

Title: Harry Potter – Slytherin: The Prisoner of Azkaban

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Summary: Harry Potter, sorted into Slytherin House, encounters the Prisoner of Azkaban.

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Chapter 1 – Owl Post

When Harry had arrived at King’s Cross station for the summer holiday at the end of his second year at Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry, Uncle Vernon was waiting for him. His Uncle had not said a single word all the way home. It did not take long for Harry to realize the Dursley’s had decided to give him the silent treatment.

This did not bother Harry at all. It enabled him to get on *their* nerves by being polite, bright, and cheerful during their few encounters during the day. The Dursleys no longer mistreated Harry. He ate with them at every meal and was served the same food without any restrictions in quantity. And they no longer required him to do any chores.

It was clear they had taken Professor Dumbledore’s threat at the end of the previous summer *very* seriously.

When he was feeling particularly mischievous, Harry would sit with the family as they watched television and make comments about the programs. He knew it drove Uncle Vernon absolutely mad. But Harry was not around home that much because, for the first time in his life, he was free.

On the evening of the very first day of the summer holiday, Hermione phoned Harry and arranged to meet at the Leaky Cauldron. She, Harry, Draco, Fred, George, and Ginny spent several long and fun days together in London. They met Hermione’s parents, Draco’s aunt and uncle, and visited the Burrow.

Draco asked if they had seen the article in the Daily Prophet about his father being removed as a school governor. He had not had contact with his parents since the end of school. Harry was glad that Draco did not seem upset by it. Instead, he was more relaxed and unguarded as Harry had ever seen him. He also noticed Draco was quite attentive to Ginny.

The first week of July was the best time Harry had ever had in his life outside of school.

However, at the start of the second week, Fred, George, and Ginny informed the others their father had won the annual Daily Prophet Grand Prize Galleon Draw and the whole family was going to Egypt to visit their oldest brother, Bill, who was a treasure hunter and curse breaker for Gringotts bank. They were sorry they would miss Harry's birthday but would be back by mid-August.

Harry, Hermione, and Draco continued their daily excursions. They used the Knight Bus to travel to magical sites all over England. They also enjoyed a front-page article in the Daily Prophet about the prize winning Weasley family in Egypt that featured a smiling family group photograph in front of the pyramids. Everyone was having a great time.

Then, three days before his birthday, while out with Hermione and Draco, Harry was stopped by two Aurors from the Ministry of Magic, one of whom was Draco's cousin, Nymphadora Tonks. Draco introduced her to Harry.

"Sorry to be meeting you under these circumstances, Harry. Just call me Tonks," she said as Harry stared at her vivid purple hair.

She explained they had been ordered to pick Harry up and take him home. When Harry asked why, all Tonks would say was, "Can't say, Harry. Just following orders. Sorry. Your friends can't come with you."

Hermione asked Harry to call her as soon as he found out what was going on. Draco said, "Send me an owl."

When they arrived at number Four, Privet Drive, he was ordered to wait for a visit from Professor Dumbledore.

Dumbledore arrived in the early evening and informed Harry that a psychopathic murderer named Sirius Black, sentenced to life in Azkaban, had escaped and was after him. Dumbledore ordered Harry not to leave his house until Black was caught.

Harry was crestfallen. The greatest summer of his life had just been completely shut down.

Uncle Vernon, on the other hand, was incensed with Dumbledore for insisting Harry remain at number Four. “I heard about that lunatic on the news. You’re *endangering* my family by keeping the boy here. I *insist* you take him away with you, sir.”

But Dumbledore politely refused, “Harry must remain here. It is the safest place for him until Hogwarts reopens. You may be assured that this house will remain under surveillance until then.”

Uncle Vernon grumbled, but he had no choice.

Harry phoned Hermione and told her what happened. He asked her to tell Draco and the others. He did not have the heart to do it himself. Harry was so bitter about it; he did not even think about annoying the Dursleys anymore. He stayed in his room except for meals. There might as well have been bars on his window again.

Fortunately, Harry received birthday cards and presents via Owl Post from Hermione, Draco, Ginny, and Hagrid the evening before his birthday. It helped lift his spirits quite a lot after spending the first two days of his ‘house arrest’ moping. It was, after all, the first time in his life anyone had ever succeeded in celebrating his birthday.

Hermione gave him a school revision planner. Hagrid sent him *The Monster Book of Monsters*. Fortunately, Harry remembered Draco telling him how to open it without it biting his fingers. Ginny sent him a picture postcard of some camels in front of the great pyramid of Egypt. Draco did not send a present, saying in his card he could not think of anything, but that he would buy Harry a Butterbeer their first Hogsmeade weekend. Harry also received his Hogwarts letter, which included the parental permission form required for third-year and above students to visit Hogsmeade.

Harry lost no time in getting Uncle Vernon to sign it. He did not even have to threaten to complain to Professor Dumbledore about mistreatment.

Hermione’s birthday card said she was going on a short vacation to France with her parents the following week. Draco’s said he was going to go on a fishing trip with his

Uncle Ted. Hagrid's said he was getting some new magical creatures for the school. Ginny's postcard said Bill was showing them ancient Egyptian tombs.

Everyone but Harry was having *fun*.

Harry was stuck at number Four -- with the Dursleys.

Chapter 2 – Aunt Marge's Big Mistake

The morning of his birthday, Harry went down to breakfast. He expected no birthday wishes from his relatives, and he received none. A year ago, his cousin Dudley might have needled him about it, but no longer. Dudley now rarely made eye contact with Harry.

Instead, the Dursleys were having a conversation as if Harry were not there.

Uncle Vernon's sister, Aunt Marge, was coming to visit for a *whole* week. Uncle Vernon was leaving shortly to pick her up at the train station.

Harry did not think things could have gotten worse, but they just had. Aunt Marge hated Harry and always baited him with her vicious bulldog, Ripper.

For the first time in a month, Uncle Vernon spoke to Harry. "Now listen, boy. Aunt Marge thinks you attend St Brutus's Secure Center for Incurably Criminal Boys..."

"What? No way!" exclaimed Harry.

Uncle Vernon ignored Harry's objection and continued, "I don't want *any* funny business. You just play along and stay in your room and out of her way except for meals. Understand?"

Unfortunately, things had not gone well at all. Harry had meant to play along with his uncle's plan, but it had not exactly worked out... And it was only a few hours since Marge had arrived.

Harry was hurriedly packing his school trunk. He had already sent Hedwig off.

The Dursleys were all in an uproar downstairs. Aunt Marge was screaming her lungs out in complete hysterics. Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia were trying desperately to calm her down and get her down from the dining room ceiling. Ripper was growling and tearing up the dining room. The last Harry had seen of Dudley was him hiding behind the sofa in the lounge, whimpering.

Harry had performed magic -- *illegal, underage magic* -- in front of Muggles.

He was not sure how, but it had happened. The last thing he remembered was Aunt Marge viciously denigrating his parents during dinner and the next thing he knew she was blowing up like a giant holiday parade balloon.

Because this was his *second* official offence -- actually, only his first *real* offence, since he had been unjustly blamed for Dobby doing magic the previous year -- the Ministry of Magic would be coming for him. They would snap his wand in two and he would be *expelled* from Hogwarts.

Harry decided to execute the plan he told Professor Dumbledore about last summer when the Dursley's held him prisoner, locked in his room. He had already sent a quick note to Dumbledore with Hedwig.

Harry hauled his school trunk and Hedwig's cage downstairs and was about to leave the house when Uncle Vernon accosted him.

"OH, NO YOU DON'T! COME BACK HERE, BOY!" shouted Uncle Vernon. "YOU PUT HER RIGHT! RIGHT NOW!" and he grabbed Harry by the back of his neck.

But Harry was not going to take it anymore. He was ready.

He spun around, shaking off Uncle Vernon's hand, and stuck the tip of his wand under his uncle's fat chin. Through gritted teeth he spat, "Back off, or you're *next!*"

Uncle Vernon blanched and his eye's bulged.

"I don't *need* a wand to do magic, but you should see what I can do when I *use* one," Harry threatened, finishing by making the sound of an explosion with his mouth, "Ka BOOM!"

Uncle Vernon stepped back quickly, looking cross-eyed at the tip of Harry's wand, and crashed into the wall of the hallway.

Harry turned, opened the front door, and dragged his trunk out. He walked directly to the curb and stuck his wand straight out over the street.

In moments he was boarding the Night Bus bound for Diagon Alley in London.

Nymphadora Tonks was waiting outside the Leaky Cauldron when Harry arrived.

“How did you know...?” Harry started to ask.

“Dumbledore told you the house was under surveillance. What did you expect?” said Tonks, sounding almost disappointed. But then she laughed, “Blew up your aunt, did you? Ha, Ha. I’m sorry I missed it... Magical Reversal Squad’s already patched things up and modified her memory. So... no harm done.”

“But aren’t you going to *arrest* me? I thought I was going to be *expelled* for doing underage magic,” said Harry, sounding relieved, but also surprised.

“Not *this* time,” said Tonks. “The law’s the law, of course, but it’s really only enforced for serious things that can’t be fixed -- mostly illegal Dark Magic. Still, they want kids to *think* they’ll get expelled -- you know, to keep ‘em in line.”

Harry was annoyed to hear this. He thought of all the ‘little’ magical spells he could have been using to get even with Dudley -- while only being *threatened* with expulsion.

“Now, Harry, I’m taking you to see Tom, the innkeeper of the Leaky Cauldron. He’s agreed to take charge of you for the rest of the summer. Professor Dumbledore and the Minister for Magic think you’ll be safe enough here. You must promise me you’ll follow Tom’s orders.”

Harry promised and he meant it. His heart was leaping for joy. Four more weeks of *freedom!*

But he had a serious question he wanted answered first.

“Tonks, *who* is Sirius Black and *why* is he after me?”

Chapter 3 – The Leaky Cauldron

Tonks gave Harry a concerned look. “I’m not sure I’m the one you should be asking... Let me think about it.”

Tonks took Harry inside and helped him get moved into his room. Tom had prepared a late snack for him, so they went back downstairs and settled into a corner table.

“OK. I’ll tell you what I know, Harry,” said Tonks. “I think it’s better than keeping you in the dark... and no one told me not to... Now, I’m sure I don’t know everything, so you’ll still have to talk to other people... I think Hagrid knew him best of all those who are still around.”

Harry looked very surprised. “Hagrid *knew* Sirius Black?”

Tonks nodded. “Harry, this may come as a shock, but Sirius Black was one of your father’s best friends. He...”

“But he’s a psychopathic *killer*. How...” interrupted Harry.

“Harry, you’re going to have sit tight and let me tell the whole story. It’s both disturbing *and* very complicated. When I’m done, I’ll answer any questions I can. OK?” asked Tonks.

Harry nodded.

Tonks started by telling Harry about his father’s three closest friends at school, Sirius Black, Remus Lupin and Peter Pettigrew, and how they had been inseparable. But Black and his father had been the closest -- like brothers. The four had stayed friends after leaving Hogwarts and had joined the forces fighting You-Know-Who. In the meantime, his father had married his mother and Harry had been born. It was not long before his parents had gone into hiding because they had been marked for death by You-Know-Who after having already escaped death at his hands three times.

“Now this is the *bad* part.” She paused and took a deep breath before continuing. “Sirius Black *betrayed* your parents, Harry. He turned spy for You-Know-Who and revealed their hiding place to him. Somehow you survived and You-Know-Who was destroyed. Peter Pettigrew tracked down Black and confronted him on a public street in London packed with Muggles. Black blew the street up, obliterating Pettigrew and killing a dozen Muggles. It left a huge crater and the only thing they found of Pettigrew was one finger.”

“The strange thing is that Black surrendered without a fight when the Aurors arrived. And, if you can believe it, he wouldn’t stop laughing. He was sent to Azkaban without a trial and had been there for twelve years before escaping last week -- which is quite remarkable, because no one has ever escaped before. *And* no one has any idea how he managed it.”

As Tonks revealed the shocking story, Harry could not help remembering what Hagrid had said about his father’s school friends -- one dead, one in Azkaban, and one not seen since You-Know-Who disappeared. Now he knew why Hagrid did not want to tell him anymore than that.

“All we can do is guess why Black is after you. The Minister for Magic thinks he wants revenge for you destroying You-Know-Who, just as he was about to become his top lieutenant. But we do know that right before he escaped, Black was overheard talking in his sleep, saying, ‘He’s at Hogwarts. He’s at Hogwarts,’ -- meaning *you*, of course.”

Harry realized Tonks had finished. She was waiting for him to ask questions.

“Did *you* know Sirius Black?” asked Harry.

Tonks, laughed. “Do I look *that* old? Maybe I need a new look.”

She screwed up her face and her hair changed color from purple to bubble-gum pink. And her face had become paler with freckles sprinkled across on her nose and cheeks.

“Whoa!” exclaimed Harry. “How’d you do *that*?”

“I’m a Metamorphmagus. I can change my appearance at will, without a wand. You can’t learn it; you’re born with it, though it’s quite rare. It helps me a lot in my job,” she said matter-of-factly.

“I bet,” said Harry.

“As I was saying...” continued Tonks, “I was eight years old when You-Know-Who went down. I only finished my training to be an Auror a year ago. As I said, if you want to know more, talk to Hagrid.”

“I already tried. Last year I asked him about my father’s friends, and he said to talk to Professor Dumbledore,” said Harry dejectedly.

“I see,” said Tonks sympathetically. “Well, sure, when you get a chance. In the meantime, you could look at old Daily Prophets, I suppose. They’re sure to have more details -- certainly more lurid and sensational stuff -- but probably not much more substance...”

“Listen, Harry,” continued Tonks, “I need to get going. Here are the rules -- from Cornelius Fudge himself. You’re not to leave Diagon Alley at all and not to leave the Leaky Cauldron at night. Your friends can meet you here as often as you like, but again, no leaving Diagon Alley. Check in with Tom when you leave the Leaky Cauldron and before you go to your room for bed. We’ll have someone take you to Kings Cross on the first of September.”

Tonks took another breath. “Now, there’s *one* more thing -- and the Minister was particularly emphatic about it. You are absolutely *not* to go looking for Sirius Black yourself,” Tonks said, watching Harry very closely.

Harry looked back at her and realized that she was expecting some kind of reaction.

Yes, he felt intense *anger* that Sirius Black had betrayed his parents. But he had no special protection from his mother against Black like he had against Voldemort. Black had blown up an entire street and killed twelve people. He was not ready to take on a wizard like that alone. Not yet. But if he did want to take on Black himself, it would be better to set a trap... ‘Let *him* come and try to get to *me*,’ he thought. Professor Dumbledore and the Ministry were his best defense.

“That would stupid,” is all Harry said.

“Right,” said Tonks agreeably. “Any questions? No? That’s it then. See you later. Have fun!”

Harry told Tom he was going to his room. Before going to bed, he wrote letters to Hermione and Draco about what happened and asked them to visit him as soon as they got back from their trips, which he knew was around mid-month. Hedwig was not back yet, so he would have to use Ministry Owl Post. But there was no rush since he expected to be on his own for at least a week.

Before he fell asleep, Harry could not help thinking that it had been the most insane birthday he could have ever imagined.

The next morning, Harry went to Gringotts to get money so he could pay for his stay at the Leaky Cauldron and other expenses. He bought all his third-year set books and school supplies. He did not have to buy the *Monster Book of Monsters* because Hagrid had sent it to him as a birthday present. He also bought new robes, as he had grown a good bit since starting at Hogwarts.

Harry surprised himself and began reading his new schoolbooks. Harry imagined that Hermione and Draco had rubbed off on him, since they were much more studious than he had ever been before Hogwarts. He wondered what Hermione would say when he told her he had already read them all.

He also completed his assigned summer essays with the help of Florian Fortescue, who owned Florian Fortescue's Ice-Cream Parlour. Florian gave Harry free ice cream sundaes and helped him with his assignments, having a vast knowledge of wizarding history.

However, the only thing that could completely take Harry's mind off everything else, including missing his friends, was the Firebolt broomstick displayed in the window of Quality Quidditch Supplies. It was the very latest '*fastest broom in the world*'. Harry stopped by every day to look at it, but the '*price on request*' sticker put him off. He still liked his Nimbus Two Thousand. Thinking about it made him want to ride it, but flying a broomstick above the rooftops of London was not a very good idea.

A few days later, Hedwig finally returned -- with a note from Dumbledore. All it said was, "*Please come see me as soon as you return to school.*"

Harry also received mail from Hermione and Draco. They arranged to meet him midweek next. He wished it were sooner, but it gave him time to finish reading all his new schoolbooks, which he actually did.

After staying in the Leaky Cauldron almost two weeks, Diagon Alley almost felt like a second home to Harry. Of course, Hogwarts would always be his first.

Draco and Hermione met Harry at the Leaky Cauldron as planned. He escorted them around Diagon Alley as if he were a tour guide. He helped them buy all their books and school supplies. Hermione bought a huge number of books, but then again, she was taking every subject this year.

Harry just happened to mention that he had already read all his books.

Hermione asked, “You *did*? Really?” When Harry assured her that it was true, Hermione praised Harry non-stop for at least a minute.

Draco finally had enough, saying, “Hermione, he just read a few *books*... He didn’t invent a *flying* spell.”

So that Hermione could not hear, Draco whispered to Harry, “You *really* must fancy her, mate, going that far to impress her.”

Harry spluttered but could not think of anything to say. Why *had* he done it? He was not quite sure.

Hermione decided she wanted to get an owl. She selected a beautiful male Tawney at Eeylops Owl Emporium and named him Aristotle.

Later she saw an old, cantankerous, beat-up looking, male ginger cat in Magical Menagerie. She immediately declared it to be “gorgeous” and spent at least ten minutes holding and petting the poor creature. The shop owner called it Crookshanks.

Harry and Draco both thought the cat was quite mangy looking. And it definitely had very ugly flat face. But they did not say anything because, for some reason, Hermione seemed to be in love with it.

But Hogwarts students were only allowed to bring *one* animal to school, and she had just bought Aristotle. Hermione always followed the rules -- at least whenever possible - - so, she said she would have to think about it and left without getting the cat. She never did.

Draco drooled over the Firebolt with Harry. Hermione rolled her eyes and told them to come get her in Scribbulus Stationary Shop when they were finished drooling.

Later, back at the Leaky Cauldron, Harry recounted his run-in with Aunt Marge, which Draco thought was hilarious. But Hermione just shook her head disapprovingly. However, they were both shocked when he told them what Tonks said about Sirius Black. Hermione looked very concerned. “Oh, Harry. First *Voldemort* and now *this!*” she exclaimed worriedly.

But before she could continue, Draco lightened the mood. “You are a *magnet* for trouble, Harry,” said Draco. “What next, *dragons*?”

Hermione, though, remained serious, asking, “Harry, I want to be sure... You aren’t really thinking about trying to get Black, *are you?*”

“Like I told Tonks... it would be stupid,” said Harry.

“Right,” said Draco. “You know, I saw Tonks yesterday at home and she didn’t say anything about it. Keeping secrets...”

“It was *Ministry* business, Draco. It would not have been proper,” chided Hermione.

“But she’s my *cousin*...” complained Draco.

Hermione and Draco visited Harry several more times over the next two weeks. During one of their visits, the Weasley family came to get books and supplies for their children and to say hello after their return from Egypt. Mr and Mrs Weasley again personally thanked Harry and Draco for saving “our dearest Ginny”, who looked quite embarrassed. Ron looked envious. Fred, George, and Ginny stayed on for the day to visit with the three. They all shared their vacation stories.

Harry retold the Aunt Marge fiasco but did not tell the Weasley kids what Tonks said about Sirius Black. Black was discussed, but only in the general context of a psychotic dark wizard making a remarkable escape from Azkaban.

A few days before the start of school, everyone agreed to meet for dinner and overnight at the Leaky Cauldron before going together to King’s Cross Station on the first of September. All the Weasleys were coming, including Mr and Mrs Weasley.

The dinner was lively and entertaining. Draco even made a point of being nice to Ron. Ron remained standoffish but did not act like a jerk. Whereas, Percy, who had been selected Head Boy, *did* act like a jerk. However, Fred and George stood and saluted whenever Percy said anything -- giving everyone, including Mrs Weasley, a good laugh. Ginny was especially bubbling and laughed at all of Draco’s jokes, and he seemed eager to please her.

Fred and George asked Harry to repeat his story about blowing up his aunt for the benefit of Ron, Percy and Mr and Mrs Weasley. But Mrs Weasley scolded them because she had told them not to bring it up. Mr Weasley explained he had heard about it at the Ministry after he got back from Egypt and had already told the family. Taking a hint, Harry told a brief thirty-second version. But everyone still laughed.

After dinner, Mr Weasley took Harry aside and told him the Ministry was making every effort to recapture Sirius Black and that Harry should stay safe and not do anything foolish -- like going after him.

Clearly annoyed, Harry complained, “Why does everybody think I’d try to go after Black?”

Mr Weasley seemed to be looking for the right words. Finally, he explained, “Harry, I mean no offense, but given your track record of remarkable heroics, it’s not unreasonable to suppose you might.”

Harry had never thought about it that way. He had only ever viewed his actions as simply the right thing to do. Here was a completely different perspective. He could not discount it.

“I won’t,” said Harry. And he meant it.

Chapter 4 – The Dementor

The next morning was a chaotic rush of dressing, breakfast, last minute packing, and hauling school trunks downstairs.

Mr Weasley had arranged for a Ministry car to take everyone to Kings Cross. When they walked out of the Leaky Cauldron, Tonks was waiting at the curb with a black chauffeured sedan.

Harry immediately thought there was no way twelve people, including all their baggage, were going to fit into it. But they did -- *easily*, with room to spare. Magic! The car also never seemed to be hindered by normally bad London traffic. It always made it through traffic lights before they turned red, and they always seemed to be at the front of every queue. So, they arrived at Kings Cross Station in no time at all.

Tonks saw Harry and Draco off all the way to the train. She gave Draco a peck on the cheek. Fred and George ribbed him, “Kissing cousins, aye?” Ginny’s face turned red when they said it.

Mrs Weasley gave them all hugs goodbye.

As they boarded, Ron went off to find Zabini. Percy headed to the Prefects' car. Harry, Hermione, Draco, Fred, George, and Ginny looked for a compartment to share.

The first compartment they checked had a solitary middle-aged man sitting next to the window. His robes looked quite shabby, and he seemed to be sleeping. They checked the next compartment which contained four obvious first-years. Fred and George ran them off to join the sleeping man so the six of them could have the compartment for themselves.

Hermione did not approve. So, Draco suggested she could go sit with and comfort the first-years if she wanted to. She did not.

They settled in quickly and began talking about school. They wondered who the man in the other compartment was. No one knew, but Hermione suggested he might be going to Hogsmeade. This triggered a discussion about Hogsmeade weekend visits that all except Ginny were eligible for. Fred and George told them how great it was. Ginny was quite envious.

Then they talked about Sirius Black. Everyone seemed very confident he would soon be caught. Still, his escape from Azkaban concerned them.

This was something that had been nagging at Harry, so he asked, "Why is Azkaban considered so escape-proof?"

The compartment went silent.

Finally, Hermione spoke. "Harry, it's the *Dementors* -- the Azkaban guards."

Harry was clueless. It was obvious from his face.

Hermione continued, "They're *fiends* -- humanoid creatures who feed on human emotions. They drain the prisoners of all joy and hope -- and eventually, the *will to live*."

Harry was horrified. He knew Hermione would never joke about something this serious.

Draco said, "Now you see why so many Death Eaters claimed to be under the Imperious Curse after the Dark Lord fell. People will do *anything* to avoid going there. Parents scare their children into being good by warning them about Dementors punishing bad people."

Fred added, “Our dad had to go there once on Ministry business. It really shook him up. He wouldn’t talk about it except to say he never wanted to go back.”

Harry shook his head. “Why would the Ministry allow the use of creatures like that? It’s *inhuman*.”

Hermione nodded, but Draco said, “Harry, you haven’t seen what Dark Wizards can do... and *have* done. Most of the wizarding world considers it *just punishment*.”

Fred and George agreed. But Hermione and Ginny shook their heads.

Hermione said, “Sirius Black was able to survive that for *twelve* years, Harry. I don’t think you should go to Hogsmeade until he’s caught.”

Ginny agreed. But Draco said, “Black wouldn’t try an attack in an all-wizard village. There’s *safety* in numbers.”

“It didn’t help Peter Pettigrew,” retorted Hermione.

“An *all-wizard* village, Hermione,” reminded Draco. “That’s way different than a London street full of Muggles.”

Hermione huffed.

George diverted the argument by saying, “I’m sure Black will be caught before the first Hogsmeade weekend.”

Everyone agreed with that. Harry hoped it were true.

They changed the subject and talked about other many things.

The weather turned bad and soon it was dark with rain lashing the train cars. Unexpectedly, the train slowed down well outside Hogsmeade and then suddenly jerked to a halt. The lights flickered and then went out. Fred said he thought he saw figures outside along the tracks. Draco speculated on a possible track washout ahead.

Then they realized someone was outside in the corridor, but the compartment’s inside windows suddenly frosted over and they could not tell who it was. The door to the compartment unexpectedly opened and a great flood of extremely cold air poured in causing everyone to suddenly huddle and shiver.

But that was nothing to what happened next.

A ghostly shrouded figure thrust its head and torso into the compartment. It was inhumanly tall and seemed to float. Its face was completely hidden. The only visible part of its body was a long skeletal hand covered with gray festering flesh holding onto the door frame. It drew rasping throaty breaths as it swiveled its hooded head and looked at each of them in turn.

The six of them moaned and seemed to visibly shrink into their seats. They desperately wanted to get away but could not move. All they wanted was for it to go away and leave them alone.

The figure finally focused on Harry. Harry began reliving every terrible moment of his life as it flashed backwards in his mind -- the Basilisk, Riddle, Quirrell-Voldemort, ten years of torment by the Dursleys, and then suddenly -- a flash of green light and a woman screaming. It was the last thing he remembered as he descended into darkness.

“Harry, Harry, can you hear me?”

It was Hermione’s voice.

Harry opened his eyes. He was sitting on the floor of the compartment leaning against the seat. Hermione was crouched beside him. He looked around. The lights were on, and train was moving again. Draco was sitting across from him looking concerned. Ginny was huddled next to Draco looking frightened. Fred and George were standing outside the compartment talking to someone.

“What was that?” asked Harry groggily.

“He’s awake!” shouted Hermione.

A man pushed past Fred and George and leaned over Harry. “Can you try to get back into your seat, Mr Potter?”

The man and Hermione helped Harry up into his seat.

“What was that?” Harry asked again. His head was clearing up.

“It was a Dementor -- something I never believed I’d see outside of Azkaban,” said the man. Harry realized he must be the man from the other compartment. The man continued, “Apparently, the Ministry has set them loose to recapture Sirius Black. For some reason, this one decided to search the train. I had to drive him off before he did more damage.”

The man held something out for Harry to take. “This is chocolate. Eat it. It will make you feel better.”

Harry took the chocolate and took a bite. He did feel better, a *lot* better.

The man said, “I’ve got to check on how the Prefects are doing. We’ll be in Hogsmeade in about twenty minutes.” Then he left.

Fred and George came back in and sat down. Hermione was now sitting very close to Harry holding his arm.

“What happened?” asked Harry.

Draco spoke for the others. He said the Dementor had affected all of them, creating a sense of hopelessness and making them relive bad memories. But only Harry had passed out.

“It’s no shame, Harry,” said Draco earnestly. “You had a *rotten* childhood and *worse*. We would have all passed out if Professor Lupin hadn’t driven it off just in time. I don’t know what spell he used, but I remember a bright silvery-white light in the corridor and then it was gone. I felt like crying with relief. He gave us chocolate. I never tasted anything so good.”

Draco added that Professor Lupin had introduced himself and then gone to do a quick check of the other students and get the Prefects to explain to everyone what happened. He also had the Trolley Witch hand out chocolate to everyone.

“I bet he’s the new Defense Against the Dark Art’s teacher,” said Hermione confidently.

George piped up, “Well if he is, I want to learn that spell. If there’s going to be Dementors out there, I want to know how to stop them.”

Fred echoed, “Bloody right!”

Then Draco said, “I’ve reconsidered what Hermione said. Sirius Black endured *that* for *twelve* years. How is that *possible*? Harry, I don’t think you should go to Hogsmeade either... until he’s caught.”

They soon arrived at Hogsmeade station and rode to the school in the self-driving carriages used by all students except first-years. It was Harry’s first time.

At the castle door, Professor Lupin was waiting for Harry and took him, despite his protests, to see Madam Pomfrey in the hospital wing. She was appalled when Lupin told her what happened on the train. Lupin then left Harry in her hands and went to the Welcoming Feast.

Madam Pomfrey complimented Professor Lupin for giving everyone chocolate. She did not keep Harry long. She examined his eyes several times, made him drink a disgusting restorative potion of some kind and then gave him more chocolate -- ordering him to eat it all.

Professor Snape was waiting for Harry at the entrance to the Great Hall. He asked if Harry were all right.

After Harry said, “yes,” Snape took him by the shoulder and said, “Listen to me, Mr Potter. I do not want to have to see you in my office again this year. I am reminding you of what Professor Dumbledore told you this summer. Sirius Black is after *you*. You are in *mortal* danger. Do not do anything *foolish*. *No Heroics! Do you understand?*”

Harry said, “Yes, sir,” looking directly into Snape’s eyes, trying very hard to sound sincere. Though by this time, he was already quite tired of being lectured about Black.

Harry thought Professor Snape was going to continue, but then they both saw Hermione running down the marble staircase looking very pleased. Snape abruptly released Harry and went into the Great Hall.

Harry asked Hermione where she had been, and she explained Professor McGonagall had wanted to see her in her office about her class timetable. Then they both went into the Great Hall and to their respective house tables. They had missed the sorting ceremony; Professor Flitwick had conducted it this year.

Professor McGonagall came in behind them and took her seat at the High Table.

Professor Dumbledore addressed the students. After his normal welcome, he informed them that the Ministry of Magic had stationed many dozens of Dementors around the school because of Sirius Black being on the loose.

This was very distressing to the students, many of whom had just suffered from a brief encounter with only a *single* Dementor on the Hogwarts Express.

Dumbledore warned the students not to cross paths with the Dementors nor give the dreaded creatures any cause to harm them. And he mentioned specifically that Dementors could see through Invisibility Cloaks and Disillusionment Charms because they detected people by their emotions and not by sight.

Then he introduced the new teachers, Professor Lupin for Defense Against the Dark Arts and, to everyone's surprise, Professor Hagrid for Care of Magical Creatures -- replacing the long time Care instructor, Professor Kettleburn.

Draco groaned hearing Hagrid's name.

"What's wrong with Hagrid?" asked Harry very surprised. "He knows *all about* magical creatures."

"Yeah, and Hagrid's OK; he's our friend," replied Draco. "But I can't see him as a *teacher*. He scares most students."

It was obvious that Draco's opinion was shared by many other students, especially the Slytherins. Hagrid got very little applause. Whereas, Professor Lupin got a huge round of applause because of his actions on the train.

Harry noticed that Professor Snape was looking at Lupin with an expression of pure hatred. He wondered why and pointed it out to Draco.

"Maybe Professor Snape is just angry because he didn't get the Defense position again," speculated Draco.

But Harry countered, "With a look like that, they have to *know* each other..."

Harry did not tell Draco, but he wanted to talk to Professor Lupin about the Dementor.

But he had to talk to Professor Dumbledore first.

Chapter 5 – Hippogriffs and Hokum

The Headmaster caught Harry's eye at the end of the feast, after he dismissed the students to bed. Harry told Draco that Professor Dumbledore wanted to see him, and he would catch up with Draco in the common room. Then he walked up to the High Table where Dumbledore was waiting.

The first thing Professor Dumbledore did was ask Harry if he were feeling all right. Professor Lupin had obviously reported what had happened on the train. Harry said he was fine.

"Very good," said Dumbledore kindly. Then he became serious, "Harry, you should *not* have left your aunt's and uncle's home... though, I do not blame you. But that is *not* what I wanted to talk to you about..."

Harry interrupted, "I know, sir. You don't want me to go after Sirius Black."

Dumbledore paused and looked intently at Harry. "You are *quite* correct. The message has obviously been delivered. Again, very good. In addition, I am afraid, you will not be permitted..."

"...to go to Hogsmeade on weekend visits," Harry finished dismally.

"I see we are of one mind, Harry. Do you have any questions?" asked Dumbledore, now smiling.

Harry sighed, "No, sir."

The next morning at breakfast, Professor Snape had one of the Slytherin seventh-year Prefects hand out their timetables. Harry and Draco's new elective classes replaced previous free time on Wednesday and Friday afternoons. Harry and Draco were taking Care of Magical Creatures and Ancient Runes. However, most third-years signed up for Divination and Care of Magical Creatures. Since Hermione was taking all five electives,

and most electives were mixed house classes, they would now have three classes with her, including Potions as usual.

On Wednesday afternoon after lunch, Harry and Draco briefly went to the library. Draco wanted to get a book on Dragons. Then they headed for their first ever Care of Magical Creatures class.

On the third-floor landing of the marble staircase as they were about to go down, they saw Hermione with several of her fellow Gryffindors three flights above them heading to the upper floors to what Harry assumed was Divination. Harry only knew it was held in the highest classroom in the south tower accessed from the seventh floor.

Then a short time later, she rushed past them going down the stairs.

Harry stopped and called to her, “Hermione, where are you going?”

“Muggle Studies,” she called back over her shoulder.

“She must have gotten her schedule mixed up,” said Draco.

Harry sounded uncertain, “But I thought she was taking Divination. Wasn’t that a one o’clock class too?”

“Huh, I think you’re right,” said Draco puzzled. “That’s funny. We can ask her later.”

They hurried on to Care of Magical Creatures so as not to be late. They were the last to arrive. Hermione was already there at the front, where she always wanted to be in every class.

Harry and Draco looked at each other. Draco whispered, “She must have raced here when she realized she was wrong about Muggle Studies.”

Hagrid had not yet emerged from his hut. Draco noticed that almost everyone had their *Monster Book of Monsters* textbook firmly tied up in some way or another. Draco pulled out his copy and showed them how to open it before Hagrid arrived.

Professor Hagrid conducted an amazing lesson on Hippogriffs -- beautiful but very dangerous looking creatures that were half-eagle half-horse and could fly. Hagrid had a small herd of them penned up behind his hut. Both Harry and Draco volunteered to approach one, a male named Buckbeak, but Hagrid picked Harry.

Hagrid gave very precise instructions how to safely approach a Hippogriff. A few minutes later, when the other students were allowed to approach the animals, Ron Weasley was almost slashed by one, because he had not paid attention to Hagrid's warnings on how to approach them properly. Draco pulled Ron back just in time.

Draco would not have done that for Ron... until now. During their first two years at Hogwarts, Ron had been their *enemy*. But at the end of last year, Ron had thanked them for saving his little sister, Ginny, in the Chamber of Secrets. And Ron had not been a *total* jerk when Draco, Harry and Hermione had visited the Weasley's at the Burrow during the summer -- before they went to Egypt.

The highlight of the lesson was Hagrid having Harry take a short flight on Buckbeak. Harry told Draco he did not particularly enjoy it -- he said it was too hard to hold on. He decided he preferred broomsticks.

At dinner, Harry was told by several of his housemates that Professor Trelawney, the Divination teacher, had predicted in her class that Harry Potter would be *dead* before the end of year.

Given that Sirius Black was after him, it did not make Harry feel very good.

Draco reminded Harry that his parents had called her a fraud and a nutter, which was why they had decided against taking Divination. Draco also said all the older Slytherins who had taken her class said she just used simple gypsy fortune telling tricks -- and not to pay attention to anything she said.

When they saw Hermione in the library after dinner, Draco told her what Professor Trelawney had said about Harry.

Hermione scoffed, "Divination was complete *rubbish*. You can't take anything she says seriously."

"What?" said Draco. "You haven't been to Divination yet."

"Of course I have," said Hermione.

"Wait a minute," said Harry, "You told us you were going to Muggle Studies, but you were in Care with us."

“Yea,” echoed Draco, “I thought they were all at the same time... Let me see your timetable...” and he reached across the table for it.

But Hermione snatched it up before he could get it, saying, “How could they be at the same time?”

“But...” started Draco, just as Hermione cut him off sounding quite testy.

“I’ve worked out my schedule with Professor McGonagall and all the teachers. It has to be very *flexible* to fit everything in. There’s nothing to it, all right? Do you want me to help you with this homework *or not?*”

That was the end of it as far as Harry and Draco were concerned -- not wanting to do anything to risk losing Hermione’s help with homework. This was especially important for Draco, as he was now quite often away from their table helping Ginny with *her* homework.

The next day in Transfiguration, Professor McGonagall made it a point to tell the class that Professor Trelawney had predicted the death of a student every year since she had been teaching at Hogwarts. Not one had ever died.

Professor McGonagall looked directly at Harry as she told them and finished by telling Harry that he was not going to be excused from doing homework... unless he *did* die.

Everyone laughed and Harry was finally able to put Trelawney’s prediction out of his mind.

Chapter 6 – The Boggart in the Wardrobe

The afternoon ended with Defense Against the Dark Arts.

Word had already spread that Professor Lupin was the best Defense teacher in at least three years. Even before the class was over, Draco and Harry both agreed; Professor Lupin was *outstanding*.

He was teaching them *real* defensive spells. They worked the first half of the lesson on the Shield Charm, *Protego*. They had learned the basics of it during second year in the short-lived Dueling Club. But Professor Lupin taught them the finer points and how to

use it skillfully. The second half of the lesson began their study of Red Caps, with other dangerous magical creatures scheduled in the weeks to come.

That night in the library, they told Hermione how good Lupin was. She had heard the same thing and was anxious to have her first Defense class with him.

Friday morning, Slytherins had Potions with the Gryffindors.

Draco, Harry, and Hermione continued to share a front worktable. Professor Snape continued to take pleasure in tormenting the other Gryffindors, especially Neville Longbottom at the table beside them. Harry did not like it, though Professor Snape still made an exception of Hermione and left her alone. Hermione tried to help Neville as much as she could.

Snape also seemed to be much less harsh with Ron, unless, of course, he genuinely messed up. It seemed that if Draco was not hectoring Ron this year, Snape was not either.

When class ended, Seamus Finnigan announced that the Daily Prophet reported a sighting of Sirius Black not far from Hogwarts. Draco said it was probably bogus, but it concerned Harry because it was so close. Hermione assured Harry that no one could get into the school surrounded by Dementors.

At dinner that night, there was a buzz in the Great Hall.

The story was that Professor Lupin had given a special practical lesson to the Gryffindor third-years that afternoon about Boggarts because he had located one in the Staff Room wardrobe. Everyone was saying how fantastic the lesson had been.

But the lesson highlight was that Neville Longbottom's greatest fear was revealed to be -- Professor Snape. And that Lupin had suggested Longbottom overcome Boggart-Snape by forcing it to appear dressed in his grandmother's clothes, which included a large ridiculous hat topped with a stuffed vulture.

Hermione told Harry and Draco it had been hilarious. The class's combined laughter had made the Boggart *explode!*

Since Professor Snape was considered by non-Slytherin students to be the meanest teacher at Hogwarts, anything that made fun of him was especially enjoyed. It was

clear to Harry from watching Snape at the High Table that he had heard the story and his animus for Lupin had only grown as a result.

On Saturday morning, Harry went to see Hagrid. He told him what Tonks said about Sirius Black.

“I’m sorry ya had ta hear that, Harry. But I s’pose ya had ta know, now that he’s on the loose,” said Hagrid sadly. He continued, “I’ll tell ya this... Yer dad and Sirius were like brothers, Harry. *Brothers!* I couldn’t believe it when I heard what Sirius did. Some ways, I still can’t. But there’s no denyin’ it, Harry. And I’m tellin’ ya, don’t ya be goin’...”

Harry interrupted, “I’m not going after Black, Hagrid. I promised Professor Dumbledore.”

“Well, that’s good then. Them Dementors ’ll get ’im fer sure. Vicious creatures...” said Hagrid shuddering.

“Hagrid, you’ve *been* to Azkaban. How did you *stand* it?” asked Harry, remembering his own terrible experience on the train.

“Don’t know, Harry. Thought I’d go *mad*. *Never* wanna go back,” said Hagrid shaking his head. It looked like sweat had broken out on his forehead just thinking about it.

Harry changed the subject. “Hagrid, does Professor Snape know Professor Lupin? I saw Profess Snape looking at him...”

Hagrid sighed, “Ya were bound ta find out... I should ’ave told ya more last year... Lupins’ the one o’ yer father’s friends who disappeared.”

“Can you tell me about Professor Lupin *now?*” asked Harry.

Hagrid nodded, “A good man, Remus. Smart, real smart. He were the quiet one o’ the lot... a Prefect, ya know. But I don’t think he had much control over James an Sirius -- they were *always* gettin’ detention, the two. I’m guessin’ maybe Remus blames ’imself fer not seein’ what Sirius was up ta with You-Know-Who. I never saw ’im after they sent Sirius ta Azkaban... ’til now, o’ course.”

“I think Professor Snape hates him,” said Harry.

Hagrid nodded. “Old grudges, Harry, old grudges... He were part o’ yer father’s gang. Snape hated the lot of ’em. But remember, it went both ways. They did everythin’ they could ta earn it, ya see... Well... mostly James and Sirius did.”

Harry suddenly wondered, “What about Peter Pettigrew?”

Hagrid grunted, “Ya figured it out -- the one who *died*... He’s the odd one. Didn’t really fit in with the others, if ya ask me. He were a follower, a tagalong at best. Never would ’ave figured ’im to be the one callin’ out Sirius after he’d betrayed James and Lily. I s’pose ya never can tell what someone’s really made o’ ’til the worst happens. Got a medal fer bravery from the Ministry, he did. They gave it to his mum.”

Harry told Draco and Hermione what Hagrid said.

“Why do some people hold onto childhood grudges?” wondered Hermione.

“Have you ever truly *hated* someone, Hermione? Wished they were *dead*?” asked Draco.

“No!” exclaimed Hermione, clearly dismayed.

“*That’s* why,” said Draco.

Chapter 7 – The Patronus Charm

After the first month of school, everyone agreed that Defense Against the Dark Arts was the most interesting class they were taking. Surprisingly, Care of Magical Creatures was a close second. By then, almost every student taking it had flown on a Hippogriff. It was amazing.

Quidditch practice had started. During tryouts, Draco had succeeding in making the Slytherin team as third Chaser. Harry was thrilled. Now there was nothing at school they were not doing together. Again, no one challenged Harry for Seeker, and Draco was even tagged as his backup.

When they arrived back in the common room after their first practice, they saw a notice for the first Hogsmeade weekend at the end of October -- on Halloween. Harry turned away; he did not even want to read it.

Draco said he would bring back anything Harry wanted, including the Butterbeer he had promised to buy Harry for his birthday. Harry realized now even more how much he had looked forward to it, especially after what Fred and George told them about it.

One of the Slytherin Prefects was collecting the parental permission forms for Professor Snape. Harry handed his in, hoping that Sirius Black would be caught eventually. The boy glanced at it, sniffed, and then told Harry that Professor Snape wanted to see him after breakfast in the morning.

Harry and Draco wondered what it was about.

“He just probably just wants to remind me that I can’t go,” said Harry dismally.

Harry was right.

“Mr Potter,” said Snape in his usual lecturing tone, “I am reminding you that you may *not* leave the school to visit Hogsmeade. These are the Headmaster’s orders... and *my* orders. I know you would not think of putting your friends, and possibly many others, in mortal danger for something so frivolous.”

“No, sir. I prom...” Harry started to say, but Snape cut across him saying, “Good. Then there is no need for further discussion. Dismissed.”

Draco was miffed when Harry told him what happened, “Why did he have to rub it in. You already knew it.” But when Hermione heard about it the library, she was not surprised. “Harry, you -- and I include myself and Draco in this -- do have a reputation for ignoring the rules, including *specific orders* from teachers. And remember, Professor Dumbledore *knows* about the Cloak, as do quite a few others by now.”

“She says they’re warning you not to try anything, Harry,” said Draco seriously.

“But I’m sure Black will be caught *soon*. Then you’ll be able to go,” said Hermione encouragingly.

“But it’s been *three* months, Hermione, and they haven’t caught him *yet*,” complained Harry.

Hermione was not interested in discussing it further and resumed working on her homework. Draco went off to help Ginny. Harry decided to blame Professor Snape, even though he knew the order had come from Professor Dumbledore.

On Halloween morning, Harry said goodbye to Draco and Hermione after breakfast. They promised to bring him back the best of the best things they could find.

Harry wandered the castle aimlessly and finally decided to visit the owlery to see Hedwig. As he passed the open door to what had been Professor Lockhart's office, he glanced in. Professor Lupin was sitting behind the desk reading.

Harry suddenly decided he wanted to ask him about his father and Sirius Black. He knocked on the door.

Lupin looked up, "Mr Potter, please come in. Have a seat. I'm afraid I'm not quite settled in yet." The office was a little disorganized, but nothing Harry would have considered messy.

"I've been wanting to talk to you, sir," said Harry moving some things around to free up a chair. A very large glass tank full of murky water was positioned behind the door and caught his eye. As he looked at it, the face of a strange creature suddenly appeared behind the glass. It was pea soup green with sharp pointed horns and green teeth.

"That's a Grindylow -- a water demon," said Lupin, "We'll be studying them after Kappas."

"Sir, why didn't the Slytherin class get the lesson on the Boggart?" asked Harry.

"Ah," said Lupin. "Well, I hadn't found another one in time for your class, unfortunately. We'll just have to hope to come across another one, I'm afraid." He paused and then asked, "You haven't been worrying about your worst fear, have you?"

"Well, maybe... it's just that... I don't know how to defeat it, sir," responded Harry. Lupin's question had brought Harry's subconscious concern to the surface.

"Really?" said Lupin sounding surprised. "But you have already faced *Voldemort* twice in the last two years according to Professor Dumbledore. I would have thought..."

Harry thought, *'Here is someone else who isn't afraid to say Voldemort's name.'*

“Not Voldemort, sir, no...” Harry interrupted. “...*Dementors*... I heard a woman... No... I heard my *mother*... screaming.”

“I see...” said Lupin, looking concerned.

“On the train, you drove it away. Can you teach me how? *Please*, sir,” Harry said imploringly.

Lupin seemed to be studying Harry. Then he spoke. “It won’t be *easy*, Mr Potter; it’s *advanced* magic. And it will take some time to prepare. I’ll let you know when.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Harry appreciatively.

“But first, I need to tell you more about Dementors, so you’ll know what you’re up against,” added Lupin.

Professor Lupin proceeded to tell told Harry everything he knew about them. Harry had already heard some of it, but he learned much more. He was amazed to hear that Muggles could not see them. They glided instead of walking, and they had no eyes. But what shocked him was that Dementors could not kill people, at least, not directly. They wanted to feast on your misery as long as possible. But when you had been driven utterly mad or when their hunger finally overwhelmed them, they did the worst thing possible -- they *ate* your soul. They sucked it out of your mouth performing what Lupin called “the Dementor’s Kiss.”

It made Harry sick to his stomach. It was *worse* than death -- an utterly empty, mindless, living-death-like existence -- until you finally starved, if you were allowed to.

Harry thanked Professor Lupin for telling him everything.

But when Harry did not get up to leave, Lupin asked, “Is there something else?”

“Yes, it’s what I wanted to talk to you about...” said Harry.

“It wasn’t about Dementors?” responded Lupin, surprised.

“No, sir. I wanted to ask you about my father and Sirius Black.”

Just as Professor Lupin was about to respond, Professor Snape walked in and delivered a steaming cup of potion, placing it on Lupin’s desk. He told Lupin he had

more if he needed it. Harry noticed their interaction seemed formal and stiff, though Snape was not openly displaying the hatred toward Lupin he had seen before.

Professor Snape gave Harry a questioning glance before he left.

“It’s for my health, Mr Potter. I haven’t been feeling well lately,” explained Lupin. “Now, first tell me what *you* know about your father and Sirius Black.”

Harry related everything anyone had ever told him about his father and his relationship with his school friends. He did not hold back, except not identifying who had said what.

“Harry,” said Lupin -- it was the first time he had not said, “Mr Potter” -- “I can’t argue with any of it. I too found it difficult to believe what Sirius had done. He and your father truly were like brothers. It was a complete shock to me. But there’s something else, something you did not mention.”

Lupin took a deep breath before saying, “Sirius Black is your *godfather*.”

“My godfather!” exclaimed Harry in disbelief.

“Yes, Harry. And that’s why I’ve always had so much trouble believing it. How could he send Voldemort to kill your parents knowing you, his godson, would be slaughtered too? It just doesn’t make sense. It never has. I so wish I had been able to talk to him before they took him away. That’s all I can say, Harry. I’m sorry.”

Harry was stunned. His godfather!

He could not think of anything to say, so he thanked Professor Lupin and left. He skipped going to the owlery and instead went to the library to wait for Draco and Hermione.

He sat at an empty table. Professor Lupin’s revelation was fixed in his mind. It was making him anxious and angry. He had to tell himself, ‘*Stop!*’ He did not want to think about it anymore.

Then he noticed Ginny was studying alone at another table. He went over and sat with her. After asking how she was doing, he asked, “Ginny, why don’t you study with us from now on? Then Draco won’t have to come over here all the time. Unless you’d rather be with your other friends, of course.”

“I’d like that... if you and Hermione don’t mind. She’s *almost* my best friend,” said Ginny.

“Who’s your *best* friend?” asked Harry, a little surprised.

“Um... Luna Lovegood... She’s in my year... in Ravenclaw,” said Ginny a little reluctantly.

“Well, great,” said Harry cheerfully. “I don’t know her. You’ll have to introduce us.”

Draco and Hermione returned well before the Halloween feast and joined Harry and Ginny. They started laying out all the goodies and treats they had brought to share when Madam Pince shooed them out of the library in a huff for “mucking up” her tables.

They spent the next hour in an empty classroom sampling everything and recounting their day. Draco had also bought special things for Ginny, which she delighted in. At Harry’s request, they described in detail everything Hogsmeade had to offer. It was obvious they’d had a great time. Draco had clearly been enamored with Madam Rosmerta, the attractive landlady and barkeep of the Three Broomsticks inn. Ginny pouted when he said Rosmerta had a great figure.

Harry told them about his meeting with Lupin. But he did not mention Lupin’s disturbing revelation about Sirius Black.

Hermione seemed especially interested in the potion Professor Snape had delivered. She wondered what Professor Lupin’s illness was, since they agreed he always looked pale. Draco was more interested in the training Professor Lupin had promised to give Harry to drive away Dementors.

“It’s the Patronus Charm,” said Hermione knowingly. “It’s *very* advanced. It’s not even taught at Hogwarts. Mostly Aurors are trained on it, because of Azkaban. Not all wizards can do it. I read about it a while ago.”

“When were you going to tell *us* about it?” asked Draco accusingly.

“I didn’t see any point, since it’s not part of our curriculum,” said Hermione matter-of-factly.

Harry stopped an impending argument, “Well, it *is* now.”

Chapter 8 – Flight of the Fat Lady and Grim Defeat

The Halloween Feast was as wonderful as ever. Everyone had a great time.

After the feast, Draco and Harry had only just returned in their dorm room when a Prefect stuck his head in the door telling them to meet in the common room immediately.

Professor Snape was waiting there. He ordered them all back to the Great Hall.

Professor Dumbledore announced that the teachers needed to conduct a search of the school, and students would have to spend the night in the Great Hall. He moved the tables and benches out of the way and conjured sleeping bags for everyone. He put the Head Boy and Girl in charge and ordered the Prefects to guard all the entrances to the Hall.

Harry and Draco quickly sought out Hermione. Ginny was with her. Hermione told them what happened.

The portrait of the Fat Lady guarding the entrance to Gryffindor tower and common room had been *attacked*. The painting had been viciously slashed, and the Fat Lady was missing. Peeves the Poltergeist had witnessed it and told the Headmaster that Sirius Black had done it.

“Sirius Black!” exclaimed Draco. “How is that *possible*? Peeves must be lying.”

Hermione shook her head. “Professor Dumbledore believed him. That’s why we’re here.”

It was clear from the buzz in the Great Hall, everyone was talking about the same thing.

They could not think of a way for Black to have gotten in. They concluded it had to be either some really unusual Dark Magic or, worse, someone on the inside had helped him. If someone had, they thought it would have to be someone Black had bewitched -- probably in Hogsmeade earlier that day.

But Harry asked the key question, “If Black is after *me*, why did he try to get into *Gryffindor* tower? That makes no sense at all.”

Neither Draco, Hermione nor Ginny could think of a reason.

The attack was the talk of the school for days with numerous theories of how Black had gained entry.

Harry noticed the teachers and Slytherin Prefects were closely watching him, and that at least one of them was always walking behind him between classes. Professor Snape made sure Madam Hooch attended all Slytherin practices when he was not there himself.

Hermione said Sir Cadogan, a well-meaning but slightly mad medieval knight from a portrait on the seventh floor near the south tower, had replaced the Fat Lady. She remained in seclusion, still traumatized by Black's attack. Unfortunately, Sir Cadogan was making the Gryffindors mental by constantly changing the password.

The week after the attack, Professor Lupin's Defense Against the Dark Arts class was taken by Professor Snape, who said Professor Lupin was ill. Professor Snape criticized Professor Lupin's teaching in every possible way. He ignored Lupin's lesson plan and instead conducted lessons on werewolves, emphasizing how to identify and kill them. To top it off, Snape gave them extra homework assignments on the subject. Hermione told Harry and Draco that Professor Snape had been horrible to everyone in her Defense class too.

They stopped by Professor Lupin's office, but he did not answer their knock, and he was not in the hospital wing.

Harry said, "I hope he's OK. Having Professor Snape teaching two subjects the rest of the year would *not* be fun."

Hermione and Draco agreed.

Fortunately, Professor Lupin resumed teaching the following week and excused them from the extra homework Professor Snape had assigned. Unfortunately, Hermione had seen to it that the three of them had already completed it. Draco was particularly annoyed.

The first Quidditch match of the year between Slytherin and Gryffindor was approaching. The weather had been getting steadily worse and on the day of the match it was a gale.

Despite the weather, the whole school turned out.

Harry could not see anything in the freezing cold rain, and he could not hear the commentator either. When the lightning started, Madam Hooch called timeout at the request of the Gryffindors. Harry found out the Slytherins were behind by ten points. He told Flint he could not see anything with his glasses covered with water, but no one could think of a solution. When the match resumed, conditions were no better.

During one flash of lightning, Harry saw the silhouette of a huge dog standing on the topmost row of the viewing stands. At first he thought it was Fang, but the shape wasn't right, and Hagrid had never brought his boarhound to a match before.

But then Flint yelled, and Harry saw the Gryffindor Seeker, Zabini, racing up the pitch. Harry could not see the Snitch, but he could not take a chance it was a feint. He chased after Zabini at top speed.

Just as he was about to catch up, it suddenly became strangely quiet. At the same time, Harry felt a surge of penetrating cold. He looked down and saw at least a hundred Dementors converging on the pitch from every direction, many with their heads turned up towards him.

The same sense of dread and despair he felt on the train began to overwhelm him. He frantically tried to fly higher to get away, but it felt like he was being dragged down. It was hopeless. He could never escape. He was doomed. He had failed. Then he heard it -- the screaming. His mother was screaming... and, this time, another voice, a shrill voice... laughing...

"Not Harry, not Harry, please not Harry!"

"Stand aside, you silly girl... stand aside, now..."

"Not Harry, please no, take me, kill me instead..."

"Not Harry! Please... have mercy... have mercy..."

He was falling.

Harry awoke in the hospital wing with his teammates around his bed.

Flint told him he had fallen off his broom and Zabini had gotten the Snitch. They had lost by one-hundred and eighty points. It was their first loss in years. Flint was not happy. Draco had already explained to the team that the Dementors had an especially strong effect on Harry.

Flint said as long as the Dementors were guarding the school, he could not risk playing Harry again. Draco would take over as Seeker and they would play their backup Chaser, Warrington, for him. Harry would be held in reserve unless he could overcome his “problem” with the Dementors.

The rest of the team left but Draco stayed. Hermione and Ginny, who had been waiting in the corridor, came in. Hermione told Harry that he had fallen at least fifty feet and that Professor Dumbledore had performed a spell that slowed him down before he hit the ground. Draco joked that the soft ground from the rain had helped turn “a *crunch* into a *splat*.” Hermione was not amused.

Harry had landed face down and had not even broken his glasses.

Hermione added that Dumbledore was very angry that the Dementors had come onto the school grounds. “Professor Dumbledore drove them off using the Patronus Charm, just like Professor Lupin did,” said Hermione. “And guess what? His Patronus is a Phoenix.”

“What do you mean?” asked Harry.

“The Patronus takes the form of an animal... Didn’t I say that before?” asked Hermione.

“No,” said Harry and Draco together.

“Well, it does,” said Hermione. “I didn’t see Professor Lupin’s Patrons on the train. All I saw was the bright light.”

Suddenly, there was a pop and Dobby the house-elf appeared standing at the foot of Harry’s bed. He was holding a plate of sweet and savory pasties and a steaming tea service.

“Dobby, what are *you* doing here?” asked Draco.

“Dobby is bringing Harry Potter and his friends afternoon tea,” squeaked Dobby cheerfully.

“But how did you *know* Harry was in the hospital wing?” asked Hermione.

“Ah, miss, Dobby now is working at Hogwarts. Professor Albus Dumbledore is hiring Dobby this school year.”

Dobby explained quite proudly that he had not allowed the great Professor Dumbledore to pay him too much or give him too much time off because, “House-elves is loving work more than anything else.” He said he loved Hogwarts because there was so much work to do -- even with a *hundred* other house elves.

“But we never see them, Dobby,” said Hermione.

“Thank you, miss,” said Dobby smiling and bowing. “House-elves is doing their best when they is not being seen.”

Draco nodded in agreement.

Ginny spoke, which was quite rare. “Dobby, I never got a chance to thank you for helping to save me last year in the Chamber of Secrets. If it hadn’t been for you, I wouldn’t have made it.”

Dobby bowed to Ginny and said, “Dobby is glad that Miss Ginny is not being killed. Dobby is always glad to be helping Master Draco, Harry Potter and their friends.”

Dobby served them tea. Then he said his break was over and he needed to get back to work. He wished them well and then vanished with a small pop.

“Do you think a house-elf could have gotten Black into the castle,” asked Harry immediately.

“Possible, but doubtful,” said Draco. “A lot of wizard magic doesn’t work on other magical creatures. I don’t know if you can bewitch a house-elf, but I am sure they would never *voluntarily* bring someone into the castle who was not authorized to be here.”

Hermione nodded. “I’ll have to do some research to be sure, but I agree with Draco.”

As they enjoyed afternoon tea, Harry suddenly asked about his broomstick. Draco reluctantly told him it had drifted into the Whomping Willow. Professor Flitwick had gone to recover it, but it was totally destroyed. “Flitwick came back with only a handful

of splinters and twigs. Flint trashed them,” said Draco grimacing. Then he brightened up, “Well, now you can get a Firebolt!”

“It won’t do me any good as *reserve* Seeker,” said Harry dismally.

Harry felt it was the worst day he had ever had at Hogwarts.

Chapter 9 – The Marauder’s Map

The Slytherins were not used to losing and did not like it.

Harry got the blame.

The news of his Dementor ‘problem’ spread very quickly. Draco apologized for letting the secret out, saying he thought their teammates could be trusted to keep quiet. But Harry did not blame him. He said it was very hard to keep a secret at Hogwarts; even Professor Dumbledore said so. Anyway, the loss *had* been his fault. That was undeniable.

Harry felt humiliated by the exceptionally strong effect the Dementors had on him and seemingly no one else. He was determined to do something about it as soon as possible.

Early Monday morning, Harry went to see Professor Lupin. He may have recovered enough from his illness to teach classes again, but he did not look good. He told Harry he would not have the energy to help him until he felt better. Harry was disappointed, but there was nothing he could do but wait.

When he saw Professor Lupin in Defense Against the Dark Arts on Tuesday afternoon, Lupin looked better. Lupin asked Harry to stay behind for a moment after class. Lupin told him he heard about the match, what happened with the Dementors, and the loss of his broomstick. Lupin told him the Whomping Willow was planted the year he arrived at Hogwarts. He described how students would try to touch the trunk without being hit until one student was seriously injured -- after which, it was forbidden. Of course, now the Willow was *very* much bigger and clearly dangerous, so today’s students readily understood the restriction. Though, Mr Filch was stationed by the tree, the first week of school when students were not in class, to warn off first-years.

Professor Lupin then said he had also heard that Flint had sidelined Harry because of his ‘problem’ with Dementors. Lupin explained to Harry why the Dementors affected him so much more than the other students. “Harry, you have seen horrors in your life that others can’t imagine. It is *not* a sign of weakness, but it *is* a vulnerability. And, again, I promise to help you as soon as I can.”

Harry felt much better with the renewed promise of help.

And Lupin kept his promise. Before the end of November, he had conducted three evening lessons with Harry. First, he taught Harry more about Dementors and ways to calm his mind so he would not panic when he felt them. Next, he taught Harry about the Patronus Charm and how it worked. He emphasized the importance of concentrating on a very happy thought. And by the end of the third lesson, Harry could easily produce a non-corporeal Patronus shield. Lupin said he was doing exceptionally well but would need a *real* target to improve further.

Harry nervously asked if Professor Lupin were going to get a Dementor. Lupin said, “Oh, no; much too dangerous,” and told him he was trying to find another Boggart instead. When he had, he would schedule their next lesson. In the meantime, he told Harry to practice on his own.

Draco, Hermione, and Ginny were very interested in what Harry was learning, so the following evening after each lesson, they went to an empty classroom, and he showed them what Professor Lupin had taught him. Then they practiced with him. Draco, Hermione, and Ginny said concentrating on the happy memory was the hardest part. Harry agreed.

At the end of November, Professor Lupin was ill again, so Harry knew that even if he found a Boggart, it would be a week or two before Lupin was well enough to resume Harry’s training.

Draco reminded Harry he needed a new broom, so he started reading up in *Which Broomstick* and figured he would order a new one before Christmas. That would give him enough time to get used to it before the next match in February -- assuming Flint would let him play. He was thinking about getting the newer Nimbus Two Thousand One. The old school brooms he had been using in practice were just too slow to play Seeker.

December brought frost and snow. Students began planning for the holidays. Draco invited Harry to his aunt’s and uncle’s house for Christmas and Harry gratefully

accepted. Hermione was going with her parents to ski in France. Ginny was going home to the Burrow with the rest of her siblings.

The next Hogsmeade visit was scheduled for the last weekend before the end of term. Professor Lupin had not scheduled any new anti-Dementor training, so Harry was doubly depressed.

On Saturday morning of the Hogsmeade weekend, Harry said goodbye to Draco and Hermione in the Entrance Hall and started back to the common room when someone called to him in a whisper.

It was Fred and George. They were furtively gesturing for him to join them from the room where the new first-years waited before the sorting ceremony. Harry went in and they closed the door.

“Harry, we have an early Christmas present for you,” they said together.

Fred -- or George -- continued. “It is our pleasure to present to you... *The Marauder’s Map*.” He withdrew it from his robes with a great flourish and handed it to Harry.

It looked like a grubby old piece of parchment.

“Is this a joke?” asked Harry looking at it and turning it over.

“Not when you do *this*,” said George -- Harry had settled on George. He tapped the parchment with his wand and said, “*I solemnly swear that I am up to no good.*”

All was revealed. Harry was amazed.

They told Harry everything they knew about the map and how it worked. They particularly pointed out the secret passages -- the ones Filch knew about *and* the ones he *didn’t*. They also swore, “The Map *never* lies.” They told Harry how they had nicked it from Filch, who, as a Squib, could not figure it out, but guessed it was magical. Harry did not know what a Squib was, so they explained it as the opposite of a Muggle-born -- a non-magical person born of wizard parents.

“Why are you giving it to *me*?” asked Harry in astonishment. “I mean, Ron...”

“No, *not* Ron. He’s been a *git* his first two years. And Perce...” said Fred. “NEVER!” they shouted together.

Harry laughed.

George continued, “First and foremost, we believe you have the *right attitude* about rules that this Map requires to be used effectively. Second, you saved our little sister last year. By the by, we can confirm the Map does *not* show the Chamber of Secrets. Finally, we believe the restriction on you going to Hogsmeade is *completely* unfair.”

“And lastly... Wait, does *lastly* come before or after *finally*?” asked Fred.

“Either is considered acceptable,” offered George.

“Brilliant,” quipped Fred. “So finally, lastly, we’d recommend using the secret passage in the Statue of the One-Eyed Witch on the third floor. Oh, and very finally lastly, tap the Map and say, ‘*Mischief Managed*’, to make it blank again.”

Harry was amazed by the map and thanked Fred and George profusely.

“Just make us proud,” they said together.

They departed saying cheerily, “See you in Hogsmeade, Harry!”

Harry contemplated the map. He wondered about it being one of those dark magic objects that can think for themselves that Mr Weasley warned about. But Fred and George had been using it safely for five years, so it did not seem likely.

Harry made up his mind. He went back to his dorm room and got the invisibility cloak out of his trunk and headed for the statue. He was in the cellar of Honeydukes sweet shop in less than thirty minutes, though it had seemed to take longer. He put on the cloak and quietly climbed the stairs.

Harry found Draco and Hermione inside the shop. He remained under the cloak and quickly got their attention. Draco was concerned but *impressed*. “Wow! You took *some* risk, Harry.” Hermione was concerned and *appalled*. “What were you *thinking*? And how did you get past the Dementors? An Invisibility Cloak is useless against them.”

Harry told them about the secret passage.

“I have a good mind to turn you in *right now*,” said Hermione sternly.

“Don’t make idle threats, Hermione. You have no intention of turning Harry in,” said Draco matter-of-factly.

“Well, I *should*,” said Hermione, sighing.

They went to the Three Broomsticks. Harry remained under the cloak. Draco and Hermione sat across from each other, so it looked like only the two of them were sitting there. Harry then told them about the Marauder’s Map and promised to show them when there was no one around.

Hermione declared, “Harry, Sirius Black must be using one of the secret passages that Filch doesn’t know about to get into the school. The teachers need to know about this.”

“Hermione, Black doesn’t *have* the Map. How could he know? Besides, I don’t want to get Fred and George in trouble,” said Harry, essentially refusing.

Hermione then asked, “And what if Black gets *ahold* of the Map?”

Harry laughed. “If Black got ahold of the Map, he’d have ahold of me too and the Map wouldn’t matter.”

“Duh,” said Draco, giving Hermione a cross-eyed look. Then adding, “If Harry gave it to a teacher, and if someone on the inside is helping Black, then it would be *more* likely to fall into the wrong hands than if Harry keeps it.”

“Then Harry should *destroy* it, because now he knows everything he needs to know,” responded Hermione, still trying to make her case.

Both Draco and Harry thought she was mad to suggest destroying something so good.

Just then McGonagall, Flitwick, Hagrid, and Cornelius Fudge, whom Draco pointed out, entered the inn. They settled down at a nearby table and ordered drinks, which Madam Rosmerta served and then joined them. Harry overheard his name mentioned.

“I’m going over to eavesdrop,” said Harry. Hermione urged him not to, and then told him to be careful when he ignored her.

Harry once again heard the story of Peter Pettigrew, Sirius Black, and his father. There was nothing new except for what the Minister for Magic had to say. He described seeing Black in Azkaban. Fudge said that Azkaban did not seem to have had *any* effect

on Black -- he was perfectional rational and calm. In fact, Black had asked Fudge for his newspaper so he could work the puzzles. Fudge concluded only someone with incredible powers of Dark Magic could endure the continuous presence of Dementors.

Harry contrasted Fudge's description of Sirius Black's response to the Dementors with his own, and it terrified him.

When Fudge finished, Harry rejoined Draco and Hermione and told them what he heard. "How can I *possibly* defend myself against Black if he gets to me?" asked Harry. "I mean... we know he can get into the castle. It's inevitable..."

Draco was not sure what to say. Hermione hesitated, "Harry, you need to..."

But Harry suddenly thought of a solution. "Hermione, do you know any *deadly* curses? You know, the 'unforgivable' ones that Tom Riddle said he knew by the time he was a second-year?"

"Harry! No!" exclaimed Hermione, causing several patrons to look their way. Then quietly, she continued, "I know *about* them, that's all. But even if I *did* know them, I would *not* help you learn how to kill, torture, or enslave people."

Hermione meant it. She crossed her arms and scowled.

"Then I'll have to learn on my own," said Harry, determined.

Hermione looked shocked, but Draco did not.

"What's Harry supposed to do, Hermione, accept his fate?" asked Draco. "He's gonna *fight*. I would too. So, *I'm* gonna help you, mate."

Chapter 10 – Animagus Anonymous

Harry was hardly able to sleep that night after returning to the castle. Black could attack him at any moment. He decided he would again carry the invisibility cloak with him in case he needed to hide from Sirius Black.

The only thing that took Harry's mind off it the next day was Draco reminding him at breakfast that he promised to show him and Hermione the Marauder's Map. Harry had

completely forgotten and had left the map in his school trunk. So, they agreed to meet up in an hour in an empty classroom. Harry returned to his dorm room to get the map.

When Harry emerged from the Slytherin common room, Hermione was waiting for him in the dungeon corridor. Strangely, the torches were out, and it was quite dark. She asked to borrow his invisibility cloak to do some important research in the restricted section of the library. Knowing Hermione, Harry chuckled and handed it over. Hermione thanked him and dashed away.

Later, the three meet up in the empty classroom. Harry took the map from his robes and laid it out on the teacher's desk. He showed them how to reveal the map. They were both amazed by its detail. Hermione even seemed to forget her disapproval of it of the day before.

Draco said, "I can see how Fred and George could sneak around the castle at night with this -- *without* an invisibility cloak. They could easily spot Filch and Mrs Norris and avoid them... Peeves too."

"Or any teachers on patrol," said Harry. "And look at all the hidden passages."

"This is a *gold* mine," said Draco, asking hopefully, "You'll share it with us, won't you?"

"Sure, I will," said Harry. "Just like the Invisibility Cloak."

Hermione huffed, "Well, *I'll* certainly never need it."

"Suit yourself," replied Harry and he and Draco both chuckled.

Draco said, "Our common room is here," pointing to a room which the map indicated protruded under the Black Lake.

Hermione raised her eyebrows and said, "Ooh, that would make me nervous."

Then she pointed to another spot on the map. "This is the Gryffindor common room and dormitories."

Draco took a close look. "Right. I see Ginny."

Hermione said, “I haven’t mentioned this, but Ginny’s become good friends with a Ravenclaw girl in her year. They spend a lot of time together. Her name is Luna Lovegood and she’s a bit odd, but...”

“Right,” said Harry, “Ginny told me about Luna when I invited her to study with us...”

“Wait a minute,” interrupted Draco. “This *can’t* be right.”

“What?” asked Harry.

“Look,” said Draco placing his finger on a particular spot in the Gryffindor common room. Hermione and Harry peered closer.

The name next to the dot read, *‘Peter Pettigrew’*.

“No way,” said Harry. “The Map must be wrong.”

“Wait...” said Draco, “didn’t you tell us Fred and George said the Map is never wrong?”

“No. They said it never lies... But it *can’t* be Pettigrew,” said Harry. “Sirius Black went to Azkaban twelve years ago for killing Pettigrew in front of a street-full of witnesses.”

Draco suggested, “Maybe it’s his *ghost*.”

But before Harry could respond, Hermione gasped and exclaimed, “Move your finger, Draco!”

Draco flinched and said, “What?”

But Hermione just pushed his finger aside with her hand. “Oh, my God!” she exclaimed.

“What, Hermione?” said Harry impatiently.

“*Look* who’s right next to Pettigrew’s dot,” she said, her voice quaking.

They looked again. It was *‘Ronald Weasley’*. They both stared at it for a few seconds, then at each other, and then at Hermione with questioning looks on their faces.

“Don’t you see?!” exclaimed Hermione, sounding exasperated.

“We see Ron’s dot. So what?” said Harry. Draco nodded.

“OK,” said Hermione. “I see I’m going to have to explain this. It’s obvious to me, but I had to put two and two... or maybe a three and four together...”

“We’re listening,” interrupted Draco impatiently.

“OK. Sirius Black tried to break into *Gryffindor* tower,” began Hermione. She continued to tick off facts:

“Peter Pettigrew was killed twelve years ago by Sirius Black.”

“Ron got his pet rat, Scabbers, from his brother, Percy -- who had him even before he started at Hogwarts seven years ago.”

“Normal rats only live about three years or so.”

“Ron usually carries Scabbers in his pocket or in his school bag when he’s outside his dorm room.”

“Scabbers is *not* on the Map.”

“The Map never lies.”

“Therefore, the only thing Scabbers can be is the *Animagus* of Peter Pettigrew.”

“Conclusion: Sirius Black is after *Peter Pettigrew*, not *you*, Harry.”

Harry and Draco both stared at Hermione with their mouths open for at least ten seconds.

Then Harry slowly said, “You are truly... incredible... amazing... and wonderful, Hermione.”

Hermione beamed.

“So, he’s like Professor McGonagall then, but a *rat* instead of a cat?” asked Harry.

“Correct,” said Hermione.

Draco looked at Hermione in astonishment and said, “It sounds *too* fantastic. How *can* it be true? Who would *believe* it?”

Hermione said to Draco, “So you believe it *too*, even though you don’t *want* to.”

“Yes. Because I can’t think of a better explanation,” admitted Draco, looking dumbfounded. “But it raises so many questions...”

“Then that’s what we need to discuss,” said Hermione. “So, whom do we tell and how do we prove it?”

Harry asked, “How did Pettigrew survive when everyone said he’d been blown to bits? How did Black know that? How did he find out where Pettigrew was hiding? Why did Pettigrew live as a rat all this time?”

“There’s got to be something major going on here -- something underlying everything... something we don’t understand,” concluded Draco.

“I agree. But I don’t think that changes the situation,” said Hermione. “I think we should take this to Professor McGonagall. She’s an Animagus. She’ll know what to do.”

“But how do we convince her without showing her the Map?” said Draco.

“Don’t be ridiculous,” said Hermione. “We *must* show her the Map. It’s our only proof. Without it, she’ll think we’re mad.”

“But she’ll *confiscate* it for sure,” said Draco.

Then Harry said, “Hermione’s right. But I don’t want to take this to McGonagall, or *any* teacher. We need to go straight to Professor Dumbledore. Agreed?”

Hermione immediately said, “Yes.”

Draco hesitated, looked at Hermione and then nodded his head.

Harry continued, “We’re not going to wait this time like we did with Riddle’s diary. We’re going *right now*. We don’t know the password to his office, so we’ll either try waiting in the corridor, or wait until dinner -- since he rarely eats lunch on Sunday.”

“I say we send him an owl immediately,” said Hermione. “This is an *emergency*. The Christmas holidays starts this Friday afternoon. Ron will be going home, and ‘Scabbers’ may not make it back alive.”

“Do it, Hermione,” said Harry.

They went directly to the owlery. Hermione wrote the note and sent it with Aristotle.

They then went to the library and waited. It was no more than fifteen minutes before Madam Pince came over and told them Professor Dumbledore wanted to see them in his office immediately.

As they walked, Hermione fell behind at one point. They turned a corner in the corridor and Hermione did not follow. Harry went back to see what was holding her up. She was stooped down a good distance back, apparently buckling her shoe. A moment later she finished and ran to catch up with them.

The Gargoyle guarding the revolving spiral staircase stood aside as they approached. They went up and knocked on Professor Dumbledore’s office door. The door swung open, and they walked in. Dumbledore was sitting behind his desk looking slightly bemused. There were already three chairs positioned in front of his desk. He gestured for them to come forward and sit. They walked forward, but none of them sat; they stood in front of their chairs looking anxious.

Professor Dumbledore noted this, and his expression became more sober. “I see I am not going to be disappointed. By now, I have come to expect very serious news whenever you three come to my office.”

Dumbledore turned to give Hermione his full attention. “What is it this time, Miss Granger?”

It was already understood among the three that Hermione would do the talking.

“Please, sir, we need to show you something, first,” said Hermione.

The three of them approached Dumbledore’s desk standing shoulder to shoulder. Harry took the Marauder’s Map from his robes and placed it in front of the headmaster. Hermione stretched out her arm and pointed to two labeled dots in the Gryffindor common room.

Hermione started to speak, “Sir, we...” but Dumbledore held up his hand for silence.

He continued to stare at the map. His eyes darted around it, seeming to try and take it all in. Then he pulled out his wand and began waving it over the map and muttering very quietly. He also tapped the corners and center of map with his wand. After about a minute, Dumbledore sat back in his chair, looked up at them and said, “Remarkable. Truly remarkable.”

Hermione began again, “Sir, we...” but Dumbledore cut in again and said, “First tell me about this map -- *everything* you know. Withhold nothing. It is essential.”

Hermione opened her mouth, but Harry jumped in and said, “It’s mine, sir.”

Harry told Professor Dumbledore everything that Fred and George had told him about it, why they had given it to him, and how to operate it. Harry thought he noticed a slight smile as Dumbledore nodded his head when Harry mentioned Fred and George.

When Harry finished, Dumbledore said, “Thank you, Harry. And now, Miss Granger, your theory, please.”

Again, Draco and Harry were amazed but not surprised at the precision and efficiency of Hermione’s presentation.

Professor Dumbledore sat with the tips of his finger pressed together as she spoke. He listened intently.

When she finished, Dumbledore said, “I cannot think of *any other* explanation. Very well done, Miss Granger.”

Hermione’s shoulders raised and fell as she took a great deep breath.

Harry had expected her to be elated by Professor Dumbledore’s praise, but instead she looked *relieved*.

Dumbledore told them to be seated. Then he got up and walked over to the fireplace. He spoke into the fire, “Professor McGonagall, Professor Lupin, Professor Snape, I need to see you in my office immediately.”

Within seconds, the three teachers had stepped out of the flames and were facing the headmaster. Looking over their shoulders, the three students could see their teachers glancing at them with, ‘What now?’ expressions on their faces.

“Thank you for coming so quickly. These students have just brought me some truly remarkable information. I want your advice on how to move forward. Please follow me.”

He led them around to the back of his desk, so they flanked him facing it. Their eyes were all drawn to the map while Dumbledore observed them. Harry saw Professor Lupin’s eyes widen in surprise as he looked at it, but the rest of his face remained blank. Professors McGonagall and Snape, on the other hand, had questioning looks on their faces.

“Ah, Remus,” said Dumbledore, noticing Lupin’s reaction. “Perhaps you can reveal something more about this map than Miss Granger has been able to. If you please, it is *vital*ly important. Without being overly dramatic, I would venture to say... a matter of life and death.”

All eyes turned to Professor Lupin who glanced at Harry. He cleared his throat and told the story of the Marauder’s Map.

He finished by saying, “It was confiscated by Mr Filch in our seventh year, but by that time, we really didn’t need it.”

Dumbledore said, “Thank you, Remus. A truly brilliant piece of magic. You could have easily earned significant recognition in any number of notable wizarding academic journals had you published your accomplishment. But that is no longer here nor there...”

Harry noticed that Professor Snape’s facial reaction was quite the opposite of Dumbledore’s.

“You assert that the map never lies, Remus, is that correct?” asked Dumbledore.

“Correct, sir,” said Lupin.

“Yes. Then it is precisely *this*, which we are here to discuss...” He pointed to the nearly touching dots of ‘*Ronald Weasley*’ and ‘*Peter Pettigrew*’ in the Gryffindor common room. “Please look closely.”

Lupin, McGonagall, and Snape all bent over to look.

Professor Lupin reacted first, “Impossible!”

Professor Snape looked at Dumbledore skeptically, “You can’t seriously trust this... *thing.*”

Professor McGonagall continued to stare intently at the map until she suddenly straightened up and gasped -- just like Hermione had in the empty classroom. But all she said was, “Animagus!”

Chapter 11 – Hello, Peter

The teachers continued to discuss the meaning of Peter Pettigrew’s presence on the Marauder’s Map and a course of action.

“Why would Peter Pettigrew go into hiding... letting people think he was dead?” asked McGonagall. “...and for *twelve* years.”

“That, I believe, is the *key* question, Minerva,” said Dumbledore. “What was he afraid of?”

“Clearly, Sirius Black,” said Snape.

“Right now, most certainly,” agreed Dumbledore. “Sirius Black tried to get into the *Griffindor* dormitory, not Slytherin. He is *clearly* after Peter Pettigrew.”

Then Dumbledore held up a questioning finger, “But what about the time *before* Sirius Black escaped from Azkaban -- all those years Pettigrew remained in hiding? No one had *ever* escaped from Azkaban before. Pettigrew should have felt *safe* with Black in prison. And he would have been *celebrated*; he was declared a *hero* for confronting Black in that street full of Muggles. So, whom did he fear? Perhaps you can provide a theory, Severus?”

Snape looked very uncomfortable. “He must have been afraid of the Dark Lord’s followers -- that others, like Black, would seek vengeance for...” his words trailed off.

“For Lord Voldemort’s downfall, you mean?” asked Dumbledore. “But would not they be angry with *Black* for that? It was *Black’s* betrayal of James and Lilly that led directly to

Lord Voldemort's downfall. Would not his followers consider that Pettigrew had conveniently done their job for them? In Azkaban, Black was as good as dead -- and by agonizingly slow torture at the hands of the Dementors."

Dumbledore paused. "I ask again, if Peter Pettigrew were afraid of Lord Voldemort's followers, then *why*? There is either something about this we do not know... or else something we think we know is *wrong*."

There was silence for a long time.

Professor Lupin had been leaning over with both of his hands pressed on Dumbledore's desk, looking down. He suddenly pulled himself upright and looked straight at Dumbledore, his eyes wide. He spoke slowly as if exploring a theory as he went.

"We believed that Sirius betrayed James and Lilly... because Peter accused him of it in public... and was then killed by Sirius... But now we know Peter did *not* die... Instead, he went into hiding -- letting everyone *believe* that's what happened. What if it were... the *other way around*? ...*Peter* betrayed James and Lilly ...Sirius went after *him* ...and was *framed* by *Peter*?"

"Ridiculous," said Snape.

"Why is it so, Severus?" asked Dumbledore.

"Because we know the kind of man Sirius Black was and what he was capable of," snarled Snape.

"A man's *life* is at stake, Severus," cautioned Dumbledore. "I need you to answer two questions. First, when you were performing services for the Order, were you ever aware of or heard of Sirius Black ever having come into contact with Lord Voldemort?"

Professor Dumbledore stared intently at his Potions Master, who stared back, looking angry.

"No," said Snape reluctantly.

"Second, I now ask the same question in regard to Peter Pettigrew," said Dumbledore somberly.

This time Snape seemed to struggle. His lips quivered. Finally, he said, “Yes,” adding quickly, “but I only heard *rumors*.”

Everyone in the room gasped, except Professor Dumbledore.

Snape responded, explaining, “I dismissed them in the light of *subsequent* events. It only made sense to do so.”

“Perhaps, Severus, perhaps,” said Dumbledore coolly. “But a supposedly *guilty* man has spent twelve years in Azkaban while a supposedly *posthumous hero* has remained very much alive and in hiding all the while.”

McGonagall asked, “Why didn’t Black claim his innocence? The story is he laughed when he was captured.”

“That tells you all you need to know,” said Snape conclusively.

Lupin looked at Snape and just shook his head. “Sirius Black was never given a trial. He never had a *chance* to defend himself.”

“There are only two people who can tell us the truth -- Black and Pettigrew. And we are getting to the bottom of this *right now*,” said Dumbledore with finality, adding, “Severus, please fetch a bottle of Veritaserum and its antidote from your stores.”

Professor Snape bowed in acknowledgement and departed.

Dumbledore turned to Professor McGonagall, “Minerva, I want you to go and escort Mr Weasley and his *‘rat’* to this office. Any pretext will do. But most importantly, do *nothing* that might raise the alarm to Pettigrew. As a last resort, use any means necessary and, I mean, *any means*, to deliver them here. Peter Pettigrew must *not* escape.”

McGonagall said “Yes, Headmaster,” and departed.

Professor Snape returned first. He and Professor Lupin continued to eye each other. Snape muttered, “I still wonder how Black got into the castle...”

“Severus...” said Dumbledore, “not now.” It sounded like a warning.

Harry, Draco, and Hermione had sat completely silent the whole time.

Harry could sense there was as much *not* being said among the teachers as there had been said. He assumed it was because of his, Draco's and Hermione's presence. He did not want to bring any attention to themselves because he was afraid they would be asked to leave. He was sure Draco and Hermione were thinking the same thing. They all wanted to stay.

Sirius Black possibly *innocent!* Harry could hardly believe it. In fact, he did *not* believe it. It was just *too* much. There *had* to be an explanation.

Harry saw that Snape, Lupin and Dumbledore were closely watching the Marauder's Map -- presumably keeping track of Professor McGonagall's progress. He also noticed that Hermione was *very slowly* swiveling in her chair so that she was eventually facing the office door. She seemed to be getting something with her right hand inside her robes.

Dumbledore, Snape, and Lupin all looked up from the map and toward the office door. It swung open and Ron came through with Professor McGonagall behind him with her hand on his shoulder. Scabbers was peeking out of a pocket of Ron's robes.

Without warning, Scabbers leaped out, hit the floor, and was already streaking out the door when there was a flash of red light that hit Scabbers and sent him flying. He bounced off the wall, landed hard on the stone floor and lay still on his back with his four paws in the air. The only motion was the rise and fall of his tiny chest.

This happened before anyone, even Professor Dumbledore, had been able to react.

Everyone, that is, except Hermione.

She was standing with her wand arm held straight out.

Everyone turned to stare at her, except Ron, who yelled, "SCABBERS! You've *killed* him!" while still in the grip of Professor McGonagall. His eyes were on the rat.

Professor Lupin moved from behind the desk, past McGonagall and Ron and gently picked up the unconscious rat. "He's just stunned, Mr Weasley. Professor Dumbledore will revive him."

Dumbledore said very calmly, "Well done, Miss Granger. I dare say you saved us considerable time in recapturing him and -- very more likely -- you prevented his complete escape. It was almost as if you *knew* what was going to happen."

He gave her a slight wink, and then said, “Harry, if you don’t mind giving up your chair...”

Harry stood up and moved back.

Professor Dumbledore gestured to Lupin, who walked over to Harry’s chair, gently laid the rat on the seat, and then stood behind it.

Draco stood up and exclaimed while pointing, “Look! The rat’s missing a toe on its front paw.”

They all saw it.

Professor Dumbledore signaled and he and the teachers took out their wands.

Ron looked confused and wailed, “What are you *doing* to Scabbers?”

McGonagall hushed him saying, “Be quiet, Mr Weasley.”

Professor Dumbledore pointed his wand at the rat. Blue light shot out of the tip and surrounded the rat, which immediately began to inflate -- no, to *transform*. In a matter of seconds, instead of a rat, on the chair sat a small man with a rat-like face. He was still unconscious, but his arms and legs were twitching.

Ron was the only person who was surprised. His eyes and mouth were wide open. Then he stammered, “What’s going *on*? What have you *done* to Scabbers?”

“Mr Weasley,” began Dumbledore, “I regret to inform you that your rat, Scabbers, is, in fact, an Animagus wizard named Peter Pettigrew.”

It took a moment for it to sink in, then Ron gagged as if he were going to throw up.

“Minerva, please take Mr Weasley back to Gryffindor tower,” directed Dumbledore. “A temporary Memory Charm would be appropriate, I think.”

“Yes, Professor Dumbledore,” said McGonagall.

Dumbledore added. “We shall await your return. I am sure you do not want to miss this.”

“Thank you, Albus,” said McGonagall. She spun Ron around, who still looked both shocked and sick, and marched him out of the office.

Dumbledore then waved his wand and ropes flew out from the tip and bound Pettigrew firmly to the chair by the chest, arms, and legs.

“Severus, please administer the Veritaserum,” said Dumbledore calmly.

Professor Snape withdrew a small bottle from his robes. He tilted Pettigrew’s head back, so his slack mouth opened naturally. He un-stoppered the bottle and carefully poured three drops of the liquid into Pettigrew’s mouth. Then he stoppered the bottle and stepped back. Snape’s face was inscrutable.

Professor Dumbledore took out a long roll of parchment, ink and quill and set them on his desk.

He waved his wand. The parchment unrolled, the ink bottle un-stoppered, and the quill jumped into the air and dipped itself into the ink. It then moved over the top of parchment as if ready to write on command.

Dumbledore spoke and the quill began to write. “Begin: Herein is the witnessed testimony of Peter Pettigrew at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, before the undersigned on the eighteenth of December, nineteen-hundred ninety-three, Albus Dumbledore interviewer... Pause.”

The quill stopped writing.

Draco nudged Harry and pointed to Pettigrew’s right hand. Harry looked and he saw that the index finger was missing, just as the rat’s toe was missing.

“Ah,” said Dumbledore, “The missing finger... All they found of Pettigrew at the scene was his finger.”

Lupin said angrily, “I bet he did that *himself*.”

A few minutes later, Professor McGonagall returned.

Dumbledore said, “Let us begin.” He pointed his wand at Pettigrew and said, “*Enervate*.”

Pettigrew pulled his head back upright, swallowed and smacked his lips. He opened his eyes and slowly looked around. He did not react to his surroundings -- certainly not like he had done as a rat. Then he seemed to focus on Professor Dumbledore and just stared at him.

Dumbledore said, "Resume... Interrogation:" and the quill started writing.

Dumbledore: "What is your name?"

Pettigrew: "Peter Pettigrew." He spoke in a dull monotone.

Dumbledore: "Did you betray James and Lilly Potter to Lord Voldemort?"

Pettigrew: "Yes."

Dumbledore: "Did you falsely accuse Sirius Black of this betrayal and fake your own murder?"

Pettigrew: "Yes."

Dumbledore: "Were you, rather than Sirius Black, the Secret Keeper of the Potter's hiding place?"

Pettigrew: "Yes."

Dumbledore: "Did you give Lord Voldemort the location of the Potter's hiding place."

Pettigrew: "Yes."

Dumbledore: "Did you act as a spy for Lord Voldemort against the Order of the Phoenix?"

Pettigrew: "Yes."

Dumbledore: "Why did the Potter's make you Secret Keeper instead of Sirius Black?"

Pettigrew: "Because Sirius Black said the Dark Lord would not suspect that I was the Secret Keeper and would go after him instead. Sirius would be a decoy."

Dumbledore: "Why have you been in hiding for twelve years?"

Pettigrew: "Several of the Dark Lord's trusted lieutenants knew I provided the information on the Potter's location which resulted in his downfall. They assumed it was a trap. They would have killed me."

Dumbledore: "Then Sirius Black had nothing to do with Lord Voldemort and is completely innocent?"

Pettigrew: “Yes.”

Dumbledore continued to ask questions.

The truth was shocking. Harry was getting angrier and angrier. He wanted to *kill* Pettigrew.

Draco and Hermione kept looking nervously at Harry.

Dumbledore finally paused the quill and asked if anyone had any questions for the record. No one did.

Dumbledore said, “Resume... This concludes the statement of Peter Pettigrew under the influence of Veritaserum. Acknowledged by the undersigned... Peter Pettigrew.”

Dumbledore glanced at the document. Space was left for Pettigrew’s signature.

Then Dumbledore continued, “Resume... Instruction: Include the standard suspect refusal disclaimer and add: It is the responsibility of the Ministry of Magic to pursue an inquiry into Mr Pettigrew’s motives and other matters. Witnessed by...” He then listed the names of the witnesses -- himself, Lupin, McGonagall, Snape -- and left room for their signatures, concluding, “End.”

Dumbledore had each of his teachers sign the document and then signed it himself.

He then said, “I am certain Mr Pettigrew will not voluntarily sign once Severus gives him the antidote, but that is no matter. I have so indicated. The Ministry will know what to do, but to be sure...”

Dumbledore touched the document and two exact copies popped from it. He rolled up each copy and affixed his wax seal. He also wrote a quick note and attached it to one of the scrolls. He called Fawkes to him and held out the scroll with the note. The phoenix grasped it with one foot.

“Take this to Amelia Bones.” Fawkes disappeared in a flash of golden light.

He handed the other copy to Professor McGonagall. “Wait twenty-four hours and send this to Barnabas Cuffe.”

She smiled slyly and nodded.

“What about Fudge?” asked Lupin.

“The Minister will find out from Madam Bones, which is the way I want it,” replied Dumbledore, holding the original. “I expect the Aurors will be here within thirty minutes to collect Pettigrew.”

Dumbledore then looked at each of them, including Harry, Hermione and Draco and asked, “Now, before we fully revive Peter Pettigrew, are there any unofficial questions any of you would like to ask him?”

Harry had noticed that Professor Dumbledore had looked at Professor Snape twice, ending up on him.

“Yes,” said Snape. He faced Pettigrew.

Snape: “Mr Pettigrew, did you ever tell Severus Snape that you were the Potter’s Secret Keeper?”

Pettigrew: “No.”

Snape: “Did you ever tell Severus Snape that you were a spy for the Dark Lord?”

Pettigrew: “No.”

Snape: “Did you every talk to Severus Snape about your plans to betray the Potters?”

Pettigrew: “No.”

Snape: “Why did you not speak to Severus Snape regarding these questions?”

Pettigrew: “Because I thought Severus Snape was a spy for Albus Dumbledore. I told the Dark Lord, but he said Severus Snape was a double agent and would not believe otherwise.”

“No further questions,” said Snape holding his head high and looking triumphant.

Harry could not contain himself. He almost shouted, “*Pettigrew, why did you betray my parents?*”

In the same monotone, Pettigrew said, “I thought the Dark Lord was going to win. He wanted to kill Harry Potter. Giving him their secret location was the only way to gain his trust and join the winning side.”

And then Harry asked the question that he had first asked Professor Dumbledore at the end of his first year, “*Why* did Voldemort want to kill me?”

“I don’t know,” said Pettigrew.

Harry was crestfallen.

Professor Lupin started forward. He looked like he wanted to strangle Pettigrew with his bare hands.

But Dumbledore said firmly, “Remus, Azkaban will be *far* worse.” And Lupin stopped.

“I have just decided *against* giving Mr Pettigrew the antidote,” declared Dumbledore. “I do not wish to subject anyone to what I am sure would sound like a stuck pig.” He smiled.

“Severus, Minerva, you may go. I want this to remain a secret until it comes out in the Daily Prophet.”

They both nodded and left.

Dumbledore looked at Lupin and said, “Remus, I am afraid I must ask you this... but do *you* know how to contact Sirius Black?”

Draco and Harry looked shocked by the question, but Hermione only watched Lupin very closely as he answered.

Lupin said, “No, sir!” quite emphatically.

Professor Dumbledore gave an obvious sigh of relief.

In seeing this, Lupin spoke again, “But since this is a time for truth, there is something I have *not* told you, and I am ashamed to have withheld it.”

Professor Dumbledore looked at him inquiringly.

“Sirius Black is an Animagus too. He becomes a large dog. I think that’s how he’s eluded the Dementors so far. I’m guessing he used the secret tunnel under the Whomping Willow to enter the grounds.”

Harry, Hermione, and Draco looked shocked, though Dumbledore did not.

Lupin continued, “Until today, I thought Sirius had been the Potter’s Secret Keeper and had betrayed James and Lilly to Voldemort. I assumed he had gotten into the castle using Dark Magic. I am sorry for not telling you about Sirius.”

Lupin turned to Harry and appeared to have tears in his eyes. “Harry, ...James, Sirius and Peter were my best friends at school. It was among the worst days of my life when I learned that Sirius had betrayed us and that James, Lilly and Peter were dead. I wanted *revenge*, but Sirius was caught and sent to Azkaban. So, I wanted him to *suffer* there for what I thought he had done.”

Then he turned and pointed to the map still on Dumbledore’s desk. “When I saw Peter on the Map tonight -- a map I help create -- I knew the *truth*. There is *no* punishment severe enough for what he did.”

With that final statement, Lupin turned toward Pettigrew and spat on the back of his head.

Dumbledore looked at Lupin dispassionately. “Remus, will you please escort Mr Malfoy and Miss Granger to... wherever they would like to go. I would like a word with Harry.”

Draco and Hermione moved to leave. Hermione briefly turned to look at Harry and mouthed, ‘*Library.*’ They met Professor Lupin at the door, and he closed it behind him on the way out.

Dumbledore folded up the Marauder’s Map, walked around his desk, and handed it back to Harry. “Another possession of your father’s which I think you deserve to keep. Of course, I expect you to let me borrow it if I ever have need of it.”

Harry nodded. Dumbledore smiled.

Just then, Fawkes returned in a flash of light above them and dropped a note which Professor Dumbledore caught in his hand.

“Ah, yes. The Aurors will be here shortly. Madam Bones is coming herself. I want you to be here to see them take Pettigrew away. I want it to be of some consolation in what has been a shocking revelation.”

Harry could only ask, “What happens next?”

Dumbledore looked uncertain. “That is for you and Sirius Black to work out. I do not know when or how. He may not believe what he will soon read in the Daily Profit. He may think it is simply a ruse to catch him. We shall just have to wait. But I can tell you this. He is your *godfather*, Harry, and I can only hope he wishes to fulfill that role.”

Harry nodded, saying, “Professor Lupin told me he was...”

There was a knock on the office door. Four tough looking wizards came in with Madam Bones. They were all business. They affixed a mirror-like metal collar around Pettigrew’s neck they said would prevent him from transforming back into a rat. They vanished the ropes binding him, then manacled his legs together and his arms behind his back. Finally, they rendered him unconscious with a spell and levitated him out of the office.

Madam Bones remained behind. She told Dumbledore that Pettigrew would be in Azkaban within minutes awaiting trial by the Wizengamot.

Dumbledore said he looked forward to it.

She also said she had informed the Minister for Magic. She said Fudge had not been pleased that Dumbledore had not informed him first. She said she told the Minister it was, foremost, a law enforcement matter. Then she smiled at Dumbledore and said, “This is going to be the biggest news story since Voldemort’s downfall.”

She shook hands with Dumbledore. Then, right before she left, she looked at Harry and said, “I’m sorry, Mr Potter.” It looked like she really meant it.

Harry looked at Professor Dumbledore and asked again, “Sir, why did Voldemort want to kill me?”

Dumbledore shook his head, “I am very sorry, Harry. But I still cannot tell you that now. Someday, I promise.”

Dumbledore walked over to Harry and placed his hand on his shoulder. “I think you should go visit your friends waiting in the library.”

Dumbledore clearly never missed anything.

“Then perhaps you might take a walk in the grounds, visit Hagrid and his beautiful Hippogriffs. Then I think you shall be ready for our delicious Sunday feast.”

As he reached the door, Harry remembered something. He turned around and said, “I’m sure I saw him -- Sirius Black. There was a large black dog sitting at the top of the stands at my last Quidditch match... the one where I fell off my broom.”

“Watching you play, you say?” Dumbledore smiled and said, “Given what we have learned, that does not surprise me at all.”

Chapter 12 – The Firebolt

In the brief chat with Dumbledore, Harry had forgotten about Pettigrew, but then it came rushing back into his mind. It made him angry all over again. He wanted to scream. He forced himself to calm down and he was feeling a little better by the time he got to the library.

Draco and Hermione were both waiting for him.

Draco asked, “So what happened after we left?”

Harry told them that Professor Dumbledore had wanted him to witness Pettigrew being taken away to Azkaban to await trial. He mentioned the magical collar the Aurors had put on Pettigrew to prevent him from transforming.

Hermione said she had read about them. The collar was a lifetime punishment when an Animagus used their ability to commit a serious crime -- the least of which in his case was being an unregistered Animagus. The collars were almost impossible to remove.

Draco said the collars sounded like Dark Magic to him.

Harry also told them Professor Dumbledore said Harry would just have to wait and see what happened between him and Sirius because he would probably think the whole thing was just a trick to capture him.

Harry said, “Let’s go down to Hagrid’s. I don’t want to think about this anymore now.”

They trooped across the snowy grounds. On the way there, Harry said, “Oh. I forgot to tell you... Dumbledore gave me back the Marauder’s Map.”

“No way!” exclaimed Draco.

“I don’t believe it,” said Hermione.

“It surprised me too,” said Harry, “especially when he said he’d ask to borrow it if he needed it.”

They all wondered at the inscrutability of their famous headmaster.

“There’s one other thing to clear up,” said Hermione looking self-satisfied. “Now that Pettigrew’s caught and Black’s innocent, you two don’t have any reason to try learning the unforgivable curses,” adding, “not *yet* anyway.”

Harry and Draco could not argue, but they did look a bit disappointed.

Hagrid was pleased to see them, and they talked about a lot of ordinary things -- their classes, Quidditch, and what they were planning to do for the Christmas holidays. Harry appreciated that Dumbledore had prescribed just what he needed -- normalcy.

Hagrid walked back with them to the feast.

Later, as Harry lay in bed trying to sleep, he tried to imagine what the last week of term before Christmas vacation was going to be like after the story came out.

His imagination did not come close.

At breakfast on Monday, Harry noticed that Professor Dumbledore and all the teachers and staff were present. That was quite unusual. However, the breakfast went on normally -- students chatting and eating. Then the mail arrived. Owls delivered letters, packages, and newspapers. Perhaps one in twenty students subscribed to the Daily Prophet. Several were delivered to the High Table.

Within seconds, there were bursts of loud chatter and students began to cluster around students holding the Daily Prophet. A buzz quickly spread throughout the Great Hall, which got louder and louder.

Draco subscribed to the Prophet, and he opened his copy next to Harry.

The headline filled the entire top half of the front page. It practically screamed.

*SHOCKING MINISTRY REVELATION
SIRIUS BLACK INNOCENT!*

The headline below the fold was only slightly smaller.

*PETTIGREW ALIVE!
CAUGHT IN WEB OF LIES AND DECEIT*

The story spanned the rest of the front page and continued on page two. It filled the whole of the second page interspersed with sensational facts in large bold text boxes. Unprecedented, the story also continued on pages three and four. Only on page five did other stories appear with their own headlines, but they were all related stories -- background, comments, theories and, of course, wild speculation.

Other Slytherins were already gathering around Draco and Harry to gape and read.

Harry said, "I'll look at it later," and pushed his way out of the encroaching students. He started on his way out of the Great Hall with his school bag, when he heard Dumbledore announce, "May I please have your attention?"

The noise died down at once. Harry turned around to listen.

"Thank you. By now you have all seen or heard about what has been reported in today's Daily Prophet newspaper. These events did occur, largely as described, in this school late yesterday morning. The credit for this must once again go to Miss Hermione Granger, Mr Draco Malfoy, and Mr Harry Potter. I award them each one-hundred points."

There were whoops from the Gryffindors and Slytherins.

"I am also awarding twenty-five points each to Mistery Fred and George Weasley who, indirectly but very importantly, helped in correcting this gross miscarriage of justice."

There were more whoops from the Gryffindor table and from the students in the other houses who appreciated Fred's and George's contributions to student life at Hogwarts.

Fred and George both looked very confused.

Dumbledore added, looking at them, “Miss Granger will be able to explain your role.” This generated quite a few laughs, especially at the Gryffindor table.

But Dumbledore was not finished. “Before I have you return to finish your excellent breakfast, I have one more announcement.”

The Hall quieted down once again.

“The Ministry of Magic has informed me, against my wishes, that the Dementors will remain in place until Sirius Black comes forward.”

This caused a loud murmur of protest which Professor Dumbledore met by raising his hands, which brought instant silence.

“The Ministry believes that Sirius Black may think this is an elaborate ruse to aide in his capture. If so, they believe Black may make another attempt to enter the castle to find Peter Pettigrew. In doing so, they believe he may be willing to use extreme violence to accomplish that goal. Therefore, the Ministry believes we are still in danger and will keep all additional security measures in place until they are no longer needed. I shall keep you informed.”

The chatter resumed as soon as Dumbledore had finished. Few students were interested in finishing their breakfasts.

Harry continued into the Entrance Hall and was soon joined by Draco and Hermione.

Hermione said, “I just heard Professor McGonagall tell Ron that he can’t go into Hogsmeade until Black comes forward. She also said she had contacted his parents to recommend that he and the other Weasleys remain at Hogwarts over Christmas -- for *his* protection *and* theirs.”

“Wow,” said Draco. “They’re almost making it sound like there’s *more* danger now than there was before... I mean, Black is *innocent*. I don’t get it.”

Hermione said, “I thought this would happen after what Professor Dumbledore said yesterday. I know it isn’t fair, but we don’t want anyone getting hurt, do we?” Before Draco or Harry could answer she added, “But there is something *more* important we need to agree on.”

“What’s that?” Harry and Draco asked together.

“We need a story of how we figured out Scabbers was an Animagus -- unless you want to tell everyone about the Map,” said Hermione, who, as usual, was one step ahead.

Draco and Harry exclaimed, “No way!”

Hermione smiled mischievously and said, “How about this? I’ll say Fred and George asked me to help them revising for their O.W.L. exams. They didn’t want anyone else to know, so they asked me to meet them in the common room after midnight. I helped them a while and then they went to bed. I stayed up to read a bit in front of the fire. I fell asleep but woke up later when I heard noises. I peeked over the comfy chair to see Scabbers going after snack crumbs on the floor. Not realizing I was there, he transformed into a man to eat some leftovers on the tables and then transformed back into a rat. Next morning, I reported it to Professor McGonagall. She was skeptical, but given current security measures, she followed up. When the teachers investigated, they discovered that Scabbers was Pettigrew.”

Draco and Harry said it sounded good, but Draco asked why she was bringing Fred and George into the story.

Hermione tutted, “Remember, Professor Dumbledore awarded them twenty-five points each and said I would explain their role. I have to give them some reason. I’ll tell Fred, George, and Professor McGonagall. I don’t think we should volunteer the story; just use it if anyone asks.”

Harry said, “That reminds me, why didn’t Professor Dumbledore mention that Sirius is an Animagus?”

“I was wondering that too,” said Hermione. “I think he’s trying to protect him... for the *future*,” said Hermione.

“What do you mean?” asked Draco.

“Do you remember when Professor Dumbledore asked Pettigrew if he had spied for Lord Voldemort against *‘The Order of the Phoenix’*?” asked Hermione.

“Vaguely,” said Draco, asking, “How do you remember this stuff?”

“I *listen*,” said Hermione, sounding a little exasperated. “Anyway, it must have been an organization separate from the Ministry that was fighting against Voldemort last time. I bet Black and others were part of it. Professor Dumbledore doesn’t want to expose Black’s secret ability if he can use it against Voldemort in the future.”

“Wow, Hermione, I think that’s a stretch even for you,” said Draco.

“I’m not so sure,” said Harry.

“Thank you, Harry. After I talk to Professor McGonagall, Fred, and George, I’m going to the library before class to get in a few minutes of research on The Order of the Phoenix. I’ll see you at lunch.”

She gave Draco a slightly dirty look and marched off. But even by Friday afternoon, Hermione had found nothing on The Order of the Phoenix, and this greatly frustrated her. It made her quite testy.

All week long, students from all houses had questioned Harry, Draco, and Hermione about what happened. They repeated Hermione’s story about the discovery and some of what happened in Professor Dumbledore’s office. Her account had become the official one. Professor McGonagall had passed it on to the other teachers and to Dumbledore, who was quite amused by it.

Perhaps predictably, Fred and George were *not* as amused. “Why did you have to make it about something *responsible*, Hermione? *Revising!* Never!” complained George. “Yea,” agreed Fred. “Why couldn’t it have been something *nefarious*... like helping us develop a puking pudding or something.”

“Hey, now that’s a great idea, Fred,” said George. They both laughed, then George said, “Just kidding, Hermione.” Hermione was not so sure.

The story of Sirius Black and Peter Pettigrew had still not worn off even as most students were packing their trunks before getting on the Hogwarts Express for Christmas break. The Daily Profit had printed front-page stories about it the whole week. Many stories attacked the Ministry for a bungled investigation that had sent an innocent man to Azkaban.

However, once the students were on the train, all thoughts turned to the Christmas holidays.

Harry was afraid Professor Dumbledore was not going to allow him to go home with Draco for Christmas. But he was never told not to and did not dare ask permission after not signing up to stay at Hogwarts for Christmas. So, he was on the Hogwarts Express with everyone else.

Harry experienced his first family-like Christmas with Draco and Mr and Mrs Tonks. Nymphadora -- called that only by her parents -- came home Christmas eve and stayed through Boxing Day. It was obvious to Harry that Draco had a bit of a crush on his older cousin.

Harry had a great time. They went to Diagon Alley to do Christmas shopping and enjoyed the decorations and lights in all the shops. Mrs Tonks was a great cook, and everyone stuffed themselves.

Harry received some nice presents. Hermione sent him a daily planner from France with a note saying she did not like skiing any better than flying. Hagrid sent a box of treacle fudge. And, to their surprise, Mrs Weasley sent both him and Draco jumpers -- green with the Slytherin coat of arms in silver. Draco said it had to be for saving Ginny last school year. Harry agreed.

The holidays were over too quickly for Harry's liking. The Tonks had treated him like a valued guest. They would not let him do anything but enjoy himself. It made Harry long for the family he never had.

They were back on the Hogwarts Express before they knew it. Riding on the train back to school reminded Harry of the Dementors, which were still guarding Hogwarts, and Lupin's promise to finish teaching him how to fight them. Reminding Professor Lupin was going to be one of the first things he would do.

When Harry got back to his dorm room to change for the start of term feast, he saw a couple more Christmas presents lying on his bed. One was a long thin package.

Draco saw it at the same time and yelled, "Open it, Harry! Open it!"

Harry ripped frantically at the wrappings, sending them flying in every direction. A second later he was holding a magnificent gleaming broomstick in his hands. He was speechless.

Draco whispered almost reverently, "*A Firebolt...*"

Chapter 13 – The Patronus

“Who sent it to you?” asked Draco. Harry searched among the shredded wrapping and the other presents, but there was no card. Then Draco and Harry looked at each other and thought the same thing.

“Sirius Black,” they said together.

Then Harry shook his head. “It was probably Professor Dumbledore. He let the school buy me my Nimbus.”

But Draco shook his head, “Not a *Firebolt*. It’s a world-class broomstick. There isn’t anyone else.” Then his face lit up, “We’ve got to tell Flint!”

Flint almost passed out with excitement, but then suddenly sobered up and asked Harry about his “Dementor problem.”

Harry explained that he was working with Professor Lupin and should have the problem solved by their next match with Ravenclaw at the end of February. Flint warned he would have to go with Draco as Seeker if Harry did not come through. Flint was worried because Ravenclaw had their best team in years.

Even Hermione, who did not know much about Quidditch, was impressed with the Firebolt. She agreed it could have come from Sirius -- his being Harry’s godfather and the lack of an accompanying card, the main reasons. She told Harry it might be a sign he was beginning to believe that he was not being tricked.

But Harry said, “But he can see the Dementors are still in place. That has to make him think *something’s* not right.”

“I know,” said Hermione, “but there’s nothing we can do.”

After breakfast on Monday, Harry went to see Professor Lupin about continuing the training. He agreed and scheduled it for Thursday evenings.

The next Thursday afternoon was also Defense Against the Dark Arts for the Slytherins. Professor Lupin had managed to secure another Boggart, this time in a large packing case. So, their lesson became an impromptu practical exercise.

Professor Lupin made sure the Boggart was not destroyed this time. He told their class he wanted to make sure his remaining classes received the lesson. To Harry's great disappointment, the bell rang before every student had faced the Boggart, and he was among them.

When Harry came back later that night, Professor Lupin explained that he had made sure that Harry had not faced Boggart earlier, because he did not want a Dementor appearing in the classroom.

"By the way, Harry, what were you going use with *Riddikulus* to defeat the Boggart?" asked Lupin.

"I was going to have it wearing bright yellow robes with big purple poke-a-dots, giant white clown gloves, and big green google eyes on springs dangling out of its hood," said Harry positively.

"Brilliant!" Lupin exclaimed, laughing. "I can see it in my mind. You might well have *blown it up!*" Then he said seriously, "Of course, Harry, I don't want you doing that tonight. You must use the Patronus Charm, because a *real* Dementor won't be defeated by the other."

Professor Lupin had Harry dry-practice the Patronus Charm again. He was a little rusty, but after a few attempts, managed to form a very good non-corporeal barrier.

Then Lupin asked if he were prepared to try against a Boggart-Dementor.

Harry said he was, but he was only able to produce a wisp of vapor before he collapsed. The sound of his mother screaming, Voldemort laughing and ordering her to stand aside was overwhelming. When he came to, Harry felt like he had just run a race.

Professor Lupin gave him chocolate, as he had on the train, and suggested his happy memory was not good enough. Harry had been using the same memory during all his lessons and practice -- the first time he had ridden a broomstick. So, he changed it to the memory of winning his first Quidditch match.

His second attempt against the Boggart-Dementor was no better. For the first time, he also heard his father's voice telling his mother to run while he tried to hold off Voldemort.

Harry realized that Lupin was magically reviving him after his collapses. He felt exhausted.

Professor Lupin gave him more chocolate and suggested Harry had practiced enough for one day. But Harry wanted to try once more. He suddenly thought of the moment Hagrid had told him he was a wizard. Just remembering it made him elated. He had forgotten how liberated he had felt.

This time, Harry generated a good solid looking Patronus barrier that he was able to maintain and keep the Boggart-Dementor at bay. The voices of his father, mother and Voldemort were still there, but very greatly diminished. He actually felt in control.

Professor Lupin used *Riddikulus* to force the Boggart-Dementor back into the trunk. The Boggart-Dementor had changed again into the silvery orb when Lupin faced it -- just as it had at the end of Defense class earlier that day.

Harry felt confident and wanted to try again, but Lupin refused. Lupin gave him more chocolate and congratulated him on his success. Then he brought Harry down to earth. "Remember, Harry, that was a *Boggart*, not a *real* Dementor. A real Dementor would be much, *much* worse. And you must also realize that because it wasn't a real Dementor, much of what you felt was your own fear of the Dementors and those terrible memories. Practice, Harry. Practice is the only way you will get better and stronger. You must practice every day until our lesson next week."

"I'll practice every day, sir," Harry promised.

But hearing his mother's voice again made him say, "Sir, since you knew my father at school, you must have known my mother..." It was not a question, but that was how he meant it.

It was like opening a spigot. Professor Lupin sat Harry down and began to tell him about Lily, his mother -- how exceptional she was in every way -- smart, helpful, kind, caring -- and how everyone loved her. He also told Harry about her courage and bravery in helping the Order fight against Voldemort with James -- as equals. "Only after they had you, did they seek Dumbledore's help in hiding -- to protect you, Harry. You look very much like your father -- except for your mother's green eyes -- but you are much more like your mother in every other way. I see *her* in you. I think that is why Professor Snape treats you the way he does."

"But he's *mean* to me... and *everyone!*" exclaimed Harry.

“Oh, no, Harry,” said Lupin shaking his head. “He’s dismissive and demeaning to most everyone, but *mean* doesn’t begin to describe how he feels about his *enemies*.”

“Well,” said Harry, “he told me he *hated* my father because he was an arrogant and malicious rule breaker, but that he had kept an open mind about me because I’d been sorted into Slytherin.”

“I think *everyone* was surprised when you were sorted into Slytherin. I know you are aware of rumors about you having a Dark Magic destiny... But after meeting you, Harry, I knew it was nonsense. But if you had been sorted into your parent’s house, I do not think Professor Snape would see you in the same way. Yes, he hated your father -- it was mutual -- but it was *nothing* compared to his hatred for Sirius Black. Didn’t you see how he reacted to the possibility of Sirius being innocent when we met in Professor Dumbledore’s office?”

“So, *why* does he hate Sirius so much?” asked Harry.

“In our seventh year, Sirius played a trick on Snape that could have killed him. I can’t tell you what it was, but your father saved Snape’s life. He has never forgiven Sirius, which is his right, but he also never forgave your father because it made him indebted... to an *enemy*,” said Lupin. He sounded a little sad.

Harry shook his head, “Draco was right.”

“About what?” asked Lupin.

“About Hermione not understanding what it feels like to hate someone so much you want them dead. I don’t understand it either,” replied Harry, but then he thought of Peter Pettigrew and Voldemort.

“You are your mother’s son,” said Lupin, which made Harry feel guilty.

Harry asked Professor Lupin one more question before leaving. “It’s about the nicknames on the Marauder’s Map... After what happened in Professor Dumbledore’s office, I figured out Pettigrew was Wormtail, and Sirius was Padfoot. But who were Moony and Prongs?”

Lupin sighed. “Harry, you’re certain to find out eventually... Your *father* was also an unregistered Animagus like Sirius and Peter. He was a stag -- *Prongs*.”

Harry had suspected it but was still astounded by the truth. “Can you tell me more about it?” he asked excitedly.

“Another time, Harry. It’s getting late,” said Lupin uneasily, clearly expecting Harry’s next question.

“Professor, are you an Animagus too? What’s Moony for?”

Lupin looked tense, but said calmly, “No. I am *not* an Animagus. And ‘*Moony*’ was given to me because of my usual somber mood. Good night, Harry.”

As he walked to the library to meet with Draco, Hermione, and Ginny before it closed, he thought about Lupin’s answer. It reminded him of Professor Dumbledore’s answer about what he saw in the Mirror of Erised.

In the few minutes remaining before curfew, Harry told them about his training and what Professor Lupin said. They were fascinated to hear that Harry’s father had also been an Animagus, about the Marauder’s nicknames, and their animosity with Professor Snape.

Draco said, “It seems strange that Professor Lupin isn’t an Animagus too, like his best friends were. Maybe he just doesn’t want to admit it.”

Hermione huffed loudly.

“What are you huffing about?” asked Draco.

“Isn’t it *obvious*?” said Hermione.

Harry, Draco, and Ginny all said, “No.”

“Well, I’m not going to tell you,” declared Hermione. “If Professor Lupin wants to keep it a secret, I won’t tell. You’ll have to figure it out for yourselves.”

Draco complained, “I *hate* it when you do that. It shouldn’t be allowed.”

Before they could argue, Madam Pince ordered them out of the library. And because Hermione and Ginny were headed up and they were headed down, they did not get a

chance to harass Hermione for the answer. Draco just whispered to Ginny, “Try to find out if you can.”

The next day and over the following two weeks, Harry practiced the Patronus Charm every day with Draco, Hermione, and Ginny in their usual empty classroom.

Hermione continued to refuse to reveal what she knew about Professor Lupin even when Draco popped the question at unexpected times trying to trick her into answering. You just could not fool Hermione.

Harry continued to perform well during his private lessons with Professor Lupin. By the third week he could produce a very strong non-corporeal Patronus at will and hold off the Boggart-Dementor for several minutes before breaking a sweat. Harry’s only disappointment was in not being able to produce a corporeal Patronus. Lupin was encouraging, saying it should come with time -- though admitting for some wizards, it never did. At the end of the lesson, Lupin declared Harry’s training was over, concluding, “Harry, you are as ready as you are ever going to be. Just remember to keep practicing every day.”

Harry went to Flint and told him he had solved his “Dementor problem” and was ready to play. Harry even demonstrated his Patronus to Flint. Flint was delighted and impressed. Flint had been tormented thinking he would not be able to take advantage of the Firebolt, which he had witnessed Harry flying masterfully in practice for the last four weeks. It was like Christmas had come again.

Harry was back as Seeker and Draco back to Chaser. Draco did not mind a bit; he knew Harry was the best Seeker at Hogwarts. It gave Harry a full month to practice before their match with Ravenclaw.

The last week in January, Professor Snape once again substituted for Professor Lupin in Defense Against the Dark Arts.

Draco said it was a good thing Professor Lupin had completed Harry’s Patronus training the week before.

Chapter 14 – Slytherin vs Ravenclaw

The Quidditch match between Slytherin and Ravenclaw took place on the third Saturday in February.

Flint started Harry as Seeker as promised. Grant Page, Ravenclaw's Seeker, was good, one of the best Seekers Harry had ever played against. But he was no match for Harry on his Firebolt. Harry could cover the pitch at least twice as fast as Page, but for the first hour of the game, the Snitch had proven to be unusually illusive.

The bright sun was at a low winter angle and very glaring. You just could not see the Snitch with the sun in your face. Harry had to station himself on the pitch with the sun at his back.

The match was going Slytherin's way. They were slowly building a lead, but after nearly an hour, they were only ninety points ahead.

While flying very high, Harry noticed a big black dog emerge from underneath the Whomping Willow and trot toward the Quidditch stadium. Harry smiled as he thought, 'It has to be...'

Then he saw Dementors coming over the school walls and out of the Forbidden Forest toward the dog, which obviously had not yet detected them.

More and more Dementors arrived and were now positioning themselves to cut off the dog in the front and rear.

The dog finally saw what was happening and started to run back toward the Whomping Willow. But it was being boxed in. The dog was not going to make it. Harry saw the dog surrounded and just before he lost sight of it, he saw it collapse onto the ground.

Harry was already speeding toward the massed Dementors -- at least a hundred of them. He had started to the rescue even before he had thought about it. He was unaware of Flint's yells or the buzz from the spectators who had no idea what was happening and why he had flown off. Harry was single-mindedly on a mission...

Save Sirius!

Harry could not see the dog but assumed it was in the center of the dark mass of Dementors below him. He braked and hovered only a few feet over them. In an instant, he felt the cold sweep over him and the unmistakable growing sense of despair.

As he drew his wand from beneath his Quidditch robes, he heard his father's voice and then his mother's scream. But by following Lupin's training, he resisted it, though while doing so, he could not help but think, 'There are so many.'

Harry produced his best Patronus shield and pointed it at the center of the black mass. It reacted by opening like a flower. The Dementors closest to the center stepped back and looked up, revealing not a dog, but a man curled on the snowy ground in a fetal position, in agony, with his hands over his mouth.

Harry was elated, "It's working!"

But very quickly all the Dementors had raised their heads toward him. The effect was overwhelming. Harry's Patronus shield began fading. His mother's pleading grew louder. He heard Voldemort laughing.

Many of the Dementors were now reaching up towards him with their long, scabbed arms as if beckoning him to join them. His Patronus was now no more than thin vapor. Harry heard his mother's final scream, and he was falling. He felt slimy hands gripping him and turning him over. A dark figure was pulling back its hood and lowering its monstrous eyeless face towards his. It's hideous mouth was wide open.

Then there was a burst of bright silvery-white light and the blackness receded. The light was moving and surrounding him. He could see Sirius Black now lying still on his back only feet away, a Dementor gliding away, and four long slender white legs suddenly racing past.

Then his eyes closed, and darkness took him.

Chapter 15 – Hermione's Secret

Harry awoke in the hospital wing feeling terrible.

Hermione and Draco were sitting by his bedside.

Hermione turned and called, "Madam Pomfrey, he's awake."

She bustled over and checked on him. She made him sit up and drink some potion and then handed him a large bar of chocolate and ordered him to eat it.

Harry was very grateful. He started to feel better right away.

“What happened?” he asked.

Draco explained that he, and everyone else, had seen Harry suddenly fly off the pitch towards Hagrid’s hut.

“At first, we thought the Snitch had gone out of bounds, but then realized it must be something else. I flew higher so I could see, and I saw all the Dementors. I couldn’t imagine what you were doing, but knew it wouldn’t end well, so I flew over to Professor Dumbledore and told him what I saw... Well, first he ordered all the teachers near him to follow, and he started out of the stands. Then I think he realized it would take too long and he called to me back to fly him there. He got behind me on my broom and we took off. It was pretty slow with all the extra weight, but a lot faster than running.”

Draco took a breath. “Anyway... By the time we got to you, the Dementors were already scattering because of the Patronus you cast. It was *very* impressive -- a *huge* stag that was circling you and Sirius. It disappeared as soon as we landed.”

“What Stag?” asked Harry uncertainly. “My Patronus shield *failed*. I passed out. The Dementors were about to get me. It must have been Professor Dumbledore casting the Patronus that drove them away,” insisted Harry.

Draco shook his head. “No. It *had* to be you. Professor Dumbledore used his Patronus to keep the Dementors moving back beyond the school boundaries. His Patronus is a Phoenix.”

Harry shook his head, saying, “I *know* it wasn’t me. I’ve never produced a corporeal Patronus. My best is just a shield barrier. But whosever Patronus it was kept us from getting the Dementor’s Kiss. One was just inches from my face.”

Hermione shuddered and said, “But you’re safe now and that’s what matters.”

“What about Sirius?” asked Harry anxiously.

Draco smiled and said, “You saved him too, Harry.”

“But I didn’t!” exclaimed Harry. “Why won’t you listen?”

Hermione answered, “It doesn’t matter now. Sirius is sleeping. Madam Pomfrey gave him something. He was catatonic when he was brought in. The Dementors had him for at least a minute longer than you. He looks terrible.” She glanced over her shoulder at the figure in the bed next to Madam Pomfrey’s office.

Harry followed Hermione’s gaze. It looked like a sheet covering a skeleton. Sirius’ face had been washed and his long hair and beard combed. It revealed a sunken and pale face, though now it appeared unnaturally calm and expressionless. When Harry had last seen his face, it had been contorted in agony.

Looking very worried, Harry asked, “Is he going to be all right?”

Draco answered, “Madam Pomfrey said it’s too soon to tell, but she thinks he should recover with good food and plenty of rest.”

Harry nodded. Then noticing orange light coming through the windows, he asked, “How long have I been here?”

“Hours,” said Hermione. “It’s nearly sunset. Professor Dumbledore’s been by to see you twice already. He wants to talk to you; he wouldn’t let Madam Pomfrey give you a sleeping draught. He asked me to fetch him when you woke up, so I’ll be back in a few minutes.”

Hermione squeezed Harry’s hand, got up and left.

As soon as she had gone, Draco said sadly, “Harry, we lost the match. Flint didn’t call for a timeout soon enough. He was too busy yelling at you and me to get back into the game. By the time he figured out his mistake, Page had just gotten the Snitch. He tried to protest to Madam Hooch, but she said the win was fair according to the rules. Sorry, Harry, but there is no way we can win the Quidditch Cup this year with two losses. Flint blames *you*, of course.”

On hearing this, Harry was surprised to discover that he did not really care. The only thing he felt terrible about was failing against the Dementors after all his training. He was just lucky that someone else had been there in time to save him and Sirius. Harry felt depressed.

Professor Dumbledore entered the room trailed by Hermione. For some reason she looked nervous. They both approached Harry’s bed.

Dumbledore smiled. “I am glad to see you awake and looking much better, Harry. What you did was very brave, and I commend you. Your godfather will be proud you. And your father would be too; *his* Patronus was a stag as well.”

“But I didn’t...” Harry started to protest.

But Dumbledore held up his hand and continued, “You risked your own life to save another. Nothing more need be said.”

It did not matter what Dumbledore said, Harry felt empty. He had utterly failed and only survived because someone else had saved Sirius *and* him.

Harry just shook his head while Dumbledore added, “I have informed the Ministry of Magic that we have... *recovered* Sirius Black. The Dementors guarding the school will have returned to Azkaban by morning.”

Dumbledore turned to Draco, “There is some unfinished business with Harry and Miss Granger that I must attend to, which I now see will make me late for the feast. Mr Malfoy, will you please go and inform Professor McGonagall to begin without me. You may remain there, as Miss Granger and I will arrive shortly.”

Seeing the disappointed look on Draco’s face, Dumbledore added with a wink, “Miss Granger will be able to update you later.”

Draco smiled and left.

Dumbledore suddenly looked *very* serious. “Harry, I am going to ask you to prepare yourself for something completely foreign to anything you have ever experienced before. It may seem like the *world* has gone mad... or that *you* have gone mad. You must trust me and trust your friend, Miss Granger. She will be able to explain everything to you. Do you understand?”

“I’m not sure, sir,” said Harry, whose mind was racing and filled with questions.

“A good answer,” said Dumbledore.

Professor Dumbledore had Hermione close and lock the doors to the hospital wing. Then he waved his wand and conjured a set of Slytherin school robes and said, “Miss Granger and I will turn our backs... Please get out of bed, change out of the hospital pajamas, and put on these robes. Your Quidditch uniform would be too conspicuous.”

This was nothing like Harry had imagined, but he did as Professor Dumbledore asked.

“Good,” said Dumbledore. “I am going to visit Madam Pomfrey in her office until you return.”

Harry glanced at the locked doors to the hospital wing.

Dumbledore said, “Do not worry about the doors.” Then he looked intently at Harry and said, “Remember this above all. You *must not be seen* by anyone. Miss Granger still has your Invisibility Cloak. *Use it.*”

Dumbledore turned and walked to Madam Pomfrey’s office, knocked, and entered when she answered. He looked back once through the crack in the door before he closed it.

“Hermione...” asked Harry, “what’s going *on?*”

As she was pulling out the invisibility cloak, she said, “I’ll explain when we get there. Just do as I say and.. *don’t... say... anything...* until I tell you to.”

She put her hand inside the collar of her robes and drew out a necklace with a long gold chain and pendant. She stepped close to him, so they were face to face. She then placed the end of the chain over Harry’s head, so it was around both their necks.

Harry just stared at her. He had no idea what was going on.

Then she threw the invisibility cloak over the two of them.

Harry started to say, “We’ll never...” and Hermione shushed him quiet.

Then she took the pendent, which looked like a miniature hourglass, and held it up to his face. She said, “This is a *Time-Turner*. We are going back in time so you can finish what you started.”

Before Harry could even begin to get his mind around what she just said, Hermione turned the small hourglass over six or seven times in her hand and then let it go.

Harry was instantly overcome with a sense of rapid motion. The room became a swirl of color and light. He felt like he was going to fall over but Hermione grabbed and steadied him. It was over in moments, but his head still felt like it was spinning.

“The dizzy sensation will clear in a few seconds,” whispered Hermione.

She was right. Harry soon felt steady but a little disoriented -- like being awakened from a sound sleep.

Hermione removed the chain from around Harry’s neck and tucked it back under her collar. “You probably feel disoriented; so, let me guide you. You get used to it... Now we’ve got to move, or someone will bump into us.”

She had her hand on Harry’s back and guided him along. It was as if Harry’s mind was not quite focused yet.

In a few minutes, they were outside the front steps of the castle on the frozen lawn. The frost had already burnt off. Snow from the last storm only remained in areas of constant shadow or where it had drifted.

There were groups of students walking around them chattering. Some were carrying banners and signs. The sun was still in the east; it looked like midmorning. Hermione continued to steer Harry until they were well outside the path of the students. Harry realized the students were on their way to the Quidditch stadium. What was going on?

Hermione stopped and said, “It’s a few minutes to ten. The Quidditch match between Slytherin and Ravenclaw will start then. Remember, we’re here so you can save Sirius.

“Hermione... this is *impossible!*” exclaimed Harry.

“Keep your voice down!” Hermione ordered quietly but emphatically. “I haven’t told you that you could speak yet. And it is clearly *not* impossible. I’ve been using the Time-Turner all year to get to all my lessons scheduled at the same time -- and to catch up on sleep,” adding, “I could really use some extra later today.”

She resumed steering Harry across the grounds towards Hagrid’s hut. When they were about halfway there, Hermione told Harry, “You should be thinking clearly by now... for your *first time* going back. You can ask me anything you want now.”

Harry's mind was suddenly overwhelmed with questions, but he was momentarily tongue-tied, "What... How... But..." Finally, he asked, "Are we going to Hagrid's?" He realized it was not one of the questions he really wanted to ask.

Hermione said, "No. We're going into the edge of the Forbidden Forest closest to where the Dementors surrounded Sirius."

Harry suddenly stopped and Hermione had to catch herself to prevent shedding the invisibility cloak. "Careful, Harry!" exclaimed Hermione. "We *must not* be seen! Remember what Professor Dumbledore told you!"

Harry groaned. He suddenly understood what he was supposed to do.

"Hermione... I *can't* do this," pleaded Harry.

"Of *course*, you can. You've *already* done it," said Hermione matter-of-factly.

"You don't *understand*," Harry sighed, "I've *never* produced a corporeal Patronus."

"Right. This will be the *first* time," said Hermione as if it was preordained.

She had to push Harry along again until they entered the Forest. They only went in far enough to be concealed but still able to see the grounds. For a split-second, Hermione was sure she saw someone -- was it herself? -- further into the trees, but when she looked closer, nothing was there. It must have been a trick of light and shadow.

"We'll wait here until you arrive on your broomstick. Then you can repel the Dementors. It should be about an hour from now. You can hear that the match has just started."

It seemed to Harry that Hermione was going on like it was just some simple homework assignment.

Then something started to nag at Harry, but he could not focus on it. All he could think about was being expected to do something he had never done before. He tried to think of something else.

"How did you think of doing this?" he asked finally.

"I didn't," said Hermione. "Professor Dumbledore did. When I went to tell him you were awake, he told me that only *you* could have produced that Stag Patronus. But when he

saw that you were on the ground unconscious while it was chasing away the Dementors, he was perplexed. Then he remembered how I had stunned Scabbers when he tried to escape from Professor Dumbledore's office."

"Yea... I've been meaning to ask... just *how did* you react so quickly?" asked Harry. "It was like you *knew* it was going to happen."

"I *did* know it was going to happen," answered Hermione. "On our way to Professor Dumbledore's office, when I fell back and you saw me buckling my shoe, there was a future me under the Invisibility Cloak telling me what was going to happen. That's why I was ready. I used the Time-Turner to go back in time. I went back, borrowed the Invisibility Cloak from you after breakfast, and then used it when I told myself what to do without you seeing two of me at the same time. Of course, I don't remember doing it because I changed whatever happened that made me do it."

Harry's mind was spinning. Nothing made sense. But he asked, "Didn't it spook you to hear *yourself* in the corridor?"

"It might have... if it were the *first* time. But it wasn't. When you get one of these, the first thing they tell you is to test it when you are alone. You go back and meet yourself one hour in the past, so you'll understand the sensation. It's an incredibly strange experience because just as you're starting to think about when you are going to do it, your future self appears right in front of you."

"What did you say to yourself?" asked Harry intrigued.

"My future-self said, 'It works. In an hour, go back one hour.' So, I did and appeared in front of my past-self and said the same thing," said Hermione.

"But what if you decided not to go back when your future-self appeared, or you decided to say something different? And what did your future-self do during that hour?" asked Harry.

"Well, to answer first question, that would be a paradox and you're not supposed to let those things happen," answered Hermione. Then she laughed, "As to the second question, I went to the library because it was me. The earlier me waited around in the room for an hour and became the future me that went back, gave the earlier me the instructions, and then went to the library."

Harry's head was still spinning. "It's like a self-fulfilling prophesy. It's barmy."

“I agree,” said Hermione. “I just try not to think about it since it *is* very confusing. It almost defies logic -- and is really hard to explain. But it works. Professor McGonagall got me the Time-Turner from the Ministry of Magic. She told me that if I encountered what appeared to be a potential time paradox, to do whatever I could to prevent it from happening -- ‘to go with the flow’ as she put it -- because doing nothing was sure to be worse. That’s why we’re here now.”

“Well, this one *is* worse,” said Harry. “You’re expecting me to do something I *can’t* do. It *will* cause a paradox, not fix it.”

For the first time since they had arrived, Hermione looked worried. “Harry, don’t say that. If you *don’t* do it, there will be *more* than a paradox. Sirius *and you* will be effectively dead. Don’t you see?”

“What do you mean ‘*effectively*’?” asked Harry.

“Harry, remember... Dementors don’t kill you; they just suck out your soul -- it’s a living death,” explained Hermione.

“Right... Maybe Professor Dumbledore will arrive in time to save us,” Harry offered.

“Harry, he said he didn’t. You *must* do it.” It sounded now like Hermione was pleading with him.

They sat in silence for some time after that.

Harry could feel the pressure building in his stomach. Everything depended on him. If he failed, he would be as good as dead. He could see the exact spot from where he was. What would happen to him here? Would he simply vanish, leaving Hermione alone or would neither of them have even made the journey back because he was already ‘effectively’ dead? His head hurt thinking about it. Hermione was right; you couldn’t explain time travel logically.

Harry had lost track of time. Hermione suddenly grabbed his arm and pointed. A large black dog had just emerged from under the Whomping Willow.

It had started. The Dementors would be coming very soon.

And then a horrifying thought exploded in Harry's mind -- the thing that had been nagging at him.

Dementors did not detect people using sight -- they detected *emotions*. The invisibility cloak would *not* conceal them! Dumbledore had said so at the Welcoming Feast in September.

Some of the Dementors were sure to come out of the Forbidden Forest right where they were hiding.

Harry grabbed Hermione and exclaimed, "We've got to move *right now!* ...Hagrid's cabin!"

Harry heaved Hermione and literally propelled her toward their destination. Before Hermione could say more than "What's..." Harry continued, "Dementors can sense people *through* invisibility cloaks."

Hermione gave a low wail, "How could I *forget* that!" and immediately began running with him.

Harry led her just inside the edge of the Forest dodging bushes and trees. Harry thought he felt the onset of the ominous cold that preceded the Dementors when he and Hermione suddenly broke out the woods and made straight for the cabin door.

Hermione had her wand ready, but the door was unlocked. They rushed in and bolted it.

Fang started to bark but Hermione pointed her wand at him and said, "*Silencio.*" Fang's mouth continued to open and close but made no sound. The boarhound was obviously frightened, so Harry pulled off the invisibility cloak and dropped it onto Hagrid's table. Fang stopped his silent barking and ran over to greet them.

Hermione ran to look out the window and cried, "WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO NOW, HARRY?"

Harry joined her at the window. He could see the Dementors. They were obscuring the dog that was Sirius and were already forming into a circle. Then he saw himself on the Firebolt approaching the Dementors.

His heart was racing, but his breathing was steady and deep. He could feel adrenalin heightening his senses. And he was feeling... *anger*. It was anger such as he had never felt in his life. He *hated* the Dementors and everything about them. They were *evil*...

And they were not going to kill him and Sirius if he had anything to do with it!

Harry bolted for the door, threw it open and was out before Hermione could say anything.

He was into the woods and racing back to where he and Hermione had hidden. He kept glancing out at the Dementors and saw himself swaying on his broomstick, the silver Patronus barrier was thinning to vapor, and the slimy hands of the Dementors were reaching up for him. Then he saw himself fall into the obscenely welcoming arms of the Dementors who crowed in even closer, eager to feast on his misery.

Harry skidded to a halt and faced the horde of hideous creatures.

He raised his wand and shouted, "*EXPECTO PATRONUM!*" as he remembered how he felt in the Hut on the Rock when Hagrid said, "You're a *Wizard*, Harry."

An enormous white shape exploded from the end of his wand and soared out of the forest. The glowing silvery-white stag charged at the Dementors, on its head a huge rack of antlers pointed down directly at them.

The Dementors were all immediately forced back toward the Whomping Willow and began to scatter. The stag pursued them for a short distance and then returned to circle the prostrate forms of Sirius and his earlier self.

Harry held his wand high to keep the stag circling as he started to move back toward Hagrid's cabin. Then he heard Hermione's voice from a few feet away, "Quick, Harry, get under the Cloak. Professor Dumbledore and Draco are coming."

She lifted the invisibility cloak and Harry joined her.

He kept his wand pointed and directed the stag until just before Draco and Dumbledore landed. Then he lowered his wand and his magnificent corporeal Patronus faded away.

"Let's get back to the castle while they're busy and before more people arrive," said Hermione.

They crept out of the woods as silently as they could and made their way back across the grounds keeping as much distance from others as possible. They passed all the teachers and many students who had come to see what happened.

One of them was Hermione. “I wonder if I should tell myself I need to go back in time with you?” Hermione whispered.

Then she answered herself, “No, it didn’t happen that way; I’d have remembered. I had to wait for Professor Dumbledore to tell me.”

They continued on and entered the castle. Some of the students had already returned from the Quidditch match and were waiting for lunch.

“Let’s find an empty classroom near the hospital wing where we can hide. We need to wait until we went back in time,” whispered Hermione.

Harry was still having trouble with the whole notion of time travel, but he didn’t say anything until Hermione found them a classroom. Harry moved to take the invisibility cloak off, but Hermione reminded him they could not take a chance on being seen. It was not even noon yet and Harry was getting very hungry. They had over four hours to wait. They might as well talk. They spoke in whispers.

“Couldn’t we use the time-thing to go forward in time, so we don’t have to wait so long?” asked Harry.

“No. It only goes back in time, but I did wonder if they had ones that went forward. Only now I’m almost sure they don’t,” said Hermione.

“Why not?” asked Harry.

“Because that would mean that the future is set and has already happened. So, then it would not be possible to go *back* in time unless it was impossible to change anything, even the smallest thing. And since going back *is* a change; it means it would not be possible. If you *can* go back, the future isn’t set... Do you see?” explained Hermione.

Harry’s head was spinning again, “No. But never mind.”

But now he had to ask the key question, “So we just did what had already happened before we left. It still doesn’t make sense, Hermione. Has anything actually *changed*? Is it *even possible* to change anything?”

Hermione said, sounding quite concerned, “At first, I didn’t think so, but after Pettigrew, I’m thinking it must be, because I haven’t yet gone back in time to do the things I know I did. That worries me. All I can tell you is in this case, Professor Dumbledore told me we *had to do it*. We have to trust him. But one thing is *certain* -- you *did* save Sirius... and yourself.”

If Hermione was not sure, there was no point in discussing it further. And though he *had* been able to save Sirius, he still did not feel like he had. But he *had* been able to produce the corporeal Patronus after believing he couldn’t. He was still confused.

Harry changed the conversation. “How are we going to trade places when our earlier selves go back in time? We didn’t see ourselves come back.”

“Well,” said Hermione, “that doesn’t mean we weren’t there. We have the Cloak. We’ll slip in when I come back with Professor Dumbledore after you wake up.”

“That reminds me, how come you had the Invisibility Cloak on you?” asked Harry.

“That’s a good question. I’ve had it with me since Pettigrew. I found it my school bag that night, where my future-self must have put it after she was finished with it. You didn’t ask for it back and I thought it would help me fix any more time paradoxes. Today when I went to get Professor Dumbledore after you woke up, he took me aside and told me there was a very serious potential time paradox, that I had to prevent it, and told me what it was. He told me to use the Invisibility Cloak as if he knew I already had it. I wondered about that. I was nervous at first because the other times I’ve had to ‘go with the flow,’ it was always me telling myself what I needed to do.”

“Wait a minute,” said Harry. “Didn’t you say that Professor Dumbledore told you that only *I* could have generated the Stag Patronus. How could he be so *sure*? It would be quite dangerous to send us back in time if he weren’t one hundred percent certain. It would be reckless to do it on a *guess*, wouldn’t it?”

“That makes sense,” said Hermione. “Maybe I should tell him? Or tell myself on my way to get him? Maybe this is another potential paradox... Oh, I don’t like this, Harry,” said Hermione starting to sound worried.

“Wait... I *think* there may be an explanation...” said Harry. “Maybe Professor Dumbledore saw me in the Forest. I didn’t have the Cloak on until you came to get met from Hagrid’s hut.”

“It’s possible; he doesn’t miss much, but you still seemed quite concealed to me,” said Hermione sounding uncertain. “So, you don’t think I need to tell him? Isn’t *that* also taking a big risk?” asked Hermione.

Just as Harry was about to agree, he suddenly remembered something. He slapped his thigh, making Hermione jump.

“What?” she exclaimed a little too loudly and then shushed herself, “Quiet...”

“The year I got the Invisibility Cloak for Christmas, I used it to go visit the Mirror of Erised. The last time I was there, so was Professor Dumbledore, but I didn’t see him until he spoke. He said, ‘I don’t need an invisibility cloak to become invisible...’ But he could obviously see *me* -- so I knew he could also see *through* invisibility cloaks, Hermione. He obviously saw us today walking back to the castle. Then he knew I had to be the one casting the Patronus -- a stag like my fathers.”

“Harry, that’s it!” exclaimed Hermione “I *don’t* have to tell myself or Professor Dumbledore. It was really bothering me that I hadn’t been told what to do by myself because it has always been that way before. I guess Time itself just allowed for another way to get the message to me.”

“And...” said Harry, “Professor Dumbledore knew you had my Invisibility Cloak because he saw us using it and it wasn’t among my clothes when they undressed me in the hospital wing. *And* he sent Draco away because he saw he wasn’t with us... It all makes sense!”

Hermione let out a very small “whoop” and softly clapped her hands.

Then she got very serious and said, “Harry, you were *so* brave. You ran out there and faced a *hundred* Dementors. You know, you saved *my* life too. If you hadn’t remembered they sensed emotions, they would have gotten us both.”

She squeezed his arm and kissed his cheek. It was a real kiss, with her lips.

For the first time in his life, Harry did not feel like pulling away. Instead, he felt a thrill go up his spine. But he was way too shy to kiss her back.

Instead, he said, “Thanks, Hermione.” Then he suddenly realized and said, “It *wasn’t* that I knew I could do it because I had done it before. It was because I was *angry*. I *wanted* to do it... I *hate* those things, Hermione. They’re pure *evil*.”

Hermione was still holding his arm. She squeezed it again.

They continued to talk, but it was about other things.

However, a few minutes later they heard a commotion in the corridor.

Hermione whispered, “That’s you and Sirius being brought to the hospital wing. Professor Dumbledore conjured stretchers for you. He was leading the way. Professors Snape and McGonagall were there, Hagrid too. And Flint, Bole and Derrick from your team. Draco and I, of course. Also Fred, George, and Ginny... Oh, and Page.”

“Page?” said Harry.

“Yes,” said Hermione. “He told me the match should have been stopped and rescheduled, but Madam Hooch told him she wouldn’t.”

“Right, Draco told...” Then Harry gasped, “My Firebolt! Where...”

“It’s fine,” said Hermione cutting in. “It only drifted a short distance. Draco retrieved it. It’s under your bed in the hospital wing,” she explained reassuringly.

“Why didn’t you tell me *before*?” Harry said, sounding incredulous.

“Well, you didn’t ask,” said Hermione, adding, “And given what we’ve just been through, it wasn’t very important.”

Harry had to admit she was right. For the next several hours they heard many comings and goings in the corridor. But soon, the waiting got very boring again.

Finally, they saw the light from the windows dimming. They decided to move to the door and opened it very carefully just a crack so Hermione could see into the corridor.

Finally, they saw Hermione walk past. A few minutes later, she and Professor Dumbledore returned.

Still under the invisibility cloak, Harry and Hermione moved silently into the corridor and walked to the hospital wing following closely but quietly behind them. They went through the doors which Professor Dumbledore had conveniently left open. Then they moved along the wall and stationed themselves in the corner nearest Harry's bed.

Harry thought it was fascinating to watch something take place for which he had perfect foreknowledge. It had a surreal quality. It was very different than watching the events of Sirius and the Dementors because then he had been extremely anxious and afraid. Now he was relaxed and enjoying it -- except for the part where he was undressing. Harry was afraid to check if Hermione were watching. He hoped she had her eyes closed. But he was *sure* Professor Dumbledore had glanced at them in the corner and winked.

Finally, Professor Dumbledore walked into Madam Pomfrey's office and closed the door. One minute later their earlier selves got under the invisibility cloak.

They waited a minute to be sure and then Hermione pulled off the invisibility cloak. She tucked it into her robes as they moved quickly to Harry's bed. Hermione turned her back and Harry changed back into his hospital pajamas. He stuffed the school robes into the cabinet of his bedside table, which also contained his quidditch uniform, and got back into bed.

In the meantime, Hermione unlocked and opened the hospital wing doors.

When everything was as it had been just two minutes before, Hermione walked to Madam Pomfrey's office door and knocked. Professor Dumbledore opened it and looked out.

"Professor Dumbledore, you wanted me to remind you about the feast..."

"Ah yes," said Dumbledore, "Thank you, Miss Granger."

Professor Dumbledore and Madam Pomfrey emerged and walked over to Harry's bed.

Madam Pomfrey asked Professor Dumbledore, sounding a little irate, if she could finally give Harry a sleeping draught because he really needed to get some sleep after his ordeal.

Dumbledore agreed and she went to get it, muttering under her breath.

When she returned, Dumbledore asked, “When can we expect Sirius to awaken, Poppy?”

“Certainly by next morning,” said Madam Pomfrey, “...thanks to Mr Potter.”

Harry and Hermione looked at each other and then Professor Dumbledore.

When Madam Pomfrey had gone, Dumbledore said, “Very well done, both of you. Everything is as it should be. Harry, you are truly your father’s son. Only we shall know what you and Miss Granger did to save Sirius. It may seem to be a paradox, but I can assure you that you changed the original outcome, otherwise the opportunity would never have presented itself.”

Then he turned to Hermione and while holding out his arm to her, said, “To the feast, Miss Granger, or Madam Pomfrey will have our scalps for keeping Harry any longer from his rest.”

Hermione waved goodbye to Harry, and they left.

Just outside the hospital wing doors, Professor Dumbledore said he wanted to talk to Hermione for a few minutes. He ushered her into the same empty classroom she and Harry had waited in.

“I knew you were waiting here,” said Dumbledore almost casually. “The door had been closed the several times I had come and gone until you came to fetch me.”

Hermione again thought that the headmaster never missed anything.

“But what I wanted to say is how lucky we are to have you, Hermione.” It was the first time he had ever addressed her by her first name and she blushed. “Otherwise, we would never have had the Time-Turner, which has been critical in favorably resolving, as of today, two extremely dire situations -- despite the danger which time travel presents.”

Hermione nodded as Dumbledore added, “But I am not sure you are truly aware of what has happened. It is vastly more complex than simply taking two classes at once.”

Hermione looked puzzled.

“These tidy little loops of time are not what they seem. They may appear neat and clean, perhaps even self-fulfilling... but what you actually did was *change* the future each time -- for the *better*. The first time, with Peter Pettigrew, something happened that made you want to go back in time to change it -- something so terrible that you believed it was necessary to change it, no matter the risk... and without asking *permission*, I might add.”

Hermione grimaced and then said, “I don’t understand.”

Dumbledore continued, “I cannot *prove* what originally happened with Pettigrew or today because both futures were completely undone, and we were left with odd residual effects. This is nothing but speculation, but I believe that Peter Pettigrew completely escaped that night and that today... *both* Harry and Sirius suffered the Dementor’s Kiss.”

Hermione looked shocked but did not say anything.

“Do you remember *experiencing* Pettigrew’s escape?” asked Dumbledore.

“No, sir,” said Hermione. “I only remember my future-self telling me that he did escape, bad things happened, and what I needed to do to prevent it.”

“Because of that, you prevented your present self and everyone else from experiencing Pettigrew’s escape and its catastrophic consequences. Your future-self went back in time to get the cloak and tell you the same story. But you now have no memory of the original events that triggered your decision to take the actions you took nor of performing the actions themselves -- doing what needed to be done.”

Hermione nodded, “Yes, Sir, but I must have done what I believed I *had* to do.”

“Did you? What if you hadn’t? We shall never know. But how does a time loop like this start? That is the paradox. You went straight to the library after you stopped Pettigrew’s escape. *You* did not do anything to get the Cloak. The paradoxical events of getting the Cloak and telling yourself about Pettigrew’s escape must have happened, but not in *your* memory. Yet, you must have obtained the Invisibility Cloak that day because you still had it with you to use today,” said Dumbledore.

Hermione balked. “Yes, I found the Cloak later in my school bag. I thought my future-self put it there... but that’s... impossible. I don’t remember doing any of it. So, how *did* I get the Cloak.”

“This is what I am trying to explain. Time travel by its very nature *is* a paradox. Sometimes the paradoxes are obscured when we try to ‘prevent’ them; other times they are glaring -- as in this example. Time itself seems to magically work out a solution that enables us to carry on. Harry gave a future-you the Cloak in the present, our present, to change the future. Logic tells us the cloak should have vanished with your future-self, a future you prevented. Time would not allow the Cloak to be lost, so it magically found a way for you to still have it as Harry would expect and for you to use today. I tell you this to prepare you for what actually happened today.”

“So, you actually think the Dementors got Harry too?” asked Hermione nervously.

“I do,” said Dumbledore, “In fact, I *know* it. But tell me, what is different about your travel back in time today than with Peter Pettigrew?”

“Sir, *you* told me to go back. I didn’t tell myself or decide for myself,” answered Hermione immediately. “It worried me the whole time. I kept thinking I needed to tell my past-self to do something but was afraid to.”

“So, this time, *I* played the role of your future-self,” said Dumbledore, “but with a difference. You had to go *back* in time to change the future rather than doing something in your present.”

“Where is this going?” asked Hermione nervously.

“I saw you and Harry under his Invisibility Cloak heading back to the school even while I was conjuring stretchers for Harry and Sirius,” said Dumbledore.

“That’s what Harry and I guessed,” said Hermione nodding.

Dumbledore continued, “I believe we only remember the final time paradox of a series occurring in the same timeframe. *You* came to me earlier today, before the Quidditch match, and told me that Harry had died trying but failing to save Sirius from the Dementors. As a result, *you* had gone back in time and been able to save Harry, but *not* Sirius. So, you decided to go back a second time and help yourself save *both* Harry and Sirius. But when you did, you did not find your earlier self as you expected. Instead, you found Harry and a different instance of yourself where before you had

been alone. It frightened you because you had no memory of it. You knew something was wrong, but you were afraid to contact yourself, so you contacted me by going back still earlier.”

Hermione gasped, “No!” She looked shocked and said, “I don’t remember anything like that, but I *thought* I might have seen myself in the woods, though I’m not sure. There was no one there when I looked carefully.”

“That is interesting and perhaps further evidence. Otherwise, based on my theory, you would have no memory of the event,” said Dumbledore. “I say this because, it would not have required *me* to tell you to go back. In *your* memory, you never went back on your own. But a future-you used a Patronus to save Harry the first time. You have mastered a full corporeal Patronus, have you not?”

“Yes, sir,” admitted Hermione. “I practiced more on my own. I didn’t tell Harry or the others because I didn’t want to show him up, given his fear of the Dementors and how important it was to him.”

Dumbledore nodded approvingly and went on. “When you doubled back to save Sirius too, something inexplicably went wrong. I cannot possibly explain it, but you realized it. You told me on my way to the match that I had to tell you to save them. It seemed all too incredible to me. Then, as events unfolded, I saw you and Harry as you described, so I was sure I had to tell you, and time magically wrapped up the whole thing, including our memories, with a nice bow.”

Hermione looked very upset.

“Please excuse me for distressing you, my dear girl. Time is mysterious. I know this... When you changed the future again on the second trip back, it erased your memory of what happened first -- because, in the end, you prevented it from happening and it left you only with the knowledge needed to save Harry *and* Sirius. Again, time itself magically adjusted everything so the outcome made the most sense to you in the end.”

“I *think* I understand,” said Hermione, “but there is no way of knowing for sure.”

“Clearly not, but let me say this, Miss Hermione Granger. You are the bravest and smartest young witch I have ever had the pleasure to know.”

Hermione smiled. Any other time she would have been ecstatic. But now she was emotionally spent.

Dumbledore smiled back at Hermione and said, “Let us go now and enjoy our wonderful feast.”

At the feast, Dumbledore awarded one-hundred fifty points to Harry Potter for saving Sirius Black from the Dementors -- for which he was given *full* credit -- and fifty points to Draco and Hermione for special services to the school.

As she sat with the Gryffindors and heard their congratulations, Hermione decided she was never going to tell Harry or the others what Dumbledore had told her.

She also decided she wanted to be rid of the Time-Turner as soon as the school year ended.

The imponderables of time now frightened her.

But that was *nothing* compared to being awakened that night by another instance of herself asking to talk to her. They whispered in dark of the dorm room.

“I saved Harry,” said the other Hermione. “I used our Patronus. I told Professor Dumbledore about the two overlapping time loops. You saw me in the Forbidden Forest when you didn’t expect to, and I saw you and Harry -- at least your feet below the cloak -- when *I* didn’t expect to. I think that’s the problem,” said future Hermione.

“I *thought* I saw someone -- myself... you -- but no one was there when I looked closer,” said Hermione.

“You must not remember, but it was obvious you saw me in *my* memory,” said the other Hermione. She continued, “I think I’m stuck in my failed time loop to save Sirius. Which means I’ve only got until I reach the time I first went back, which is only a few more hours. I didn’t sleep that night -- tonight for you -- after Harry... died... It took me a day to make the decision to go back again and plan it. Professor Dumbledore is going to take me to the nearest telephone later so I can call mum and dad, just so you know... I need to hear their voices one last time... Don’t be sad. It was a risk worth taking.” She sounded resigned. Then she looked away and said, “Take care of Harry for me.”

“I will,” was all Hermione could say.

Hermione cried herself to sleep. In the morning, it felt like a dream, but she knew it wasn't.

Chapter 16 – Sirius Black

When Harry awoke the next morning, Sirius Black was sitting next to his bed.

Harry thought Sirius already looked much better than he had the evening before. Though he was still skin and bones, he had some color in his cheeks and he had shaved off his beard. His long hair was tied back in a ponytail, and he was wearing hospital pajamas.

Harry did not know what to say.

Sirius spoke first. His voice sounded hoarse. “Dumbledore came to see me earlier this morning. He told me what you did. You risked your life to save mine. I am in your debt. Did you know your father's Patronus was a stag too?”

Again, Harry did not know what to say, so he just nodded.

Sirius looked a little uncomfortable and then said, “I don't know if anyone has told you, but I'm your... godfather.”

“Yes, I know,” said Harry. “Professor Lupin told me.”

Sirius smiled and then continued, “I was suspicious of the stories in the Prophet about Pettigrew. I thought it might be a trap. When the Dementors continued to surround Hogwarts, I was certain of it. But I wanted to watch you play Quidditch again. You know, I saw you in your first match, when you...”

“I know. I saw you at the top of the stands,” said Harry.

“Then you know I'm an Animagus,” said Sirius.

“Yes,” said Harry. “Professor Lupin told us the night Pettigrew was captured. And it's a good thing. I saw you yesterday coming out from the Whomping Willow while I was flying.”

Sirius laughed. It sounded almost like a bark.

“Yes, *very* lucky for me. I was shocked that the Dementors came after me as a dog. That never happened before. They must have learned somehow that I was an Animagus. That’s what enabled me to survive in Azkaban without going mad. Dementors can’t see so I could transform into a dog and the guards outside my cell affected me very much less. I also knew I was *innocent*, and it sustained me. It wasn’t a happy thought because of all the pain associated with it, so they couldn’t rob me of it.”

“You don’t need a wand to transform?” asked Harry.

“No. In fact, and any magical objects in your possession will *not* transform with you, only non-magical things like clothes and coins and glasses will. Ordinarily, you need to leave your wand in a safe place.”

Harry remembered back to Professor McGonagall’s demonstration in Transfiguration. She had first placed her wand on her desk before she transformed into a cat.

“So, then Pettigrew never had a wand the whole time he was a rat,” said Harry.

“No. He dropped it when he transformed into a rat on that street in London and ran into the sewer,” snarled Sirius. The memory obviously still angered him.

Harry had a thought. “Say, maybe Pettigrew told the Dementors in Azkaban about you being an Animagus and they spread the word.”

“Probably,” said Sirius. “He’d do anything to try and ingratiate himself.”

“Professor Lupin said that you were best friends with my father,” said Harry softly looking directly into Sirius’s eyes.

“We were,” said Sirius, “from our *first* day at Hogwarts. I was best man at your parents’ wedding.”

“Then why didn’t you say you were innocent?” asked Harry.

“Harry, you must believe me. I was in *shock* at what happened -- Pettigrew betraying us... your father and mother dead. I blamed *myself* for their deaths -- for talking them into making Pettigrew their Secret Keeper. *I should have known. Foolishly*, I suspected *Remus* of being the spy. But when I discovered that Pettigrew wasn’t in the safe-house

I set up for him, I feared the worst. I went to warn your parents, but when I got there... Hagrid had just recovered you from the rubble.”

Sirius hung his head. “I went *insane*. I tracked down Pettigrew and was planning to *destroy* him, but the devious little rat was one step ahead of me and made it look like I had done what I was planning to do to *him*. But he also made *me* look like the *traitor!* ...I never would have killed all those innocent Muggles -- *just him.*”

“I cracked. They say they took me away laughing. I have no memory of it. When I came to my senses, I was fully prepared to proclaim my innocence, but the Minister for Magic, Millicent Bagnold, wouldn’t allow me to speak and sent me straight to Azkaban without a trial. Pettigrew was *triumphant*,” said Sirius bitterly.

Harry had never heard such bitterness in his life. It seemed like Sirius was pouring out his very soul to Harry.

“How did you know Pettigrew was here and in Gryffindor tower? And how did you escape from Azkaban? You’re the first one to ever do it,” said Harry, having overcome any reluctance to engage his godfather.

Sirius told Harry about Cornelius Fudge visiting Azkaban and giving him the Daily Prophet. He saw the picture of the Weasley family in Egypt and he recognized the rat sitting on Ron’s shoulder. The missing toe eliminated any doubt in his mind.

He escaped as a dog by slipping past the Dementors the next time they opened his cell door. As a dog, he was thin enough to get through the bars of the front gate and swim to the mainland. The swim had nearly killed him.

Being the first to escape meant nothing to Sirius.

Harry then asked him why the Dementors affected him yesterday as a dog.

“I wasn’t just facing one or two guards outside my cell. There were *dozens* and *dozens* focused on me and I didn’t have any way to defend myself. The sheer anguish of it forced me to transform back into a man -- to *die* as a man,” Sirius said with pride.

Harry was sorry he asked; he should have thought of it himself.

“You’ll need to come up with a story of how you escaped if you want to keep your secret. The Ministry of Magic and the press will want to know,” said Harry.

“I hadn’t thought about that,” said Sirius. “...I’ll just say I have no idea and that I didn’t recover my memory until I was back in England... unless I can think of something better. How many people know I’m an Animagus?”

Harry told him -- Lupin and Pettigrew, of course, but now also Dumbledore, Hermione, and Draco.

Sirius asked who Hermione and Draco were.

When Harry said Draco *Malfoy*, Sirius exploded, “MALFOY! He’s the son of a Death Eater, Harry! My secret is worthless! ...*DAMN!*” But he immediately calmed himself and said, “With Pettigrew telling the Dementors, it will be known soon enough...”

“Sirius, Draco is my best friend; he can be *trusted*,” said Harry and he told the story of how Draco was estranged from his parents and living with his aunt and uncle.

This genuinely surprised Sirius, who then said, “I didn’t think there were any *good* Slytherins.”

To which Harry replied, “*I’m* a Slytherin.”

Sirius stared at Harry for a few seconds and Harry stared right back.

Then Sirius smiled. “I’ll admit I was shocked when I found out. I couldn’t *believe* it. How could James’ son be in Slytherin? But then it hit me -- I was a *Gryffindor* who came from an all Slytherin family. We have something very unusual in common, Harry.”

Then he asked not very subtly, “So, is this Hermione person your girlfriend?”

“No!” exclaimed Harry. “She’s my very good *friend*. And why does everyone always ask me that?”

“Well...” said Sirius, sounding amused, “if *everyone* asks you that, it must be *obvious*. Perhaps you *‘protesteth’* too much.”

Sirius leaned over and patted Harry on the shoulder. Then he said, “Hungry?”

“Starving!” exclaimed Harry.

“I’ll get Madam Pomfrey to get us some breakfast. It’ll be seconds for me. You can see I’ll be needing seconds for some time. Dumbledore says he wants me to stay here until I recover. I suspect he also wants to shelter me for a while from the Ministry and the press. For that, I am *very* grateful.”

Sirius got up stiffly and walked rather slowly over to Madam Pomfrey’s office door.

A minute later, Sirius and Madam Pomfrey walked back with trays of food.

Madam Pomfrey fussed over Harry for a minute and told him she would release him tomorrow, but only if he stayed in bed, ate all his meals, and got a good night’s sleep. Then she bustled back to her office.

As they ate, Harry asked Sirius to tell him about his mother and father.

Sirius regaled in telling their stories. He also said Harry was at least as good a flyer as his father. And, yes, he had sent the Firebolt to Harry -- for twelve years of missed birthdays and Christmases. Harry thanked him over and over for it.

Sirius told stories how he, his father and Lupin -- while not mentioning Pettigrew -- had ranged all over the castle and grounds using an invisibility cloak his father had, while searching for secret passages out of the school. He was astonished to learn that Dumbledore had returned the cloak to Harry.

And then Harry asked, “Where does the secret passage under the Whomping Willow go? That’s the only one I don’t know about.”

Again, Sirius was astonished that Harry knew about all the secret passages. Harry laughed and told him how he had gotten the Marauder’s Map and how it had been instrumental in uncovering Pettigrew.

“I wondered about that,” said Sirius. “The Daily Prophet didn’t give the details on how he was discovered, just that he had been.”

Harry said, “We have a cover story that Hermione came up with so we can still keep the Map a secret -- though McGonagall, Snape, Dumbledore, and, of course, Lupin know.”

Sirius then told Harry that the passage under the Whomping Willow leads to the Shrieking Shack and that was how he was entering the grounds and avoiding the

Dementors. When he tried to get into Gryffindor tower, he had been able to simply walk into the castle through the front door that someone had left left unlocked.

Harry exclaimed, “Filch!”

Otherwise, he said he would have had to risk going into Hogsmeade and try using the secret passage from Honeydukes.

Sirius also told him he had gone to Privet Drive to try and get a glimpse of Harry before school started. He had even considered a wild notion of trying to talk to Harry but had come to his senses. Still, he had seen Harry get on the Knight Bus outside his house.

Sirius asked if Harry liked living with his aunt and uncle.

Harry laughed and told Sirius he hated them and why.

Sirius’ face suddenly looked tense, and he said, “I have a townhouse in London that I’ll be going to once I’ve recovered. I don’t suppose you’d like to come live with me when you’re not in school... I mean, I am your godfather and...”

Harry’s jaw dropped open, and Sirius quickly added, “But you don’t have to, of course.”

Harry could hardly get the words out fast enough, exclaiming, “*Of course, I want to come live with you!* Who in their right mind would want to live with the Dursleys?”

Harry leaned forward and hugged his godfather.

When Harry released him and leaned back, Sirius had tears in his eyes.

And so did Harry.

Chapter 17 – Salad Days

The next morning, Madam Pomfrey pronounced Harry ready for class, but only after he had finished every bite of his breakfast.

As he was getting dressed, Professor Lupin came in. Apparently, he was over his latest illness. But he did not look that good -- still being quite pale.

“Professor Dumbledore told me about your Patronus, Harry. *Very well done*. Did you know your father’s Patronus was a Stag too?” asked Lupin.

Harry nodded.

“It’s not surprising,” said Lupin as he clapped Harry on the shoulder.

Harry smiled and said sincerely, “I couldn’t have done it without your lessons.”

Lupin smiled and nodded.

“And *I* appreciate it too, Remus,” said Sirius loudly from across the room.

Lupin turned, and the two men met each other halfway in a strong embrace.

When they broke apart, Lupin, his voice cracking, said, “Thank *God* you’re alive, Sirius! Can you ever forgive me for believing *you* betrayed James and Lilly?”

Sirius replied, “Can you ever forgive *me* for thinking *you* were the spy?”

Lupin said, “Yes, but I can never forgive *myself* for being fooled by that traitorous little bastard.”

“No more than I,” replied Sirius, adding, “He’ll never get half of what he deserves.”

“You can be sure of that...” said Lupin, “He’s *dead*... It was in this morning’s Prophet. He chewed off his hand and bled to death -- apparently living like a rat for twelve years made him think like a trapped animal. He knew he was finished. He didn’t even wait for his trial.”

“It gives me *no* pleasure,” said Sirius, “I had hoped to watch him beg and grovel at his trial. It only *proves* he was a coward. He knew the Death Eaters in Azkaban would get him before the Dementors did -- and they wouldn’t be as *nice*.” But then he sighed and said, “No, I take that back. ...When the object of your anger is dead, it’s time to let go -- lest you be *consumed* by it, as I was when he was alive.”

Harry wanted to hear more but needed to get to Charms. He finished getting dressed (in the perfectly fitting robes Dumbledore has conjured), retrieved his Quidditch uniform and Firebolt, said goodbye to Sirius and Professor Lupin, and headed to his dorm room to get his school bag.

At morning break between classes, Harry and Draco met up with Hermione, and he told them about his long conversation with Sirius and also what Professor Lupin and Sirius had said.

The story of Pettigrew's suicide was all over the school.

Hermione said the person who seemed the happiest about it was Ron. She laughed, saying Ron had been in almost a permanent state of "cooties" since Pettigrew's capture.

Harry laughed for almost a minute, but Hermione had to stop and explain "cooties" to Draco.

"You mean '*wiggers*,'" as he started laughing too. "That's the term wizards use."

This made Hermione and Harry laugh all over again.

Later, Draco also told Harry about the slew of points they had won because of Sirius. But then he asked, "I wonder why Hermione got points?"

Harry just said, "Maybe Professor Dumbledore forgot he already gave her points for Pettigrew's capture."

"Professor Dumbledore, forget?" said Draco doubtfully, but he did not pursue it.

By mid-March, Sirius was well enough to leave the hospital wing, though he was far from fully recovered. Still, he was putting on weight and looked much better. He also cut his hair. He moved to one of the visiting guest rooms and began eating in the Great Hall.

Initially he sat at the High Table sitting next to Lupin, but after a while he started eating at the student tables. He started with Slytherin, next to Harry, but then began to rotate between Gryffindor and Slytherin. He also started sitting in on Lupin's Defense Against the Dark Arts classes and assisting Lupin in the instruction.

Sirius was an excellent storyteller and seemed to have an endless number of them.

He soon became very popular and Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff invited him to sit at their tables too, which he did.

It was obvious that Professor Snape did not like all the attention that Sirius was getting. During meals, Snape was constantly looking at Sirius with the same look he had, until now, reserved for Professor Lupin.

Sirius let it be known he was leaving the school at Easter break. He half-jokingly said he had a lot of catching up to do and needed to find a job to make himself useful. Many of the students suggested he stay and become a teacher, but he joked Hogwarts was a nice place to visit -- for seven years -- but he would not want to live there.

Sirius asked Harry if he would like to take three days off at Easter break and come with him to stay at his townhouse in London. But if Harry wanted to use the time for revision, like most students did, he would understand.

Harry said he could not wait to come.

When the time came, they took the Knight Bus to save time. By now, Harry was used to it, but he still did not like it.

Stan Shunpike was all-agog at having both Harry Potter and Sirius Black on his bus. He could not stop telling Sirius how sorry he was for the miscarriage of justice he had suffered and saying everyone blamed the Ministry of Magic for railroading him. Stan said he would buy Sirius a drink if he ever saw him in the Leaky Cauldron and asked for his autograph.

Sirius took Harry to number Twelve, Grimmauld Place. Sirius told him it was un-plottable and had to make Harry say the address out loud in front of the place before he could see it.

Sirius apologized at least a dozen times in the first five minutes for the extremely run-down condition of the house, but Harry did not care. It was going to be his *home* from now on -- except, as Dumbledore had told Sirius and reminded Harry, for one overnight stay on the first day of the summer holiday with Harry's aunt and uncle at number Four, Privet Drive.

Professor Dumbledore again explained that it was absolutely essential in order to maintain the magical protection of Lily's sacrifice. That protection lived in Harry's very

skin and blood. It had saved him from Voldemort-Quirrell and would have saved him from Tom Riddle in the Chamber of Secrets -- if it had come to that.

Sirius promised Harry he would hire a team of professional house-elf cleaners from the Magical Services Contracting Agency in Diagon Alley and have the house in proper shape before school was over.

The Black family house-elf, Kreacher, was very old and reclusive. Harry only saw him a few times during the visit, but each time he was always muttering criticisms of Sirius under his breath. Sirius said Kreacher was completely mad and incapable of maintaining the house any longer... But Sirius said he was not going to cut off Kreacher's head and mount it on the wall -- like his mother would have -- as had all the Black-family mistresses going back generations, to their old and useless house-elves. Sirius said this to annoy Kreacher because having his head mounted was the elf's dying wish.

The three days went by too quickly and soon it was time to go. Harry hugged his godfather goodbye and took the Knight Bus back to Hogwarts.

Draco snagged Harry as soon as he entered the common room. "Have you read the Prophet today?" asked Draco.

"I haven't seen it since I left," said Harry.

"Then look at this," said Draco handing Harry the Prophet he had been holding.

The headline read:

WEREWOLF TEACHING AT HOGWARTS

Harry began reading, but Draco said, "You can read it later. It's *not* the truth. Let's go see Hermione. She said she'd be revising in the library until it closed -- waiting for you."

Harry did not even drop off his school bag that he had used for the short trip. He and Draco hurried to the library.

On the way, Draco said, "It happened the day after you left. At the end of breakfast, Professor Snape came over to our table -- supposedly to talk about the need for revising during the Easter holidays. I mean... he'd *already* told us in class every time for the last *month*."

Harry nodded.

Draco continued, “Well, then he said he needed to get back to his office to start preparing the next batch of Wolfsbane Potion for Professor Lupin...”

“Professor Lupin? A *werewolf!*” exclaimed Harry.

“Yes. Well... all hell broke loose. Professor Lupin was still finishing his breakfast at the High Table and a whole bunch of Slytherin students started pointing at him, yelling ‘Werewolf! Werewolf!’ Girls started screaming and running out of the Great Hall. Fortunately, Professor Dumbledore was there and reestablished order. He asked Professor Snape what happened, and Snape apologized for ‘*accidentally*’ mentioning making Wolfsbane Potion for Lupin. I’ve never seen Professor Dumbledore look so angry. He didn’t say anything to Snape but stared him down. Then he escorted Professor Lupin from the Great Hall. I assume they went to his office.”

When they got to the library, Hermione gathered up her things and asked them to walk with her to Gryffindor tower.

On the way, she told Harry about visiting Professor Lupin in his office after his exposure by Professor Snape. Lupin told her the full story of himself and the Marauders -- about being bitten by a werewolf as a child; being allowed to come to Hogwarts by Dumbledore; the Whomping Willow; the Shrieking Shack; the Marauder’s Map; James, Sirius and Pettigrew becoming Animagi together; all their dangerous and reckless escapades on the grounds and in Hogsmeade; and above all, their friendship -- ultimately destroyed by Pettigrew. Finally, Lupin told her about Professor Dumbledore giving him a chance to teach at Hogwarts after being unable to find work for years and years.

Harry was dumbfounded and then asked, “Where *is* Professor Lupin?”

“He’s gone -- resigned,” said Draco. “He left before the end of the same day. He said that parents wouldn’t want their children being taught by a werewolf.”

“But he hasn’t hurt *anyone!*” exclaimed Harry.

“I know; it’s so unfair.” Hermione began to cry.

Draco said, “She cries every time she thinks about it.”

Hermione punched Draco on the upper arm with her fist.

“Ouch!” said Draco, “That hurt.”

“You don’t *care*,” sobbed Hermione.

“I *do* care,” said Draco. “I’m just not crying about it. I just wish you had told us about it a long time ago. It wouldn’t have been such a shock.”

“What do you mean?” said Harry, looking at Hermione.

She sighed and sniffed, “I first suspected it when Professor Snape substituted for Professor Lupin and made us study werewolves. I also remember the white orb that appeared when he faced the Boggart -- it was the *full moon*. And finally, he was always ill *during* the full moon... I *told* you it was obvious.”

“But why didn’t you tell us?” asked Harry.

“I was mad at you at the time and then later I figured the fewer number of people who knew, the better. He was an excellent teacher and wasn’t hurting *anyone*,” sobbed Hermione again.

“So, what now?” asked Harry.

“Professor Dumbledore is making Professor Snape teach all the remaining Defense classes. It’s meant to be as hard on him as it is on us,” said Draco.

Harry groaned and said, “Don’t bet on it.”

Draco and Hermione stopped before the portrait of the Fat Lady. Harry hadn’t been paying attention to where they were. Hermione had finally gotten over her tears.

“OK then,” said Harry. “We’ll see you tomorrow,” and he started to turn.

“No, wait; we’re going in *too*,” said Draco. “It’s still Easter break. Curfew is an hour later.”

“We’re going *in*?” asked Harry.

Hermione said, “It’s something Ginny and Draco came up with at the start of Easter break -- visiting each other’s common rooms. I’ve already been to the Slytherin common room once... I must say it’s a little creepy... And Draco’s been here several times. The word spread very fast. At first, everyone was surprised -- I think some students are probably against it -- but it’s already catching on. Students who have good friends...”

“...boyfriends and girlfriends mostly,” interjected Draco, nudging Harry with his elbow.

“...good *friends*...” Hermione repeated. “As I said, students with good friends in other houses are all for it. Surprisingly, none of the Heads of House have objected -- maybe because Professor Dumbledore hasn’t. Now, Professor Snape requires other house students to be out of *his* common room an hour *before* curfew, but Professor McGonagall and the others didn’t impose any restrictions. The unofficial rules are... after dinner to curfew on school-nights and after breakfast to curfew on weekends.”

“What about passwords?” asked Harry as Hermione said, ‘ginger root’.”

“No one cares about sharing them. It’s really kind of silly having them, don’t you think?” she said breezily.

“*Well*, it kept Sirius Black out of Gryffindor tower,” retorted Harry.

“But then he might have *killed* Pettigrew and you wouldn’t have your godfather back,” snapped Hermione.

“Not now, you two,” pleaded Draco.

They all climbed through the portrait hole. The Fat Lady, who had returned after Pettigrew was caught, said cheerily, “Welcome to Gryffindor Tower, Mr Harry Potter.”

They sat with Fred, George, and Ginny and a girl she introduced as Luna Lovegood. Harry quickly discovered that Luna truly was, as Hermione had described her, “a bit odd.” But she was actually quite nice, and he liked her.

Harry told them about his visit with Sirius at number Twelve, Grimmauld Place. He said he hoped they would all be able to get together there during the summer. They all said they would try. They were eager to see if Harry were telling the truth about the house-elf heads being mounted on the wall. Hermione hoped he was joking.

The last two months of school were the most carefree and uneventful months Harry had ever spent at Hogwarts. Harry thought he could easily get used to it. Oh, he still had to revise very hard and take exams, but that was what school was all about. But he was with his friends in the place he considered home. They all passed. Hermione, of course was first in her year again.

After her last exam, the first thing Hermione did was relinquish the Time-Turner to Professor McGonagall -- telling her she would be resuming a normal schedule next year.

At the end of term feast, Slytherin won the House Championship, but just barely, helped by Harry winning their last Quidditch match against Hufflepuff in May and earning fifty house points. But one win was not nearly enough to earn the Quidditch Cup. Gryffindor had won all three of their matches, and so they won the Quidditch Cup for the first time in nine years. Both houses were generally satisfied. But not everyone was, especially a few in Slytherin -- in particular, Marcus Flint. He said he would never forgive Harry. It was Flint's last year, and he would never get a chance to win the Cup back.

The ride to London on the Hogwarts Express was uneventful. Harry, Hermione, Draco, Fred, George, and Ginny shared a compartment again. The most exciting conversation centered around the upcoming Quidditch World Cup, which was going to be held in England over the summer. They were all hoping they would be able to go.

When they arrived in London, their families were waiting for them on the platform.

And for Harry, it was Sirius and Remus.

Sirius had taken Remus in. He had nowhere else to go.

Sirius invited everyone to number Twelve for Harry's birthday, and Mrs Weasley insisted they all come to the Burrow for dinner in August before the Quidditch World Cup.

They all said their goodbyes.

When they exited through the wall by the ticket barrier, Harry led Sirius over to Mr Dursley. "Uncle Vernon, this is Sirius Black. He's my *godfather*."

Uncle Vernon blanched and gasped, "The escaped *murderer*..."

Sirius stepped forward and said, as he poked Harry's uncle sharply in the chest, "I've heard how you've treated my godson. If I hear one more thing, it's going to be your neck. Do you understand me, Dursley?"

Uncle Vernon nodded like his head was on a spring.

Then Sirius explained that he would pick Harry up at number Four, at this same time tomorrow, keep him for the rest of the summer holidays, and put him on the Hogwarts Express on the first of September.

Uncle Vernon looked astonished. He even cracked a quivering smile as if what he were hearing was too good to be true.

Then he stammered, "Why don't you take the boy *now*?"

"Because your house has a magic spell that keeps Harry safe as long as he stays in it one full day a year. Your wife knows this. So, I will be picking up Harry tomorrow evening."

Harry could tell that Uncle Vernon was very uncomfortable learning that his *house* had a magic spell on it -- especially one that did Harry any good. But all he said was, "Fine."

Sirius and Lupin accompanied Harry to Uncle Vernon's car, helped load his school trunk and Hedwig's cage, and then shook his hand. He waived them goodbye as Uncle Vernon drove off.

Once they left the train station, Uncle Vernon started humming merrily.

Harry could see a huge smile on Uncle Vernon's face in the rear-view mirror. When they arrived at number Four, Privet Drive, Uncle Vernon burst from the car and dashed into the house as fast as his very large frame allowed.

Harry could hear him shouting even from inside the car, "Petunia, Petunia, we're *rid* of the boy!"

Uncle Vernon was almost as thrilled as Harry was -- though for very different reasons -- when Sirius showed up the next evening on the coolest flying motorbike with sidecar that Harry had ever seen.

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 Prisoner of Azkaban* by J.K. Rowling.