asked Harry with a grin.

“Yea,” said Draco with a smile. “I figured it was about time.”

To his surprise, Harry's shadow Auror was no longer standing in the corridor by the portrait of the Fat Lady. In fact, all the Aurors guarding the school seemed to be gone. Harry did not stop to think about it.

The dorm rooms of the DLA male members were empty. And they were not in the other boys' dorm rooms or bathroom. Draco had to shout from the common room down the girls' hallway to wake up a Slytherin first-year girl. They got her to wake up Tracy. She came out in her dressing gown and asked what was going on. They told her, and she joined them. It only took her a minute to go get dressed. She checked the two DLA girls' rooms, reporting them empty too. She also checked the other girls' dorm rooms and bathroom. When she returned, Queenie was with her.

Draco asked, "How come no one noticed they didn't come in before curfew?"

"Hell, no one pays any attention to them anymore. They've kept to themselves since school began," said Adrian.

He was right. Harry now regretted he had not been able to infiltrate one of the DLA meetings to find out what they were doing...

It hit him like a thunderbolt -- *The Room of Requirement!*

It had to be. It must not show up on the Marauder's Map either. Why had he never thought about checking that before? He was angry with himself for being so blind.

"Harry? Harry!"

Harry refocused and saw Draco snapping his fingers in front of his face.

"You totally blanked out for a minute. What's going on?" said Draco sounding a little worried. "Not another *vision*...?"

"No, No," said Harry excitedly. "They're in the *Room of Requirement!* They've got Hermione in the Room of Requirement! It's the *only* explanation!"

Draco's eyes almost popped out of his head in realization. "Brilliant, Harry! That's it! Let's go!"

“Wait, wait, WAIT!” exclaimed Tracy as Harry and Draco turned to go. “What are you *talking* about?” She was clearly speaking for the others who all had questioning looks on their faces.

“And don’t we need to meet back at the Staff room *first*?” asked Vaisey.

Harry looked embarrassed. “You’re right. *That’s* the plan. We’re going to the Staff room first. I’ll explain everything on the way.”

Chapter 10 – Saving Hermione

Harry explained to everyone assembled in front of the Staff room what the Room of Requirement was and how it worked. The two gargoyles standing guard seemed especially interested but did not say anything.

Harry said it was important for each of them to think they truly needed to get into the Dark Lord’s Army meeting room.

While explaining about the Room, Harry had suddenly realized that if the door was not there, he would have been wrong about Hermione being in the Room. He should have checked first. But they were already primed to go, so he did not say anything, desperately hoping he was right.

Harry led them to the seventh-floor corridor. The door to the Room of Requirement was where it always appeared. It meant the DLA *was* inside -- and so was Hermione. Harry felt relieved he had not been wrong.

Harry deployed everyone with him along the seventh-floor corridor outside the Room of Requirement. Only those guarding the school exits and four of the runners were missing. He took out the invisibility cloak, which he announced Dumbledore had given him. This was true, but the uninformed understood it to mean it was just on loan for this mission.

Harry told them he would go into the Room alone under the invisibility cloak and assess the situation. If he could, he would rescue Hermione; but if he could not, he would position himself to protect her. And if he did not come out after *one* minute, Draco would lead the charge into the room -- everyone with wands out firing stunning spells.

They were outnumbered by six but had the advantage of surprise.

Harry put on the invisibility cloak and, with wand at the ready, walked up to the door. He concentrated, thinking to himself, 'I need to get into the Dark Lord's Army meeting room.' He slowly turned the handle of the door and pushed. The door moved silently inward. He opened it just enough to slip inside and slowly closed the door.

The room was dim. Only a few torches were lit. Hammocks were slung between pillars. Many were occupied. Harry heard heavy breathing and snoring coming from those sleeping. At the far end of the room were five students who were standing in a circle talking to someone in the middle he could not see. They sounded angry. He also heard loud clapping sounds.

Behind the group, Harry could just make out a figure lying on the floor. He thought it must be Hermione, but was not sure. The figure was motionless. Harry felt his anger rising and threatening to explode, but acting on his own was sure to fail.

Rescue was out of the question.

Harry now had less than minute before his friends would come rushing in. He quickly and silently moved to the back wall of the room -- near the small circle of DLA members but out of the way. He now saw it *was* Hermione lying on the floor. She was bound tightly in ropes. She looked *terrible*. Her face was swollen and heavily bruised. She seemed to be unconscious.

Harry positioned himself where he could cast a shield charm to protect her and fire stunning spells at the backs of the DLA members standing near her.

As he waited, he suddenly became conscious of what they were saying, having been totally focused on Hermione until now.

"If you don't tell us, we'll *kill* you," threatened Warrington. This was followed by two loud quick slapping sounds and a soft cry.

Ginny! Harry recognized her voice.

"How did you *find* us?" demanded Warrington.

"I *told* you. I was just walking down the corridor and saw a door I'd never seen before. I just wanted to see where it went," sobbed Ginny. Her voice sounded thick, like her mouth was full of blood.

“LIAR!” shouted Warrington. “We already told you; you can’t just *walk* into this room. You’re a spying blood-traitor.”

“But I *did!*” pleaded Ginny.

Harry heard a heavy thudding sound. Ginny gasped and sagged from a hard punch to the stomach. She was been held up from behind by Crabbe.

“We’re just getting *started*,” laughed Warrington.

“This is taking *way* too long,” said Pansy Parkinson. “Use the *Cruciatus* curse on her.”

“No, Pansy,” said Montague. “*This* is more fun. Crabbe and Goyle had their turns. I want *my* turn after Warrington.”

Harry could barely restrain himself, but he knew Draco would be exploding through the door any second. And he was right.

The door burst open with a BANG! Draco and the others poured in firing stunning spells at everyone they saw. Harry could see that Draco had assigned directions of fire and hardly any spells were wasted. Sleeping DLA members fell out of hammocks or were blasted out as they tried to get up.

The five surrounding Ginny drew their wands and returned fire. They were using Dark Magic and Harry saw one of his friends go down.

Crabbe dropped to the ground with Ginny who was wrestling to get away from him, but he got her into a headlock and was able to get his wand out and point it at her head.

Pansy turned and pointed her wand at Hermione and yelled, “*AVADA...*”

Forgetting the Shield Charm, Harry fired a stunning spell right into Pansy’s face at point blank range. She dropped like a sack of potatoes.

Hearing Harry’s spell behind them, Warrington, Montague, and Goyle whirled around and looked right through Harry but did not attack, momentarily surprised to see a blank wall.

Harry dove sideways onto the floor and hit Goyle with a stunning spell. He went down like Parkinson.

Montague took off running firing hexes as he made for another door on the side of the room.

Harry realized this Room must have an emergency exit which led... somewhere.

Harry aimed a spell at Montague's back, but missed because Warrington started firing hex after hex in Harry's general direction. He must have figured that someone was using a disillusionment charm or invisibility cloak.

Before Harry could target Warrington, who seemed to be the DLA's leader, Warrington went down from a stunning spell from behind. Unfortunately, Warrington lurched forward and fell onto Harry pinning his wand hand against his chest. Harry scrambled to recover, but he was caught up underneath Warrington in the folds of the invisibility cloak.

Just then, Draco, Neville, Tracy and Katie appeared and were pointing their wands at Crabbe.

The brutish DLA member had hoisted Ginny to her feet still holding her in a headlock with his wand pointed at her temple. Her face was a mess – swollen and covered in blood.

"Drop yer wands or she *gets* it," spat Crabbe.

None of them did.

"I *MEAN* IT!" shouted Crabbe.

Without warning, all four fired stunning spells directly into Crabbe's face. His head snapped back and he fell backward taking Ginny with him. Draco rushed forward and pulled Crabbe's huge arm from around her neck. She was unconscious and barely breathing -- Crabbe had been strangling her.

"Quick! Get her to the hospital wing!" shouted Draco.

Neville and Katie rushed in to pick up Ginny and quickly carried her away.

Tracy saw Hermione and rushed to her side.

Harry finally managed to kick Warrington off himself enough to pull the cloak from his head, “Draco, over here... Help me up.”

“Harry! I thought something had happened to you,” said Draco sounding relieved, moving to help. “Is Hermione all right?”

“I don’t know,” said Harry fitfully, “She doesn’t look good. We need to get her to the hospital wing too.”

“Right away,” said Draco. “Hey, Pucey, we need you. Help Davis get Hermione to the hospital wing.”

With Draco’s help, Harry finally managed to get up, but the invisibility cloak remained tangled under Warrington.

Hermione was already on her way out, being carried by Adrian and Tracy.

“Montague got away out that door,” Harry pointed.

“You go,” said Draco, “I’ll clean up here. We’ve already got most of them tied up.”

Harry patted Draco on the shoulder and took off running.

The side door opened onto a steep descending stairwell. At the bottom was another door. Harry opened it cautiously and looked out. He was staring across the corridor at the door to Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom on the second floor. He had come down five floors. He stepped out and the door behind him vanished -- a capability of the Room he needed to remember.

Harry could only imagine that Montague would try to leave the school and get to Hogsmeade. Where else could he go after what just happened?

As Harry approached the first-floor landing of the grand staircase, he ran into Fred and George coming from the first-floor corridor.

“Hello, Harry,” they said in unison. Fred continued, “We just chased down Montague. He was heading for the front door, but as soon as he spotted us, he took off up the stairs. We chased him into that empty classroom above Filch’s office -- we know it well... used to bang pot and pans on the floor to drive him crazy.”

George jumped in, “Anyway, we forced him into that old vanishing cabinet in the far corner. Of course, he didn’t *know* it was a vanishing cabinet. But he’ll turn up sooner...” Fred joined George chanting, “...or later ...in a day ...or two.”

Harry could not help but laugh, but then he said, “Really, I wish you’d captured him. Then we’d have them all.”

“Wow. You *got* them!” said Fred. “What about *Hermione*?” asked George anxiously.

“She’s in the hospital wing. She was unconscious and badly beat up. Ginny too, I’m afraid,” said Harry sadly.

“Ginny!” exclaimed the twins together. “Come on; let’s *go, Harry!*” they said urgently.

“I’ll be there as soon as I can. I’ve got to check in with Draco. He’s getting everything sorted out,” said Harry.

The twins took off down the corridor, knowing the best shortcut. Harry trotted back downstairs. He stopped by the Staff room. Most of the teachers had returned from their search by now, including Professors McGonagall, Moody and Snape. As succinctly as he could, Harry told them what happened.

After the hubbub died down, Harry asked the teachers to follow him to the seventh floor. On the way, he learned that neither Professor McGonagall, Moody nor Snape had seen Ginny earlier. That bothered him.

Whatever happened with Ginny seemed to have driven the DLA over the edge. The whole rescue had gone down without the teacher’s help. It was not what he expected. But he knew if he had waited to get their help, things would have turned out worse.

When they arrived at the seventh-floor corridor, the door to the Room of Requirement was gone. Draco had fifteen DLA members bound, gagged and sitting along the wall. They were being guarded by Harry’s team.

“We had to take four of them to the hospital wing along with Urquhart,” said Draco. “He was hit by some kind of curse and his legs are paralyzed.”

“I think Warrington did that,” said Harry angrily. “They were using Dark Magic. Parkinson was about to use the *Killing Curse* on Hermione when I stunned her.”

Professor McGonagall looked shocked, but Professors Moody and Snape did not.

Professor Moody growled, “I warned Albus not to let the children of Death Eaters who left the school last year back in here. He’s too *trusting*.”

As Professor McGonagall, Moody, Snape and the other teaches began checking on the condition of the students, Harry spoke quietly to Draco. “I left my Invisibility Cloak in the Room...”

“No worries,” said Draco. “I got it when we picked up Warrington. We collected up all their wands and found Hermione’s and Ginny’s too.”

“Thanks,” said Harry.

There was something Harry wanted to try, but it would have to wait until later. He wondered if the Room would reappear as the DLA meeting room if you were not a member of the DLA. He suspected it would because the Room appeared to respond to needs, not identities. But it was important to fully understand how the Room operated.

“You did well,” said Professor McGonagall to everyone after finishing her inspection. “You protected the honor of the school. All those who perpetrated this... this *crime*... will be expelled. I expect they will also face the Wizengamot after a Ministry investigation.” She looked around as if looking for someone, “But where are the *Aurors* who are supposed to be guarding the school?”

“They were all recalled by the Department of Magical Law Enforcement for some unspecified reason,” said Snape drolly. “Miss Nymphadora Tonks informed me before she left.”

“I assume we shall soon be hearing from the Headmaster then,” said Professor McGonagall, giving Harry a knowing look. “Let us move these soon-to-be former students down to the room off the Entry Hall where the first-years await the sorting. The Aurors may deal with them when they return,” said McGonagall with disdain, adding, “The teachers and I will take care of it.”

Then she announced, “You may return to your houses and get some well-deserved rest. Everyone is excused from classes tomorrow -- correction -- *today*. There will be a feast tonight. You may stop by the hospital wing on your way to see your friends.”

Harry and his team all cheered.

As he made his way to the hospital wing with all the others, Harry looked around and thought, *'We need a name too.'*

And it came to him immediately -- Dumbledore's Army.

He turned to Draco and said quietly, "We're *Dumbledore's Army*."

Draco understood immediately. He shouted, "WE'RE DUMBLEDORE'S ARMY!"

The cry was echoed by all, "DUMBLEDORE'S ARMY!"

Chapter 11 – Aftermath

Madam Pomfrey had the injured DLA members -- Crabbe, Parkinson, Nott, and Runcorn -- sedated and strapped to their beds.

Urquhart was already asleep from a sleeping draught. Madam Pomfrey said he would have to be sent to St Mungo's to receive the required care for his Dark Magic paralysis.

Hermione was awake and sitting up. The others let Harry approach her bed alone, though they all waved at her or gave the 'thumbs up' sign.

She waved back and mouthed, "Thank you."

Madam Pomfrey told Harry to be quick. Hermione had refused to take a sleeping draught until she saw him. She looked terribly battered. Her face was even more swollen and bruised than when he had seen her in the Room of Requirement. He sat down in the chair next to her bed and held her hand.

"Couldn't Madam Pomfrey heal the bruises?" asked Harry.

In a very weak voice, Hermione said, "They *tortured* me, Harry. Madam Pomfrey says the Cruciatus Curse magically amplifies other injuries. They'll take longer to heal and have to heal naturally."

"Hermione... I'm *sorry* I didn't find you sooner..." Harry said miserably, but Hermione cut him off.

“Harry, you *saved* me. They planned to *kill* me. They’re all Death Eaters. Pansy wanted to kill me right away, but Nott persuaded them to wait.”

“Theo Nott persuaded them?” asked Harry in surprise.

“Yes,” said Hermione. “I didn’t hear a lot, but I did hear they were waiting for some news. Nott said if things didn’t go as planned, they might need me as a bargaining chip to get away. But I really think Nott had cold feet about killing me -- and all the other things they were doing. He didn’t seem to have his heart in it.”

“That’s enough for now, Mr Potter,” said Madam Pomfrey bustling over to care for her stubborn charge. “She needs her sleep. You can visit her again after the feast tonight.”

“Has it been only *eight* hours?” said Hermione, as she glanced at the clock. “It feels like *ages*.”

Madam Pomfrey handed her the sleeping draught and she downed it in one.

Harry got up, leaned over and kissed her as softly as he could on her very swollen cheek and said, “I love you.”

Hermione smiled and said, “I love you, too.”

She scooted down, closed her eyes and fell asleep immediately.

Harry went over to see Ginny. Draco was with her.

Madam Pomfrey had been able to heal all her injuries but insisted she remain until she had a good sleep. All the others had said their best wishes and left while Harry was with Hermione. “Five more minutes and then you go too,” said Madam Pomfrey. As she walked away to check on her other patients, they heard her muttering, “Never in my life have I seen such *barbarity* from students...”

They all looked at each other and nodded.

But then Ginny had tears in her eyes said, very guiltily, “I’m *sorry* Harry. It’s *my* fault. I endangered everyone.”

“Wait. What are you *talking* about?” asked Harry, but then he remembered what he had heard Ginny say to Warrington and his eyes narrowed.

Draco jumped in, “Ginny’s already told me. I don’t want to put her through saying it again.”

“OK,” said Harry.

Draco continued. “Ginny left right after us to go look for the teachers -- Professor McGonagall, Snape... You know, just like you asked. She walked down the seventh-floor corridor when she left Gryffindor tower and passed by the wall where the Room of Requirement is. She saw the door. She hadn’t gone more than a few steps past it when the thought struck her that the DLA had Hermione inside -- just like it struck you in the Slytherin common room.”

“However, she made a *big* mistake by trying to take a look inside just to make sure. She knows she should have come back immediately to report her theory and hasn’t stopped blaming herself since. Well, as soon as she opened the door, Crabbe grabbed her. He was on guard. They beat her for at almost an hour before we arrived.”

Harry knew he was the last person who could blame someone else for being impulsive. He would have blown it himself at least twice tonight if someone had not been there to pull him back. He should not have sent Ginny on a mission by herself, when for all the other tasks, he had, at the least, paired people up.

So, he said, “Ginny, if you had *not* distracted them, they would have still had a guard waiting at the door. *I* would have been the one they grabbed. Our surprise attack would have failed, and Hermione would have been... would have been... *killed*... for sure.” Harry almost choked up. “*You* made them let their guard down... Ginny, you were the perfect *decoy*.”

“Harry...” Ginny began.

But Harry cut in, “I want you to *forget* about it. It was *my* mistake. I should never have sent you by yourself. We always need to work in teams. I forgot that. Please believe me.”

Ginny began to cry in earnest.

“What are you *doing* upsetting my patient like this?! Out *now!*” commanded Madam Pomfrey as she returned. She grabbed Draco and Harry by the back of their necks and pushed them toward the door saying, “Don’t come back until *after* the feast.”

The Slytherin common room was empty when they returned. If there had been any discussion with the other Slytherins, it had finished. Harry and Draco went to their room. Pucey and Vaisey were already asleep. Urquhart's bed was just as he had left it a few hours ago.

Harry felt guilty that his friend and Quidditch teammate had suffered a serious injury, but then he got angry. It was not *his* fault. It was *Voldemort's* fault and his *supporters'* fault -- *the DLA's* fault. Urquhart was not the first victim, and he would not be the last.

Voldemort *had* to be defeated.

There was a note on Harry's bed. It was from Professor Dumbledore. He showed Draco. It read:

*Well done. Come to my office as soon as you read this.
A.D.*

Chapter 12 – School Again

Harry slept better that night than he had in a long time. It had been *almost* dreamless. But as if to remind him of his fate, his scar prickled slightly when he got up. It was late afternoon. He had slept on a bed in Professor Dumbledore's office the headmaster had conjured.

It was all part of the plan.

Before Harry slept, Professor Dumbledore asked him for a full report even though Professor McGonagall and Professor Snape had already briefed him. Dumbledore then told Harry what happened at the Ministry.

Harry had been elated hearing Dumbledore's report, though slightly disappointed that Bellatrix had gotten away. He had never expected that Voldemort himself would be captured. None of the Order members had been injured, which was remarkable.

Dumbledore recapped, "As we discussed, our deception was an important piece of 'psychological warfare' as the Muggles call it. We have sewn doubt in the minds of Lord Voldemort's supporters, perhaps even Lord Voldemort himself, and bolstered confidence in our own. And while it is true that I have somewhat *enhanced* your

reputation, I can assure you it is deserved. You *are* the Chosen One, Harry, but as you know, the Prophecy does not *guarantee* success, and you still have much to learn. The road ahead will be difficult, if you still choose to take it.”

“I know, and I do,” replied Harry.

Professor Dumbledore had told him all this before -- perhaps some of his ‘psychological warfare’ directed at Harry.

“I know Voldemort will never stop trying to kill me,” said Harry without any fear. “Someone has to stop him and I have every reason in the world to be the one.” Harry was determined.

As he got dressed, Harry realized Professor Dumbledore was already gone. He cleaned up in Dumbledore’s bathroom, which was very nice. The hot shower felt great on his aching muscles, which he had not noticed the night before. There was a new toothbrush set out for him. He brushed his teeth and left.

When he arrived in the Slytherin Common room, most of the Slytherins were there. They stood and applauded when he walked in. Draco led a cheer and then made Harry tell them everything that happened. Even though they had already heard it from Draco and the others who had participated, they all wanted to hear it again from Harry.

Harry kept it as low key as he could, but it was not easy. He gave all the credit to those who had helped him. When he finished, they all looked expectantly at him to continue. When he didn’t, Draco said excitedly, “Harry, now tell us about what happened at the *Ministry!*” He even picked up and waved an afternoon edition of the Daily Prophet.

Harry only saw the headline, but it was in *very* big letters.

*HARRY POTTER DUELS AT THE MINISTRY
YOU-KNOW-WHO ROUTED AGAIN
DOZEN DEATH EATERS CAPTURED*

Harry was ready, “Oh, that. Sorry, I’m not allowed to talk about it -- Professor Dumbledore’s orders from the Minister for Magic himself. Please don’t ask me.”

His housemates were all extremely disappointed, Draco especially, when later Harry told him he was not an exception. But the account in the newspaper was thrilling. A

larger number of Aurors had apparently witnessed much of it and the story had leaked out.

Soon it was time to go down to the feast. His housemates escorted Harry like an honor guard. When they arrived in the Great Hall, a cheer rose up from all the students already present. Professor Dumbledore and all the teachers also stood and clapped.

Harry was embarrassed.

Professor Dumbledore made a speech praising Harry and all those who had helped him rescue their fellow students. He mentioned those who had suffered gravely -- Hermione, of course, who was still in the hospital wing, Urquhart, who was now in St Mungo's, and Ginny, who though having suffered greatly, had been healed by Madam Pomfrey.

Ginny was sitting with Draco. They were holding hands.

Professor Dumbledore did not mention anything about what happened at the Ministry, but by now, everyone had read or heard about the capture of twelve Death Eaters trying to steal something from the Department of Mysteries.

The Daily Prophet's story also reported that anonymous sources said it had been about a prophecy from the fabled Hall of Prophecies. Of course, the topper was the series of anonymous eyewitness reports saying Harry Potter had once again defeated You-Know-Who in a spectacular duel. After what his fellow students had witnessed, they were quite prepared to believe that Harry had gone to the Ministry with Professor Dumbledore after leading the newly named Dumbledore's Army in saving Hermione and Ginny. The Prophet confirmed the Hogwarts Headmaster had been present because the Ministry acknowledged his meeting with Scrimgeour after the capture of the Death Eaters.

Saving Hermione and Ginny from the DLA, helping capture a dozen wanted Death Eaters, and beating You-Know-Who in another duel was just all in a night's work for the Chosen One.

The psychological warfare was working... at least for now.

After the feast, Harry, Draco, and Ginny went to see Hermione.

The swelling had gone down a lot, but her face was still completely black and blue, now with tinges of green and yellow. She looked worse than Hagrid, whose own facial injuries continued to appear without an explanation.

Hermione was reading the Daily Prophet when they arrived. She was eager to hear Harry's account. She was even *more* disappointed than Draco and Ginny had been when Harry would not even make an exception for *her*.

She had whispered, "You can tell me later," but Harry said, "No."

"But Professor Dumbledore lets you tell me everything," she complained.

"I'm sorry. Not this time. Maybe someday," was all he would say.

"Well then..." said Hermione a little testily. Then she began reading the story from the Daily Prophet as she normally did. She occasionally glanced up looking for any revealing reaction from Harry.

He did not say anything until she read,

"Part of the Ministry's investigation into the incident will try to determine what caused the breakdown in security at the Ministry in the early morning hours. According to reports, no security personnel were on duty. A mix-up in scheduling was reported to be the cause by a Ministry spokesman, but this is considered highly suspicious. Pius Thickness, department head for Ministry Security in the Department of Magical Law Enforcement has been suspended by the Minister pending a formal investigation. Until then, Senior Undersecretary to the Minister, Dolores Umbridge, has been temporarily assigned to assume his responsibilities in addition to her own."

Harry said, "It looks like the Minister wants his own man in charge of Ministry Security."

"Woman, you mean," corrected Hermione.

"My dad *hates* her," said Ginny. "I've overheard him talk about her to my mum. She's *bad*... hates non-humans almost as much as she does Muggle-borns."

"Then I wonder why Scrimgeour picked her," said Harry.

"Maybe he wants a hard-ass in charge right now," said Draco.

“It doesn’t sound like a good idea to me,” said Hermione, adding slyly, “Maybe that’s one of the things Professor Dumbledore talked to the Minister about.”

She looked at Harry inquiringly, but he did not take the bait.

At breakfast the next morning, it was apparent that things had changed. The euphoria of the previous night’s feast was gone. Could Hogwarts ever be the same after what happened? Harry did not think so. The atmosphere was more subdued, almost somber. Now when you heard laughter, it seemed out of place. The war -- a wizards’ civil war between the forces of good and the forces of evil -- had come to Hogwarts. It had involved their own. *Students* had fought each other! *Twenty* students had been expelled... and nineteen *arrested!* The remaining students now paid much more attention to what the Daily Prophet was reporting about the war.

The Aurors had returned to the school before breakfast. They collected and transported the members of the DLA, including those in the hospital wing, to the Ministry to be charged and questioned. Everyone was glad to be rid of them.

Ginny said that Ron would not stop complaining that he, Seamus, Dean and Blaise had missed out on the action because they had been assigned as runners. At least Fred and George had got to tangle with Montague -- who had not yet emerged from the vanishing cabinet. Of the runners, only Neville had been available to join in the assault on the DLA, and Draco said he had been ferocious. Ginny finished by saying that Lavender finally got tired of hearing Ron complaining and told him to sod off.

The vanishing cabinet was moved into Filch’s office. No one knew for sure how long this particular vanishing cabinet keep the user ‘in limbo’.

Things started to return to normal after a few days.

Hermione was released by Madam Pomfrey after a week. Only then did things seem normal again to Harry. Though her face still had plenty of nasty bruises, especially around her eyes and cheekbones, she did not try to cover them with makeup. She wore them like a badge of honor.

Weeks later, when she was alone with Harry, she finally opened up -- talking about what happened to her. It was hard for Harry to listen, but clearly something she needed to get out.

She said Crabbe and Goyle had stunned her on the seventh floor as she approached the Portrait of the Fat Lady. She had thought it odd to see them there but was completely caught off guard. She regained consciousness in the Room of Requirement. She was surrounded by *all* the DLA members and slapped around. Then Crabbe, Goyle, Warrenton, and Montague took over and started the heavy beating until she fell unconscious. When she regained consciousness again, she found herself tied up on the floor. Then Parkinson and Bulstrode took over. They used the Cruciatus Curse on her, occasionally applying a sharp kick in the ribs for good measure. It went on for a very long time -- perhaps hours.

Hermione said, "Harry, I wanted to *die*." She began to cry.

Harry hugged her and she wept on his shoulder.

When Hermione finally regained her composure, she said, "They never asked me any questions. All they did was beat me, torture me and call me a filthy Mudblood... Harry, they're *evil*. Don't ever forget that. I want to make them *pay*."

Chapter 13 – Horcruxes

The Easter holidays finally arrived. Everyone was grateful for the time off.

Harry did not go home to Grimmauld Place because Hermione wanted to stay at school. Professor Dumbledore offered to arrange safe travel for her parents to see her, but she said she was not ready to tell them what happened and did not want to lie about her bruises. Harry was glad he would not have to talk to Sirius about what he had learned from the Pensieve about his father. Like Hermione, he was not ready either.

Draco went to the Burrow to stay with Ginny and the Weasleys.

On the first day back after Easter break, Ginny stormed into breakfast and slammed her school bag down onto the table.

"Remember me telling you about Dolores Umbridge?" she said before anyone could ask her what was wrong. "Well, our last night at home, Percy stopped by to tell mum and dad that he got a job as Umbridge's personal assistant. He said it was a big promotion after having been a nobody in International Magical Cooperation after Crouch was murdered. Anyway, dad told him he was mental to work for Umbridge because of how demented she was. Percy blew up and said he knew how to manage

his own career and following dad's example would get him nowhere. Mum had to step between them or they would have come to blows."

Ginny took a deep breath and finished, "Percy said he didn't want to have anything to do with a father who had no ambition and didn't provide for his kids. Mum slapped him and he stormed out. She cried the rest of the evening."

"I'm sorry for you and your parents," said Harry. "Are *you* alright?"

"Yes, I'm fine," said Ginny. "Percy has been a *pompous prat* his *whole* life. Draco wisely stayed out of it."

Draco said, "Not that I *wanted* to. Mr Weasley was far too kind describing Umbridge."

"Percy shouldn't have said those terrible things," said Hermione.

"Well, he *did*. And *none* of us care if we *ever* see him again," snarled Ginny. "Fred and George said they'll *hex* him if they do."

Harry, Hermione, and Draco laughed.

"They were *serious*," said Ginny with a straight face. "I'll have my Bat-Boggy hex ready for him too."

Draco said, "Woah." He knew Ginny meant it when she threatened that.

Harry thought it would take some time for Hermione to truly recover from her ordeal, but the day after her emotional recount, she acted as if it never happened. All she wanted to do was catch up on homework -- which Madam Pomfrey had not allowed -- and start revising for OWL examinations.

She made up revision schedules for herself, Harry and Draco, as they knew she would. Draco complained it was too early, given they were almost two months away. But Hermione had them revising in the library whenever they were not at Quidditch practice or Dueling Club. And now she only agreed to spend time in the Student Lounge on Hogsmeade weekends.

The week after Easter Break, fifth-year students were instructed to schedule Careers Advice with their heads of house.

Harry told Professor Snape he wanted to become an Auror. Professor Snape said his Potions grades were not good enough to be in his NEWT Potions class next year unless, through some miracle, he earned an Outstanding in his Potions OWL. The lack of encouragement or motivation from Professor Snape did not bother Harry; he was used to it after five years.

Harry could not think of anything else he wanted to be. His only course of action was to focus most of his revision time on Potions so he could earn the Outstanding OWL. He asked Hermione to help him and she was quite pleased. She updated their revision schedules to double up on Potions.

Draco had no idea what career he wanted. People in his family had never worked -- they just lived off their wealth. This was no longer an option, having been disowned. Professor Snape sarcastically told him to “marry well.” And Snape knew that Draco was going with Ginny, whose family barely made ends meet.

Professor McGonagall simply told Hermione, given her grades and brilliance, could be whatever she wanted. Harry asked Hermione if she was thinking of the law as a possible career because he figured she was still thinking about PEE. She said, “I’d rather do something *useful*. All solicitors do is talk endlessly, accomplish nothing, and charge outrageously.”

Harry received a note for another lesson with Professor Dumbledore.

Before Dumbledore began, Harry asked, “Sir, can I ask you about my father again?”

Professor Dumbledore looked a little uncertain. “It has been some years now. Is something the matter?”

Harry launched into a description of what he had seen in Professor Snape’s memories, and then said, “People say I’m like my father, but I’m *not*.”

“No, Harry. As I have told you, you only *look* like your father, but you are *much* more like your mother... I think you should talk to Sirius about this. He was much closer to your father than I. I trust him to tell the truth... You should too.”

Harry understood that the topic was concluded.

The Pensieve was sitting on the desk as usual but Professor Dumbledore spent several minutes telling Harry how Tom Riddle felt about Hogwarts. It made Harry a little uneasy hearing that Voldemort felt the same way about Hogwarts as he did. Dumbledore also told him about Riddle's surprising early career as an "obtainer" at Borgin and Burkes in Knockturn Alley.

Harry offhandedly said Fred and George had always wanted to go there but Mrs Weasley forbade it.

Dumbledore chuckled and said that Mundungus Fletcher had probably gotten the twins anything they needed. But then he added he was still surprised that the twins had not yet blown themselves up, saying, "I keep reminding Madam Pomfrey that she need be ready."

Professor Dumbledore then showed Harry the memories of Hokey the house-elf concerning a meeting between her mistress, Hepzibah Smith, and Tom Riddle. Then Dumbledore described what happened afterward -- Hepzibah's sudden death and the missing treasures, Helga Hufflepuff's cup and Salazar Slytherin's locket -- followed by the disappearance of Tom Riddle.

"Riddle obviously stole them and framed Hokey," said Harry.

"No doubt," said Dumbledore. "But what I want you to focus on are the *objects*. Recall the missing *ring* of Marvolo Gaunt?"

"Right," said Harry. "Riddle framed Morfin for his father's murder and stole the ring. It's like what we saw at the orphanage -- he likes collecting trophies."

"Yes, Harry, especially important historical objects which associate him with the founders of Hogwarts, which he considers his home. Thus, he also coveted the ring of an ancient pure-blood family, the Peverells, presumed descendants of Salazar Slytherin," explained Dumbledore.

"Do you think he has more -- something of Gryffindor's and Ravenclaw's?" asked Harry.

“A very good question,” said Dumbledore and then pointed across the room. “The only known artifact of Godric Gryffindor’s is his *sword*, which is hanging in that case on the wall.”

Harry looked, though he had seen it many times.

“For Rowena Ravenclaw, it is her *diadem*,” continued Dumbledore.

Harry looked around expecting to see it, but was disappointed when Dumbledore said, “Unfortunately, it has been lost to history -- as far as we know. But remember, Harry, Tom Riddle *found* the Chamber of Secrets. And I have reason to believe Lord Voldemort attempted to position himself here to obtain at least *one* of the two founder’s artifacts.”

Then Professor Dumbledore showed Harry one last memory -- of an ominously physically altered Tom Riddle seeking to become a Hogwarts teacher. Dumbledore, then Headmaster, made it very clear to Riddle why he had refused him. After he discussed it with Harry, Dumbledore leaned back in his chair, opened one of the side drawers of his desk, took out something and showed it to Harry.

It was Tom Riddle’s diary -- the very one that Professor Dumbledore had instructed Harry to stab with the Basilisk fang in the Chamber of Secrets in his second year.

Dumbledore looked intently at Harry and spoke, “Harry, I have been collecting these memories ever since Lord Voldemort first came to power. However, the day Tom Riddle came out of this diary shed a completely new light on them. There remains one more memory, which I shall share with you another time. However, I am confident that Lord Voldemort’s interest in collecting these objects we have discussed had a far more ominous purpose than merely satisfying his megalomania... He wanted to use them to achieve *immortality*.”

“Immortality? Is that possible?” asked Harry incredulously.

“Without getting into the obvious theoretical and practical implications of true *eternal* life... as it concerns us here... yes, I am afraid so,” said Dumbledore dramatically. “Harry, this *diary*... is or, more precisely, *was*... a *Horcrux*. I am sure you have never heard this term before, so let me explain.”

Dumbledore proceeded to explain that a Horcrux was an object which a dark wizard used to contain and hide a portion of his soul. It was among the darkest of Dark Magic,

requiring *murder* to split one's soul in two, so that a portion of it could be concealed within an object. As long as a portion of the wizard's soul remained inside a Horcrux, the wizard would not truly die -- even if his physical body were totally destroyed. The portion of soul within the physical object -- the Horcrux -- would survive, ready to be reborn into another body through more Dark Magic.

Harry could not imagine anything darker.

"But the Horcrux, Riddle's diary, was *destroyed*, sir," said Harry. "Did that part of his soul rejoin the other part -- wherever it was?"

"No," said Dumbledore. "That part was destroyed. And if it had been the *only* Horcrux, it would have put Lord Voldemort in mortal peril once again. Unfortunately, I have strong evidence that this was not the *only* Horcrux Lord Voldemort made. I believe it was his *second*."

"He made *more* than one!" Harry exclaimed.

"Yes," said Dumbledore emphatically. "And we must *find and destroy them all* or the world will *never* be rid of him."

"How is that even *possible*? They could be *anything* and *anywhere* -- a pebble at the bottom of the ocean," said Harry sounding overwhelmed.

"You forget Lord Voldemort's penchant for collecting aggrandizing trophies," responded Dumbledore.

"The ring, the locket, the cup!" exclaimed Harry in realization, but then added, "But why the *diary*?"

"It was his documented proclamation to the world that he was the indomitable heir of Salazar Slytherin himself, proven by discovering and opening the Chamber of Secrets. It was, therefore, a most worthy object," said Dumbledore confidently.

"So, there are... I mean, *were*... at least *four* Horcruxes and there could be more," said Harry.

Dumbledore nodded, "Yes, but we are going to focus for now on what we *know*. These objects are assuredly well hidden. It is not very likely that Lord Voldemort would keep them on his bedside table or on display in a trophy case. However, I believe they will

have been hidden in places *significant* to Lord Voldemort. Still, they will be difficult to find. Will you help me hunt them down?”

“Of course!” exclaimed Harry, “But how are we going to find out if there are others? There could be a *hundred!*”

“I think not,” said Dumbledore. “I believe the more the soul is split, the less human the wizard becomes. Lord Voldemort today is unrecognizable as the once handsome Tom Riddle. I do not think a wizard could withstand his soul being split into a hundred pieces, much less a dozen... But the most difficult part will be determining the *exact* location of each, because if Lord Voldemort chose to hide something here at Hogwarts, it could be behind any of the untold thousands of building stones.”

Harry groaned imagining the impossibility of it.

Dumbledore continued, “Yes, you see the challenge. But we are going to use your *connection* into Lord Voldemort’s mind to find out.”

Harry started to speak, but Dumbledore held up his hand. “Harry, it is absolutely critical you do not attempt to do this until I have finished my lessons with you. Do you understand and agree?”

“Yes, sir,” said Harry truthfully.

“Good. And it is also important to continue mastering Occlumency with Professor Snape, so Lord Voldemort cannot discover this,” said Dumbledore.

“I understand,” said Harry.

Dumbledore nodded and then smiled. “I know Professor Snape rarely gives students compliments, but he tells me you are progressing satisfactorily -- *when you practice.*”

Harry grinned sheepishly.

Professor Dumbledore chuckled. Then he said, “This is more than enough for tonight, Harry. There will be no more lessons until we are ready to go hunting for our first Horcrux. I will let you know in the usual way.”

Dumbledore reached into the drawer again, took out a large and very old looking book and handed it to Harry.

It was titled *Secrets of the Darkest Art*.

“Please give this book to Miss Granger. Keep it hidden until you give it to her and tell her to keep it hidden as well. It is a highly restricted book. It will tell you all there is to know about Horcruxes, including... how to *destroy* them.”

Chapter 14 – O.W.L.s and Surprises

This was the first time Hermione, Draco and Ginny did not interrupt once as Harry told them about his latest session with the headmaster.

Harry had insisted they go to the Student Lounge to ensure absolute privacy. Hermione’s hands shook as she accepted the book from Harry that Professor Dumbledore wanted her to read and tell the rest of them about. They were surprised when Hermione said she had never heard of Horcruxes. She said she was sure there were not any books in the library on the subject.

“I’m almost frightened to open it,” she said uncharacteristically.

“Not what you’d call bedtime reading,” said Draco trying to lighten the mood.

They spent the rest of the time before class discussing where the three suspected intact Horcruxes were hidden and how many more there might be. The task to find and destroy them seemed to be overwhelmingly difficult, if not impossible. Harry reminded them they needed to think like Voldemort, not a rational person.

Draco shook his head, “Still, Harry, maybe this time Professor Dumbledore is expecting too much.”

Ginny and Hermione obviously agreed.

“We have no choice; we have to try,” was Harry’s reply.

From that day on, Harry anxiously waited for a note from Professor Dumbledore to join him hunting Horcruxes, but the rest of April went by without one.

A surprising story appeared in the Daily Prophet.

Theodore Nott had turned Ministry evidence against the other members of the Dark Lord's Army. He claimed that Pansy Parkinson had used her charms as a witch to lead him astray.

His testimony before the Wizengamot condemned the DLA members. They were all found guilty, including Montague in absentia. But they were sentenced to only one year in Azkaban because they had still been in school, even though several were already of age.

"Well, look at the bright side; some of them will be reunited with their dads," said Ginny cheerfully.

The story also noted that Aurors had replaced the Dementors as the guards of Azkaban. The Dementors were found to have allowed the recent mass breakout and had gone over to the side of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. Some in the public did not believe it. They claimed Scrimgeour was using it as an excuse to dismiss the Dementors and increase his power, since many more Aurors would now be needed.

The last two Quidditch matches were held in May.

Slytherin beat Hufflepuff as expected. Summerby was an excellent Seeker, but no match for Harry on his Firebolt.

But to everyone's great surprise, Gryffindor beat Ravenclaw, and it was not because Ginny got the Snitch, which she did. It was because Ron had been excellent as Keeper. He had blocked almost every shot on goal. They won by more than three hundred points. This meant they came in third, with one win, rather than last.

Of course, Slytherin still won the Quidditch cup, having won all three of their matches. Hufflepuff was second and Ravenclaw last.

Hermione noticed that Hagrid's face had finally started to heal, perhaps being more aware of it because of her own bruises.

Hagrid just said, “Things ’re workin’ out jus’ fine,” but would not explain *what* things. He only said, “Yer gonna know soon ’nough.”

Everyone was still furiously revising for their O.W.L.s, N.E.W.T.s, or end of term examinations. The teachers were all conducting revision lessons in class. Harry did not think he could fit another fact into his head, especially after Hermione’s double drills on Potions.

Finally, it was time for the exams. They started the second week in June and lasted two weeks, with an exam each day -- theory in the morning, practical in the afternoon, or evening, in the case of Astronomy.

Harry was rubbish only at History of Magic. He was sure he passed everything else, including Ancient Runes. He knew he achieved an Outstanding in Defense Against the Dark Arts but lacked confidence that he had done the same in Potions -- even though he had been able to answer all the questions and made a very good sleeping potion in the practical.

Draco was sure he passed everything.

Hermione fretted over every answer on every exam and tried to get Harry and Draco to review them with her, but they refused. They had no doubts she would once again be first in their year. They would know for sure sometime in July when they received their O.W.L. grades via Owl Post.

At the feast following the end of term exams, they received unbelievably shocking news.

Professor Dumbledore regretfully announced that Professor Moody had been killed in an ambush at Hogsmeade train station that afternoon.

Moody had been escorting Theodore Nott back to school. Nott had just been released on probation by the Ministry of Magic. It was his reward for testifying against the other members of the DLA. Theodore Nott had also been killed and was believed to have been the actual target of the attack. At least five Death Eaters had participated, including Nott’s own father.

Professor Dumbledore had offered Nott the chance to return to and live at Hogwarts because he had nowhere to go and would be in danger anywhere else.

The Daily Prophet article that appeared in the paper the next morning reported rumors that He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named had ordered Orpheus Nott to murder his own son.

Moody had managed to kill three of the Death Eaters and was said to have injured the other two before falling. Nott's father got away.

Hogwarts students and teachers, especially the students, were in genuine mourning over Professor Moody's death. The students had loved his incredibly realistic and practical no-nonsense approach to Defense Against the Dark Arts. Even more, they loved how and what he taught them in the Dueling Club. All those who participated, which was almost everyone, were more confident and prouder of their abilities and of themselves than they had been before. And, finally, they loved how funny Mad-Eye could sometimes be even though he was never trying to be.

Per his wishes, Alastor Moody was cremated. His ashes were scattered on the school grounds.

Professor Dumbledore held a memorial service on Sunday in the Great Hall and gave the eulogy. There were many tears, especially from Neville Longbottom.

Tonks was inconsolable.

Hermione told Harry she had also shed a tear for Theo Nott because she believed he had intervened to prevent her murder by the DLA. Nott had been Harry's first friend at Hogwarts, but Harry had no sympathy for him because he had chosen darkness.

After the ceremony, as the students were filing out of the Great Hall, someone was heard to ask, "I wonder who's going to lead the Dueling Club now?"

Another voice, a good distance away answered quite clearly, "Harry Potter, of course." It was Luna Lovegood.

Students often laughed at Luna's comments, but not this time.

A buzz immediately broke out. Someone else said loudly, "Yea, Harry Potter. He's beaten You-Know-Who at least *four* times since he's been at Hogwarts -- including before Easter."

Students started chanting his name.

Harry could not believe it. He tried to duck down and edge back, but Draco grabbed him and said, “No you don’t. Luna’s right. You *can* do it. You *should* do it.”

Then Fred and George were there and hoisted him up on their shoulders and began to chant, “DUMBLEDORE’S ARMY! DUMBLEDORE’S ARMY!” as they carried him through the throng.

Harry had no choice. He was appointed by acclamation. To his surprise, Harry found he enjoyed leading the Dueling Club.

Unofficially, it became known as Dumbledore’s Army Dueling Club. There was only one meeting before the end of term, but Harry looked forward to resuming next year. He was already planning lessons.

Most students had already learned quite a lot, so Harry whet their interest by announcing he would try to teach them the Patronus Charm next year. Most could hardly wait.

Finally the school year was over. Slytherin won the House Championship with Gryffindor a close second. Hufflepuff was last again despite being second in the Quidditch Cup. And, continuing to grow in importance, the Intramural Quidditch League trophies were handed out.

Professor Dumbledore awarded a *huge* number of last-minute points to the Slytherin and Gryffindor students who had fought the DLA, with Harry being awarded the most among them. Draco received almost as many. It set the record for the most points ever earned in a single year for each house.

Most students took the Hogwarts express back to Kings Cross station, including Draco and Ginny. Draco had been invited to spend the summer with the Weasleys. He would be taking over Percy’s old room.

This year, however, for the first time, some students remained behind to spend the summer at Hogwarts, which Professor Dumbledore had made available to all. These

were students whose parents thought it safer. Mysterious disappearances and murders had continued and, if anything, were on the rise.

Harry and Hermione returned to number Twelve, Grimmauld Place via the direct Floo Network connection from the Staff room. From there, Harry was given a large escort by members of the Order of the Phoenix to number Four, Privet Drive, where he spent one full day, and was then escorted back to number Twelve.

Harry realized during the visit that he only had to spend one more day next summer at Privet Drive and never return again. Aunt Petunia would not come out of her room to see Harry. However, Dudley thanked Harry for keeping him and his mother alive. He understood that *'Dark Wizards'* had killed his father. He told Harry that Dedalus Diggle had been very good to them, checking in almost every day, and getting them everything they needed at no cost.

Much to his surprise, Kreacher Apparated into Harry's bedroom at number Four, saying in his bullfrog voice, "Kreacher will guard Master Harry while he sleeps." Kreacher was quite pleased to have Harry back home since he had not seen him during Easter Break.

Hermione was anxious to see her parents. Fortunately, her bruises had finally healed. Professor Dumbledore again made arrangements for them to be brought over from their safe house in France. She did not intend to tell them what had happened to her and asked everyone not to mention it.

Harry told Hermione he was disappointed that Professor Dumbledore had not yet contacted him to go on a Horcrux hunt.

Based on what she knew had happened in the Chamber of Secrets, she said, "Be careful what you *wish* for."

"Well, I *do* wish we had been able to spend more time on Animagus training. We've got to catch up this summer," said Harry.

Hermione agreed, saying, "It probably means we'll be starting over... minus the potion."

Harry groaned.

Harry finally talked to Sirius again about his father.

Sirius admitted that he and James had both been malicious arrogant gits and took much longer to mature than Harry had. He assured Harry that his father eventually became a good and responsible person, but it was *after* Hogwarts and the result of Lily's influence on him. "However, I can't vouch for myself. I never had someone like Lily. ...Maybe Fleur will make a good man out of me... *someday*," he said, winking.

Sirius and Harry both laughed.

Over dinner that night, Sirius asked Harry and Hermione for a detailed accounting of Hermione's kidnapping and rescue. Because it was Sirius, they agreed and gave him the whole story.

Harry did not know how Hermione felt, but for him it felt good to finally talk about it. It enabled him to put it behind him. He had been five feet away from her, but had not been able to rescue her.

When they finished dinner and were having some wine, Sirius asked, "Whatever happened to Montague?"

Harry had not thought about it for some time, but as far as he knew, Montague had never come out of the vanishing cabinet.

The End

End Notes:

Without citation, the nature of this alternate universe fan fiction story requires liberal use of terms, concepts, characters, paraphrased conversations and story lines from *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* by J.K. Rowling.