

Parley a Future

“He that shall live this day, and see old age,
Will yearly on the vigil feast his neighbours,
And say ‘To-morrow is Saint Crispian:’
Then will he strip his sleeve and show his scars.
And say ‘These wounds I had on Crispin’s day.’
Old men forget: yet all shall be forgot,
But he’ll remember with advantages
What feats he did that day: then shall our names
Familiar in his mouth as household words
Harry the king, Bedford and Exeter,
Warwick and Talbot, Salisbury and Gloucester,
Be in their flowing cups freshly remember’d.”
--Henry V, William Shakespeare

July 1998, After the Final Battle

The half-broken door to Hagrid’s hut creaked and a dark-cloaked form stood framed by the bright opening, wand raised.

Harry, sitting before the cold hearth, pointedly turned his face away from the figure. The hand with which he petted Fang clenched but the great boarhound did not react, just continued to snore contentedly. Harry stroked the short, flat hair on the dog’s head three times, four times, before the silhouette in the crooked doorway stepped inward. Sunlight from the side window lit Professor Snape’s sallow features as he glided closer.

“What do you want?” Harry growled. When Snape did not reply, Harry asked, “The Order didn’t really send *you* to find me, did they?”

“Heavens no,” Snape replied, slowly lowering his wand to hold it at his side. “Unlike the others I could hardly care less what became of you.” The wand at his side bounced nervously while his eyes passed keenly over Harry, who was sitting low on one of Hagrid’s massive overturned buckets. “Eventually, however, I grew suspicious.” Then more cockily: “And I am the only one with the sense to look here, knowing as I do your penchant for wallowing.”

Harry moved his hand toward his pocket, face contorting in pained anger. “Hagrid was my friend!” he snarled and then had to swallow hard. Harry forcibly lowered his hand from his wand pocket back to Fang’s floppy ear. The boarhound had lifted his head at the forceful voices and cracked open one eye. His head soon lowered back to rest on one of his great paws, and air escaped from his bulk in a sigh. Harry resumed petting him.

Snape had raised his wand when Harry reached for his, but he now lowered it again. “It seems unlikely that your concern for Hagrid’s pet is your sole reason for sequestering

yourself away.” Harry did not reply. Snape went on, more taunting. “Certainly your vanity is not such that you fear going unrecognized without that accursed scar of yours . . .”

Harry rose to that bait by shooting Snape a derisive look and rubbing his now smooth forehead.

“Did you know about the horcruxes?” Harry asked as though fishing for something to use against his old nemesis.

“Know or suspect?” Snape asked in return. At Harry’s shrug, he explained, “I certainly suspected, but could not confirm with the Dark Lord, nor coincidentally enough, with Albus.” The last came out annoyed. “It was the only thing that explained your connection to him, your scar being one of them.”

Harry picked up one of Fang’s well gnawed dragon bones and put it beside the hound’s nose, to no response. “Good riddance to it,” Harry said.

“Not vanity then . . .” Snape uttered as though checking things off a list.

Sharply, Harry tossed his hand to indicate the cabin and said, “What, you think I’m plotting something in here?”

Snape was slow in responding. “It does not appear that you are. These are difficult times, however, and thoughts run easily to assuming the worst.”

“What do you want, Snivellus?” Harry demanded impatiently. “Out with it or get lost.”

“Why so eager to return to your solitary communion with this animal, I wonder?”

“Say what you came to say and get the hell out of my face,” Harry reiterated.

Snape’s eyes glanced at the pocket Harry had reached for previously. This time anger had not compelled Harry to move toward a fight, so Snape’s wand remained pointing at the floor.

“I was concerned that the general consensus--that you had destroyed all of the horcruxes--was mistaken . . . that something untoward may be occurring. It was the only reasonable explanation for your absence from your adoring fans as well as your friends, who so clearly are in need of leadership after such upheaval in their little lives.”

Harry laughed with a kind of sob. “I could kill you right now,” he said.

Snape’s wand twitched. “I am most curious why you have not tried to do so.”

“You were baiting me?”

“It is little effort,” Snape haughtily pointed out. “But this is the first time in a year that you have not attacked me the precise instant such an opportunity arose.”

Harry bent his head toward Fang to scratch under the dog’s thick leather collar. “You saved the mission, and probably my life,” Harry said with false benignity. “Why would I attack you?” Still in a false voice, Harry went on, “You made it possible to get at Nagini. She was the last one. Why wouldn’t I owe you something?”

As Harry spoke, Snape’s gaze grew more suspicious. “But that does not explain why you have run away.”

Harry waved his hand wildly, instantly upset again. “This isn’t ‘running away’ . . . I’m at Hogwarts.” Harry glanced pensively out the window of the cabin and bit his lip. Quickly he bent back toward Fang.

Snape glanced out the window as well, but saw nothing of interest between the cabin and the high wall of the castle.

“Leave me alone,” Harry said, anger gone again already. “Nothing ‘untoward’ is happening here. Get lost. Go take a long broom flight over a short sea.”

“That the best you can do?” Snape mocked lightly.

Quietly, almost inaudibly, Harry answered, “Yes.”

Snape made his first move toward the door. “I will tell them where you are.”

“I’d rather you not.”

Snape turned back. “The job of Chosen One, Hero Extraordinaire, whatever you will, has not ended for you. The wizarding world, not to mention your little friends, expect at least your glowing presence, even if you are not quite as iconographic as you once were.”

“It’s over,” Harry muttered.

“For the survivors it is never over,” Snape insisted.

“It IS over,” Harry said more forcefully, standing and taking out his wand for real this time. Snape had his up and aimed, but Harry merely swung his from side to side in front of himself. With a crumpled face, he tossed the wand at Snape’s feet. “Take it.” He sat heavily back down on the bottom of the bucket.

Snape flipped the discarded instrument into his hand with a flick of his own wand. He held Harry’s wand up and asked, “Are you rejecting this because Albus arranged for you to have it? Is this your way of rejecting everything?”

“You’re really dense; you know that?”

Snape examined Harry’s wand before stepping over to hold it out to Harry.

Harry stared at him, but he did not take the wand. Snape set it on the quilt covering Hagrid’s massive bed, easily within reach. He stepped leisurely away as though to taunt Harry with his exposed back. At the door he stopped and for half a minute, silence descended upon the cabin.

“You’re still here,” Harry pointed out in annoyance.

“I am not terribly in the mood to report to McGonagall, myself,” Snape admitted without turning around to face him.

“I wouldn’t risk running into Scrimgeour if I were you,” Harry tried not to sound too much like he enjoyed pointing that out.

Snape rotated around to face him. “Kingsley kindly failed to execute the Minister’s warrant last time I encountered him. The Minister is not particularly pleased with you either, I hear.” Snape tapped his long fingers on his wand, glanced at Harry’s wand, which still lay upon the quilt, and raised his wand, aimed directly at Harry’s nose. “Pick up your wand.”

“No,” Harry said, attentively petting Fang instead.

They remained in that tableau for several breaths. Finally, Harry reached for his wand and said, “Nothing works. Not even a Lumos. It’s gone.”

Snape struck out with a slow-developing Sparkle Hex, which Harry instinctively attempted a counter for, but was pushed back to the wall, tumbling off his seat. He scrubbed at his eyes as his vision filled with fireworks.

“Damn you! Why’d you do that?” he shouted at Snape. “I TOLD you . . . my magic is gone.” Fang rose up and licked Harry’s face, which Harry also did not have a counter for.

“I recognized that you believed that, but did not think it possible,” Snape said, gesturing between the hearth and the door. “Even though you passed up several clear openings for easy revenge in the last three minutes.”

Harry’s vision cleared and they considered each other while Harry pushed Fang’s snout out of his own. He managed to set the bucket back on its top and sit upon it with one hand while defending himself from the dog with the other.

“So that is why you are hiding in Hagrid’s hut?” Snape asked.

Fang finally gave up washing Harry’s face and chewed upon his own haunch instead. “I wanted to go to the castle, but I . . . couldn’t find the door.”

“Mr. Filch has always got by. I’m surprised you could not.”

Harry frowned. “I admit at first I thought it may have become a pile of rubble for real. Then I remembered: that’s what it looks like to Muggles.” In a tone of confession, Harry bent his head and said, “I didn’t imagine I’d care this much about losing my magic. But I feel like half of what I was before.”

“You should return to the Burrow, Potter,” Snape said, seeming uncomfortable with a confessing Harry.

“You going to take me?” he mocked.

“Only if I cannot help it. How did you get here?”

“Sirius’ bike. Bloody long ride though.”

“Ah.” Snape exhaled through his teeth. “Come up to the castle.” He sounded less angry and annoyed all of a sudden, which brought Harry’s gaze up to him.

“What? Now you’re trying to be *nice*?” Harry accused.

“You have spared me much ongoing aggravation from the Dark Lord. I am not utterly ungrateful.” Snape leveled his wand at Harry’s heart, his other hand holding the door to the hut. “On top of that, you are completely helpless, Potter. It makes you far less like your father.”

“Try anything and I’ll deck you,” Harry threatened.

Snape’s face took on a comically dubious expression. “Right. You will *never* get the opportunity. Come along.”

Harry followed out of the cabin and through the missing gate that previously protected the pumpkin patch. Burn marks scarred the lawn leading to the castle. Harry’s eyes moved over the castle walls, pained.

“It suffered minor damage,” Snape stated. “Undoubtedly not as bad as you are perceiving right now.” Snape opened the side gate leading to the bailey and gestured that Harry should lead on.

Harry’s footsteps stuttered to a stop and he insisted, “There’s a solid wall here. One of the few left standing.”

“It is not a wall, Potter. It is the gate. Go on.” When Harry failed to move, clearly believing he was being put on, Snape impatiently said, “Look at the marks etched into the stone.” He pointed above the arched gate in two places. “Can you see those?”

“Yes,” Harry replied.

“They are Mr. Filch’s marks so that *he* can find this door himself. Come along.”

Snape led the way in and Harry, with just one short second thought, followed. As they stepped up to the fountain, the castle materialized around Harry and he had to swallow an emotional noise of relief.

“Better?” Snape sharply asked.

“Yeah,” Harry replied stiffly, sounding begrudging.

Snape rolled his eyes and led the way to another inner courtyard. Halfway across that they encountered McGonagall, coming the other way, relying heavily on a cane.

“Harry dear,” she said with emotion. Her concerned eyes flickered to her colleague with more than a hint of suspicion.

“Found him in Hagrid’s hut,” Snape informed her.

“I didn’t realize you were hunting for Harry,” she said evenly.

Snape tossed his broad-sleeved robe generally in Harry’s direction as though it answered that.

“I guess I did instruct everyone to do so,” she conceded. Turning to Harry, she said, “The Weasleys are most concerned about you, Harry. I think we should pay them a visit immediately so they can call off the search.”

“I just needed some time to think,” Harry said. “I told Ron that.”

She hooked her arm around his, hung her cane over her forearm, and leaned on him instead. “Yes, well, I don’t believe they expected you to think quite so long.” She peered at him with affection. “You do look different without that lightning bolt, my boy.” She patted his arm. “Makes you look even more like James . . .” She trailed off into the distance of memory but returned quickly. “Well, they are trying to arrange a celebratory picnic and it cannot commence without you, so let us get you there, shall we?”

She led him away, but Harry glanced back over his shoulder. “Is Snape coming?”

McGonagall stopped and rotated them both around, still holding fast to Harry. “I doubt Mr. Snape wishes to go,” she pointed out ploddingly. Her fingers rapped on Harry’s forearm and she asked the former professor, “Did you put him under an Imperio, because if you-”

“Certainly not,” Snape retorted sharply.

“He didn’t,” Harry insisted, tired of all the suspicion. Very tired.

“But you sounded as though you wished him to accompany us. . .” she went on.

Harry struggled a moment before saying with confidence. “He was in the Order, you know.”

“I am well aware of that, Harry,” McGonagall stated, unconvinced.

“And Dumbledore trusted him,” Harry added, finding himself arguing because he dearly wanted someone present who knew the truth; an ally against the painful shock he would have to confront when that truth became universally realized.

Snape appeared as surprised as McGonagall by Harry’s insistence.

McGonagall turned Harry aside and whispered, “Are you trying to get Mr. Snape arrested?”

“No,” Harry whispered back.

Their heads bumped as Harry leaned closer to hear her say, “I only ask because many of the Ministry Aurors will be at the Burrow . . .”

“True. But none of them have arrested him yet, despite having opportunities.”

McGonagall pulled away slightly and invited, “Why don’t you come along, Severus?”

Harry leaned over and asked, “Are *you* trying-” but he was cut off by her squeezing his arm sharply. He assumed Snape learned what he needed to know in his keen glance at McGonagall’s eyes before he bowed and followed them inside.

At one of the hearths in the Great Hall, McGonagall held out a canister of Floo power to Harry, who hesitated and glanced questioningly at Snape. Harry had no idea if the Floo would work for him or not. Snape nodded once, subtly. Harry grabbed up the powder, tossed it onto the merry flames of a fresh fire and soon was spinning away toward the Weasley residence.

Harry stepped out of the hearth and turned to assist the less agile headmistress who arrived right behind him. The few people lounging on the couch or helping with party preparation rushed over to Harry in eager greeting. The warm noises grew fainter as the Floo tinted green a third time and Severus Snape arrived.

“What’s he doing here?” Charlie challenged them.

“He’s here with Professor McGonagall and me,” Harry stated, immediately marching toward the open door and the boisterous sounds outside.

Molly Weasley, plasters covering her chin and left ear, intercepted Harry and, following a firm hug, said, "Ginny and Ron and the rest of your friends are out looking for you," she said, casting glances back at McGonagall and Snape. "They said to hold you here, that you shouldn't go looking for *them*."

"I'll wait here. No worries," Harry said easily.

The impromptu celebration was spread wide on the broad lawn beside the Burrow. The sun had even decided to make an appearance. Harry took a seat at a rickety table and withstood all the congratulations from those already occupying it. He did not bother this time to point out that he had done everything they admired just to stay alive, so congratulating him was not required. Normal conversation resumed after everyone expressed their gratitude and gave their own personal version of recent events, the close calls, the still missing, and the lucky happenstances that could have turned out so much worse.

Harry's friends returned and hugged him or clapped him on the back too hard. Ginny came running over and gave him the longest hug of the bunch. She sat down beside him, fully pressed against him from shoulder to knee. Harry appreciated the solidity of her.

The twins dashed over, handing out brooms. A broom was held out to Harry. "We're playing Quidditch, come on," one insisted, despite sporting a bandaged hand the size of a Mountain Troll's club.

Harry glanced at the broom and then around the lawn. He found his former nemesis positioned at the next table, facing him as though he knew that Harry would be looking for him. Snape shook his head faintly. To the twin, Harry gestured with his mug, pain shooting through his ego with a razor edge. "I'll just stay here, drink my butterbeer."

"Really?" Ginny confirmed doubtfully.

On top of realizing he would never play Quidditch again, Harry was upset that Snape, of all people, understood him with such ease. It also ground on his ego that Snape had correctly predicted that Harry would again need to rely upon him. "Go on," Harry urged Ginny.

She frowned but did not argue and skipped away. Harry gripped his butterbeer tightly.

The makeshift Quidditch pitch was being repaired by various Weasleys on broomstick. An authentic league-style golden ring was being put into place for one of the missing goals. Rocking high on poles beside it were a Muggle car tyre and a hula hoop. Harry watched all this with an exceedingly heavy heart. He did not really belong here anymore.

Hermione sat down across from him. A bruise darkened her eyebrow and her hair had been cut short to hide that it had singed, but she was otherwise unharmed. "Why so glum, Harry?" she asked, concerned.

"Well, Voldemort's gone, but there's still trouble."

Hermione laughed. “Well, what did you expect?” Leaning closer, conspiratorially, she added, “Ignore Scrimgeour. He can’t touch you.”

Harry did not have the heart to tell her he did not care a rat’s arse about the Minister for Magic. If only that were all he had to worry about. “Maybe I’m just too used to worrying about what is going to go wrong next, or what stupid thing the Ministry may try.”

“Yeah, that’s probably it,” Hermione agreed. “Knock it off.”

From the line of scrub that bordered the orchard, Ginny yelled and waved, her voice had to drift on the wind to be heard. “Come on, Harry!”

Harry waved back, longingly watching the Weasleys and many of his friends take flight on broomsticks. He did not glance back at Snape, figuring he had shown the git far too much vulnerability already. The rest of their table stood and approached the pitch, two on crutches, leaving Hermione and him alone.

“I lost my magic, Hermione,” Harry said, heart racing fiercely.

Ron came along just then and Hermione shooed him off, saying she was not letting Harry play until they talked some. Ron rolled his eyes and loped off toward his siblings.

“Are you certain?” Hermione asked Harry, all serious and parental-sounding.

“Yes,” Harry replied. “No magic works, none at all.”

“Maybe you’re just burned out or something.”

Hope fluttered inside Harry’s stomach. “Does that happen?”

Hermione’s mouth twisted up sideways. “Not that I’ve heard of, exactly. I’ve never heard of it going away completely, just going wobbly.”

“Why did you suggest it then?” Harry asked, wounded.

“It sounded reasonable,” Hermione replied.

“My magic went the way of my scar,” Harry lamented. Very quietly, he added, “I think I’d rather have kept both. Some moments I think that, anyhow.”

“Harry,” she uttered in shock, “that would mean Voldemort could come back, might still be around even!”

“I know that.” Harry snapped, sounding difficult. “But, I got used to having magic. I got used to . . . well, playing Quidditch and . . . Broomstick won’t work, will it? Floo did.”

She shook her head sadly. "Everyone's going to go 'round the bend when they find out about this. I can see why you've kept it to yourself while you worked it out."

Harry declined to tell her that their former hated professor was the first and previously only person to know. He took a long swig of his butterbeer; at least it tasted the same as always. It did not improve Harry's mood to consider that the Dursleys, his only relatives, would probably actually have him over for dinner if *they* knew. He could picture them gloating and it soured his mood further.

At the next table, Snape was being chatted at by Griselda Marchbanks. He ignored Harry now, his dark gaze fixed in the distance. He probably correctly assumed that Harry had informed Hermione and that she could fill in for him.

Tonks approached them, hair brown and dull. She gave Hermione a hug before slapping Harry on the shoulder, almost knocking his butterbeer over.

"How's Remus?" Hermione asked.

"Doing better," Tonks assured her, although her red-rimmed eyes spoke of more worry than her voice. "He'll be out of St. Mungo's next week, hopefully."

"We're going first thing in the morning to see everyone again. Maybe they'll be allowing him more visitors."

"I'm sure he'd love to see all of you," Tonks said, sounding as though she spoke on automatic. "It was such a nasty fight he had . . ."

Hermione stood as Tonks started to step away, saying quietly, "Why don't you go home and get some rest?"

Tonks scoffed sadly. "I've forgotten how to rest." She laughed awkwardly.

Hermione, more gently, said, "Remus is going to need you well-rested when he gets discharged."

Tonks nodded and pulled away from her, but continued on to the next table. Hermione sat back down and fetched a fresh butterbeer with an Accio. As she guzzled it, Alastor Moody hobbled across the lawn, diverting so he could lean down to say something to Snape before continuing on.

"If Scrimgeour wants Snape arrested," Harry commented, "he's going to have to do it himself."

Hermione swallowed and glanced behind her. "I think you're right."

Harry grinned pleasantly. "I like that no one tells me to say *Professor* Snape anymore."

Hermione giggled. Brightening even more, she straightened and said, "Harry, you could ride a broomstick *with* Ginny."

Harry looked over at the orchard where teams were still being sorted out. He jumped up with a broad smile at Hermione, then jogged toward the pitch with a much lighter heart.

Ginny's face brightened, transforming from serious to joyful, upon seeing him approach. Harry came up behind her, set his chin on her shoulder, and said, "Beater, we're going to play Beater. Together."

No one questioned him or complained, and the teams were smoothly rearranged. Harry mounted the broomstick behind Ginny and his stomach rebounded violently as they rushed upward into the air above the trees. They flew in a broad arc, trousers and sleeves flapping, to pick up a bat from one of the twins, who was hovering an equipment trunk in the middle of the pitch, playing keep-away with it when someone he did not like reached inside.

"Oh, no you don't. You're playing on Fred's team," George said to Ron. "You can fetch a broken bat from the shed."

With an expert flick, Ron pulled his wand, stunned his brother and took out a bat for himself. His held his pointed chin high and haughty as he steered away to get into position. George drifted in the breeze, arms wooden, eyes unblinking, rotating gently. Ginny would have fallen off the broom from giggling if Harry's arm had not been around her. Harry steered her and the broom over to the twin and, with a slap on the back, reanimated him. George, who immediately flushed beet red, shouted at his brother, "No more freebies for you from the shop!"

Ron shouted back, "You never give me any, anyhow!"

Harry glanced around and saw that Katie had a Quaffle and that only the Bludgers were left in the floating trunk. "Everyone get in position!" Harry shouted and the chatting groups broke up obediently and took their positions. George, ducking his hot face, lowered the trunk and set the Bludgers loose.

Ginny nearly tossed Harry off the back of the broom when she kicked forward to chase down the closest Bludger. Harry adjusted his grip on the bat in preparation for a good strike. He wished he had gloves like they used to wear for Hogwarts games. The skin of his palm felt likely to go raw against the rough wood before the match was over.

Ginny swerved around the Bludger and ducked close to her broomstick to get clear of Harry's swing. Harry with a *crack!* redirected the magical marauder in Charlie's direction because he had just intercepted a pass from Katie to Fred. Charlie had to veer and his pass to Justin went wide.

Again Ginny swerved hard and gave chase to the other Bludger. “You’re a better flyer than I thought! Especially hauling me around on the back of your broom!” Harry shouted over the wind.

She turned hard again when the Bludger changed direction and the Quaffle started the other way down the pitch, picked up off the ground by Fred, because it was not charmed properly to fall unnaturally slowly. George struck a Bludger in his twin brother’s direction and Ginny surged over, spinning upside down to give Harry an opening to deflect it. Harry barely held on with his knees to the broomstick and as Ginny corkscrewed to right them, he landed hard behind her, his forehead colliding with her hard shoulder bone.

“I think I’m getting too old for this,” Harry complained in her ear.

“Nah, this is *fun!*” Ginny insisted and again they swerved to give chase.

The game went on. Ron’s Keeping proved better than Cadwallader’s and their side gradually pulled ahead. As usual, they did not bother having a Snitch in play.

“What score are we playing to?” Ron asked when they congregated for a short break.

“We’re playing until we’re back in the lead!” George insisted as he flew through the center of their number, sending them scattering.

“Hey, watch it!” Ginny shouted at her brother, sounding oddly like their mother, except for the expletive she added on the end to refer to her sibling in a highly unflattering manner.

Harry glanced down at the picnic to see if either Weasley parent was nearby to hear. What he saw made him sit up and turn his head hard to keep things in view as the broomstick rotated.

“Ginny, put me down,” Harry said.

“We’re about to start again,” she pointed out.

“Scrimgeour is here and he looks like he’s angling for Snape.” Harry had to crank his head around the other way to watch the full-haired Minister and his two assistants, including Fudge, march through the thick of the picnic. Harry had to turn his head first one way then the other to keep them in view.

“So, let him,” Ginny said.

“Ginny . . .” Harry began, and *almost* let it go. His own emotions on this were hardly clear-cut. But he could not deny that he knew exactly what Dumbledore would do right now. Harry said, “See, I don’t think this would have all worked out if it weren’t for Snape, as tough as it is to admit that.”

“He’s still a miserable git,” Ginny argued. Their side was getting back into position to resume play. She went on, “Sure he helped you. Maybe he thought you were going to win and would end up more powerful, so he wanted to appear to be on your side.”

“He doesn’t think that now,” Harry muttered. The Minister had spotted Snape standing beside Ephias Doge and Horace Slughorn, and his assistants spread out as though to execute a pincer maneuver. Harry could not face his conscience if he let this go unchallenged. “Put me down.”

Ginny huffed, but dropped out of the air like a rock before zipping just over the low hedge and down to the lawn. Harry handed her the bat, expecting her to resume playing.

“I’ll come with you,” she said.

“Thanks,” Harry said, since he may need her and her wand.

Harry strode purposefully into the mix of people who had gathered near the minister. The crowd reacted to Harry, and Scrimgeour focused his hardened eyes on him and said unpleasantly, “Ah, still Dumbledore’s man, are we?”

Harry was grateful that the Minister had not said “Dumbledore’s Wizard”. He replied, “Yes, I am,” and avoided glancing at Snape. This had less to do with him than it had to do with filling in for his old Mentor, or more accurately the old mentor they both shared.

“What are you doing?” Harry asked the Minister.

“Rounding up the remaining Death Eaters,” Scrimgeour stated. “As if I need answer to you . . .” He had his wand out, pointed at Snape. Scrimgeour’s other assistant, who must be Percy’s replacement, flicked Snape’s wand out of his pocket and held it out to the Minister. Snape remained impassive, eyes hooded.

“He was helping us,” Harry pointed out. Inside, he was in thorough conflict; part of him still wanted Snape to rot in prison.

“The Wizengamot can decide what to do with him—when they get through their already full schedule,” Scrimgeour stated. “I’m only doing what the Auror’s office should have done two days ago.”

Ginny leaned in close behind Harry and whispered, “What’s wrong with that?”

What was wrong with that? Harry asked himself and found an immediate answer. “You aren’t taking him to Azkaban, are you?” Harry asked.

Scrimgeour adopted a mocking tone. “That’s where Death Eaters go, Mr. Potter.”

“I was just thinking that he should survive to face the Wizengamot,” Harry countered, also demeaning. “Without the Dementors the security tends to be more lax than it once was. You’ve lost a lot of prisoners lately to retribution. People who were helping Dumbledore and were framed, for example.”

Scrimgeour’s shoulders twitched as though Harry had scored with that one. The minister recovered and said, “I suspect Mr. Snape is better equipped than most to take care of himself.”

Harry glanced at Slughorn and then over to Moody and Tonks, who had melted out of the crowd. “What if you release him to someone to watch, like Professor Slughorn?” Harry took this leap based on Slughorn also being Slytherin Head of House. “Or to Moody. One of them can be responsible for him.”

“You are saying, let them be Sureties?” Scrimgeour asked.

Slughorn rocked in his usual trundling manner as he stepped forward. “I think that’s what the young man is suggesting: releasing him to one of our recognizance.” He put his hands in his pockets and looked Snape up and down. “I for one think his lifespan amongst his former colleagues would be rather short, given how much help Potter says he offered him.” He seemed to savor the theory on his tongue as he went on with, “And given that he is trying to keep prison from killing Mr. Snape, that damages the theory that Potter is just setting him up to be killed by claiming to the professor’s old chums that he was a traitor.”

Snape stood, nonreactive to the discussion. His future was being negotiated and he simply stood, taking it in with his usual keen gaze. Harry wondered then just how much trouble and fear one had to survive to become that unaffected by stress. If it were not for anger, the man may be emotionally dead.

Moody had joined the discussion and was saying, “I think the Wizengamot has an interest in hearing Severus out. They won’t get a chance if you take him to Azkaban.”

Scrimgeour glowered at the only face in the vicinity more scarred than his own. He turned back to Harry. “I’ll turn him over to *you* as Surety. *You* can take the fall for his absence when the time comes.” His sparkling eyes indicated such a trade would be quite acceptable.

“Fine,” Harry said. “Inform me where he is supposed to be and when, and he will be there.” Ludicrous, handing this task to a Squib, Harry thought. If only Scrimgeour knew. Snape definitely knew, but he still gave nothing away.

Scrimgeour held his open hand back over his shoulder. “Fudge, get me a Covenant form.”

Fudge felt around in his breast pockets and pulled out a large envelope and thumbed through it. “Not exactly the right thing for this circumst—” he began, before being cut off by his superior. He sheepishly handed over the requested form, then had to fish for a quill in the same round of pockets.

“I’ve got one,” the minister said, producing a Neverout quill with a flick of his hand. He made Fudge bend forward, so he could write upon his back. Finally, he held the form out to Harry. “A spot of blood, if you will. To seal the Surety.”

Harry moved to feel his own pockets, but was tapped on the arm by Ginny, who handed him a pocket knife. Harry thanked her and nicked his finger. The sting of the cut on top of the last week’s events, almost pushed him into a tirade, but he swallowed it with heroic effort. He rubbed his bloody finger across the bottom blank area of the parchment, making it sizzle. After a quick re-examination, Scrimgeour rolled the parchment up and stashed it away next to his heart. He sneered at Snape, gave a crooked smile to Harry, then spun on his heel and marched away with his loping gait. Fudge took a moment to gather his wits to shuffle after him.

Stillness fell on the lawn, leaving the wind in the leaves as the loudest noise. The significance of what Harry had just done sank into his stress-dulled wits. He glared at Snape and said, “Can I have a word with you?” He strode off to the side, expecting Snape to follow as though he were one of his friends and they were working on an operation of some kind.

Snape did follow, but with an independent grace and angle of the head that Harry caught himself admiring, despite the disgusted twist in his abdomen.

Harry began, “So, obviously . . . I need you to cooperate. I have nothing to hold over you . . .”

“You what?” Snape interrupted, gazing at Harry as though he were a First-Year again. “Your future testimony before the Wizengamot is just one of many things . . .” he trailed off, eyes flicking between each of Harry’s. With more disgust, he said, “But as usual, you do not consider that negotiable because you intended from the beginning to tell the truth.”

Harry’s mouth fell open. Snape had pegged him perfectly, which annoyed him thoroughly. “I wouldn’t lie,” Harry said, recovering to find himself insulted.

Snape sighed and shook his head. “You *are* Dumbledore’s man, Potter.”

Back at the edge of the picnickers, Ginny stood tense and antsy as did Hermione, beside her. Hermione had her wand out.

“You make that sound like a bad thing,” Harry said, gesturing to his friends that everything was all right. Hermione stopped bouncing on her toes, at least. Ginny propped her hands on her hips.

Snape hesitated responding. He crossed his arms and turned away from the steady breeze ruffling his robes. “I’m not certain I can tolerate another Dumbledore in my life.”

“Oh,” Harry said with feeling. “I still hate your miserable guts and *could* I toss a Forbidden Curse at you, I would be really bloody tempted to.”

“Ah,” Snape said, eyeing Harry with more respect. “I think we shall get along in this just fine, then.”

Harry tried to hold back a grin. His emotions had been on a see-saw since the final battle and he hoped it stabilized soon. “Wait ‘til they find out,” he muttered, dreading the uproar over his impending announcement.

“I think your standing will suffer less than you fear. Some will prefer it, exactly *because* it decreases your power and influence. I suspect your friends, being the Muggle-loving folk they are, will not care.”

Harry did not at all desire to be reassured by Snape. “I know they won’t,” Harry said with confidence, brushing Snape’s comments away.

Tonks and Moody were strolling toward the house, chatting. Harry watched them, saying, “I was going to be an Auror.” He did not really need to work; he had his godfather’s old house and a vault full of gold. “I’ll have to find something to do with myself.”

“Potions research is an option . . . should you wish to risk it given your sorry skills.”

“Is it?” Harry asked. “I thought you said it wouldn’t work for Muggles?”

“I lied,” Snape said with a sniggering huff. “You believed me?”

“It’s true, first lecture you said it did not involve wand waving.”

“Ah, so you *were* listening. Imagine that.”

Harry carried the snarky tone, “And to think how different things would have been if we hadn’t got off to such a poor start. What with you killing my parents and all.”

Snape’s narrow black eyes came around to Harry. “As usual, assuming you know everything, when you know almost nothing.” Harry’s friends were approaching, so Snape leaned closer and spoke rapidly. “Sometime we will have a real word with each other, but then you would have to let go of that hatred, and what would you fill the void with then? Hm?”

Ginny was within range of hearing, so Harry simply asked with extra innocence, “Speaking from experience?”

Snape gave him his darkest glare and strode away, Disapparating before he reached the picnic.

“Was that agreement with the Minister such a good idea, Harry?” Hermione asked, glancing at the spot where Snape had disappeared.

“It’ll be all right,” Harry assured her, and for once he felt that a last-minute, panic-planned scheme would indeed work out just fine. “I’m still filling in for Dumbledore. He’d expect me to do this.” Harry felt an additional surge of reassurance because the old wizard would be quite proud right now.

“Ah.” Ginny took Harry by the arm and lead him back to the others. “You’re planning an insanity defense. Best to start working on it now.”

They broke into laughter and rejoined the rest of their friends, who had given up on Quidditch because a fresh barrel of mead had arrived. It was also possible that the injured had realized Quidditch was not such a wise idea after all.

Hermione leaned close after surveying the raucous crowd and said, “Many people aren’t going to believe your magic’s really gone, you know.”

“They’ll have to get used to it,” Harry stated, feeling better about most everything. There was a world of opportunity awaiting him.

Overflowing mead cups were handed eagerly through the crowd and Harry ended up with two. Nearly everyone in their turn toasted Harry, who for most of it, kept his head down to hide the fierce blush on his newly unscarred face.

- 888 - END OF ONE-SHOT - 888 -

Author’s Note:

Obviously this was written before the release of Book 7, Deathly Hallows. I don’t really think Harry is going to lose his magic, but I suspect he is going to lose his scar.

This bears only a tiny resemblance to what I had initially set out to write. I had a metaphor attack and this story came out instead. The canonical end to such an era certainly deserves more than 17 pages (even as sweated over as these have been) but real life made that impossible. It’s been quite a ride and a joy to share it with you all. These have been some awfully long coattails we’ve been riding, haven’t they? It’s going to be odd to have canon firmly defined; anticipation and speculation have been such a part of the magic.

And a call out to my intrepid betas: Ally, Amy, Bettina, and Nana.