

Title: Beyond the Dementor's Kiss

Written: 1/18/2016

Revision: 1.7, 8/16/2023

Summary: Lucius Malfoy seeks revenge for his life sentence in Azkaban and takes Dark Magic to new depths.

Timeframe: Four years after the battle of Hogwarts in Book 7

Audience: PG-13

Category: After Book Seven (before Epilog)

Warnings: Evil Violence

Length: 79 pages

Beyond the Dementor's Kiss

Chapter 1 -- The Biography

Lucius Malfoy snapped the book shut in disgust and threw it down onto the bed.

He had already done this more times than he could remember, but now he had finally finished it -- *Harry Potter, The Authorized Biography* by Rita Skeeter, subtitled: *The true story of the Boy Who Lived and his defeat of Voldemort*. The book had been out for some time and was wear worn. It was the copy from the Azkaban prison library. He had been on the waiting list for months.

Lucius seethed. Rita had portrayed him as weak and foolish. But his anger -- no it was more than anger -- his *rage* was directed at the subject, Harry Potter. He would have his revenge on Potter. Oh, yes... Potter had revealed *too* much. He did not understand how dangerous the truth could be.

Lucius heard the familiar sound of the food trolley in the corridor just outside his cell. He had been so absorbed by the book; he had not noticed its approach.

The rectangular cat door in the bottom the cell door slid open. Lucius got up from his bed and dashed over to the door to slide his empty bowl and cup, which had been setting on the floor right next to the door, through the opening. If you did not do it within about two seconds, the little door would close and there would be no food until the next scheduled meal. A few seconds later, the bowl and cup were

pushed back through with the evening meal. The cat door slid shut with a clang and a snap of the latch.

His stomach growled. After serving nearly four years of his life sentence, he no longer rebelled at what passed for food in Azkaban. With only two meals per day, he was always hungry. He quickly ate the thin stew using the heavy bread that came with it as a utensil. The tea in the cup was tepid, but he washed down the last of the bread with it. Then he set the empty bowl and cup by the door.

He stood up and surveyed his domain. The cell was all stone, about six by eight feet wide and eight feet high. The floor sloped to a small drain hole in a back corner. A small chamber pot sat close to it with an old newspaper, yellow with age, lying nearby for toilet paper. The cell door was iron clad wood. Besides the cat door used for food delivery... *and* exchanging the chamber pot between the meals... there was a peep hole about shoulder high, also closed and latched from the outside.

The main freestanding object in his cell was the bed. It really was just a small cot -- a rickety wood frame with stretched canvas, which was now sagging sadly. The sleeping arrangements included a very thin but lumpy mattress with a heavily stained cotton cover. Finally, there was a shabby wool blanket bunched sloppily at one end. No pillow.

High on the outside wall there was a small slit of a window, open to the outside world, too high to look out. It was the only source of light and did not provide much of it. Now it was late afternoon and very dim in the cell. Below the window in the corner above the drain hole was a small metal sink attached to the wall and a single faucet which delivered very cold water. The drain hole in the sink had no pipe and water simply fell onto the floor near the floor drain. There was a tiny piece of soap about the size of a Knut on the edge of the sink. If you wadded up a piece of the old newspaper, you could make a reasonable stopper for the sink.

The faucet and sink had been recent additions to the cell. Conditions were slowly -- very slowly -- improving in Azkaban since the Dementors had been removed as guards following the Dark Lord's defeat. A fresh placard of prison rules had been glued to the inside of the cell door. He did not know if any of the rules were new since the original placard had been scraped off by previous cell occupants.

The first rule, written in bold letters, was '*No talking in the cell block except to answer questions by Prison Officials or to request a Healer.*' The others concerned food, hygiene, exercise, privileges, and punishments. The latter typically affected the amount and quality of the previous four things.

Having a life sentence allowed *very* few privileges. He could not be assigned trusted prisoner duties such as kitchen, laundry, or cleaning. These were reserved for prisoners who could be paroled for good behavior. He was normally only let out of his cell once a week for a one-minute shower, which included issue of a clean prison robe and a small piece of soap. This outing also constituted his 'exercise' period. His prison robe also served as his towel, napkin and handkerchief. His prison slippers, which had not yet been replaced, were also his fan and his flyswatter.

His other privileges were letter writing and requesting one book from the prison library at a time. Both activities were performed whilst standing in the line for the shower. Getting a specific library book was hit and miss; if there was a waiting list for it, you could not get another book in the meantime. It was advisable to just request *any* book. He could also receive letters once a week (also in shower line), but prisoners could not receive packages. Finally, he could have visitors once a month; but visitors were limited to legal representatives and family members. Having visitors was the only other way to leave his cell so far. The one time he asked for a Healer, the Healer came to his cell and told him *lifers* were not brought to the prison hospital.

His wife, Narcissa, had seen him several times after first arriving in Azkaban -- while they had been awaiting their joint trial for supporting the Dark Lord. They had a standing arrangement through Gringotts to provide generous 'gifts' to all the pure bloods on the Wizengamot in case they were ever arrested. The payoffs failed, and their family fortune had been significantly depleted. In fact, it was almost exhausted, though they still had Malfoy Manor.

Narcissa had received a twenty year sentence in Azkaban. But eighteen years had been suspended because, to his shock and anger, the Potter boy had testified in her defense at their trial. It still made him seethe to think about it.

Potter testified that Narcissa had lied to the Dark Lord about Potter being dead. The Dark Lord had used the Killing Curse on him in the Forbidden Forest. Doing so had clearly affected the Dark Lord -- he had collapsed to the ground at the same time Potter had. When the Dark Lord had recovered a few seconds later,

he had ordered Narcissa to check on Potter and... she had *lied*... **LIED!** ...to the Dark Lord!

When Potter had revealed this at the trial, she had quickly told Lucius it was only so she could get into Hogwarts castle to find out the fate of their son, Draco. He had wanted that too, but *not* at the cost of betraying the Dark Lord! He was enraged and railed at her in the courtroom. Her treachery had led to the Dark Lord's downfall... and their own. But Narcissa refused to accept responsibility or show any remorse for either, so he had cursed at her, called her a traitor, and then refused any further visits from her.

She had already served her two years in Azkaban and had been out for nearly two years. She wrote him a letter every week; she wanted to reconcile. But he refused and did not return her letters. She told him Draco had been living in Malfoy Manor but moved out when she returned home after her release. Draco refused any contact with either of them.

Of course, his son Draco was an even greater traitor. He had betrayed his parents as well. He had refused to help them escape after the Battle of Hogwarts, which led to their capture by Aurors. Even worse, at Draco's trial, Potter had testified in Draco's defense and gotten him off completely. Draco was the only living Death Eater not to be sent to Azkaban after trial by the Wizengamot. His twenty year sentence had been fully suspended.

And why? Because he had *saved* Potter's life by not identifying him when the Snatchers brought him to Malfoy Manor. This had caused Lucius to delay using his Dark Mark to summon the Dark Lord. Never mind that Bellatrix had also gotten in his way -- he had secretly relished her death at the Battle of Hogwarts but never told Narcissa this. Now he waited for the best possible moment to reveal it to her.

And today he had finally read the book, Potter's biography, and all the loose ends were neatly tied up. Potter may have been the Chosen One after all, but not anymore...

Potter would *pay*!

Finally, with the information from the book, Lucius had a viable plan for revenge and a renewed ambition... for greatness.

Chapter 2 -- Winky the House-Elf

"Winky is glad to be seeing Blinky again," squeaked the small house-elf. "Is you being bad again?" she asked warily.

Blinky was Winky's brother. He closely resembled Winky except he was taller, his eyes were gray instead of brown, and he had three large hairy moles on his small chin -- which were hard not to look at. They both had long thin noses, bat-like ears with protruding wisps of long brown hair, and large bulging eyes.

They were standing next to the great fireplace in the Hogwarts kitchen, where Winky worked. Many other house-elves were bustling about preparing for the next meal in the Great Hall above.

"Blinky is not doing bad things, ever. Blinky is doing what is *right*. Master Draco is teaching this to Blinky. Blinky is wishing Master Draco to be returning home, but he is not still seeing eye-to-eye with Mistress Narcissa -- for nearly two years," moaned Blinky. He shook his head sadly, but then said, "Blinky is seeing Winky this time on his Mistress's orders."

Winky frowned. "House-elves is only to be doing what their masters is telling them. You is being like Dobby. He was a *bad* house-elf."

"Blinky is doing what Master Draco is telling him. Master Draco is good. Blinky's *Mistress* is bad," countered Blinky.

Winky looked shocked and exclaimed, "You is needing to be punishing yourself most grievously for saying that!"

Blinky held his head high and said defiantly, "Blinky is only punishing himself if Master Draco is ordering it. Blinky is obeying Master Draco above all."

"A house-elf is not to be choosing its master," scolded Winky.

"Then why is you still at Hogwarts? You called Blinky to be helping save Hogwarts from He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. Blinky is thinking Hogwarts is Winky's home now," said Blinky.

Winky hung her head and croaked, "Winky is having nowhere else to be going. Master Barty is... is... is *sick*... and can't be going home." Her eyes welled up with tears.

"Then Blinky is bringing Winky news she is wanting to hear," said Blinky excitedly.

Winky looked at him questioningly. "News?"

Blinky nodded and then said in a very quiet voice so as not to be overheard, "Yes, but you must be keeping it a secret. Mistress Narcissa is receiving a letter from Master Lucius, in Azkaban. Blinky is bringing Winky the news the owl is delivering. Mistress Narcissa is pleased because she is receiving the first letter Master Lucius is ever writing after she is writing him every week. She is reading the letter and is then telling Blinky to be finding and bringing Mister Crouch's house-elf to be seeing her tomorrow. Blinky is curious and is reading the letter after Mistress is going to bed."

Winky gasped disapprovingly at hearing this, but Blinky ignored her and continued.

"The letter is being written in the ancient family code. It seems to be saying one thing but is really saying another thing. It is saying my master is having secret news of helping your Master Barty get well and he is only saying it to Mr Crouch's house-elf in person."

"*Master Barty!*" cried Winky aloud.

Several of the other house-elves in the kitchen stopped what they were doing and looked in their direction.

"Winky must be being *quiet!*" hushed Blinky.

Winky clapped a hand over her mouth, then withdrew it and whispered, "But Winky is knowing only family can be seeing prisoners in Azkaban. She is learning this from Mr Crouch ages ago."

"The letter is saying how. Winky is to be pretending to be Blinky, the Malfoy family house-elf, when she is visiting Master Lucius in Azkaban," whispered Blinky disapprovingly. "Blinky is not liking it but is wanting to help his little sister,

Winky,” said Blinky sounding very guilty, since this went against his new code of doing only what is right.

Blinky thought he would have to punish himself but then remembered Master Draco’s order to not punish himself without his permission. To make up for it, he said, “Blinky is thinking Winky ought to be refusing. You is needing to be careful. This letter is being very suspicious.”

It was as if Winky had not heard Blinky’s warning and advice.

“Oh, yes, yes!” said Winky excitedly. “Winky is thanking Blinky more than she can say. Winky must be hearing news of Master Barty and making him well.” Winky hopped on the spot like an excited child.

Blinky grabbed Winky by the shoulders to stop her and said, “Winky must be listening to Blinky now. You is not to be saying Blinky is telling you anything except to be seeing his Mistress. You is not to be saying you is even knowing Blinky. Is you understanding Blinky?”

Winky nodded slowly. “Winky is understanding.”

Blinky grabbed hold of his sister’s hand and said, “Malfoy Manor...”

There was a loud pop and they vanished.

A few of the Hogwarts house-elves noted their departure. None of them cared.

Winky had never been much help at Hogwarts, even after she had stopped drinking.

Chapter 3 -- Visiting Hours

Lucius Malfoy sat manacled to a plain wooden armchair behind a small battered wooden table. The table faced the door in a visitation room in Azkaban. The windowless room was not much bigger than a cell, maybe eight by eight, all stone. It was lit by two magical oil lamps hung on opposite walls.

Lucius was tense with anticipation.

The heavy wooden door opened and a small house-elf trotted in. It looked at him nervously, and then proceeded to the chair opposite him. The elf pulled it out and hopped up to stand on the seat. If it had sat down, its head would have barely cleared the top of the table. And besides, a house-elf does not sit in front of its master.

The visitation room door remained open. Lucius knew at least one Auror was listening outside.

Lucius spoke first, "I understand from my wife's last letter that she would send Blinky to tell me something because I refuse to see her."

Winky nodded. "Mistress Narcissa is wishing most greatly for Master Lucius to be reconciling with their son, Master Draco. She is also wishing Master Lucius would be writing her more than once. She is writing Master Lucius every week."

As Winky was talking, Lucius leaned his head down close to table and, using his tongue, flipped a small rolled up piece of damp parchment from his mouth onto the table. Then he sat up again.

Winky immediately snatched up the little roll of parchment and hid it under her pillowcase smock.

Lucius nodded and mouthed silently to Winky, "*Read - it - la - ter.*"

Winky nodded.

Lucius smiled and said, "My wife and son have been disloyal. I value loyalty above all else. I do not want a disloyal house-elf too. If you are loyal to me, swear it now and you will receive what is due. If not, all will be lost."

Winky quivered, but squeaked, "Wi..." quickly catching herself, "Blinky is swearing loyalty to Master Lucius." Then she then mouthed silently, "*Wink - y - is - swear - ing.*"

Lucius nodded in approval. "A house-elf must come when called by its master." He winked at the still quivering elf. "Were that true of a wife and a son, things would be different. Go now and tell them there will be no more letters and no reconciliation. I am finished."

Winky looked at Malfoy apparently hoping to hear more, but he just tipped his head slightly toward the door and opened his eyes wide indicating she should go.

Winky got the message. She hopped down from the chair and trotted out the door.

Less than a minute later the Auror who had escorted him from his cell, entered the room and unlocked the manacles. As he escorted Malfoy back to his cell, he said, "We don't get many house-elves visiting Azkaban. They usually come with other family members. It sounded like that was a wasted visit."

"We shall soon see," said Malfoy.

Chapter 4 -- The Investigation Begins

Harry Potter and his current Auror supervisor and trainer, Chief Inspector Burke, sat waiting in the office of the Azkaban prison Warden. Harry was in his third year of Auror training which included being assigned to various Auror offices for real-world hands-on training. He loved it -- with some exceptions.

This month he was assigned to work in Investigations Division. This was his first case and something he had been really looking forward to. The Records Division had been exceedingly dull, surpassed only by Legal Proceedings Division. Learning to deal with solicitors was like punishment. He had just come from a stint in the Alchemical Division, which had been quite interesting, though not something he'd want to do long term. Hermione would have loved it.

Chief Inspector Burke was a pro. He did not treat Harry any differently than any other trainee. Harry appreciated that. Burke had given him only two bits of advice so far: "Pay attention and you might learn something," and, "Get yourself a Muggle pocket notebook and pencil."

While they waited for the Warden, Burke was thumbing through his old case notebook. Harry now had one too -- and a pencil -- but his was new and completely blank.

Burke was a burly man, with a lined face and a heavy five o'clock shadow, which was visible even after he had just shaved. His hair was black and wild like Harry's but he kept it cut short and flat on top. He also had piercing grey eyes

below thick eyebrows. He looked tough. He was tough. Harry knew he wasn't someone you'd want to tangle with. Just looking at his knobby knuckles, you could tell he'd been in a lot of fights, but his nose appeared unbroken.

The door to the Warden's office opened and a tall but elderly man in dark grey robes hurried in.

"Sorry to keep you waiting. There's always something..." He threw some papers down onto the desk and looked at his visitors.

"Ah, Bill..." said the Warden warmly, "So good to see you again. It's been too long..." The Warden came around his desk and shook hands with Burke, who had stood up to greet his old friend.

"It has," said Burke amiably. "I was surprised when you took this job. Didn't figure you working behind a desk."

"I was getting too old for chasing down Dark Wizards and someone had to take over when we got rid of the Dementors," said the Warden.

"Harry, I'd like you to meet Warden Davis, the best detective Investigations Division ever had. He trained me thirty years ago... and never stopped. I learned everything I know from him -- including the notebook and pencil," he added with a smile. "This is Harry Potter."

Davis beamed at Harry and shook his hand. "I couldn't be prouder to meet you and to know you've chosen to become one of us. I dare say, you've already made your biggest catch, and it'll be rather dull from now on."

"Uh...", Harry started to say when Davis slapped him on the shoulder. "You just pay attention to Burke here, and you might learn something."

Davis then rubbed his hands together and said, "Let's get down to business." He walked over to a row of filing cabinets, opened a drawer, and withdrew a standard evidence box about twice the size of a shoebox. He placed it on his desk and took the lid off. The first thing he pulled out was a copy of the Daily Prophet. He unfolded it and held out the front page so the second headline, below the fold, was on top.

It read, *Death Eater Commits Suicide in Azkaban*. Harry remembered it from yesterday. The paper had reported the suicide of Lucius Malfoy, who had served just under four years of his life sentence. Harry had been surprised, but not sorry.

Burke asked, "Are you saying it *wasn't* a suicide?"

"Everything about it says suicide... including the note," replied Warden Davis as he pulled a piece of parchment and series of photographs out of the evidence box.

The note said, "*I cannot go on.*" It was crudely written in blood, with what Harry guessed was a fingertip, on the back of a letter from Narcissa. In the short letter, Narcissa begged for reconciliation and requested Lucius accept a visit from their house-elf the following day to hear a message, since he refused to see her.

The photographs were wizard photographs, but nothing was moving in them since they were pictures of a static scene with a dead man. They were quite graphic.

A close up shot showed a man with a thick cord wrapped tightly around his neck. The cord looked more like a sheet which had been twisted, rather than a rope. The cord had been tied to the top of a wooden cot frame which had been stood on its end and leaned against a cell wall. The man sagged down heavily on the cord. His knees were bent and his bare feet dragged backwards on the stone floor. His face was bloated and his swollen tongue stuck out of his mouth.

A wider shot showed the whole cell. A thin lumpy mattress and an old looking blanket were on the floor next to the bed, apparently having been cast aside when the cot was up ended. There was a chamber pot in the back corner near a small metal sink attached to the wall. There was another photo which showed an empty bowl and cup by the cell door and an old torn newspaper which had been under the mattress.

The close-up of the man's face was hard to look at, but Harry recognized it as Lucius Malfoy. He had no doubt, especially when he looked at the 'cadaver' photos of the man after being taken down and positioned on the floor. The Dark Mark was on the left forearm. It now looked like a faded red scar. Harry doubted you could fake that. There was also a small cut on the wrist, probably made to get blood for the suicide note. A dark stain on the man's right index finger was probably blood.

As Harry looked again at the close up of Lucius' face, Davis said, "It's Malfoy all right. His wife identified him. That was two days ago. We've already released the body and I think he was laid to rest in the family mausoleum today."

Harry said, "I knew him. It looks like him to me." Then he asked, "Can you commit suicide like this without hanging free?"

"Yes," said Burke. It's more like slow strangulation than hanging, which is usually quite fast. It may take several tries, but a determined person eventually passes out and once that happens, it's all over. But it's not usually quick."

"Was it a sheet?" asked Harry.

"It was the mattress cover; no sheets for prisoners," answered Warden Davis. "There's one more picture I want you to see." He reached into the evidence box and pulled out another photo and handed it to Burke.

It showed the base of the cot's wooden frame and the cell floor looking from the back wall. There appeared to be a course piece of cloth wedged between the wall and the wooden frame.

"What's that?" asked Harry.

"*That* is why you're here," said the warden. "It shouldn't be there." He reached into the evidence bag and pulled out a rectangular brown burlap cloth about one foot by two feet and held it up.

Harry said, "It's a potato sack."

"It's a *Muggle* potato sack," corrected Burke.

"Exactly," said Warden Davis. "The open end was rolled up to shorten it when we found it."

Warden Davis handed the evidence box to Harry who put everything back inside it.

Davis said, "There are of couple of reports in the bottom for you as well. Now, before you go, there are a few more things worth mentioning..."

“One week before Malfoy committed suicide, he was, in fact, visited by his house-elf. That is unusual, but not unheard of. There is a statement in the evidence box from the Auror that took notes of their conversation. There isn't much in the statement, but it may establish state of mind. Malfoy's wife wrote him a letter every week like clockwork since she was released from Azkaban nearly two years ago. But he had refused to see her again after their trial, even when they were still in prison together.”

“He read her letters, but put them in his chamber pot. He wrote her just once -- four days before their house-elf showed up. He got his last letter from her one day before the elf. He used that letter to write his suicide note. Interestingly, a strip of parchment, maybe one inch wide, had been very carefully torn off the end of the letter, as if trying to hide the fact. We didn't find it. Malfoy should have gotten his regular weekly letter from his wife on the day before he committed suicide, but it never came. The guard's report may explain that. Malfoy told the elf he was through with her and his son. But his rejection of them had never stopped her writing before. ”

Burke said, “A house-elf, a potato sack, a strip of missing parchment, and a letter that never arrived. That sounds right up my alley.”

Chapter 5 -- The Janus Thickey Ward

Healer Pethig looked up from reading her book. There had been a knock on the door to the ward. She looked at the watch pinned to the front of her white robes. Evening visiting hours were almost over, but not quite. She put down her book on the desk of her station and walked to the door. She could see a kindly looking middle age witch with graying hair smiling at her through the round glass window in the door.

The Healer was very familiar with all the regular visitors of her patients. She had never seen this witch before, but it could only mean one thing -- another Gilderoy Lockhart fan. Most of them seemed to be women of this age.

Pethig unlocked the ward door and admitted the witch, who said, “I'm here to see...”

“Gilderoy Lockhart, of course,” interjected Pethig. “He's such a dear man.”

“What? ...Oh... Why, yes. How did you know?” said the witch, looking a little startled.

“He’s quite famous for all his books. Only fans come to visit him, since he has no family,” explained the Healer. She looked at the witch’s empty hands. “I’m surprised you didn’t bring a book for him to autograph, most of his fans do. But don’t worry, he’ll give you an autographed photo. I’ll tell him you’re here. What’s your name? If you’ve sent him fan mail, I bet he’ll remember it. He doesn’t remember much else.”

Healer Pethig smiled and waited for the witch to respond and was surprised to see the witch pull out her wand. Before she could finish saying, “There’s no need for...”

The witch commanded, “*Imperio!*”

The Healer froze with a blank look on her face.

The witch took Healer Pethig’s keys, which were still in her hand, locked the ward door and pocketed them. The witch then turned and surveyed the ward. There were two screened beds along each side wall and a curtain drawn across the ward from both sides about half way down. A gap in the middle of the curtain showed there were four more screened beds beyond it.

“Show me Lockhart,” said the witch.

Healer Pethig led her over to the first screened bed on the right. The witch peered around the end of the screen. Lockhart was seated on a chair next to the bed, bent over the bedside table, humming merrily, and autographing a large stack of photographs of himself.

The witch pointed her wand at Lockhart and said, “*Imperio.*”

Lockhart froze. Then he put down his quill, stood up and turned around with a blank look on his face. He was wearing a velvet maroon robe with his initials embroidered in gold on the right breast. The witch gestured with her wand and Lockhart removed his robe and laid it on his bed, leaving him in pale green and white striped hospital pajamas and white cotton slippers.

The witch spoke to the Healer, "Take us to Crouch."

The Healer led the way followed by Lockhart and the witch. She led them through the curtains dividing the ward to the last screened bed on the left. The witch turned to Healer Pethig and said, "Give all the other patients a sleeping draught and then guard the door. Let no one in." Pethig turned and left.

The witch looked at the bed. Except for the neatly shaved head on the pillow, you could almost miss the fact a human being occupied the bed. Only the shaven head suggested it was male. The figure was skeletally thin and hardly lifted the bed covers. The eyes were closed and deeply sunken, as were with the cheeks. The face was so thin, the ears and nose looked very large. The skin looked leathery but was almost transparent. The figure's breathing was very, very slow and sounded dry and raspy. Barty Crouch Jr was obviously wasting away and near death.

The witch took a glass vial out of her robe pocket, and uncorked it. She pulled a hank of golden blond hair from Lockhart's head. She took one hair and put it into the dark brown sludgy contents of the vial, which immediately began to bubble and turned a pea green color. She put the rest of the hank of Lockhart's hair into her pocket. She took off her shoes and then drank the potion. In moments she began to transform. Within a minute she appeared identical to Lockhart except for wearing now very snug witches robes.

The witch walked over to Crouch and pulled a few very short hairs from his eyebrows. They practically fell out. She backed away and then pointed her wand at Lockhart.

He walked to the bed, pulled down the covers, and lifted the skeletal form out of the bed and laid it gently on the floor. He then climbed into Crouch's bed and pulled the covers up.

The witch took from her robes another vial containing the same dark liquid and uncorked it. She dropped in the hairs she had taken from Barty Crouch Jr. into the vial. This time it turned black. She flicked her wand and Lockhart opened his mouth. She tipped the vial and poured the contents into Lockhart's mouth and he swallowed it. Within a minute, Lockhart had transformed into the deathly figure of Barty Crouch Jr.

The witch was now the only person who looked like Gilderoy Lockhart. She smiled, showing the wide array of dazzlingly white teeth that were his trademark. Then suddenly, with clear and willful intent, she placed her hands around the shrunken throat of the figure in the bed and squeezed with tremendous force. The figure convulsed and flailed in an involuntary struggle to breath, but its efforts were feeble and no match for a healthy, fully grown man.

It was over quickly, but the Lockhart-witch continued to squeeze for several minutes. There could be no mistake.

When it was done, the witch returned the vials and corks to her robe pocket. She also picked up her shoes and stuffed them into her pocket. Then she kneeled on one knee and carefully picked up the real Barty Crouch Jr from the floor in a rescue carry, placing him over her shoulder, and walked to the front of the ward. Crouch was incredibly light; he could not weigh more than sixty pounds. The witch gently set Crouch onto the floor.

The witch, still appearing to be Lockhart, used her wand to perform a Memory Charm on Healer Pethig, who was guarding the door with her wand out. She took the Healer's wand from her and put her own wand back into her robe pocket. She then punched the Healer hard in the jaw, knocking her out. The Healer collapsed onto the floor, unconscious. The witch took the ward keys from her own pocket, unlocked the door and then dropped the keys onto the floor. Finally, she pointed her new wand at the Healer, lifted the Impirius Curse and intoned, "*Obliviate.*"

After a few seconds, the witch commanded, "Winky!"

Almost instantly, there was a small pop, and Winky the house-elf appeared. She stood quivered before a tall blond man in witches robes standing next to her beloved Master Barty, who lay deathly still on the floor.

The elf looked surprised, but before she could speak, the man spoke, "Winky, I had to transform into this man in order to rescue Barty Crouch. Take us to our hiding place, now, so I can revive him."

"Yes, Master," squeaked Winky, not looking at him. She could not take her eyes off her beloved former master. She kneeled next to the skeletal figure and gently took his hand with her own. Then she reached up and took the hand of the large blond man and an instant later they all vanished with a loud crack.

Chapter 6 -- The Investigation Continues

“What have you got, Sandy?” asked Harry.

He was addressing a very attractive young witch from the Alchemical Division of the Auror Office. She was wearing a stained lab apron over her robes and her hair was covered with a cloth that was tied behind her head. She had heavy goggles perched on her forehead and wore thick dragon hide gloves. Still, Harry thought Ginny would probably be jealous if she saw him with her.

“Quite a lot actually... with help from Research,” she said cheerfully. She gave Harry the once over, which she did every time he came down to the Alchemical Division’s potions lab. It had been a struggle avoiding her when Harry had done his stint in the Division.

She rummaged through stacks of boxes and papers under the counter between them and pulled out a thick envelope. She opened it and pulled out several reports and a stack of photographs, which she spread out on the counter.

She began an efficient rundown of the findings. “This report says the Muggle potato sack came from a produce company in Scotland. It was primarily being used to carry clothing and other items. There were lots of different clothing fibers inside the bag. But there were also many hairs from the same person -- mostly in the bottom of the sack, indicating it was probably being worn on the persons head, likely for warmth. We used our special formula of Polyjuice Potion for a quick head transformation using one of our trainees.”

Harry was familiar with this process; he had been subjected to it during his month of training in the lab.

She continued, “These are the photographs of the person.”

Harry looked at them -- full face and left and right profiles. It was a middle-age man with black hair, a short beard, and a mustache, all tinged with grey. It looked as if he had cut his hair himself using scissors and no mirror. His eyes were brown and heavy lidded. He looked like he had not seen a good meal -- or a bath -- in a long time. His nose was slightly swollen and very red; his forehead was heavily lined.

"He's a Muggle," she said.

"How do you know?" asked Harry, "Polyjuice won't tell you that."

"Research, of course," she said airily. "Given the potato sack is from up north, I had the Research Division check Muggle police reports in those parts and we got a hit right away. The man is Leonard Stein -- *Lenny the Lush* his friends call him. He's a vagrant living on the streets of Glasgow. He has a record of petty crime mostly for money to buy drink. He's been reported missing. This is the report." She pointed to one of the reports on the counter.

"Good work," said Harry.

"We try," said Sandy, smiling.

"Now this is the interesting part," she continued, raising her eyebrows. "Lenny's skin cells were found inside and outside the sack, which is not surprising. Lucius Malfoy's skin cells were found on the outside of the sack, also not surprising. But we also found skin cells of a house-elf on the outside of the sack."

Harry raised his eyebrows when he heard *house-elf*.

"I thought you'd agree," she said. "Unfortunately, Polyjuice Potion doesn't work for elves, so we can only get a match by finding the elf and comparing it to the sample."

"We know Malfoy was visited by his house-elf the week before he killed himself. We'll start there," said Harry.

"I'm way ahead of you," said Sandy proudly. "We had an Investigator go to Malfoy Manor and get a skin scraping from their house-elf, but... it did *not* match, though it was quite close," she said disappointedly.

"It *didn't* match?" said Harry sounding surprised.

"Definitely not," replied Sandy assuredly and pointing to another report. "This is the report."

Harry was thinking his emerging theory had just blown up, when Sandy said, "So maybe the elf that visited Malfoy in Azkaban wasn't *his* house-elf. Who at

Azkaban would think to check the identity of a house-elf? That could explain the cell mismatch. But how did the elf smuggle the sack to Malfoy so he could get it to his cell? Visitors, including elves, are carefully searched and probed before seeing prisoners. They can only take paper and photographs in during a visitation session. And what was the sack for? What was in it?"

Harry was embarrassed that he had not thought of the 'other elf' angle. His theory, now slightly modified, still had life. "What about the suicide note?" he asked.

Sandy pointed to another report. "It's definitely Malfoy's blood on the back of his wife's letter. The crude lettering can't be reliably matched to his hand writing, but as far as I know, no one is questioning he wrote it. He definitely used his finger tip. The small cut on his wrist accounts for the source of blood. It looks like he cut it with his fingernail. The strip of parchment torn off the bottom of his wife's letter probably didn't have any of his wife's writing on it, but we can't be absolutely sure. It was very carefully torn off to provide a uniform width of an inch or slightly more. Only letters between prisoners and their official defense solicitors are not inspected. There was no record of anything unusual about her final letter. It only just said she wanted to reconcile, their house elf would be visiting the next day, and she begged him to accept the visit -- which he obviously did."

Harry asked, "What could you write on a one inch by six inch piece of parchment with a fingertip and blood?"

"Anything short, I suppose: a simple message, a password, a name and address..." she surmised.

"Right," said Harry already moving onto his next question. "Are visitors searched when they *leave* Azkaban?"

"Yes, the same inspection as when they arrive including the Probity Probe. They get their wands back and anything else that wasn't allowed during the prisoner visit. They are allowed to leave inspected documents, letters and photographs with the prisoner. If you're thinking about the switch Barty Crouch Sr engineered at Azkaban seven years ago -- where Barty Crouch Jr and his mother traded places -- that can't happen with the procedures put in place afterwards. Visitors never go to the cellblock anymore and prisoners are shackled to their chairs in the visiting rooms which are monitored by Aurors. They usually just listen, but

sometimes watch, except for visits from solicitors -- which are closed-door private. But I think you already know all this.”

“I do, but it helps to hear it from someone else,” he admitted. “Do you think the visitor exit inspection would have detected a one inch by six inch piece of parchment?”

“Ah... very good. I see where you're going. You have a theory don't you?” Sandy asked, intrigued.

Harry nodded, “Yes, I think...”

Just then Chief Inspector Burke strode through the door and said, “Harry, drop what you're doing. We're off to St Mungo's. Gilderoy Lockhart has murdered a patient and escaped.”

Chapter 7 -- The Room of Requirement

Three figures suddenly appeared with a loud crack in the Room of Requirement at Hogwarts School: Winky the house-elf; the witch transformed by Polyjuice Potion to look like Gilderoy Lockhart; and the soulless shell of a living body which had once been Barty Crouch Jr.

The room was brightly lit by torches and a blazing fireplace. It contained two beds, a small table with two chairs and a long workbench piled with books, beakers, cauldrons, and various instruments, including a set of scales. Wizard's robes were hanging in two open wardrobes. There were the remains of a meal on the table with two sets of dishes and tableware. One set was unused.

In one corner of the room, there was a doorway to an adjoining bathroom. Next to the doorway, bound securely to a chair with ropes, was a witch. She looked like the witch who had just been in the Janus Thickey Ward at St Mungo's only a few minutes earlier. She appeared to be in a deep sleep.

Winky let go of her side-along Apparation 'passengers'. She cried aloud and threw her arms adoringly around the head of the skeletal form of Barty Crouch Jr, her beloved master. “Master Barty is being so sick. Winky is taking care of you now.”

The witch who still looked like Gilderoy Lockhart said harshly, “Not *now*, elf! Help me get him onto that bed. He is not yet back among the truly living. I must quickly perform *very* difficult magic to bring him back... as I promised. There is no time to lose.”

Crouch weighed so little, Winky was able to manage her end, while the man lifted the other. When her Master Barty was laid upon the bed, Winky carefully arranged his arms and legs. When she looked up, the blond haired man was holding open a large old book in one hand. Winky could see the title on the cracked leather cover. It was *Secrets of the Darkest Art*.

The blond haired man held a wand in his other hand. He seemed to be reading from the book and practicing an incantation over and over as he moved his wand. After a few minutes, he snapped the book shut and threw it back onto the worktable. Winky thought he looked nervous.

The man looked at Winky and said, “Until I tell you otherwise, you are to remain still and quiet. Do *not* interfere no matter what happens. Do you *understand?*”

Winky nodded nervously.

“Get behind me now!” he commanded. Winky obeyed.

He lowered his wand and pointed it directly at Barty Crouch Jr’s head. He spoke words that Winky had never heard before. It sounded like three phrases strung together. He said them loudly and forcefully. There was a flash of dazzling blue light from the tip of his wand to Barty Crouch Jr’s head. At the same time, the blond man gasped and staggered.

A few moments passed in total silence, then Barty’s mouth gaped open and he took a very deep breath. As he exhaled he let out a long and sorrowful groan, like a man who had not been able to express pain for a long time.

It sent shivers down Winky’s spine, but she remained silent.

Barty took another deep rasping breath, then another, and coughed dryly. He seemed to relax a bit and took a few more labored breaths. Then he opened his eyes and blinked. “Water!” he croaked.

Winky could contain herself no longer. “Master Barty, you is back!” she cried.

“As you can see, I have kept my promise,” proclaimed the blond haired man. “I have brought your old master back from the living dead. Remember, elf. *I* am your master now. You swore your loyalty to *me* as the price. Now, attend to him. I need to get some sleep. Have breakfast ready in the morning.”

On his way to bed, the man emptied his pockets onto the long workbench and immodestly took off his too tight witch's robes and threw them onto the floor.

“Yes, Master,” said Winky who was already bringing a goblet of water to her dear Master Barty. She held his head and slowly tipped the contents into his mouth. He gulped it all down greedily, but the effort seemed to exhaust him and Winky laid his head back down and he closed his eyes.

Winky was determined to nurse him back to health. After that, she would have to time to think about her loyalties. If her brother, Blinky, had been able to make such seemingly impossible choices, why could she not?

Winky bustled about caring for her Master Barty, who had quickly fallen into a restless sleep. He mumbled and shook his head. Winky wiped his face with a damp cloth and caressed his shaven head. She manicured his finger nails and rubbed lotion into his thin dry skin.

As she cared for Master Barty, Winky saw that the sleeping form of the tall blond man transform back into the short middle-aged witch, whose double remained bound in the chair by the bathroom door.

About an hour after that, the same witch, who had just invaded the ward at St Mungo's, slowly transformed back into Lucius Malfoy.

Even in his sleep, Malfoy had a triumphant smile on his face.

Chapter 8 -- Connecting the Dots

“Just take it slow and tell us what happened... from the beginning,” said Chief Inspector Burke calmly to Healer Pethig.

Harry and Burke were standing by the Healer's station in the Janus Thickey Ward at St Mungo's Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries. This ward

handled long term residents suffering from permanent spell damage. Healer Pethig was sitting in her chair behind the station desk, ringing a handkerchief in her hands. Her direct supervisor and the hospital administrator were hovering behind her.

The administrator, a rather puffed up and pompous old wizard, had met them inside the entrance to the hospital. He had expressed his desire for a quick investigation and assured them that nothing had been touched at the crime scene. The administrator led them to the ward, but Harry knew the way.

Harry had been to St Mungo's nearly six years before at Christmas when he, Hermione and the rest of the Weasley family had visited Mr Weasley. He had been recovering from the attack by Voldemort's huge pet snake, Nagini, while guarding the entrance to the Department of Mysteries. While at St Mungo's, Harry, Ron and Hermione had gone for tea and had run into Gilderoy Lockhart wandering the halls. Lockhart's Healer at the time, not Pethig, had them visit with Lockhart when she returned him to this same ward.

Harry noticed the ward was different now. It seemed to be longer. It had the Healer station inside the ward and all the beds now had privacy screens. Plus there was a curtain half way down the ward separating the 'hopeless' cases in back from the 'hopeful' cases in front. This was not a happy place.

Harry sadly remembered that Neville Longbottom's parents were screened off in the back then and he presumed they were still there. He was fairly certain Barty Couch Jr was not in the ward then. He must have been brought in later from another ward.

Healer Pethig's face was swollen on the right side and was heavily bruised along her jaw and cheekbone. The Investigations Division photographer was waiting to take photographs during their walk-through. Once he had taken a picture of the Healer's face, she'd be able to have it completely cleared up by another Healer.

She began her story. "I was sitting at my station reading. Evening visiting hours were almost over when I heard Gilderoy's voice coming from the back of the ward. He was shouting that someone would pay for not wanting his autographed photo. I rushed back there and he was strangling poor Barty." Healer Pethig sobbed and blew her nose in her handkerchief. Then she continued.

"I tried and tried to pull him off but I couldn't. I pulled out my wand, but he suddenly lashed out and grabbed it from me and then ran down the ward to the door. I ran after him. He tried to use my wand to unlock the door but it is enchanted against that. He then turned and punched me, knocking me out. He must have taken my keys and unlocked the door. They were lying next to me when Healer Churchstone came to relieve me this morning and found me and... That's what happened," she finished.

"Were there any visitors to the ward yesterday?" asked Burke.

"No, none," said Pethig. "We don't usually get any on weekdays."

"You didn't see Lockhart leave his bed and walk to the back of the ward?" asked Burke.

"No. I must have been too distracted by my book." She held up a book, *Bewitched Lovers in Paradise*. It had a lurid cover illustration.

"How long did it take you to get back there after you first heard Lockhart shouting?" asked Burke.

"No more than ten to fifteen seconds," answered Pethig.

Her supervisor, Healer Gladhill, spoke up. "From the looks of the heavy bruising on Mr Crouch's neck, he had to have been strangled for at least a minute, probably longer."

Burke spoke to Pethig, "Could Lockhart have begun strangling Crouch *before* he started shouting?"

"I suppose..." said Pethig uncertainly, then "...he *must* have," she concluded.

Burke was obviously in thought.

Harry asked a question. "Can you hear normal conversation at the back of the ward from your desk?"

"Sometimes, but not clearly. You don't expect to hear anything from the patients back there, just their visitors... Poor Barty; Poor Gilderoy," she said tearfully.

Burke resumed. "So this was completely unexpected?"

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed Pethig. "Gilderoy wouldn't hurt a fly. He has the mind of a child. It has not improved noticeably since he first arrived. He didn't even know he was a wizard anymore. All he cared about were his autographed photos and his fan mail, which he really didn't understand. He just liked the fact that people liked him and wrote him letters... Barty was the saddest case I'd ever seen -- the Dementor's kiss, I'm sure you know. At the time it happened, he couldn't be sent back to Azkaban, so he was sent here. With no soul or consciousness, the body just slowly wastes away. He was a living skeleton and near death. No charm or potion could sustain him, though we tried." Pethig started sobbing again.

Between sobs she said, "It... doesn't... make... any... sense."

Burke looked at the Administrator. "Who saw Lockhart leave; what time was it?"

The Administrator looked embarrassed. "Ah, as far as we can tell, *no one* saw him. And the only entrance is the one you came in. The windows are all magically sealed. There is no access to the roof either. And you can't Apparate or Disapparate except in the emergency room; he definitely was *not* seen there. So he is either hiding in the hospital, has an invisibility cloak (or performed a first-class Disillusionment Charm) and walked out the main entrance."

"Nonsense," said Pethig. "He couldn't perform magic, and he didn't have a cloak. He was wearing St Mungo's pajamas -- he left his monogrammed maroon robe on his bed."

"You said he took your wand and tried to unlock the ward door," Burke reminded Pethig.

"Yes, and I can't understand that," she said shaking her head.

"I notice all the other patients are rather quiet," said Harry. He remembered much more activity the last time he was here.

"They all seem to have been given a sleeping draught," Pethig said.

"Is that normal?" asked Burke.

"No, but I must have done it, though I can't remember doing it. The remaining quantity in the potion bottle is less than I remember. The blow that knocked me out must have affected my memory," she said, looking confused.

Burke and Harry looked at each other.

"OK. Time to take a look. Please lead the way, Healer Pethig," Burke said. The photographer quickly stepped up and took her picture.

They looked at Lockhart's bed first. It was still made up and his robe was thrown across it. There were stacks of signed and unsigned photographs on his bedside table. The ink bottle was still open and the quill lay on the top signed photo. The photographer took several photos from different angles.

Then they went to the back of the ward and stood at the foot of Crouch's bed.

Harry was shocked to see the physical transformation of Barty Crouch Jr compared to when he had seen him last -- six years ago in the Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher's office at Hogwarts. He looked *worse* than the living skeleton that Healer Pethig had just described. Of course, now he *was* dead. Harry could clearly see the livid bruising on the emaciated neck.

Burke spoke first. "Healer Pethig, you said you struggled with Lockhart. The screens on either side of this bed are not disturbed and there isn't much room between the screens and the bed. It's really only enough for one person attending the patient. From the bruises, it looks like Lockhart stood on our left side facing the patient."

"I can't explain that," said Pethig in surprise. "The screen on the left should have been pushed aside or knocked over."

Burke gestured to the Photographer, who took a series of pictures.

Harry spoke up. "Where's Lockhart's autographed picture?"

Burke cocked his head. "Good one, Harry."

"I distinctly remember there was a photograph," said Pethig.

There was no photo on the bed or the small bedside table. They stooped and looked under the bed and then at the floor in adjacent patient areas in case the photograph had sailed away.

Harry's heart ached when he looked across the aisle and saw Neville's parents asleep. Their beds were right next to each other in a shared screened area. They were holding hands.

Burke said, "It could only be in one other place."

He walked to the left side of the bed near Crouch's head. He reached across and lifted the bed covers, which were very rumpled -- obviously during the strangulation. He walked them back to the foot of the bed and let them drop over the frame. There was no autographed picture under the bedcovers.

The photographer started taking more pictures.

"Notice anything, Harry?" Burke asked.

Harry was looking. Crouch had on hospital pajamas that seemed much too large for him, but then again, he was extremely emaciated. Then Harry noticed something and looked excitedly at Burke.

Pethig noticed too and exclaimed, "*Impossible!* He *couldn't* walk and never has."

Barty Crouch Jr was wearing white hospital slippers.

Healer Pethig reached over and removed one of the slippers. She exclaimed almost immediately, "This doesn't make *sense!*"

She looked very confused as she held up the slightly soiled slipper exposing the inside of the heel to Burke and Harry.

It bore hand lettered inked initials: *G.L.*

Pethig shook her head and said, "We only issue new slippers when needed. I write their initials in them to sort them out, because they are always getting mixed up. How did Gilderoy's slippers end up on Barty?"

Harry had a pretty good idea.

Chapter 9 -- Another's Memories

He was dreaming. He had not dreamed in so long he craved it. But it was a nightmare.

The Dementor was closing in, but he could not move. Someone was screaming. He was screaming.

Other voices were shouting. One -- a small, squeaky voice -- was wailing his name, "Master Barty! Master Barty!"

He awoke with a start. He thought, 'What has happened? I feel so weak. My head is swirling with strange memories.'

A voice close by squeaked excitedly, "Master Barty, you is awake. You is needing to eat to be getting back your strength."

"Master Barty?" he thought. "No, I'm Lucius Malfoy." He was still groggy from restless sleep. He tried to raise himself but could not.

Small hands gripped his shoulders and the squeaky voice spoke again, practically in his ear, "Master Barty, you is weak. Let Winky help you." The surprisingly strong hands helped him sit up and then placed several pillows behind him so he could lean back comfortably.

Winky moved in from of him where he could see her.

He recognized her. "You're... Winky," he said slowly. He had known her as long as he could remember. She was the family house-elf. No, that could not be right. He had only met the elf two weeks ago. He felt so confused; he closed his eyes and shook his head.

When he opened them again, Winky was placing a food tray across his lap. His mouth immediately began to water. He was desperately hungry, but he was too weak to lift his arms.

Winky began to feed him, very slowly, only offering very small bites. It was excruciatingly frustrating. He wanted to devour everything on the tray and more, much more. All he could think about was food.

"Master Barty must not be overeating at first," said Winky, seeming to read his thoughts. "You would be throwing it all up."

A man moved into his field of view. He was looking at... *himself!*

It was like a switch had been thrown inside his head. He suddenly understood what had happened.

'I AM THE HORCRUX!'

He screamed in outrage, "NO!"

Winky grabbed the food tray and leapt back.

"Yes!" said Lucius Malfoy excitedly. "Get used to it ...Barty." His eyes were wild looking.

Malfoy looked at Winky and said, "Get a restorative potion from the hospital wing and more food from the kitchens. Now!"

Winky put down the food tray, bowed and disappeared with a pop.

Malfoy went on. "*Secrets of the Darkest Art* does not cover this situation, but I suspected that placing half my soul into a soulless living body would allow it to take control and restore the body to normalcy. Harry Potter was one of the Dark Lord's Horcruxes, but Potter had a soul, a mind, a consciousness which dominated. The smaller bit of the Dark Lord's soul in him might have had some effect, but I think the former was the key." He paused for a moment as if studying Crouch, then said. "But you know all this, don't you?"

"No," croaked Crouch weakly. He was still in shock.

"Nonsense... you are weak and simply confused," said Malfoy almost sympathetically. "You have a whole brain full of another man's memories, which I believe will soon be replaced with your own. But your mind and soul know the truth. What power can mere memory have over consciousness, a mind and a

soul? So listen now, for everything depends on it. The elf must not know you and I are halves of a whole. He must think you are Barty Crouch Jr, the son of his beloved former master. To this effect and to avoid confusion, I will call you Barty or Crouch and you will call me Lucius or Malfoy. Do you understand?"

"Yes," said Crouch grudgingly. He was gritting his teeth.

Just then, Winky, popped back into the room carrying a basket almost as large as she was. "Winky has everything you is ordering, Master Lucius."

"Excellent. It is your duty to nurse Mr Crouch back to health. He should be up and about in a week with good food, some exercise, the restorative potion and a few good spells. See to it."

"Yes, Master Lucius," Winky said happily.

"Rest today, Barty. Tomorrow we will begin discussing how you got here and our future plans," said Malfoy, quite satisfied with himself.

Lucius turned and walked over to the worktable where he began checking on a bubbling cauldron sitting on a burner over a small blue flame.

Winky, happier than she had been in six years, began attending to her beloved Master Barty.

Chapter 10 -- Two Plus Two

Harry read the headline in the Daily Prophet and shook his head, *Murder in St Mungo's*. He began reading the story.

Gilderoy Lockhart, famous author, former celebrity and brain-addled patient at St Mungo's Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries, strangled former convicted Death Eater, Barty Crouch Jr on Thursday evening. Crouch was himself a patient at St Mungo's after receiving the Dementor's Kiss following his infamous escape from Azkaban seven years ago in a scandal that rocked the Ministry of Magic. Even more shocking, Cornelius Fudge, the Minister for Magic at the time, claimed Albus...

Harry folded the paper and threw it down on the counter.

Sandy, the Alchemical Division witch, walked through the door behind the counter and handed Harry a report.

“You were right, Harry. The pajamas and slippers on Crouch had lots of Lockhart’s skin cells and body hair. So it appears Lockhart took the trouble to exchange his hospital garb with Crouch, a helpless comatose wraith, then strangled him and escaped from the hospital -- naked and barefoot -- without being seen. Of course, ...he *was* crazy.”

“He wasn’t crazy. He was mentally about seven years old...” Sandy, we both know what this points to...” said Harry.

They both finished the sentence, “...Polyjuice Potion.”

“It’s suspicious how Crouch was involved again in the same type of deception that his father and mother used to affect his escape from Azkaban,” said Sandy. “Who would want to murder Lockhart to get Crouch out of St Mungo’s? Crouch was the living dead; what use would he be to anyone? And how did they get him out without being seen?”

“Good questions,” said Harry. “I think Lockhart was just unlucky. It could have been any of the ambulatory patients in the ward instead of him.”

“So what’s your theory?” Sandy asked looking especially interested. She put her elbows on the counter and cradled her face on her hands, smiling.

Harry looked a little uncomfortable. “Uh, I have to meet Burke. We’re going to interview Narcissa Malfoy and the family house-elf. I’ll talk to you later.”

He turned and left.

Sandy puffed out her cheeks and pouted before rising and walking back into the laboratory.

“You took a *long* time to pick up that report... Watch out, Harry; she’s got her eye on you.” Burke said smiling. He had been waiting for Harry to join him in the atrium.

Harry blushed. "Sandy's smart and it's good to talk over the evidence with her. She reminds me of my friend Hermione from school. But I'm already serious about Ginny Weasley. We're not officially engaged, but I plan to propose after I finish Auror training."

"Everybody knows. I'm just pulling your chain," laughed Burke. "But seriously, Sandy is *very* smart, and it *is* a good idea to review the evidence with her. Did you know she's only a year older than you?" asked Burke.

"Really," said Harry. "I'd remember if she'd been at Hogwarts. Did she go to another wizard school?"

"She was home schooled," said Burke. "She earned Outstanding on all of her NEWTs, including full marks in Charms, Potions and Transfiguration."

"Wow," said Harry. "Even Hermione didn't do that."

Burke patted Harry on the shoulder, and then changed the subject.

"Before we talk to Narcissa Malfoy, I just want to be clear. We are going to pretend we believe she sent her own house-elf to see her husband a week before he committed suicide. We'll make other arrangement to talk to her house-elf without her knowledge. Right?" said Burke.

"Right," said Harry. "I can help with the second part. I can use my house-elf to set it up."

"*You* have a house-elf?" said Burke, looking at Harry a little strangely.

Harry laughed. "It's refreshing to know someone who hasn't read my biography."

"I didn't want to bias our relationship..." claimed Burke. Then he shrugged, "OK, I skimmed through it. I'll admit it. Everyone has." Then he returned to the subject at hand. "Let's get to Malfoy Manor for our appointment. You've been there; why don't you lead?"

Harry nodded. He took hold of Burke's arm and they turned on the spot.

They Apparated into the courtyard of Malfoy Manor right in front of the carriage entrance. Harry looked around. The grounds looked run down.

Burke rang the bell.

A house-elf opened the door. It seemed very familiar to Harry, but he was distracted by three large hairy moles on the elf's chin.

Burke introduced himself, and Harry, and said they were here for an appointment with its Mistress. The elf's eyes bulged even more than usual when it looked at Harry. It invited them in and asked them to wait in the entrance hall. It came back a minute later and asked them to follow. It led them up the grand staircase, down the hall and into the drawing room. It squeaked, "Mistress Narcissa, Mr Burke and Mr Potter to be seeing you," and then departed.

Narcissa was seated on a divan, dressed in a beautiful silver and black robe. She did not get up or greet them, and did not invite them to sit down. It was very uncomfortable for Harry to look at her. Her face clearly showed years of stress, but she still had a cold superior look on her face, almost sneering. She ignored Harry and only looked at Burke. She said nothing.

Burke was obviously used to this kind of treatment. He only waited a moment for Narcissa's rudeness to settle over the room, and then asked his questions. Narcissa answered immediately each time as if she were ready for them.

Burke: "Why did you send your house-elf to see your husband in Azkaban?"

Narcissa: "My husband's only letter made me believe it was my last chance to reconcile."

Burke: "What did your house-elf tell you your husband said?"

Narcissa: "There was no chance of reconciliation."

Burke: "Were you surprised by your husband's suicide?"

Narcissa: "Of course, but I understand it."

Burke: "Why is that?"

Narcissa: "He lost everything he believed in and believed his wife and son betrayed him."

Burke: "Did you?"

Narcissa: "No. We betrayed the Dark Lord, who was destroying us. He didn't see it."

Burke: "Is there anything you want to add?"

Narcissa: "No."

Burke: "Is your son here? We'd like to ask him some questions."

Narcissa: "He doesn't live here anymore. We are estranged."

Then Burke said, "Thank you for your cooperation, Mrs Malfoy."

He turned to leave, but then turned back and said, "One more question, please. Do you think the murder of Barty Crouch Jr in St Mungo's has any connection with the death of your husband -- being so close together in time and them both being Death Eaters?"

This question caught Narcissa off guard. She flushed and stammered, "What? ...I don't know... Of course not."

Then she quickly regained her composure. "Your question is preposterous. Barty Crouch Jr effectively died years ago."

Harry smirked for just an instant, but Narcissa saw it. She glared at him and snarled, "I did it for *Draco*, not *you*. I didn't ask you to testify for me. You cost me my *marriage* and my *son*. *GET OUT!*"

Harry thought about responding, but Burke grabbed him by the arm and they left.

Outside, Burke said, "She's not that good at Occlumency. I could tell she clearly lied answering the first three questions and the last one. She told the truth for the rest, though evasively. She doesn't know what's going on, but she did suspect there is a connection with Crouch's death."

Harry was impressed. So far, his performance in Auror Legilimency training was about as good as his performance had been in Occlumency lessons with Snape. He instantly committed himself to working harder on both.

Burke paused a moment and then chuckled. "Whew. You *really* set her off. If looks could kill... she is as hard as they come. Imagine having her on the other pillow."

Harry laughed. "You think *she's* hard? You should have seen her sister, Bellatrix -- the only female Death Eater."

"OK then," said Burke getting back to business. "You talk to the Malfoy's house-elf. We'll meet back at the office tomorrow at lunch to review the evidence. You can invite Sandy if you want... just kidding," he added at Harry's look of alarm.

Then Burke said, "Something *e*lse is going to happen, but I don't know what or when. We'll just have to wait."

Burke and Harry Disapparated separately.

Harry reappeared with a crack in the front hallway of number twelve, Grimmauld Place. Per 'house rules' he took off his shoes and placed them near the front door. He also stopped in the hall bathroom and washed his hands. Then he went downstairs to the kitchen.

He passed the place where Mrs Black's portrait hung. Instead of velvet curtains it was now covered by two large latched wooden doors which had been nicely painted with a bright scene of Hogwarts castle in springtime by Luna Lovegood -- just because she was so nice. This had been an acceptable compromise for Kreacher, who could still commiserate with his departed Mistress, while not disrupting the house whenever a door slammed.

"Good evening, Mr Potter," said Kreacher with his bullfrog voice as Harry entered the kitchen. "You are home early." It had taken Harry a long time to persuade Kreacher not to directly address him as 'Master Harry.'

"I have a mission for you. It's important. Lives may be at stake," said Harry very seriously.

"Kreacher will do his best to serve his master, Mr Potter," said Kreacher bowing low.

Harry was still working with Kreacher on the indirect 'master' references... He noticed Kreacher was fingering the locket of his former Master Regulus, which rested on his chest under his spotless clean white smock.

"Thank you, Kreacher," said Harry. "I need you to contact the Malfoy family's current house-elf and arrange a meeting with me as soon as possible, but before noon tomorrow -- someplace away from Malfoy Manor. Here would be best, I think. You must tell him or her that it is official Auror Office business and it might endanger his or her Mistress if she finds out."

"Him," said Kreacher.

"Excuse me?" said Harry.

"The Malfoy house-elf is male. His name is Blinky. Kreacher knows him. He fought with the Hogwarts house-elves in the battle against He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named."

"The Malfoy's house-elf fought against Voldemort?" asked Harry incredulously.

"Yes," said Kreacher. He no longer flinched when Harry said the name.

Harry was still wondering at the impossibility of it, when Kreacher asked, "Shall Kreacher go now?"

"Yes!" said Harry excitedly.

Kreacher disappeared with a loud crack.

Harry poured himself a shot of old Ogden's Old Firewhisky. He sat down at the kitchen table and opened the Daily Prophet which was where Kreacher always left it for him. He skipped the St Mungo's murder story. The Chudley Cannon's were still bottom of the league. Some things never change, he thought.

Then he noticed an item from the section on *Local News Highlights* from across England. A middle age witch had been reported missing in Hogsmeade. She had been staying at the Three Broomsticks visiting friends. All her things had been left in her room. Harry thought this was unusual. He had never heard of a real, non-magical, disappearance in an all-magical village.

Just then, there was another loud crack. Kreacher had returned. A much smaller house-elf stood trembling next to him. It looked like the same one who had greeted him and Burke at Malfoy manner today -- the three large hairy moles were unmistakable. But there was something else he could not put his finger on.

"Kreacher has returned with Blinky," croaked Kreacher.

"Thank you for coming, Blinky," said Harry, who smiled -- trying to put the tiny elf at ease.

"Blinky is wanting to help Harry Potter and protect my Mistress," squeaked Blinky. He looked nervous and was trembling slightly.

"Blinky, this is very important. I am investigating the suicide of your former master, Lucius Malfoy. I have just a couple of questions for you."

"First, did you visit Lucius Malfoy in Azkaban?" asked Harry evenly.

Blinky began to tremble even more, but he said, "No, Harry Potter."

"Do you know who did?"

Blinky was now shaking. "Yes, Harry Potter, but Blinky cannot be saying."

Harry knew not to try to force someone else's house-elf to reveal information it did not want to, but the fact the elf had said 'Yes' was crucial and needed to be verified.

"Fine. Maybe another time," said Harry. "Do you mind if I gather some evidence from your person. I promise it won't hurt."

"Blinky is not minding," said Blinky, now back to a slight tremble.

Harry took out his case notebook, which was now well used, and tore off a sheet of paper. He walked over to Blinky and had him hold out his arm. He gently scraped the edge of the paper along the elf's arm like he was sharpening a knife. He then folded the paper several times in both directions and put it in his pocket.

Harry wanted to be sure Blinky was the same elf that was sampled by the investigator that Sandy had sent to Malfoy Manor.

“Thank you, Blinky,” said Harry. “Please keep our meeting secret for the sake of your family. I won’t make you promise. This is just a very special request. You are free to go.”

“Thank you, Harry Potter,” said Blinky. He smiled and now seemed to be quite calm. Then he disappeared with a pop.

“Thank you, Kreacher. You have done very well,” said Harry. “I’m going to make a quick trip back to the Auror Office and then I’ll come back for dinner.”

Kreacher looked a little funny. He was rocking back and forth on his heels, like he was conflicted.

Harry said. “Kreacher, is there something you want to tell me?”

Kreacher continued to rock and looked at the spot where Blinky had been standing.

With sudden inspiration, Harry asked, “You know who the elf is that Blinky wouldn’t identify, don’t you?”

“Kreacher *thinks* he knows. Kreacher could be wrong, but Kreacher doesn’t think so. There is only one house-elf Kreacher thinks Blinky would be protecting.”

“Kreacher, I order you to tell me who you think Blinky is protecting,” commanded Harry.

“Winky, the sister of Blinky,” croaked Kreacher.

Harry’s jaw dropped. That’s why Blinky looked so familiar. He chided himself for not being able to look past those hairy moles...

Chapter 11 -- Half and Half

“You are already looking better,” said Lucius Malfoy pleasantly. He was standing next to Crouch who was sitting up in bed and had just finished a breakfast tray provided by Winky. Crouch had been strong enough to feed himself. “I bet you’ll be able to stand up by tomorrow.”

Crouch said, "Feeling better too," though he did not sound pleased. It was more of a diagnosis. He belched.

"Winky, take his tray and leave us. I want to talk to Mr Crouch privately," said Malfoy. "I will call you when I need you."

"Yes, Master Lucius," said Winky, bowing. She vanished with a pop.

Lucius took out his wand and levitated a chair from the table and placed it next to the bed. He sat down.

Crouch eyed the wand.

Malfoy noticed. "Ah, I see. Yes, we need to be sure, don't we?" He pointed his wand toward the workbench and said, *Accio* wand. A wand which had been lying on the workbench sailed through the air and Malfoy caught it in his free hand.

"This is the wand I took from the witch tied up over there. I now freely give it to you, making it your wand," said Malfoy rather dramatically. He handed it to Crouch. "Try it," he said.

Crouch pointed his new wand at a book on the workbench. It rose into the air, did several flips and then settled gently back down.

"Good," said Malfoy. "Any problems?"

"No," said Crouch.

"Well then, it's time to talk," said Malfoy. "Of course, I'm going to do most of the talking because unless I'm mistaken, you don't yet have a lot of specific memories of my life... or should I say... our life." He smiled.

Crouch's brow furrowed in thought and then he said, "No. Barty's memories are dominant right now. My Lucius memories seem to be things tied to self awareness and emotions. I remember my family, wife and son and... others... the Dark Lord in particular. Specific events are very unclear. I'm not sure what I don't remember. It's very confusing. I can only assume the clear memories of things that happened before the last few days are Barty's."

"In the long run, I don't think it is going to matter," said Malfoy. "You have a new life ahead of you. You only need to know how you came to be and how we are going to avenge ourselves on Harry Potter."

"Harry... *Potter*," spat Crouch. Memories flooded his head. They were Barty's memories, but they reinforced his own emotions on hearing the name -- *Revenge!* Yes, he wanted revenge for his failure to kill Potter, which to his despair, had led to the Dark Lord's downfall. His reaction was so strong he knew it was the focal point of both Barty's memory and Lucius' emotion. "I'll kill him."

"That's the spirit," said Malfoy. "You must hate him more than I do."

Malfoy began his story. "You know that both Narcissa and Draco betrayed us, but Narcissa wanted reconciliation. Draco did not. Still I refused contact with Narcissa until I realized I could use her... but I am getting ahead of myself."

"It was during the Battle of Hogwarts where the story starts. The Dark Lord and Potter were about to have their final duel when Potter said '**There are no more Horcruxes. It's just you and me.**' I didn't know what a Horcrux was and completely forgot about it. Then last month I read Potter's biography by Rita Skeeter and I found out. I also found out things about elf magic I never knew. I realized I had a way to escape from Azkaban and have my revenge."

"But it would be complicated because I did not trust my *own* house-elf. It did not come to us when we needed it the most. What elf then? Again Potter's biography provided the answer -- the loyal house-elf called Winky who so loved her Master Barty -- who also happened to be a fellow Death Eater. But Winky would not answer my call or do my bidding unless she declared her loyalty to me. What would make her do that? It could surely only be an opportunity to bring her beloved Master Barty back from the living death of the Dementor's Kiss."

"I wrote Narcissa a letter. It was coded using the ancient Malfoy family code. I told her I would reconcile if she would arrange to have Winky visit me in prison. Winky would pose as our house-elf, asking for family reconciliation. She was to tell Winky that I had vital information about her beloved Master Barty that I would only tell Winky in person. She made the arrangements and sent me a letter saying Winky would visit me the next day. She knew what day I received letters in Azkaban and scheduled the visit accordingly."

“During Winky’s visit I had her pledge her loyalty to me and passed her a simple instruction on a small piece of parchment which I had concealed in my mouth. It said to come when I called her if she wanted the news about her beloved Barty. That night, I called her and she Apparated directly into my cell. I knew she could and would because of the Potter book.”

“I told her I could and would restore her former master to life if she did whatever I commanded, but if she refused to do anything, he would be lost forever. She peed herself in her excitement. But it soon became clear to me that she was more than up to the task. She *desperately* wanted her master back.”

“I ordered her to find a hiding place where we would not be found and where Barty could be nursed back to health. I told her to provision it with food, certain books and supplies. I told her to obtain enough Polyjuice Potion for a dozen transformations. And I told her to obtain a wand. Finally, I told her to return to my cell at the same time of night when she had accomplished all of it.”

“To my surprise, she returned the very next night and said she had done everything. I didn’t believe her, of course, and berated her for lying to me. But she showed me. Without warning she grabbed my hand and we Disapparated to *this* hideout. It was perfect. I asked her how she had found it. She said Dobby, our old treacherous house-elf, had shown it to her. It was the Room of Requirement at Hogwarts. I had never heard of it until Draco told me about it. How ironic that Dobby’s betrayal will backfire on him at last.”

“To my surprise, there was a dumpy looking witch, bound and unconscious, in the room. Winky said the room would go away if someone wasn’t in it; and it would not reform if someone else was using it for another purpose. On her own, Winky had kidnapped a witch staying at the Three Broomsticks in Hogsmeade. This is what I meant when I said she was more than up to the task. The only limiting factor is that the old rule still applies -- witches and wizards cannot Apparate into or Disapparate out of Hogwarts. This applies to the Room of Requirement as well. But... it does not apply to *house-elves*. Winky will be able to take us in and out.”

As he was listening to Malfoy drone on about his brilliant plan, Crouch realized it’s one thing to know you’re brilliant and brag to someone else, it’s entirely another if that someone else is yourself -- it’s boring. Soon, it became annoying. As he stared at Malfoy, he began recalling more memories. Malfoy was annoying. He was rich. He was arrogant. He was condescending. He was a

smarmy boot-licking sycophant to the Dark Lord. But he did not go to prison for the Dark Lord when he disappeared that fateful Halloween during the first wizard war. Oh, no... not Lucius. He claimed to have been under the Impirius Curse -- the coward. Barty *hated* Lucius.

Crouch could not help himself, maybe it was Barty's memories, but he did not care. Then he finally realized that *he*, the Malfoy part of him, *also* hated Lucius -- *for making him a Horcrux*.

Malfoy was still speaking when Crouch tuned back in to listen.

"...the witches wand. I only lingered a minute and had Winky return me to my cell in Azkaban. I then gave her next instructions. She was to find a Muggle who would not be missed. She was to stun him and bring him to my cell along with the wand and Polyjuice Potion. After three days, Winky had not returned. I called her. She apologized saying it was difficult finding such a Muggle. She had to tail a candidate for hours to see if he would be missed. I told her she had only three more days to find someone. I probably should have told her to get anyone... Who cares about a missing Muggle anyway?"

"On the sixth day she returned with a Muggle man and the items. The man was pathetic. He obviously lived in the gutter. His clothes were rags. But he was just what I needed. I used the Impirius Curse on him and awakened him. I used one of my hairs and the Polyjuice Potion to transform him into me. I had him disrobe and put on my prison robes. I chided Winky for not bringing robes for me to wear, assuming I was going to wear Muggle clothes. I sent Winky back for robes. This was intentional. While she was gone, I ordered the Muggle to hang himself as soon as I left the cell. I had already placed a suicide note under the blanket on the cot. Winky returned with robes for me. I dressed and had Winky pick up the Muggle's rags. We returned to the Room of Requirement."

"Bravo," said Crouch dramatically.

Then Malfoy launched into a lurid retelling of his foray to St Mungo's to recover Barty Crouch's body. He had taken advantage of the kidnapped witch in the Room of Requirement and used her for his initial Polyjuice disguise. Winky did not know where Crouch was kept so he had Winky take him near St Mungo's. He used the normal entrance and found out by reading the directory sign at the information desk.

When Malfoy finished, Crouch said, "Wasn't that a risk? The witch must have been reported missing by then. There were probably already missing person's posters of her everywhere. St Mungo's always gets copies of them."

Malfoy was shocked that his brilliant plan was being criticized.

"You're welcome for me having saved you," Malfoy sneered.

"Saved me!" shouted Crouch. "I'm a damned *Horcrux*, not Barty Crouch Jr!"

Malfoy looked surprised and embarrassed. He had completely forgotten.

Chapter 12 -- Deadly Plans

The next morning, Crouch was able to get up and walk with Winky's help. He was happy to be able to use a bathroom again. Sitting on a toilet almost seemed like heaven.

Winky served Crouch and Malfoy breakfast at the small table. It was the usual delicious food the Hogwarts kitchens always offered.

Crouch looked over at the witch tied up in the corner next to the bathroom door and asked, "Winky, are you taking care of that witch?"

"Master Barty, Winky is giving her elf long-sleep. She is being fine until Winky is waking her when we is leaving Hogwarts for good," she squeaked cheerfully.

"Very good, Winky," said Crouch.

Winky bowed happily and continued her constant cleaning and arranging.

Malfoy nodded to Crouch, who nodded back, and said, his voice much louder than it needed to be, since they were sitting across the table from each other, "Let's talk about our plans."

"Our goal is to force the Ministry to release all remaining Death Eaters and supporters of the Dark Lord from Azkaban. They have been in prison long enough. They must be allowed to leave the country and start new lives," said Malfoy.

“Agreed!” exclaimed Crouch.

“The only way the Ministry will agree is if we have a hostage. And the only hostage that will sway the people and put pressure on the Ministry is Harry Potter,” continued Malfoy.

“We must kidnap Harry Potter,” said Crouch.

“It would be too difficult to take him by force,” responded Malfoy. “Even now, Harry Potter is closely watched by the Ministry. They know he is a target. It would be an embarrassment to the Ministry if something untoward were to happen to him. So... Harry Potter must surrender to us and become our hostage. The only way to do that is to kidnap someone easy to get to, someone close to him, someone he loves, so that he will willingly exchange places with them.”

“We must kidnap the Weasley girl,” said Crouch.

“Correct,” said Malfoy. “And when Potter surrenders to us, we will hold him until the Ministry releases our friends from Azkaban.”

“Excellent plan,” said Crouch.

Malfoy called out, “Winky, have you heard what we said?”

Winky stopped what she was doing, shuffled closer to the table and said, “Yes, Master Lucius. You is not telling Winky not to listen.”

“Good... Then I want you to tail the Weasley girl and find out her routine movements. I’ll take care of Mr Crouch in the meantime. Report back in two days. Bring us enough food before you go. Do you understand?” said Malfoy.

“Yes, Master Lucius,” squeaked Winky.

“Then go now,” commanded Malfoy.

The little elf disappeared with a pop. A few minutes later she reappeared carrying two large baskets and set them on the workbench. Then she bowed to the two men and disappeared again.

Malfoy looked at the spot where Winky vanished and laughed. "That house-elf is loyal and content, but she can't be trusted with murder. You heard her... she as much as said she expects the sleeping witch to be released when we abandon this hideout."

He turned back to look at Crouch. "We will have the Blood Traitor Weasley girl write a letter with our demands. Potter must surrender to us in the middle of Diagon Alley or she dies. When he surrenders -- and he will -- we kill him on the spot and cast the Dark Mark, so everyone knows the Dark Lord is avenged... so I am avenged... so we are avenged."

Crouch slapped his hands on the table and declared with messianic fervor, "Then we go abroad and build a new army of pure blood followers to renew the Dark Lord's noble goal of Wizard and Muggle world *domination!*"

"Right," said Malfoy without any fervor. "We'll kill the witch, the Blood Traitor, *and Winky*; then we'll go to Malfoy Manor to collect the gold I have hidden in a crypt in the family mausoleum."

"Kill Winky?" said Crouch with a look of surprise on his face.

"She *knows* too much. And you have heard about the way elves can find each other. We could be located through her," explained Malfoy.

Crouch's face was now passive. "You're right, but it should not be done until she has helped us get abroad. Her Apparation ability is much more powerful than ours."

"Agreed," said Malfoy. "Let's discuss the details of the greater plan and decide where we'll go abroad later."

But Malfoy did not really agree. Too much of Barty Crouch's fanaticism was coming out. Malfoy was content with his personal vengeance -- fighting for world domination was no longer on his agenda. Living out his life on the Argentine pampas in a nice hacienda with several beautiful native servant girls sounded just fine. It was looking like he and Crouch would be going their separate ways. If necessary, Crouch might have to be eliminated -- he was a just a Horcrux after all. And Potter's biography showed that a wizard can kill the bit of soul in his own Horcrux, as the Dark Lord had done to his bit of soul in Potter. He wondered how

much it would hurt. He remembered the Dark Lord collapsing when he had done it to Potter.

Crouch was looking at Malfoy. He could tell Malfoy was deep in thought. He imagined what Malfoy was thinking about and did not like it. Malfoy seemed to have the advantage over him. Malfoy could kill his Horcrux. Could his Horcrux kill him? Was not this the same situation as the Dark Lord and Potter -- did not Potter-as-Horcrux have to be destroyed before he could kill the Dark Lord? Then he thought, if Malfoy's body were destroyed, Malfoy would be like the Dark Lord was in exile -- less than ghost. But Malfoy was not a wizard with the Dark Lord's prodigious power, enabling his return. Malfoy would be doomed to exist as near nothingness until his Horcrux was destroyed. And Crouch knew it would be destroyed eventually, since *he* had a mortal body, which would die someday of its own accord. When the object a Horcrux is encased in is destroyed, the encased bit of soul is destroyed too. So, he could *as good as* kill Malfoy to ensure an essentially normal life for himself. That was good to know, because he would *never* allow Malfoy to kill Winky.

Crouch had also detected a lack of enthusiasm in Malfoy for renewing the fight for pure blood world domination. If Malfoy would not lead, he would take over and purge Malfoy if necessary. He wondered which would happen first, killing Malfoy to protect Winky or to pursue the pure blood cause.

"Let's take a look in those baskets," said Malfoy, getting up from the small table.

Crouch looked at Malfoy's back and imagined seizing him from behind and cutting his throat.

Chapter 13 -- Winky's Report

Winky popped back into the Room of Requirement in the early evening two days later.

"Winky is returning as Master Lucius is ordering," she squeaked.

Malfoy and Crouch were laying in their beds staring at the ceiling. Their beds were now along the walls on opposite sides of the room. They had moved them to be as far apart from each other as possible. The small table and workbench were now in the middle of the room.

They were no longer speaking after finally agreeing on the plan. They had spent the entire first day in long rancorous arguments over the details of the plan to kidnap the blood traitor Weasley girl and kill Harry Potter. They never even gotten close to the point of beginning to discuss where they would go abroad afterwards. The second day was spent in silence aside from moving the furniture.

"Well, tell us what you found out about the girl," snapped Malfoy, sounding irritated and impatient.

Crouch responded immediately, "Winky, why don't you go get something to eat first? Then bring us dinner and you can tell us while we eat." Then he got up from his bed, walked to the table and sat down.

Malfoy stood up from his bed and snarled, "No, she'll tell us first."

"What would you like to do, Winky," asked Crouch calmly, clearly trying to annoy Malfoy.

"I am the bloody creature's Master; she'll do what I tell her!" yelled Malfoy. "Do as you are *told*, elf! *Now!*" commanded Malfoy.

Winky was trembling as a result of the verbal exchange. Now she bowed to Malfoy and began to speak. "Winky is finding Miss Ginny Weasley living in London with girlfriends from Hogwarts. Miss Ginny is playing Quidditch for the Holyhead Harpies. Winky is watching practicing. Miss Ginny is playing Chaser very well..."

"We don't care about Quidditch," spat Malfoy, "Tell us her *schedule*."

"I love Quidditch," said Crouch evenly.

Winky nodded energetically.

"That's *Barty* speaking," snapped Malfoy, looking at Crouch, forgetting that Winky did not understand the true situation. Then he demanded, "Get on with it, Winky."

"Winky is seeing Miss Ginny leaving her place before breakfast and walking to Diagon Alley through the Leaky Cauldron. She is having breakfast with her brothers at Weasley's Wizard Wheezes and then is helping in the shop for a

while. Then she is Disapparating to practice Quidditch. When she is finishing, she is doing something different each day. She is visiting her parents one day and is shopping the next. Afterwards, she is going back to her place to be eating dinner with her friends and sleeping.”

“When she walks to Diagon Alley, is the street very busy?” asked Malfoy, his eyes focused intently on Winky.

“Winky is not seeing the street very busy. Miss Ginny is being very early, only six o’clock,” answered Winky.

“That’s it. Perfect!” exclaimed Malfoy. “We’ll grab her on the street.”

“Perhaps we should have Winky tail her for a few more days and find a more discreet location?” suggested Crouch. “Out in the open on a busy street seems a little risky, doesn’t it?”

Malfoy glowered at Crouch and answered through gritted teeth, “She just said the street *wasn’t* busy. We’ll grab her *there*. The discussion is *over!*” he said with finality. Then he turned to Winky and commanded, “Get us dinner.”

Winky vanished with the usual pop.

Crouch had enjoyed baiting Malfoy. It was so easy. He was getting stronger. The restorative potion and the food were doing a good job. Now he only looked skinny, rather than emaciated. In a few more days, he’d be fit again. Since he had not talked to Malfoy all that day until Winky had returned, he had spent the time reviewing his memories. He had only the vaguest memories of Lucius’ parents but a head full about Barty’s. The Barty memories remained clear and strong. Very few of Lucius’s memories were strong except the ones about the Dark Lord and Harry Potter. He believed this was the case because of the strong emotional link both men had with them.

Winky returned with a delicious Hogwarts dinner. Crouch ate at the table and invited Winky sit with him. Most house-elves would refuse the invitation, but Winky did not. They chatted about Quidditch. Crouch occasionally glanced at Malfoy who sat on his bed eating from a tray and looking sullen.

When Crouch was finished eating, he leaned back in his chair and said loudly, "Winky, why don't you take the rest of the night and tomorrow off too. Just pop in to deliver meals. You've been working hard and deserve a break."

Winky nervously looked over at Malfoy.

Malfoy did not look their way but he was glowering.

"Master Lucius ..." Winky began.

"Go!" commanded Malfoy without looking.

Winky risked a glance at Crouch, smiled broadly, and disappeared with a pop which contained the merest vanishing echo of a joyous exclamation.

Chapter 14 -- A Wild Theory

"Let's review the evidence," said Burke.

He and Harry were sitting in Burke's office in the Investigations Division. It was spartan -- a plain wooden desk, worktable, chairs, and a dozen filing cabinets. On the desk were a bottle of ink, a quill, a stack of plain parchment, and a pencil. There was a blackboard on the wall along with a cork bulletin board with papers neatly pinned, a clock, a calendar, cloak rack, dust bin, and an oil lamp on each wall. The floor was wood, the walls were white, and the door had a glass panel with his name and title stenciled on it. The ceiling fan completed the picture.

Harry wondered if Burke had ever seen any old black and white Muggle detective movies. He'd feel right at home. The only things missing were a telephone, revolver with shoulder holster, and a fedora.

Burke and Harry were seated at the worktable. Both had their notebooks out.

"Harry, you go first. We'll validate what you have against the timeline on the blackboard."

"OK," said Harry. He turned to the front of his notebook. "Malfoy sends his wife a letter. Three days later, Narcissa sends Malfoy a letter saying she is sending their house-elf to visit him the next day. A house-elf we suspect to be Winky, not

their house-elf Blinky, visits Malfoy in Azkaban. Winky is Blinky's sister and the former house-elf of Barty Crouch Jr, a Death Eater like Malfoy. Seven days later Malfoy commits suicide in his cell and is found the next morning. A Muggle potato sack is found in his cell with the hairs from a missing homeless Muggle from Glasgow. Three days after the suicide, Gilderoy Lockhart kills Barty Crouch Jr in St Mungo's and vanishes, but took the time to switch hospital pajamas and slippers with him, except that Crouch didn't have slippers of his own. That's it."

"You left out the missing strip of paper from the suicide note, which was Narcissa's last letter to Malfoy, after sending regular weekly letters for two years," added Burke.

"Right," said Harry. "Oh... I forgot. What about the missing autographed Lockhart photo?"

"It never existed," said Burke. "We don't have to account for it."

Burke paused and threw his notebook on the table. "Harry, you knew every one of these people. That has got to be an advantage. We know these crimes are connected. Give me your theory. Don't hold back."

Harry put down his notebook and said, "Sir, I'm sure a lot of this involves criminal use of magic that you have seen many times. But I believe there is an *extra* layer that you are not going to believe."

"Try me," said Burke.

Harry took a deep breath and began. "OK. Here it is... Malfoy comes up with a plan to escape from Azkaban. He writes his first ever letter from prison to his wife Narcissa. Through code or some method he conveys his intentions and tells her to contact Winky. She uses her house-elf Blinky to make contact. She probably doesn't know they are related. Narcissa meets with Winky and persuades her to visit Malfoy in prison pretending to be their house-elf. The two house-elves conveniently look alike, but I don't think Azkaban would have checked the identity of a house-elf anyway. She writes her last letter to Malfoy telling him the elf is coming. Winky visits Malfoy. Malfoy is able to pass Winky a note, the missing strip of paper, giving her a reason to help him. I think the reason has to do with her former master's son, Barty Crouch Jr, whom she worshiped. Winky later Apparated into Malfoy's cell and he ordered her to deliver him the homeless Muggle man and Polyjuice Potion. He transformed the man into himself and

murdered him. Then Winky took Malfoy to a hiding place. A few days later, they Apparated into St Mungo's. He knocks out the Healer and performs a memory charm on her. He uses the Imperius Curse on Lockhart, again uses Polyjuice Potion to turn Lockhart into Crouch, switches the two men, strangles Lockhart-Crouch and then has Winky Disapparate with him and Crouch... That's what the evidence indicates."

"I agree on the essentials. But do you really think the house-elf was that much a part of it?" asked Burke.

"I'm glad you asked that," said Harry. "No, I don't. I don't think Winky would be OK with the killings. That means the actual crime scenarios are probably more complicated, but not crucial. I think it also means she's probably in danger for knowing too much. But I don't think it would make a difference to the Wizengamot. She's clearly an accessory to other very serious crimes."

Harry paused and then he asked a question. "Do you think we should get an expert Obliviator to try and undo the memory charm on Healer Pethig to verify our theory?"

"No," said Burke. "It might risk alerting Malfoy that we know he's escaped. She didn't seem like someone who could keep a secret once we removed the charm. We'll have to wait until we capture him."

Harry nodded.

"So what's the extra layer I'm not going to believe?" asked Burke.

Harry looked straight at Burke. "Malfoy is coming after me for revenge. Winky witnessed the Dementor's Kiss on Crouch. The only thing that would make Winky obey Malfoy was if he convinced her he could bring Crouch back to real life. He brought Crouch back to life by making him into a Horcrux."

Burke stared at Harry and did not say anything.

Harry went on. "When Voldemort accidentally made me one of his Horcruxes, I already had a soul and a mind and they dominated the piece of Voldemort's soul in me. But the Dementor's Kiss removed Barty Crouch Jr's soul. When Malfoy made a Horcrux of Crouch, that half of Malfoy's soul should completely take over the living body. It's not Crouch that's come back to life. It's like a duplicate of

Malfoy who looks like Crouch -- like permanent Polyjuice Potion, but with the original brain still there. The Horcrux probably has both their memories. I'm sure this has never occurred before, so I am just theorizing on the effect. But I'm sure Winky believes, or at least wants to believe, her beloved Master Barty is back. It also means that if Crouch's memories are intact, the Malfoy Horcrux is doubly motivated for revenge, because Barty Crouch Jr hated me too."

Harry stopped talking, took off his glasses and began to clean them on his robes.

Burke leaned back in his chair taking a long deep breath and then exhaled slowly. "Whew... I thought it would be *something* Dark, but that is right out of the Voldemort cookbook... Harry, you've had one *hell of a life*."

"You *believe* me?" asked Harry.

"I have no reason not to... in *your* case," said Burke. "If it were someone else, I'd say they were barking." He paused for a moment and then said with a grin, "You realize of course, most of your future cases are *not* going to have ghosts of Voldemort popping out from behind every curtain. I don't want you to get in the habit of *looking* for them."

"So, what now?" asked Harry putting his glasses back on.

"We need to find Winky," replied Burke.

Harry gawped. "She works at Hogwarts. Didn't I mention that?"

Burke shook his head and said, "No. If I'd known, we'd have already interviewed her."

Harry was embarrassed. "Sorry."

"Forget it," Burke said. "We'll go to Hogwarts tomorrow morning. Send an owl to the Headmistress that we'll be arriving via Floo network. Meet me here at seven o'clock."

Chapter 15 -- Winky's Interview

Harry stepped through emerald-green flames and out of the fireplace into the Staff Room of Hogwarts School.

Professor McGonagall was waiting for him. She smiled warmly and said, "It's good to see you again, Mr Potter."

Harry smiled as well. "It's great to see you again too, Professor."

Just then, the fireplace again erupted in emerald-green flames and Burke stepped out onto the hearth rug.

Harry made the introductions, "Professor, this is Chief Inspector Burke, my supervisor. Sir, I'd like you to meet Professor McGonagall, Hogwarts Headmistress."

McGonagall spoke first, "Nice to see you again, Mr Burke. It's been at least thirty years."

"Thirty-three," said Burke.

McGonagall approached him and shook hands. "Burke was the best Keeper that Ravenclaw ever had. Twelve outstanding OWLs and NEWTS. Amazing Transfiguration abilities..."

"Enough Professor, please," said Burke blushing.

McGonagall smiled. "You two know the school; it's at your disposal. Do your duty. If you have time, stop by my office before you go, for a chat and a drink." She held out her arm toward the staff room door.

Burke and Harry said thanks and left the room. McGonagall followed them out.

Harry led Burke to the kitchens. Burke had never seen them in his time at Hogwarts.

"You really got around," said Burke with a touch of envy. "My face was always in a book when I wasn't playing Quidditch." Then he added, "Of course, a Dark Wizard wasn't trying to kill me during *my* seven years."

"I'll show you some other neat stuff if we have time," said Harry, enjoying walking the corridors again.

Harry tickled the huge green pear in the painting of the fruit-bowl in the basement hallway below the Great Hall. The pear turned into a door handle. Harry pulled it and opened the door to the kitchens. Burke gawked in amazement as he walked in past Harry. It was as large as the Great Hall. But his gaze was interrupted by the uproar that ensued.

Burke saw at least a hundred elves of all shapes and sizes, wearing tea towel togas stamped with the Hogwarts crest on the front, racing toward him and then past him to greet and embrace Harry. The swell of jabbering elves in their mostly high pitched but some bullfrog voices forced Burke further into the room. Elves were offering drinks and treats of every kind.

Finally, above the din, Harry shouted, holding his hands out wide, "Thank you. Thank you, all, for this wonderful greeting." The crowd of elves quieted down to listen. "I don't deserve this. You fought as bravely as anyone to defend Hogwarts. I should be thanking *you*."

One of the oldest looking elves standing next to Harry, apparently acting a spokes-elf, said excitedly, "Harry Potter honors us with his presence. What can we be doing for the great Harry Potter?"

"I am here on business with my boss, Chief Inspector Burke, an Auror," said Harry. The elves all turned en mass to look at Burke, who looked quite amused.

"Welcome, boss of Harry Potter," said the spokes-elf. Immediately about a dozen of the closest elves approached Burke and offered him scones and tea, which he accepted. Burke looked at Harry and said, "Go on. This is your party."

The elves all turned to look at Harry again.

"We need to speak to Winky," said Harry.

As soon as he said her name, there was much murmuring among the elves. A few feet away from Harry, a hole opened in the crowd as elves backed away and left one of their own standing alone in the middle. The tiny elf was quivering slightly. Finally the enlarging hole connected with Harry allowing a clear path to the elf he recognized as Winky. The last time he had seen her, she had been

covered in ashes from the kitchen's great fireplace and quite drunk on Butterbeer.

The spokes-elf tugged on Harry's robes, leaned close and whispered, "Winky is not being liked, Harry Potter. She is not working hard like a good house-elf. Winky is often being gone when she is supposed to be working." Then, like the other elves, the spokes-elf drifted back, eventually leaving Harry and Burke alone with Winky near the door to the Kitchen. The other elves had gone back to work.

Harry and Burke approached Winky, who had not moved. She looked very nervous.

Harry said, "Winky, we'd like to ask you a few questions. There is nothing to be afraid of. Please tell the truth."

Winky did not reply. Harry thought this was unusual. The handful of house-elves he had met personally were generally talkative, even if they did not want to provide information.

Harry decided to start slowly. "Winky, I understand you have missed a lot of work time lately. Where have you been?"

"That is being Winky's business, not Harry Potter's," she said nervously.

"Did you know that five days ago Gilderoy Lockhart murdered Barty Crouch Jr in St Mungo's?" asked Harry, trying hard not to sound accusing.

Winky looked shocked and said, "Winky is knowing this is false. Why is Harry Potter telling Winky a lie?"

"But it's true, Winky." He took out his notebook and pulled a couple of clippings from the Daily Prophet that were folded inside the front cover. He unfolded one and showed it to Winky. "This is from five days ago. Look for yourself."

Winky glanced at it and shook her head. "Harry Potter is trying to fool Winky."

"You said you know it isn't true. How do you know? Have you seen your Master Barty?" asked Harry gently.

Winky began rocking back and forth, heel to toe. "Winky is not saying."

Harry squatted down so he was at eye level with her. She avoided his eyes.

“Winky, did you know that Lucius Malfoy committed suicide in Azkaban eight days ago?” asked Harry, a bit louder. He held out another Daily Prophet clipping in front of her.

Again, Winky looked shocked. “No! Winky is not believing Harry Potter. Why is Harry Potter asking Winky this? Winky is not knowing?”

Winky was now hugging herself and rocking faster.

“We are *not* trying to fool you, Winky. We are only asking you to tell the *truth*,” Harry said honestly.

Winky stopped rocking and covered her long ears with her hands, flattening them against her head. “You is nosing... Harry Potter is trying to get Winky into trouble. Winky is being loyal to her family and her master.”

“Winky, we *know* you visited Lucius Malfoy in Azkaban. You told me Master Barty *isn't* dead. Please help us. Tell us where they are,” pleaded Harry.

But Winky had reached her limit. She jumped back from Harry, gave him an angry look and vanished with a loud pop.

“Damn,” said Harry.

“It’s more than I expected to get,” said Burke. “I think she pretty much confirmed your analysis.”

Burke looked around. “I wonder if we could get a sandwich to go... I missed breakfast.”

Chapter 16 -- The Schedule Moves Up

Winky appeared in the Room of Requirement with a loud pop. Malfoy and Crouch looked up in surprise from their respective sides of the room.

“Winky, we gave you the day off...” said Crouch.

“Master Barty! Master Barty! Harry Potter is nosing. He is saying you and Master Lucius is dead. He is wanting Winky to be telling him where Winky is going when Winky is not working.”

“Where were you just now?” asked Malfoy.

“Winky is just coming from the kitchens,” answered Winky

“He’s at Hogwarts now? Does he know where we are? Was anyone with him?” Crouch asked rapidly.

Winky nodded, shook her head, and nodded as he asked the questions. Then she said, “Harry Potter is being with an Auror. They is asking Winky questions. They is trying to trick Winky. Winky is telling them nothing. Winky is loyal to her family and her master,” she said proudly.

“This is serious,” said Malfoy. “It they had just asked about Barty Crouch Jr, I would not be worried. After all, Winky was his house-elf. But the fact they asked about me says they suspect the two apparent deaths are linked. And they knew about her absences from Hogwarts.”

“I agree”, said Crouch.

“Why is Harry Potter saying Master Barty and Master Lucius is dead?” asked Winky nervously.

“Like you figured out, Winky; he was trying to trick you,” said Crouch reassuringly. “You did well to come and warn us. You are not to go back to the kitchens or be seen by the other Hogwarts house-elves or the Hogwarts staff. You will get food outside Hogwarts. Stay here for now. Understand?”

“Yes, Master Barty,” squeaked Winky.

Malfoy declared, “Crouch, we can’t wait three more days for you to get better. We need to move up the plan to get the blood traitor girl. We go *tomorrow* morning.”

“I have to agree,” replied Crouch. “We’ll just have to assume the Polyjuice Potion will compensate for my weakness.” He turned to the elf. “Winky, you are to wake us at five o’clock tomorrow morning. Have two vials of Polyjuice Potion from our

stock ready for use. We already have the hairs for the subjects. I am going to be the Muggle you took to replace Mr Malfoy in Azkaban.”

He did not mention that Malfoy had refused to transform into a Muggle man's body when they had discussed the plan details.

Crouch continued, “Mr Malfoy will be the witch you brought to this room. We will both need clean robes. After we transform, you will take us to the closest alleyway on the route to Diagon Alley from where the Weasley girl lives and wait with us. After we subdue her, you are to return us all here. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Master Barty.”

Crouch looked at Malfoy and said, “I think we're set.”

Chapter 17 -- Plans and Counter-Plans

“Wake her,” said Malfoy.

Crouch pointed his wand at Ginny, who was tied with ropes to a chair at the small table in the Room of Requirement. Only her arms were free. She lifted her head and looked around.

“What...?” Her words were cut off as the witch flicked her wand. She could not speak. She saw a scruffy looking middle-age wizard and a pleasant looking middle-age witch pointing their wands at her. She also saw a small house-elf wearing a white toga stamped with the Hogwarts crest. The appearance of the room -- the walls, the floor, the furniture -- looked *very* familiar. It *could not* be!

“There is no need to speak,” said the witch. You are to use the parchment and quill before you and write the letter I dictate. If you do not, I will torture you using the Cruciatus Curse until you comply.”

Ginny heard the elf squeak loudly. The wizard spoke softly to the elf, but she could not hear what he said.

Ginny wrote the letter. The witch moved to look over Ginny's shoulder as she dictated. When Ginny finished, the witch snatched it up and re-read it. To Ginny's great alarm, the witch picked up a wicked looking knife from a nearby workbench

and approached her, but she only used it to cut a lock of Ginny hair. She tossed the knife back onto the workbench. Then she spellotaped half the lock of hair to the letter and tossed the other half into a small bowl on the workbench. She then addressed and sealed the letter herself.

The witch held out the letter to the elf and said, "Deliver this to the Ministry of Magic immediately without being seen... And then return with lunch."

The elf took the letter, bowed, and disappeared with a pop.

The witch pointed her wand at Ginny again and more ropes bound her arms to the chair. Then a black velvet sack appeared out of thin air and fell over her head. Finally she felt the chair and herself being levitated and moved until bumping into a wall and being set down. She thought she heard '*Muffliato*' spoken before the room suddenly became quiet.

"What did you say to the elf?" asked Malfoy.

Crouch resented being questioned. "I told Winky your threat to use the Torture Curse was a bluff and the letter had to sound equally harsh to make Harry Potter comply. I assured her that we had no intention of harming the girl."

"Do you think she believed you?" asked Malfoy, "Because if not, she might betray us."

"Winky would never betray me," said Crouch, sounding both defiant and irritated.

"There is far too much of Barty Crouch Jr in you," said Malfoy ominously.

Crouch shot back, "It is very clear we won't be working together after we have killed Potter."

"That suits me fine," said Malfoy. "It has become very clear to *me* since I made you, that Barty Crouch Jr's memories are not fading away. You have become the irrational relentless fanatic that he was."

"And you are the self-promoting sycophantic coward that denied the Dark Lord when he disappeared in order to save your own skin," spat Crouch.

They pointed their wands at each other's hearts.

They glared at each other for several seconds when they both began to change back into their true forms. Malfoy slowly lowered his wand and Crouch did the same.

Malfoy gave Crouch an irritating smile. "Let's just focus on the present. We have Potter to kill first. We need to review the details before the elf returns with lunch."

Malfoy did most of the talking and it was obvious he still loved his plan. He would use Polyjuice Potion to transform into Gilderoy Lockhart. Malfoy still had a hank of his hair from St Mungo's. Crouch would transform into Ginny. The real Ginny would remain in the Room as insurance in case things did not go according to plan. Winky would scout Diagon Alley right before noon. Then Winky would Apparate with them right in front of Potter, who would be waiting as instructed. Lockhart would be standing behind Ginny with a knife in one hand at her throat. Lockhart would use his wand on the other hand to bind Potter, who would naturally cooperate. Then Winky would take them all back to the Room of Requirement.

This was the plan they would tell Winky -- including the fact they needed to keep the real Ginny even after capturing Potter so he would continue to cooperate until the Dark Lords supporters imprisoned in Azkaban were released.

What they would really do when they appeared in Diagon Alley was have Polyjuice Ginny use the Killing Curse on Potter while Polyjuice Lockhart cast the Dark Mark. Then Winky would bring them back to the Room of Requirement. Then they would kill Ginny and the witch, and have Winky take them to Malfoy Manor to divide the gold and then go abroad separately. Winky would go with Crouch.

If Winky balked at the killing and would not take them back to the Room of Requirement, they would Disapparate to Malfoy Manor by themselves, divide the gold and separate. It meant the blood traitor girl and the witch would survive, but the main objective -- killing Harry Potter -- would be achieved.

"We'll tell the false plan to the elf in the morning," said Malfoy.

Crouch grunted in acknowledgement.

After a minute, Malfoy asked casually, "Have you decided where you will go?"

"None of your business," responded Crouch coldly.

"I'm going to Argentina," said Malfoy. "I think one should retire after one has accomplished all of their lifetime objectives."

Crouch scoffed derisively.

Malfoy was unfazed, because his actual plan was to cut Crouch's throat as soon as Crouch had killed Potter. He did not care about the Dark Mark anymore. He might cast it for 'old times sake' if there were time. He would then kill Winky and Disapparate to Malfoy Manor and have all the gold for himself to take to Argentina. He did not care what happened to the blood traitor and the witch in the Room of Requirement. They would probably die of thirst.

Malfoy stretched out his arms and said, "I plan to relax for the rest of the day and read. And I happened to find the exact book I wanted to read on the workbench."

Crouch's hatred of Malfoy was almost overwhelming. He had made his decision. As soon as Winky delivered them to Diagon Alley, he was going to kill Malfoy and then throw himself as Ginny into the arms of Harry Potter. As soon as Potter looked into Ginny's eyes he was going to kill him and cast the Dark Mark. In the confusion, he'd have Winky return him to the Room of Requirement. If they got separated, he'd just Disapparate somewhere and call Winky. With almost equal pleasure, he'd kill the real Ginny. He'd kill the witch too, and then go abroad with Winky and the gold. He was going to build a following and resume the noble goal of pure blood domination.

A few minutes later Winky returned with lunch.

Chapter 18 -- Proof of Life

Harry was sitting in Burke's office the next morning. They were discussing possible hideouts and next moves.

Before leaving the Hogwarts kitchens, they had asked the spokes-elf to immediately notify them and the Headmistress if Winky returned and to use their

magic to detain her. They also saw Professor McGonagall and told her they suspected Winky's involvement in a serious crime which they could not discuss. She agreed to alert the staff and try to capture Winky if she showed up again. But neither Harry nor Burke expected Winky to return.

Harry believed Winky's life was now in even greater danger.

There was a knock on the door, and it opened enough for a young Administrative Division wizard to poke his head and arm inside and hold out a letter. "Urgent letter for Harry Potter," he said excitedly.

Harry leaned out of his chair far enough to take it, saying, "Thanks."

"May I?" Harry said to Burke, holding up the letter.

Burke stood up and said, "Sure, I'll take a short break and go check Research for any unusual sightings."

Harry broke the seal and opened the folded letter. Before Burke had gotten to the door, Harry gasped, "No!"

Burke turned. Harry looked at him in panic. "It's from Ginny. They have her."

Harry handed the letter to Burke and sat motionless, looking stunned.

Burke read the letter. The outside was addressed *Harry Potter, Auror Office, Ministry of Magic*. The word 'URGENT' in capital letters was written at an angle several times across the outside. Burke turned it over and read.

Harry,

I have been abducted. The people that have me will kill me if you don't surrender to them in front of Weasley's Wizard Wheezes in Diagon Alley at noon tomorrow. They will exchange me for you. Come alone and unarmed. If there is any attempt to intervene by Magical Law Enforcement, I will be killed in front of you.

Ginny

A lock of red hair was spellotaped under her signature.

“She’s alive,” said Burke. “You were right, they do want you. This must have just happened. If it had happened last night, we’d have heard about it before now. I’m going down to Research right now and get them on it. Then I’ll spin up everyone in Investigations. I’m taking this to the top. I’ll be back in ten minutes. I need you to write down Ginny’s normal daily routine and the people she normally sees. We need to interview them to see if they noticed anyone or anything suspicious in the last few days. They had to be casing her movements.”

Harry was glad that Burke was thinking. He was mentally paralyzed.

“Harry!” Burke shouted.

Harry looked up at him.

“We’ll save her,” he said earnestly. Then he commanded, “*Now get on it!*” He turned and left.

Harry stood and went to the blackboard and began his assignment. It helped to distract him, but not much. He could not help but think that Ginny was in danger because of him. Voldemort’s death had not been enough to eliminate the danger to her as he had hoped.

She was clearly in mortal danger now. He knew Malfoy and Malfoy-Crouch had no intention of a trade. They would kill her as part of their revenge on him. If he could save her, was her life always going to be at risk? Could their relationship survive? Would he not be forced to push her away again for her own safety? It was too painful to think about.

He kept writing and had just finished when Burke came in with a half dozen Aurors from Investigations. He gave instructions to them. “Record the schedule and names Harry has on the blackboard. Divide up the work among you and get your teams on it. I want everything checked within two hours and report back to me.” The Aurors all nodded and hastened out. Burke turned to Harry and said, “Harry, come with me down to Research.”

Harry looked surprised. “Shouldn’t I be out looking too?”

“No. This may just be a ruse to get you to go where they have an ambush set up. We can’t take that chance. We’ll do what the letter says. We’ll be ready by noon tomorrow,” Burke said confidently.

"Then Ginny may *already* be dead?" Harry asked in alarm.

"I'm sure she's alive. They need her as the hook. If things fall through tomorrow, they'll still need her to get to you. They will offer proof of life if it comes to that. The letter says they will bring her to Diagon Alley for a swap. If they didn't, would you surrender to them? ...Of course not. And besides, you should never... ever... surrender."

Harry looked at Burke with a blank expression.

"Harry, you *never* put down your wand when confronted by a bad guy holding someone in jeopardy. You attack, even if the person in jeopardy might get hit in the crossfire. If you put down your wand and surrender, you are *both* sure to die. By attacking, you have a chance to save the person. You can't count on a miracle, like someone coming to rescue you in the nick of time. Remember... *ATTACK!* ...Now let's go," finished Burke.

Harry followed Burke out of his office.

He could not help but remember surrendering Bellatrix's wand at Malfoy Manor when Bellatrix had been holding a knife to Hermione's neck. They *had* been saved by Dobby's miracle rescue in the nick of time ...and Dobby had died for Harry's mistake.

He knew now, and had really always known, if not for that miracle rescue, he, Hermione and Ron would have been killed.

Chapter 19 -- Candid Camera

"This just came in to Research from Memory Modification," said Sandy, from Alchemical, holding up the report.

She, Burke and Harry were standing in the Research Division front office.

Sandy summarized it. "The Memory Modification unit was alerted by our agents in the Muggle police department in London that one of their security cameras recorded an unusual kidnapping in Covent Garden at three past six o'clock this morning. The police report said, '*A man and a woman wearing long robes came out of an alley behind a young woman walking on the sidewalk, pointed sticks at*

her, causing her to collapse. They grabbed the woman and were joined from the alley by a hairless monkey wearing a white toga. The security camera then apparently malfunctioned because the group simply vanished.”

“Here are enlarged photographs from the recording,” said Sandy handing Burke and Harry the photos.

Harry examined the photo. His heart skipped. It was Ginny. He also recognized the homeless Muggle man from the lab work Sandy had done a week ago. He also recognized Winky, obviously referred to as the ‘hairless monkey’ in the police report. He did not recognize the woman.

Burke beat him to the question. “Who is the woman?”

“She’s a witch who was reported missing two weeks ago from the Three Broomsticks in Hogsmeade,” said Sandy. “Irene Parsons. She was visiting friends and didn’t show up for breakfast.”

“We know the Muggle man is dead. I remember reading about the missing witch in the Daily Prophet. Is there a possibility this witch is helping Malfoy? Does she have any Dark history?” asked Harry.

“She grows orchids,” said Sandy.

“Besides,” said Burke, “why would she fake her disappearance if she were helping Malfoy?”

“Right,” said Harry. He was not thinking clearly. This would not help Ginny. He needed to focus and get his head on straight.

Burke rolled up his copy of the photo and put it in his pocket. “Harry, I want you to go back to my office. You are to collect and analyze the reports coming in from the Investigation teams plus anything else from Research. Sandy will be your assistant and liaison to Research and the other Divisions. Have her contact me immediately if you find out anything critical. I’ll keep you informed of my location. I’m going to Diagon Alley now to scout the location and pick our vantage points. *They* will have already done the same thing. We should be able to figure out the ones they would pick and cover them.”

“One more thing,” said Burke. “Can you have Kreacher meet us in my office at six o’clock tonight?”

“Kreacher?” Harry asked, but then said, “Sure.”

Burke’s take-charge tone changed. He said quite gently, “Harry, we’ve already started to contact Ginny’s family and friends, asking them to keep this quiet. It’s the best way to keep her safe for now.”

He patted Harry on the shoulder and left.

Harry looked at Sandy. He tried to sound calm but failed when he said, “Let’s go to Burke’s office and get... *started*.” His voice cracked.

Sandy looked sympathetically at Harry. “Harry, I’m so sorry. We’ll do everything we can to get Ginny back safely.”

Harry nodded appreciatively.

They turned and walked out together.

Chapter 20 -- High Noon in Diagon Alley

The next morning after breakfast, Crouch told Winky the plan meant for her. He also ordered her to get suitable robes ready for their imposter roles.

Winky seemed nervous. “Master Barty, why isn’t you returning Miss Ginny?”

“I already told you, we need to have leverage over Potter,” said Crouch reassuringly. “We won’t hurt her.”

Winky looked doubtful and Crouch knew she did not like it. This usually set Malfoy off, but now he seemed unconcerned.

The morning dragged by. Winky wanted to attend to the Weasley girl, but Malfoy would not let him. Ginny was still bound to the chair against the wall with the sack over her head.

Finally, at a few minutes before noon, they got ready and donned their imposter robes and drank their respective Polyjuice Potion after adding the final ingredient of Lockhart's and Ginny's hairs. Malfoy turned into Lockhart. Crouch turned into Ginny.

They both held their wands. Crouch exchanged the witch's wand for Ginny's wand, which was still on the workbench, telling Malfoy it would be more satisfying to kill Potter with his girlfriend's wand. It had not occurred to him that Potter might be less surprised to see Ginny holding her own wand than a stranger's wand. When Malfoy had mockingly told him this, Crouch was incensed. He threw the witch's wand across the room.

Malfoy was still using Healer Pethig's wand, which he had switched to using the night at St Mungo's because Lockhart was supposed to have taken it. He also had hold of the wicked looking knife he had used to cut the lock of Ginny's hair. It was in his 'weak' hand, but he did not expect to have any problem cutting Crouch's throat. If Crouch somehow failed in using the Killing Curse on Potter, he could still kill Potter himself with his wand and then kill Crouch.

They got into position. Polyjuice Lockhart-Malfoy stood behind Polyjuice Ginny-Crouch with his arm around her and the knife at her throat. Lockhart's wand arm was extended forward. Ginny put her hands behind her back pretending they were tied, while holding her wand at the ready -- to curse Lockhart behind her.

They were almost ready.

Crouch called Winky over to him. She stood right in front of him shivering.

Crouch smiled at her. Then he said slowly and carefully, "Winky, when I tell you, go scout Diagon Alley in front of the Weasley shop. If Harry Potter is not standing out front unarmed... or if anything looks suspicious... come back immediately and don't do anything. If everything looks OK, memorize the spot immediately in front of Potter, no more than six feet away. Make sure it is clear of people. Then come back, stand behind Mr Malfoy, take hold of us, and immediately take us to that spot facing Potter as quickly as possible. I don't want any delay. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Master Barty," she said, her tiny voice quivering.

"Then go!" commanded Crouch.

Winky vanished with a pop.

Five seconds... ten seconds... twenty seconds... the delay seemed endless.

Then there was another pop, Malfoy and Crouch each felt a tiny hand grip one of their legs and then everything went black and they felt the familiar constricting pressure over their entire bodies, until...

Suddenly they were in bright sunlight and the bustling sounds of everyday activity in Diagon Alley reached their eardrums.

Winky had done her job, they were standing right in front of Harry Potter, no more than six feet away.

But as the instant of normal disorientation ended, they could both see that Harry Potter had anger on his face and his lips were moving. His arm was extended directly at them and he was holding a wand!

Lockhart leapt backward, tripping over Winky and dropped the knife. He had already started to yell, "GET US..."

Ginny pushed sideways against Lockhart and twisted, attempting to bring her wand arm out from behind her back, but she was too late.

Harry's stunning spell hit Ginny squarely in the chest and she collapsed onto the paving stones, her wand flying out of her hand.

By now the people walking or standing nearby were ducking and running in all directions away from the fight.

Harry shifted his wand to aim at Lockhart, who had landed on top of Winky and had just finished saying, "...OUT OF HERE!"

There was a loud crack and Lockhart and Winky were gone.

"Damn!" said Harry. Then he sent another stunning spell into Ginny for good measure.

Burke rushed up with several Aurors.

“Don’t worry, we’ll get him,” said Burke. But he swore too. “We were momentarily surprised to see Lockhart. We expected to see the man or the witch. By the time we attacked, he had tripped and was below our firing lines over the crowd. That’s a mistake I shouldn’t have made, especially with all the lead time we had and knowing their plan.”

Two Aurors were already collecting the Ginny imposter. The other Aurors were holding back the gathering crowd of curious bystanders.

The front door to Weasley’s Wizard Wheezes suddenly flew open. Ginny Weasley raced out and threw herself at Harry, embracing him and not letting go.

Sandy followed her out the door, apologizing to Burke, “I couldn’t hold her back any longer.”

Then Sandy went over and picked up Ginny’s wand for her. She stood a few feet away from Harry and Ginny, but they showed no sign of letting go of each other. Sandy sighed.

Burke just chuckled.

Then he saw Ron Weasley, George Wesley, and Bill Wesley, plus the rest of the staff of the famous joke shop, all running out of the shop toward Harry and Ginny.

“Now wait just a minute!” exclaimed Burke holding up his hands. “This is a crime scene!”

Chapter 21 -- Reunion at Malfoy Manor

Lucius Malfoy experienced the darkness and the compression of Apparation far longer than he expected. At one point it felt like he had run into a wall. His head was ringing, and he thought he would pass out, when he and Winky finally appeared again.

It was not in the Room of Requirement.

They were in a forest. Light was streaming through the trees, but it was still quite dim.

"Where are we?" asked Malfoy, recovering from the trip.

Winky whimpered like she had been hurt. "We is in the Forbidden Forest," she said weakly.

"Why didn't you take us to the Room of Requirement?" demanded Malfoy angrily.

"Winky is trying more than once, but is not getting in," she moaned as if the effort had caused her real pain.

Then Malfoy remembered what Winky had said. She could not Apparate into the Room unless someone was already in it. If she could not get in now, it meant the witch and the Blood Traitor girl were gone -- or already dead.

"Impossible!" he said aloud. How could they get away in less than a minute after he, Crouch and Winky had left. It could not be any longer than that.

"Are you sure you can't Apparate in?" he asked.

Winky nodded, but he ignored her.

Malfoy commanded, "I order you to try again by yourself."

Winky groaned but complied. Malfoy saw her disappear but she reappeared moments later, staggering.

"Winky is not getting in," she wailed.

"Fine! We'll go to Malfoy Manor as soon as I have changed back into myself."

Winky began crying silently and blubbering softly, "Master Barty..." over and over.

To try and shut her up, Malfoy said, "You'll be able to get him out of Azkaban the same way you did for me."

This did not help. Winky cried louder.

It was going to be almost an hour waiting. Malfoy paced and started thinking about what had happened. Potter must have known the plan; he was ready for them the moment they appeared. But how? Winky must have betrayed them -- but she would never have betrayed her precious Master Barty. It did not make sense. Winky must have been careless and been seen by Potter or the people helping him. Surely that's what happened. Potter must have had his wand hidden when Winky did her scouting and got it ready just before they arrived. But why had Potter attacked Ginny? He must have hit her accidentally trying to attack Lockhart. It was a *perfect* plan! It seemed incredible to have failed so utterly. At least he had escaped.

Malfoy finally changed back from Lockhart to himself. Winky had stopped crying and was just sitting on the ground with her head hanging down miserably.

"Winky, I am going to Disapparate to Malfoy Manor," said Malfoy. "But you will go first and make sure there are no Aurors waiting in the house or the grounds. Find my house-elf and have him help you. Then report back to me here after you have made your search.

Winky was back in ten minutes. "Winky and Blinky is seeing nothing."

"Good. Go back to the kitchen in my house and make me lunch. Then prepare my bath and pack a large traveling bag with clean clothes and accessories for me."

Winky bowed and disappeared with a pop.

Malfoy rubbed his hands together. He had not expected any Aurors to be there this soon. After all, who would be looking for a man who had committed suicide? They were looking for Lockhart. Even if the blood traitor Weasley girl had escaped from the Room of Requirement, she had only seen Lockhart and the witch. And the real witch had never seen anything.

But he was not taking any chances. He had to act fairly quickly. He figured they would be using *Veritaserum* before long, especially after they got over the shock of seeing the Weasley girl transform back into Barty Crouch Jr.

Malfoy was extremely disappointed, but he was surprised to find he could accept it. There had been a lot of disappointments in the last six years. He may have failed to get his revenge and kill Potter, but he was *free*. It was time to get on with

life, time to forget about another attempt to kill Potter and, especially... trying to take over the wizarding world. Crouch's mania had taught him that.

Malfoy Disapparated.

He Apparated at the foot of the grand staircase in Malfoy Manor. He walked up the marble stairs calling Narcissa's name.

He saw Narcissa rushing down the great hallway to meet him at the top of the stairs. She embraced him.

"I *knew* you weren't dead," she said dramatically. "I *knew* you would never kill yourself. Your letter to contact Winky about Barty Crouch Jr let me know that you had a plan. The Aurors questioned me, but I told them nothing. You *know* what I did in the Forbidden Forest was only to save our son. I know *now* it was a mistake. He has betrayed us *both* -- going over to Potter's side."

Malfoy interrupted, "Enough for now, Narcissa. I need to hide. My plans have gone awry. Barty Crouch Jr has been captured and they are sure to learn everything from him. I'll tell you everything later, but now I must go abroad. I need gold."

They walked together down the hall and into the drawing room.

"That's not *all* you need," said a too familiar voice behind them.

It was Draco standing next to the wall behind the door. He had his wand out.

Narcissa exclaimed, "*Draco*, what are you *doing*?"

"Doing the right thing for once," he said. "If you reach for your wands or make a move, I'll stun you. Just stay where you are. The Aurors will be here momentarily. Blinky will let them in."

Narcissa looked utterly shocked. Lucius looked like he was calculating. His hand twitched toward his robe pocket.

"Don't try it, father. Put your hands up," he commanded, gesturing with his wand.

Lucius looked murderous, but complied.

"How *dare* you treat your father like a *common criminal*," hissed Narcissa.

Draco ignored her. Instead he looked at his father and said, "I'm sure you're curious, Father. Blinky came and got me as soon as you arrived. I sent him to fetch the Aurors. Did you know Winky is Blinky's sister? Blinky suspected Winky was up to something. Blinky told me about your coded letter. I never believed for a minute you committed suicide. And I remembered how Dobby was able to Apparate and Disapparate from our enchanted cellar, which was protected from wizard Apparation. That plus all the other odd things reported in the Daily Prophet and Skeeter's biography of Potter, I just put two and two together. If I could figure it out, I'm sure the Aurors have too."

"How could you *betray* me, Draco?" said Lucius, trying to sound emotionally injured.

"Because you are *evil*," said Draco disdainfully. "And now, if I have guessed correctly, you are *twice* as evil as I thought."

Narcissa looked at Draco questioningly.

"Mother, he did what *Voldemort* did!" Draco exclaimed. "He murdered someone to split his soul in two and made a *Horcrux of himself* in the soulless body of Barty Crouch Jr!"

Narcissa looked at Lucius in horror. Lucius managed only to shake his head feebly, unconvincingly.

"He's no better than *Voldemort*," spat Draco.

Just then they heard the carriage entrance door bang open downstairs and multiple footsteps rushing up the grand staircase.

After the Aurors had taken away his parents, Draco walked slowly downstairs to the kitchen. Winky was with Blinky.

Draco looked at Winky, who was not looking good. She was battered and bruised. Her Hogwarts toga was quite dirty. He shook his head and spoke to her. His voice was firm.

“Winky, you cannot claim ignorance of what was going on. You were aware of the bad things the two wizards you chose to be your masters were doing. You helped them. You did bad things too. You know the Dementors Kiss is irreversible; but you chose to believe it was possible. The man that looked like Barty Crouch Jr was not your old master and you *knew* it. You just pretended he was because you wanted to believe it. Blinky tried to warn you. I could go on but there is no point. If you want to face wizard justice, go turn yourself in to the Ministry now. Otherwise, leave this country today and never come back.”

Winky began to cry and then collapsed onto the floor.

Draco looked at Blinky, who looked very, very sad because of his sister's crimes. “Blinky, never tell me where Winky has gone.”

Draco started to walk out of the kitchen, but he turned back after a few steps.

“Blinky, I'm sure the Wizengamot will immediately revoke my Mother's suspended sentence for her part in this. She'll be going back to Azkaban today. So I'll be moving back in. I'll have dinner with you in the kitchen tonight as we used to.”

“Yes, Master Draco,” said Blinky happily.

Draco and Blinky both smiled.

Chapter 22 -- Denouement

Ginny was sitting in her parent's living room at the Burrow between her parents on the couch. They still had their arms around her. Harry was standing by the fireplace with Burke.

Ginny was telling her story. She was excited. It showed because her thoughts were a little unorganized.

“I was afraid, but much less so once I realized where I was being held.”

“They only used ordinary charms to tie me with ropes... and cover my head with a sack so I couldn't see... and more charms to silence me and prevent me from hearing them. They didn't use the *Room's* magic to hold me. The Room must have thought I was just another person hiding out. I *needed* to be able to see them and hear them. And because I did, the Room let me hear and see everything. Their silencing charm lifted and I could see through the sack like it was an invisibility cloak.”

“Winky had to have been the one to ask for the Room in the first place since she was at Hogwarts. She must have checked that the Room wasn't in use, then kidnapped the witch in Hogsmeade -- it was Irene Parsons by the way -- she's so nice... then opened the Room and brought her inside, probably in the middle of night when no one was around. Apparently, Winky only asked for a hideout, not a place to hold hostages. It was a perfect hideout... But that's all it was -- a place to 'hide out.' I don't think Winky thought of Irene as a hostage, but just an *anchor* for the Room when she was away. I'm sure Winky intended to let her go when they were finished with the Room...”

Maybe so, thought Harry, but Malfoy -- both halves of him -- did not.

Ginny was still talking. “...And Winky obviously never asked the Room to change or improve after they kidnapped me. I don't think her heart was ever in it...”

“Malfoy and Crouch didn't understand the Room. They never used Room magic to ask for things or do things. They always used ordinary magic. When they went to sleep, I needed my bonds to loosen so I could get free. They practically fell off. I needed to be very quiet. The room produced slippers that made no noise. They left my wand on the worktable. I used *Muffliato* first so I could wake Miss Parsons and talk to her. Winky had Miss Parsons under some kind of trance; *Finite Incantatem* didn't break it... so, I *needed* her to wake up and the Room woke her. She had no idea what had happened to her. I explained the situation. We *needed* a way out of the room, but I thought it was a bad idea to go into the school corridors late at night, so the tunnel to the Hog's Head appeared just like before the Battle of Hogwarts.”

“But we couldn't just leave. I *really needed* to make them think we were still there as long as possible. And the Room produced two incredibly lifelike dummies -- they even looked like they were breathing. They had on copies of our clothes and ropes and everything. We left them in our places. I put my wand back on the

worktable and we took the tunnel to Hogsmeade... Was Aberforth ever surprised! ...Miss Parsons stayed in the Hog's Head to eat something... she was starving. Aberforth used side-along Apparation to come with me to the Ministry of Magic. I was immediately taken to Harry and Chief Inspector Burke. We guessed if they detected the dummies in the morning, they just wouldn't show up in Diagon Alley."

"You know the rest," she concluded.

Harry said, "Smart girl. Ginny probably saved my life -- allowing us to know what they were going to do when they Apparated into Diagon Alley. I suppose we're quits now from the Chamber of Secrets." He grinned.

Ginny tried to grab a pillow from the couch and throw it at him but her parents were still holding onto her while they all laughed.

Burke said, "Kreacher helped us develop a new charm. It played an important part. We suspected they would use Winky in the same way as they had used her in Azkaban and St Mungo's. We had Kreacher perform elf Apparation for several hours. I'm sure he got tired of it, but we learned how to detect it magically. That gave us the warning time Harry needed to go from looking passive and unarmed to being armed and ready. The only thing we had before that was the Caterwauling Charm which only works on human Apparation and, as you know, is not silent. The new charm is still a Ministry secret.

"So, Harry," Burke asked, "What do you think of your first nine days in the Investigation Division?"

"I think I already need a vacation," said Harry.

They all laughed.

Mr Weasley said, "Well, I think we all need a drink. I'll get the Firewhisky. Harry, you get the glasses."

Chapter 23 -- End Game

Lucius Malfoy and Barty Crouch Jr -- who at his trial had been declared 'Horcrux-Lucius-Malfoy' by the Wizengamot -- were chained to rough wooden chairs in a small stone room lit by a single torch in the basement of the Ministry of Magic.

They were gagged.

The heavy wooden door opened; Kingsley Shacklebolt entered and spoke in his deep sonorous voice.

"The Wizengamot had some difficulty deciding your sentence, Lucius."

He spoke to them as if they were a single person.

"Veritaserum has revealed everything. Evil and despicable does not begin to describe it. Did you know each half of you was planning to kill the other?"

Malfoy and Crouch looked at each other in surprise.

"It's ironic in a way. We're not absolutely sure how that would have worked out magically. Maybe one of you *would* have managed to kill the other. We'll never know. You already have a life sentence in Azkaban. The Wizengamot has ruled it applies equally to both halves of you. There is undoubtedly some other ironic statement I could make, but I'll skip it."

Shacklebolt paused and looked at his notes from the sentencing hearing.

"The Wizengamot has also ruled that to return you to Azkaban to simply complete your life sentence is not a just punishment. However, Lucius, your own actions helped us arrive at the appropriate punishment. I suppose this is another opportunity for an ironic statement, but I'll let you figure it out."

Shacklebolt turned and walked out leaving the door open.

A rush of cold air filled the room as two Dementors glided through the open door, their scabbed skeletal hands already reaching toward their victims.

Muffled screams were heard in the hallway as the Dementors entered the room. Then moments later as Malfoy's and Crouch's gags were removed, blood curdling screams sent shivers up Shacklebolt's spine. Then there was total silence.

Shacklebolt watched from the doorway, along with the Head of the Department for Magical Law Enforcement -- official witnesses to the sentence being carried out. They showed no emotion.

When it was done, Shacklebolt said to the group of Aurors standing behind them, "Get these foul creatures out of here immediately. I hope we never have to use them again."

Harry Potter sat at his kitchen table reading the Daily Prophet, which had been placed in the usual spot by Kreacher.

The paper had a typically sensational headline reporting *The Exclusive and Shocking Full Story of the Escape and Capture of Lucius Malfoy*. But Harry had to admit it was a sensational story. And who else but Rita Skeeter could perfectly capture the incompetence of everyone in the Ministry involved? Of course, it included Harry. It was her way of tweaking him for his insistence on the absolute truth in her biography of him.

The most important development to come out of the case was the Ministry putting the new secret Elf Apparation Detection Charm in place just about everywhere the Ministry operated. But there was more. The Department of Mysteries had also developed another version of the charm, which would completely block elf Apparation. This charm was immediately implemented in Azkaban and the Ministry of Magic, not including the atrium.

Harry was looking through the article for 'the human element' which Rita captured so well. Healer Pethig, who had her memory restored by Ministry Obliviators, was extremely pleased to have poor Barty Crouch Jr returned to her ward in St Mungo's. She said he looked better than he had in years and she was looking forward to caring for him for the rest of his life. At the same time, she was deeply saddened by the death of Gilderoy Lockhart.

Rita used the article to slip in an announcement of a new book she planned to write about Lockhart. Harry could hardly wait.

The story also reported the return of Lucius Malfoy to Azkaban to serve out his life sentence.

Narcissa Malfoy had her suspended twenty year sentence revoked and was given an additional twenty years for aiding and abetting her husband's escape. Part of her sentence was to care for her now living-dead husband in prison. They were the only couple in Azkaban sharing a cell.

In a '*startling turn of events*,' as the Prophet called it, Narcissa Malfoy had smothered her husband during their first night together. She pleaded guilty and received a life sentence from the Wizengamot.

The story did not report that Draco Malfoy had assisted in the capture of his parents. Draco had requested that it be kept secret, and the Ministry had obliged. The article just said they had been captured in a raid at Malfoy Manor.

Finally, the story reported that Winky, the house-elf, had not been seen since the day in Diagon Alley and was presumed to be on the run. This was yet another example of Ministry incompetence.

Harry knew the Ministry had no intention of hunting Winky. Ginny felt sorry for Winky, but Harry did not. Winky may not have agreed with or known about all the things her masters did or planned to do, but the things she did know, she knew were wrong. She also committed criminal acts of her own. A house-elf's duty to obey its master does not extend to personal criminality.

Harry folded the paper and placed it back on the table.

Within a week after Diagon Alley, Harry had tried to have 'a talk' with Ginny about the danger he exposed her to. She had immediately sensed what he was going to say, and she would not hear of it. Thankfully, it did not take them long to work it out.

In fact, Harry considered it the best thing to come out of the whole episode.

"I still think we should paint the en-suite bathroom yellow," said Ginny as she reached for the pepper to put on her eggs. "Kreacher thinks so too, don't you, Kreacher?"

"Yes, Miss Ginny," answered Kreacher in his bullfrog voice.

“Kreacher is pleased having a feminine touch once more present in the Black family home,” said the grizzled old house-elf with a smile.

The End

End Notes: The quote ‘There are no more Horcruxes. It’s just you and me.’ in **bold** text in Chapter 11 of this story is taken from chapter Thirty-Six of Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, by J. K. Rowling.