

"Open Wide the Gates of Time" OWtGoT I: Harry James Potter

"*Silencio!*" cried Hermione and the man's voice was extinguished. He continued to mouth through the hole in his mask, but no sound came out. He was thrust aside by his fellow Death Eater.

"*Petrificus Totalus!*" shouted Harry, as the second Death Eater raised his wand. His arms and legs snapped together and he fell forwards, face down on to the rug at Harry's feet, stiff as a board and unable to move.

"Well done, Ha-"

But the Death Eater Hermione had just struck dumb made a sudden slashing movement with his wand; a streak of what looked like purple flame passed right across Hermione's chest. She gave a tiny "Oh!" as though of surprise and crumpled on to the floor, where she lay motionless.

"*Hermione!*" Harry roared, forgetting everything that was happening around him as he saw her fall. He quickly bolted forward, near-throwing himself to his knees as he looked down at the wet mess that used to be smooth flesh.

He reached out with a shaking hand to her throat, feeling for her carotid artery. For a moment that lasted an eternity, he couldn't feel anything. He didn't notice Neville kneeling next to him, reach for the other pulse on Hermione's neck.

"Dat's a pulse, Harry..." Neville said after a moment. "I'b sure of it."

Harry didn't feel relief, as he expected he would. All he could feel was a mind-numbing, spirit-crushing despair at seeing Hermione casually dropped during the battle. He turned his head slightly, staring at the Death Eater with pure malice.

The Death Eater reached up and tore off his mask, revealing the long, pale, twisted face of Antonin Dolohov. He gestured at Hermione, then at Harry, then at Harry again. Even though he was still silenced, his meaning was clear.

Harry stood, his free hand clenching spasmodically as he stalked forward, intent on ending the scum-sucking dickhead. He was robbed of the chance as Neville managed his first non-verbal spell, sending a weak-but-adequate stunner spell at Dolohov's maniacally grinning face. He slumped backwards, out of the fight... for now.

Together, Harry and Neville picked up Hermione, having no time to be gentle, as they left the office, meeting up with Ron, Ginny and Luna. Thanks to the actions of the Death Eaters, they ended up in the Veil Chamber, and Harry's already grief-stricken heart took another blow as Sirius was blasted back through the Veil.

He didn't really pay much attention after that, chasing after Bellatrix and attempting his first unforgiveable curse. He didn't really care that he was possessed by Voldemort. What he *did* care about was that Hermione was still there, lying on the floor of the Death Room, slowly bleeding out.

As soon as Dumbledore arrived, banishing Voldemort and fighting off Fudge's smarming attempts to quickly turn the story to his favour, Harry headed over to Hermione, only to be stopped by Dumbledore stepping in front of him, pressing something into his hands.

He felt a gut punch as the Portkey activated, whisking him away from the Department of Mysteries and back to the only place he'd ever called home.

He landed on the floor in Dumbledore's office, winding himself as he smacked onto the stone. He ignored the pain, lungs straining like bellows as he pushed himself up, heading straight for the door. Only one thing mattered to him now; Hermione. He *had* to get to the Hospital Wing and see her. Do whatever he could to ease her pain and help her get better.

The door was locked. Not just locked, but *locked*. Sealed with spells that were far stronger than he knew how to break. Deciding on a quicker course of action, he threw a *Reducto* hex at the door, ducking when the curse simply dissipated against the ancient wood. After a moment, a *Bombarda*, a *Diffindo* and even an *Evanescio* failed to open/remove the door.

Screaming with rage and frustration, he glanced about the office, looking for something he could use to physically break the door down and get to her. He didn't spot anything before the Floo activated, Dumbledore stepping through casually.

"Ah, Harry..." Dumbledore said amiably, heading over to Fawkes' perch and reaching into his pocket, pulling out the newly-regenerated phoenix and placing him on the shelf. Ignoring Harry's intense glares, he headed behind his desk, sitting down and steepling his fingers together. "Would you take a seat, my boy?"

"I want to check on Hermione." Harry said brusquely, not stepping away from the door.

"There's plenty of time for that later, my boy." Dumbledore said, gesturing politely at the chair in front of his desk. "For now, however, there are things we simply must discuss. Things I should have told you several years ago."

"I want to check on Hermione." Harry said again, his voice dropping to the 'shit, it's bloody freezing!' temperature range.

"In good time, Harry." Dumbledore said, a little more firmly this time. "Please, Harry, sit down. I have things that I simply must discuss with you, before we allow anything to get in the way."

Harry stared at the chair, then back at Dumbledore.

"If you prefer to stand, Harry, that is, of course, your choice." Dumbledore said, shrugging slightly and pulling a lemon drop from the bowl on his desk. "It's time I tell you everything... things I *should* have told you five years ago."

"You mean when I *actually* asked you at the end of first year?" Harry asked pointedly.

Dumbledore, naturally, didn't acknowledge this statement. "I must say, I know how you feel, Harry."

"I really doubt that." Harry said flatly, not removing himself from the doorway.

"You see, Dumbledore?" The portrait of Phineas Nigellus snarked loudly. "Children today think that they-"

He was cut off, not by Dumbledore saying anything, but the simple fact that his portrait burst into flame, quickly consuming the ancient canvas.

"What the-"

"Now that we've had this fascinating discussion," Harry said, not looking at all perturbed he'd just set fire to a rather irreplaceable painting, "I'd like to go and see Hermione. *Sir*."

"There's no shame in what you're feeling, Harry." Dumbledore said, trying to project as much feeling as he could.

"What I'm feeling, old man, is a rather heavy dose of anger towards you, not to mention an overwhelming concern for Hermione." Harry's glare was every bit as intimidating as Snape's, not to mention a lot more intense.

"I understand that, Harry." Dumbledore said heavily. "I'd like to explain, if you'll let me."

"And I'd like to see Hermione." Harry said, reaching out and trying the door again. "Let me out."

"No."

"Let. Me. Out."

"I have yet to explain, Harry." Dumbledore said, leaning back in his chair. "I will not allow you to leave until I have explained my actions and you have accepted those reasons."

Harry glared for a moment. "Fine. Talk. Fast."

"It all begins-"

"I said 'fast', old man. This isn't it." Harry interrupted.

Dumbledore continued, ignoring Harry's interruption. "It is my fault that Sirius is dead."

"Yes, it is."

The old man winced slightly at the condemnation in Harry's words. "Would you care to tell me how you came to that conclusion?"

"Will you let me out to see Hermione if I do?"

"When we have finished our conversation." Dumbledore replied.

Harry's eyes narrowed. "It was *you* who didn't tell me that Voldemort could send me visions. It was *you* who kept Sirius locked up in that shit-hole hovel. It was *you* who assigned Snape to teach me Occlumency, even though you know he and I *hate* each other with a fiery passion. It was *you* who ignored me all year. I hold you at least as much to blame as I do Bellatrix."

Dumbledore sighed heavily. "Yes... I do hold some small responsibility towards the actions of this evening. Not as much as you appear to have laid against me, Harry, but I would like to explain."

"Are you *ever* going to get to a point?" Harry asked, exasperated.

"Everything revolves around your scar. I suspected, fifteen years ago, that your scar represented a link between you and Voldemort."

"It does." Harry pointed out. "And don't you think this would have been information that *I* needed?"

"More and more recently, I have noticed that you have begun to become... influenced, by Tom's moods. The terrible anger you've been feeling ever

since last summer is not your own. At least, the connection became far stronger when Voldemort used your blood in his resurrection ceremony. You began to slip into his mind, as he did to you earlier tonight.”

“Bored now.” Harry said, tugging discretely at the door.

“When you saw the attack on Arthur Weasley just before Christmas, I saw the true danger of the link between you and Voldemort... and this is the reason that I haven’t spoken to you since last summer.”

“Possession.” Harry said after a moment. “And Legilimency. You were worried that he’d use me to get to you.”

“In a word; yes.” Dumbledore said.

“Well, that’s great. Now, let me go and see Hermione.”

“We haven’t finished.” The old man said sharply, feeling irritation begin to creep into his mind. “When we have finished, Harry, I will dismiss you.”

“Then speak quickly.”

“When you alerted Professor Snape about your vision, he immediately checked in at Grimmauld Place with Sirius, and found him to be hale and hearty.”

“Did he.” Harry said, then his eyes narrowed. “Kreacher... it was that little cum-stain who told me that Sirius had gone. He lied to me.”

“He did.” Dumbledore confirmed heavily. “As you are not Kreacher’s master, he is able to lie to you.”

“And I bet the little turd was laughing fit to fucking burst when he realised he’d sent Sirius to his death.”

“Indeed.”

“I’ll kill him.”

“I can’t allow that, Harry.” Dumbledore said. “Forgiveness for one’s sins, even when they cost so much, is always to be strived for.”

“So, *you* forgive him. *I*, however, will wring his scrawny little neck next time I see him.”

Dumbledore’s eyes narrowed. “That is something we will be able to discuss later. Moving on, as soon as we realised that you had gone to the Ministry, members of the Order made their way there, in hopes of protecting and extracting you from the danger.”

“And they failed.”

“They did not. They saved you from committing terrible crimes, Harry. There is a reason unforgiveable curses are so named.”

“Get to the point, Dumbledore, or I’m going to become... annoyed.”

“Because of the way that Sirius treated Kreacher-”

“Enough.” Harry said, in a whisper that was louder in the office than any shout could be. “Do not talk about Sirius. You didn’t know... *you couldn’t* know. He was a prisoner in that house. *On your* orders. Just like I was, last summer. You have a *lot* to answer for.”

“I know that.” Dumbledore said simply. “I hold no foolish disbeliefs about the consequences of my actions, Harry.”

“Good.”

“However, it’s time I told you *everything*.” Dumbledore sighed for a moment. “I was there, when you were left on the doorstep of the Dursley residence. Indeed, it was I who arranged that placement. I knew that I was condemning you to ten dark and difficult years. I hated that it had to be so, but there wasn’t any other choice.”

“It wasn’t your decision to make.”

“Your aunt, in accepting you into her home, sealed a set of very powerful protective wards that Voldemort could not breach. It was all based on your mother’s love, a very powerful emotion. With that love, in combination with a set of blood-based wards, you are kept safe.”

“They’re shite.” Harry said. “Petunia hates me. Always has. I hate her.”

“But by accepting you into her home, the wards *were* sealed.”

“Whatever.”

“Five years ago, you arrived here at the school. I could see that you’d suffered during your time away, but you were still hale and hearty. You weren’t some arrogant, strutting peacock, but as normal a boy as I could hope for.”

“Starved and beaten isn’t ‘normal’, old man.”

“At the end of that year, when you asked me about why Voldemort was coming for you, I declined to tell you. At that point, I cared for you too much. I

saw you as a surrogate grandchild. How could I put the weight of the world on your shoulders at such a tender age?

"No, instead, I told myself that I would wait until you were older, stronger... more ready to accept the burden. So, your second year, your third year and your fourth year passed. The dangers you faced certainly made you stronger, more prepared for the war that was coming. And through all this time, I felt my love and affection for you growing. More and more, I didn't want to be the one to end your childhood."

"You did that by leaving me with the Dursleys."

Again, Dumbledore ignored the inconvenient truths he didn't want to hear. "The whole reason for this was a simple thing; a prophecy, given by Professor Trelawney shortly before you were born." The old man raised his wand, summoning his Pensieve from the small cupboard it resided in. His wand was pressed against his temple, pulling out a single, silver strand.

Once dropped into the Pensieve, a single, willowy figure rose up. "The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches... born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies... and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not... and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives... the one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies..."

Harry nodded. "This is it... this is why Voldemort came after me... and why you left me with the Dursleys..."

"Yes. This single prophecy announces the one person in the world who can defeat Lord Voldemort... you, Harry."

As Harry looked at the old man, noticing the tears slowly trickling down that ancient face, he felt nothing but contempt.

"I feel I have to give you another explanation, Harry, about the prefect position... I simply thought you had enough to be dealing with."

"Well... that makes me feel so much better."

Dumbledore reached up with a conjured hanky, wiping his eyes. "There's one other thing we need to discuss this evening."

"Fast, Dumbledore."

"Your summer arrangements, Harry. With your victory in the Department of Mysteries, Voldemort will be gunning even more strongly for you. That means that you'll need to stay at the Dursleys for at least half of the summer holidays. Again, it will be necessary to restrict owl post while you're there. After that, you'll be able to go to the Burrow."

Harry shook his head. "Fine... now, let me out. I want to see Hermione."

Dumbledore raised his wand at the door, flicking slightly. Harry could hear the locks opening. He opened the door, intent on heading to see his best friend.

"Harry?"

Stiffening slightly, he turned to see Dumbledore looking pleadingly at him.

"Do you think you could ever forgive me?"

Harry's response was immediate, heart-felt and entirely accurate. "I hope I live just long enough to piss on your grave, old man." And with that, he was gone.

Harry raced through the corridors as though the hounds of hell were pursuing him. None of it mattered; he had to get Hermione.

He burst through the doors to the hospital wing, nearly tearing the ancient wood from its hinges.

"What the devil-" Pomfrey spluttered as she erupted from her office.

"Hermione..." Harry muttered, seeing her lying on his normal bed. She looked, for lack of a better word, dreadful. She was far too pale, the front of her medical gown shining in the low light with leaked blood.

"H-Harry..." Hermione moaned, trying to smile when she saw him coming in, but dissolving into a pained grimace.

Harry moved closer, taking her hand as he sat tentatively on the side of the bed. "Hermione..."

"Are you okay?" She asked, looking him up and down.

"Me? I'm... never mind me, Hermione. How're you?"

"It hurts, Harry." Hermione whispered, squeezing his hand tightly. "I... I'm sorry, Harry."

"Why?" Harry noticed his vision growing misty. Confused, he reached up to find his eyes leaking. He was *crying*? He hadn't cried since he was four years old...

"I... I should have done b-better." Hermione whispered plaintively. "I..."

Harry pressed his finger against Hermione's lips. "Shh... you did very well, Hermione. I'd be dead if it wasn't for you." He let his hand slip down slightly, cupping her cheek softly.

Hermione moaned, arching her back slightly as another wave of debilitating pain washed over her. "I... I don't have long..." She gasped.

"N-No..." Harry said, panic filling his voice. "You can't leave me, Hermione... You can't..."

"I don't think I have a choice, Harry." She whispered back. "I'm dying... I know it..."

"You can't..." Harry sobbed. "P-Please, Hermione, don't... don't leave me... I can't live without you..."

"You have no choice, Harry..." Hermione said, squeezing his hand tightly. "I have to tell you..." She coughed, blood coming from her mouth.

Harry reached up and calmly wiped the blood away. "Hermione, before you do... let me..."

"I k-know, Harry." She said, staring at his eyes. "You love me."

"I... do..."

"And I you, my love." She whispered. "For so long... you must go on, Harry... don't mourn me..."

"No..." Harry moaned. "Please, H-Hermione... everyone I love leaves me... don't leave me, please..."

She flailed her free hand for a moment, trying to take a hold of him. "L-last request..."

Harry took her flailing hand, kissing her knuckles tenderly. "Anything, my love."

"Kiss me, Harry... please... just once... let me feel your lips..." She was cut off as Harry leaned forward, pressing his lips to hers chastely. She moaned slightly, pressing forward before leaning back, opening her eyes slowly. "As good as I thought..."

Hermione Granger, the smartest witch of her generation, died with a small smile on her face and the hand of the man she loved beyond reason held in her own.

Again, the tears prickled up in Harry's eyes, one slowly making its way down his cheek. He felt... a cold, *aching* numbness in his chest.

Nothing... A thought formed and died in his mind. *There's nothing left... it's all gone... all of it...* He could feel his magic roaring throughout his body, but he didn't care what it was doing. The hole of Hermione's death was deep and sharp, making him feel... *empty*.

From her vantage point, Poppy Pomfrey brushed away a tear, feeling a great sadness come over her. Like most of the teachers at Hogwarts, she'd never married or had children, but she felt that each of the children that passed through the doors and into her care were at least a little her own. Not of her body, but of her care and attention. One of the reasons she was so angry at poor Harry was the fact he was injured so often.

She looked up sharply when she felt an increase in the ambient magic. Her wand was in hand before she realised what was happening. Harry's clothing, his t-shirt, jeans and trainers were slowly turning black. It took her a moment to remember that was a Muggle custom; when in mourning, Muggles wear black. It wasn't really used as a Wizarding custom, but then, Harry was Muggle-raised.

She glanced up when she saw the door to the hospital wing open. *Oh, shite...* she thought, as she saw who entered.

"Harry?" Dumbledore strode forward, frowning at Harry's current choice of attire. "How is Miss Granger?"

Harry didn't look up. Didn't make any indication that he'd heard Dumbledore's inane question.

"Harry?"

"Headmaster, this way, please." Poppy said, calling the old man over to her. With a final glance at Harry, he ambled over.

"Yes, Poppy?"

"I'm afraid... I'm afraid Miss Granger passed away, Headmaster. The curse damage was simply too severe to deal with."

"Oh..." Dumbledore frowned. "This will cause complications..."

"Complications', sir?" Poppy asked, her eyes narrowing.

"Hmm?" Dumbledore looked up. "Nothing, Poppy." *Yes... explaining to the Board of Governors as to how a student died, even though she's just a Muggleborn. This could have one of two effects; either driving Mr. Potter further away, or back to my side...*

As he looked up, he saw Harry neatly tucking the covers over Hermione, making sure that she was shielded from the cold. *I'd best let Harry know what needs to happen next.*

"Harry?" Dumbledore called out as he approached, waiting for the young man to look up at him. Once he had Harry's attention, although he could

certainly tell that I was not entirely there, he spoke softly. "I'm sorry to hear about Miss Granger, Harry. It's always a dreadful loss when one of our own is taken from us."

Harry blinked slowly, not registering what Dumbledore was saying.

"Yes... and this, coupled with Sirius' untimely demise. I'm truly sorry."

Slowly, Harry began to regain his senses. The empty feeling was still there, but more thoughts were being added all the time. *He... had he told me everything, we wouldn't have gone to the Ministry... Hermione would still be alive...* Deep inside his body, on a level beyond human comprehension, new linkages formed, channelling more and more power through his body. It was subtle... at first.

"I will notify Miss Granger's parents immediately, so that arrangements may be made for her funeral."

Harry still didn't look up. *He kept me from coming here for almost half an hour... I could have had more time to say goodbye to her...* The linkages increased, channelling enough magic every second to power every car in London for three years.

"Unfortunately, it will not be possible for you to attend, Harry. Your safety is far too important to squander on such an insignificant thing as a funeral."

The linkages began to shift, contort, change. More and more energy was thrumming through Harry's body. It changed, becoming more and more obvious to those around him.

"I will advise this, Harry; keep hold of those memories, and allow yourself to grieve. Your seclusion this summer will be an excellent time to mourn, coming back stronger for it."

Harry looked up, his eyes glowing green while he was surrounded by a thick aura. "Stop." He commanded sharply, cutting Dumbledore off instantly.

"Harry, my boy—"

"I said 'stop'." Harry intoned, his voice beginning to gain an echo in the large hospital wing. "*You did this.*"

"My dear boy, nothing could be further from the—"

"I said 'stop'." Harry repeated, making the slightest gesture at Dumbledore. His magic silenced Dumbledore instantly. "This is your fault, old man." His voice seemed stronger and more self-assured than anything Dumbledore had ever heard. "Had you done the right thing, and told me the things you *should have told me*, Hermione would still be alive."

"Harry, I have apologised for the things I kept from you, for your own good. You didn't need to be burdened with that kind of knowledge. I understand that this is your pain and grief talking, as it did back in my office earlier tonight, but you must allow yourself to mourn, and not burn bridges that cannot be rebuilt." Dumbledore tried a new angle. "I realise that you feel pain, and anger, but you must release those emotions for the Greater Good of the Wizarding world. You are needed."

"Yes, I am..." Harry said, standing up and releasing a wave of raw power. "And I will go where I am needed... but you will no longer pull my puppet strings, old man..."

Dumbledore straightened, the very model of an offended man. "Harry, I have never 'pulled on your puppet strings', and frankly, I am insulted at your statement."

"I no longer care."

"You do, Harry. You would not be in this great pain if you did not care."

"No." Harry said, extending his hand. His wand flew into it from his back pocket, waiting to be called into battle. "I would not be in this great pain if it wasn't for *you*." Instead of Harry pointing his wand at Dumbledore, it simply burst into flame, consuming itself in the fires of eternity. Instead, Harry just pointed, blasting Dumbledore back into the wall with a great wave of raw power.

"Mr... Potter..." Dumbledore moaned, trying to marshal his considerable resources and fight back. "You... must... stop this..."

"Oh, I intend to." Harry said, extending his other hand.

From another part of the castle, Dumbledore could hear the sound of the ancient stone walls being battered by something.

"*Enough!*" He roared, trying with all his might to break the power that Harry was holding him with. "*Stop this now!*"

"Oh, I will..." Harry promised evilly. "I just need to *finish* the job..."

The wall next to Dumbledore's head exploded into dust as *something* flew through the wall, landing neatly in Harry's outstretched hand.

"Now..." Harry ended the onslaught against Dumbledore, letting the old man slump to the ground, near-dead. "Let's see..." *Hermione was my everything... even though I never proposed, she was my wife in my heart... give me this one...*

"*Open wide the gates of time, destroy the power of darkness' grime, Future, past and present collide, take me back to Hermione's side!*"

Dumbledore looked up in horror as he sensed the pure energies surrounding Harry, and his request. He tried to raise his wand, intent on ending

this... spell? Ritual? It didn't matter. It had to be stopped.

Several forces competed at once; the will of fate, knowing that her chosen was asking to break the first law of time in order to carry out a prophecy she, herself, had made. Hogwarts, feeling her champion struggling against injustice, added her considerable power, shutting down the castle itself as every erg of the incredible power was rerouted to the hospital wing.

And Albus Dumbledore, a man who was convinced that he alone knew what had to be done. Fate, Hogwarts and Harry had no intention of letting the old man win *this* pissing contest. Fate asked, and Hogwarts agreed. A magical self-destruction was triggered, Hogwarts allowing herself to die so that the world could continue.

Dumbledore glanced up as Harry vanished with a 'rip'. He heard the wall begin to crumble around him, feeling the ancient wards fall and the castle start to implode. Then he died. Then they all died.

Harry blinked as he found himself stood, once again, in the Department of Mysteries. Instantly, he willed himself to disappear from view, such concepts as spells being foreign to him now. Formalised spells were meaningless. He was vengeance, and pain, and love and power. There was nothing he couldn't do. He was truly an Angel of Death, content to visit his 'tender mercies' on those who would bring harm... to her.

In his hand, the Sword of Gryffindor sang to him, feeling another opportunity to end injustice. He knew how to wield the ancient blade, feeling power in everything he did. He stalked forward, spotting the past Harry and Hermione fighting against Antonin Dolohov and that nameless, faceless Death Eater.

Dolohov raised his wand.

"*Silencio!*" cried Hermione and the man's voice was extinguished. He continued to mouth through the hole in his mask, but no sound came out. He was thrust aside by his fellow Death Eater.

"*Petrificus Totalus!*" shouted Harry, as the second Death Eater raised his wand. His arms and legs snapped together and he fell forwards, face down on to the rug at Harry's feet, stiff as a board and unable to move.

"Well done, Ha-"

But the Death Eater Hermione had just struck dumb made a sudden slashing movement with his wand; a streak of what looked like purple flame tore through the air... only to be casually deflected by something in between them, ricocheting into the air, where it sizzled impotently on the ceiling.

Harry stared, quickly taking Hermione's hand as he looked her up and down, making sure she was okay. Hermione, instinctively, knew what he was doing. "I'm fine, Harry..." She whispered, before turning her attention back to Dolohov.

Said minion was looking confused, wondering just what the hell was going on. That expression, one of scared confusion, was permanently etched onto his face as an invisible blade neatly bisected his neck, causing his head to topple forward while his body slumped backwards.

Harry fought an urge to retch as the newly decapitated corpse still squirted blood for a few moments.

"I... I think we should get the hell out of here..." He said to Hermione, who, as usual, was in complete agreement.

Together, the two left, not looking back at the Death Eater who was still petrified on the floor.

"You know, Jugson..." A gravelly voice said emotionlessly from right next to his ear. "You're having a very bad day. If Dumbledore were here, he'd be trying to bring you back to the light... but me? I'm going to eviscerate you, and let you die in a puddle of your own body parts."

Jugson looked down as he felt a burning pain in his stomach. He couldn't see the weapon that was wielded, but he could see the results as his clothing and flesh was neatly carved away.

"W-Why..." He managed to gasp.

"Because you tried to hurt *her*." The voice whispered. "And for even *thinking* of it, you must die."

Jugson couldn't get enough breath to scream as his intestines flopped out of his body onto the floor, leaving him to slowly die.

The Angel of Death grabbed the fallen wand, stood up, absently wiping the grisly sword on Jugson's trouser leg. "Work, work, work..." He chuckled softly, and began to look for his next victim.

Harry and Hermione met up with Neville, who was still sporting a splattered nose, but otherwise still able to fight.

"Neville, let me look at your nose." Hermione said, pointing her wand. "*Episky!*"

Neville's eyes began watering as his nose was forced back into shape and healed. "T-Thanks..." He gasped.

"Anyone seen the others?" Harry asked.

"Harry!" Ginny called out, leaning heavily on Luna. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah..."

"I... I thought I heard something." Ginny said, wincing as her broken ankle twinged angrily.

"I think there's something else here." Harry said, glancing round. "Something... dangerous."

"To us?" Neville asked, wiping blood away from his mouth.

"No..." Harry's eyes narrowed as he stared at a particular patch of wall. "Not to us..."

"Correct." The wall said. "Now, come with me. There's more work to be done here tonight." A wand appeared, floating over to Neville. "Take it, and let's go."

"Er... the wall's speaking." Ginny said.

"No... I think there's someone disillusioned there." Hermione said, squinting in the darkness, looking for the characteristic shimmer that disillusionment produced.

"Head to your right." The voice called again. "Ron's in the brain room. Do us all a favour and stop him playing with them, will you?"

The group of five, plus one hidden, made their way along the corridor, finding Ron sitting behind a shelf full of brains. "Hey, Harry!" Ron announced loudly.

A bolt of bright purple erupted from the shadows, making Ron cough, roll over and begin vomiting.

"Ew..." Ginny groused.

"He'll feel better in a moment." The voice called out. "Get up him, clean him up and get him moving."

Ron was onto dry heaving by now, coughing weakly. Hermione conjured him a glass of water, which he accepted with a grateful nod. After he gargled and spat a few times, he drained the glass, dropping it to the floor as he pulled himself up. A breath-freshening charm and a *Scourgify* later, he felt much better.

"What the hell's going on?" He asked, pulling his wand from his robes and looking round. "The last thing I remember, I blew up Pluto..."

"Head out." The voice called from near the doorway. "Bellatrix Lestrange is coming... and she's mine."

"Whoa... who's that?" Ron asked.

"You don't want to know." The voice called, opening one of the doors with an invisible gesture. "Head this way."

The six, with their invisible Angel, made their way through the Department of Mysteries, heading for, hopefully, the exit.

"There!" A voice cried, as three sets of footfalls sounded in the corridor. "Potter's there! Get him!"

Just in front of the group, another door opened. "In here!" The voice commanded. "Quickly! Seal the door behind you and keep heading along that corridor!"

Seeing no reason to discount the voice, Harry led his friends into the next corridor, closing the door and sealing it with a *Colloportus*. They quickly made their way up the passage, opening the next door and bustling through, again sealing it behind them.

Luna looked up and gasped; they were in the Veil Room. "Harry..."

"We have to get out of here!" Neville, Ron and Ginny said in unison.

A faint 'pop' alerted them to the arrival of someone by apparition. "Go over to the right, get down. The Death Eaters will be coming in the door to our left in just under thirty seconds. Prepare for a fight."

Again, there was no reason to distrust the voice. The 'Ministry Six' headed behind one of the raised plinths, aiming their wands at the door that the voice had pointed out to them.

Almost as if on-cue, the door burst open, Death Eaters quickly making their way into the room, wands raised, looking for the students. "Where are they?" Bellatrix said with a definite pout.

"They're safe." The voice said, slowly moving towards them. "You, on the other hand, are going to die." It was chilling how emotionlessly that voice spoke.

"Who's there?" Bellatrix demanded.

"It doesn't matter." The voice replied. "If it helps, think of me as... the sound of inevitability. Think of me as the sound of your death."

Bellatrix turned to her men. "Find the students. Find Potter. Get the prophecy."

Rodolphus and Rastaban Lestrange, Bellatrix's husband and brother-in-law, quickly moved forward, intent on finding the students. Bellatrix stood by

the door, waiting to see what'd happen.

Rodolphus glanced up, seeing nothing in front of him. With a gasp, he glanced down to see the faint shimmer of disillusionment... as something was sticking out of his chest. He gasped, feeling some kind of fluid enter his lungs.

"Tell me, Rudy," The voice whispered soothingly in his ear, "what it feels like to know that you're a dead man walking?"

"B-Bella..." Rodolphus gasped, gaining the attention of his wife.

"No!" Bellatrix scream as she saw the blood trickling from his chest. She could see that whatever had stabbed him was still inside. It was pulled back, dropping her husband to the floor with a wet crack. She quickly made her way over, intent on seeing how she could help. True, she was a despotic monster who was truly incapable of love or pity, but Rodolphus was one of the Dark Lord's inner circle.

She saw a flash of light as several people apparated into the Death Room. More Death Eaters were entering the chamber, along with more members of the Order. The fight was just beginning...

Sirius entered the battle with a healthy blood lust pounding through his veins. His godson was here, and he needed help. He quickly spotted Bellatrix kneeling next to her bastard of a husband.

"Lestrangle!" Sirius called out, raising his wand. "We have a Black family matter to deal with!"

Bellatrix grabbed her wand and began to fight, sending a series of medium-power hexes at her cousin.

Sirius dodged, ducked and weaved, clearly enjoying himself in the duel. A streak of red light passed by his head, making him dodge to the left. "Come on!" He goaded. "You can do better than that!"

Another red beam erupted from her wand, impacting heavily on Sirius' chest, making him stagger backwards... towards the veil... until something bodily impacted him, sending him tumbling of the dais and collapse to the ground. A moment later, he was surrounded by active magic as something levitated him towards a plinth. He was still a little woozy... until he saw Harry, reaching out to help pull him in.

"Are... are you okay?" Harry asked, looking his godfather up and down.

"Yeah..." Sirius groaned, feeling a stiffness in his chest. "She just tried to stun me."

Harry hugged Sirius as tightly as he could with one arm, while the other attempted to crush Hermione's hand. "You... you almost left me tonight... both of you..."

Sirius, although widely thought of as an immature prankster, wasn't nearly as dumb as he portrayed. "We're not going anywhere, pup." He said, hugging Harry with one arm and pulling Hermione into a three-way hug with the other. "We'll stand with you..."

Ginny prodded Ron with her elbow, pointing him towards the hug. "Finally!" He whispered. "I thought those two would *nev er* figure it out."

"You know, teaspoon boy, you're getting better." Ginny whispered back. "All we need know is a girlfriend for you, and you might just progress up to a tea cup."

"Thanks." Ron whispered back.

"Lestrangle!" A voice bellowed from the plinth.

Bellatrix stopped chasing Tonks around and looked up. Her mouth dropped open as she saw the ripple of something becoming visible... It was *who* she saw. "N-No..."

Hermione squeaked as she saw a second Harry stood in front of the Veil. "Harry!" She hissed urgently.

Harry and Sirius turned, paling as they saw a second 'Boy-Who-Lived' before them. "That's different..." They whispered together.

The Angel of Death was pissed. "You tried to kill my family, Lestrangle. You tried to break me. You must be punished."

"Oh... is wittle Potty gonna twy and hurt me?" Bellatrix taunted.

"No. Not 'twy'." A beam of sickly yellow light erupted from the palm of his hand, streaking across the Death Room to impact Bellatrix heavily. Her scream spoke of a pain so great, of a *terror* so great it was enough to shock the other Death Eaters. Most of them stopped fighting, allowing the Order personnel to subdue them quickly.

After a moment, the beam was broken. "Run, Bella." The Angel commanded softly.

The mad woman's tattered synapses started firing randomly, wanting to complete her mission, wanting to please her lord, wanting to avoid the pain.

The Angel spoke with a loud voice, utterly emotionless, sounding all the more damning for it. "Run for your *life!*"

Bellatrix ran.

In the meantime, the Angel of Death stepped off the plinth, moving over to the bound form of Lucius Malfoy. "So, Malfoy... you led this mission." He sounded almost like he was enjoying a polite conversation.

Even though he was trussed up like a chicken, the Malfoy patriarch was as imperious as ever. "The Dark Lord will kill you for your transgressions, boy."

The Angel of Death cocked his head slightly. "It's certainly a possibility." He allowed. "'Tis only a shame you won't be alive to see it."

"You think the incompetent Aurors will harm me?" Malfoy laughed evilly. "No... one payment to the Minister, and I'll be released, proven to have been here under the Imperius curse."

"You assume that you're getting out of this room alive." The Angel replied, kneeling down. His voice became far more menacing than Voldemort's ever was. "An entirely wrong assumption, I assure you."

The soft-spoken way these words were spoken made them all the more damning to Malfoy. "But... you're part of the Order! They don't kill their prisoners!"

"I'm not part of the Order, Malfoy." He stood, staring down. "And you're right; I don't kill prisoners. I do, however, exterminate vermin. Now... *die!*" Malfoy flashed green as his magical core was turning into a very potent *Avada Kedavra*, his own magic killing him.

Moody cleared his throat. "What did you do? Why would you kill him, Potter? He was down..."

"And now he's out, Mad-Eye." The Angel replied quietly, turning to face the rest of the prisoners. "I have no conscience or mercy you can appeal to. I cannot be intimidated and I cannot be bought. I am justice." A small smile crossed his face as he raised both hands, focussing a tiny fraction of his magnificent powers towards the Death Eaters. "I am *Death!*" Each of them died as their magic was poisoned. "Now... Bellatrix."

The Angel of Death had so far scored a perfect record, with eleven of the twelve Death Eaters dead. He vanished silently, leaving Moody to preside over chaos. The instant the second Potter was gone, Dumbledore appeared in the doorway, wand raised, prepared for battle.

"What..." Dumbledore trailed off as he realised that the people he was here to save didn't need saving at all. Damn... that ruined his entrance. "What happened?"

Behind Moody, the six children and Sirius (although some would undoubtedly argue that there were *seven* children) quickly rose up, heading for the door. "We have to get moving!" Sirius near-shouted, racing through the corridors.

Bellatrix raced through the corridors as though the hounds of hell were pursuing her. And in a manner of speaking, they were. What she'd faced that evening was beyond her frame of reference. She'd been tortured by the most powerful Dark wizard in history on multiple occasions, giving her the most powerful orgasms she'd ever had in her life.

But even the Dark Lord's most powerful Cruciatus couldn't begin to compare to the raw agony she felt when the second Potter had waved his hand at her. It felt like her entire body was composed of raw nerve endings, being dipped in boiling hot lava.

She sighed with relief as she entered the atrium. The Floo fireplaces. She could use those to escape. She was about to run into one, when she felt a crack in her waist. A moment later, agony began to make itself known.

She slumped to the ground, feeling the agony double as she hauled herself round. Stood less than ten feet in front of her was that blasted second Potter.

"Did I say you could leave?" He asked mockingly. "It'll be harder now... that crack you felt? That was me crushing your hips."

"You... the Dark Lord will... will come for me!" Bellatrix gasped.

"Yes." The Angel replied, smirking evilly. "I'm counting on it."

"He will... kill..."

"He'll *try*." The Angel corrected sharply. "But, he'll fail." He looked up as he heard the Order making their way ever closer. "Still, time draws near, Bellatrix... you must *suffer!*"

She began screaming as the lava flowed over her again, lighting up her nervous system like a Christmas tree.

"Stop!" Dumbledore bellowed from the doorway. "You must not do this!"

"Silence, old man." The Angel said, not even looking over his shoulder. "She has committed her crime... now she must 'serve her time'."

"This is wrong!" Dumbledore said, raising his wand. "She will be arrested and tried under the law!"

"Not my law." The Angel replied. "In fact... time to *die!*"

Bellatrix stopped screaming as her body flashed green for a moment, her magic converted like the other Death Eaters.

"What have you done?" Dumbledore roared, stepping forward with his raised wand.

"I said 'silence', old man." The Angel replied, turning and walking over to Harry and Hermione. "I have something for each of you."

"Who are you?" Harry asked, looking into a face identical to his own.

"I am... it doesn't matter." The Angel replied, pressing a finger against his temple, slowly pulling it back to reveal a silver strand. "I give you this, so that you need not suffer as I have." He pressed his finger against Harry's temple, allowing the memory strand to be absorbed into it. He repeated the procedure on Hermione, who began sobbing as she saw the scene that had caused everything.

Instantly, Hermione turned to Harry, grabbing a hold of the side of his head and kissing him with every ounce of passion she possessed.

"Is this really the right time for that?" Lupin asked, standing close to Sirius. "There *are* single people here, you know."

Tonks saw the opportunity and pounced, smooching the werewolf to a standstill. "There *were* single people, wolfie... but not for long."

Hermione pulled back, looking at Harry intently. "We'll have to talk later."

"Yeah..." Harry gasped, looking completely shell-shocked at his first *proper* kiss. "Later..." He shook his head, bringing himself firmly back to the present. "He's coming, then?"

"Yep." The Angel replied, staring at a particular point on the far wall. "Moony, put Tonks down, please. Might need your wits about you in the next couple of minutes." After a moment, the Angel cocked his head. "Hands in your pockets, Tonks." Beat. "Your *own* pockets, Tonks. Unless you really are counting his pocket change, and not just looking for a couple of Knuts."

"What is going on here?" Dumbledore demanded angrily. "I am the Headmaster of Hogwarts, Chief Warlock of the—"

"Weren't you removed from those posts?" Hermione asked innocently. "Doesn't that make you '*Mr*. Dumbledore'?"

Dumbledore glared at Hermione. "You should hold your tongue, Miss Granger. I *am* the Headmaster of Hogwarts, and if you're not careful, you may find yourself looking for alternate schooling!"

Hermione shrugged, not particularly bothered by the threat, especially considering what she'd learned this evening.

A swirling black cloud of apparition announced the arrival of the self-styled 'Lord' Voldemort. He blinked in confusion as he saw so many witches and wizards waiting for him, which rapidly mutated to shock as he saw his most powerful Death Eater, not to mention his favourite, lying on the floor, clearly dead.

"So..." He began, only to trail off as he realised he didn't have a clue what to say.

"I've come here to kill you, Thomas." The Angel said, raising the glowing blade in his hand.

"So many have... tried... who are you?" Voldemort stared for a moment, before a flash of silver gained his attention. He looked down, seeing the still-quivering Sword of Gryffindor buried hilt-deep in his chest. Black blood was starting to trickle from the sides of the wound, and he felt the purity of the blade begin to ache. "You..."

The Angel was stalking forward, eyes glowing like fog lights. "You have committed so many misdeeds... I may not kill you, Thomas, but I'm going to make you regret *ever* coming after the Potter family." He raised both hands, the sickly yellow beams of the Cruciatus erupting, splashing against Voldemort.

Pain... unlike anything he'd ever felt before. Even when he'd been disembodied in 1981, he'd never felt pure agony like this before. This power was at least an order of magnitude above his own, and he was undoubtedly the most powerful Dark wizard alive.

It had been said that Lord Voldemort was only afraid of one man; Albus Dumbledore. Now, Dumbledore had company.

While the beams were ravaging the Dark Lord, the Angel of Death was making his way closer and closer. When he was close enough to reach out and touch the despotic monster, the Angel broke the beams. Voldemort instantly collapsed to his knees, his battered central nervous system incapable of keeping him on his feet.

"Who... who a-are you?" Voldemort asked.

"Death." With that, the Angel grabbed Voldemort's shoulders, dragging him to his feet and pulling him into a bear hug. "And now we die." The Angel closed his eyes, sending a very particular command to his magic.

The atrium of the Ministry of Magic was vaporised as the Angel of Death exploded. It was only the work of Harry, Hermione and Sirius raising shields that saved their lives.

In the aftermath, when supportive charms and beams had been conjured and placed, things were looking a whole lot better. Voldemort had been

found, still breathing, and instantly apparated away... leaving behind his wand arm and wand. Harry snapped the cursed thing, feeling a rush of joy go through him as he destroyed his parents' murder weapon.

The Ministry personnel had come streaming in, seeing the down-but-not-out Dark Lord apparating away. Amelia Bones had immediately called for a vote of no-confidence in the silly bastard, sending a grinning Percy Weasley away to organise the paperwork. Harry and Hermione realised, at that moment, that Percy wasn't loyal to Fudge; he was loyal to good government. If only they could remove that colossal stick from his arse, he might actually turn out to be a good guy. In dire need of getting laid (and possibly a spanking... or maybe combining those two...), but he'd be okay.

Harry and Hermione knew that Amelia would be politicking for the rest of the night, and neither of them could be bothered dealing with such an irritating subject. Together, they strode forward, heading for the fireplace so they could Floo back to Hogwarts.

"One moment." Dumbledore called out sharply. "Mr. Potter, I have things I need to discuss with you. Miss Granger, you may return to Hogwarts."

"Or, we'll both go to Hogwarts and speak there." Harry said sharply, the encounter his other self had with Dumbledore firmly in mind.

"This is not to the time to be childish, Harry." Dumbledore said reprovingly. "There are things we need to talk about. A *private* conversation."

Harry glanced at Hermione, who blushed and nodded. "There isn't anything I keep from Hermione, Headmaster. My..." He trailed off, prompting her to nod again. "My fiancé and I tell each other everything."

"Fiancé?" Dumbledore repeated, looking shocked. "Mr. Potter, you don't... we'll discuss this back at Hogwarts. *Privately*."

"Of course, sir." Harry said, surprising Dumbledore. "Just the three of us."

Dumbledore pointed his wand at Harry, turning his belt buckle into a Portkey. "No, Mr. Potter. Just the two of us. *Activate!*"

As Harry felt the 'hook in gut' sensation, he could feel Hermione's magic reaching out and mixing with his, taking her along for the ride. The pair of them vanished from the former atrium.

Together, they landed in Dumbledore's office, nearly splatting onto the ancient stone floor. Harry was on his feet in an instant, holding out his hand to help Hermione up. Together, they made their way to the couch that rested underneath the window. They slumped, wrapping various body parts around the other.

"So..." Hermione began. "You came back for me."

Harry nodded, slowly assimilating the knowledge in his mind. "You would have done the same for me."

"True." Hermione said slowly. "I'm..."

"What?"

"Well..." She looked a little uncomfortable at what she was about to say. "You killed twelve people for me tonight, Harry."

"I suppose... in a manner of speaking..."

"I know it was a different you, Harry, but..."

Harry sighed. "You're scared of me." It wasn't a question.

"No." Hermione protested immediately, making Harry look at her sharply. "No, it wasn't that, Harry. It's just... well, a bit daunting to know that the man you love," she smiled as she saw him beam at her, "is willing to destroy the world for you. That other you... damn, he was just so..."

Harry's eyebrow shot up.

"Oh, please!" Hermione snorted. "Please tell me you're not jealous of yourself."

"Little bit."

"Harry, my dear, sweet Harry, you're an idiot sometimes."

"I've been told that."

"You are everything I could want you to be." She blushed slightly. "Of course, if you ever feel like giving me a... private performance of that side of you..."

"Ooh..." Harry felt his own cheeks warm up, but there was only a limited amount of time to get in the truly important mocking. "We've only just admitted how we feel about each other, and you're planning kinky games already."

"Harry!" Hermione managed an offended look. "I'm hurt!"

"Sorry." He said, unrepentant.

"No... I've been planning kinky games for years." She giggled at his momentary 'deer-in-headlights' look. "Trust me, my love..."

"Without question."

"You'll greatly enjoy my perversion, Harry." Hermione promised, smiling at him as she reached up to gently stroke his face.

"I have no doubt... smartest witch of her generation, you know..."

"Not to mention probably one of the most devious..."

"Seconded."

"I... I truly do love you, Harry." She said, leaning closer and resting her forehead against his. "With everything that I am, I love you."

Harry reached, cupping both of her cheeks as he moved closer. "And I you, my love. My heart belongs to you... as it always has."

Hermione, at that point, uttered words that Harry *really* didn't want to hear. "What about Cho?" With a groan, Harry looked down. Hermione reached up, pushing his head back up. "Harry."

"Well... I... I thought you wanted Ron." He whispered.

"Ron? Why'd you think that?"

Harry sighed, before pulling one of his hands free and extending a finger. "When we stopped fighting after the Firebolt incident, you hugged Ron, not me." A second finger. "When we thought that Buckbeak had been executed, you hugged Ron, not me." He extended a third finger. "On the evening of the Yule Ball, you were angry at Ron not taking you, not at me. You spent most of the summer with him before I got there-"

Hermione stopped him speaking by kissing him passionately. After a moment, she pulled back. "I... I never thought of it that way. Harry, me and Ron spoke, during that summer, when he revealed he fancied me. I pointed out, quite rightly, that he treats me *exactly* the same way he treats Ginny. I'm his sister, Harry, not his love interest."

"Oh..." Harry stared into her eyes for a moment. "But... if you love me, why didn't you ever say?"

"Because I was afraid, Harry." She whispered. "You're gorgeous, rich and famous... why the hell would you ever love a mousy little bookworm like me?"

"Because you're a gorgeous mousy little bookworm with a filthy mind and a cracking body." Harry retorted instantly. "And you're not that mousy... Christ, you gave me my first erection when you hugged me in Diagon Alley before second year... and my first wet dream. Not to mention making me really horny when you smacked Malfoy that time."

"*That* made you horny?"

"Seeing Valkyrie!Hermione in action? Oh, hell, yeah!"

"Hmm... have to remember that one. We're both idiots, Harry."

"You're not."

"Shut up and kiss me." Hermione commanded, leaning closer and capturing Harry's lips with her own. Unable to resist a base impulse, she reached down to Harry's lap, groping gently for the thing she most wanted in the world. She squeaked, which Harry matched a moment later, when her hand found an impressive bulge in Harry's jeans.

"Hermione..."

"That's *mine* later." She said firmly.

"Always."

"And don't you forget it."

"You're still holding it... not likely to forget it."

"And, you're free to do whatever you want to me, too." Hermione said, feeling Harry's lips begin to grin. "Behave, Harry. Dumbledore'll be here soon."

Harry grumbled as he pulled back, thinking as many uncomplimentary things about ugly people (Snape, Fudge, Malfoy, Voldemort, Umbridge) to rid himself of his arousal. It was rather difficult... considering Hermione hadn't let go and was now absently stroking him. "Hermione... please..."

"What?" Hermione asked innocently. "I think he's pleased to see me."

"Yes, he has a joyful tear in his eye." Harry said dryly. "But, if you keep doing this, he's going to spit at you."

Hermione's grin could be described in no other way than 'wicked'. "My tongue is just *aching* for that, Harry."

Harry began coughing. "Please..."

"Oh..." Hermione, reluctantly, released her hold on her newest toy. "All right... for now."

"I'm the son of one Marauder and the godson of another... I will get you back, you know."

"I'm looking forward to it."

"I'm thinking the library... no, Snape's potions class!"

Hermione blushed. "I've stopped..."

"Too late. Just picture the scene..."

Whatever Harry was going to suggest was cut off as the fireplace roared green for a moment, the old man stepping through. "Ah, Harry..." Dumbledore said amiably, heading over to Fawkes' perch and reaching into his pocket, pulling out the newly-regenerated phoenix and placing him on the shelf. "We have much to discuss. Miss Granger, you're dismissed."

"I'm staying with Harry." Hermione said firmly.

"This is a private conversation." Dumbledore retorted, equally firmly, as he sat behind his desk.

"Not from her." Harry said, adding his two pence to the conversation. "Whatever concerns me concerns her."

"Not this."

"There's *nothing* you could say that Hermione won't be privy to." Harry said bluntly. "If you're not prepared to discuss it with her present, then we have nothing to discuss. May we leave?"

"Miss Granger may leave, but you and I, Harry, have much to discuss."

"No, we don't."

"We do. For instance, who was that other person in the Ministry? What did he give you?"

"Good questions that, frankly, I refuse to answer."

"I need to know, Harry." Dumbledore said, popping a lemon drop into his mouth. "For the Greater Good of the Wizarding world. Now, please tell me."

"No."

Dumbledore rubbed the bridge of his nose. "I've had a... stressful evening, Harry, trying to smooth over your actions with the Ministry. This is not the time to be childish. Tell me who that other person was."

"No."

"I have an idea." Hermione said, leaning closer to Harry. "Why don't you tell Harry and myself why Voldemort was there this evening?"

"That is confidential information, Miss Granger. At this moment in time, only I know the precise reason. It's something that I can only discuss with Harry, when you're not present."

"Oh..." Hermione glanced at Harry, performing a silent countdown from three. At 'one', the both began speaking in perfect unison. "The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches... born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies... and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not... and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives... the one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies..."

Dumbledore's jaw dropped. "What... how..."

"I think we're done here." Harry said, hauling himself and Hermione to their feet. "You said earlier that Hermione would be expelled from Hogwarts. That won't be necessary... since we've both decided to leave this school as soon as the year is over. Since that's a whopping four days away, we'll stick around."

Dumbledore shook his head woodenly. "I'm afraid I can't allow you to leave Hogwarts, Harry... Miss Granger, you're more than welcome to go, but you'll be remaining here, Harry. Since you know of the prophecy, you know that you must be trained to fight the coming darkness."

"And I also know that you're a manipulative old man who has plans to use me in this war. I'm not a puppet, old man. I'll fight, in my own way and on my own terms." Harry said sharply. "You've lost me... I wonder what'll happen when the 'Boy-Who-Lived' announces that he's leaving Hogwarts."

Dumbledore still had one more card to play. "As your magical guardian, I can forbid you from leaving--"

"*You* are not my magical guardian."

"Nor mine." Hermione added.

“Sirius holds that for both of us... we asked him last Christmas.” Harry said, smirking slightly. “Had he died tonight, it probably would have reverted to you... shame. You lost. Now, we’re leaving, and you *won’t* stop us.”

They approached the door, taking hold of each other’s hands, and raising their wands. Without a word, the door vanished neatly. Hermione stepped through, stopping when she felt Harry stay still. “I hope, Headmaster, that we do not see each other again. For your sake.”

“I-”

“Save it. Sooner or later... the day comes when you can’t hide from the things you’ve done anymore. That day’s today.” Harry snapped, then remembered what his other self had said in the previous timeline. “I hope I live just long enough to piss on your grave.” He strode out, leaving Dumbledore sitting, sobbing, at his desk.

They made their way slowly back to Gryffindor tower. Neither of them knew what the future held, but they knew there was nothing they couldn’t face. Together.

"Open Wide the Gates of Time" OWtGoT II: Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore

"*Silencio!*" cried Hermione and the man's voice was extinguished. He continued to mouth through the hole in his mask, but no sound came out. He was thrust aside by his fellow Death Eater.

"*Petrificus Totalus!*" shouted Harry, as the second Death Eater raised his wand. His arms and legs snapped together and he fell forwards, face down on to the rug at Harry's feet, stiff as a board and unable to move.

"Well done, Ha-"

But the Death Eater Hermione had just struck dumb made a sudden slashing movement with his wand; a streak of what looked like purple flame passed right across Hermione's chest. She gave a tiny "Oh!" as though of surprise and crumpled on to the floor, where she lay motionless.

"*Hermione!*" Harry roared, forgetting everything that was happening around him as he saw her fall. He quickly bolted forward, near-throwing himself to his knees as he looked down at the wet mess that used to be smooth flesh.

He reached out with a shaking hand to her throat, feeling for her carotid artery. For a moment that lasted an eternity, he couldn't feel anything. He didn't notice Neville kneeling next to him, reach for the other pulse on Hermione's neck.

"Dat's a pulse, Harry..." Neville said after a moment. "I'b sure of it."

Harry didn't feel relief, as he expected he would. All he could feel was a mind-numbing, spirit-crushing despair at seeing Hermione casually dropped during the battle. He turned his head slightly, staring at the Death Eater with pure malice.

The Death Eater reached up and tore off his mask, revealing the long, pale, twisted face of Antonin Dolohov. He gestured at Hermione, then at Harry, then at Harry again. Even though he was still silenced, his meaning was clear.

Harry stood, his free hand clenching spasmodically as he stalked forward, intent on ending the scum-sucking dickhead. He was robbed of the chance as Neville managed his first non-verbal spell, sending a weak-but-adequate stunner spell at Dolohov's maniacally grinning face. He slumped backwards, out of the fight... for now.

Together, Harry and Neville picked up Hermione, having no time to be gentle, as they left the office, meeting up with Ron, Ginny and Luna. Thanks to the actions of the Death Eaters, they ended up in the Veil Chamber, and Harry's already grief-stricken heart took another blow as Sirius was blasted back through the Veil.

Albus Dumbledore was many things... but a fool wasn't one of them. True, he was incredibly short-sighted, and he focussed entirely too much on one plan at a time, making him... unprepared to deal with rapidly changing circumstances. And these certainly qualified.

He made his way to Hermione's slumped body, tapping her robes with his wand to send her straight to the hospital wing.

"Harry... Harry!" He called out, making Harry's bloodshot eyes lock on hers. "Come on, my boy... we'll take the Floo back to Hogwarts to check up on Miss Granger." He helped Harry to the fireplace. "Kingsley!" He called out.

"Headmaster?"

"Please ensure the rest of the students make it back to Hogwarts as quickly as possible."

With that, Dumbledore and Harry vanished in a blasé of green fire.

Once back at Hogwarts, Harry raced through the corridors as though the hounds of hell were pursuing him. None of it mattered; he had to get Hermione. Dumbledore was running right beside him, somehow managing to keep pace with the man less than a tenth of his age.

They burst through the doors to the hospital wing, nearly tearing the ancient wood from its hinges.

"What the devil-" Pomfrey spluttered as she erupted from her office.

"Hermione..." Harry muttered, seeing her lying on his normal bed. She looked, for lack of a better word, dreadful. She was far too pale, the front of her medical gown shining in the low light with leaked blood.

"H-Harry..." Hermione moaned, trying to smile when she saw him coming in, but dissolving into a pained grimace.

Dumbledore quickly headed over to Pomfrey. "How is she?" He asked, concern leaking into his voice.

Pomfrey leaned closer. "She's in a bad way, Albus... that spell pierced her heart. Unfortunately, the flesh was badly burned, and I can't stop the bleeding. She's dying, Headmaster... she doesn't have a lot of time left."

Dumbledore's grimace was entirely genuine. "What have I done?" He asked himself, feeling every single second of his 163 years. He watched as Harry moved closer, taking her hand as he sat tentatively on the side of the bed. "Hermione..."

"Are you okay?" She asked, looking him up and down.

"Me? I'm... never mind me, Hermione. How're you?"

"It hurts, Harry." Hermione whispered, squeezing his hand tightly. "I... I'm sorry, Harry."

"Why?" Harry noticed his vision growing misty. Confused, he reached up to find his eyes leaking. He was *crying*? He hadn't cried since he was four years old...

"I... I should have done b-better." Hermione whispered plaintively. "I..."

Harry pressed his finger against Hermione's lips. "Shh... you did very well, Hermione. I'd be dead if it wasn't for you." He let his hand slip down slightly, cupping her cheek softly.

Hermione moaned, arching her back slightly as another wave of debilitating pain washed over her. "I... I don't have long..." She gasped.

"N-No..." Harry said, panic filling his voice. "You can't l-leave me, Hermione... You can't..."

"I don't think I have a choice, Harry." She whispered back. "I'm dying... I know it..."

"You can't..." Harry sobbed. "P-Please, Hermione, don't... don't leave me... I can't live without you..."

"You have no choice, Harry..." Hermione said, squeezing his hand tightly. "I have to tell you..." She coughed, blood coming from her mouth.

Harry reached up and calmly wiped the blood away. "Hermione, before you do... let me..."

"I k-know, Harry." She said, staring at his eyes. "You love me."

"I... do..."

"And I you, my love." She whispered. "For so long... you must go on, Harry... don't mourn me..."

"No..." Harry moaned. "Please, H-Hermione... everyone I love leaves me... don't leave me, please..."

She flailed her free hand for a moment, trying to take a hold of him. "L-last request..."

Harry took her flailing hand, kissing her knuckles tenderly. "Anything, my love."

"Kiss me, Harry... please... just once... let me feel your lips..." She was cut off as Harry leaned forward, pressing his lips to hers chastely. She moaned slightly, pressing forward before leaning back, opening her eyes slowly. "As good as I thought..."

Hermione Granger, the smartest witch of her generation, died with a small smile on her face and the hand of the man she loved beyond reason held in her own.

Again, the tears prickled up in Harry's eyes, one slowly making it's way down his cheek. He felt... a cold, *aching* numbness in his chest.

Nothing... A thought formed and died in his mind. *There's nothing left... it's all gone... all of it...* He could feel his magic roaring throughout his body, but he didn't care what it was doing. The hole of Hermione's death was deep and sharp, making him feel... *empty*.

Dumbledore was hard pressed to keep tears of his own from making their way down his face. *This is all because of me... because of the things that I didn't do... and should have done. If only I'd told Harry... if only I'd found a way to stop this from happening...* A very wrong thought crossed his mind. *It's risky... dangerous and foolish...* He was more than a little apprehensive. *It'll mean going back to what I was...*

He looked up again, spotting Harry crying into Hermione's neck, holding her tightly. *I'm sorry, Harry... More than you can know.* Steeling his resolve, he looked at Pomfrey. "Keep things together here until I get back, Poppy."

"Get back, Albus?" Poppy asked. "Back from where?"

"That... is a far more interesting question than you might suspect." Dumbledore said as he strode out of the Hospital Wing.

On his way up the stairs, Dumbledore quickly evaluated a cost/benefit ratio over his planned course of action. *This is going to cost me a lot... but it's worth it, to stop it costing my grandson... He's not of my blood, but of my love.*

A voice broke into his thoughts. It was weak, but still had an underlying strength. **You know this is wrong, Albus. What you're proposing-**

Is necessary, Fawkes, my friend. Because of my actions, I've cost Harry so much. It's time to correct that.

And you believe this is the way?

Can you think of anything better?

There was silence as Fawkes contemplated the options. **No.** He admitted after a few moments. **But, if you do this, Albus, I won't be able to stay with you.**

Dumbledore sighed as he mounted the spiral staircase to his office. *I understand, old friend.*

Unless...

Opening the door, Dumbledore spotted his familiar weakly balancing on his perch, looking more than a little nervous. **There is a way... you know what it is.**

Dumbledore recoiled. *Fawkes, I know what I'm contemplating is wrong, but what you're suggesting-*

Is just as necessary... as you know.

"Fawkes..." Dumbledore muttered aloud. "What you're asking is to... it's almost unfathomable."

It's the only way I can stay with you, old friend. For more than sixty years, we have fought the good fight together. I wish to continue that, and this is the only way.

"It's wrong, Fawkes..."

You know that I love you, Albus. I've been alive a long time, and you're the only human I've loved. I do not want to leave you. You must bond me to you so that I can stay with you.

You're suggesting that I use a Dark Art bonding on you... Fawkes, there's a reason that spell was made highly illegal!

I know... I also know it's what I want, old friend. Please...

Dumbledore knew that he'd need the help of his phoenix in the mission to come, but what he was asking... "I will do as you ask." He said heavily, slowly lifting his wand. Taking a deep breath, he dug into his magic, preparing to force a bondage bind on a Phoenix. It was highly illegal, but it was at Fawkes' request.

As soon as the spell hit the newly-regenerated phoenix, he squawked loudly, writhing as the Dark energies tore through him. He began to grow quickly, painfully, up to his normal size. Instead of his plumage turning it's normal beautiful red and gold, it slowly turned black, making him look like a massively-oversized raven.

Ah... that feels oddly... good, Albus. Fawkes sent stretching his wings.

"I was never planning on taking you with me, old friend." Dumbledore said as he tapped his robes with his wand, changing them from a horrendously eye-clashing violet to a pure black.

You need me. You know this.

I agree. Dumbledore thought back. *But a bondage bind on a phoenix...*

Get over it. Fawkes said, looking at his human. **I hope you're going to do something about that beard.**

With a chuckle, Dumbledore nodded, trimming his waist-length beard to a short goatee, pointed at the chin. He quickly trimmed his hair to shoulder length, tying it up into a pony tail.

You look very dashing. Fawkes offered, snickering slightly. **I suggest you use the sword.**

The Sorting Hat animated as it fell of the shelf, landing neatly on Dumbledore's desk. "Hello, Headmaster."

"Adrian."

"One Sword of Slytherin, coming up." Adrian offered, scrunching up his face as something 'clanged' onto the desk. Dumbledore lifted the hat, revealing the jet-black Sword of Slytherin.

"I feel I should warn you, once this you start using this, it will be very difficult to come back from it." Adrian offered.

"For the Greater Good... of Harry Potter, Adrian, I have no choice." Dumbledore said, tucking the sword into his waist band. "It is for him that I do this."

"Going Dark for a boy, Headmaster?" Adrian said, a definite smirk on his face. "What would the papers say?"

"I no longer care." Dumbledore gently placed the hat back on his shelf. "I have failed that boy too often. Now, I have the opportunity to do something about it. I am not 'going Dark'... I am simply using *all* spells in my arsenal."

"You're preaching to the converted, Albus." Adrian replied. "You forget, I'm a thousand years old. I've seen Dark, Light and Grey. Using the Dark Arts to save the world? You're grey... *as you always should have been!*"

Fawkes flapped over, landing on Dumbledore's shoulder. ***Avast, my hearty!***

Rolling his eyes, Dumbledore raised his wand. "Now... time to see what we can do, old friend..."

"Open wide the gates of time,

Allow me the darkness to restore my prime,

To the past I must go to save her life,

And give Harry Potter the love of his wife!"

Hogwarts began rumbling as the old magicks were called upon, allowing her head to throw off the shackles he'd placed on himself all those decades ago and use *all* his powers to help mankind. She diverted all her energy into Dumbledore, allowing him the strength he needed. The instant he vanished with a 'pop', so did Hogwarts. Time was to be rewritten, the history of things to come skewed.

Dumbledore found himself stood in his office, quickly looking at the clock. *Ah, excellent! They're just arriving at the Ministry now.* He dashed to his fireplace, moving far quicker than a man his age should be capable of. "Ministry of Magic!" He shouted, vanishing in a puff of green flame.

He blinked as he entered the Atrium, spotting the children running into the lift. "Bollocks..." He muttered, a mental agreement coming from his phoenix. "Fawkes, would you-" He was cut off as Fawkes teleported the two to the edge of the Department of Mysteries.

Phoenix for Dumbledore? Fawkes sent cheekily.

One day, old friend, that smart-arse of yours is going to get you into trouble.

Perhaps... but not today. Fawkes took off, heading down the corridor like a missile, looking for something to rip, tear and maim. Dumbledore followed, hearing the sounds of battle coming from the other side of the floor. ***Found 'em!*** Fawkes near-shouted. ***So far, things are going as expected... you'd better get over here, Albus. Harry and Hermione have been separated, and there's two Death Eaters chasing them.***

Dumbledore vanished with a pop. As he reappeared, he was already walking forward, raising wand and sword as he saw Harry and Hermione fighting against Antonin Dolohov and that nameless, faceless Death Eater.

Dolohov raised his wand.

Silencio! cried Hermione and the man's voice was extinguished. He continued to mouth through the hole in his mask, but no sound came out. He was thrust aside by his fellow Death Eater.

Petrificus Totalus! shouted Harry, as the second Death Eater raised his wand. His arms and legs snapped together and he fell forwards, face down on to the rug at Harry's feet, stiff as a board and unable to move.

"Well done, Ha-"

But the Death Eater Hermione had just struck dumb made a sudden slashing movement with his wand; a streak of what looked like purple flame tore through the air... only to be casually deflected as Dumbledore, but not Dumbledore, stepped from the shadows, flicking his wand and sending the spell ricocheting into the air, where it sizzled impotently on the ceiling.

"Antonin..." Dumbledore said politely, stepping in between the Death Eater and his students. "What a shame it is to see you here."

Dolohov just cackled silently. He'd been caught, true, but it was by the Muggle-loving old fool. He'd spend a couple of weeks in Ministry custody and then be able to rejoin the Dark Lord.

Avada Kedavra. Dumbledore intoned smoothly, the green blast erupting from his wand and ending the life of the Death Eater.

Harry's jaw dropped, followed a second later by Hermione's, as they watched the 'Leader of the Light' kill his opponent. "S-Sir..."

"Ah, Harry." Dumbledore said, turning round, allowing the students to see the full extent of his changes. "One moment, please." He quickly used the killing curse on the petrified Death Eater. "Now, I believe we must make haste."

"You... you *killed* them..." Hermione said, still clearly in shock.

"Yes, I did." Dumbledore said shamelessly. "If you know the consequences of allowing that filth to live..." He shook his head. "Come with me."

The three made their way through the Department of Mysteries, quickly spotting Luna and Ginny hobbling along. "Professor Dumbledore?" Ginny asked, staring at the, frankly *disturbing* view of her headmaster.

"Miss Weasley... are you well?"

"Er... my ankle's a bit... banged up." Ginny said, leaning against the wall heavily.

With a quick flick of his wand, Dumbledore healed the break, using a spell to compress the wound slightly. "Try not to run on it." He said, before looking at Luna. "Miss Lovegood?"

"I'm fine, sir." Luna stared at him for a moment. "You've gone grey, sir."

"Yes, I have." Dumbledore confirmed. "That, however, is a conversation for another time. Where are Misters Longbottom and Weasley?"

"I'b here..." Neville said stumbling along the corridor. "Professor Dubbleadore?"

Another flick of his wand healed Neville's nose, before a third flick summoned Dolohov's wand from the corpse, which he then presented to Neville. "Use this until we can obtain a proper replacement, Mr. Longbottom." Dumbledore then raised his wand. "*Po int Me Ronald Weasley.*" After his wand stopped spinning, he took off in that direction, looking like the Pied Piper as the five children followed after him.

"What the hell's going on?" Ginny asked, looking at Hermione.

"Not a clue." Hermione said with a shrug. "But, he's here and he's fighting... can't really ask for much more at the moment."

Fawkes came screaming down the corridor, pursued by three Death Eaters. He spun neatly in mid-air before racing back down the corridor, backed up by his human. He wasn't afraid of being hurt; after all, he was a phoenix and would be reborn from his ashes, but if he was killed, he'd be useless for the rest of this fight.

Dumbledore quickly sent a wave of killing curses, non-verbally, at the three Death Eaters. Two of them fell to the spells, while the third, Bellatrix Lestrange, managed to duck out of sight and run.

"Professor... you're killing the Death Eaters..." Ginny pointed out unnecessarily.

"Yes, I am." Dumbledore said, opening the door to the brain room. He stepped inside, seeing Ron sat by one of the shelves, giggling to himself. "Oh, sweet Merlin... Mr. Weasley!"

Ron's head snapped up, staring at Dumbledore for a moment before he began giggling again.

"*Purgio.*" Dumbledore muttered, sending a purging spell at Ron, quickly and neatly removing the effects of whatever spell had been cast on him.

Ron stopped giggling, immediately. He shook his head, climbing to his feet. "What the hell happened to me?" He asked, before getting a good look at Dumbledore. "No... never mind that... what happened to *you*, Headmaster?"

"A fascinating tale, Ronald," Dumbledore said absently as he looked around, "but most definitely a tale for another time. Come, we must keep moving." As Dumbledore was speaking, Fawkes re-entered the room, coming in to land on Dumbledore's shoulder. *Ah, Fawkes... how goes it?*

Lousy... I only managed to get one.

There are more enemies to confound and slay, my friend. Patience is a virtue.

Fawkes just 'hmpd' in Dumbledore's ear as they began moving again, heading towards the penultimate confrontation of the evening.

"Students, we're about to go into another combat situation." Dumbledore said as he led the students into the Veil Room. "Make sure you have adequate cover and use your strongest spells. *Reducto*, *Bombarda* and *Diffindo* would be best. Remember, they won't be throwing tickling charms at you. I suggest you return the favour."

Hermione gasped as she realised that the 'Leader of the Light' was telling the students to 'shoot to kill'. "Sir!"

Dumbledore turned, his eyes crinkled in annoyance. "Miss Granger, think of it this way; who should walk out of here alive? Innocent students or murderous thugs?"

"S-Students..." She muttered quietly. "Sir, don't you think-"

"Not any more." Dumbledore said firmly. "Miss Granger, we must all do whatever is necessary to protect those we love and care for." He glanced at Harry, making Hermione's eyebrow shoot up. "You know this to be true... in your heart."

"Y-Yes, sir." Hermione said, tentatively reaching down and taking Harry's hand in her own. He blushed slightly but didn't try to pull away.

"Now..." Dumbledore gestured the students to cover as he stood in the centre of the room, his eyes locked onto the doorway. "Let us see where events take us..."

Dumbledore had less than a minute to wait as the Death Eaters burst into the room, wands drawn. He was pleased to note that there were only seven of them, thanks to his efforts earlier. He began firing spells, not AKs for the moment, but enough nasty spells to make the get behind cover.

And... cue the Order... Fawkes thought, hovering near the ceiling as he spotted for his human. The bright white smoke trails of apparition

announced the arrival of Sirius, Tonks, Remus, Shackbolt and Moody, each of them quickly taking behind cover and firing spells.

Sirius made his way cautiously to where the students were hiding, spotting the Dumbledore lookalike fighting with unparalleled ferocity. He grabbed Harry in a fierce hug tightly, seeing Hermione's hand held tightly in his own. "Hey, pup. How're you?"

Harry snorted. "I've had a bloody odd evening, Padfoot." He said softly. "... Is it me or has Dumbledore totally changed the plot?"

"It ain't you, pup..." Sirius said, watching Dumbledore casually striking down the Death Eaters. "I should really go and help-"

"Stay down!" Dumbledore roared, not looking over. "This is *my* fight! Where is your coward of a master, Bellatrix?"

Bellatrix Lestrange was bleeding heavily from multiple wounds, but her pride was still at full strength. "You dare to call the Dark Lord a coward, old man?"

"I do." Dumbledore confirmed, sending a full-power Cruciatus at her, making her writhe and scream. "Just like you..."

Bellatrix began crawling, trying to get away from Dumbledore's intense torture curse. She was halfway towards the doorway when it slammed open, revealing... another Dumbledore? This one was clad in the characteristically horrendous purple robes.

The other Dumbledore looked up in shock, seeing another version of himself torturing one of the Death Eaters... then he saw nothing as a stunning charm robbed him of consciousness.

The momentary lapse in concentration was all Bellatrix needed to make a break for freedom, the Cruciatus losing strength for a fraction of a second. She began running, heading for the relative safety of the Atrium.

Dumbledore quickly tied up the rest of the Death Eaters, infecting each of them with an overpowered flesh-rotting curse. It would take almost an hour for them to die, and best of all; it was unstoppable. He headed over to his past self, reaching up to his temple, pulling out a memory strand which he dropped onto the other Dumbledore's forehead. The strand wriggled for a moment before sliding down, heading straight for the ear.

That done, Dumbledore drew the Sword of Slytherin from his belt and set off in pursuit of Bellatrix. When he got to the door, he stopped for a moment, before turning. "Harry, Hermione, Sirius... you should come along, too."

The three got up, dashing across the chamber and into the corridor as Dumbledore ran after the mad-dog that was Bellatrix Lestrange.

Bellatrix raced through the corridors as though the hounds of hell were pursuing her. She'd heard of Dumbledore's power, of course, just like everyone who was born in Wizarding Britain over the last five decades, and she'd heard the pitiful rumours that stated that Dumbledore was the only wizard her master was afraid of... she could certainly put some proof behind those rumours now.

As she entered the atrium, she felt a pang of relief as she saw one of the many Floo fireplaces already lit. All she needed to do was dash inside and call out her dest-

Her thoughts stopped as another Cruciatus impacted her, throwing her to the ground. Using the last of her weakening strength, she turned to see Dumbledore, with Potter, his Mudblood and the Blood Traitor watching.

"I didn't say you could leave." Dumbledore said sternly, not allowing his concentration to waver at all. "Instead, I really must insist that you die."

"What's this?" Another voice called out, drawing Harry's, Hermione's and Sirius' attention. Lord Voldemort was stood near the Fountain of Magical Brethren, staring at the almost unbelievable sight of the Leader of the Light torturing someone. "You appear to have fallen off your pedestal, old man."

Dumbledore stared at Bellatrix for a moment, before he broke the curse, casually sending a Killing Curse at her. Bellatrix slumped and died, allowing Dumbledore to turn his full attention to Voldemort.

"It was foolish of you to come here tonight, Tom."

"Oh?" Voldemort raised a mocking, hairless eyebrow at Dumbledore. "Are you going to try and arrest me, old man?"

"No." Dumbledore said, raising the Sword of Slytherin. "I'm planning to kill you."

That shocked Voldemort. "You, Dumbledore? Aren't you the Leader of the Light?"

"I'm the man who's gonna take you down, Tom." Dumbledore said, staring with pure hatred at Voldemort. "You should learn to pay more attention to your surroundings."

Fawkes, who'd discretely made his way behind the despotic monster, raced forward, his talons razing through the top of Voldemort's head. Instantly, the despot started bleeding black blood, feeling a malevolence from the all-black phoenix that was unnatural.

"We shall fight now, Tom." Dumbledore said, sending a barrage of five Killing Curses at his nemesis.

Three floors below, the Dumbledore in purple woke up, feeling outrage at being casually stunned. He stopped when the memory that had been dropped into his mind worked its way through his subconscious, slowly assimilating itself with his own mind.

My god... Dumbledore slowly stood up, thinking furiously. *What have I done? What have I cost?* He watched the rest of the memory, where his future self decided to unleash all his powers, and made the same decision. *Very well... it's time to be what I should always have been.* He turned and began to run, heading up for the confrontation in the atrium. He had work to do...

Voldemort dived to the side, dodging the killing curses with only inches to spare. He sent back his own curse, not able to cast as fast as the old man. He never noticed the follow up barrage of bone-breaking hexes that came his way, turning his left shoulder and several of his ribs to powder, prompting him to scream.

Dumbledore conjured Fiend-Fyre, imbuing it into the shape of a phoenix, which surrounded Fawkes. ***I will detonate inside him, Albus.*** Fawkes offered. ***Because of the bondage bind and a selfless sacrifice, I won't regenerate... I love you, my human.***

With a nod, and a slow tear down his cheek, Dumbledore agreed. *I will miss you, old friend.*

You won't... neither of us exist in this time. We are anachronisms... the other you and the other me will still be able to fight.

Then I shall see you on the next great adventure, old friend.

Fawkes nodded, racing forward at the centre of a Fiend-Fyre pyre, heading straight for Voldemort. The Dark Lord saw him approaching, and tried to move, but space in the atrium was limited. He screamed when he felt the razor sharp beak of the phoenix impact his chest, exploded with all the force of Light and Dark, Fiend-Fyre surrounding him.

Dumbledore gasped as the explosion tore into his magical core. He hadn't known that the bondage bind would have that effect on him. Feeling his strength waning, Dumbledore looked over to see his other self race into the atrium. "Protect him..." He dropped to his knees, coughing up blood.

Voldemort tried to apparate away, only to find himself too weak. It was time for plan B to go into effect...

Harry gasped as *something* began to penetrate his mind. It was evil, malevolent and oddly familiar. Hermione took his hand, staring at him in concern as he collapsed onto his back, gasping pathetically.

"Kill him..." The weak voice of Voldemort came from Harry's mouth. "Mudblood... Black... Dumbledore... if you wish me to die, kill the boy..."

Dumbledore snorted. "As if, Tom." He glanced over at his fallen self, realising that there was still a little fight left in him. "Together?"

Dark!Dumbledore nodded, wheezing slightly. Together, the two wizards raised their wands, casting an exorcism spell on Harry. For a moment, the two fought the spirit, feeling it become more entrenched as it tried to fight back.

An overwhelming wave of love washed over Harry as Hermione pressed her lips to his, blushing brightly. Sirius took his hand, muttering about his feelings for his godson.

Harry, boosted by the spells from the two Dumbledores, not to mention the raw power of his love for Hermione, fought back. His scar began to bleed angrily, before a black mass erupted, falling to the floor impotently, before bursting into flame.

Dumbledore looked over at his Dark counterpart, seeing him pass away. With a casual flick, he transfigured the body into a small action figure, before he summoned it to hand and thrust it into his pocket. That would certainly lead to far too many questions...

Voldemort wheezed as he tried to rise. "You..." He coughed, spitting out a glob of black blood. "What have you done?"

Around them, the fireplaces flared up, Ministry personnel flooding through as they only now responded to the massive waves of magic that had occurred.

Dumbledore allowed himself to smirk evilly. "Two down, Tom." He said, raising his wand. "How many left, I wonder?"

Eyes wide in shock, Voldemort gathered every ounce of his strength and apparated away, leaving behind his right leg.

With a frown of distaste, Dumbledore vanished the mess, before he turned back to Harry. "Are you okay, Harry?"

"Yeah..." Harry sat up, coughing. "What the hell was that?"

"I'll tell you as soon as we get back to Hogwarts." Dumbledore said, looking round the atrium. "I expect the Ministry personnel will want an explanation... and I have something to do." The instant he spotted the coward that masqueraded as the Minister, he strode forward, rearing back and slugging the incompetent little glob of sputum.

"Wha..." Fudge gripped his jaw, looking up in shock at Dumbledore.

"Now do you believe me?" Dumbledore roared, looking angrier than ever. "I told you... I *told you* that he was back! Now you've seen it with your own eyes!"

Several Aurors were glancing around the atrium, spotting the notorious criminal Sirius Black stood there. "Sir!" Dawlish shouted. "Sirius Black!"

Arrest him!" Fudge shouted, seeing a way out of the political disaster that was sure to come.

"Freeze!" Dumbledore roared. "Sirius Black is under the protection of the House of Dumbledore, Fudge. I can assure you, he's going nowhere. I have proof of his innocence."

Fudge looked up. "He's not innocent!"

"I tire of your stupidity, Fudge!" Dumbledore slapped the Minister's face twice. "I challenge you to a duel of honour, Fudge. To the death. You have impugned my honour for the last year, and I demand satisfaction."

Amelia Bones stepped forward. "Enough of this." She commanded sharply. "Professor Dumbledore, unfortunately, we can't allow the Minister of Magic to duel in this precarious time." She began to smirk. "I'm calling for an immediate vote of no-confidence in the little shit. As soon as he's ousted from office, he's all yours."

"Thank you." Dumbledore replied, nodding respectfully at her. "With regards to Sirius Black, he is under my protection until a trial can be arranged."

"So noted... Headmaster."

"Thank you again." He turned to glance at Harry. "Now, Madam Bones, I really must return my students to school. This has been a trying evening for us all."

"Of course, Headmaster. Your authorisation to make Portkeys has been restored, retroactive to this morning."

"You have my gratitude, Amelia." Dumbledore summoned a long piece of wood from the floor, turning it into a Portkey with practiced efficiency. "I would like it if we could arrange a time tomorrow morning to cover as much as we can. Would you be able to come to Hogwarts?"

"Of course."

"Then we shall continue this conversation tomorrow morning." Dumbledore gestured to the students and Sirius. "Please take this to my office. I shall gather the rest of the students and Portkey them straight to the Hospital Wing. Then, I shall return to my office, and we shall have a *long* overdue conversation."

Harry took the Portkey, eyeing Dumbledore curiously before he held it out to Hermione and Sirius, vanishing instantly.

Harry landed on the floor, groaning as Hermione landed on him (which, under the circumstances, wasn't that unpleasant) until Sirius flopped onto the pair of them.

After getting up, Sirius helped Harry and Hermione to their feet, before pushing them onto the couch and slumping onto a chair. For a moment, silence reigned as each of them took a few seconds to contemplate the events of the evening.

"Well..." Sirius said, before trailing off.

"It's been a bloody weird night."

"Hermione!" Harry said, shocked at her profanity.

"Get over it, Harry." Hermione said. "What the hell was that? Two Dumbledores, one of them using Dark Arts casually, killing the Death Eaters, telling us to do the same... I think I'm allowed to swear tonight."

Dumbledore appeared in the office, landing lightly as he casually tossed the small stone he'd used as a Portkey into his waste bin. "Indeed, Miss Granger. Now, do any of you require a visit to Poppy before we begin speaking?"

"No, sir." Harry said, "But, we all have questions."

"As you should." Dumbledore said. "Under different circumstances, I would not answer them. But after the events of tonight... I think we have no choice. First, I would like to explain my actions this year, then this evening, and then you may ask any questions that you wish."

Harry glanced at Hermione, who nodded, then at Sirius, who shrugged. "Very well, Headmaster."

Dumbledore sat down behind his desk, summoning a bottle of brandy and four glasses. "Normally, I wouldn't encourage underage students to drink, but I think we will all require one by the end of our conversation.

Sirius stood, taking hold of a glass and holding it out. Dumbledore half-filled the glass before pouring himself one. The two men took a sip, appreciating the fine taste of brandy, before Dumbledore began.

"Approximately sixteen years ago, I was interviewing Sybil Trelawney for a position of Divination Professor. The meeting was held in Hogsmeade, as I believed that letting her into the castle would cause... complications."

Hermione's eyes narrowed as she thought. "You believed if she was in the castle, it could be difficult to get her to leave?"

"I believed so, yes." Dumbledore nodded. "To be perfectly frank, before that night, I never really held the 'art' of Divination in high regard. It isn't really a subject that can be taught. You either have a gift or you don't. However, for those with the gift, they do require training. So, it was necessary

to have a Professor. During the interview, she gave a prophecy. It stated, 'The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches... born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies... and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not... and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives... the one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies...'

Harry blinked as the meaning washed over him. "It was me... me or Neville, right?"

"Correct. So, I immediately notified the Potters and the Longbottoms about this, telling them to go into hiding. I proposed the use of the *Fidelius* charm, since it's unbreakable under ideal circumstances."

"The 'right circumstances' being not trusting a rat." Sirius snarked as he took another swig of brandy.

"Indeed." Dumbledore nodded. "I was not privy as to who was Secret Keeper. At the time, I believed it to be Sirius. I was invited to Godric's Hollow to visit on several occasions. James and Lily had a piece of parchment with the secret on it, and I didn't recognise the handwriting. When James and Lily were killed..."

Dumbledore sighed, taking a sip of his drink. "At the time, I believed it essential to get Harry to a position of safety. Since I, along with everyone else, believed that Sirius was the Secret Keeper," He turned to Sirius, "I couldn't allow you to take Harry. That left only his blood relative, Petunia Dursley. I... I had Hagrid bring you to Surrey, and left you on the doorstep with a letter."

"You... you left a baby on a *doorstep*?" Hermione squealed angrily. "How could you? He could have crawled away... been attacked by a wild animal, anything!"

"I am aware of that, Miss Granger." Dumbledore said heavily. "Have you ever heard the phrase 'power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely'?"

Hermione nodded.

"I hold three of the most powerful positions in British Magical Society. I am the Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot, making me able to influence politics and laws. I am the Supreme Mugwump of the ICW, which allows me to influence international politics, across the whole world. And I am the Headmaster of one of the foremost schools of magic in the world. Put simply, I began to believe the hype that was thrust on me."

"And now?" Harry asked, feeling anger begin to pump through his veins.

"And now, I've had some sense knocked into me." Dumbledore said. "I intend to resign my position on the Wizengamot and the ICW, and step down as Headmaster. I intend to take a teacher's position here, allowing me to focus on what I enjoy without the temptations of power."

"Oh..."

"So, I left you at the Dursleys. I realise now what a mistake that was. When you arrived here five years ago, I knew you'd suffered. Suffering that was *my* fault. Instead of using the brains god gave a goose, I continued to return you to that abusive environment, year after year."

"Yes, you did." Harry said emotionlessly.

"There's more, Harry." Dumbledore said, taking a long swallow of brandy. "At the end of your first year, you asked me why Voldemort came after you. Do you remember?"

"I remember you telling me I was too young to know." Harry groused lightly.

"Yes... I did. That was only partially the truth." Dumbledore sighed. "Once you became aware of your destiny, I honestly didn't believe you'd be strong enough to face Voldemort. I considered it my duty to 'harden' you to your destiny."

"I see." Harry was again emotionless. Hermione, on the other hand, had a few choice phrases to share.

"How *dare* you?" She roared. "You... you... you *evil* old man! Do you have any idea what you've done to him?"

"Yes." Dumbledore said firmly. "And that is why I have to finish, Miss Granger. Believe me, I will relate all of my sins to you this evening." He waited until Hermione nodded before continuing. "Your second through fourth years run along a similar vein; I believed that each of your 'adventures' were suitable training, allowing you to learn just enough to face Voldemort, but not enough to survive the battle."

"Albus, I'm not sure I can listen to any more of this." Sirius said, feeling an overwhelming urge to reach for his wand. "You're... how could you?"

"At the time, I believed it to be necessary. I couldn't defeat Voldemort, so nobody else would be able to, either. My... arrogance was profound."

"I'll say." Sirius said, keeping hold of the hilt of his wand.

"There's more... and it relates to Snape."

Hermione cocked her head. "Not *Professor* Snape, sir?"

"I..." Dumbledore sighed. "Voldemort found out about part of the prophecy. He was spying on me when Sybil gave me the prophecy. He immediately ran to Voldemort and told him what he overheard. It can be solidly rested on Severus' shoulders that Voldemort targeted the Potters."

Sirius was on his feet in an instant. "I'll kill him!"

"Sit down!" Dumbledore roared, making Sirius sit, instantly. After a moment, he continued. "It is not your place to deal with Severus. It is *mine*. And I will."

"Why..." Harry felt hot tears prickling at the back of his eyes. "All this time... I was a slave at the Dursleys... you *paid* him... and he's been abusing students..."

Dumbledore nodded. "Yes. I allowed him to be... unpleasant to the students to maintain his cover as a Death Eater. He convinced me that he was truly turning his back on Voldemort and wanted to spy."

"This..." Hermione shook her head, wiping away her own tears as she grabbed Harry's hand. "Sir, do you know what you're admitting?"

"Yes, I do." Dumbledore said, focussing on the subject at hand. "Ever since last summer, I've been ignoring you, Harry. The reason for this is that I was scared of you. Your connection to Voldemort has been growing ever since he used your blood in his resurrection ceremony last year. Voldemort is an accomplished Legilimens, and I feared that he'd be able to use you as a conduit to me. My fear stopped me from speaking to you and telling you what you needed to know."

Harry was nearly in shock at the revelations.

"Now for the... events of this evening. Miss Granger, you remember when you had the time turner?"

"Yes, sir."

"I told you that you must not be seen. Time turners are incapable of creating a paradox. However, there are other ways of travelling in time. That other copy of me time-travelled after the disaster in the Department of Mysteries."

"What disaster?" Sirius asked.

"Both you and Miss Granger died in battle." Dumbledore said bluntly. "Sirius, you were knocked through the veil by Bellatrix, while Miss Granger, that flame whip from Dolohov would have nearly sliced you in half. My future self decided that was unacceptable and travelled back in time, intent on changing it."

"How do you know?" Harry asked.

"When he was leaving the Death Room, do you remember he dropped a memory strand on my forehead?"

"Yeah."

"That was his memories of this evening, from his point of view. I knew that I could not allow that to happen again. Like him, I will use whatever spells are in my power to protect you. Including the Dark Arts."

Silence reigned. Harry cleared his throat. "So... what happens now?"

"Originally," Dumbledore said, "my plan was for you to return to the Dursleys for at least half of the summer. However, I believe you would be better served at Headquarters with Sirius."

"Sir?"

"You will need training, Harry... training I should have started giving you five years ago. I've been a fool. I want to try and correct that."

"Oh..."

"I believe that a training schedule, lasting for most of the holidays should be drawn up, teaching you the most powerful combat magicks I know. There's also several missions that will need to be undertaken, and I would like to have both of you present in Order meetings. Your point of view can only be an asset."

Harry stared at him.

"One thing I *will not* do, Harry, is tell you where to go. I am aware that the revelations of tonight will not doubt infuriate you. I understand and accept that." He held up a hand, seeing Harry about to speak. "I do not want your forgiveness, Harry. Instead, I would like to earn my redemption. I have wronged you. I would like the opportunity to make it back up."

"Do you really think you can?" Hermione asked.

"No." Dumbledore said candidly. "That will not, however, stop me from trying."

"I'll try, Headmaster." Harry said diplomatically.

"That is all I ask, Harry." Dumbledore stood up, flicking his wand at himself, turning his robes black and trimming his hair. "Sirius, would you come with me, please? I believe the two of us should have a conversation with Severus."

Sirius headed for the door, stepping through, Dumbledore right behind him. Just before he closed the door, Dumbledore stuck his head back

round. "Oh, Harry? Hermione?"

The two teens looked up. "Yes, sir?"

"You both love each other, you know. Do me a favour? Admit it to each other." With a grin, Dumbledore withdrew his head, before putting it back round. "Another favour? Don't wipe it off on my cushions." Dumbledore closed and sealed the door, holding up his hand to stop Sirius from moving. After a moment, he heard Hermione's breathy, "Oh, Harry..." followed by a moan.

"You know... you frighten me sometimes..." Sirius said as he led the way down the stairs.

Once inside the dungeons, Dumbledore casually bound Snape in unbreakable ropes before throwing him onto a chair.

"Headmaster?" Snape looked confused. "What are you doing?"

"It's question and answer time, Severus." Dumbledore said, rooting through the shelves in Snape's private cupboard. "Ah, excellent." He withdrew a small vial, filled with a clear liquid.

Snape began squirming as he realised just what the Headmaster had picked up. "Sir, what are you—" He stopped speaking as Sirius grabbed hold of his head, prising his jaw open.

Six drops later, Snape's eyes glazed over.

"Now, Severus... shall we have a conversation?"

"Yes."

"Who are you loyal to?"

"The Dark Lord."

"Why did you allow me to believe that you were my spy?"

"Because my Lord commanded me to, and you're an old fool."

"Indeed... indeed. Was anything you told me true?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"The Dark Lord wasn't planning on killing Lily."

"Why not?"

"Because I asked him to spare her for me."

"What?" Sirius frowned, squeezing Snape's jaw painfully. "Explain! *Now!*"

"I asked the Dark Lord to allow me to keep the Mudblood as a sex-toy. Had she followed his commands, she would still be alive."

"Sirius, stop!" Dumbledore commanded, waving his wand to push Sirius back. "I understand your desire to kill him, but there are still questions to be answered."

"Ask them quickly." Sirius said through gritted teeth. "I have limited patience."

"I will." Dumbledore turned back to Snape. "Have you been providing information to Voldemort about the Order of the Phoenix?"

"Naturally. He *is* my master."

"And when I asked you to teach Harry Occlumency, did you?"

"Not at all. It was a chance for revenge against James Potter."

"James Potter's been dead for fifteen years, Severus. What could you hope to gain by torturing his son?"

"He's a Potter... they're all guilty of *something*."

"Only one more question, Severus." Dumbledore said, raising his wand. "Are you prepared to die?"

"I have been ever since I accepted the mark."

"Good. *Avada Kedavra*." Dumbledore watched impassively as a man he once considered a friend die. Another flick of his wand transfigured him into a match, which he struck against the side of the bench, allowing it to burn out. He dropped it to the floor, grinding it into dust with his boot.

"You know... you're definitely a lot more intimidating now." Sirius said, his normally pale face even whiter.

"You stand with Harry." Dumbledore said in a clipped voice. "As long as you remain there, you have nothing to fear from me. Now, let us return to my office. I just hope they've exercised some self-control."

Upon his entrance, Dumbledore was forced to suppress snickers as Hermione quickly rebuttoned her blouse. Harry was blushing brightly, but there was a gleam to his eye that hadn't been there before.

"Harry..." Dumbledore knelt down, holding his wand across his palms. "I would like to pledge myself to you. I, Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore, hereby swear my life to supporting Harry Potter and Hermione Granger/Potter in the upcoming war. I will train them to the fullest of my abilities and will keep no information from them. As I swear, so mote it be."

He flashed for a moment, before standing. "Now... I believe you and Miss Granger should continue your... conversation. Please ensure you use appropriate contraception. Good evening."

As Harry and Hermione fled, Sirius chuckled rustily. "I suppose I'd better get to work on cleaning up the hovel."

"Take as many elves as you need from Hogwarts." Dumbledore offered. "And kill that rodent you have working for you at the moment."

Sirius blinked.

"He betrayed you, Sirius, not to mention the rest of the Order. I intend to make sure we do *not* lose this war."

"Aye..." Sirius took his leave and Floo'd away, leaving Dumbledore alone with his thoughts.

Harry, Hermione... I know that I've betrayed you both by my actions. This time, I will not mess it up again. He knew that there was nothing they couldn't face... together. And he'd do everything in his power to make sure they stayed that way.