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Chapter 1 Sudden Appearance

Harry ran up the steps to Hogwarts tower. He could hear the noises of spells and explosions from all around him as huge pieces of stone crumbled. He felt his heart hammering in his chest as he took deep breaths from the cold night's air. Determined to get there in time he stayed focused on his steps as his destination neared closer. When he reached the top he pulled out his wand from his back pocket and exchanged spells blindly as he approached Ron and Hermione who did the same on either side of him. The air was thick with dust and debris. Harry dodged as curses flew past his limbs barley missing him, he fired back with more conviction. After a moment it began to seem like they were winning the fight. Death eaters were backing away from them, they were retreating. Harry held his wand firm, he knew that the fight wasn't over yet. In the distance and through all of the wreckage, Harry spotted Fred who was still exchanging spells with his back to him. In front of them, and approaching the tower in what seemed to be slow methodical motion, was Rockwood. Becoming distracted, Fred edged himself right into Rockwood's path. Harry watched the red and black gleam in his eyes as he fixed them on Fred.

"Watch out —," shouted Harry. But it was too late.

"Bloody hell Harry, wake up!"

Harry forced his eyes open. He was covered in sweat and shook with cold. He reached for his glasses but didn't need them to see the worried look on Ron's face.

"Are you okay, Harry?" asked Ron, who hovered over Harry with a look of unease and fear resonating on his face.

"I'm alright," said Harry, he sat up slowly on his cot and dried the cold dampness from his face.

"Blimey Harry, you were shouting in your sleep again."

"Sorry, I didn't mean to wake you," said Harry truthfully, he caught a glimpse of the dark sky outside of Ron's window, "What time is it?"

"It's late," said Ron lowering his voice, "and I don't give a goblins beard about you waking me Harry, but Mum, Dad and everyone is worried about you," Ron started in.

"Well, they shouldn't be, I'm fine," said Harry, he really hoped that he sounded convincing but knew that Ron would see the better of it.

"Yea, it really shows," said Ron dryly. "You've been thrashing about in your sleep almost every night now, I can tell its getting worse," Ron continued. "I know that we've all had a hard time ever since..." Harry watched as Ron broke off and turned his attention to his bed sheets. Harry knew that Ron still had a difficult time discussing the details of the battle and didn't blame him for it.

"Did you want to talk about it?" asked Ron.

"Talk about what?" asked Harry.

"The dreams, he's not back again is he?" asked Ron, the fear on his face returned with intensity.

"No, he's not, and there's nothing to talk about," said Harry. "I'm tired, I'm going back to bed," said Harry, as he reached over, turned out the lights and rested his

head back on his pillow. Ron sat in his bed for a few more moments, but soon followed suit with Harry with snores immediately following. Harry looked out of the window and waited for the sun to come up.

It had been three months since the battle of Hogwarts, and Harry and Hermione had returned to the Burrow with the Weasley family.

For three months straight, the wizarding world around them was in celebration. When Harry's birthday had come, he had received more gifts in one day than he had ever been given in his entire life. Witches and wizards that Harry had never met sent him singing birthday cards with thank you notes that turned into confetti after you read them. Exotic chocolates and candies were shipped by the barrels from witches and wizards from around the world. The most interesting of which, was a set of chocolates that resembled a whimpering Voldemort and a tall broad shouldered Harry that would pummel the chocolate Voldemort to the ground.

"These ones are from Bulgaria," said Ron as he took a giant bite of the whimpering Voldemort.

"Bahhh! He tastes disgusting," Harry watched as Ron spit out a huge piece of Voldemort's head. "But you're not that bad Harry," Ron continued with a reassuring smile.

Long past his birthday, Harry was continuing to get owl posts from wizards and witches congratulating him for the defeat of Voldemort and thanking him for his bravery. Something as small as looking out of his window at night was an extraordinary spectacle where Harry would watch fireworks with his name set in upon the sparks. As time grew on, however, Harry felt himself tunneling deeper and deeper into depression. At night, Harry would lay awake and think of all of the things that he could have done differently.

"Why couldn't I have found them sooner?" Harry mumbled to himself one morning over breakfast as he thought about the Horcruxes, jabbing his food with his fork aimlessly.

"It's not your fault you know," said Hermione, Harry didn't even notice that Hermione had been watching him from across the table, she leaned over and lowered her voice, "blaming yourself won't change anything," she continued with an empathetic look on her face, "The war is over and we all have you to thank for that, Harry you *are* a hero." Harry watched as Hermione managed to give him a half smile, but her words didn't console his heart at the least.

"No Hermione, I'm not," said Harry as he excused himself from the table, breakfast uneaten.

Harry knew that Hermione was right about one thing, which was that the war was over and Voldemort was gone forever. Knowing this however, didn't settle his unease, nor was it able to prepare him for the emotional aftermath of it all. The war was over but that didn't stop his stomach from tugging every time he looked at Mrs. Weasley, who managed to suppress sobs at the mention of her son Fred.

"He was so brave," said Mrs. Weasley, wiping her eyes as she looked at a framed picture of Fred above the mantel in the sitting room. "Fred, always getting into trouble at school... gave his life to save us all," Harry watched as Mrs. Weasley looked as though she were about to faint with grief. She began to sob, but stopped abruptly when noticing Harry standing behind her. "Oh, Harry dear," said Mrs. Weasley tucking her napkin into her apron and hiding her face from him, "...are you hungry? I'll get started in the kitchen then," She brushed past Harry without giving him a chance to speak. Harry didn't know how he would be able to manage much longer.

For weeks, he had caught only glimpses of George who had returned to the Burrow with Percy, who decided to move back after Fred's funeral. During the week, everyone kept busy and seemed to become increasingly busy in the presence of Harry. Mrs. Weasley would clean and re-clean every surface of the Burrow, while Mr. Weasley worked late into the night at the Ministry along with Percy, who seemed to grow increasingly frail.

"He looks like he hasn't slept in ages," Ron began in a whisper to Harry one evening over dinner. Percy, who was sitting across the table, had deep circles under his eyes and looked pale and thin.

"It doesn't help that he's over working himself at the Ministry either." Ron continued

over the roast Mrs.Weasley had prepared for them.

“Well you know what he’s been doing, don’t you?” said Hermione, catching a glimpse of Percy.

“No Hermione, why don’t you share?” said Ron with sarcasm. Harry leaned in closer to better hear what Hermione was saying.

“I overheard your dad this morning at breakfast,” Hermione began, “and apparently Percy has been working with the Ministry’s court, he’s actually been helping to convict people who the ministry believes were working with Voldemort.”

“Well that’s great, isn’t it,” said Ron. “I would love to be the one to send the Malfoys over to have tea with the dementors.” Harry fully agreed with Ron, but knew by the look on Hermione’s face that there was more to it.

“No Ron, you’re forgetting something,” said Hermione. “Many Death eaters are still claiming that it was the Imperius curse that caused them to join in on the dark arts.” The Imperius was one of the forbidden curses that would force the inflicted witch or wizard to submit to the will of the wizard who conjured it. Use of any of the forbidden curses would result in a sentence to Azkaban.

“How do they know whose telling the truth?” asked Ron.

“That’s the thing, no one knows,” said Hermione. “They have been trying to get witnesses, but it’s still hard to tell.”

Harry looked at Percy and tried to imagine what it would be like to sentence people to Azkaban without knowing if they are guilty or not.

“Hey, Hermione,” Harry began. “Why did they pick Percy to work for the court?”

“I’m not sure,” said Hermione. “But I imagine it’s because he worked in the main

office and had insight on who might have been corrupted.”

Harry, Hermione and Ron, along with the rest of the Weasley family continued the rest of their meal in silence until the evening paper arrived.

For weeks, the Ministry had been working with the Daily Prophet to unleash the complete story of the events leading up to the end of Voldemort and the battle at Hogwarts. This was due to the wild rumors that were in circulation, fueled in part by Rita Skeeter, a reporter who wasn't holding back on what she felt was the true story. Rumors that Harry was Voldemort's long lost son were becoming so ridiculous that finally Rita Skeeter was demoted to sports writer for the Daily Prophet, by order of the Ministry. The first new issue began with Harry's parents and the innocence of Sirius Black. Harry felt a sense of joy as he watched the photo of a young happy Sirius standing side by side with his parents.

“Dumbledore would have wanted it that way,” Mr. Weasley said over his plate of kidney steak as he began to discuss the daily prophet. “He always said that the truth would show itself.”

“The Prophet says that the Malfoys have managed to flee the country...” said Hermione examining the contents of the Daily Prophet. Harry knew that the Ministry was working around the clock to capture Death eaters and anyone associated with Voldemort.

“Kingsley, figuring that they would be on the hook for sure this time, says that Lucius is looking at a long term sentence in Azkaban if he's ever caught,” said Mr. Weasley, it was a known fact that Mr. Weasley hated the Malfoys, particularly Lucius Malfoy, ever since he slipped a Horcrux, in the form of a diary, into Ginny's school books.

“The nerve!” said Mrs. Weasley as she splattered extra helpings of mashed potatoes onto Ron's plate, who dodged as small chunks flew in the direction of his face, “running with the rest of them...” Mrs. Weasley was noticeably upset at this news, “...afraid of what will happen when the dementors get a hold of him,” She was turning red with rage. Molly was a kind faced woman, but when provoked she was a force to be reckoned with.

“Molly dear...” Mr. Weasley started in with a calm voice, “Kingsley has been doing a great job at the ministry and everyone suspected of foul play has been given a fair trial and sent to Azkaban if convicted.” It was clear that Mr. Weasley was trying to

comfort his distraught wife but failed miserably.

“What about Rookwood?” asked Mrs. Weasley relentlessly. At this, the room fell silent. Percy, who already looked pale turned white as a ghost; Harry thought he was about to fall out of his chair, but instead he stood up slowly and with slight difficulty walked out of the kitchen. Augustus Rookwood was the wizard responsible for Fred’s death. Harry, along with Percy, Ron and Hermione had seen him at the top of Hogwarts tower, right before he cast the killing curse that ended Fred’s life.

“It’s only a matter of time before he’s found,” Mr. Weasley said, but not nearly as confident as before.

“Harry looked at the cover of the front page in Hermione’s hands, it was a picture of an angry Goblin pummeling an elderly witch to the ground in front of Gringotts Bank.

"Hermione, what's that all about?" asked Harry.

Harry waited as Hermione flipped to the front cover.

“It says here that a woman was attacked by a Gringotts Goblin in Diagon Alley,” Hermione read. “It said that she was attempting to receive gold from her account as usual when she was attacked,” Harry watched as Hermione grimaced and held the paper as if it would attack her if it got too close “It looks pretty bad,” said Hermione she handed Harry the paper, he read:

Local witch was taken to St. Mungo’s Hospital after being severely beaten by a Gringotts Goblin this afternoon. Onlookers claim that the Goblin became enraged when the woman requested to empty her account. When the Goblin refused the witches request onlookers claim they began to argue. The Goblin now identified as Goolihuk pummeled the elderly witch in an enraged fit. (Continue on page 9).

“Not another attack,” said Mr Weasley as he took the paper from Harry.

“Mr. Weasley there hasn’t been other attacks like this one has there?” asked Hermione.

Mr. Weasley eyed Hermione for a moment. "Actually Hermoine, Goblins from all over London have been acting very strange lately," said Mr. Weasley.

"Strange how?" asked Harry. He hadn't realized it until now, but he had been completely out of touch with the on goings of the wizarding world outside of the burrow.

"Easily aggravated to say the least," said Mr. Weasley. "They have never been that pleasant, but a Gingotts Goblin attacking an innocent witch is just unheard of," said Mr. Weasley as he set the newspaper back on the table.

"If things don't get better Kingsley will have to step in for sure." Mr. Weasley began. "I can't imagine what will happen if we have to replace the goblins at Gingotts they have been in control of our gold for hundereds of years."

"Oh dear," started Mrs. Weasley who was now mixing a giant pot of stew. "I was going to take Ginny to buy her school things tomorrow."

"Not to worry Diagon Alley is perfectly safe," said Mr. Weasley. "We just haven't figured out what's going on with the Goblins yet."

Not the slightest bit eager to continue on with the subject Mr. Weasley started directing his attention towards Harry, Ron and Hermione.

"Hey you lot, have you given it much thought of what you want to do at the end of the summer?" he asked with a hint of elation in his voice "...now that you all are done with your studies, that is?" said Mr. Weasley.

Harry's stomach sank. Earlier that week a letter from Professor McGonagall had arrived for them by owl post. Harry, along with both Hermione and Ron, had been excused from their last year at Hogwarts. As headmistress Professor McGonagall felt that they exuded magic and wit beyond their years by performing expert levels of magic to bring down Voldemort. Because of this, they had each received the highest level of certification that Hogwarts could offer any pupil: Golden N.E.W.T.S.

But even with his exemption from his last year, Harry hadn't given it much thought of what he was going to do or where he would go. Two things were certain in his mind however, he couldn't stay at the Burrow and he wasn't sure how he would manage to say good bye to the Weasleys, and to Ginny who would be leaving for

Hogwarts in a week.

Harry looked over at Hermione who sat across the table. He noticed that she was fidgeting in her seat. Harry was reminded of the days at Hogwarts when Hermione tried but failed horribly at suppressing the need to be a know it all. Harry knew that she had something important to say.

“Arthur!” Mrs.Weasley snapped and the remainder of the table jumped again. “They are staying here of course, haven’t they been through enough?” said Mrs. Weasley. “They are not going anywhere until they are ready.”

“Well who’s to say that they are not ready,” said Mr. Weasley, “We have all seen what they are capable of without any of our help,”

“Wait, Mrs. Weasley...I mean I have something to say,” said Hermione, interjecting the feud between Mr. and Mrs. Weasley. Hermione cleared her throat, as if preparing to give a long speech, but was cut off suddenly by the appearance of someone standing in the doorway.

It was George.

He was wearing bright orange dress robes, which clashed horribly with his bright red hair and had a great look of bliss on his face as he stared at them all. Harry noticed two oddly shaped trunks dangling from his arms, which he released to the ground with a thud.

“George!” exclaimed Mrs.Weasley as she gawked at her son with a mixture of shock and doubt. The bowl she was clutching hit the floor with a crash.

“What’s with all the surprised looks?” said George surveying the room. George had locked himself in his old bedroom for weeks. Besides the occasional shrieks and bangs from the Ghoul who showcased his displeasure of Georges return, George’s presence in the Burrow had been eerily vacant.

“I just wanted to tell you all, that I’m heading off to London,” said George beaming at them all. Harry was surprised, George who was the identical twin of Fred, looked to be well rested and groomed, the complete opposite of Percy, who appeared to be taking the loss of his brother very hard.

“I’ve been working on a new line of products for Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes,” George said surveying them all with bewilderment. “Lee Jordan and Angelina are meeting me in London to discuss the new plan...,” Harry thought that George sounded particularly professional as he spoke. “...I’ve dedicated the new line to Fred, I think it would have made him proud,” as George spoke, Mrs.Weasley burst into tears and

flung herself onto her son.

“George...I...am so proud of you.” She said through sobs, squeezing her son so tight Harry thought he would snap in half with all the force. Finally with Mr.Weasley’s help, George managed to break free and collect himself. “Don’t cry mum, it’s alright,” said George, trying to comfort his mother but failing. “I’ll be at Angelina’s for a while...”

“—we’ll send post,” said Mr.Weasley, holding his wife close to his chest, as she sobbed on his shoulder.

“Write, will you?” said Ron who looked concerned at the sudden appearance of his big brother.

“Right,” said George beaming at them again as he walked past them all, out onto the front garden and finally out of sight.