

Lily's Return Visit to the Potter Family Graveyard

The small group approached Godric's Hollow with a sombre mood surrounding them. It was Harry Potter's first time back to the house since he was fifteen months old. Albus Dumbledore headed the small parade, joined by Hermione Granger, Ron and Ginny Weasley, Tonks, and Remus Lupin, all guarding Harry. His three fellow students were there at his request.

They approached the remains of the house, which was in surprisingly good order, as far as they could tell. If not for being told that the house had burned, Harry would have assumed that there was no one at home in a perfectly well kept home. "I'd like to look back here at the house when we're done at the family crypt," Harry said softly, and both Hermione and Ginny moved closer to offer him some emotional support. He surprised everyone by putting an arm around both their waists. "Thanks, ladies. It means a lot." They simply smiled at him.

The walk continued around the building until they came to a large field, immaculately tended. "Either there are some really good charms on the lawn here, or someone is taking care of this property," Harry said.

"I find it intriguing as well," Dumbledore said. "We shall definitely see what is happening here as soon as possible."

There was a cast iron fence a distance away, with weeping willows and other trees seemingly guarding the entrance. They approached and felt a strong sense of foreboding. Warily, Harry approached the gate, his wand now out. As he passed between the trees, a sense of being Legilimensed by a distinctly non-human (and likely non-living, as he thought about it) presence hit him, and the feeling of foreboding suddenly evaporated, the cemetery contained within seeming to brighten. He opened the gate silently, drawing another raised eyebrow from various members of the group. He headed for the first mausoleum that he saw, and was surprised by the inscription above it.

GRYFFINDOR.

"Did I not tell you that only a true Gryffindor could have pulled that sword from the Sorting Hat?" Dumbledore said with a smile. "I did not tell you as a youth for fear that you might well develop the attitudes that Severus accuses you of."

"That's a conversation we'll have some day, sir," Harry said darkly. "What you've just said tells me that you know of the abuse that he heaps upon the Gryffindor students, which means that you condone it. But that's for later."

He opened the door and was intrigued to note that the interior lit immediately. There were several biers before him, with one quite obviously the centrepiece, as it were. A gleaming brass plaque declared that the occupant was Godric Gryffindor. The obviously dead man's hair was silvery-white, and he reminded Harry very much of the Headmaster. He looked to the man.

"The resemblance is due more to age rather than blood, I believe," Albus Dumbledore said with a slight smile. "I could probably trace some connection, but yours is far more direct."

Harry reached out carefully to touch the man's body, and felt the velvet as if it were new. "I guess you're sort of my ultimate grandfather, if you will," he said. "I hope I'm doing you proud."

"I'm sure you are," Hermione said. "Those are remarkable preservative charms, sir," she said to the Headmaster.

"Some of the best in existence. These crypts actually have them built into them. Placing a body in them stops the processes of time. I believe that these crypts are the reason that the Time Turner was developed. The inventor was attempting to develop a portable version, and accidentally found out how to ... well, rewind time, as it were."

Harry chuckled as he thought about such a powerful item being invented by accident, but at least now he understood why the bodies were not in coffins. As he pulled his hand away from Godric's chest, he found his hand actually pulled to the necklace that the man wore. As soon as he touched it, the chain unfastened. Harry picked up the heavy brooch and looked at it. He recognised it easily – it was the symbol for his House at Hogwarts.

"I think that more than anything else proves that you are a Gryffindor. You have just been given the crest that designates you as head of the Gryffindor line."

"Shouldn't that be a ring or something?" he asked. As soon as he asked, it grew warm in his hand, and suddenly was a ring. "Ah," was all that he said for a minute or so. "Which is preferable? Brooch or ring?" It waited for several seconds, as if thinking, and then grew warm again and reformed into the necklace. He clasped it around his neck and slid it under his shirt.

He visited some of the others in the crypt, working to remember names, not noticing the scratching of Hermione's quill as she wrote down the important information that Harry seemed to want to remember.

Finally, he finished with the first mausoleum and headed back outside, looking specifically for the one marked 'Potter', which took him some time. He swore to visit them all at some point. Finally, he stepped inside the crypt marked with the Potter name carved into it and looked about. In an

alcove to his right, three quarters of the way toward the back of the building were his parents. All the others on that side were empty, awaiting family. He was by their sides immediately, not even aware that he'd run the distance.

As he looked down into his father's dead face, he realised why everyone said that the two of them were so alike. It was almost eerie to see yourself lying dead on a palette. He actually brushed the hair away from his father's forehead as if to check for the scar. "Scary, isn't it? I'd almost think it was me, if I wasn't looking at him."

He got no answer, and turned to see Hermione, Ron and Ginny looking at James Potter. There were tears in their eyes, but he watched as they obviously resolved something, almost simultaneously. They looked at each other, meeting each others eyes, and then nodded, without a word ever spoken. Harry could tell that something significant had just happened.

Hermione and Ginny walked over to Harry, and Ginny said, "That will not be you, Harry. You won't be on one of these until you have a beard as long as your ancestor's, the one whose brooch you wear."

"Too right," Ron said. "He Who ... oh hell, V- V- Voldemort!" he exclaimed, then nodded proudly to himself. "V-Voldemort will have to go through me to get to you, Harry. I swear it. I let you down once, it won't happen again."

"Then stay alive for me, Ron. How do you think I'd feel if I knew that you died to keep me alive?"

"How do you think I'd feel if you died because I didn't do something I could have to keep you alive? We're at war, Harry, and people die in wars. I'm not gonna throw myself off a building at the slightest thing, but I will throw myself in front of a Killing Curse for you." He laughed wryly. "I've got some things to do first, so I think I'll just ... what's that Muggle phrase ... take a rain check on throwing myself in front of any big curses." He grinned widely. "Besides, I've got grandchildren to spoil. Which means I have to get married first."

Harry laughed. "I needed that. Thanks, chum." They did a manly slapping of backs as they hugged quickly.

Harry's demeanour changed as he turned back to the biers containing his parents. "Mum, Dad, I wish you could be here to meet these people. I mean, I know that you know the Headmaster and Remus, but Tonks and Hermione and the Weasleys? You'd love 'em, I bet. They're some of the best friends that anyone could ever ask for. Then again, you knew that about Remus, didn't you?"

He looked at his mother's body. "Gods, Mum, you are so beautiful. And you look as if you could just sit up at any moment." He reached out and brushed his hand across her cheek.

He staggered as he felt something rush out of him. A loud gasp, drew his attention to the bier, and as he looked at his mother's body, he realised that she had been the one to gasp, as she sat up and looked at him. "Harry?" she asked.

Lily's Return Proofs and Information Gathering

Harry stepped back from the bier, not in shock, but from sudden exhaustion. Hermione and Ron were the first to him, and helped him to stay on his feet. "What just happened?" he gasped.

"I think I did," Lily Potter said. "This did not work the way that it was supposed to, damn it." She scowled. "Where did the spell go wrong?"

"Excuse me, but can you prove that you are actually Lily?" Remus said, his voice shaking.

She looked at him for a long moment before saying with more than a little quaver in her voice, "No one ever knew, except you four, that I was also an Animagus. We also discovered why I should not run with the group of you."

"Why?" Hermione asked without thinking. "Were you a cat of some sort?"

"No, that wouldn't have stopped them, since wolves usually hunt stags, but he wouldn't hunt James. However, I was another canine – as stereotypical as it sounds, I was an Irish Setter." She fluffed her bright red hair by way of explanation for the stereotype comment. "We ... uh, well, let's say that there was a pregnancy scare, and we weren't sure who the father would have been."

Remus was blushing furiously, any possible anger that might have been part of his reaction gone completely. "That's Lily," he croaked.

"You never did take me up on my offer, Rennie," she laughed.

"You were with James at that point," he said faintly.

"Trust me, he wouldn't have minded."

There was silence for a moment before it was broken by Ginny's soft, "I think you broke Harry." It was full of amusement as she spoke.

"Harry?" Lily spoke. "I'm sorry I wasn't there. The spell didn't work the way it was supposed to."

"What happened?" he asked, beating Dumbledore by only a fraction of a second.

"I had found a spell that ... well, it was a dark spell. It required a blood sacrifice, and would give Harry extremely strong protections. There was a reason to believe that it would even protect against the Killing Curse. Peter betrayed us before I could finish the spell's pre-work. If I'd been able to succeed, I'd not be here today, since I had chosen myself as the blood sacrifice. Apparently I did enough to bounce the curse, though." She paused. "Looks like he accidentally turned Harry into a quasi-Horcrux." Dumbledore jerked slightly, but she bulld on. "Where is Sirius, by the way? You were with him these past few years, so I'd expect he'd have come along for today's ride."

"He's dead," Harry said. "My stupidity killed him a couple months ago."

Before anyone else could say anything, he had been spun around by Hermione. "I am tired of hearing you say that! You did everything you could! Kreacher lied to you!"

"If I'd thought about the fact that Kreacher could -" He got no further, because the house elf in question appeared suddenly.

"What does filthy half-blood master wish?" the creature snarled.

Before he could even think to respond, there were several more pops and about fifteen house elves appeared. "Traitor!" they squeaked. "What does Master Harry wish done with vile traitorous elf?"

He blinked at them. "What ... what sort of punishment would you suggest?" he asked them.

They gasped. "Master asks us? Master is too good!" A moment later, they squealed again. "Mistress is back, as we knew she would be! Mistress!" One small elf exploded forward and wrapped her arms around Lily's knees, in a manoeuvre that looked very familiar to Harry, since Dobby had done it to him more than once.

"Well, Mum, since you're the mistress of the house, what do you suggest we do to Kreacher?" he finally asked after getting most of the shocked grin off his face.

"I say we leave it to them. They have a better idea of what sort of punishment they think is appropriate for betrayal." She couldn't continue because Kreacher began to scream horribly.

"Harry, you can't!" Hermione said. "They'll kill him, or worse!"

"Isn't that implied in allowing the elves to make their own decisions?" he asked in response. "That they might make a decision that we might not agree with? Besides, what sort of punishment is proper? Forcing him to work for me, when he's proven to be unfaithful? After all, his actions directly led to his previous master's death, so I have every reason to believe that he would attempt my own. When word got out, no household would hire him for fear of getting a traitor on the payroll, so firing him is wrong, because he'd simply starve to death. Would you take him as your own house elf, knowing that he would curse your name and do everything within his power to harm you and lead you to your death, as he did Sirius? Before you answer that, by the way, know that there are at least three of us who would draw and quarter him literally if he led to your death, no matter what your wishes might be."

She blinked a few times, eyes suspiciously full of tears, before she leapt forward and hugged him, kissing his cheek. "I love you too, Harry," she whispered. "We'll talk later." Letting him go, she stepped back and said, "I see your point, and I have to agree with you. As much as I think he deserves a second chance, or even a third, we should let the house elves do what they will to him."

He was too stunned by what she had whispered to him to react immediately. Lily took the chance to say, "Kira, take charge and deal with the traitorous elf." This was the elf who had attempted to hug Lily's legs to death. There was no answer other than to have fifteen elves leave with a sixteenth in tow.

Lily turned and looked down at her husband's body. "Goodbye, James. I love you, now and forever." She knelt and kissed the cold cheek, then faced the group again. "Shall we head into the house and talk about what happens now?"

Harry nodded and started to leave the crypt, but turned when he heard a gasp. Lily had collapsed, and was being held at the moment by Remus and Tonks. Harry ran back to her.

"Interesting," Tonks said after a moment. "She regained her colour when you got closer. Would you mind backing away very slowly, so that you can come back at a moment's notice?" Harry nodded, and walked backwards, intentionally placing one foot immediately behind the other. Roughly twenty feet away, she lost her colour again, and he ran to her, putting his arm around her waist.

Dumbledore was scowling in concentration. "I suspect that proves that you were carrying her soul with you," he finally said to Harry. "She may well need to remain in close proximity to you until it reintegrates completely with her body."

"So I get to spend a lot of time with a woman who was dead until about five minutes ago? Someone I never thought I'd see until I finally passed across, after beating that half-blooded bastard who murdered Dad and her? Well, almost in her case." He pulled her into a tight hug, grinning widely, tears of happiness flowing freely from his eyes. "I think I can deal with that."

She revelled in the feeling of Harry's fervent hug for a while, but finally broke the embrace with a slightly worried look. "Harry, the distance that seems to be involved is a little smaller than you may be comfortable with," said Lily. "Let's put it this way – I've always slept *au naturel*, Harry."

He looked puzzled for a moment, and then looked at her. His eyes went wide suddenly, and his face went a colour that made Ginny and Ron proud. "Shall we head to the house, he asks, blatantly changing the subject," Harry stated.

"Speaking your stage directions, Mr. Adopted-Weasley?" Ginny asked with a giggling undertone to her voice.

"If it changes the subject, I'll do it for the rest of the night," he replied with a nervous laugh.

"Don't like thinking about your Mum naked?" Ginny asked.

Harry blushed but stayed silent, although he certainly looked as if there were a comment on the tip of his tongue. "Shall we head toward the house?" he asked a little more insistently, drawing small laughter from everyone. He left his arm around Lily's waist as he motioned everyone out of the crypt.

Out in the sunlight again, Lily looked at the house and gasped. "Oh, they've done so well on it! What with the fire and all, I was afraid that it would be destroyed." She pointed towards what looked to be a house large enough for several children to live in behind the house. "The elves live there. Gives them some well needed privacy." They reached the house's back door, which opened easily for Harry as he touched the door. He let go of his mother and stepped inside carefully, letting his wand drop from his sleeve.

Before he could get very far inside, he heard Dumbledore say, "This household is safe. We are the only ones here. The house was merely admitting its proper owner."

"You'll stake our lives on that?" Harry asked sharply.

Dumbledore was obviously quite stunned by the question as he answered, "Yes."

Lily stepped inside and took charge. "Let's go to the dining room to sit and talk for a while." Without waiting, she headed into the house, not getting too far ahead of Harry. When she reached the dining room, she chuckled softly. "I've always loved how good Kira is at what she does." On the table were three cups of tea and five butterbeers. The four students and the Auror grabbed the butterbeers, while Lily, Dumbledore and Remus made for the tea.

They sat and drank in companionable silence for a moment before Hermione spoke up. "Now for the question on everyone's mind, I'm sure. What now?"

"Well, we put this house back under *Fidelius* and then go to the Ministry and prove that Mum is alive. She lives here, and I'll be the damned Secret Keeper. There is no way in Hell that I'll be a traitorous bastard and divulge her location to my worst enemy."

"I fear that you may not be able to stop him, Harry," Dumbledore said, "unless you resume your lessons in Occlumency."

"When can you begin to teach me, sir?" he asked calmly, with no other sign of emotion.

"I'm afraid that my reasoning from earlier in the year is unchanged," came the unhappy response.

"Very well. Mum, it seems as if you're going to be your own Secret Keeper. Voldemort can get into my mind with little to no problem because of the connection we have via this scar, and there's no one that the Headmaster trusts outside Professor Snape to teach me Occlumency, so I'm not learning it."

Lily looked at the Headmaster with a raised eyebrow that spoke volumes. "You let *Severus Snape* root around inside Harry's head?"

"There is far too much information that Voldemort could have gotten from me. Severus was the only one trained to teach Harry."

She nodded. "Harry, our lessons will begin very soon, if you don't mind your poor old mother teaching you, now that I'm amongst the living."

"That might be a bad idea," Dumbledore said. "Sadly, we are not certain -"

Harry looked at him coldly, and then reached into his shirt and removed the brooch. Taking it off, he said, "Here. You obviously speak with my voice in all things, since I'm too young yet. You'll need this." He turned to Lily. "I look forward to seeing you when he lets me talk to you occasionally. He's about to say that we have no idea whether or not this is a plot of Voldemort's wherein we discover that you're actually Bellatrix or someone, so until you can be vouched for, I should continue lessons with Snape." He turned back to the Headmaster. "Can I assume that Snape will be visiting me on a schedule at the Dursleys? And will you even allow Mum to visit me again before I leave Hogwarts?"

"What?" shrieked Lily. "You sent Harry to live with Petunia?"

"He needed the blood protection from the remaining Death Eaters. They would not think of looking in a Muggle town -"

"- unless Lucius or Narcissa or Bellatrix or Pettigrew or Lestrangle or any number of other people at Hogwarts remembered that I am Muggleborn," she interrupted. "So you gave him faulty protection in order to give him to an abusive family."

"I am certain that -"

"Who knew them better, Albus?" she snarled. "You, or the one who grew up with Petunia? She's a petty little bitch who could never be happy with her own life. She judged herself by me, and felt that I should have been disinherited because I was a freak. So you put my son with her." She stood and scowled. "Besides, I find that I have a sense of the passage of time, which is likely why I accepted that James is dead, rather than becoming distraught. It's somewhere in the mid 1990's correct?" Everyone nodded. "I guess I got something from being carried around by Harry for these past however many years." She paused. "That passage of time is probably why I called your name first, Harry."

She looked back to Albus. "You'd best have put the strongest possible wards in existence around him if you put him in with Petunia and that bigot husband of hers." She paused. "He's still alive. You must have."

"Surely they wouldn't have tried to kill him," Dumbledore said, shocked.

She stared at him for a very long time. "How many people have died because you think the best of the wrong people?"

Harry shook his head. "It's no use, Mum. Even with Dementors showing up a few blocks from the house last summer, it's still considered safest for me to live with the Dursleys. Until Tom is dead, I won't be allowed to live with you."

"To be crude, son – fuck that. You are my son, and I am alive again. That means that any protections gained from my death are now worthless. You are staying with me, and I will kill anyone who gainsays me." She met Dumbledore's eyes.

The Headmaster's eyes narrowed. "The Lily Evans I knew never would have made a threat like that."

"Two things, *sir*," said Lily, stressing the 'sir' somewhat mockingly. "First, I died the first time as Lily *Potter*, proving my second point."

"Lily?" asked Remus quietly, catching her attention. "May I make the point to Albus in a manner that he might better understand it? He's long been a fan of Kipling."

"I'll have to learn that some day," said Harry with a sidelong chuckle to the others. "I've never Kiplined before." Remus gave him a dirty look, although the effect was lost with the addition of the amused twinkle evident in his eyes.

The amusement was lost instantly though as he looked to Dumbledore. "You may know this poem, Albus. It's called 'The Female of the Species', and it *always* made me think of Lily." He cleared his throat and began to speak, surprising all by dropping into a somewhat coarser accent and mode of speech as he recited the poem from memory.

"When the Himalayan peasant meets the he-bear in his pride,

He shouts to scare the monster, who will often turn aside.

But the she-bear thus accosted rends the peasant tooth and nail.

For the female of the species is more deadly than the male.

*When Nag the basking cobra hears the careless foot of man,
He will sometimes wriggle sideways and avoid it if he can.
But his mate makes no such motion where she camps beside the trail.
For the female of the species is more deadly than the male.
When the early Jesuit fathers preached to Hurons and Choctaws,
They prayed to be delivered from the vengeance of the squaws.
'Twas the women, not the warriors, turned those stark enthusiasts pale.
For the female of the species is more deadly than the male.
Man's timid heart is bursting with the things he must not say,
For the Woman that God gave him isn't his to give away;
But when hunter meets with husbands, each confirms the other's tale—
The female of the species is more deadly than the male.
Man, a bear in most relations—worm and savage otherwise,—
Man propounds negotiations, Man accepts the compromise.
Very rarely will he squarely push the logic of a fact
To its ultimate conclusion in unmitigated act.
Fear, or foolishness, impels him, ere he lay the wicked low,
To concede some form of trial even to his fiercest foe.
Mirth obscene diverts his anger—Doubt and Pity oft perplex
Him in dealing with an issue—to the scandal of The Sex!
But the Woman that God gave him, every fibre of her frame
Proves her launched for one sole issue, armed and engined for the same;
And to serve that single issue, lest the generations fail,
The female of the species must be deadlier than the male.
She who faces Death by torture for each life beneath her breast
May not deal in doubt or pity—must not swerve for fact or jest.
These be purely male diversions—not in these her honour dwells—
She the Other Law we live by, is that Law and nothing else.
She can bring no more to living than the powers that make her great
As the Mother of the Infant and the Mistress of the Mate.
And when Babe and Man are lacking and she strides unclaimed to claim
Her right as femme (and baron), her equipment is the same.
She is wedded to convictions—in default of grosser ties;
Her contentions are her children, Heaven help him who denies!—
He will meet no suave discussion, but the instant, white-hot, wild,
Wakened female of the species warring as for spouse and child.
Unprovoked and awful charges—even so the she-bear fights,*

Speech that drips, corrodes, and poisons—even so the cobra bites,

Scientific vivisection of one nerve till it is raw

And the victim writhes in anguish—like the Jesuit with the squaw!

So it comes that Man, the coward, when he gathers to confer

With his fellow-braves in council, dare not leave a place for her

Where, at war with Life and Conscience, he uplifts his erring hands

To some God of Abstract Justice—which no woman understands.

And Man knows it! Knows, moreover, that the Woman that God gave him

Must command but may not govern—shall enthral but not enslave him.

And She knows, because She warns him, and Her instincts never fail,

That the Female of Her Species is more deadly than the Male.”

He shook his head. “While I disagree with his comments about women and governing, I do not argue with his basic thought. To put it succinctly, Albus – if you want to hurry on to the next great adventure, get in her way. If she has to kill you to save Harry, then she will, no questions asked, no quarter given. More than anything else, her reaction to finding out that the Dursleys were Harry’s guardians tells me that this is really Lily.”

To Harry’s surprise, Hermione spoke up next. “Sir, if you attempt to tear Harry from his mother at this point, then I swear to you that you will lose all support from those closest to Harry. I know that Ginny and I will fight you tooth and nail.”

“As will I,” Tonks said sharply. Remus simply gave Albus a look that said *Do you have to ask?*

“And if you think Mum is going to stand by and let that happen,” Ginny said, “then you’ve gone senile.”

Harry was blinking rapidly, and it was obvious to all present that he was blinking back tears. “What’s wrong, Harry?” Lily asked in alarm.

He shook his head. “I know tears are a sign of weakness, but ... I’ve never had anyone tell me that they’d fight *for* me before. With me, yes, and against me is a given. Even the Headmaster fights against me, all the while telling me it’s in my best interests. It might even *be* in my best interests, but I’m never given the information to know! All I ever knew about why I had to live with the Dursleys was that your sacrifice was giving me protection. I’m wondering if the fact that I was carrying you with me was what was doing it.”

Hermione spoke up. “I’m a little confused on your spell. What exactly were you trying to do?”

Lily winced. “Do you know the prophecy about Harry? Well, it could be about Neville Longbottom as well, but I don’t know if you know him.”

“One of five people my own age that I trust at my back at all times. He was with us when ... when Sirius died.” He sighed. “Besides, the Headmaster says that my scar is proof that it’s me that is his equal.” He looked at her. “You know the prophecy?”

Lily cleared her throat. “‘The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches ... Born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies ... And the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not ... And either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives ... The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies...’ Can I assume that you’ve heard it as well, since you aren’t acting all that surprised, Harry?”

“The Headmaster told me about thirty minutes after Sirius went through the Veil.”

Lily held up a hand, and it was obvious that she was attempting to keep her temper in check. Finally, she looked up. “Okay. Before we go any further, I need a history of the world according to Harry. It should be told by as many who know it, rather than letting Harry hide what he thinks will make me hate my only son.” She looked significantly at Harry at that, and he had the grace to blush.

About an hour later, Lily had the entire story, and Albus Dumbledore’s skin was matching his beard – stark white. “Harry,” he finally said, “I ... nothing I can say could begin to make up for ... I am horrified at -” He went silent and shook his head. “If I can misjudge so badly and put a child in so much danger from his own relatives, then I should not be in charge of other children. I shall begin the process of retiring from my position as Headmaster of Hogwarts this year.” There were tears in his eyes.

Harry looked at him for a long moment. “Sir, if you were asked to swear an Oath that everything you did was for the best, using the information that you had available, would you be able to?”

“Yes, Harry, but as the saying goes, the road to Hell is paved with good intentions.”

“Sir, you used all the information you had available at the time to give me a place to stay. Learning about the prophecy, I can see that you knew that Tom would return some day. Even if it annoys me, I can see not wanting to load me down with information as to what my life was going to be like – wanting to let me have a childhood, I think you called it. It’s easy to look back and ... I think I heard a phrase once. It’s Muggle, but I think you’ll understand it. ‘Everyone has twenty-twenty hindsight.’”

"Very true, Harry," Albus replied. "It does not make it easier to deal with what you have gone through at my insistence, simply because I could not believe that family would do such things."

Hermione was smiling, however. "Harry, you are going to hate me in a minute."

Aghast, Harry replied, "I could never hate you, no matter what!"

An amused smile came across her face. "I'm not sure that you know how that sounded to me, Harry, but that's not what you'll hate me for. Why are you guilty of everything except complicity in the Ministry incident of a few weeks ago, while the Headmaster is basically forgiven for his transgressions against you?"

"They're two entirely different things, Hermione!" Harry protested.

"Not really. Both of you did what you thought best, given the information that you had available to you. You made several efforts to verify the vision that you had. Did you know that Kreacher was lying to you? No," she answered before he could say anything. "You are not to blame for Sirius's death."

Lily looked intrigued for a moment at the comment. "You said that he fell through a veil at the Ministry? In the Department of Mysteries? Ancient looking stone arch?" The four who had been there nodded. "No promises, but he may not be gone permanently."

Remus looked at her for a long moment before grinning. "I always wondered what your job was."

"Research and development section," she said with a grin. "As a matter of fact, those folks will be the ones to verify my identity."

"You make it sound as if you're an Unspeakable," said Hermione softly, eyebrows rising.

"Guilty as charged," replied Lily. "They can verify my identity and we can all go from there." She stood. "In fact, I think we should go now."

Albus looked startled, but nodded his agreement. "My only worries are for Harry's safety, but I believe that you know methods of entry that are not standard, am I correct?"

"You may assume that to be the case," she responded.

Harry was frowning. "I'm not sure that I like the idea of everyone knowing that you're back. I've gotten myself used to the idea that I'm his number one target, but you having come back from the dead will likely throw you to the top of the list." He sighed. "As the prophecy target, I am expendable. You aren't."

There were six sharp inhalations at Harry's comment. "You are not expendable!" Ron finally exploded, before anyone else could speak. "If anyone in this house is expendable, it's me! And I personally don't find myself all that easily replaceable," he finished with a slight grin.

"Your logic is faulty, Harry," Hermione said. "If the prophecy states that you are the only one who can defeat him, then you are the least expendable of us all."

"Besides," Ginny said softly, "you still have to decide between Hermione and me." He looked blankly at her for that comment. "It's embarrassing to say it in front of the Headmaster and your mother, but given our druthers, we'd both tie you down and have our wicked way with you until you couldn't get the grin off your face."

Harry looked wide-eyed around the table. Lily was smirking, as were Tonks and Remus, and the Headmaster was simply twinkling up a storm. The one he expected to be exploding was grinning at him. "Don't look at me, chum. I've known that about them since before the school year ended. Besides, I had a chance to talk to Luna on the way home from the Express, and ... well, let's just say that I've been on the receiving end of what they're talking about." He was blushing furiously as he finished.

"From the sounds coming from the meadow, I'd say that you weren't the only one tied down," Ginny said with a grin.

"She's a sweet girl," Ron replied with a knowing grin. Hermione coughed on her drink as she caught the double entendre. "Gotcha," he murmured.

To call Harry confused was an understatement, and Lily took pity on him. "I think we should go to the Ministry," she said, and took Harry's hand. They headed into the family room and she grabbed a book. "I think all of us can touch this at one time." She pulled her wand, but before she could cast the spell she wanted to, she seemed to remember something. "*Accio* Gryffindor's brooch!" The small piece of jewellery shot into the room and into her hand. "This is yours, I believe," she said as she handed it to Harry.

"Now, I don't know that it will be the case, but we might well set off alarms when we get there, so do not draw your wands. Other than that, let me talk, because I should be able to prove my bona fides fairly quickly." She tapped the book and murmured "Portus," and they were suddenly standing in what Harry found to be a familiar room. The circular room in the Department of Mysteries stopped spinning and a single door opened. Three people stepped out from the door, and Lily stepped toward them, about ten feet or so.

No one could hear what the four of them said, but Lily turned back to the group, smiling. As she stepped the few feet back, Harry saw one of the men start to pull his wand and aim it at Lily. Before anyone else could react, he had grabbed her and thrown her to the ground, whipping out his own wand and firing off "*Reducto*!"

The three men dove back through the door after Harry's spell was reflected into the ceiling. Harry, on the other hand, was casting large blocks of rock for the group to hide behind. The others were huddling behind them in worry, except for Lily, who was on the floor with them, laughing, much to

Harry's surprise.

"I warned them not to test me that way," she said. "I'd have been able to stop them, but ..." she looked at Harry. "It's all right, Harry. They're the good guys."

"Like hell!" he replied hotly. "Turn the book into a return Portkey and get us back home. I lost Sirius here; I'm damned if I'm going to lose you as well!" He looked to everyone else and said, "Gather around. We're leaving."

"But Harry -" Lily started to protest.

"I am not staying here to get anyone else that I care for murdered by Death Eaters!" He was beginning to shake. "I just want us all back safe!"

A bright flash later and they were all in Godrics Hollow.