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# Midnight Avatar

## Part One

It was the first Saturday of February, just over a month since Harry had disappeared without a trace on New Years Eve of their fifth year at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. To say his disappearance had been a surprise was the greatest understatement anybody in the history of Hogwarts had ever spoken.

There had been no warnings, no premonitions, no hints, not even the usual morbid predictions of Professor Trelawney.

Harry had simply vanished.

The Weasleys, Ron, Fred, George and Ginny, had unanimously decided to remain at the school over the Christmas holidays that year, along with Hermione, Neville, Dean, Seamus, Lavender, Parvati, Colin and Dennis Creevey and a good portion of the rest of the Gryffindor students. Everyone was on edge over Voldemort's return and all were firm believers that Hogwarts was the safest place that the magical world had to offer against the Dark Lord and his minions.

Little did they know.

There had been the customary New Years Feast, which lasted throughout the night, cumulating in the enchanted ceiling of the hall lighting up and counting down, with massive numbers, the time until the changeover from one year to the next. The celebration had continued for an hour after that, until Professors Dumbledore and McGonagall had called an end to the festivities and sent the students back to their dormitories.

It was a little before two o'clock that morning when those in Gryffindor Tower had finally made their ways to bed, smiles on their lips and good cheer bubbling inside them. It had been a great day and night, in which everyone had slept deeply and undisturbed.

That morning, when the fifth year boys awoke, Harry was gone.

Ron and Hermione quickly became hysterical. Or rather, Hermione quickly became hysterical, which quickly dragged Ron down the same path. Indeed, this proved to be highly contagious and within a matter of minutes every person within the walls of Gryffindor Tower was on the verge of nervous collapse or breakdown.

The teachers set about searching for Harry with a grim determination, helped and hindered along their way by the Gryffindors, who insubordinately refused to remain confined inside the tower if Harry was not in there with them. It was a measure of the seriousness of the situation that both Professor Dumbledore and Professor McGonagall relented to allow them aid in the search. Even the usually antagonistic Professor Snape put up only a token resistance to the Gryffindor movement.

The castle was searched from top to bottom several times over, being turned practically as well as literally inside out in the process. The search was comprehensive to a degree that made their hunts for Sirius Black two years prior look like an amateurish game of hide and seek. Yet by the end of the day, it proved to be a time wasting exercise in futility.

The search had moved outside the castle, to the grounds, the Forbidden Forest, Hogsmeade and out into the countryside. It did not take long for those continuing and taking up the search to come to the realization that the British Isles contained a lot of ground to cover.

During the first week the flurry of activity involved in the search had transformed Hogwarts in more ways than one. As the days, then weeks passed by, the search remained unbelievably intense and determined, continuing even after a good deal of the hope that Harry would be found began to wane and diminish.

By the end of the month, grim determination had given way to grim resolution. Very few retained hope that Harry would be recovered alive and were now simply focusing on the task of finding his remains, if any. The energetic, in some cases frantic, atmosphere had passed and was replaced by a shroud of gloom and depression that was keenly felt during meal in the Great Hall.

Everyone had been affected by the loss of Harry, particularly the Gryffindors. The mood at their table was sombre and oppressive, as the diminished house sat and ate under a pall of silence not even the Slytherins could escape from. The depression that stifled conversation in the Great Hall fell heavily on Harry's closest friends, particularly Hermione, who were alternating between the frantic anxiety of the first few days and a zombie-like automation that caused grave concern to both fellow students and teachers alike.

The pair was currently in between swings of their emotional pendulum, which meant that they were as close to normal as they could get during the crisis. Breakfast that morning was as sombre an affair as ever, only the occasional whisper or murmur to break the silence, when all hell broke loose and engulfed the Great Hall in an uproar.

Hermione was staring unseeingly at her eggs and toast, mindlessly tapping her fork against the rim of the plate. Her mind was awl with thoughts, none of which made any amount of sense that she could determine. It had been a month since Harry had vanished, a month of such an emotional roller coaster, that she was simply exhausted.

"That's odd."

She looked up at Ron, who was leaning back and staring at the ceiling, his brows furrowed as he contemplated the scene above. "What?" she asked, wondering what could stir her best friend from the stupor that had engulfed the pair of them.

"The weather," he replied, motioning at the roof, "It was clear blue skies as far as the eye can see when we got in here five minutes ago. Now it looks like the grandmother and grandfather of all storms is brewing."

Hermione looked up and was startled to see that Ron was right; the weather was indeed foreboding, with dark blue/grey clouds rolling low across the sky. Now that she thought about it, Hermione saw that the torches along the sides of the hall had been lit and the enchanted candles were now floating above them. She hadn't realized how dark it had suddenly become in the past few minutes while she moped about her darkest thoughts.

"Must be a front coming over," she muttered, watching as the dark clouds billowed in ominous turmoil. As she watched she noticed that she was feeling chilled through her robes and was not the only one. Most of those inside the Great Hall were shifting about, rubbing their hands over their arms and legs to warm them up. As she wondered at this the fireplaces burst to life and a warm glow spread over the hall, accompanied by relieved sighs from the students.

"Weird," commented Ginny, sitting beside her, "I've never see the weather change so dramatically in such a short time."

"Yeah," agreed Fred, who was across from her, flanking Ron, "Looks like we will be spending the day indoors."

"Ah, so much the better," chirped George, from Ron's other side, "Nothing quite like spending a few hours with prospective *clients* for our latest confectionary delights."

Fred nodded enthusiastically, "Quite so, dear brother. But who would be a suitable unsuspecting taste tester for Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes?"

None of those who were listening ever found out who the twins intended victim was, for at that moment the massive doors leading into the hall burst inwards as though struck by a giant hand. The doors swung fully open with a resounding crash as they rebounded off the walls. There was a clamour of noise from everyone, a good number of whom had leapt to their feet in surprise, when the doors hung listlessly on their hinges. But the mutterings and exclamations died down almost immediately as they spotted the solitary figure standing just outside the hall.

For a single moment Hermione thought it was Snape, a tall, thin man, cloaked in black robes with a pale white face and black hair above. But a glance at the teachers' table confirmed that Snape was there, standing ramrod straight beside Professor McGonagall. Turning her attention back to the intruder, Hermione watched as he silently drifted into the hall, seeming to glide across the floor rather than walk, a frigid chill sweeping out before him as the candles, torches and fires were suddenly extinguished.

It was Harry.

Sweet God, she wondered as the thought occurred to her. It's Harry. He's back. He's... my God.

As other students began to recognise him as well, Hermione stared in horror at his appearance as he slowly made his way towards the staff table. He looked a good deal taller than when she had last seen him, but his face was gaunt and unhealthily thin. His skin was white as bone and drawn painfully tight over his cheekbones. His eyes, robbed of their glasses, were rimmed with shadows

of exhaustion so dark, as to be almost black against his pale skin, his face resembling a skull. With the cowl of his robe up and hanging low over his brow, Harry seemed a spectre in the very image of death itself.

"All he needs is a scythe and hourglass," muttered Dean Thomas, echoing her thoughts, as they tracked Harry's slow progress into the hall.

Everyone watched in morbid fascination as Harry glided down the path to the stage, flanked by the Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw tables. Hermione, her gaze riveted on Harry's face and his sunken eyes, noticed that his robes hung motionless and undisturbed from his shoulders. His body was hidden completely from view under the inky black garment and even though he was moving at a reasonable pace, the robes remained tightly fastened and unyielding.

As he reached the middle of the hall Harry came to a halt, his face and eyes remaining fixed on the staff table, but somehow his attention seemed to be directed elsewhere. A soft whisper could be heard from the direction of the Slytherin table, and when she craned her neck, Hermione could see Draco Malfoy making a hushed comment to Pansy Parkinson. Apparently Harry had noticed and, impossibly, overheard whatever was being said.

With a startled yelp Draco leapt into the air and, spinning and careening wildly, he rocketed straight to where Harry was standing and waiting, face expressionless. Just when it seemed that Draco would crash into him, he jerked to a violent halt, hovering in midair before a motionless Harry that continued to lock gazes with something only he could see. Without turning or moving to acknowledge Draco's presence he spoke.

"If you ever speak in my presence again," he said, his voice a deep, yet soft rasp, as though raw from countless hours of screaming and begging, "I will do things to you that will make your darkest nightmares pale in comparison."

The words hung in the air for a moment, much like Draco, and nobody that heard them could doubt Harry's sincerity. Not a warning, not a threat, merely a statement of fact, like saying that the sky was blue and that grass was green. As though declaring it so made it a law of nature, a law that not even magic could circumvent or bend to its will.

"Now be quiet," finished Harry dismissively, his eyes never once focusing on the boy hanging in the air beside him. And, apparently done, Draco once again launched into motion, hurtling across the hall to collapse in a heap with several of his fellow Slytherins. Seeming finished with his pronouncement, Harry continued towards the front of the hall, the rim of his cloak just brushing against the floor as he glided silently forward, ignoring how those Hufflepuffs and Ravenclaws along his path leaned back and pressed away as he passed them by.

Finally he stood before the staff table, completely ignoring the assembled students behind him and the waiting teachers in front of him, and continued to gaze unseeing into space. He remained where he was, perfectly still in a way no human could achieve, even his robe remaining unruffled by the soft draft that was sweeping through the hall from the open entrance.

After what seemed an age, Harry began to focus on the world surrounding him, his eyes locking upon the headmaster with a singular intensity that caused the teachers to involuntarily shrink back several steps. Harry and Dumbledore held each other's gaze for a long minute, before he gave a short nod of greeting. "Albus," he acknowledged, his voice sounding more like the Harry of old.

"Harry," Dumbledore greeted cautiously, "I'm very pleased to see you. It's a relief to have you back with us."

This was too much for Hermione and she, along with Ron, the rest of the Weasleys and a good few of the other Gryffindors that knew him, rushed toward where Harry and Dumbledore were speaking. Drawing to a stop half a dozen or so feet away, she gave a gasp as she got her first clear look at Harry, her heart skipping several beats.

"And I'm sure," Dumbledore continued, a faint smile on his lips, "that your friends are equally, if indeed not more, relieved at your return."

Harry turned his head a fraction and his eyes swept dismissively over his waiting classmates, a cursory examination that was chilling in its apathetic indifference. Harry returned his gaze to Dumbledore and spoke, "I am not here to deal with *trivialities*," his voice colder than the chill engulfing the hall, "I only returned here to inform you that it is over and get the formalities out of the way."

"Over?" queried Dumbledore, his voice laced with a concern, "What do you mean, Harry?"

"It's finished," Harry said, a faint scowl forming on his brow, "Lord Voldemort and his Death Eaters are no longer a threat worthy of consideration."

Ron voiced a strangled question, "You, you defeated You-Know-Who? Again?"

"You mean he's gone?" asked Ginny immediately after, "For good?"

Harry did not move to acknowledge them, save for a brief nod, "Yes. Lord Voldemort is finished, as are all the Death Eaters. I brought them with me, so that you can handle their disposition."

Dumbledore exchanged a quick glance with Snape, who was looking rather ill, "All of them?"

"Yes," confirmed Harry, "After I escaped confinement Lord Voldemort called them all, every single one of them, except for Severus. I prevented the call from reaching his Dark Mark."

Snape looked at Harry in disbelief, "How the devil could you do that, Potter?" he asked, without his usual sneer, "The Mark is one of the most powerful forms of Dark Magic in existence."

Harry's eyes slid over to look at the Potions Master, "I am more powerful," he said flatly.

Ron and Hermione exchanged an amazed look, the way Harry had stated that, it was clear he was not kidding around. Ron shook his head in disbelief and whispered to her, "I hope Azkaban has a lot of empty cells waiting."

By now Harry had returned his gaze to Dumbledore again, but he obviously heard Ron's comment as he replied, "Azkaban will not be receiving any new Death Eater inmates."

"Why not?" asked Fred, standing right behind his younger brother.

"Because, there are no Death Eaters *left* to be sent there," answered Harry, his voice flat as a series of gasps and stifled cries came from the back of the hall. Everyone, save Harry, turned and gaped in amazement and horror as dozens of black robed forms floated through the open doors.

Hermione's hands covered her mouth as she took in the sight of the Death Eaters. They hung limp in the air as they drifted towards the front of the Great Hall.

"You *killed* them?" she whispered in horror.

"They killed themselves," he corrected, not bothering to turn around and survey the bodies hovering throughout the room, "I gave them all a choice, surrender or else. Unfortunately for them, they chose the former."

His gaze shifted to rest on his fellow Gryffindors, "I believe they were under the mistaken impression that I would be stupid enough to show them mercy. I didn't."

"Merlin's ghost, you killed them all?" Professor McGonagall sank into her chair in shock.

"No, not all," replied Harry, once again looking at Dumbledore, who appeared very disturbed by the multitude of limp bodies drifting about the hall, "I did restrain myself from ending the miserable existence of one particular *rat* ."

Soft whimpers became audible as another body floated through the doors, his body curled into a tight ball. He was a short, somewhat chubby man, with thinning, almost colourless hair, bulging watery eyes and dirty black robes. His right arm was tucked into his left armpit, but blood was dripping steadily down.

Peter Pettigrew.

Wormtail.

"He should live, but you'll have to hurry if you don't want him to die from blood loss. I was forced to remove the new hand Lord Voldemort had given him," declared Harry, a thin smile on his lips as Dumbledore motioned Madam Pomfrey forward.

"No need to hurry that much," he protested as the bustling matron ran to where Pettigrew hung motionless in the air, still save for his soft moans. "I don't really need him alive. His body will do just fine as far as providing evidence of Sirius Black's innocence."

Hermione, and everyone else, was shocked at how callous and cold Harry was being about how the man was suffering. Admittedly Pettigrew had betrayed his parents, not to mention Sirius and many more besides, but was this the same Harry Potter that had convinced Sirius and Professor

Lupin to spare Wormtail's life at the end of their third year? How could he be so... cruel?

With a shake of his head, Harry released Wormtail from whatever magic was holding him up, and the tiny man fell to the ground with a loud thump and several sharp cracks. Wormtail cried out as he landed, obviously breaking several bones in the process, before curling into an even tighter ball as his blood-soaked form collapsed in a heap.

"I shall send word to the Ministry at once," said Dumbledore, watching as Madam Pomfrey conjured a stretcher and levitated the shivering form of Wormtail onto it. He turned to fix Harry with a penetrating stare, "But in the meantime, Harry, I think that perhaps you should accompany Madam Pomfrey to the hospital wing. You do seem rather pale."

"No."

"Don't try to be a hero, Potter," snapped Snape, seeming to have recovered his usual dislike of The Boy Who Lived. "You look about as healthy as a man on his death bed."

"It has nothing to do with heroics," Harry said, "My business here is not yet complete."

Ginny stepped forward, accompanied by Hermione, "Harry, you need to go with her. You don't look all that good. You need her to help you get better."

Harry sighed and shook his head tiredly, "There's nothing she or anyone else can do for me," he explained to them all.

"Come on, Harry," argued Hermione, "It can't be that bad. You managed to walk in here alright!"

He turned to look at her, for the first time actually look at her, and it chilled her with its cold intensity. Another sigh escaped his lips and the hood of his robes fell back. Hermione felt the blood drain from her face when she saw his hair. Beside her, Ginny and Rob clasped her arms for support as they too paled at the sight. Behind them, and all round the hall, people gasped as they saw the change in Harry's hair.

At his temples it was snow white, a gleaming silver similar to Dumbledore's, so very pale it was difficult to see against his chalk white skin. Thin streaks of silver ran through the rest of the tussled raven mop, accompanied by thicker streaks of a reddish brown, where the hair had not yet completely lost its colour.

Dumbledore, who was supposedly as unshakeable as the earth itself, seemed rocked to his very core as he leaned back against the table behind him for support. "My God," he whispered, the famous sparkle completely absent from his blue eyes.

Harry cocked a wry eyebrow and curled his lips into a thin smile, "Believe me, Albus, God had *nothing* to do with it. Unless you've decided to deify Lord Voldemort at the last minute and neglected to tell me."

"Harry..." Hermione whispered, tears pooling in her eyes, "What did they do to you?"



He turned to look at her again, his eyes blazing with cold scorn, "They made me stronger than I was before. Truth be told, I'm rather *pleased* with the end result."

"Stronger?" asked George, slowly beginning to regain his composure after the shock of seeing Harry's appearance.

"End result?" asked Fred, standing beside his sister, his one arm wrapped around her trembling shoulders as she leaned against his chest for support.

Dumbledore stood straight, his eyes grave over his half-moon spectacles, "Harry, you have to tell us what happened. How did you escape? And what has become of Voldemort?"

"How did I escape?" Harry asked, apparently finding the question amusing, "I didn't *escape* , Albus. I was set free."

"Set free?" repeated Ron, hand clasped firmly on Hermione's shoulder as they stared at Harry in disbelief, awe and good deal of worry.

Harry nodded, "Yes. Perhaps I should show you," he said, his thin skeletal right hand emerging from within his robes, wand held loosely in its grasp.

As the wand came clearly into view, Hermione gasped and dropped back a step, fumbling about her robes for her own wand. A surge of panic had blossomed within her the instant she got a clear look at the revealed wand, its long and dark length gleaming in the subdued light of the Great Hall. It was made from yew, she knew, and just over a foot long, thirteen and a half inches to be precise, with a core made of phoenix feather.

*The other phoenix feather.*

That's not Harry, that's not Harry, she thought desperately as her fingers closed upon her own wand, pulling it out and aiming it straight ahead of her, at the person whose disguise she was first to penetrate. That's not Harry, that's not Harry!

**"MORSMORDRE!"**

The cry boomed throughout the Hall as a wave of green energy swept out from Harry, knocking all those near him off their feet as the Dark Mark bloomed to life over the staff table. Harry was pointing his wand at Dumbledore, who had stumbled back against the table under the onslaught of raw energy, and a multitude of thin, glowing green, tendrils exploded forth.

"Nox Mortis Bindus!"

The glowing ropes wrapped themselves around Dumbledore before he had a chance to move or duck out of the way. With his arms bound tightly to his sides and his legs stuck firmly together, he fell to the floor. Harry stood over him, his face twisted in a mocking smile as shrieks and yells of disbelief filled the air as the once limp Death Eaters suddenly sprang to life, dropping lightly to the floor all round the Great Hall, their wands out and firing Cruciatus at any student that tried to

resist. Within moments the entire school, every student and teacher, were subdued under the watchful gazes of Voldemort's followers.

"Potter, what are you playing at!?"

"Harry, are you out of your mind!?"

"Potter...!"

"Harry...?"

Shouts and cries came from the teachers and Harry's friends that were on the stage near him, all unable to comprehend what was transpiring before them. How could Harry Potter, The Boy Who Lived, do something like this? How could he consort with Death Eaters, bring them inside the school and attack Dumbledore?

It was Hermione that answered all their questions with a single word, a name, spat out with the vehemence of the curse which it was.

"Voldemort!"

TBC...

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## Part Two

'Harry' turned to face her, his smile one of supreme triumph. "So, it is the little Mudblood who pierces my disguise. How did you recognise me, girl? The rest of these fools did not."

The wild tangle of his silver streaked black locks retracted into his skull as his face began to change shape and form. His already pale skin grew even whiter, until it was as bleached as bone, while his nose shrank into his face, only his nostrils remaining as two thin slits. His gleaming eyes narrowed and the vibrant emerald green swirled and was replaced by a glowing crimson.

"Perhaps the two of you were *lovers*?" theorized Voldemort, looming over the fallen Dumbledore, "Is that how you saw through my facade? You and Potter must've been careful indeed to hide such a relationship from my servants. Answer me, Mudblood!"

Hermione swallowed nervously, her wand clenched tightly in her hand, anger at his insinuations causing her cheeks to flush a deep scarlet. Harry was the kindest, most caring and utterly selfless person she knew and Hermione could openly admit that she could very easily love him. But Harry had enough to deal with without her adding the demands of a relationship to his troubles.

Struggling to meet and hold the dark lord's disturbing gaze, "Your wand," she said, "I'm one of Harry's best friends, even if we *don't* share a bed, thank you very much. I would know his wand anywhere and that's not his."

Voldemort nodded, "Ah, yes. I suppose that is as good an explanation as any. I had thought my disguise complete with Potter's face and body, but I suppose an observant mind would pick up on small details like that. No matter, especially since the boy's wand is destroyed."

*"Only because you snapped it in half."*

Voldemort whirled about, his narrow red eyes searching wildly for the soft voice that had spoken out, seeming less than a whisper, yet still loud enough for all present to hear. The Death Eaters shifted nervously as they too scanned the massive room for the speaker.

*"I'm curious, how did you get the Death Eaters inside Hogwarts?"* asked the voice, seeming to echo forth from nowhere but the still air. All of the teachers and some of the students, mostly the Gryffindors, began to react to the voice as well. They recognised it, had heard it speaking only minutes before, uttered forth from the disguised mouth of Lord Voldemort.

"Show yourself, Potter!" declared Voldemort, his robe swirling about, parting to reveal that the injuries to his body had been an illusion, just as he had used Harry's face. "Show yourself, or I shall start executing these fools, starting with the Mudblood girl you cherish so."

A soft chuckle filled the hall, *"Really, there's no need to get excited. I'm not actually inside*

*Hogwarts at the moment, but I will be soon enough. Until then there isn't any reason to interrupt our chat. I believe you were telling me about your Death Eaters."*

Everyone was now peering about, hope growing within them as the ethereal voice bantered lightly, almost tauntingly, with the Dark Lord. Even the Slytherins seemed to be rallying behind the soft whisper, especially since they too had fallen prey to Death Eater curses. The loyalties of the dark lord's servants did not extend to their fellows, nor their children, it seemed.

"Draught of Living Death," Voldemort ground out, motioning angrily at some Death Eaters to move to the entrances leading into the Great Hall. They hurried into position, perfectly placed to grab anybody that tried to enter.

Again a soft chuckle drifted through the air, *"Honestly. Do you really think I'm so stupid that I'd use the front door, or any of the conventional entrances?"*

Lightning cracked across the sky outside, perfectly reflected by the enchantment on the ceiling. Indeed flashes of lightning strobed throughout the dark clouds, increasing in their frequency and intensity with each passing moment. The crackling bolts of energy whipped wildly about, seeming to coalesce directly above the Great Hall, the flickering light illuminating the interior of the castle with quickening flashes. And then it all stopped, suddenly and without warning.

A complete stillness hung suspended in the air for a moment. But only for a moment.

The Great Hall was rent by the explosive force of the single, unbelievable, bolt of lightning that plunged down from the heavens outside. It was a strike of lightning such as had never been before, a thousand times more brilliant, more powerful, more everything than a single lightning bolt could expect to achieve.

A clap of thunder sounded as the bolt struck the floor at the dead centre of the room, a rolling crack of sound that reverberated throughout the castle. Paintings fell from where they were hung, suits of armour toppled where they stood, windows shattered under the concussive force and the very foundations of the millennium old school shook and ground unsteadily against themselves.

Hermione had turned away from where the lightning had struck, her eyes shut against the blinding light and her hands clasped tight over her ringing ears. Cautiously, after several seconds, she turned back to the centre of the Great Hall, where an amazing sight greeted her.

Harry Potter had returned to Hogwarts.

The stone floor beneath him was scorched black, burned by the intense heat of the lightning when it connected heaven and earth. A thin network, a web, of cracks radiated out around him where the flagstones had lost their struggle to contain or dissipate the energy released upon them. And a pair of Death Eaters, who had been standing watch over the Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw tables, were lying strewn on the floor, reduced to charred and contorted skeletons.

"And I thought him and Ron arriving with a flying car was impressive," declared Lee Jordan in a

hushed, awe-filled whisper, standing just behind Fred and George, his dreadlocks standing on end from the static that charged the entire hall. Truth be told, the only two people in the hall whose hair was not sticking out were Voldemort and Professor Snape - Voldemort because he had none and Snape because no force on earth could defeat the grease holding his hair in place.

Rooted to the spot where he was standing beside Professor McGonagall, Snape cleared his throat, "Leave it to Potter to make an entrance."

Harry was down on one knee, both hands out to steady himself, head bowed down low, with his mop of raven black hair falling down and obscuring his face. Hermione was pleased to note, somewhat absent-mindedly, that his hair was completely black and devoid of any silver. His skin was pale, but not frightfully so, and his body and limbs seemed entirely intact and injury free. At first glance he seemed to be wearing his thick and sturdy Gryffindor Quidditch robes, but Hermione was quick to note that the scarlet and gold fabric was actually very fine and regal in appearance.

All in all, it was as Snape had said; quite an entrance.

Finally Harry lifted his head and looked at those standing on the stage by the staff table, his expression intense, yet oddly serene. All who caught his eye gasped or muttered, some taking a step back in shock and even Voldemort seemed disturbed by what he saw.

As long as Hermione had known him, Harry's eyes had burned fierce and strong, a brilliant green that shone like a beacon in the darkness. The fire in his eyes had waxed and waned over the years as life mercilessly threw challenge after challenge into his lap, but always he fought on and the fire continued to blaze within him. It had been at its lowest during the time after Voldemort's return at the end of their fourth year, but had been steadily regaining strength before he had disappeared after Christmas.

And now... now the fire in Harry's eyes had been rekindled beyond anything Hermione had thought possible. In truth, the intensity, the raw power that blazed in his eyes, managed to scare her and yet comfort her at the same time. Comparing how his eyes had shone to what she saw kneeling before her now was like putting a matchstick up against the blinding glare of a nuclear furnace.

"Hello, Tom," he greeted calmly, his voice deeper than Hermione remembered, but still smooth and ringing clear through the air.

"Do not presume to call me by that name, Potter," Voldemort glowered, hiding the discomfort he had experienced at seeing Harry's eyes and facing his nemesis with a dangerous glare. He was the most powerful, most evil, dark lord to arise in centuries. No person alive, not Dumbledore, not anyone, dared to call him by the despised name inherited from his Muggle father.

Harry smiled thinly and rose to his feet, the scarlet and gold robes billowing about his slender frame, "Why shouldn't I? If you're such a coward, Tom Marvolo Riddle, to have to *hide* behind a false name and title, it's no skin off my nose." He smirked, "At least I have one."

Voldemort hissed, "For that, Potter, I shall make your death all the more painful."

"You've tried before," Harry acknowledged, "I can't help but notice that I'm still here."

"Dumbledore and these others cannot protect you any more, boy!" declared the dark lord, a tone of grim satisfaction dripping from his words, "Hogwarts has fallen before me and these pitiful fools are inconsequential against *my* power."

Hermione and Ron bristled at this, but were prevented from rashly stepping forward by Fred and George, who gripped them tightly by the arms and held them back, "He keeps this up and I'll show him just how inconsequential I can be," hissed Hermione, fingering her wand.

"Hermione!" whispered Fred, holding her firmly, "Don't do something stupid. Let Harry handle this, it's what he's best at." Reluctantly she returned her wand to her robe pocket, but gave the preoccupied Dark Lord a furious glare. If only looks could kill...

"Y'know," came a drawling observation from Harry, "I hate it when people insult my friends."

Voldemort sneered, "Insults are the least of their worries. And yours."

Harry laughed, "Your pathetic attempts at frightening us only make us that much stronger. And right now, insults are the least of *your* worries, not mine."

The Dark Lord's eyes narrowed to thin slits, "And why's that?"

"Because I'm back from the very edge of oblivion," announced Harry, "And I'm going to kick your scaly arse back to whatever hell you came from."

"You try my patience, Potter," Voldemort snarled, his glowing red eyes flickering dangerously.

Without moving a single muscle, Harry's expression became foreboding and dark enough to match that of the Dark Lord's. Ron and Hermione, still held in the firm grips of Fred and George, both suppressed shudders as their best friend's green eyes flickered as dangerously as Voldemort's had done. If not more so.

"And you've already used up all of mine!" Harry retorted sharply.

A long moment passed as Harry and Voldemort fought a silent battle. The already tense air that had permeated the Great Hall became even thicker as the weak candle and fire light began to dim, particularly near the staff table which was enshrouded in shadow. Only near the centre of the room, where Harry continued to stare down the Dark Lord, did any light seem to survive, glowing softly around him.

"Avada Kedavra!"

"NO!!" the combined cry came from Voldemort and Hermione, as one of the Death Eaters could take the mounting tension no longer and fired off the Killing Curse straight at Harry from across

the width of the Great Hall.

With a scream of terror one of the Ravenclaw students, sitting not far from where Harry was standing, soared into the air. Twisting wildly about he intersected the path of the green bolt streaking towards Harry, his scream ending abruptly as the curse slammed into him. For several moments he hung limply in the air, his limbs dangling much as the Death Eaters had earlier, but with no hope of ever awakening.

Voldemort's outstretched arm, wand in hand, dropped back to his side and the luckless Ravenclaw fell to the ground with a dull thump. Turning slowly to face the Death Eater who had fired off the curse, Voldemort's face was contorted with rage and his eyes glowed angrily.

"Nott," he hissed the trembling man's name contemptuously, "Have you forgotten what I told you? Have you forgotten that killing the boy is a task reserved for *myself alone*?"

"No, My Lord! I'm sorry, I didn't-

"Crucio!"

Nott fell to the floor, screams of agony being torn from his throat as he writhed about. The entire Hall was transfixed as Voldemort pressed the curse upon him for half a minute before he pointed his wand away.

Or tried to.

The collapsed Death Eater's agonized howls intensified as Voldemort looked down at his wand arm in consternation, his grip on his wand tightening. His arm was surrounded by a soft red glow and began to visibly shake as he tried to pull his wand away from where it was aimed. Instead the wand remained firmly fixed on Nott, whose screams were becoming hoarse and ragged as he writhed helplessly on the floor.

Voldemort reached up with his free hand and tried to push or pull his arm away from Nott, but to no avail. When he tried to grab hold of the wand and pry it loose, he suddenly hissed in pain and withdrew his hand, thin tendrils of smoke rising from his burnt fingers. Meanwhile Nott's cries were reaching a fever pitch and suddenly he pulled himself up to his knees, throwing his head back and letting loose an ear splitting wail.

His shrieks began to die as he began coughing up blood, but continued to arch back and choke through the thick liquid pouring from his mouth. Loud cracks and pops sounded as he suddenly fell limp, all his cries and pleas ceasing as, save a few twitches, he became perfectly still. At almost the same moment the red glow surrounding Voldemort's wand and arm faded and his hand jerked away from the direction of the crumpled, obviously dead, Death Eater.

Staring at his servant's lifeless body for a long while, Voldemort finally turned to face Harry, who had not moved a muscle despite everything that had just transpired. The dark lord's eyes were wide with anger, disbelief and more than a little fear. "You... you did this?" he hissed, waving a



hand at Nott's corpse.

Harry smiled and arched an eyebrow, "I would've thought you knew, Tom," he said serenely but with a cold edge to his voice, "Never start something if you're not prepared to *finish* it. Think of it as your punishment for using a student to stop the curse from hitting me."

"But, but that was impossible!" Voldemort protested, eyes darting back to Nott's body.

"I always try to accomplish six impossible things before breakfast," replied Harry.

"Lewis Carroll? Alice in Wonderland?" Hermione wondered, blinking in disbelief. Somehow the entire situation had taken on an air of surrealism that made her wonder if indeed she herself had not somehow stumbled down the rabbit hole.

Harry frowned playfully at her, "Through the Looking-Glass," he corrected, grinning impishly.

Voldemort snarled viciously, apparently becoming aware that Harry was not only making a fool of him, but a mockery as well. Baring his sharp, predatory teeth, he levelled his wand at Harry in a swift motion as he hissed loudly, "Crucio!"

"Ouch," observed Harry as the curse washed over him. He rolled his eyes and clasped his hands theatrically to his chest, over his heart. His words matched his actions, "Oh, the pain. Oh, the agony. Spare me, please, I beg of you. Oh, the pain," but were delivered in such droll and laconic tones that it was almost funny.

If nothing else, this incited Voldemort to new heights of rage and blind fury as several of the less awed and terrified students actually snickered in amusement. He quickly ended the curse before Harry could become more dramatic in his acting and once again levelled his wand at the surprisingly cheerful looking boy.

**"AVADA-"**

As she heard him begin to say the dreaded words, Hermione summoned all her strength and pulled herself free of Fred, who was still holding her tightly by the shoulders.

**"-KEDAVRA!"**

She flung herself at Voldemort, knocking against his wand arm in a desperate attempt to divert his aim away from Harry, but was just too late. She saw the green flash being released from his wand, streaking towards Harry, with nothing to stop it. With her momentum carrying her forward, Hermione fell to the floor of the stage, twisting to watch in horror as the killing curse struck Harry's chest.

The sickly green glow seeming to splash over him as he stood there, the challenging yet bemused expression still on his face. The flickering energy completely enveloped Harry, illuminating his figure briefly in an eerie halo that slowly faded away.

The hall was utterly silent as Harry, calm as can be, remained upright where he was standing so steadfast, deliberately dropped his head to one side with a resounding crack. Righting his head and seeming to stand even taller, he arched an eyebrow towards Voldemort.

"If that was your best shot," he observed, sounding decidedly unimpressed, "Then you're in deep shit."

Harry stood perfectly still, in the centre of the Great Hall and with three dead bodies at his feet, and watched Voldemort's reaction with cool impartiality. After a long beat, he parted his robes and languidly slipped a hand inside, his movements slow and deliberate. Reaching into an inside pocket Harry withdrew something and held it out for everyone to inspect.

"Recognise this?" he asked, displaying a couple of broken wooden sticks. His eyes narrowed and his voice took on a sharp edge. "It's my wand. The one you snapped in half the same night you captured me. Five minutes before I managed to escape."

Voldemort, not to mention everyone else, was simply too flabbergast from recent events; namely Harry's surprisingly nonchalant approach to being hit by Avada Kedavra, to say anything. He and every other person present merely remained where they standing or sitting, barely even aware of anything other than Harry, the broken wand in his hand, the frightening glint in his green eyes and the sudden feeling of nervousness in their guts when Harry bared his teeth in a feral smile.

"They say it's impossible to repair a broken wand," he hissed. Harry's eyes were gleaming wickedly as he raised his hand high above his head, "Good thing we all know my stance on the impossible."

**"Reparo!"**

A blinding white light flared around Harry's upheld hand, brighter than even the lightning bolt that delivered him into the Great Hall. It was a miniature sun that radiated indescribable power, yet did so in complete silence. Slowly, after a heartbeat, the light began to fade, dissipating like a fine mist under the early morning sunlight.

And there, held lightly in Harry's hand, was the impossible made possible. A thin shaft of holly, just under a foot long, eleven inches to be precise, surrounding a core made of phoenix feather.

"Looks good as new. What d'you say we test it out?"

There was a pregnant pause, all eyes were focused on Harry as the meaning of his words began to sink in. Twirling his wand nimbly around his fingers, like a baton, Harry never once broke eye contact with Voldemort, who actually seemed nervous and unsure what to next. A thin smile curled his lips and a soft chuckle escaped as Harry suddenly stopped playing with his reincarnated wand.

**"Incendio!"**

It was a simple curse, one of the most basic ones known, taught to students during their first year at Hogwarts. It was usually good for getting a good blaze going in the fireplace, or if need be, fighting off the occasional rabid animal or plant. Suffice to say, everyone could be forgiven for reacting the way they did when Harry fired it at Voldemort. They had no reason to expect the blaze of unbearable heat that shot forth from the newly forged wand.

Hermione thanked the high heavens above that she, along with everyone else on the stage, had backed a good distance away from Voldemort during the recent proceedings. As it was, she could feel the heat from the spell with the same intensity she would feel standing beside an open blast furnace.

When the cone of blue-white flame finally extinguished itself, she was exceedingly amazed that anything remained of Voldemort. The stage where he had been standing was charred black, and in places had been reduced to ashes which swiftly collapsed under their own weight. The section of the staff table that had been caught in the blaze had been totally burnt away, causing the two surviving pieces, on either side, to topple. The back wall, against which Voldemort had been slammed with great force, was scorched and blackened in a manner similar to that of the floor where Harry had appeared in a flash of lightning.

Voldemort himself was looking very much the worse for wear. The sheer magnitude of the spell and the force behind it had knocked him against the rear wall. His magical defences had managed to save him from being incinerated, but his black robes had failed to withstand the heat. With the force of the spell no longer holding him up, Voldemort slumped to the floor in a swirl of ash as his robes disintegrated about him. His blackened and blistered body collapsed with a thump, sending up a cloud of soot.

Everyone turned to look from the burnt Dark Lord to Harry, who lowered his wand and surveyed his work with a satisfied expression. The Death Eaters shifted nervously about, fully aware that if Harry could do this to their master, he could just as easily do it to them. And they were not nearly powerful enough to survive such an experience.

"Hhhhhnnn... Paaaah - tteeeeerr!" gasped Voldemort, struggling to his knees as the black soot from his incinerated robes drifted about his crumpled and horribly burned figure.

"Well, I took your best shot - and I'm still here. You've taken my best shot, kind of, and you're still there," observed Harry, as he smiled wolfishly, "Care to trade second best shots?"

The thick black ichor that was Voldemort's blood dribbled from his mouth as he looked up at Harry in what could only be described as terror.

Harry's grin broadened, "Well? What seems to be the problem?"

Voldemort pulled himself up, swaying unsteadily on his feet, his eyes wavering as he leaned back against the scorched wall for support. Drawing deep, gasping breaths he raised a trembling hand and pointed a skeletal finger at Harry, hissing an order to his Death Eaters.

"Kiiilll hiiim!"

TBC...

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# Midnight Avatar

## Part Three

Harry had disappeared in a flash of bright light and radiant energy. Oh, Hermione was certain he had not left Hogwarts, or the Great Hall, and was in fact still standing precisely where he had been only moments early. The problem was that nobody could see him through the glare of the many curses, hexes and whatever else was going on.

After Voldemort's hissed command to kill Harry, there had been a pregnant pause throughout the hall. Then one of the Death Eaters, Hermione thought it was probably Lucius Malfoy, had taken a step forwards and shouted the Killing Curse at the top of his lungs.

That had been the catalyst and even before that first Avada Kedavra had hit Harry a dozen more curses, of every shape, description and force, were hurled at the waiting Boy Who Lived. Every one of the students trapped in the hall, save those standing on the stage with the teachers, had dropped to the floor or crawled under the tables to avoid being caught in the crossfire. The Death Eaters appeared to think that in this case, after having witnessed Harry nearly incinerate their leader, overkill was a good idea.

It seemed impossible that anyone could shout and scream so many curses, one after the other, without pausing to take breath. Yet, Hermione noted abstractly, that was what the Death Eaters were doing. Avada Kedavra and Cruciatus were the two most common curses that they were hitting Harry with, but there was still a wide range of others being used. Pretty much everything except the kitchen sink was flying through the air.

Then again, it seemed impossible that anyone could survive being on the receiving end of so many curses. Surviving a single casting of Avada Kedavra was one thing, still impossible, but it had been done before. Once. Surviving dozens, perhaps hundreds, of that same curse... well, that was something entirely different. Of course, if anyone could, it was Harry.

Besides, Hermione mused, she would have known if he was dead. She did not know how or why she could feel it, but she knew he was alive.

Somewhere in that mess.

After perhaps a good five minute of continuous fire the Death Eaters slowly tapered off and lowered their wands. All eyes became focused on the centre of the Great Hall as students poked their heads out from under cover, both eager, yet dreading to see the results of such a furious barrage of magic.

It was like watching ball lightning Hermione decided after a moment observation. A great big, bleeding example of ball lightning, three yards across, but that was the closest analogy she could think of. The opalescent sphere of energy thrummed deeply, like a massive dynamo of power, as arcs of colour crackled across its surface. Occasionally one of these tendrils would whip out and

snap against the stone floor or the wooden tables, leaving a whips of smoke drifting upward from where it had touched.

"That is a lot of magic," breathed George, his eyes wider than ever before.

"That is a shitload of magic," corrected Fred, eyes just as wide as his twin's.

Gradually the iridescent sphere grew less opaque, slowly becoming first translucent, then transparent and finally disappearing entirely. It seemed to Hermione, who was watching closely, that the energy did not simply dissipate, but was actually being drawn away, siphoned off.

And there was Harry.

His jet black hair was a messy as it had always been and his green eyes sparkled playfully over the rims of his round glasses, which had slid low down his nose. The stately scarlet and gold robes he wore were unruffled and, impossibly, untouched by the tumultuous forces that had been playing around him. A slightly amused and perhaps even condescending smile sat on his lips as he reached up and pushed his glasses up.

"That tickled."

Ron made a choking noise that sounded like an attempt to stifle a disbelieving laugh. Hermione understood the feeling. Harry had just survived enough curses to kill just about every person at Hogwarts and yet there he stood, completely unaffected, and all he had to say about it was that it tickled?

Voldemort, who was leaning weakly against the back wall, had until this point been wearing a smugly superior smile. Now he gaped at Harry, terror visibly blooming in his red eyes, and made an odd gurgling whimper. The Death Eaters seemed to be in a similar state of shock, especially since it had been their spells that Harry was dismissing so casually.

"I couldn't help but overhear, Tom, before I arrived," Harry said, twirling his wand in his hand as he glanced around the hall, looking from one Death Eater to the next, "How you supposedly gave all your Death Eaters a choice. I believe it was; surrender or else."

Harry's eyes were gleaming dangerously and the smile on his lips had transformed into that of a predator. After matching gazes with every single Death Eater in the Great Hall, Harry returned his attention to the stage and Voldemort. He stopped twirling his wand and dropped his hand loosely by his side.

"In the interests of symmetry," he announced, "I'll give you all the exact same choice. Surrender or else."

"Or else?" spat one of the Death Eaters contemptuously. Again Hermione thought she recognised the voice as belonging to Lucius Malfoy.

Eyes not straying from Voldemort, Harry replied curtly, "I kill you."

As he had before, Lucius took a broad step forward and levelled his wand at Harry, the hood of his billowing black robe falling back and exposing his face. His mouth was curled in a furious snarl, baring his even white teeth, while his cold grey eyes burnt with icy intensity.

"Avada-"

The only part of Harry that moved were his eyes, which snapped towards the elder Malfoy as he began to shout. Not far from where Malfoy was standing by the Slytherin table, one of the many golden steak knives lifted up and hurtled through the air. Malfoy's shout changed to one of pain as the blade stabbed right through his hand, knocking his wand loose. As the wand was falling it suddenly changed direction in midair and jerked to Harry. Just before it reached him the wand exploding into a thousand tiny splinters which rained down around Harry, though not one piece managed to touch him.

"Five," Harry said as Malfoy screamed in pain and rage, reaching with his uninjured hand to try and pull the knife out. He tugged and strained, but as had happened to Voldemort earlier, he could not budge the utensil as blood seeped thickly from the wound.

"Four," Harry continued, his eyes sliding back to Voldemort, who was watching the proceedings with a look of abject terror on his pale, blistered face. As he counted, another knife launched towards Malfoy, embedding itself in his thigh this time. Malfoy cried out in pain and grabbed at the knife, but could not pull it free either.

"Three."

This time two knives sped into motion, sinking into Malfoy's other thigh and his uninjured arm's shoulder. The silver haired Death Eater was screaming now, falling to his knees as his legs gave out under him.

"Two."

More knives rose from the Slytherin table and flew at the injured Death Eater. One stabbed into each of his arms, another into a calf and a fourth one sliced through his other hand. Malfoy gave a pain filled wail, tiny flecks of blood flying from his lips as the knives dug and twisted into him.

Harry's face seemed carved from stone as he spoke, "This is your last chance. If you haven't laid down your wands and surrendered by the time I finish counting..."

A handful of the more cowardly Death Eaters, scattered about the hall, practically threw their wands to the floor and took long steps back, hands held high above their heads. But most of the dark wizards held their ground, keeping their wands firmly in hand.

Voldemort seemed furious and glared balefully at those who had surrendered and bellowed to the bulk that had remained loyal, "Traitors! Kill them!"

"One."



Despite the dark lord's orders, not a single Death Eater budged an inch as the word dropped like a stone. All eyes turned to Malfoy, who was gasping for breath, as a lone knife rose up from the Slytherin table, bobbing gently up and down in the air. Malfoy looked up and stared at the blade just as it flew into motion. He opened his mouth to scream, but completely lost the ability to make any sound as the knife sank its entire length into his groin.

With an incoherent choking noise, Malfoy jerked sharply and toppled over. He hit the stone floor of the Great Hall with all the grace of a felled tree, his limbs twitching and spasming in agony as he finally found his voice and began to shriek with pain.

"Time's up," declared Harry, "Don't say I didn't warn you."

In the space of ten seconds it was all over. Only the five Death Eaters that had cast aside their wands survived the experience without injury, suffering only the indignity of a simple Leg Locker Curse and conjured up manacles that tightly bound their hands together. The others, however, were not treated as gently.

With what was probably excessive force the still loyal Death Eaters were sent hurtling through the air, smashing hard against the stone walls of the Great Hall. Those that retained hold of their wands during the collision, and subsequent breaking of bones, were utterly helpless to use them as the walls behind them turned to liquid. With their arms and legs spread-eagled, the Death Eaters found their hands and feet sinking into the stone, wands and all. Before they could even try to pull themselves free the stone solidified once more, trapping the hapless Death Eaters where they hung.

The students stood or sat where they were, motionless, their faces white and almost as pale as Voldemort's. Several collapsed in dead faints, while others began grinning stupidly. Up on the stage Harry's friends, the teachers and Voldemort stood perfectly still and looked at The Boy Who Lived in amazement and terror. Harry had done it all without moving, his wand held loosely by his side, and his eyes remaining firmly fixed on Voldemort throughout.

"But - but you said you'd kill them!" blurted a fourth-year Hufflepuff, standing up to stare at Harry with uncertain eyes. He seemed almost indignant that Harry had not done so.

Harry looked at the boy and shrugged, "I lied." Grinning his familiar, sheepish, smile, Harry turned to the stage and Voldemort.

"I'm a Gryffindor, not a murderer," his eyes darkened ominously and a hush fell over the hall as Harry stared across its length at his life long nemesis. "Still, no guarantees I'll be so merciful when dealing with Tom."

For the first time since his arrival Harry moved from the spot of his appearance, his Gryffindor colour robes swirling about him. He began to slowly wind his way down the central aisle of the hall, towards the staff table. Aside from a few moans and groans coming from the trapped Death Eaters and some pathetic mewlings from the fallen Lucius, the room was for the most part silent.

"Magic is just like everything else in the universe," said Harry as he walked slowly, adopting a lecturing tone of voice, "If you can understand it, you can control it."

Emerald eyes, burning with an inner flame, remained firmly locked on Voldemort. "If you can control it, you can destroy it."

Hermione was vaguely aware of Dean and Seamus, slightly behind her, helping to prop Dumbledore into a sitting position. In some fashion she was a bit embarrassed that they all had seemingly forgotten the headmaster up to this point. Still, considering what was transpiring... she was sure he would understand their failing to try and aid him.

"That's what you're afraid of, isn't it, Tom?"

Harry was no longer meandering his way forward, but was now stalking ever so slowly forward. His determined strides seemed full of menace. Taken as a whole, his posture was one of pure foreboding.

"That's why you tried to kill me."

Voldemort was visibly quivering, but held his blacken wand tightly in his hands. His skin of skeletal fingers was drawn tightly over his knuckles, clenching the wand so firmly, that the many blisters had burst and a watery liquid was dripping to the floor.

"That's why you killed my parents to get at me."

Harry was almost at the foot of the stage and Hermione could see that he was gripping his impossibly repaired wand just as tightly as Voldemort. His knuckles were almost bone white and his hand seemed to tremble almost imperceptible with suppressed emotion.

"That's why you are still so eager to try and kill me."

Ron was clutching her shoulder with one hand, his anxiety rising with each step Harry took. The tension mounted as Harry climbed up onto the stage, now only a scarce few metres from Voldemort, who seemed rooted to the spot.

"That's why you're afraid of me."

Dumbledore had finally broken free of the glowing green bindings that had been restraining him. He was helped to stand by Dean and Neville, a palpable aura of power and authority growing around him as he rose his feet. Yet, as with everyone else, the aged headmaster did naught, save place a reassuring hand on both boy's shoulders and watch what was happening.

"You know."

The two words had same effect on Voldemort as a sharp slap across the face. The dark lord jerked back from Harry, who was now standing almost toe-to-toe with him. With shaky legs, Voldemort stumbled backwards, until he brushed up against the scorched wall leaving him trapped with

nowhere left to turn.

"You know that I can understand magic."

Harry, not bothering to follow, remained standing at the front of the stage. Hermione was only a couple of long steps away from him now, yet she could not move. Nobody, it seemed, was willing to interfere in what they all suddenly knew would be the last encounter between The Boy Who Lived and He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named.

"You know that I can control magic."

He lifted up his empty hand, palm up, and a ball of light silently swirled into existence. It floated in the air, just above Harry's open hand, glowing the same sickly green that came from a Killing Curse. From where she was standing Hermione could barely detect a faint hum, the sound of death itself being caged by Harry's will.

"You know that I can destroy magic."

The revelation in that sentence certainly drew the attention of everyone that heard. As if to underscore his words, the tennis ball sized sphere of green light vanished with a low pop, gone from sight and hearing as though it had never existed.

"Destroy you."

The words dropped like stones, uttered with such finality that it scared her. Voldemort was more than simply scared. A look of such fear and unmasked terror crossed his face that nobody would have been the least bit surprised if he suddenly fell to his knees and started begging.

"And so you tried to kill me," continued Harry, ignoring how Voldemort's naked expression was forced behind a veil of anger and frustration. The dark lord literally hissed at him, his teeth bared in a snarl.

"I would have succeeded," he seethed, "Had your Mudblood mother not interfered."

"Your first mistake," Harry acknowledged with a nod. His eyes then flickered and his already stony expression became truly terrifying to behold. The Grim Reaper himself could not match the look of inevitable, and final, judgement that Harry was expressing. "Your last mistake."

Voldemort's grim look of defiance wavered, but he obviously struggled to muster himself and glare menacingly back at Harry. But he could not still the telltale tremors that caused his limbs to shake ever so lightly.

"You interfered with something that should never be tampered with," Harry explained, his voice cold and harsh. He sounded like a stern judge passing down a death sentence. "And I punished you for it. Stripped you of your body, your power."

Until now the Great Hall had been almost entirely silent, everyone watching and waiting in quiet

anticipation. Harry next words however sent a wave of muted whispers and murmurings rushing out and over the students at their tables.

"But I kept a part of you," he said. Harry reach up and laid his hand on his chest, over his heart, "Here, inside of me. A shadow of midnight terror. Death."

Hermione took a short step forward in protest, the first movement anyone had made since Harry walked up to the stage. His eyes flicked over to her and she stopped before taking another step as he shook his head a fraction. Harry turned back to Voldemort, who was pressed back against the cold stone wall, his fast and ragged breathing loud over the low mutterings of the audience.

"I have come back to finish what I started, fourteen years ago."

The words were a death knell. And in that moment Hermione knew that regardless of whatever happened next, Voldemort would not live to see another day.

"I am going to destroy the one thing you covet more than anything else."

Nobody could resist the shivers that ran up and along their spines. Harry seemed to loom above a defiant standing Voldemort, his shadow falling long and dark over everything that stood before him. Anyone that could see Harry at this moment would never again be able to consider him fully human. He was beyond the definition of human.

"More than power."

A deep chill began to permeate the Great Hall. Despite the glowing fires and the flickering torches, an arctic cold descended over them. Breathes began to condense in billowing clouds of vapour as cloaks and robes were drawn close and tight.

"More than fear."

The fires were almost extinguished, barely surviving as dark crimson coals that shimmered and glowed in subdued protest. The very air of the Great Hall grew dark and foreboding, the ceiling was a mass of rolling, lightning free, black clouds.

"More than pain."

Everyone jolted as the massive front doors slammed shut with a reverberating bang, all the other entrances swinging closed at the same time. The walls, arches, roof and even the floor seemed to groan in protest against the ever mounting tension.

"More than life itself."

Harry's eyes somehow continued to gleam despite the darkness that had engulfed the room and his smooth tenor dropped to a low growl.

"And when I am done you will be what you despise more than anything else."

Hermione frowned, wondering just what Harry could mean by this. Until now she had been listening with mounting dread and grief, sure that he was going to kill his opponent.

"Your father."

And suddenly it all became clear. A fitting punishment for the man, the creature, that had caused so much hurt and pain and sorry. Something far worse than anything else that could be brought upon him.

"A Muggle."

Voldemort screamed, whether from terror or outrage no-one could tell, and pushed off the wall he had been leaning against. His tall and skeletal body, covered in blisters and burns, gleamed sickly in the dim light as he tried to escape. It was too late, however, as Harry raised his wand level with Voldemort's chest.

"Sic transit gloria mundi."

The dark lord froze where he was standing, transfixed in one stop, as a shimmering white and gold light streamed from the tip of Harry's wand. The beam of light washed over him and his body began to glow by itself. The air began to stir restlessly, ruffling the hair and clothes of everyone watching. Slowly the breeze picked up and a strong wind, a wild hurricane centred where Voldemort had been standing, scattering the cutlery lying abandoned on the tables, shifting the teacher's chairs, making the long benches and tables groan and creak and causing the robes of everyone present to whip noisily around them.

The light had been growing progressively brighter, eventually causing Voldemort to vanish from view in the blinding glare. It was brighter than the summer sun, glowing white with streaks of gold and red and shimmering swirls of every colour that could exist and been seen.

Then, in a rush of air and with the hush of a dying star, it was stopped.

"Tom Riddle," Harry greeted with a small and pitying smile, "Been a while."

There on the stage, where Voldemort had been standing, swayed a young teenaged boy. His hair was the same raven black as Harry's but neater and somehow duller. His eyes, which were open wide and staring, were a cold grey and disturbing in their intensity. The traditional black robes of a Hogwarts student, clothing his tall and lithe body, shifted as he gaped down at his perfectly normal, human, body.

It was Tom Marvolo Riddle, as he had been fifty years ago. He looked up at Harry, mouth working silently, his expression one of unfettered shock. Then his eyes narrowed and he looked at Harry with a sly and calculating gaze. In a blink his wand, thirteen and a half inches of yew, was aimed at boy who had done this to him.

"Avada Kedavra!"

For all the effect Riddle produced, he might as well have been holding a simple twig picked from the Forbidden Forest. He stared stupidly at his wand for a moment, clearly struggling to comprehend what was happening. Disbelief tore at his clean cut features and he began stabbing his wand again and again at Harry, voice rising in pitch with every shouted word,

"Avada Kedavra! Avada Kedavra!! AVADA KEDAVRA!!!"

Riddle was growing frantic at his continuing failure, almost on the verge of tears. Hermione, Ron, Dumbledore, Snape and everyone else could do nothing else look on. The once most feared and powerful dark lord to have risen to power in over a century reduced to a Muggle.

None of them were paying attention to the bundle of rags and flesh curled up on a stretcher not far away. Not even Madam Pomfrey, who was standing only a foot away, saw Wormtail's trembling hand dip into the folds of his blood soaked robes. By the time they realized that his wand was pointing shakily at the now near hysterical Tom Riddle it too late.

"Av-ada... Ke-kedav-ra..." he croaked hoarsely, finally garnering their attention.

And so, with only those two words as an epitaph, Tom Marvolo Riddle collapsed in the Great Hall of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, his lifeless body falling limply at the feet of Harry James Potter.

TBC...

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# Midnight Avatar

## Part Four

Hermione stared down at the limp body of Tom Riddle, lying lifeless at Harry's feet. Nobody seemed to know what to do. Hogwarts: A History was filled with stories and little anecdotes about the things that had occurred over the centuries. Somehow she doubted there was a precedent for anything like what had just transpired in the Great Hall.

The most powerful dark lord in several centuries literally having the magic seemingly sucked out of him until he was no more than an everyday Muggle. And all that being done to him by a fifteen year old boy, who seemed almost as surprised by the outcome as everybody else.

Wormtail... Peter Pettigrew... killed his own master.

Harry seemed to be having similar thoughts, Hermione noticed. He was looking down at Riddle's body, an strange look of sadness in his startling green eyes. Shaking his head sadly he looked to where Pettigrew was curled on the stretcher Madam Pomfrey had conjured up earlier. After a few moments deliberation he turned away from the crumpled form at his feet and made his way across the stage.

Hermione took a small step forward as Harry was passing her, causing him to stop and turn to her. She was about to speak, she didn't really know what she was going to say, but he silenced her with a finger to her lips.

Until then she had not known what to expect from Harry. After such a display as he had just given she had doubted whether or not she would be able to relate and interact with her old friend. As his finger brushed against her lips Hermione knew she had nothing to worry about. He was not an all-powerful wizard. He was not some primal force of nature.

He was Harry. Just Harry.

He smiled timidly at her, almost as if he were afraid she would flinch away from him, "I've got one or two things left to wrap up. We can talk after that, 'kay?"

"Okay, Harry," she agreed with a small nod. It was incredible. His touch felt like fire on her skin and his voice, a deeper tenor than before, seemed to reverberate through her. As he went past Hermione thought that the brilliant scarlet and gold of his robes seemed duller somehow, less vibrant than before.

"Don't worry," he assured her, "It's over now."

Harry made his way to where Pettigrew was lying, giving a nod and encouraging grin to Ron and the rest of the students as he passed them. Pettigrew was trembling on the stretcher, his wand limp in his remaining hand. Harry knelt down alongside him and placed a stilling hand on the man's



shoulder.

"You didn't have to do that, Peter," he said, a small amount of reproach in his voice.

"I brought... him back... into... this world," gasped Pettigrew, his breath coming in unsteady pants, "It seems... seems only... fitting... that I take... him out... of... it."

Harry looked over Pettigrew's injured body and shook his head, "You're dying. You know that, don't you?"

Pettigrew's smile was a thin and humourless one, "My master... was not... happy... with me... after you... slipped... from his grasp."

A slight chuckle seemed to escape Harry, "Yes, I'd imagine he wasn't please that you helped me to escape. Thank you for that."

"Don't be," Pettigrew shook his head, coughing as he spoke, "I'm the one... who captured you... in the first place. But you... you saved my life... two years ago... from M-moony and... Sirius. I was... indebted... you. A wizard's debt. Paid... in blood."

"The blood you took from me last year?" Harry asked, his voice strained.

"Do not... for a moment... think that I... I am doing... doing this for you... out of any... sense of... seeking redemption, Harry," he wheezed as his movements became sluggish and his breath thin, "I am... beyond that... now. It's fourteen... years... too late... for... me."

Pettigrew's eyes were glazing over and Hermione doubted he could even see Harry properly anymore, but even as his last breath slipped away, he seemed to focus on a point beyond the boy kneeling at his side. A faint smile of contentment and satisfaction seemed to curve around the corners of his mouth as his head slumped gently back and he grew still.

Harry sighed and reached up a hand to close the dead Marauder's eyes. "Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine et lux perpetua luceat eis," he muttered as he did so. After a moment Harry rose to his feet, his robes looking faded and worn, as though very old.

"Goodbye Peter," he said, "Some will mourn your passing. Most will not."

With a wave and gesture of his wand, Harry levitated Pettigrew's body off the stretcher, lying him down gently on the stage. With a glance towards the Slytherin table Harry directed his wand towards the curled up form of Lucius Malfoy. Surprisingly none of the students clustered nearby the fallen Death Eater were attempting to offer him any aid. Not even his son, who was standing proud and dishevelled only a few metres away.

"Mobilicorpus," Harry said and a moment later the elder Malfoy was drifting through the air to the stage. Harry settled him down, with a bit of a malicious thump, on the stretcher so recently occupied by Pettigrew. Once the injured Death Eater was in place Harry waved his wand again and muttered under his breath, causing thick leather straps to appear and secure Malfoy's arms and

legs to the stretcher's side.

"He should be alright," Harry said as he turned to a bewildered looking Madam Pomfrey, "As long as the knives aren't removed all at once the blood loss should be minimal. I don't recommend treating him while he's conscious and certainly not without an armed guard present. Best just do what is needed to prevent him from dying, leave the rest for the Ministry."

Madam Pomfrey nodded and quickly levitated the stretcher into the air, guiding it with her wand towards the nearest exit from the Hall. Hardly anyone appeared sorry to see the Malfoy patriarch being carried out, mewling pitifully, especially Draco who was tracking his father's progress with cold grey eyes that were blazing with barely checked cold fury.

The Death Eaters and their master had shown their true colours during the attack, destroying any illusions harboured by those that might have wanted to join their ranks. At that moment Hermione was certain not a single student present would ever again consider turning. Considering the Death Eater's actions and Harry's swift retribution, she could hardly bring herself to be surprised.

Harry watched as the nurse left to the infirmary, with Lucius drifting behind her. Once she was out of the hall he turned to face both his friends and the headmaster, his robes now dull a grey and brown that hung limply from him.

"Professor Dumbledore," he greeted with a solemn nod, the grave effect somewhat ruined by the mischievous gleam in his sparkling green eyes and the barely, but masterfully, suppressed grin that threatened to spread across his face.

"Harry," acknowledged Dumbledore with an equally solemn nod, also robbed of its graveness by the devilish sparkle in his own eyes, which peered over his half moon spectacles, and the twitch of his moustache that indicated his struggle to hold back a smile.

"You certainly know how to make an entrance," the headmaster observed, glancing over the throng of students who were watching closely with bated breath. His voice was unable to hide the joyous delight that was bubbling from within the old wizard at Harry's unexpected return.

Finally the smile he was withholding broke free and Harry grinned happily, "If you're going to make an impression, best make a big one," he answered impishly.

Dumbledore nodded sagely, but with equal amusement, and pointed, "I think I should point out that your robes appear to be losing their finish."

"Yeah, well," Harry looked down at his robes as they flickered and reverted to their original form, "My entrance wouldn't have been *quite* so impressive if I had made it in my pyjamas."

Hermione had to admit he was right, and Ron standing beside her seemed to be agreeing from the way he was laughingly shaking his head. The old and far too large pyjamas hung on Harry's lanky frame, the blue and green pattern scuffed with dirt and grime and torn in places. The regal red and gold robes had been much better looking, even if they had been transfigured.

"Potter," asked Snape waspishly, "do you think you could be kind enough to bother explaining just what *exactly* has happened here?"

"I'd have thought it was obvious," replied Harry, turning to face Snape with the look of someone resigned to never be on the Potions Master's good side.

Hermione could not restrain herself any more and stepped up to Harry, somehow managing to keep her composed exterior in place. As he looked at her, a question in his eyes, she wordlessly shook her head and threw herself at him.

She had hugged Harry before, usually before or after he came within an inch of getting himself either killed or horribly maimed. But this time, this time something about it felt different.

"Oh, god, Harry!" she gasped, crushing him in her arms, "Don't you ever bloody think of doing something like this again! Ever! D'you hear me?"

Harry cradled her in his arms, gently rocking her back and forth as she tried her damndest to break every rib in his body. His hands were flitting around her back and when he trailed one of them up her spine she shivered at the sensation.

"As delightful as this may feel, 'Mione," he wheezed after a minute or so, "I would like to breath sometime soon. I'm starting to see spots."

Hermione eased up on her death grip, but still kept Harry firmly in her grasp. Off to one side she heard one of the twins snort with amusement, "He can knock the stuffing out of You-Know-Who, but ickle Hermione here comes close to killing him. Go figure, eh?"

"Oi! Shut up!" protested Harry, flushing a remarkable shade of red, "Or else they'll be putting up a monument for the two of you as well as him." He jerked his thumb across the stage towards Riddle's corpse.

"A monument?" asked McGonagall incredulously, "A monument for You-Know-Who?"

Harry nodded in a seemingly serious fashion as he gently extracted himself from Hermione's tight grip, "I was thinking something along the lines of; *'Here lies Tom Marvolo Riddle. He valued the purity of blood above all else. Little did he realize that he himself was only human.'*"

Nobody could tell if Harry was joking or not. Harry drew one of the empty chairs from around the charred staff table and slumped into it. He sank down with a volcanic sigh and stretched out his arms and legs, revealing a pair of dirty, mismatched socks on his feet. Hermione recognised them as the pair Dobby had given him the previous Christmas.

"Ooooh, my aching feet," he groaned, "Heck, my aching everything."

"How do you feel?" asked Ginny anxiously, sandwiched between Fred and George.

Harry looked over at her and grinned, "Like I've been trampled by a rampaging herd of

Hippogriffs." He rolled his eyes at the thought and slumped even further back against the chair,

Dumbledore stood forward then, gently resting a hand on Harry's shoulder, "I think, Harry, that we should adjourn to my office for an explanation. After that you may get some well deserved rest."

"In a bed?" asked Harry eagerly.

"In a bed," confirmed Dumbledore with a smile, "I think your housemates will be very much relieved now that you are returned to us."

"A bed," repeated a blissful Harry, "That sounds almost too good to be true."

Dumbledore's eyes were sparkling mischievously as he took hold of Harry's arm and attempted to lever him to his feet, "I can well imagine that sleep is foremost on your mind right now, Harry, but I'm afraid we require an explanation first."

"Personally I think that's a terrible idea," said Harry as he stood up, stifling a yawn, "If I fall asleep somewhere in the middle remember it's all *your* fault."

Dumbledore quickly delegated orders to the rest of the staff, asking McGonagall to call the Ministry in to clean up the mess and take the Death Eaters into custody. Snape, Flitwick and all the others, along with the house Prefects, were to escort the students back to their dormitories.

Harry stepped off the stage and made for the exit that led towards where Dumbledore's office was, followed by Hermione and Ron. Snape seemed about to protest their inclusion, but a look from Dumbledore silenced him.

"Potter!"

Harry paused and turned as everyone stopped what they were doing and listened intently. The feud between Harry and Draco was well known to everybody at Hogwarts. Almost legendary in fact. So when the two faced off yet again, everyone stilled to wait and see what happened next.

Bright green eyes locked with glittering grey eyes as the two boys stood before each other. Malfoy's pale face was a dispassionate mask as he momentarily studied Harry's own inscrutable countenance.

After a moment of consideration he seemed to come to a decision about something and directed a fractional nod towards Harry, who was waiting patiently. One of Harry's eyebrows rose a fraction and then he returned the nod in the spirit it was given.

"This doesn't change anything, y'know," drawled Malfoy, "I still think you're an arrogant, stuck-up prick."

"And you're a spoiled, prejudiced bastard," replied Harry, "Guess we'll just have to stick with what works and carry on hating each others guts."

Malfoy smiled thinly and gave another nod before turning to start directing his housemates on their way down to the dungeons. Harry stood silently amidst the bustling students for a minute, watching as Malfoy bossed his fellow Slytherins around. Finally he shook his head and continued on his way to Dumbledore's office.

"Remind me to watch my back around him," he muttered to Hermione as they trudged down the corridor and finally came to the stone gargoyle that guarded entrance to the headmaster's office.

"Humbug!" declared Dumbledore and then escorted the three children inside.

The four of them climbed the winding stairway up to the large circular office. There Dumbledore motioned them to take seats in the large, overstuffed chairs in front of his desk. After the students had seated themselves the old wizard rounded the desk and sat in his own chair, which creaked as he sank onto it.

"I wish I could tell you precisely what happened, but I can't," began Harry, apologetically, "I can only tell what I know, what I experienced, which I'm afraid has a great deal of gaps. Interrogation of the Death Eaters might reveal the finer details."

Hermione scraped her chair until she was sitting right by Harry, Ron following next to her. They had both missed him over the past month, Hermione especially, and wanted to be as close to him as they could. Chances were he would not leave their sight for another month if either of them had any say in the matter.

"It started on the New Year, although I'm willing to bet things were set in motion much earlier, probably some time around Christmas."

Harry was stroking his chin thoughtfully as he spoke, "I don't know how Pettigrew got into the castle, but it was probably in his Animagus form. No slight to Filch, but nobody's going to notice an extra rat scampering about. I still haven't figured out how he managed to get into the Gryffindor tower, but he managed it somehow."

He green eyes blazing dangerously for a second, "I woke up just as Pettigrew grabbed me and activated another portkey. Like the one from the Third Task, last year. Before I could do or say anything we were transported to Voldemort's private hellhole. Azkaban."

"Azkaban!" exclaimed Ron, paling at the very mention of the wizarding world's most feared prison.

"A perfect hiding place for him," agreed Dumbledore, "The Dementors are creatures of the utmost darkness and would make suitable allies for him during his reign."

Harry shuddered at the memory, "It certainly earned its reputation. Coldest, darkest place I've ever been. It's a miracle Sirius managed to survive in there for so long."

Hermione almost reached out a hand to comfort him, but restrained herself before the motion was

even half formed. She knew how uncomfortable Harry got during open displays of affection or comfort, she remembered how he would always tense up whenever she hugged him. He simply wasn't used to the experience.

"Malfoy was there waiting," Harry continued after a time. "Him, Nott and MacNair were the welcoming committee laid out for me. They trussed me up with those magical bindings everyone seems so fond of and Malfoy took my wand away. Then they dragged me inside the prison..."

His eyes lost focus as he recalled the event, "I thought Voldemort would have wanted to be at the top of it all. I should've guessed he'd prefer to stay in the bottom-most dungeon. He had carved or conjured up a throne for himself, he was sitting on it when we entered. Looked almost alive, really, hundreds of snakes coiled around and around each other."

Hermione licked her lips and asked, "Who else was there?"

"Everyone I think," admitted Harry, "Except for Snape. Voldemort did a lot of talking when they brought me in. Went on and on and on about how he was the greatest sorcerer in the world and how he was destined for absolute dominance, blah blah blah. Apparently he knew Snape was working as a double agent, but kept him alive so he could pass false information to our side."

"Hmm. A good thing for Severus that he did," said Dumbledore, stroking his beard, "Normally Voldemort would have killed any spies that he discovered."

Harry shook his head, "He was going to kill him, just not right away. He's more useful to Voldemort alive than dead at the time. Anyways... Malfoy eventually got around to presenting him with my wand at which point he made a big show of snapping it in half. He tossed the pieces to me and then told Pettigrew to release me so that we could duel. He wanted to see if I fared better without the *Priori Incantatem* to help me."

Harry began to pull pensively at his bottom lip, "Pettigrew picked up the pieces and cut me loose from the rope. Then he gave me my wand... *and a specially made portkey* . Voldemort was talking to the Death Eaters about how he was finally going to get to duel me without anything interfering or interrupting us. He bowed and then hit me with the *Cruciatius Curse*."

"Oh, Harry," breathed Hermione, clutching her face with her hands and digging her nails into her cheeks as Harry recounted what had happened.

"It's okay, 'Mione," Harry assured her, "I don't know how long I was under the curse but at some point the portkey activated. I'm just lucky I didn't drop it."

Dumbledore leaned forward somewhat and asked, "I trust you do not need any immediate attention by Madam Pomfrey?"

Harry gave an embarrassed cough and gingerly pressed his right arm against his side, "Actually I think I might have a couple of cracked ribs, but nothing serious."

Ron sputtered for a moment, "Ribs - you - nothing serious?!"

"It's not that bad, Ron, honestly," said Harry, patting himself on the injured area and trying to hide the wince, "Just a little uncomfortable. I'm sure I can live long enough to tell the rest of what happened before stopping by the Hospital Wing."

"So where did Peter's portkey take you, Harry?" asked Dumbledore.

"That's where things get a little strange," replied Harry, "I don't really know what happened but something went wrong with the portkey. Or something went right if you want to look at it that way. I don't know what caused it, it could have been because of the curse or not. I was a little distracted at the time so I wasn't paying much attention. Even if I was I wouldn't have been able to understand how the magic was focusing."

Hermione was curious, "You've said that before, '*understand magic*'. What do you mean by that?"

Harry looked at her and shrugged, "As I said, that's where things get strange. You all know how it feels to travel by portkey; a tugging and pulling, then everything twists and suddenly you're someplace else. You experience the entire journey from start to finish. This time it was different somehow."

"What do you mean?" asked Ron.

"Just when everything came to a point, that moment before you arrive at your destination, there was... a moment of... something," explained Harry, grasping for words, "I can't even call it a moment, because I don't know how long it lasted. A moment or an eternity. It could have been either."

For a long time Harry sat there, staring into space and seeing something only he knew. After a while Dumbledore cleared his throat and asked, "What happened in this 'moment', Harry?"

"Something wonderful," replied Harry rapturously, "It was... wonderful. I still don't know how it happened or why, but suddenly it was like... it was like a rubber band stretched too far and then snapped or... a light switching on in the middle of absolute darkness. I just... I understood."

"Understood what?" asked Hermione, thinking that perhaps she already knew the answer.

"Practically everything."

The bald statement caused the other three occupants of the office to stare at Harry with round eyes, or in Dumbledore's case a bright twinkle and a twitch of his moustache. Harry for his part simply rested back in his chair and continued to gazing into nothingness, remembering.

"I can understand magic on every level, down to the point where I can even manipulate spells on a base level. I can... 'see' magic, the way it works, how it works, why it works. I know what effects it will have, on itself, on its surroundings, on other forms of magic, everything."

Harry seemed to return to the present and turned his eyes to Dumbledore, "After that, that one moment, the portkey deposited me in Hogsmeade. Right outside the Shrieking Shack, actually. I was almost back at Hogwarts when I spotted Voldemort entering through the front doors, disguised like me and with all his Death Eaters literally hanging around outside."

He smiled and gave a shrug, "I was able to figure out what was happening inside the castle by looking at the magic that enchants the ceiling of the Great Hall. That's how I knew what was going on, by reading the way the enchantment reacted to the people beneath it."

"At which point you apparated through the wards," observed Dumbledore with a chuckle.

"Not through the wards. Around them," corrected Harry, "I manipulated the wards to create a funnel through the ceiling, so I could make my grand entrance as you described it. The lightning wasn't really planned, it was more a side-effect of changing the wards' shape so quickly which produced the build up."

"Bloody impressive for a '*side-effect*' ," noted Ron.

"Actually I was quite a bit surprised to find the entire school here," observed Harry after giving his friend an apologetic shrug, "I didn't think school would be back for another day or two."

"Harry," explained Hermione softly, "You've been gone a month."

"A month?"

"Yes"

"A month?"

"It's the first weekend of February now, Harry," stated Dumbledore.

"You've missed all of January," confirmed Hermione

"Bugger," Harry swore with a frown, "That means I missed the match against Ravenclaw."

Finis.

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