

Chapter 2

With his newfound knowledge, Harry found the majority of his classes boring. He took to skipping Potions entirely and spending his time in his other classes working out a plan for the Horcruxes. Professor McGonagall hadn't been happy to see him ignoring her lessons, but every time she called on him to perform a spell, he did so non-verbally and with ease. After a week, she stopped calling on him entirely.

Snape's reaction hadn't been so mild. He tried to give Harry detention for missing class, but he simply didn't show up for those either. When he took the matter to Dumbledore, the headmaster dismissed Harry to talk with Snape alone. Harry didn't know what was said, but while Snape was clearly furious, he went from targeting him at every turn to pretending he didn't exist.

A vast improvement, in Harry's opinion.

"Are you alright, Harry?" Hermione asked, watching him worriedly.

Shaking himself from his thoughts, he realized he'd been staring off into nothing, his fork hovering halfway to his mouth.

"I'm fine," Harry said, setting his fork down and pushing away his breakfast. "Just a lot going on in my head."

"Is there anything I can do to help?" she asked, nibbling her bottom lip cutely.

"Not right now," Harry smiled. "But thanks for having my back, Hermione."

"Oh, you're welcome," Hermione said, ducking her head and blushing.

Harry's smile widened briefly but fell when he heard Parvati and Lavender giggling a short distance away. As glad as he was to see Lavender alive again, he could do without all the staring and whispers. He felt like he was back in sixth year when girls he'd never even spoken to were chasing after the Chosen One. He just hoped the novelty wore off before he ran out of patience.

The sound of fluttering wings drew his attention to the ceiling where hundreds of owls descended from the rafters. A speckled owl landed in front of Hermione to deliver its copy of the Daily Prophet, while a brown barn owl landed in front of Harry. Looking at the bird curiously, he untied the tattered parchment from its leg. As the owl took to the sky, he unfurled it and read.

Meet me by the stile at the end of the road today, 10 am.

There was no name attached, but there was no need. Harry knew it was from Sirius, and his heart leapt at being able to see his Godfather again. Then, remembering how he lived in a cave near Hogsmeade, feeding off rats as a dog, Harry stood abruptly.

"Harry?" Hermione asked.

"I need to take care of something," he replied quickly. "You can come if you want, or I can meet you by the carriages."

"I'll come," Hermione answered, quickly getting to her feet.

Smiling, Harry led her out of the Great Hall and down towards the kitchens.

"Where are we going?" she asked curiously.

"The kitchens," Harry said, handing her the note from Sirius. "Sirius is going to be staying in a cave near Hogsmeade. I'm going to bring him some food and ask Dobby if he can make regular visits. Damn, how could I forget Dobby is here?"

Harry's excitement turned dark as he began to question himself. How could he forget about Dobby after he died saving them from Malfoy Manor?

Feeling Hermione's hand slip into his, he looked over and gave her a small smile, squeezing her hand gratefully. When Harry let go, he wrapped an arm around her shoulders and hugged her to his side.

"You're a great friend, Hermione," he said, kissing the top of her head. "The best a bloke could ask for, but sometimes I seriously question your sanity."

"What? Why?" Hermione asked, slipping her arm comfortably around his back.

"Because, after everything we've been through and knowing how bad things could get, you're still here," Harry smiled. "Any sane person would've run far away from me years ago."

"Harry, we go to a castle most humans can't see to learn magic," Hermione said, rolling her eyes. "We've had to deal with Trolls, giant three-headed dogs, a Basilisk, and Dementors, not to mention a teacher with two faces, one that can turn into a cat at will, and one that was a Werewolf. I left sanity behind when I boarded the express."

Harry laughed as they turned the corner. Unwrapping his arm from around her, he walked over to the portrait of fruit and tickled the pear. With a giggle, it danced out of the way to reveal a door handle. Turning the handle, he pushed the door open and stepped inside the bustling kitchen.

"Dobby!" Harry called.

The House Elves stilled, turning to look at him curiously.

"Harry Potter, sir!" Dobby yelled.

Seeing a stack of brightly colored, wobbling hats making their way through the crowded room, Harry smiled widely. As Dobby ran towards him, he fought back tears while pulling the surprised House Elf into a tight hug.

“It’s good to see you again, Dobby,” Harry said, his voice thick as he pulled back and clapped his shoulders.

“Dobby is glad to be seeing Harry Potter again, too,” he replied, smiling widely. “Is Harry Potter, sir needing Dobby’s help?”

“Yeah,” Harry said, smiling at the way his friend’s eyes lit up at the prospect of being able to help him. “Is there somewhere private we can talk?”

“Oh, yes,” Dobby said, nodding so hard his hats slipped over his eyes. “Follow Dobby.”

Harry and Hermione followed him over to a stack of Butterbeer barrels that had been converted into homes for the House Elves.

“What is Harry Potter, sir needing?” Dobby asked.

Kneeling down, Harry cast a Muffliato Charm around them.

“Listen, Dobby,” he began. “Sirius Black is my Godfather, and he’s innocent. I found out at the end of last year. Now, he’s back in Britain because I got mixed up in this Tournament. He’s hiding in a cave near Hogsmeade. Could you deliver him food when he needs it and help him get anything else he needs? I can pay if-”

“Oh no, Harry Potter, sir, doesn’t need to be doing that,” Dobby said, bouncing on the balls of his feet. “Dobby be happy to help Harry Potter, sirs, Godfather.”

“Thank you, Dobby. You’re a good friend,” Harry said, smiling when his little friend beamed with pride. “If you need money for anything, just let me know. Could we get a basket of food to take with us? We’re going to visit him today.”

“Of course, give Dobby just a moment,” he said.

After Dobby rushed off, Harry stood up and checked his watch.

“We still have fifteen minutes before we can go to Hogsmeade,” he said to Hermione. “Do you mind if we stay here for a little bit?”

“Of course not,” Hermione said, looking at him sympathetically. “Besides, I want to know more about the House Elves that work here. They’re free like Dobby, right?”

Bugger, Harry thought.

“Harry?”

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Hermione ranted about the injustice of enslaving House Elves for the entire carriage ride to Hogsmeade. Harry just nodded along silently, letting her get it out of her system. By the time they got out of the carriage, most of her anger had burned itself out, and he felt safe enough to respond.

“I agree with you, Hermione, but don’t go trying to knit clothes and homing to trick them into freedom,” Harry warned, smiling when she blinked at him in surprise. “It won’t work. They’ll just stop cleaning the common room, and Dobby will have to do it by himself.”

“But it’s wrong!” Hermione exclaimed frustratedly. “Harry Potter, don’t you dare tell me I should let this go.”

“I’m not,” Harry said, raising his hands in surrender. “All I’m saying is you need to start in the right place. You’ll never free House Elves if they don’t want it. And you can’t just tell them what they should want. People tend to resist being told what to do on principle. You need to convince them there’s a better way. Talk with them; get to understand them better. Show them that you genuinely care before you go trying to change minds. They’ll respect your opinion more if you do.”

“Oh,” Hermione said, blinking at him in surprise. “I suppose that makes sense. When did you get so smart?”

“I didn’t, I just learned a thousand different ways not to do things,” Harry smiled. “I used up all my bad ideas. All that’s left are good ones. Usually.”

“Usually?” Hermione asked amusedly.

“Bad ideas still creep in now and again,” Harry said. “I think it’s my brain’s way of keeping me on my toes.”

Hermione giggled as they continued down the road, walking past the Shrieking Shack and down to the stile. They were early, but Harry knew exactly where to go. Taking Hermione’s hand, he led her down a barely visible game trail, winding between trees and over logs. Eventually, they reached a rock outcropping where the entrance of the cave was hidden in the shadow of the morning light.

“Hello,” Harry called out. “Sirius?”

“Harry?” Sirius called back.

Stepping out of the cave, he shielded his eyes from the sun and squinted.

“Sirius!” Harry yelled.

Grinning, he rushed towards his Godfather and pulled him into a crushing hug.

“Whoa,” Sirius chuckled. “Good to see you too, Kiddo. Merlin, you got big. What the hell happened to you?”

Harry hugged him for a moment longer before letting go, a smile stuck on his face.

“Let’s go sit, and I’ll explain,” he said. “Oh, Hermione and I brought some food for you. A House Elf friend of mine is going to make sure you have everything you need. His name is Dobby. Don’t worry, I trust him with my life.”

As Harry led a thoroughly confused Sirius back into the cave, Hermione followed behind. They both stopped and bowed to Buckbeak when they saw him lounging on the floor. He looked up and gave them a short nod. Grinning, Harry set the basket he was carrying down and pulled out a whole, uncooked chicken. Buckbeak perked up and got to his feet. Tossing it underhand into the air, the Hippogriff snatched it out of the air with his beak, the bones crunching easily under his powerful jaw.

Handing the basket to Sirius, they all sat, and Harry began telling him about how the Goblet had affected him and the memories he now had. It was a long, emotional conversation, but Harry plowed his way through to the end. While he trusted Sirius, he kept the Horcruxes from him. He wasn’t going to do anything that would risk his Godfather’s life again. If he told him, Sirius would jump in without hesitation, and that wasn’t something Harry needed to worry about.

“Listen, Sirius,” Harry said. “I need you to do something for me. At Grimmauld Place, there’s a golden locket Kreacher is hiding. Regulus gave it to him. I need it.”

“Why do you want something my brother had?” Sirius asked suspiciously.

“I’ll explain everything later,” Harry promised. “I can’t tell you more than that. Sirius, I need you to trust me. Can you get me that Locket?”

Taking a bite of his sandwich, he nodded his head.

“Yeah, I can do that,” Sirius said.

“Thank you,” Harry said gratefully. “When you find it, tell Kreacher to bring it to me so I can destroy it. Oh, and make sure you order him not to talk to Narcissa or Bellatrix. I don’t want him tricking me again.”

“Oh, I will,” Sirius said, shaking his head. “Can’t believe the little shit helped to get me killed.”

“It’s a bit more complicated than that,” Harry told him. “And for what it’s worth, Regulus turned against Voldemort before he died.”

“Really?” Sirius asked, surprised. “Reg did that? What happened?”

“I can’t tell you yet,” Harry said apologetically. “I promise I’ll fill in everything after the Tournament is over.”

“Alright,” Sirius replied. “But want you to promise me you’ll ask me for help if you need it. I don’t want you going off on your own to protect me. It’s my job to protect you. I’d gladly die a thousand times if it meant keeping you alive.”

“I know,” Harry said, smiling sadly. “And I will. In fact, I might need your help with something soon. I’ll meet you here once I have it figured out.”

“Then I’ll look forward to your visit,” he smiled. “Just don’t come down here too often. I don’t want to draw attention.”

“Don’t worry, I’ve gotten good at sneaking around,” Harry smiled.

“So, what else interesting happens in the future?” Sirius asked, leaning back on his arms.

Harry and Hermione spent another hour talking to Sirius before they had to leave in case they were missed.

“So, how many of those things are left?” Hermione asked as they trudged through the woods.

“Minus the Locket, three,” Harry said. “The Cup, Nagini, and me.”

“Do you really have to...?” Hermione asked, trailing off worriedly.

“Yes,” Harry said, squeezing her shoulder. “Don’t worry. I’ll be fine. It doesn’t even hurt. I’m more worried about the Cup.”

“That’s one in the Lestrage vault, right?” Hermione asked.

“Yeah,” Harry sighed, running a hand through his hair. “We only got in last time because Bellatrix was loose, and Voldemort had taken over. You Polyjuiced yourself to look like her, and even then, everything went wrong. We had to free a Dragon and flew our way out. That won’t work this time. Dumbledore’s working on it, but I don’t know if he’ll be able to get it. The Goblins don’t really care about Voldemort one way or the other. I just hope we can get it before the end of the Tournament.”

“What about Nagini?” Hermione asked.

“She’ll be in the Graveyard,” Harry said. “I’ll have to kill her then.”

“I wish there was more I could do to help,” Hermione said sadly.

“You help just by being here,” Harry told her sincerely.

Giving him a smile, they walked back to Hogsmeade.

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A few days later, Harry made his way to the third floor for the Weighing of the Wands ceremony. Without Snape’s antics to hold him up, he got there on time. He had to hold back a smirk when Rita looked up and smiled falsely. If she thought she was going to run roughshod over him like she had last time, she was in for a surprise.

“Ah, Harry,” Rita said, grabbing his arm. “It’s so nice to finally meet you. I’m Rita Skeeter, but I’m sure you already know that. Now, how about a quick interview? You know, for a bit of color.”

While she spoke, she led him over to a small broom cupboard he had to duck to get into. Rita crouched in behind him and sat on one side while he took the other.

“There,” Rita sighed, flashing her pearly white teeth. “This is cozy, isn’t it? You don’t mind if I use a Quick Quotes Quill, do you?”

“Let me save you some time, Rita,” Harry said. “I’m going to tell you what happened, and you’re going to report it exactly as I tell it. If you don’t, I’m sure the Ministry would love to hear just how you get all those juicy stories no one should be able to overhear.”

“Oh, and just how do you think I’m doing that?” Rita asked, her smile turning tense.

“You should be more careful about who you *bug*, Rita,” Harry smirked. “You might just get squashed.”

Rita’s face fell, her face paling as she snatched her Quick Quotes Quill out of the air.

“Glad we understand each other,” Harry said. “Now, I didn’t put my name in the Goblet of Fire, and I don’t know who did. When my name came out, the Goblet decided to make my physical age match that of the other Champions. If you want to know why, ask Dumbledore or someone at the Ministry. I voluntarily took a points deduction to take me out of the competition. I’m just a sideshow. The other three are the real Champions, and I’m going to do everything I can to stay out of their way.”

Standing up as best he could, Harry reached for the door before pausing and turning back to Rita.

“Oh, and leave my friends alone, too,” he told her. “Especially Hermione, the Weasleys, and Hagrid.”

Opening the door, he stepped back into the room. While he was dealing with Rita, Fleur and Madame Maxime had arrived. They looked at him curiously as he stepped out of the cupboard, and Rita followed him out. Smiling, Harry walked over to Fleur.

“She’s a reporter,” he told her softly. “Gossip columnist. Avoid her as much as you can.”

“Merci,” Fleur said, eyeing Rita with disdain.

There was a bright flash, and Harry spotted Bozo lowering his camera after taking a picture of Fleur in profile. His eyes were fastened to her until Maxime stepped in front of her and folded her arms over her chest.

“So, how are you liking Hogwarts so far?” Harry asked.

“Eet ees alright,” Fleur replied. “I am not used to ze cold, and I weesh zey ‘ad more French food, but eet ees nice.”

“Just not as nice as Beauxbatons,” Harry said, smiling. “I get it. Hogwarts is like my home. No matter how nice Beauxbatons might be, it just wouldn’t be the same.”

“Oui,” Fleur smiled.

“Well, I can’t do much about the cold, but one of the House Elves that works here is a friend of mine,” Harry told her. “I’ll ask him if they can make some French food for you and your classmates.”

“Merci,” Fleur said, looking at him curiously. “You are friends wiz a ‘Ouse Elf?”

“It’s a long story, but I tricked his abusive master into freeing him, and then he saved my life when he tried to kill me,” Harry smiled.

“You ‘ave a very... interesting life,” Fleur noted amusedly.

“Oh, you don’t know the half of it,” he chuckled.

“Zen maybe you can tell me sometime?” Fleur said, smirking slightly.

Before Harry could figure out if she was flirting with him or not, Cedric arrived along with Bagman. A couple of minutes later, Krum and Karkaroff showed up, followed a minute later by Dumbledore and Ollivander.

“Excellent,” Dumbledore smiled, clapping his hands. “Since everyone is here, perhaps we should get started. Garrick, if you would?”

The Weighing of the Wands went much as it had in Harry's memories. Unfortunately, Rita still wanted her photos for the article she was writing.

"Perhaps we could have Harry first, and then--"

"I'm not doing photos unless the other Champions are in it. This isn't about me," Harry interrupted her.

Rita scowled but motioned for the other to join him. Smiling widely, he swung an arm around Fleur and Cedric's shoulders. Shaking her head with a smile, Fleur wrapped her arm around his back and struck a pose.

"Come on, Krum, get in here," Harry said, waving him over.

Cedric and Krum looked at each other before Cedric shrugged his shoulders and slung his arm around Krum. With a strained smile, he gave the camera a thumbs-up just before the flash.

"Maybe we should get one with Fleur standing in front of the boys," Bozo suggested.

A room full of glares was his reply. Thankfully, he stopped making suggestions after that. Once they'd finished taking pictures, everyone got ready to leave.

"Hey, Fleur, do you fly?" Harry asked.

She looked at him oddly, "Oui."

"How about the four of us go flying, I want to talk to you about something," he suggested, looking at Cedric and Krum to get their opinions.

"I'm up for it," Cedric replied while Krum grunted and nodded.

Shrugging, Fleur turned and spoke to Madame Maxime in French for a moment before turning back.

"I weel need to get my broom from ze Carriage," she said.

"That's fine," Harry smiled. "Let's meet at the Pitch in fifteen minutes?"

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"Hey, Harry," Neville said, looking up from his Herbology book when Harry entered their dorm.

"Hey, Neville," Harry grinned, grabbing his broom from next to his bed. "New book?"

"Yeah," he replied. "Moody gave it to me. It's really interesting. Have you noticed he's acting a bit different lately? He doesn't seem as... I don't know..."

"Creepy?" Harry suggested with a smile. "I think it's because he's calmed down a bit. He was a bit intense in the beginning."

"That's one way to put it," Neville mumbled as Harry walked over to the window and pushed it open.

"I'm going flying for a bit, do you mind closing the window behind me?" Harry asked.

Neville tilted his head curiously.

“What?” he asked.

Grinning, Harry climbed onto the sill and gave his wide-eyed friend a cheek wave before falling backward. The wind roared in his ears as he plummeted through the air. Mounting his broom mid-fall, he shot off towards the Pitch.

Predictably, he was the first to arrive and flew a few laps while he waited for the others. It felt like it had been years since he'd last flown on his Firebolt. When Cedric and Krum showed up shortly after he arrived, they joined him in the air. Fleur was the last to arrive, bundled tightly in a heavy cloak and scarf. The boys flew to the middle of the Pitch to meet her, coming to a stop high above the stands.

“You know, they have these things called Warming Charms,” Harry told Fleur teasingly.

Fleur flicked a Tickling Charm at him with impressive speed, but he rolled out of the way laughingly. Huffing, she put her wand away.

“So, what'd you want to talk to us about, Harry?” Cedric asked.

“Right, well, I'm pretty much out of the competition, but I still know what the tasks are,” Harry said, running a hand through his hair. “The way I see it, I can tell you three what they are so we're all on the same footing, or I can keep it to myself, and you can compete like I'm not even a part of it. I'll leave that up to you, but you all have to agree. I'll warn you now, though, this Tournament is more dangerous than you probably think it is.”

The three Champions looked at each other for a long moment.

“Wouldn't that be against the rules?” Cedric asked.

“The Goblet already broke the rules by giving me memories of my own future,” Harry pointed out. “And the first time I did this, Crouch cheated to help me win. Cheating is a tradition in the Triwizard Tournament. I’m just offering to level the playing field by making sure we all cheat the same.”

“That has to be the most Gryffindor thing I’ve ever heard,” Cedric snorted, shaking his head.

“I want fair competition,” Krum said. “If we all know, is fair.”

“Oui,” Fleur agreed, her words slightly muffled by her scarf. “We should all know.”

“So long as we all know what’s going to happen, I suppose that’s still fair,” Cedric said after a moment of thought.

“So, you’re all agreed?” Harry asked, getting nods in return. “Alright, the first task is to steal a Golden Egg from a nesting Dragon.”

Fleur’s bright blue eyes went wide, Cedric’s mouth fell open, and Krum went rigid.

“They’ll be chained to the ground, so they can’t fly,” he continued. “I’ll leave how to deal with that up to you. The Egg is a clue to the Second Task, which is to retrieve something from the bottom of the lake. You’ll need to hold your breath for about an hour. Oh, and the clue doesn’t tell you what they take, but it’s people. For Krum and Cedric, they took your Yule Ball dates. Fleur, your date didn’t go so well, so they took Gabrielle instead.”

“My seester!” Fleur exclaimed indignantly.

“Sorry,” Harry said sympathetically. “They put them in an enchanted sleep at the bottom of the lake. The Third Task is a maze filled with dangerous spells, enchantments, and magical creatures. In the middle of the maze is the cup. Grab it, and you win.”

“So, you could still win this thing,” Cedric said.

“Maybe,” Harry shrugged. “Even with a perfect score in the first two Tasks, I’ll be starting ten minutes after everyone else. Realistically, the only way I can win is if all of you are eliminated in the maze.”

“But now that we all know the tasks, can’t they give you those points back, and we can all compete evenly?” Cedric asked.

“It’s not just knowing the tasks, I’ve done them,” Harry said, shaking his head. “Besides, I shouldn’t even be competing. I don’t want to compete. I have bigger things to worry about.”

“You mean You-Know-Oo,” Fleur said.

Harry nodded.

“Is there anything we can do to help?” Cedric asked.

“No,” Harry said firmly, shaking his head. “I know you three are capable, but this is my fight. I know what I’m doing... for once. I don’t want anyone else to get hurt. Hey, how about we fly for a bit? It’s been a while since I could stretch my wings.”

Thankfully, the others let it go and agreed. Harry zipped around the Pitch with the others, playing a game of tag and letting his worries fall away for the moment.