

## Death of a Hero

Harry stepped onto the platform in Hogsmeade, prepared to climb onto the Express to return home to his abusive relatives once again. Fifth year was over, Sirius was dead, and people in the Ministry obviously had it out for him, if this last year was any judge. Fudge would be especially unhappy to have come face to face with who he was denying, so Harry would take the brunt of that anger.

"May I request a moment of your time, Harry?" the Headmaster asked him, startling Harry out of the small reverie he'd been in. "I promise that it will take but a moment."

"Certainly, sir," he said. "And might I apologise for the damage that I did to your office, living down to Professor Snape's opinion of me?"

"No apology is necessary, Harry. I chose a truly horrid time to put even greater weight upon your back, and for that I apologise." He frowned. "I have a truly distasteful request to ask of you, but I promise that this time I shall explain its necessity. I have received words from certain unnameable sources that the same factions within the Ministry that attempted to discredit and destroy you last year are likely to continue those attempts this summer, and become more ... shall we say intense about the prospect? Due to this, I need to request that you not leave your home without an Order escort." He paused. "They will all be trustworthy – do not fear that Mundungus Fletcher will be guarding you."

"That's something good to know," Harry said, a dry tone to his voice. "Besides, the smell of that dead animal that he smokes that *he* calls tobacco does sort of make his presence obvious."

"I fear that they will be likely to attempt to trump up charges against you, Harry," Dumbledore added. "I can only come up with a single solution to make it obvious that you are not practising magic during the summer, and it is one that I do not like."

Harry thought for a moment, and then pulled out his wand. "Keep it safe for me, sir. This way, if they try to manufacture evidence, you can show that you had it since I left school. I do hope you put only the best members on guard, though. I really don't like the idea of Death Eaters or dementors showing up and me having only the ability to whizz on them to drive them off."

Dumbledore's startled chuckle at Harry's imagery told Harry everything he needed to know.

*Still, Harry thought as the Express pulled out of Hogsmeade Station, it wouldn't hurt to have a few surprises planned. Just in case.*

---

Voldemort looked down from his makeshift throne to the newest recruit into the ranks of the Death Eaters. Lucius Malfoy's son had an arrogance about him that was intriguing, although it still had a tendency to come forth when speaking to his betters, but that would soon be trained out of him.

Assuming he survived long enough.

"Do you have an understanding of chess, my young student?" he asked the blond young man.

"I'm not terribly good at it, my Lord," Draco admitted to him. His voice carried shame at his perceived failing.

"Not many are, so do not worry yourself. Do you know how to win a game, however?"

This was ground that Draco felt comfortable on. "You destroy the king."

"Close. You win the game by forcing the king into a position where he has no moves available to him – none that will not play into the opponent's hands."

"You see Dumbledore as the king, sir?" Draco asked. After a very brief pause, he added rapidly, "That's how most of the wizarding world acts, I mean."

"Excellent choice of words to make your point understood better," hissed the Dark Lord.

"My apologies, my Lord. I meant no offense."

Voldemort magnanimously waved away the apology. "How would you propose to place our esteemed Headmaster into a position wherein he has no escape, young Malfoy?"

Draco furrowed his brow, unsure if he was being given a chance to prove himself or hang himself. After a few seconds, he said, "If it pleases you, my Lord, he is seen as the one that everyone turns to in a crisis. Perhaps if multiple simultaneous attacks were to happen? The Ministry would be seen as ineffective, and his Order of the Phoenix would be seen as equally worthless."

"What sort of targets would you choose?" was Voldemort's next question.

Now Malfoy knew he was being tested. After a moment's thought, he said, "From the Ministry, I'd go for Amelia Bones and a few of the others who are openly fighting you, sir. From the Order side of the equation, I'd aim for ..." He paused and began to laugh softly. "The Weasleys, sir. I have my own problems with them, but for your purposes, they are a perfect choice. Arthur Weasley is an open supporter of Dumbledore and an open foe of your agenda – a true blood traitor. You could likely get the Ministry *and* the Order to their place, which might cause even greater chaos."

"Not just those two, but it is an excellent beginning," Voldemort said. "You have done well."

"If it pleases you, sir, I have one final suggestion for a target."

"Potter is my final target," Voldemort said, easily reading the boy's thoughts. "But only *after* I have the Ministry and the Order engaged in combat." His smile made Draco shiver. "I won't even have to send many people to deal with him. A little bird told me Potter will be helpless this summer. As helpless as any Muggle."

---

The Ministry Floo exploded into activity. "This is Susan Bones," a voice screamed from the fireplace. "My Aunt is fighting several Death Eaters and the wards are about to fall."

"Help is on the way," was the response. "I'm sending every available Auror, you just have to hang on for a few minutes." The responder's voice was calm, but some anxiety slipped through.

"Hurry," Susan sobbed. "Please hurry."

---

Albus Dumbledore was in his office at Hogwarts when his Floo erupted. "Albus!" Molly Weasley's voice exclaimed. "We need help! There are Death Eaters trying to bring down our wards!"

He stood. "I'll have people there immediately, Molly. Hold tight. You'll be safe."

"Thank you, sir," she said with relief. "We'll be waiting."

---

Harry sat in his room, rereading more of the books that his cousin had abandoned. He'd slipped a few of the magazines into his trunk when he'd noticed that a few of the ladies reminded him of his classmates (and had wondered if any of the girls he knew looked as good unclothed as these ladies did), but he was currently reading one of the Tarzan books by Burroughs as a break from his school books.

That was all that he seemed able to do this summer. The relatives were nastier than usual, but after a few words from his minders, the Dursleys weren't even permitting him to do yard work. This was leading to a *very* boring summer.

As he closed the book – Burroughs was a very fast read, even with the turgid prose – he heard two pops from the front of the house, signaling that his minders had left. This was unusual, and did not bode well – Dumbledore had promised they'd stay.

He grabbed a parchment and scribbled something on it and handed it to Hedwig. "Get to someone who can help me."

---

"That the house?" one of the robed individuals asked. Before anyone could answer, they saw a white owl come out of a window and wing off toward London. "Never mind. Kill the bird before it can get anyone here to help him." He started walking toward the house, firing off a spell or two absently toward the retreating owl.

The door exploded inward as he reached it. This, of course, was because he had fired a *Reducto* at it. "What's all this, then!" Vernon bellowed. "You freaks can't -"

No one would ever know what 'the freaks couldn't' because the Killing Curse rolled off the Death Eaters tongue and took Vernon to the floor. As the ground shook, he looked at the other two and said, "I'll get Potter while you two deal with the other two Muggles." They nodded as he headed up the stairs to the room that Potter stayed in. "The Master wants a meeting with you, Potter," he said outside the closed door. Open the door and throw out your wand."

"You'll have to come in after it, Death Eater!" came the voice from the other side.

He shrugged and blasted the door off its hinges, then stepped in over the shards and splinters of wood. "Why'd you have to do this the hard way, Potter? Now I'm just going to have to OOF!" He punctuated his statement the way he did because Harry had used a broken cricket bat as a club. It had impacted rather solidly with the Death Eater's stomach, bending him over.

---

Harry brought the bat up and hit the Death Eater again, this time in the neck. He didn't really pay attention to the fact that he'd brought the sharp side down on the man's neck, and certainly didn't hear the sickening crack that made him fall to the ground.

He grabbed the man's wand and gave it a quick wave – it was nothing more than a stick for him. "Damn. Too much to hope for, I guess." He did one or two things he had prepared for just such an emergency, slid out the door and made a quick stop at Dudley's room to find a better cricket bat – as well as a few other of Dudley's favourite possessions – and then headed downstairs.

"*Crucio!*" he heard, followed by the painful shrieks of a wounded water buffalo. Either that or Dudley. He couldn't be sure if he recognized the voice

of the one doing the cursing or not, since the masks muffled voices somewhat.

“What’s taking him so long?” said another voice, which also sounded familiar.

“Probably decided to have some fun first. He’d better be careful – the Master wants Potter more or less whole when we bring him to him.”

“Gurgle,” was the only response from the other speaker, and when the sole remaining Death Eater turned around, he understood why – there was an ugly knife buried in the man’s neck, up to the hilt.

That Death Eater started casting the Killing Curse haphazardly while he grabbed his medallion. “We’ve got problems! There were more minders for Potter! Send back-up!”

---

A battered, bruised, but generally bubbly Order of the Phoenix returned from the fight at the Burrow. They fell into chairs as they began to talk about the raid that they’d just foiled.

“I still say that there’s something wrong,” Alastor Moody said. “Say what you will, but we got off too damned easy, and they left too fast. We were set up.”

“I disagree,” Tonks said. “I’m betting that they thought they could take us, especially with them choosing a much bigger Ministry target, too. The Aurors would go to save Amelia Bones. I’m betting that the real target was Arthur, since he’s so openly against Voldemort and the pureblood agenda. They didn’t expect such a turnout to protect him.”

“I think you’re wrong, girl,” Moody growled. “But you make sense. You’ve got promise.”

Minerva McGonagall opened her mouth to say something when the fireplace flared green. Much to everyone’s surprise, a somewhat singed cat exited the fireplace, yowling.

“I didn’t know cats could do that,” Remus said softly.

“A cat might not, but a Kneazle can,” McGonagall said. She shifted into her Animagus form and began to yowl and meow at the feline intruder, who yowled back. Suddenly she appeared to double in size as all her fur stood on end. She turned to face the group. As she turned, there was a crack of Apparation, and she launched herself at the new intruder. She changed in mid-air, much to the surprise of Emmaline Vance, the intruder, shrieking “Murderer!” much to the surprise of the rest of the Order. The impact drove both women to the ground, but since Vance wasn’t prepared for it, there was a loud cracking in her chest.

McGonagall rolled to her feet with a grace that belied her years but certainly proved that animal traits carried over. “That is Mr Tibbles – one of the late Arabella Figg’s Kneazle boarders. That Death Eater appeared and murdered Arabella and managed to kill two of the other Kneazles – Snowy apparently survived as well – and then disappeared.”

“Are you certain?” Dumbledore asked with worry.

“Quite,” McGonagall said through pursed lips.

“Oh dear. She was one of the two guarding Mr Potter. Elphias Doge was the other. I think we -” He was interrupted by a bedraggled and injured Hedwig crash landing on the table, imitating the Weasley owl Errol for the first time anyone could remember.

Dumbledore spun on Vance and cast several spells at her before saying, “We must away to Little Whinging! There is no time to waste!”

They arrived in time to watch a raging inferno consume the collapsing building that once housed Harry and his relatives. The unearthly howl of sirens expressed their feelings perfectly.

---

After a few judicious Obliviations of the Muggle police, fire brigade, and the locals, they left the remains of Number 4 Privet Drive and returned to Number 12 Grimmauld Place in a much different mood than when they had returned from the Burrow. Emmaline Vance was still unmoving on the floor.

With a few flicks of Dumbledore’s wand, she was in a chair and bound there. “Why, Emmaline?” he asked. “We found Elphias in the lawn in his mask, and we know that you killed Arabella. What is so seductive about Riddle’s philosophy that you would help him murder a boy?”

“You’ll never understand, old fool. You help these blood traitors destroy our world, and expect us to worship you for it.”

“I never expected or desired the worship that you refer to. I simply realised that we cannot survive as a people if we do not start to accept others. But my words will never convince you, if you chose to follow a madman such as Riddle.”

“What do we do with her?” Remus asked. His fury was barely contained.

“Exhaust her information,” Dumbledore responded in a tired voice. “What you do with her then I care not.”

Many around the table blinked in shock, but Remus Lupin, Severus Snape and Nymphadora Tonks simply stood and dragged Emmaline Vance from the room without being ordered to. After a few moments of silence, Molly Weasley said, “You’re aware that only Severus is likely to keep Emmaline alive, Albus.”

"I doubt that," Albus responded. "There are things in Severus's past that will likely ensure the death of Miss Vance."

"That doesn't bother you?" Arthur Weasley asked.

"At this point in time, no," Albus said as he reached into his robe and pulled out a wand. "I trusted both Elphias Doge and Emmaline Vance when they informed me that the Minister was planning to redouble the effort to harm Harry and his reputation. I convinced the boy to leave this wand with me." He placed the wand on the table. "Because I trusted two Death Eaters, a boy we all cared for is now dead. I can only hope that my understanding of the Prophecy was incorrect."

---

The three Vanished the remains of Emmaline Vance. Her disappearance would go down as another death caused by Voldemort. Remus Lupin turned to Snape. "Severus, we've never been friends and I doubt we ever will be, but your reaction to this surprised me. From everything I've ever known about how you felt about Harry, this was quite out of character for you."

Severus Snape looked at the werewolf for a long moment before opening his mouth to respond. "I agree as far as the prospects regarding friendship between us," he finally said. "But this incident has brought back a memory from my childhood that strongly tempts me to tell the Dark Lord to take a Cleansing Potion enema." Tonks winced at the imagery while Lupin started and then laughed.

"It'd be the last thing you ever did, but it would likely be satisfying," Lupin finally said.

"Little wanker would probably like it," Tonks said as she giggled slightly.

Severus looked at the two and realised that they weren't going to let their question be brushed aside. They were right – he'd been quite out of character as far as they knew him. He sighed lightly. "As for why I was as ... *enthusiastic* as you two? While I have never liked Mr Potter, he did not deserve to die in such a horrible manner." His eyes focused elsewhere. "I was eight. I had someone who was the closest I'd ever had to a friend living nearby. Their house caught fire, and none survived the fire. We could hear their screams as the flames killed them. There was no way an eight year old and some Muggles could save them." He shook his head. "I still have nightmares about that night. To be honest, I am quite tempted to inform the Dark Lord exactly what he might do with his plans for world domination." He scowled. "But I shall talk to Albus first. I owe that much, at least, to the late Mr Potter."

---

Lawrence Lovegood looked down at his parchment and discovered that he could do no more than stare at it. *I have an article to write, and it's even the truth, but I can't bring myself to write it. And howdo I tell my daughter about this?*

Almost wraith-like, as if summoned by his thoughts, Luna breezed into the room. "Hello, Daddy. Is there any way that I can help you with your problem? Perhaps if you had me write the article instead of fighting over it yourself?"

"I think that you'd have an even more difficult time writing this article than I'm having, darling," he said softly. "I have absolutely horrible news to report that I wish ... I hate this business sometimes, dear."

"Tell me what the problem is, and perhaps we can solve it together, Daddy," she replied.

"Well, dear, it starts with some truly terrible news ..."

---

Morning came, as it was wont to do, and Old Tom exited the Leaky Cauldron to pick up his daily copies of the various newspapers. It was unnaturally quiet in the Alley, which put him on edge. As he picked up the bundles, he saw one of the early risers walking around in a daze. "What's happened?" he asked her, alarmed.

"Potter ... Harry Potter," she sobbed. "He's dead."

"No, you must be mistaken," he said; now even more alarmed. "He's ... he's just a boy!"

She thrust a copy of the Quibbler into his hands.

### ***Gone Too Soon – A Brave Young Man***

#### ***Harry Potter Dead at 15***

*by Lawrence Lovegood*

*It's never a good thing to write the obituary of a young person, but this one strikes me personally harder than any I've ever written. The young man in question was a friend of my daughter's, and the subject of an in-depth interview a few months ago.*

*To think that he died fighting off more than a dozen Death Eaters after we in the wizarding world treated him as if he was something to be scraped off our shoes says something for both Harry Potter and for the wizarding world.*

*What it says for him shows the true meaning of what it means to be a human being. What it says for us is something much different, and not very good at that.*

*He loved his fellowman, and was one of the few to befriend my daughter at Hogwarts, not caring that those who treat children cruelly would tar*

him with the same brush. He fought to tell the truth about Voldemort (we at the Quibbler refuse, from this day forward, to react in fear to this coward's made-up name) and was tarred for it, and a Ministry official was sent to the school to shut him up.

He cared.

We, the wizarding world, cared only for our security, and if that meant treating a child as a scapegoat, then so be it. We beat him and battered him verbally, and called him insane and attention-seeking.

He was trying to warn us of the return of a cowardly Dark Lord. Of course he sought attention for that message! But insane? Never.

He faced more than a dozen Death Eaters, killing them all in the process of fighting for his own life. And he did this with no wand. He had willingly turned his wand over to Albus Dumbledore, in the hopes that, if the Ministry tried once again to frame him, the reinstated Chief Warlock could prove that the charges were trumped up.

Someone who knew that fact is a Death Eater or sympathizer.

I'm hoping that the traitor was found dead on the lawn of Harry Potter's home, myself.

I will likely bring destruction on myself and my paper from both the Ministry and the thing that calls itself a Dark Lord for this article, but there are things more important than keeping my paper alive.

One of them is remembering what a brave young man fought and died for.

Don't let Voldemort win.

Remember Harry Potter.

The paper nearly fell from Tom's hands. "It can't be true," he said numbly. "Not Harry. He can't be dead."

"I know Lawrence," the woman insisted. "He had tears tracks on his face when he delivered the copies. It's true."

Tom returned to the Cauldron in that state where the mind simply refuses to recognise what is going on, and simply acts by rote. He did his job normally, stunned by the knowledge that the young man would never again come into his bar with that look of wide-eyed wonder that he never seemed to lose.

"Did you hear?" one of his early morning patrons asked. "About Potter, I mean?"

Tom slapped the Quibbler's headline. "No wand, and he still managed to take down more than a dozen of the bastards."

"I bet the little pricks lit the fire to make sure he couldn't escape," the patron growled.

"The Quibbler got a couple things wrong by omission," said a woman who had just entered the pub. "But that's forgivable, because I'll bet that they simply didn't know. My brother works at the Ministry. They found three bodies that they're pretty sure were his relatives, since they were wearing some of those weird clothes that Muggles do. There were three more in there that had masks near them, and the twelve on the lawn. They found ... they found a young man, burned beyond recognition, but he had melted glasses near his body." She broke down in sobs. "I was one of those that the Quibbler talked about. I thought the boy was ... how can we make up ... how could we -" Her voice broke down into gasping sobs.

"Who's going to save us now?" a woman wailed from the corner.

"He was a *kid* and took out more than twelve," Tom said. "If he could do that *without* a wand, then *we* can bloody well deal with the rest of the bastards when we've got our wands." He slammed his fist down on the counter hard enough that every single glass on it, full or not, jumped. "We shouldn't have been expecting him to save us in the first place. We should have been saving him. For what it's worth, I'll not let that boy die in vain. We'll fight those cowards in masks."

"That's right!" another man yelled. "If he could take down twelve with no wand, then what do you think we can do?"

"We can remember Harry Potter. Make it up by fighting the bastards and finishing what he started," Tom said. "Remember Harry Potter."

"Remember Harry Potter!" someone else shouted. A moment later, the entire bar exploded with the cry.

"Remember Harry Potter!"

---

Hermione Granger exploded into the foyer at 12 Grimmauld Place. "Tell me it isn't true!" she wailed.

"MUDBLOOD! FILTH! DEFILER!" screamed the portrait of Mrs. Black. This proved to be the final time it ever did that as Hermione spun and gripped the painting's edges and pulled. To everyone's surprise, the painting separated from the wall with a ripping noise.

Kreacher popped in. "What has the filthy Mudblood done?" he screeched.

"You want her, she's yours!" Hermione screamed and flung the heavy portrait at the deranged elf. He caught it, but since it weighed considerably more than he did, he skidded backwards until they crashed into the wall hard enough that the painting embedded in the wall a few inches. Kreacher

had already joined his ancestors, since he had struck him at roughly neck level. Hermione stalked over to the portrait, which was now as terrified as a portrait could get, and pulled out her wand. “CONFLA -”

“SILENCIO!” Remus yelled. “That’s a bad spell to cast in here, Hermione,” he said in a softer tone. Yanking the painting out of the wall – which required he call on his werewolf strength, surprising him he set it in the fireplace, set up protections, and then set the portrait of the woman aflame.

“Tell me it’s not true, Remus,” she finally said, watching the painting melt away to ash. “The Prophet and The Quibbler both are saying that Harry is dead!” Her lower lip was quivering.

“We found him in the wreckage of the burned out home. His glasses were near his body. That was the only thing that told us it was him, to be honest. The body was – well, if we judged by just what was left, you couldn’t tell if any of the burn victims were male or female, or even human.” He sighed heavily. “I know that you want him to have survived, but you also know he can’t see anything without his glasses.” He pulled her into a hug as she began to cry in earnest.

---

Voldemort sat back in his throne and considered the past few days. He had lost fifteen people, including two of his three spies within Dumbledore’s ineffectual Order of the Phoenix, but on the plus side of the equation, he had finally eradicated that annoying child. *Fitting to drop a house on one who does magic*, he thought with some amusement.

In losing Vance and Doge, however, he’d lost a valuable resource. Snape was not as trusted as he would prefer, but that was the price he had to pay. And losing a few of his Hogwarts members was mildly annoying, but he still had the best of them. Draco Malfoy was likely to need a reminder as to where the leadership lay in this organization, however, with the death of the Potter child. Draco was strutting around the place as if *he* owned it.

Well, it was best to begin to remind the world who was in charge. “MacNair! Wormtail! Bellatrix!” he called out. When the three appeared before the throne and bowed, he said, “I need attacks on the wizarding people. They mourn for their useless little boy they thought a saviour, and I need to remind them that not only was he not a saviour, but he is also rather dead. No one will save them now.” The three bowed and scraped their way from the room.

He sighed happily. Life was good, now that one of his nemeses was gone. With luck, Dumbledore would soon follow.

---

Lawrence Lovegood walked through Hogsmeade on his way to the castle. He had a problem that he needed to talk to the Headmaster about – one that might preclude his child returning to Hogwarts in the fall.

As he stepped onto the path toward the castle, he heard the tell-tale cracks of multiple Apparitions and turned to see Death Eaters appearing in the town square. “Wonderful,” he grumbled. “A story falls in my lap when I don’t *want* one!” He ran back toward the town.

By the time he reached the square, he found a sight he didn’t expect. Thirty Death Eaters had Apparated into the square and begun to indiscriminately curse people nearby. There were three townsfolk on the ground, but the rest – almost a hundred people – appeared to have pinned down the Death Eaters, who looked desperate.

The Death Eaters attempted a rally, but someone buried deep within the townsfolk’s group shouted “Remember Harry Potter!” and the rally quickly failed. Finally, the Death Eaters began to disappear, leaving behind their fallen comrades. The townsfolk surged forward and started kicking the Death Eaters, which broke Lawrence from his shock.

“Stop!” he yelled. Several people spun, wands out at him. “I’m Lawrence Lovegood!” he said. “Harry Potter wouldn’t want this!”

“These scum *killed* him!” someone shouted at him.

“Would he want you to kill them – before we could find out as much information as possible from them?” Lawrence asked, hoping that these people would listen.

“Get the Headmaster from Hogwarts!” one of them yelled. “We’ll turn these bastards over to him!”

“I was heading up there anyway,” Lawrence said. “I’ll go get him. Keep these people safe for now, and we’ll drain them of everything they’ve got about Voldemort.” He turned and began to run to the castle. *I think I understand Luna now. Harry isn’t dead so long as we keep his memory alive. Maybe I don’t need to talk to the Headmaster about her now.*

---

The attack attempted on Diagon Alley was at best described as a rout. The Death Eaters Apparated into the Alley, and were almost immediately met by resistance. What was worse was that they had appeared outside Weasley Wizard Wheezes. The owners of the establishment had exited the building moments after the Death Eaters arrived and threw items at the invaders, screaming “For Harry!” every time they threw something.

The Death Eaters assumed that they were being attacked by jokes and toys, but that didn’t last for long. One bit of Silly String hit one of the Death Eaters and he almost immediately began to shriek in pain as it ate through his body. Bellatrix’s last mistake was to try to destroy the string heading her way with a wave of flame. The detonation focused on her and separated her into three distinct pieces.

By the time that the Aurors arrived, they found people standing over the dead and maimed Death Eaters chanting “For Harry!” and hoisting the sombre-faced Weasley twins on their shoulders.

---

The final team chose another icon of Wizarding Britain for their target – St. Mungo’s Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries. The hospital had a dedicated Apparation point, and they chose to use it. They expected to come in shooting. As with the other sites, their plan did not survive first contact.

The first to appear heard “*Accio!*” and was quickly unmasked; that spell was followed quickly by a Stunner. A group appeared almost immediately behind the first person – it appeared that the first man had jumped the gun. A firefight broke out at the Apparation point – but very few Death Eaters were able to cast anything of any real value.

One Death Eater was hit by someone screaming “*Ipecac!*” and proceeded to vomit all over his fellow terrorists. Another was hit by a curse that seemed to do nothing, but when he tried to cast, the effect was glaringly obvious.

“*Ababa Kebabra!*” he screamed through numb lips. His victim turned into a six foot tall rabbit in a top hat, which startled the Death Eater for long enough to someone else to drop him. The rabbit was led to the Spell Damage ward, grumbling all the way.

Before terribly long, all the Death Eaters were unconscious or in need of the hospital’s services. When the Daily Prophet asked some of those involved in the fighting why they had fought back, one of them commented, “If Harry Potter could fight twelve without a wand, then we can fight them when we have ours. This is how we choose to remember a brave young man. This is how we remember Harry Potter.”

---

Cornelius Fudge was more than slightly disturbed to discover that one of the Death Eaters caught at St. Mungo’s was a dead man – Peter Pettigrew. This made public feeling toward the Ministry that much less positive.

Fudge’s last act as Minister before the Wizengamot overwhelmingly voted ‘No Confidence’ on his performance was to pardon Sirius Black and revoke Pettigrew’s Order of Merlin.

---

Hermione Granger looked around the kitchen at the Burrow. Her act of tearing the heavy portrait off the wall and then throwing it had done physical damage to her. She had seriously torn the ligaments in her back and hurt her musculature with that manoeuvre, and was recovering after a St. Mungo’s Healer had looked at her. The Healer had wanted to admonish her, but when Tonks had told the woman that Hermione was one of Harry’s best friends, she simply nodded sagely and did what she could for the girl. To this end, Hermione had been moved to the rebuilt Burrow, as had Hedwig.

A number of ladies – herself, Ginny Weasley and her mother, Katie Bell, Angelina Johnson, Alicia Spinnet, Lavender Brown, Morag MacDougal, Lisa Turpin, Cho Chang, Marietta Edgecombe, Schuyler Fawcett, Parvati and Padma Patil, Luna Lovegood, Susan Bones, Hannah Abbott, and even Daphne Greengrass and Su Li – were seated around the long kitchen table or in conjured chairs jammed into the cozy room. Hedwig perched on the back of Hermione’s chair, but seemed restless, as she had since the reports of Harry’s death. Minerva McGonagall and Poppy Pomfrey stood off to the side

Hermione spoke. “I’ve asked you all here because in our own way, each of us loved Harry Potter. Some as nothing more than a friend, some as a beloved patient,” she nodded to Poppy at that, “and I know of at least three at this table who had more romantic feelings toward him.”

“But what do we do now that we’re together?” Parvati asked.

“I’ve made biscuits,” Molly Weasley said in a voice that made it clear that she was hoping for at least a smile from the assembly, and she wasn’t disappointed. Chuckles rounded the table, along with small happy noises as plates of warm chocolate chip, peanut butter, oatmeal raisin, shortbread, and other biscuits settled on the table, along with a rather large pitcher of milk and a large number of glasses.

“To be honest,” Molly said, “I need something else to do than cook. I do that when I’m stressed or hurting, and the death of my ... well, he wasn’t of my body, but he was my son.”

“He still lives, you know,” Luna said quietly, but she was either unheard or ignored.

“That’s the reason I wanted you here,” Hermione said. “Amongst us, we comprise some of the smartest people at Hogwarts and of its graduates. Being female, we’re also the ones most likely to be ignored when we come up with some idea, even if people are unaware of the sexism.

“Harry was my very best friend, and I will admit that someday Ginny and I would likely have gotten to the hair-pulling stage over him. That bastard Voldemort took away one of the best friends I will ever have in my life, and I’ll be damned if I’ll let him profit from that.”

“What about the prophecy that he was willing to kill for?” Ginny asked.

“You know my opinion of Divination,” Hermione said. “I don’t know what the damned thing said, and I don’t care. My opinion is that the group of us has enough brains and ability to bring down that bastard once and for all. We’re going to prove that the female of the species is more deadly than the male.” She felt herself starting to lose it once more, as she too often did these days. “And we’ll do it for him.”

Ginny moved over quickly as Hermione started to lose it again, letting the girl weep on her shoulder, and felt her own tears surface.

When the tears were over, Lavender said, “We need a name. What do we call ourselves?”

“How about we name ourselves after Harry’s most avid supporter?” Schuyler Fawcett asked. Her eyes were twinkling as she spoke. “Name ourselves something like ‘The Coven of the White Owl’.”

Hermione looked at Hedwig for a moment at that suggestion and then to Schuyler. “‘Avid?’ That’s a bad pun.” She grinned suddenly. “I like it. We’ll name ourselves for the one who has always loved him from the moment she met him.”

Hedwig preened for a moment, basking in the admiration of the assembly of ladies. Then they got down to business.

---

Voldemort was not having a good day. He couldn’t be said to be having a good week. Actually, the entire month was going rapidly downhill for him, and the rest of the year didn’t shape up to be much better. As much as it had seemed a good idea at the time, the murder of Harry Potter had been the turning point for the wizarding world. His Death Eaters no longer inspired fear – instead, they inspired unusual and often painful cursing, invariably humiliating in nature. He had been forced to perform the Killing Curse on one who actually thought that he could resign from the Death Eaters after a vain Hogwarts witch had cast a Depilatory Charm on the man. The charm was used for sculpting eyebrows and other areas of the body with hair. The charm this witch had cast was missing two vital parts, however – the charm she had cast had no limiting parameters and had not had the numbing aspect activated either. He had had every hair painfully plucked from his body at the same moment. That was one of the gentler spells his Death Eaters could now expect to face.

As if that weren’t a worry, he also had a new foe to deal with. The Order of the Phoenix had been easy enough to deal with before, since they had seemed to be nothing more than a fact-finding organisation. With the death of Potter, they had gone on the offensive, and were now joined by a group calling themselves the Coven of the White Owl, who all seemed to be female. Many of his best had actually died as a result of their spellwork. None of the spells were illegal, either, or even remotely dark. Given how inventive some of the deaths had been, however, he was certain that the majority of these women had been in Ravenclaw.

So many of his best were gone now, either dead or in custody. Macnair, Pettigrew and Narcissa Malfoy were all in Ministry custody, having been caught. Lucius had died at the Potter home with an odd circular piece of metal sticking from his throat. He wasn’t sure what had happened to the children of Crabbe, Goyle and Parkinson, other than that they too had perished at the Potter home. Draco Malfoy was still alive and competent enough to have *remained* alive, but he certainly was not going to trust him yet with heading a mission. Bella had died as the result of a mere prank. *I always knew her arrogance would kill her one day.*

And Snape – oh, how Severus Snape was going to suffer when he finally got his hands on him once again. The man that he once had thought to be one of his most loyal had actually walked into a meeting, asked for his attention, told him simply, “Bite me; I quit!” and dropped a hypercharged dungbomb into the hall, escaping in the confusion and illness that had immediately followed.

He needed to strike fear once more. He had not gone on any of the missions, not deeming any of them that important, but he needed to deal with one himself. “Draco, attend me!” he said, rising to his feet. “It is time that we remind these people who their lord and master truly is.”

---

## ***Voldemort Killed By Muggle!***

***by Dilwyn Barton***

*Last night, a startling event happened at the Muggle hospital called the Royal Surrey County Hospital – Voldemort was struck by a Muggle and died some time later from the blow.*

*It is unknown why he chose this hospital, other than to perhaps attempt to strike fear into the populace once more. It is known that he walked into the main lobby of the building and announced himself. Apparently a Muggle, seated in a device known as a wheelchair (which allows a patient unable to walk to roll themselves around a building and even outdoors), rose from the chair as Voldemort turned to threaten one of the Healers at the facility. (The Muggles call their Healers ‘Doctors’.)*

*When Voldemort’s attention was away from this courageous Muggle, the Muggle apparently removed a stand of metal attached to his chair and struck Voldemort in the back of the head. Muggle newspapers report that Voldemort fell as if turned off. He was carted away, and the Muggles even attempted to save the life of this despotic madman, but to no avail.*

*We were unable to learn the name of the courageous Muggle who performed this service to the wizarding world, since Muggle newspapers (where most of this information was gleaned from, to be honest) are forbidden to print the name of underage individuals involved in this sort of event. We do know that he is an orphan who was being taken home by his foster family, and that the Muggle Aurors (whom they call ‘police’ or ‘constables’) do not feel that he will suffer any legal consequences from this courageous act.*

*Since the area that Voldemort died was the area that Harry Potter had lived, we can only speculate that perhaps the Muggle knew Harry Potter and acted in the brave manner that he did in memory of our lost hero.*

---

The mood on Platform 9 ¾ was mixed that September first. There was elation at the final destruction of Voldemort, but sadness that Harry was not around to enjoy it. Several members of the Coven met on the platform before climbing aboard the train. Hedwig, the one the group was named for, sat in her cage, gnawing at the latch.

“It couldn’t hurt to keep the group alive,” Angelina said. “We’ve always got idiots out there, and there’s currently a power vacuum with the death of Voldemort.”

“Agreed,” Katie said. “You and Alicia should get together with Mrs Weasley -”

“That’s Molly, dear,” came the Weasley matriarch’s response. “You all have the right to call me by my first name.”



“- Molly,” Katie continued, blushing slightly, “and see what we can do. It’s best for you now that your done at Hogwarts. This should not be a group that simply rises and falls like the Order did, showing up only when a Dark Lord arises. We should actively be stopping them from rising in the first place.”

“Agreed,” said Ginny. “In memory of Harry, we should try to stop the rise of the next Dark Idiot.”

That pronouncement seemed almost to be a key of some sort, because the door to Hedwig’s cage popped open, and the owl adroitly sped from the cage, shooting down the platform at a speed more often seen from a hawk.

“Hedwig!” Hermione screamed, tearing off down the platform after her. She finally caught up with the owl right by the barrier, where she was flapping madly in front of someone. The young man raised his left arm and leaned on his cane, and Hedwig settled in on the arm, still quite excited.

“It’s good to see you again too, girl,” Harry Potter said with a big grin. He looked at the growing crowd. “It’s good to see you guys, too.”

---

When Hermione came to, she was on the Hogwarts Express, looking up at the ceiling of one of the compartments. She shook her head a little, but didn’t look around, and closed her eyes once more as she felt tears building. “I didn’t expect to have that happen,” she said. “But who does?”

“What?” asked Ginny Weasley, although she seemed somewhat amused.

“Hallucinating Harry returning.”

“Damn!” said a familiar voice. “You mean I’m nothing more than a hallucination?”

She sat up so fast that she greyed out for a moment, and then carefully moved across the way to touch his face. When he leaned into her touch slightly, smiling, she lost all control, and kissed him on the mouth, hard. She surprised herself by using tongue.

When she pulled away, he was looking more than a little stunned, but certainly did not seem to have a problem with what she’d done. “Wow, that’s a conversation for later, I think, but ... damn! Thanks for the welcome home!” He pulled her into a tight hug. “Gods, I missed you guys, and I had no way of getting in touch with anyone in the wizarding world. I was in the hospital for so long, and then my foster family ... well, things were confused.”

“Are you going to have problems with your foster family? Hiding your magic, I mean?” Ginny asked.

Harry laughed. “Nope. They have a daughter attending Hogwarts. They recognized me when the Muggle news media was doing stories about me, and offered to foster me.”

“So your foster family is the parents of one of our classmates?” Hermione asked. “Which one? Do I know her well?”

“I’ll explain later, when we’re in Hogwarts. I’d imagine that word has gotten back to there by now, and Dumbledore is probably wishing he could Apparate onto a moving train. I’d really rather not repeat it a thousand times, so I’ll just say it once, to the group that Dumbledore decides to gather.” She nodded in response.

---

“If I’d known that all I had to do to get the hottest girls in the school to snog me was to be dead for six weeks or so, I’d have done it earlier!” he said with a laugh as the train pulled into Hogsmeade station. When word had gotten around that Harry Potter was actually alive and on the train, it seemed that the compartment that he was in became *the* place to be.

“Was there a girl that *didn’t* try to kiss you?” Neville asked with amusement.

“I wasn’t paying attention to all of them, just the yummy ones.” He turned and wiggled his eyebrows at Ginny and Hermione, who graced him with blushes.

“I’m not that pretty,” Hermione said.

“I am exercising my right to disagree with you, Miss Granger,” he said with a laugh. He stood as the train came to a stop and helped both girls to their feet. Ginny ‘accidentally’ tripped and hugged him.

“What’s this thing in your pocket?” she asked as she stepped back. “It’s kinda sharp.” She rubbed her hip where it had pressed against her. “If I bruised, you’ll have to kiss it and make it better, you know,” she finished, wiggling her eyebrows.

He reached into his pocket with confusion evident on his face, and then brightened. “Ah yes! Don’t want to confuse the elves.” He pulled the object from his pocket, placed it on the seat and tapped it in a rhythmic pattern. It enlarged to become his trunk. “I had Tonks place that charm on it at the beginning of the summer. It’s why I still have things like the Invisibility Cloak and such.”

He laughed when he reached the platform, because there was a loud cry of “‘Arry!” from Hagrid, and he found himself lifted off the ground by a very happy half-giant. “There was rumours you’d got on th’ train, but ... oh ‘Arry, it’s great to know yer still alive.” Hagrid put him down and pulled a handkerchief (what many would consider a small tablecloth) out and blew his nose loudly. “I’ve got ter go deal with th’ First Years, but we’ll talk later, right?” Harry laughed again and promised him.

He climbed into a carriage and found himself surrounded by Cho Chang, Lavender Brown, and both Patils. Lavender stood and said, “Sit down Harry.” When he did, she ensconced herself on his lap. “I’m the least interested in dating you of the people in this car, so I may be the safest to sit on your lap.” He contemplated her curves and wisely kept silent about that. He reiterated that he would not be telling the story repeatedly, and that

he first wanted to explain to the Headmaster and a few others before he began to talk to the students. They nodded, a little unhappy at not knowing, but understanding.

---

Their arrival at the castle led to some curiosity when their carriage emptied. The girls were all laughing, and Harry was blushing furiously. "Nice to know you're carrying a torch for me," Lavender said coquettishly as she walked into the building, an extra swing to her hips.

"Harry?" Ginny asked, perplexed.

"She was sitting on my lap, and one of the bumps in the road moved her interestingly against me. I'm sixteen and male." Hermione's face fell, but Ginny remained perplexed. "Ever hear the phrase 'Is that a banana in your pocket, or are you glad to see me'?" He got a mischievous glint to his eyes as he finished with, "And if *Lavender* can get that kind of reaction out of me, imagine what the two sexiest Gryffindors I know can do to me." He gently lifted their chins, drawing looks of wonder from them as they realised he was referring to them.

They approached the front doors to the castle and were met by several adults – two of whom had wands pointed at him. Dumbledore and Remus stood behind Tonks and Moody, the two with wands out. "If you're Potter," Moody growled, "then find a way to prove it."

"How?" he asked incredulously. "I'd point out the comment you told me when you found I was carrying my wand in my back pocket, but I'd imagine that you tell that to everyone who carries it back there. The Headmaster back there is holding on to my holly and phoenix feather wand, which I gave to him on the platform down in Hogsmeade. Bad idea, but it seemed like a good one at the time."

The wands lowered and Tonks looked over her shoulder. "Don't take this wrong, Remmie," she said, and then launched herself at Harry. She kissed him soundly for a moment, and then said, "Don't ever scare us like that again!" Her voice made it quite obvious that she was near tears.

"Wasn't my intention, Tonks," he said with a grin. "Now, I think you ought to go kiss Remus like you just kissed me. Thanks, by the way. A kiss like that is a cardiovascular workout all its own!" Tonks's blush went all the way to her hair. He looked to Dumbledore. "Can we have a meeting later on, so that I can cover this all at once? Invite whomever you trust."

"I think I shall invite every member of the Coven of the White Owl that I can find," he said, his eyes twinkling madly. He looked Harry in the eyes and said, "I am so truly sorry for -"

"Stop right there, sir," Harry interrupted. "Remember that I handed it to you of my own free will. We all made decisions based on best information. And in the long run, it worked out. Voldemort is finished, I'm alive and mostly working, although I'm going to want someone to do a Lockhart on my left leg, and I have been thoroughly kissed by some of the best looking witches at Hogwarts. There's been bad as well as good, but overall, I'd say good won out."

"I am happy to hear you say that, Harry. And thank you for forgiving an old man his part in your near death experience."

"As long as you forgive me my part in it," Harry said with a smile.

"You need no forgiveness for it," Albus protested. Harry simply smiled widely at the man, waiting for the penny to drop. The man's eyes developed tears suddenly as he realised what Harry was saying. "Bless you," he said thickly.

---

After a Welcoming Feast far more raucous and joyous than seen in many a year, the students were sent off to their dormitories, save those that Dumbledore requested remain behind. It contained quite a few females. Shortly, adults began filtering into the Great Hall, and Harry found himself being joyfully smothered by Molly Weasley. "I thought it was some cruel joke," she kept whispering to him.

"Nope, I'm here," he said, giving her a happy hug in return. Arthur also gave him a surprisingly powerful hug, and he could tell that the man was crying tears of joy at his survival, which gave Harry a warm feeling, knowing that he was truly loved by these people.

The reaction that truly surprised him, however, was when Severus Snape entered the room. Harry was behind Hagrid at the moment, listening to Cho explain about the summer and her delightful usage of a Depilatory Charm, and the high-pitched scream that the recipient released. "Headmaster, from what I can tell, it seems to be true. It actually seems that the young man has survived."

"Yes, I did, Professor," Harry said simply as he walked out from behind Hagrid.

Snape's eyes went wide, his hands clasped Harry's shoulders, and he cried out happily, "Harry!" Remembering that he was in public, he quickly slammed his persona back in place, clearing his throat. "Mr Potter," he continued, fighting the slight redness that seemed to be trying to colour his ears. "I must say that I find myself ... not displeased at the rumours of your survival being true. However, do not think that this will mean that you will be allowed to coast through your classes for the next two years."

"I wouldn't think of it, sir," Harry replied seriously. "And if I never said it before – thank you for your part in this conflict. You did a dangerous job, and you did it well. Thank you." He bowed from the waist to the Potions Master.

Snape's response told him that it was taken with the seriousness it was intended when he returned the bow and said, "We all had parts to play. I'm simply glad that my part was useful."

Finally, the crowd was assembled and seated. "Mr Potter?" the Headmaster said. "Are you willing to tell your story?"

Harry nodded. "There's a lot of it, and I'd prefer that most of this not get out unless the Headmaster allows it." There were nods all around. "Okay, it started with the Headmaster attempting to prevent another attempt by the Ministry to discredit me. He had a suggestion that he did not wish to

make, and I pre-empted by handing him my wand. Let me stress that, so that no blame hits the Headmaster. He was attempting to prevent the Ministry from going after me again, so he started to ask that I leave my wand with him, but I beat him to the punch. I handed the wand to the man without his actually needing to ask, so if any blame is going to come from this, then let it be at me for agreeing and not fighting it.”

He shook his head at the knowing smiles as he continued. “Okay, on to what happened. The Dursleys decided, after some Order members gave them a talking to, that I was going to do no chores at all, and in fact I was to spend as much time as possible staying out of their hair. Basically, I was as useful as a fish bicycle.” Hermione frowned at that comment. “However, that gave me plenty of time to make certain – arrangements. I stashed useful objects in every room of the house, and made sure I always had my trunk and my Invisibility Cloak with me.”

“The day of the attack, I heard my minders Apparate out for some reason. I understand that there was an attack on the Burrow that night, so I assume that they went there.” Remus winced. “Ah, they were traitors, Remus?” he asked.

“Yeah,” Remus said with some worry. “Doge was one of the ones found on the lawn at Number 4, and Vance ... well, Vance killed Arabella Figg and two of her Kneazles. She was ... well, she's not bothering anyone anymore.”

“I heard that it was a nasty death,” Cho Chang said. “I'd imagine that Voldemort wasn't happy that she'd been found out.”

“That would be a safe bet,” the Headmaster said.

Harry read the undercurrents and watched Remus meet Snape's and Tonks's eyes for just a moment, so he nodded at him in understanding. “Anyway, a short time later, Death Eaters chose to attack. One came up to the room and I smacked him with a cricket bat.”

“Cricket bat?” Ginny asked.

“Beater bats are round. Cricket bats are basically flat, with an edge to them. I smacked him with one of those and he went down and stayed down. I put on my Cloak, shrank my trunk, and headed to Dudley's room. I knew exactly where he kept his stash of illegal weapons, and I raided it. He had knives and things he called ninja throwing stars, as well as some throwing spikes or darts or whatever they call those things.

“Well, I slid downstairs, slipped a knife in one of the remaining two Munchers, but didn't get to the third guy until after he'd called for back-up. I threw some things at the new Munchers, knocking a few of them down, but one or two made it inside. Pansy Parkinson managed to knock my glasses off while I was whacking her with the cricket bat, much to my chagrin, but my fumbling around on the floor caused me to avoid a few of the curses going about at chest level.”

“The point when I knew I needed to leave was when I heard one of the shots hit something in the kitchen. I realised that I could hear hissing when I smelled gas. I knew my way around even without my glasses, since Dudders loved to hide them when I was younger. I'd seen the broken glass door in the back, so I just ran like mad and dove through it as someone fired off a spell that certainly had some heat to it. I was in the air when the explosion hit, and it knocked me arse over teakettle into the back garden. I landed wrong and shattered my leg.” He grimaced. “Let me tell you that it was not fun to try to get the trunk out of my pocket, put my cloak in, and then shrink it again, all while I was in pain with a leg that had extra bendiness to it.”

He shook his head. “That night makes me so glad that the human body doesn't keep a memory of pain, just the memory that pain existed. I would *not* want to live through some of that again. Anyway, the neighbours found me on the ground next to the fence and helped me to their place. I was eventually brought to the Royal Surrey, where I stayed for a while while they rebuilt my leg. I've more pins in my leg right now than 'the girl most likely to' had boyfriends.” Hermione's scowl was deepening.

“I spent some time being a suspect, until people in the neighbourhood started stepping forward to implicate Dudley in some crimes. Somewhere along the line, all on their own, I think, the police decided that Dudley had fallen afoul of a drug syndicate. I did the nicest thing I've ever done for the Dursleys, even if they aren't around to appreciate it, and stated that while they might have spoiled Dudders, they likely knew nothing of his criminal enterprises, or stayed wilfully ignorant of it.”

“I was suddenly an orphan again, and now the heroic sole survivor of a horrible attack in the heart of peaceful Surrey. My picture was all over the Muggle news, and even my name. I was surprised that no one seemed to be paying attention to the Muggle news.”

He sighed, but there was laughter in it. “Ah well. Anyway, as usually happens when this sort of thing happens, people came out of the woodwork to foster this poor lonely child. One was finally settled on, and they had shown up to pick me up when Voldemort arrived to dance his last dance with me, although he didn't know that at the time.”

“Regulations require that a patient being discharged be wheeled out of the hospital to the vehicle. Well, when Fluffy the Wonder Chicken arrived and started threatening and hexing people, he made the mistake of not looking around. While the Ferret was threatening someone else, I pulled the IV stand out of my chair, limped up behind Voldemort, and kwanged him proper on the back of the head. He fell like I'd slapped him with a wet cow.”

“Just a minute!” Hermione yelled. “'Kwanged him proper'? 'Slapped with a wet cow'? 'Fluffy the Wonder Chicken'? 'Fish bicycle'? Just where are you getting these from? If I didn't know better, I'd swear you've been hanging out with my father!”

Harry grinned and reached into his pocket. “My bedroom is next to yours, although I think I'd best move into the furnished basement, based on that kiss on the train.” He pulled out an object and tossed it to her. “You rushed out of the house so fast that you forgot your cellular phone,” he finished with a grin.

She turned a little green. “You're my brother now?”

“Nope. I'm just living with your family until I'm old enough to be released into the wild to fend for myself. Social services was willing to let them foster me when I said that I knew their daughter, and any family that could raise a girl that I trusted with my life had to be okay.”

He shook his head again. "Sorry about that. Well, with no way to contact the wizarding world other than visiting Diagon Alley, I decided to wait and return to school on the first the usual way. Given my leg," he said, holding up the cane, "I thought visiting a place where I might be mobbed was probably a very bad idea."

"As much as I wish that you *had* visited," Albus said, "I understand your reasoning and support it fully."

"I'm sorry that I had to kill people," Harry finished quite seriously, "but I'd decided before the attack that if it came down to them or me, then ... well, I don't want to be the last of the Potters. I want to father children someday, and enjoy the heck out of the process. So the Death Eaters had to go."

"I understand completely, Harry," Dumbledore said with a small laugh. "I think that, due to mitigating circumstances, that I shall do something unheard of and cancel classes for the first week of school. We need to have a party and celebrate the return of an extraordinary young man to us, whom we thought lost."

"Hear, hear," said many voices, most surprising amongst them the voice of Severus Snape.

Harry grinned again. "Have I basically answered all the important questions?" When the others at the table nodded, he said, "Well, then, how about letting me head back to Gryffindor Tower to start the First Annual Gryffindor Welcoming Orgy?"

Several people started to laugh at that, and Remus managed to choke out "First Annual?"

"Hey a guy can dream, can't he?" Harry replied with a laugh.