



# Best Served Cold

## Chapter 1

"Harry, I'm so sorry about what happened, but we need to get you back to ... the house, and quickly," Arthur Weasley said.

Harry Potter had been stunned when it had happened, but that moment had passed, and now he was taking charge. "I'm sorry, Mr Weasley, but there are things that I need to do first, and they have to be done here at the Ministry. It's far better that they be done now, while I'm here, rather than force people to take time out of their busy schedules to bring me back here." He murmured quietly to the man, "Also, it's much safer in terms of what I think they call operational security. Nobody will think too much about it with you waiting around for me here today, sir."

"Good point, Harry. Very well. Let's get it done." As Arthur Weasley led him toward the Muggle Liaison office, Harry thought back to what had happened just a few minutes earlier.

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Harry had come to the Ministry with Arthur in the early morning and discovered that it was a good thing, given that the time of the trial had been moved up by several hours.

"You're late."

"Sorry," said Harry nervously "I – I didn't know the time had been changed."

That is not the Wizengamot's fault," said the voice. "An owl was sent to you this morning. Take your seat."

Harry dropped his gaze to the chair in the centre of the room, the arms of which were covered in chains. He had seen those chains spring to life and bind whoever sat between them. His footsteps echoed loudly as he walked across the stone floor. When he sat gingerly on the edge of the chair the chains clinked threateningly, but did not bind him. Feeling rather sick, he looked up at the people seated at the bench above.

There were about fifty of them, all, as far as he could see, wearing plum-coloured robes with an elaborately worked silver W on the left-hand side of the chest and all staring down their noses at him, some with very austere expressions, others looks of frank curiosity.

In the very middle of the front row sat Cornelius Fudge, the Minister for Magic. Fudge was a portly man who often sported a lime-green bowler hat, though today he had dispensed with it; he had dispensed, too, with the indulgent smile he had once worn when he spoke to Harry.

A broad, square-jawed witch with very short grey hair sat on Fudge's left; she wore a monocle and looked forbidding. On Fudge's right was another witch, but she was sitting so far back on the bench that her face was in shadow.

"Very well," said Fudge. The accused being present - finally -let us begin. Are you ready?" he called down the row.

"Yes, sir," said an eager voice Harry knew. Ron's brother Percy was sitting at the very end of the front bench. Harry looked at Percy, expecting some sign of recognition from him, but none came. Percy's eyes, behind his horn-rimmed glasses, were fixed on his parchment, a quill poised in his hand.

"Disciplinary hearing of the twelfth of August," said Fudge in a ringing voice, and Percy began taking notes at once, "into offences committed under the Decree for the Reasonable Restriction of Underage Sorcery and the International Statute of Secrecy by Harry James Potter, resident at number four, Privet Drive, Little Whinging, Surrey.

"Interrogators: Cornelius Oswald Fudge, Minister for Magic; Amelia Susan Bones, Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement; Dolores Jane Umbridge, Senior Undersecretary to the Minister. Court Scribe, Percy Ignatius Weasley -"

"Witness for the defence, Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore," said a quiet voice from behind Harry, who turned his head so fast he cricked his neck.

Dumbledore was striding serenely across the room wearing long midnight-blue robes and a perfectly calm expression. His long silver beard and hair gleamed in the torchlight as he drew level with Harry and looked up at Fudge through the half-moon spectacles that rested halfway down his very crooked nose.

The members of the Wizengamot were muttering. All eyes were now on Dumbledore. Some looked annoyed, others slightly frightened; two elderly witches in the back row, however, raised their hands and waved in welcome.

A powerful emotion had risen in Harry's chest at the sight of Dumbledore, a fortified, hopeful feeling rather like that which phoenix song gave him. He wanted to catch Dumbledore's eye, but Dumbledore was not looking his way; he was continuing to look up at the obviously flustered Fudge.

"Ah," said Fudge, who looked thoroughly disconcerted. "Dumbledore. Yes. You - er - got our - er - message that the time and -er - place of the hearing had been changed, then?"

"I must have missed it," said Dumbledore cheerfully. "However, due to a lucky mistake I arrived at the Ministry three hours early, so no harm done."

"Yes - well - I suppose we'll need another chair - I - Weasley, could you -?"

"Not to worry, not to worry," said Dumbledore pleasantly; he took out his wand, gave it a little flick, and a squashy chintz armchair appeared out of nowhere next to Harry. Dumbledore sat down, put the tips of his long fingers together and surveyed Fudge over them with an expression of polite interest. The Wizengamot was still muttering and fidgeting restlessly; only when Fudge spoke again did they settle down.

"Yes," said Fudge again, shuffling his notes. "Well, then. So. The charges. Yes."

He extricated a piece of parchment from the pile before him, took a deep breath, and read out, "The charges against the accused are as follows: That he did knowingly, deliberately and in full awareness of the illegality of his actions, having received a previous written warning from the Ministry of Magic on a similar charge, produce a Patronus Charm in a Muggle-inhabited area, in the presence of a Muggle, on the second of August at twenty-three minutes past nine, which constitutes an offence under Paragraph C of the Decree for the Reasonable Restriction of Underage Sorcery, 1875, and also under Section 13 of the International Confederation of Warlocks' Statute of Secrecy."

"You are Harry James Potter, of number four, Privet Drive, Little Whinging, Surrey?" Fudge said, glaring at Harry over the top of his parchment.

"Yes," Harry said.

"You received an official warning from the Ministry for using illegal magic three years ago, did you not?"

"Yes, but -"

"And yet you conjured a Patronus on the night of the second of August?" said Fudge.

"Yes," said Harry, "but -"

"Knowing that you are not permitted to use magic outside school while you are under the age of seventeen?"

"Yes, but -"

"Knowing that you were in an area full of Muggles?"

"Yes, but -"

"Fully aware that you were in close proximity to a Muggle at the time?"

"Yes," said Harry angrily, "but I only used it because we were -"

The witch with the monocle cut across him in a booming voice. (Order of the Phoenix, JK Rowling)

"To reiterate Minister Fudge's question, no matter how impressive your casting a corporeal Patronus might be – you cast a spell in the presence of a Muggle?"

"Yes, but -"

"I need hear nothing more," she interrupted once more. "His guilt is plain, and from his own mouth. He is under the age of seventeen, and he cast a spell in front of a Muggle. I call for a vote now."

"I must protest!" Dumbledore said. "There are extenuating circumstances!"

"You no longer have power in these chambers, Dumbledore," the woman in pink said. "I second the motion to vote." In short order, the vote was resoundingly against Harry.

Fudge turned to Percy and said. "Scribe Weasley, would you do the honours of relieving Mr Potter of his wand before resuming your position?" Weasley murmured a spell which left the quill hovering above the parchment.

Percy was obviously all too happy to perform this job for the Minister, and as he nearly ran toward Harry, Harry looked to Dumbledore, who still would not look in Harry's direction. "He can't help you, Potter," came the all-too-Malfoyish tone from Percy. "Your wand?"

Harry sighed and handed his prized wand, his badge of being a wizard, over to the smirking redhead, who turned and carried it to Minister Fudge. With a grin on his chubby face, the man took the ends of the holly and phoenix feather wand in his hands and snapped it. "And so ends the real threat to the wizarding world, Mr Potter." He threw the pieces to the floor in front of Harry.

"Incendio!" exclaimed the woman in pink, causing the pieces to turn immediately to ash. "I'm taking no chances that Dumbledore might try to turn the pieces into some sort of icon, making the boy into a martyr. Now there's nothing to show for it." Her smile defined the word vile.

Harry had been in shock, but her smile caused something in him to snap. The anger surfaced sharply for a moment, but he beat it down, and

something else burst through him – the intelligence the Dursleys never let him use. A plan formulated in the blink of an eye, and he thought it a good one. He smiled, and it was not a pleasant one.

"What are you smiling about?" Fudge asked. "We've just snapped your wand and forbidden you to ever do magic again."

"Yes, you have."

"Then why are you smiling?"

"I grew up there, sir. It's not exactly a punishment to put me back there." He turned and headed toward the exit of the courtroom, noting that at no time did Dumbledore make any effort to speak to him.

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His mission at the Muggle Liaison office was more interesting than he expected, and he knew that things would get explosive at 12 Grimmauld Place when he told them of the results of the meeting. He met up with Arthur Weasley once more and took the ride back.

He was, of course, smothered with a Molly Weasley hug when he walked in the door. Much to his surprise, after the others had given some stuttering sorrowful apologies, not knowing how to deal with the fact of his conviction, he was suddenly dealing with a face full of bushy brown hair, as Hermione grabbed him, sobbing. Oh my, he thought. Why have I never noticed just how ... female ... she is, and why does it have to be now? She's going to slap my face so hard that my head won't stop spinning for a week ...

He noticed that she had suddenly stopped crying, and had in fact apparently stopped breathing, easily noticeable since her mouth was right next to his left ear. "Finally noticed I'm a girl?" she finally whispered with a small shuddering laugh. "We'll talk later." She stopped gripping him so tightly, but didn't stop hugging him, hiding the evidence of just how much he had noticed how female she was that was poking her in the stomach. "You know that you can talk to us if you need to," she said in a conversational voice.

"You especially, and probably Tonks and Professor Lupin as well, since they have more knowledge of the Muggle side of things," he said. He hugged her tightly for a moment. "Thank you for being a friend." He looked around the room while hugging her. "Thank you to all of you." This move actually help his reaction subside, and they separated.

"Yeah, it was a shock," he added, "but I have to move on. I need to get set up in the Muggle world, and one of the reasons that I didn't come right back here was the fact that I stopped to talk to the Muggle Liaison office."

"Oh Harry, I'm sure that Albus will manage something -" Molly started to say.

"I don't mean to be rude, Mrs Weasley," he said, interrupting her, but with an apologetic look, "but I can't rely on that. He's lost all the important titles other than Headmaster, and the way that the Minister seemed to be reacting to him, I suspect he's going to lose that at some point during the year as well. He might become the top man of the Wizengamot again before the year is out, or it might never happen again. I can't live my life in this house hoping that he'll save my bacon." He walked over and hugged her. "I know you care, and it means so much to me, but I have to be a man and live as if it's going to be the worst case scenario, which is that he can't manage to get me my rights back."

He laughed a little darkly. "Personally, I suspect that the Ministry will be wanting to talk to me within a few years, and not as a criminal. They'll be looking back on today and cringing." He shrugged. "But I can't count on that."

"So, in a week, I need to go to Number 10 Downing to meet with someone. Apparently my name being mentioned in that office at the Ministry set off some bells that the Muggles didn't like being set off."

"Not sure that's a good idea, Potter," Moody growled. "I'd better see if I can get that meeting cancelled."

"I'm betting that you can't, Moody," he replied. "If anything, you just might get ordered to come find me and produce me immediately if you try that. I don't know that to be the case, but don't be surprised if it happens."

"A well placed Obliviate -"

"- can start a war, Moody," Harry stressed. "Certain Muggles obviously know about us, and there's such a thing as paperwork. I'd imagine that there are safeguards in place to prevent this meeting from being cancelled. You'd likely need an Imperius to manage it, and even that's not assured to work. Just let the meeting happen, okay? I can tell you after what they said."

"He's right," Hermione said. "I read spy novels as a hobby, and I can think of six ways to let the other side know that you tried to stop the meeting right now, and I'm not in the intelligence community. If I've got six, they've got more."

Moody just scowled, but after a moment, nodded sharply. It was then that the fireplace flared green, and Dumbledore and Snape stepped in. Dumbledore continued in ignoring Harry as he breezed into the kitchen. "We shall need to meet shortly. I have called a meeting for seven PM."

"Oh dear, That was when supper was going to be. I guess I'll have to make sure that you children are fed before the meeting starts," Molly said as she bustled off.

Snape simply came to a stop before the Hogwarts students, a vicious smile on his face. "I hear that congratulations are in order, Mr Potter. You managed to do something so thunderingly stupid that your wand was snapped and you have been forbidden to do magic again. Just how did you manage to do something so dunderheaded?"

Harry smiled at him. "Well, since the Hat wanted to put me in Slytherin, when I was faced with those Dementors in Little Whinging, I just asked myself what a Malfoy would do, and then did it," he replied.

"Obviously not," Snape said, "or else you would still be a wizard, and not little better than a squib."

"Hey, shit happens," Harry replied with a shrug. He decided to try something, to see how it worked. "Look at it this way, Snape. It's a bonus for you. You never have to look out into your Gryffindor classes again and see the son of Lily Evans ever again."

It was somewhat hard to see, but Harry was looking for it. Severus Snape looked as if someone had struck him in the stomach after that comment came out. "What did you say?" he hissed.

"I'm sorry?" Harry asked as if he hadn't heard the man. "All I said was that you never have to look out into the class and see the son of Lily Evans looking back at you ever again. After all, you've got that tattoo on your arm, and she was a Muggleborn. A Mudblood, I think you Death Eaters call them? I figure that's why you've always hated me, between my looking like my father and having a Mudblood for a mother -"

His wand was out and pointing at Harry. Before he could say anything, his wand was sailing through the air and into Dumbledore's hand. "He is unarmed Severus," was all that was said, in a slightly chiding tone. "Come, we have a meeting." A snarling Snape stalked away from the group and through the door to the kitchen.

Harry relaxed. "Hoo boy. Acting cool like that is harder than it looks," he said, his voice shaky.

"That was awesome!" Ron said.

I'm not sure 'awesome' describes having a wand pointed in my face -"

"Sure it does!" Ron interrupted. "After all, it wasn't me it was aimed at!" He kept a straight face for a moment, but started to chuckle, while Harry just shook his head.

"What are you going to do?" Ginny asked. "We're going to miss you at Hogwarts this year." He saw her eyes flicker to Ron and a wicked smile crossed her face for a moment before she said, "There were so many broom closets I wanted to check out with you!" He could see her eyes sparkling, and knew she was trying to get him to blush as well as get her brother to explode. Ron was already building to steam whistle levels.

Harry decided to fire back and see what kind of a reaction he could get. "Well, since I won't be there, you could always grab Hermione and check them out in my place. She knows me well enough to know a lot of my tastes."

He was startled to note the widening of both girls' pupils and the attempt by both to see if they could tear through their clothes. Ron's colour continued to change, coming closer to Vernon Dursley's puce tendencies, and Harry said, "Ron, we were both joking. Mellow out."

In response, Ron exhaled explosively and then started panting. "Merlin, I'm glad you finally decided to say something. I was about to pass out from holding my breath, mate." Harry just stared at Ron for a moment before starting to clap slowly. "Thank you," Ron replied, bowing slightly. "A guy can't live in a house full of pranksters without learning something, can he?" His own eyes sparkled for a moment. "Besides, after about seven, you and Ginny can check out a few of the cupboards around this place, since all the adults will be in the meeting." He grinned. "Maybe even see if you can fit all three of you in one." Hermione looked at him. "C'mon, Hermione, it's been clear for a while that if you had to make a choice, it would be between Harry Potter and that redheaded whatsisname."

"I never meant to -"

"And I'm sorry I gave you the impression that you were. I'm just saying that even last year, it was kinda clear that you weren't trying to get Harry and I to talk for me, but for Harry."

"Before this gets into an apology-fest," Harry interrupted, "I'm going to want to talk to you guys. We'll have our own little meeting while the big kids are lording it over us that we aren't invited to their meeting."

One of the twins snorted. "Interesting point of view, Harry. Are we invited?"

"I suppose so, if you can behave." He grinned at them, making them laugh again.

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The meal went quietly, and when Sirius asked him about his silence in regard to other things, he was blunt. "Honestly, the Ministry saw to it that none of what you guys are dithering over is any of my business any longer. I have no wand, and am forbidden to cast spells. It should be interesting when Voldie comes forward, since he's going to want to hunt me down and kill me."

"How can you say that?" Molly Weasley gasped.

"Simple, Mrs Weasley. I'm the Boy Who Lived, as stupid a moniker as that is. It's a reminder that he faced someone who defeated him once. He cannot allow me to live. So I have to prepare for him in another way, which is part of the reason why I wanted to talk to the Muggle Liaison office. I was startled to find out that people as high up as Number 10 Downing want to talk to me." He pretended not to notice as eyes met across the table significantly. He laughed. "Besides, I suspect that this is going to bite Fudge on the butt, and that he's going to want me back in the wizarding world within a year or two, to save his job."

"What will you do if he does?" Remus asked.

"Ask for my wand back," Harry said.

"His Senior Undersecretary destroyed it," Sirius reminded him.

"I know. Sucks to be Fudge, doesn't it?"

"You'd leave the wizarding world to -" Emmeline Vance started to say, but stopped suddenly. Again, Harry ignored the not so subtle Silencing spell, and intentionally misunderstood her question.

"I have to leave the wizarding world. Either that or be treated as a Squib. And I've seen how Squibs are treated."

"I am afraid that I cannot permit you to leave this house, Harry," Dumbledore said from behind him. "It is far too dangerous for you."

Harry seethed for a moment, but he kept it fairly well hidden. A moment later, he finally said, "I understand, sir. Given that I've got the Ministry wanting me dead, as well as Voldie and his crew, keeping me protected is fairly high on the list of important things to do."

"I'm glad you understand. Now unfortunately, we have a meeting of the Order, so I'm afraid that I must ask the young people to perhaps head upstairs?"

"I can harass them while they all work on their summer assignments," Harry said with a grin as he stood.

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"I can't believe that you agreed with Dumbledore!" George exclaimed.

"I don't. But all I'd get out of complaining is to be treated like a child. Dumbledore's going to ignore things, and do his best to keep me from my meeting at Downing Street as well, I'm betting. I need to leave until the Ministry decides that they need me once more."

"What are you going to do then?" Ron asked.

"Let's just say that they will not be happy with it. Given that Fudge, your brother, and that toad woman were in on this?"

"Percy?" Fred asked.

"He was giddy as he took my wand from me and handed it to Fudge to snap. He was happy to see it done. I intend that all three have their wands snapped and be forbidden to do magic again, just the way they intend me to live." He shook his head. "I'll probably change that opinion by the time that it comes time to negotiate with them, but I'll bleed them. As it is, I need to get to Gringott's soon, preferably before I go to meet anyone in the Muggle government."

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Your name, teller?" Harry asked in a monotone.

"Blagrot, hu-mon, not that it will serve you at all. Vows of revenge are dealt with swiftly, with hu-mons losing."

Harry smiled darkly. "Then the goblins are fools. Revenge is a dish best served cold, as the Klingons say. Thank you for the listing of what the goblins helped the Ministry steal, though. It will serve me well in the days to come."

"As something to cry over?" Blagrot sneered. Harry just looked at him and used the portkey that Sirius had given him to return to 12 Grimmauld Place.

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"So they railroaded you, snapped your wand, burned it, and then took everything your family owned from you?" It was clear that John Major was used to holding his temper in. It was also clear that this situation was requiring that talent.

"Yes, Minister," Harry replied carefully.

"Don't worry, Mr Potter, I'm not angry at you. I've been worried about what's happening in your side of the divide for a while, and now you've made it clear that it's even worse than I thought."

"It's not my side any longer, sir," Harry replied. "They made that clear. I've seen the Daily Prophet, and the public largely supports what was done to me. So, I intend on leaving somehow. Preferably leaving the entire United Kingdom if I can."

John Major thought for a moment and finally said, "Are you talking about renouncing your citizenship, or simply getting away from England, Scotland, Ireland, and environs?" He laughed slightly at Harry's horrified look upon asking about renouncing his citizenship and said, "That answers that question. Would you perhaps be interested in somewhere such as Antigua, but be able to school in the United States, for example?"

"If you can work that out, sir, I would be grateful." He smiled. "And I'm aware that this is a tit-for-tat arrangement, if you'll pardon the crudity."

Major laughed. "That's mild, Mr Potter. Personally, just helping you out of the country is going to be helping me, because I know that they'll be coming around looking for you at some point. The effort put into preventing you from being at this meeting was amazing, to be honest."

"I know. Dumbledore has something up his sleeve other than his arms, and I seriously doubt that it's good for me." He shrugged. "Besides, when they do get around to looking for me, they'll be very unhappy. As will the goblins." At the Prime Minister's amused look, Harry proceeded to explain. "Well, they destroyed my wand, so they'll need to replace it. That'll be the easiest for them to do, assuming that they can get Fawkes to give a new feather." He grinned. "I won't accept just any wand – I want a real replacement for the one that they destroyed. Second, since Fudge, Umbridge, and Percy Weasley insisted on something that would have led to me living my life without magic, I will demand that they all have their wands snapped and be forbidden to ever do magic again. Amelia Bones I will likely demand be removed from office, and someone competent put in her place."

"I like it."

"I'm just getting started," Harry said with a grin, mimicking the character from "The Princess Bride". "As I told Blagrot, revenge is a dish best served cold. This is going to be in a year or two, so the goblins will expect that I will have forgotten. Not only will I demand that the Ministry return all the money plus interest – I'll probably let myself be talked down to about three to five percent, payable before my return, but I also intend to bleed the goblins for a similar amount, pointing out that Voldemort will definitely make every attempt to exterminate them. I will specifically point out that they have Blagrot to blame for this requirement, so that his name can be cursed by the entire goblin race. Since this information will be passed to all nations that deal with Gringott's, their only hope is to either work with me or to go underground for long enough for people to forget, which is a very long time."

"What are you going to do if some of these Death Eaters have bought your family's things and destroyed them?"

"It's possible that they will, but the ones most likely to purchase them are also the ones most likely to flaunt that they're owning a piece of the Potter legacy. It'll mean too much for Draco Malfoy, for example, to sleep in the bed that my mother used, just so that he can taunt me later." He shrugged again. "If the Ministry can show me that the piece is actually destroyed, then the one who destroyed it will be reimbursing me for the price of replacement." A vicious grin followed. "If it was irreplaceable? Then I get that family's entire money and goods. Very little should be destroyed."

"How will you know, though?"

"Blagrot was an idiot, and wanted to taunt me, so he gave me a full accounting of what the Ministry took. And the goblins are meticulous record-keepers."

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September 1st came around, and everyone was running around madly. Harry said his goodbyes and disappeared upstairs, ostensibly to avoid anyone seeing him being sad that he couldn't attend with them. In actuality, he prepared for leaving with the Weasleys. He was especially pleased that they left him alone, apparently using the same logic that they had used for earlier in the summer - ignore him and he won't complain.

He did get one small knock on the door. When he opened it, he found Hermione and Ginny both outside. They came into the room and closed it behind them. Without a word, Hermione flowed forward and pulled him into her arms and then kissed him. Her tongue was quickly in his mouth, which told him everything he needed to know, so he returned it, with great interest. When they broke, his hands were gripping her bum rather tightly.

"Whew! Next time we kiss like that, I think we should be wearing less clothing," he said, panting.

"Next time I kiss you like that, I intend to wear less," she replied with a purr. "Ginny and I have decided that we'll share you until you make a decision." He looked to Ginny, who grinned widely, nodding.

"What if I decide I want you both?" he asked with his own answering grin.

"Then Ginny and I figure out a valid excuse for the Aurors as to why you have that big grin when they check out your dead body."

He laughed. "I'll be living with you two. I know that wizards don't tend to use logic, but damn, even Fudge's people could figure that one out. Two hot witches equals one dehydrated wizard."

He pulled Ginny into an embrace and kissed her the same way that he and Hermione had kissed. Being that she was shorter than he was, he had to hold her up by her bum as well. In response, she wrapped her legs around his waist. She moaned against him, and shuddered briefly just before the kiss broke.

"Damn," she breathed when they finally broke. "I can tell exactly how fast your heart is beating right now."

"That's not my heart you're feeling, Ginny," he replied with a chuckle.

"From how hard it's pulsing, are you sure about that?"

"You keep grinding and I suspect that you'll find out whether or not it's blood that it spurts," he groaned.

"If it's going to spurt, then it should be placed a bit deeper," she moaned.

"I want to, but we'll get caught if you're in here much longer." He paused. "Jab your fingers in your eyes and climb down. Someone's on their way up."

Ginny did it in the opposite order, climbing down before jabbing herself in the eyes. Hermione did the same. Both had red, weepy eyes when Molly Weasley opened the door. "I'll miss you both," he said softly, but certainly loud enough for Molly to hear.

"I'm sorry to break this up," she said, "but we need to be leaving." The girls both sniffed, but they left. Molly looked at him sadly, but didn't say a word.

When she was gone, and he'd heard the front door close, he stepped out of the room and headed for his own. He set out the letter he had written, and then gripped his trunk and broke the small plaster shield he'd glued to it. This activated the Portkey.

## Best Served Cold

October 1, 1995

"He is not safe on his own, Sirius. Where is he?" Dumbledore asked once more. He was beginning to become exasperated at the man.

"I specifically never asked, Albus. I have no idea, and we carefully do not stay in touch except for postcards and letters sent the Muggle way, which are always routed a different way each time. And before you think about sending a tracer or Portkey to him that way, I should tell you that he's already thought of that. The drop at his end cancels all magic on incoming letters, be it beneficial or not. If it can't be cancelled, it's destroyed. Harry told me that's how it was set up, at his request, because he expects that either you or Voldie will try something that way."

Albus frowned. "He has chosen the worst possible time to be childish about this, Sirius. His safety is paramount."

"It is being taken care of, Albus. Where is he? Besides, why should you care? You made your position fairly clear to him this summer. You spoke to him once, to tell him he was as much a prisoner in this house as I am. Other than that, you have treated him as non-existent. Is it to toughen him up? Is it because you're disappointed that the Diggory boy died and you feel that Harry didn't do enough to save him? Is it something else?" Sirius shrugged. "No matter. I'm not being told where he is, because I don't want you or Snape rooting around in my skull to pull it 'for the greater good'. And by the way - both the Americans and the British Prime Minister are aware of what's happening. If Harry doesn't report to them in some way or another, then a whole can of 'international incident' opens up on you. Harry will contact you when he's ready to."

"I just worry. There are things he does not know, Sirius."

"And whose fault is that, hmm, Albus?"

January 10, 1996

"Please, Miss Granger, I must know where he is."

"Well, I can't tell you, sir. He never told me. All I know is that I took my bikini with me, and that there was sand. We took a Portkey that was supplied for us. He is safe, and happy."

"How can he be? His wand was snapped."

Her eyes twinkled, and if it had been anyone other than Dumbledore, they would have known that she was biting back a fairly racy comment. "I'm not sure, but he certainly seemed happy to see me," was what she finally chose to say.

"Miss Weasley? I know that you are still close to him. Perhaps -"

"I wasn't allowed to be there this break." She frowned for a moment before continuing. "Not to be rude, sir, but this is exactly why he's not telling anyone. You pester people about it, and Professor Snape simply Legilimences people, whether or not it's legal to do so, because he knows that you'll protect him, because you find him vital to the war effort or something. So he says nothing to anyone that can give it away."

"To be honest, sir, when we went to the beach, it was by Portkey," Hermione added. "For all I know, we could have been ten feet away from where he was living, or a thousand miles."

Dumbledore sighed. "Very well. You may return to your Tower." They turned and left the office. As they headed downstairs, he could hear Miss Weasley say, "I note that you said you took your bikini. Did you wear it?"

"Let's just say that I've got no tan lines, and ... " Their voices faded as they exited at the bottom of the stairs.

"We must find him," Albus murmured. "Voldemort will come after him, and he is unprepared."

"Whose fault is that, Albus?" asked the portrait of Armando Dippet.

June 12, 1996

"This is intolerable, Dumbledore!" Umbridge said. "Potter must be found and returned to England to perform his duty to the wizarding world!"

Cornelius was about to say something, but Dumbledore cut him off. "This is, of course, the same Harry Potter whom you and Cornelius railroaded last August? The same Harry Potter who not only had his wand snapped, but had the pieces incinerated, thereby destroying a brother wand to Voldemort's wand?" He met Dolores's eyes. "Feel free to run back to your master with that titbit, madam. I am certain he already knows it, or planned it."

"How dare you!" she shrieked. "I am Senior Undersecretary to the Minister for Magic, and you will respect my office and title!"

Albus did not rise to his feet. He merely released his aura, which beat heavily upon the two. "And I am once more Headmaster of Hogwarts, Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot, and once more the Supreme Mugwump of the International Confederation of Wizards. If we are throwing around titles to be respected, Dolores, then you had best be respecting mine." He pulled his aura back in, murmuring, "I begin to understand why Harry and the others get annoyed at my insistence that they respect Severus."

They seemed properly cowed at that, and Percy Weasley, who had come to take notes as necessary, looked as though he needed new pants and trousers. Albus continued as if his outburst had not been required. "I have been in contact with the Muggle Prime Minister, who was apparently instrumental in the removal of Harry from England. Harry is still a subject of the British Crown, but it was made clear that were he to be found by us, both the Queen and his hosting country would take it rather strongly amiss were he to be simply retrieved. We will have to actually petition Harry and convince him of the rightness of our need for him."

Dolores scoffed. "How much fight could his hosting country put up?"

"Ignoring that it might be China, Japan, or the United States," Dumbledore said, "there is also the small matter of offending the Queen, to whom the Ministry, and therefore the wizarding people, have several oaths. I have looked at these documents, and let me simply say that the penalties for breaking these oaths would be ... severe. The absolute gentlest would be dissolution of our government as it stands, and being placed directly under the rule of the Queen. Death would be a kindness to those who willfully and knowingly broke these oaths."

"To clarify, Headmaster," Percy Weasley asked softly into the silence of the room, "are you stating that an attempt by the Ministry to reclaim Harry Potter would be seen as breaking these oaths to the Crown?"

"It has been made clear to me, through diplomatic language, that Her Majesty would see it exactly that way, Percival." He smiled and said, "May I say once again just how much I admire your name?"

Percy blinked for a moment, and then clearly remembered one of Dumbledore's many names and chuckled. "Thank you sir." He puffed up and said, obviously mocking himself, "Clearly a name destined for greatness."

"One never knows, Percival," was the reply. The smile disappeared. "I shall begin talks with the Prime Minister to see if we can secure a meeting with Mr Potter. That is the best that we can do at the time."

"We must have him back!" Cornelius nearly wailed. "You Know Who has returned, and we need Potter to fight him! He never should have left England."

"Whose fault is it that he did, Cornelius? Dolores? Whose fault is it?"