

Those Who Still Hunt Death Eaters

It was drawing close to midnight as a group of two wizards, one witch, a dog and (oddly enough) a battered turquoise Ford Anglia, stood by the edge of the ritual spell seal currently adorning the floor of the Great Hall.

"D'you think it'll work this time?" asked the one wizard, a redhead, as the dog stood muttering over an ancient and elaborately bound spell book.

"If you don't get distracted," replied the witch, also a redhead.

"Hey! That was your fault for interrupting, remember?!"

"Quiet you two," chided the second wizard. "Now's not the time."

"Sorry Harry," the two apologised, cut off before they could start a proper argument.

Harry Potter smiled at his companions, Ron and Ginny Weasley, and then gestured towards the dog. "Just get ready. We'll be starting as soon as Hermione transfers the spell fragments to the book."

The three young magic users turned to watch the fourth member of their party, Hermione Granger. At this moment in time the young genius was currently a dog, more accurately, a golden Labrador. Or, at least, that is what she had originally looked like. After many long months of wandering about Britain, with several excursions to the continent, Hermione's canine body had so spell fragments imprinted upon it that she resembled a child's crude finger painting.

It had certainly been the strangest year Harry and his friends had ever experienced. And with the way their past years at Hogwarts had been, that was saying something. It had also been a very difficult and demanding year as inspecting the nude bodies of Death Eaters everywhere, trailing mayhem and destruction in their path, sounded a whole lot easier on paper than it really was in practice.

Not only was it next to impossible to find where the Death Eaters were hidden away, but stripping the clothes off of them once you did was no easy task. Most of them put up a fierce struggle, as anybody would, and one or two of them had nearly managed to kill the group before being subdued.

Even with the resurrected spirit of Sirius Black by their side, currently possessing what used to be the Weasley family car, things very seldom went according to plan. Because of this Harry and his friends experienced more life and death situations in the course of a single month than they had in the previous five years.

Worse yet, not only did they have to contend with Voldemort and his Death Eaters in their search for the spell fragments, but the Ministry had somehow gotten involved as well. Ron's over-exaggerated sense of paranoia and enthusiasm, which had resulted in several innocent citizens being stripped in cases of mistaken identity, probably had something to do with it.

The prime example of such was when Cho Chang, the school's head girl, tried to stop them. Naturally, it hadn't ended well. For Cho, that is.

Ron had, for reasons known only to himself, come to the conclusion that the Ravenclaw witch was actually a Death Eater in disguise. This train of thought promptly resulted in Cho being stripped of her clothes, tied to a log and floated down the Thames River. That had caused, quite understandably, something of a stir amongst the Muggles.

That and the fact that they had destroyed several buildings (and one bridge) in the process.

Not to mention that time when they tried astral projection in an effort to strip the ghost of a Death Eater. It was only luck that they escaped that mess, when an overly enthusiastic nun (thinking they were dead) almost cremated the bodies of the three students. As it was they had to make a wild dash from the crematorium to a nearby pond.

Hermione, being a dog, had found herself buried in the backyard of the inn they had been staying at.

There had also been the unfortunate incident where Ron had inadvertently damaged Hermione's scrying crystal, which the group used (with mixed results) in an attempt to track down anyone possessing a Dark Mark. This caused a malfunction, the subsequent misreading of which led to the rather regrettable storming of Buckingham Palace and the interruption of a royal ball of some sort.

The queen was remarkably understanding when Harry explained that it was an accident.

Eventually Minister Fudge had brought all four students, even Hermione (though she was technically a dog at the time and thus not answerable to wizarding law), up on charges before the Wizengamot. With charges varying from forced public indecency to disturbing the peace, things had not looked good.

It was only the fact that they had captured more Death Eaters in such a relatively short amount that had they had gotten off with only a warning not to risk exposure to the Muggles. Whether the judge was referring to exposing the wizarding world itself, or exposing more innocent people's bodies,

nobody dared ask.

Returning to their quest, those who hunted Death Eaters persevered through skill, determination, and sheer bloody-minded refusal to lie down and die.

Now, barely days before the end of term, the last Death Eater had fallen before them.

Peter Pettigrew, otherwise known as Wormtail, had been tracked down and promptly stripped of his clothes (much to everyone's disgust), barely half an hour's walk from Hogwarts, deep within the Forbidden Forest. The fight had not been as easy as anyone would have liked, or expected.

Pettigrew actually managed to put up a surprising struggle and had, with a lucky Reductor Curse, reduced Harry's prized Firebolt to splintered shards. For a moment it had seemed that Sirius (whose spirit had been possessing the broom) was once again lost to them. But, as luck would have it, Sirius was not so easily done away with and had somehow managed to locate Arthur Weasley's long lost Ford Anglia, which he settled on as a replacement for his previous form.

Pinning the treacherous wizard between his new (if slightly battered) front grille and one of the forest's trees, Padfoot held Pettigrew in place long enough for Harry and Ron to do their work. The little rat had, unfortunately, managed to escape, once again through the use of his animagus form, but not before Hermione had recovered the last spell fragment from his nude body.

Returning to Hogwarts, riding within Padfoot's new body, the group planned their next move. First, they would imprint the spell fragments in a blank spell book. Then they would return Hermione to her human form... and then, finally, they would collapse unconscious on the nearest available bed.

Their plans had changed, however, when the group had stumbled across none other than Draco Malfoy, whom, they knew, had taken the Dark Mark over the Easter Holidays.

It was too perfect an opportunity not to take.

Hermione had blasted the blonde-haired Slytherin with a wandless lightning spell that she had been forced to master during their adventures, as dogs could not hold a wand.

Malfoy had barely managed to put a shield up in time, thus preventing himself from being flash fried. He would have been better off if he had not done so, as the glancing blow still had enough power behind it to temporarily disorient him. This was enough to give Ron the chance to close the gap between them and demonstrate his hard-learned physical combat skills.

Which is how Malfoy found himself lying unconscious in the centre of the spell seal.

With the Dark Mark tattooed into his bruised flesh, Malfoy (now tied up by nearly a mile of conjured rope) was the most readily available conduit they had to Voldemort.

Which meant that those who hunted Death Eaters could now; transfer the spell fragments to the spell book; have Hermione revert to human form; finish casting the spell which started this mess; fully return Sirius to the land of the living; destroy Voldemort once and for all and then, finally, collapse unconscious on the nearest available bed.

Besides which, as Ron had observed about Snape in their previous attempt to cast the spell, Malfoy was an evil git and they could always hope that the spell would destroy him as well as the Dark Lord.

"It better work," muttered Ginny, leaning against Padfoot the Ford Anglia.

"If it doesn't," threatened Harry, "I'll have to kill someone."

"At last," groaned Ron in rapture, "I'll get to have some *real* curry!"

"That's Ron," noted Ginny with a grin. "Always thinking with his stomach."

"Food is better than sex," Ron declared staunchly.

"I totally agree, ruff," said Hermione, trotting up to where the three were standing. "I'm sure that any girl you ever have sex with will feel exactly the same way."

"Yeah... hey!"

Ignoring Ron, who had only just now worked out her insult, Hermione directed her attention to Harry and Ginny. They, she knew, would pay proper attention to what she had to say.

Harry knelt down beside her, so she didn't have to strain her neck looking up at him. Placing a steady hand on her shoulders, he asked, "Ready to start, Hermione?"

"Yes," she confirmed. "The spell book is primed. All I have to do is transfer the spell fragments to it."

"Do we need to do anything?" asked Ginny.

"No," Hermione shook her head. "It's all up to me."

"Just try not to screw up," warned Ron. "Knowing your luck, you'll probably turn into a panda."

"Listen you ignoramus," Hermione barked, turning to snarl at the redhead. "I wouldn't even be in this mess in the first place if you had just concentrated on the spell like you were supposed to!"

"Whatever," dismissed Ron. "Just transfer the fragments so we can get to bed."

"It's not that simple, Ron," she tried to explain, using the last of her frayed patience. "The spell has to be imprinted into the book in exactly the right sequence as the spell is put back together. It's not like I can just stick my face into the pages and have the fragments sucked off my body. This is going to be a very delicate procedure. One mistake, even the smallest mistake, could have disastrous consequences."

"You know," Ron drawled, "for a dog you have an amazing ability to turn out horse crap."

"Shut up!"

"Ron, stop baiting Hermione," ordered Harry sternly. "Hermione, don't let him get your hackles up. Just think, in a couple of minutes, you'll be human again."

Ron snorted and turned his back away from the others, grumbling under his breath about how he actually preferred Hermione the way she was. It was only Harry and Ginny's intervention that stopped their canine companion from leaping at Ron in an attempt to grievously maul him.

Quickly regaining her composure, Hermione stalked back to the open spell book. With her friends watching (she did not currently include Ron in that number, as her friendship with him had been greatly strained over the past months) she began the incantation to transfer the fragments and reassemble the final spell.

With a gentle glow and then a flash of light the first of the spell fragments vanished from her body, leaving behind unmarked tan fur, and reappeared on the spell book's open page. The second fragment followed, this time glowing a slightly different colour before shifting from Hermione to the book.

The third fragment, then the fourth, then the fifth and the many others followed soon afterwards, the time between growing shorter and shorter as each fragment transferred to the book. Soon Hermione's body was alight with a magical glow, before the display finally faded away.

"It is done," intoned Hermione as she backed away from the spell book.

Harry, Ron and Ginny came up behind her and looked over her shoulders to see the fruits of their labours. The spell book lay open at the middle, its pages decorated with densely packed lines of indecipherable runes. By strange coincidence the runes were grouped in patterns that matched the shapes of spell fragments that had gathered on Hermione's body.

"Now that looks familiar," joked Ron, earning an elbow to the ribs from his sister.

"I'd say the transfer was a success," concluded Harry, looking from the runes to Hermione's tan coat, which for the first time ever was devoid of any form of markings.

"Are they all gone?" asked Hermione apprehensively.

"Yes," confirmed Ginny. "All gone."

"Then it's time," announced Hermione, stepping back from the spell book and standing as upright as she could manage with four legs supporting her. "*Finite incantatem!*"

By all rights this should have had no effect whatsoever, as the accident which had caused the transformation was by no means an ordinary spell. However it would seem that the gods were smiling down on Hermione this night, as her form was enveloped in streams of golden light.

With a flash and crackle of magical energies, Harry, Ron and Ginny were presented with the sight of their bushy-haired friend the first time in over eight months. Hermione was standing in place, resplendent in the same elegant, pale blue dress robes she had been wearing during the first casting, her hands clenched tight and her eyes screwed closed.

"It worked!" exclaimed Ginny happily. "Hermione, it worked!"

Hermione tentatively cracked one eye open, then the other. With an expression of awe she lifted her hands in front of her face, turning them this way and that. With a sob she wrapped her arms around herself and collapsed to the floor, overcome by emotion upon finally regaining her proper form.

"What's she getting all weepy for?" asked Ron cluelessly. "It worked, didn't it?"

"Jerk!" snapped Ginny, reaching behind her to pull a thickly folded paper fan from its place beneath her uniform shirt. This was a weapon she had wielded several times since the start of their adventure, which is why she had no trouble using it to whack Ron over the head. After all, he was her usual target.

"Hey! What did you that for?!"

Harry ignored the exchange, dropped down onto his own knees and enveloped Hermione in the most loving hug he could manage. They were joined shortly by a teary-eyed Ginny, who latched onto the crying girl's other side. After spending several seconds grumbling about it, Ron added to the group hug, his long arms easily encompassing the other three. Even Padfoot, who couldn't join the hug (for obvious reasons) gave a soft and comforting bark.

"So," said Harry, once Hermione's tears of joy had subsided, "let's get this show on the road, shall we?"

"Sounds like a plan," said Ginny with a determined nod.

"Yes," agreed Hermione, smiling softly.

"Yeah!" exclaimed Ron, punching a victorious fist into the air. "It's nearly curry time!"

"Rowf! Rowf! Rowf!" agreed Padfoot, blinking his headlight on and off.

The group separated, Harry giving Hermione a helping hand up, and arrayed themselves around the edge of the seal. With the inclusion of Ginny, they had to stand at the cardinal points of the compass; Harry at the north, Ron to the east, Ginny by the south and Hermione to the west. Padfoot remained waiting impatiently by the doors to the Entrance Hall.

Hermione was the one to begin, having the spell book levitating in front of her. Her voice was soon joined by Harry and Ginny, invoking the spell in a language long dead to man. Ron was the last to pick up the chant, his own words running in counterpoint to Hermione's.

An unearthly glow began to fill the Great Hall as the seal flared to life with magic. The air about them grew heavy, charged with the growing energies.

It was now that Draco, in the centre of this swirling display, finally regained consciousness.

"W-wha? Where am... what's... who... POTTER!"

"Shit," muttered Harry in between verses, but not stopping his chant.

The spell they were invoking, once started, could not be aborted. Simply put, it was all or nothing. Remembering what had happened the last time they had been interrupted, having Draco wake up in the middle of the casting was something they had been hoping to avoid. Hopefully the ropes binding him would stop him from disrupting the proceedings.

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO ME?!" Draco demanded, rolling back and forth until he was able to somehow push himself onto his knees. His cheeks were splotched with red as he furiously ordered, "LET ME GO!! LET ME GO!!"

"What do we do?" called Ginny, keeping her focus on the spell despite Malfoy's shrieks.

"Keep going!" yelled Harry, whose eyes were on Hermione - who was working the bulk of the spell's incantation.

For a minute, it seemed as if the spell would be completed successfully. Raw magic filled the room, spilling over from the spell seal. A soft breeze swirled around, ruffling the hair and robes of those present. Shimmering streams of ethereal light began to coalesce around Padfoot, whose headlights were flashing like strobes. Nearby, growing in pulses of magic, a human form began to take shape.

Naturally, it was now that things went awry.

"What's going on here?" asked a bitter, familiar voice. "Why are you lot out after curfew?"

"HELP!! HELP!!" screamed Malfoy. "PROFESSOR SNAPE, HELP ME!!"

The spell had almost fully run its course. A ghostly Sirius Black was standing next to the Weasley's Ford Anglia. Flashes of pure magic were starting to gather around Draco, no doubt attracted to his Dark Mark. Harry could feel the tingle of Voldemort's pain, echoing through his scar. They were so close they could almost taste it.

"DRACO? POTTER! STOP THIS NONSENSE AND RELEASE MISTER MALFOY THIS INSTANT!!"

"Bugger!" swore Ron, his concentration broken by the intrusion. He half turned to glare at Snape. "Not now, you greasy-haired git!" he yelled over the howling magic. "Can't you see we're almost finished?"

"HOW DARE YOU TALK--"

"Ron, you idiot!" shrieked Hermione in horror. "Watch what you're doing!"

Ron's eyes almost bulged out of their sockets as his attention returned to the spell. Already the magic was being to lose its cohesion. Sparks of static and crackles of lightning began to spread across the seal, moving too fast for the casters to compensate for.

"Oh no! Oh no! Oh no!" pleaded Ron desperately, trying to correct his mistake.

It was too late.

"GAAAAAHHH!"

With a deafening crack that popped the ears of everyone present, the magic bound within the seal shot upwards. Forming a towering pillar of raw energy, it tore through the ceiling of the Great Hall as easily as tissue paper. Reaching high in the sky above the school, the magic gathered into a tiny dot of light before exploding like one of Fred and George's more impressive fireworks.

There was a moment of stillness, in which the various participants stood in stunned disbelief. Then the damaged section of the ceiling began to topple inwards, collapsing with a strange majesty. Harry, Ginny, Hermione and Ron, being on the edge of the seal, were able to simply back away to get clear of the falling debris.

Draco, still bound from shoulders to ankles, was forced to hop desperately for safety. Despite losing his balance several times and nearly toppling over, he almost made it too. It was his back luck, however, that a chunk of stone rubble landed on his head just as he reached the edge of the seal, knocking him out as effectively as any stunner.

"Aw, no," groaned Ron, as he and the other three Death Eater hunters gathered around Padfoot. For an inanimate object, the motorcar was looking rather dejected at this current turn of events.

"What the hell did you do that for?" demanded Hermione angrily.

"We were so close," lamented Ginny, smacking her hand to her forehead. "Ron, you moron - this is all your fault!"

"This isn't *my* fault!" countered Ron indignantly. "It was Snape! And Malfoy!"

"You're the one that stopped focusing on the spell casting," insisted Hermione.

"Snape was going to stop us!" Ron persisted.

"Fifteen more seconds and it would've been over!" wailed Ginny.

"Why couldn't you just ignore him?! He couldn't have interrupted if he tried!"

"Don't try and blame me for this! You messed up too!"

Hermione goggled and stared incredulously at him. "What?! Me?! How?!"

Ron huffed and crossed his arms over his chest and sticking his nose in the air. "You should've gagged Malfoy. That way he wouldn't have been able to call for help!"

"I didn't have a wand!" Hermione protested. "For that matter, I didn't even have any hands!"

"Besides," added Ginny, "it was your job to tie him up."

"Enough."

The group immediately grew silent and turned to stare at Harry. The Boy-Who-Lived was standing next to Padfoot, one hand resting on the car's roof.

"All this means is that we're back to square one," he said with a tired, almost resigned smile.

"Yeah, you're right," Ron muttered, quickly calming down. His gaze turned away from Hermione, over his shoulder to where Snape was standing. "Who knows, there might be some fragments right here..."

Snape's face had lost all colour, doubtless remembering when he had been stripped by those who hunt Death Eaters shortly after the first time the spell had shattered. He was under no illusions as to what Ron, and the others, would do if they managed to get their hands on him.

"GGAAAAAHHH!!!" he screamed in unbridled terror, turning on a heel and sprinting for safety as fast as he could manage in his billowing black robes. Ron followed in close pursuit, shouting invectives and commanding him to stop and submit to his fate, while Hermione, Ginny and Padfoot brought up the rear of the formation.

"Come back here and take your clothes off, you greasy-haired git!"

"Just make sure you don't pull his underwear down this time!"

"Ew, don't remind me!"

"Rowf! Rowf!"

"GGAAAAAHHH!!!"

"Gotcha!"

"NO! NNNOOOO! NNNNOOOOOO!!!"

"Ouch! Watch out for his legs!"

"I've got his arms!"

"NO! I'll kill you before I let that happen again! NO!"

Harry, who had followed after them at a sedate walk, watched as his friends fought to strip the struggling potions master. He could already hear the

running footsteps of the castle's other inhabitants, who had no doubt been drawn out of their beds by the cacophonous noise caused by the spell shattering.

"Forgive me for ripping your clothes off!"

"Rowf!"

"NO! Kill you! Kill!"

"Gak! He's trying to bite me!"

"Bugger that, hold him down so I can get his robes off!"

"Kill! Kill you all!"

"What the devil's going on in here? What's all this noise about?"

Turning to the newcomer, Harry saw that Professor McGonagall had arrived on the scene, wearing a tartan dressing gown and not looking very pleased at being woken in the dead of night. It took the stern witch several seconds to take in the sight of what was happening in the Entrance Hall. It took her several more seconds to comprehend what she was seeing.

"Mister Weasley! Miss Weasley! Stop that this instant!"

"I've got his robes off! Keep holding his arms down, Gin!"

"I'm trying!"

"Kill! Kill! Kill! All of you!"

"What are you waiting for, you dumb dog?"

"I'm not a dog any more!"

"Miss Granger? You're yourself again?"

"Rowf!"

"Whatever, just start pulling his trousers down!"

"I do not want to see Snape's bits again!"

"Stop arguing and start pulling!"

"Kill!"

"Oh dear, this does look interesting. Dare I ask what is going on?"

Harry lifted his glasses and pinched his nose. By now the Entrance Hall was host to those who hunt Death Eaters, their prey, several other professors, a few dozen curious students and now the headmaster (dressed in florescent pink pyjamas with a rich purple cloak thrown over them).

"Well," said Harry with a soft sigh. "Here we go again."

Fin.