

## Take Me With You How It Began

*Welcome to the film screening from hell.*

Harry Potter sat with his face to the corner of the darkened room, keeping his eyes off the seven scrying spells shining their varied images onto the walls behind him. He couldn't stay this way much longer, or the same innate magic powering those spells, the magic of the wizarding manor house where his Pack and Pride were being held prisoner, would turn him around by force. It would hold his head still and his eyes open so that he had no choice but to watch, and it would not let him go until the obscenity being enacted at the other end of the scry was finished.

*If I turn, at least I can choose which one I see.*

*Not that any of them are better than the others.*

He got to his feet and looked over his shoulder, into the depths of the first scry.

A blond boy his own age sat slumped at a table, his rich robes and the wand handle visible in his pocket contrasting sharply to the dull misery on his face. Above him, a metal cage swayed on the chain holding it to the ceiling. Flickers of frightened whiskered face and tricolored paws and tail hinted at the occupant Harry already knew.

*"The dear twins I gave to their father, as is proper,"* said a high, cool, amused voice in Harry's memory. *"He chose to restore to the boy the tangible signs of the place the son of such a house should occupy—removing his magic temporarily, of course, to prevent any little accidents—and confine the girl, in her charming Animagus form, in an unbreakable cage which shrinks a little with every passing moment. Unless the boy swears fealty to his father and myself within the hour, she will be crushed to death by its bars."*

The next two scrys held scenes practically identical in set-up—each showed a girl and a boy separated by a thin partition, the boy pacing restlessly like a caged animal, the girl sitting quietly on the bed her section of the room held. The redheaded boy ran his hands through his hair, then slammed them against the walls as though hoping something would give; his sister, in the other scry, fingered the neck of her robes, her face taut with anticipation. The brown-haired boy leaning on the other side of her partition with his eyes shut reached into his pocket and brought his hand out empty several times a minute, and the blonde girl who awaited the red-haired boy twisted a silver bracelet on her wrist, a small, fond smile on her lips.

*"We must not waste pure blood over the scruples of its current vessels."* The voice was back, chuckling to itself as it spoke. *"Both the young wizards fall readily enough under the Imperius, and what witch could resist such strength? These four will produce the first soldiers of my new army."* An outright laugh, the memory of which made Harry shudder. *"Whether they wish it or not."*

The central scry displayed a room very like Harry's own, lit only by the flickering light of a spell for magical seeing, its one occupant torn between knowledge and ignorance. This occupant, though, was female and dark-skinned and delicate, and in her hands she gripped a tiny vial. The small whimpers she emitted had their effects not only on Harry, but on the figures displayed in the two scrys to the right of hers. In one, a broad-shouldered man hurried around corners and through corridors, changing into the form of a great black dog whenever a floating figure in black robes tried to intercept him, always shifting back as soon as it veered off. In the other, a woman with skin darker than the girl's knelt at the doorway of a room, her face in her hands.

*"Your sweet sister must decide for herself, with all the clarity and intelligence fourteen years provide, whether life is still worth living when her beloved has so enjoyed himself with another. Her parents will be allowed to hear her cries, but in different ways—her father will think that she is just ahead of him, around the next turning, but her mother, her beautiful Muggle-born mother..."* A long, self-satisfied sigh. *"Her mother will hear her daughter weeping, and know how to release her. She will know the same about her husband. She will also know that to come into contact with either of them, to see them or touch them or speak to them, will kill her within five seconds. Can she tell one of them how to save the other within five seconds? I doubt it."*

The final scry had taken Harry longer to understand than any of the others; he had only caught on when he realized it was showing him a view from high up rather than at eye-level like the others. Water trickled into the bottom of a pair of holes, in which crouched a brown-haired man and woman, silver collars around their necks and a chain running from one to the other through a tiny tunnel. The man's breathing was ragged with panic, and the woman's hand kept creeping upwards as if she hoped to discover some secret way by which she could touch him.

*"And what should those whose nature is fire fear more than drowning?"* The voice had turned almost musing in this, its final explanation. *"They are chained neck to neck, so that one may only stand up if the other lies down, and they know already that the water will rise beyond the level where they may both breathe. And like your own room, Harry, everything in that room has been charmed against their fire magic, so it will do them no good trying to melt their collars or boil away the water. I wonder whether his chivalry will force him to sacrifice himself for her, or his animal nature will come forth and he will kill her in his struggle to survive?"*

Harry turned away from the last scry to face the first again. His brother still sat immobile in the chair, his sister paced in the cage high above. Already it was noticeably smaller than it had been. There was no more time to waste on memories.

*If there's a chance anywhere, it's here. He's free and he has a wand, and she still has her magic. If they could just touch...*

The cage was unbreakable, he knew that, but there was still room between the iron bars for a human hand to pass through. So the only remaining question was, how to bring the cage where the particular hand in question could do so?

*As long as he forgot that my magic isn't just limited to what's around me—that I can burn anything that I can see—*

Harry focused his eyes on the chain holding the cage to the ceiling, brought his will to bear, and concentrated.

If this didn't work, they were all going to die.

## Take Me With You How It Proceeded

Harry focused on one link of the chain holding up Hermione's cage. *Melt*, he willed it. *Lose your shape. Fall apart.*

The spells around his room, put there to keep him from escaping himself, resisted this use of his magic, but he pushed through them and held onto his thoughts. *Heat up. Turn red. Get soft. Melt.*

Distantly, through the scry, he heard Hermione yowl, saw Draco's pale face staring upwards, but all his attention was for that one link, and that one link was stretching—it was bending—

It snapped. Draco shoved the table out of the way and dived to catch the falling cage, coming to rest with it cradled in his right arm, his left hand flat on the floor for balance.

"Yes!" Harry punched the air in jubilation, then stopped, looking closely at the scry. It had gone fuzzy, like a badly tuned television. Voices shouted in its depths, figures moved rapidly back and forth, lights flashed—

The picture came into focus again, and Harry felt his stomach turn over. Lucius Malfoy stood in the doorway of the room, his wand still outstretched towards Draco and Hermione, watching them coldly.

*He was the one who put the scrying spells in place. That's why they went over funny when Draco attacked him. But then they came back, so that must mean...*

Almost against his will, Harry found his eyes turning towards his siblings. What he saw sent his hand to his throat, forcing back his immediate urge to be sick. It was worse than he'd let himself imagine.

*The cage was unbreakable, it was too small even for her cat body, and he turned her back into a human while she was still inside...*

Harry tried to console himself with the knowledge that Hermione must have died instantly, but it did nothing against the sight of her broken body, torn flesh and splintered bone protruding from all sides of the iron cage. Her blood soaked Draco's robes and pooled around his knees, dyeing his hair and skin a vivid Gryffindor red. Draco, for his part, was covering his face with his left hand, his right still against what was left of Hermione's arm—

*Except it isn't outside the cage. It's inside. He must have been reaching for her when the spell went, and now his hand's trapped in there with her and it's broken, I can see the bones sticking out—*

Lucius crossed the room, stepping daintily between puddles of Hermione's blood, and used his wand to pull back Draco's right sleeve, exposing an area of clean skin. Leaning down, he fastened his hand around Draco's arm and squeezed cruelly. Draco's face went white under the blood, but the back of his left hand pressed against his mouth and he made no sound.

"Free yourself, clean up this mess, and change your robes," said Lucius, straightening up. "Then come to find me, and we will discuss healing your hand." He started back across the room, stopping at the door to look over his shoulder at his silent son. "Perhaps this will teach you the meaning of 'off limits.'"

The door shut behind him, and Draco doubled over where he knelt, his low moan worse than a scream. Harry clapped his hands against his ears, but the sound would not be stopped, and he realized after a moment that was because he was echoing it himself, grieving for his sister in the closest equivalent his human form could produce to a howl.

*This is my fault, I tried to make things better and made them worse, Neenie's dead and Draco might as well be and it's all my fault—*

The sound from the scry cut off abruptly, and Harry looked up. Draco was reaching for something, and his face had changed from grief-stricken to calculating, the look he wore when he was about to pay someone back in full. As his hand's burden became visible, Harry understood.

*Lucius took away whatever magic Hermione was able to give him, but that doesn't need magic, it doesn't need anything, it already is all it needs to be—*

"O happy dagger," Draco quoted softly, regarding the blue-stoned weapon with which Hermione had once killed a werewolf. With its point, he pulled back his robes, exposing the soft leggings he usually wore under them. "Here is thy work. Go to, and let me die."

He sliced deeply across his thigh, and fresh blood shot out, soaking his hand again. Dropping the dagger, he raised the hand to his eyes, staring at it in wonder. "Do you see?" he said aloud, turning it this way and that. "No difference, none at all. So much for blood..."

His eyes rolled back, and he crumpled across Hermione and did not move again. A moment later, the light in the scrying bowl winked out.

Harry pressed his fingers against the inside corners of his eyes, willing back his tears. *It's over for them. It's over. It was quick—Hermione probably never knew what happened, Draco only suffered for a minute—and now they can go on together...*

A stifled scream brought his head around. The next two scrying spells were showing signs of life. Within the rooms holding Ron and Luna, and Ginny and Neville, the partitions had been dropped, and the boys were approaching the beds with jerky steps, obviously fighting the Imperius Curse as best they could.

*Who screamed? Luna? No, Ginny.*

Harry glanced back and forth rapidly between the two spells, torn three ways at once. He could try not to watch either, but that might trigger the magic that would force him to see and he couldn't help hearing them in any case; he could watch his best friend, who had never in his life been able to break an Imperius, be forced to assault the girl who had loved his brother; or he could watch his own love try to fight off a boy who had her physically outmatched in every way and was under the control of a mind that hated them both.

*At least she's on her feet. Staying out of the way. Luna's just sitting there. I don't think she's even going to—*

Luna reached out and pulled Ron onto the bed with her, leaning up to kiss him.

*Either she's snapped or she's taking 'try and enjoy what you can't stop' much too far.*

*Whichever, I don't need to see it, not after what I just saw*

His decision made, Harry hung a curtain of fire between himself and the spell that showed Ron and Luna. In the next one over, Neville, his face twisted in a rictus-like grin, was stalking Ginny around their small bedroom. Ginny's hands were clutching the neck of her robes, her eyes feverishly bright as she dodged from side to side.

"Give it up, girl," Neville breathed, his voice hoarse. "You can't get away." His hand slid down towards his pocket, then pulled back. "Your pretty friend's decided to make the best of it." He jerked his head towards the far wall, through which now came an unmistakable gasp of pleasure, doubled in Harry's ears from the spell on the other side of the fire. "Why don't you?"

"I have my reasons." Ginny tightened her grip. "Come and get me if you dare."

"Oh, I dare." Neville started to close the gap between them, making his steps big and deliberate. "I dare plenty of things."

Ginny leapt out of the way just as he snatched for her, hurdling the bottom of the bed and spinning herself into the opposite corner. The noises were coming faster now from the other spell, and her face wrinkled in distaste, though Neville, or whoever was controlling him, seemed to be enjoying it. Harry stuck a finger into that ear and yawned loudly, concentrating on watching Ginny and Neville, though he couldn't keep from knowing what must be going through Ron's mind right now.

*He hates that he falls under the Imperius so easily, that he can't fight it off like I can or Draco could. It's his biggest shame, that he's weak that way. How is he going to be able to live knowing how much he hurt Luna because of that weakness? Is he even going to want to live, with that and finding out Hermione's dead?*

Another rush by Neville, another adroit dodge by Ginny, though this time the margin was thinner. Another, and another, and—

Neville's hands closed on Ginny's robes and yanked her backward into his arms. "Ha!" He spun her around, grinning evilly at her. "Now kiss me, beautiful. Let go your collar and hold me tight, and kiss me..."

"Hold you?" Ginny bared her teeth. "If you insist."

Her hands shot out and over Neville's head, a thread of gold joining them. Neville froze, his muscles tightening as though he'd been hit with the Body-Bind.

*Her pendants! Harry pounded the floor with a fist in excitement. She's put them on him—she must be helping him fight—maybe together they can get him loose from the Imperius—*

Neville jammed a hand into his pocket, then shoved it against his mouth. His jaw went rigid, his throat worked, and slowly his face relaxed, losing the ugly lines of the Death Eater who had been controlling him and returning to the quiet expression Harry knew so well. "It's all right," he said, slurring the last word slightly. "He won't come back now. He knows."

"Knows what?" Ginny caught at Neville's elbow as he stumbled. "Captain, what's—"

"In my pocket," Neville interrupted, closing his hand around Ginny's and guiding it down to the place he meant. "Should still be enough. You can see they work fast." A tremor ran through his body. "Smart of you to think alpha," he murmured, leaning on Ginny. "You're the boss."

"That's right. I'm the boss." Ginny drew him towards the bed. "So I'm ordering you to lie down and rest. Understand?"

"Mm-hmm." Neville dropped onto the bed, his eyes already shut. "Rest... I can do that..." Another tremor ran through him, and he was still.

Gently, Ginny reached into his pocket and withdrew three shriveled red berries. "I'd better hurry," she said, sitting down on the floor. "I know they're watching. They'll try to stop me if they can." She looked up, her eyes remote. "Harry, if you're there... don't be too long. I miss you already."

She put the berries into her mouth, chewed, and swallowed. Leaning back against the bedstead, she lifted her right hand, the thumb, forefinger, and smallest finger extended. It trembled in the air for an instant, then fell limply into her lap. The scry held the scene in its depths for a few seconds before going dark.

"Love you too," Harry whispered around the tightness in his throat and Meghan's heartbroken cry from the next spell over.

## Take Me With You How It Ended

Movement several scrys over caught Harry's eye. Letha was running, her feet echoing eerily in time with Meghan's sobbing as the only light within his baby sister's room, the scry through which she'd been able to see Neville and Ginny, winked out the way Harry's had. Sirius, in the image between the two, knelt in place, his breathing harsh and ragged, dementors beginning to converge on him.

*Go for Padfoot, Harry willed Letha, staring at her figure in the scrying bowl. There's still a chance for him. He can use the dog form to stay away from the dementors, and to smell his way out if you open the door to that maze he's caught in. I know they have magic over you that means you'll die if you get that close to him or Pearl, but at least he'll be alive, he'll be free—there's a chance he could get to Pearl himself, get to Moony and Danger, a few of us could still make it out—*

Thinking of his other Pack-parents sent his eyes to them. The water was halfway up Moony's chest now, and nearly to Danger's chin. She wore a look of intense concentration, and a few of the lines of fear had smoothed away from Moony's face. Harry hoped wherever they were dreaming together, it was better than here.

*Hard to see how it could be worse.*

A dementor's hand stretched out and caught Padfoot's hair. He snarled and struck it away, transforming to the black dog and bounding out of the closing circle, but Harry could see his godfather was weakening. Meanwhile, the noises from the scry he'd hidden, the scry holding Ron and Luna, were rising to the point where he couldn't ignore them, not without sticking his fingers in his ears, and that would mean he couldn't hear anything else—

"Dadfoot," Meghan said in a tone so quiet Harry could hardly have heard it in silence, and had to strain his ears to the utmost to hear now. "Mama Letha. I'm sorry. You aren't nothing to me. But Neville..." A tiny pinging sound, as of the cap of a vial being dropped. "He's everything. He was my future. I don't want one without him."

The black dog put on an extra burst of speed, barking with the few scraps of breath it could spare. Letha skidded around a corner, her face as near to white as it went.

"I'm sorry," Meghan repeated in a whisper.

A shriek and a hoarse shout from behind Harry's curtain of fire coincided with the sound of shattering glass from the darkness. Harry shoved his fist against his mouth, fighting a shout of his own, then tore down the shielding flames with a savage gesture. There was no use hiding from the truth anymore.

Ron lay panting across the bed, his hair and back soaked with sweat. Luna, barely decent with the aid of a corner of sheet, looked ruffled but vaguely pleased, as though something had worked the way she wanted it to. One hand worked itself free from under Ron's weight and went to her opposite wrist, sliding off the silver bracelet she was still wearing.

"Please," croaked a voice, and Ron raised his head. Harry flinched back from the depths of shame in the blue eyes. "Please—before they stop you again—"

His face changed, hardened, the Imperius taking hold of him, and he lunged for Luna's arm, but she was too fast for him. Her hand darted out, there was a dull thud, and Draco's green-stoned dagger, released from its disguising curl, buried itself in Ron's back. He stiffened, then relaxed utterly. "Thank you," he breathed.

"I'm only sorry I wasn't quick enough earlier," Luna murmured in answer, stroking his hair. Her fingers drifted down and closed his eyes, which had gone unfocused and glassy. "Hermione will forgive you, I promise."

She bent her head and kissed the top of his, then applied both hands to the dagger and pulled it free in a gush of blood. Its edge pressed against her throat. "Harry," she said in a quiet, carrying voice. "Don't be afraid. We won't go far."

The dagger passed through her skin and flesh with deceptive ease, and her blood redyed the sheets on which she lay. The scry went blank as her eyes closed.

*We won't go far? What does that mean?*

Harry whirled back around as a cry struck his ears, a cry scarcely human. At the sight of Letha, crouched beside the unmoving form of her daughter, he felt his last frail hope crumple in his chest. It was over, there was no one left, no one who wasn't dead or dying or seconds from losing their soul forever—

"Sirius, I'm sorry," Letha whispered, cradling Meghan to her. "I tried."

The black dog howled in anguish and flung itself at the nearest wall, cracking its head and falling to the floor as the human Padfoot. Harry strained his eyes, trying to get a look at his godfather through the gathering darkness—

Both scrys went out at once, leaving Harry with two images burning against the backs of his eyelids: Letha collapsing bonelessly, her arms still around her daughter, and Padfoot, looking up at the dementors with bleak and terrified understanding.

*Of course they wouldn't let him die. Their army has to be fed.*

Choking back bile from the knowledge of what was happening to his godfather, fighting to remember his duty to the Pack, what remained of it, Harry turned to the last scry left to him.

Water lapped against Danger's face, and Moony swallowed hard before ducking down to let her raise herself far enough to get a breath. He barely waited until she was finished to shoot back up, gasping in air as though he'd been submerged for minutes rather than seconds. His eyes swirled brown as Danger's did blue, and after a moment they both nodded once, firmly, cementing a silent decision.

Raising his hands, Moony planted them on the sides of the pool—

And stood up, pulling Danger underneath.

Harry gasped, but Moony wasn't finished. A sharp clap resounded as he brought his hands firmly together. From afar, Harry felt the twinge of fire magic being worked, and a brief burst of bubbles surfaced in Danger's pool. Then there was only Moony, leaning wearily against the wall, two tears tracking down his face to add their own tiny contribution to his private hell.

"You always forget something," he said in a conversational tone, his right hand going to his throat. "No matter who you are or what you're doing, you always forget some insignificant detail that has the power to ruin everything. Like forgetting to make *us* fireproof along with everything else." He turned his head to look into the scry, his eyes wholly blue for the first time in Harry's memory. "Thank God."

He convulsed, his face a mask of pain, then relaxed, slumping forward into the water. Nothing disturbed its calm rippling around him. He might have been a dummy, left carelessly behind by some lifesaving course, except—

*Except he's not.*

The scry blacked out. Harry stood alone in the dark.

*He's not.*

He had sometimes wondered, as a child, what it would be like to be completely alone. Now he knew. It was pain, and blackness pressing in, and awful shivering cold as the sounds and the sights rushed back to taunt you, and wishing, wishing with all your heart it had been you, that just one of the horrible things you'd seen had happened to you instead. "We won't go far," Luna had said, but the Pack and the Pride had gone farther than he could possibly go, they were parted forever, he would never see any of them again—

"I think that will be quite enough of that," said a firm voice somewhere near his right ear.

*I've gone mad, I'm making it up, I'm hearing things—*

"Moony?" Harry quavered.

"Who were you expecting?" The voice was teasing but kindly, exactly the way Moony had always sounded when Harry was frustrated with his Patronus or his Animagus work. "Sit down, you don't want to fall and hurt yourself. Three steps back if you need the wall to lean on."

Harry slid his feet backwards, one, two, three, and found the wall, pressing his back against it and letting it guide him to the floor. Warmth wrapped around him, tame fire sheathing his body, though he had not willed it and he still saw nothing. "Where are you?" he asked, reaching out a hand, then letting it drop.

"Nowhere you can't come. Which you ought to have known." Moony's voice took on a hint of scolding. "Voldemort's little melodrama is no reason for you to forget what we've taught you. We aren't gone forever. We haven't even gone far. Just like Luna said."

Harry shut his eyes, letting relief overwhelm him. "Take me with you," he whispered. "I don't want to stay here alone."

"You won't have to." The fire swirled around him, Moony's version of a long-distance hug. "You know, or you should, what Voldemort thinks he has to do with you. But we've found out something rather interesting. It seems that scar on your forehead isn't only a scar."

"As if I didn't know that," Harry muttered.

"Yes, true enough, we've known that much for years. What we didn't know until just now was that it is, and don't repeat this aloud, a Horcrux."

"A—" Harry clapped a hand over his mouth. "It is not," he said when he could trust his voice again.

"Oh, it is. Which explains why we always thought there was one we couldn't find." Moony chuckled. "But you'll enjoy this. We got all the others, which means you're the last of them, and do you know what happens when a wizard who's made a Horcrux destroys it himself?"

"Please tell me it takes him down with it," Harry said fervently.

"It does indeed." Another laugh. "Hold your head high, Harry-kins. You're going to win the war for us after all."

Harry laughed in return, feeling the warmth of the fire striking inward, chasing away the earlier chill. "Are the others with you?" he asked.

"Yes, Sirius just arrived, so we're all here. As will you be soon. They're coming for you."

"Good." Harry got to his feet. "I hate long waits."

The Death Eaters who opened the door to his room seemed surprised to see his smile. Certainly they were baffled when he came willingly at their summons, and his quick, light tread as he walked the halls with them confused them utterly. But it was all right, Harry thought. They'd probably never had a prisoner like him before.

*Screaming, fighting, trying to bribe them, that they'd understand. But I want to go where they're taking me.*

One Death Eater pulled open the door, and Harry stepped through into a vast hall. The handful of jeering Death Eaters lining its walls, even with his two escorts added, seemed pitifully small, but the sheer presence of Lord Voldemort, at the hall's other end, made up for a great deal of that.

"Harry Potter," purred the Darkest wizard in a hundred years. "You have seen my power demonstrated. Now you come to taste it yourself. Do you have any last words?"

Harry folded his arms. "Snap it up, Tommy boy," he said. "I'm late for den."

The look on Voldemort's face was one Harry knew he would remember for the rest of his life.

*Not terribly hard.*

The yew wand swung up to point at Harry's chest, but he never heard the two words spoken. His ears were too full of the laughter of the people he loved, the people he was going to rejoin, and fulfill his life's purpose by so doing.

Harry Potter died with a smile on his lips.



## Take Me With You And What Came After

He lay facedown, listening to the noises. They were quiet, businesslike, making no attempt to disguise themselves as silence. At a guess, he thought, there were six or seven people making them, but none of them were taking notice of him. He might as well not be there. Perhaps he wasn't.

Opening one eye, he saw a boy his own age, lanky and red-haired, sitting with his back against a stone wall and wearing an expression of careful nothingness. A girl sat beside him, her face and body unmarked by cuts or bruises, brown hair spilling in curls over her robed shoulders. Her hand lay between them, palm up.

"How can you even look at me?" Ron said quietly, still staring into the distance. "After what I did to Luna?"

"I love you." Hermione's voice was soft and fond. "And stop worrying about Luna. She's nothing to do with it."

Ron turned to stare at Hermione. "Nothing... to do..." He seemed unable to finish.

"She wasn't there," Hermione added. "Not after that partition fell."

"Well, it sure looked a hell of a lot like her!"

"Of course it did. Her body didn't go anywhere. She just left her body for a while."

"She left..." Ron leaned back against the wall again, his eyes falling shut. "She left. She wasn't there. She isn't going to hate me forever." He heaved a huge sigh. "She wasn't there." His eyes came open again. "Hang on a tick. *Someone* was there."

"Someone had to be there. You were being watched." Hermione shivered slightly. "They kept hooting and whistling, some of them were shouting suggestions to the one who had you under the Imperius... I'm sure they would have noticed if Luna stopped responding."

Ron's face set like iron. "I remember the suggestions," he said. "He tried, but I wouldn't. Not like that. He could make me do it, but he couldn't make me hurt her with it." A snorted laugh. "Like I didn't hurt her enough the way it fell out. Or whoever it was."

"You didn't," Hermione assured him. "You were actually quite gentle."

There followed a long and exceedingly awkward pause.

"No," Ron said finally. "I don't believe it. It wasn't you."

"Not quite the way I'd imagined our first time," Hermione admitted, "but it wasn't a total disaster."

"It wasn't—are you *mad*?" Ron shut his eyes and ground his hands against them. "No, never mind, of course you are, you've always been mad. But how could you do that to yourself? After what's happened to you?"

"How could I not, knowing what was happening to you?" Hermione shot back. "It was the only way, Ron, the only way I could do anything at all—"

"You call this anything?" Ron's voice nearly broke on the last word. "Making sure I know I hurt *you* that way?"

"How many times do I have to say you didn't hurt me before you believe it?"

"At least one more!"

"Fine!" Hermione yanked her pendants out of her robes. "See for yourself!"

"Thank you, I will!" Ron threw the chain around his neck and tipped his head back, his face taking on the stillness of concentration. Hermione watched him for a few moments, then rearranged his quiescent body around her so that she was sitting in the crook of his arm, her head on his shoulder.

"I told you," she murmured, closing her own eyes. "I love you, and I know you. Luna would forgive you for it, but you'd never forgive yourself, and I couldn't let them hurt you like that. So, since I was free by then, she and I swapped places. You didn't do anything I didn't want, you didn't hurt me, and I'd like to try it again sometime soon." A quiet chuckle. "Wearing my own body this time, obviously!"

Ron echoed her laugh, hesitantly but with genuine warmth. "I don't deserve you," he mumbled.

Hermione reached up and flicked a finger across his lips. "There are better things to do with these than tell stupid lies."

Harry closed his eyes on the reassuring familiarity of his best friend snogging his sister. It seemed some things really never would change.

He dozed again, and fell into a dream like one he'd had long ago, the first time he'd battled Voldemort and remembered it. Then he'd been a wolf cub, now he was a young wolf, but the principle was the same. The slayer who hated all wolves had captured him, and this time he had destroyed the wolf's Pack first. There was nothing left to live for, no safety or home to return to, so why not let himself be killed to avoid the madness of the cage?

But every breath he took made the story a lie, for the Pack's scents were all around him, fresh and living, not old and dead, and now that he thought rather than simply giving in to his fear, he remembered the truth. The Pack had not been destroyed; they had gone on before him to their new hunting grounds, leaving the old ones free of distraction for his final fight with the slayer.

What a silly cub he'd been, to whine 'Take me with you' when his battle was not done! How could he forget the deep pit, carefully covered over, into which he would lure the slayer, possibly at the price of his own life if he could not make the leap without alerting his enemy? But a wolf need not fear to die if his death would save the Pack, and so it would be done.

He grinned in his sleep, remembering his cleverness. For he had run as if in panic, and the slayer had run after him, and they had both tumbled into the pit—and then he had leapt *on top of* the slayer, using the evil one as a stairway to his own freedom! The wails of his enemy had made harmony with his joyous howls, and those of his Pack, as he sped on his way to join them in their new home. He must have arrived safely there, for their scents to be all around him now, and one most particularly...

Harry opened his eyes again and looked down at a tangled mane of ginger hair, which seemed to be attached to the softly breathing warmth against his side. Ron and Hermione, he saw as he lifted his head, had fallen asleep sitting up, still sharing Hermione's pendant chain. Luna lay beside Hermione, Snow Fox curled under her chin, his tail wrapped around one of Hermione's ankles.

*The others must be behind me.*

Sitting up carefully, so as not to disturb Ginny, he turned. Sure enough, there lay Padfoot, on his back and snoring, one hand outstretched and loosely clasping Letha's. Meghan had taken her usual spot between her parents, and a shimmer of silver on her back betrayed the location of Captain the demiguise. Harry stifled a snicker at the line of drool running down from her open mouth, then let his gaze roam down towards Letha's feet. If he was right...

*I'm right.*

Moony waved one hand in greeting, his other being occupied with stroking Danger's hair where she lay with her head in his lap. "Have a good sleep?" he asked.

"Fair to middling." Harry hitched himself more upright and hissed in pain at the soreness in his chest. "What hit me?"

"It's called the Killing Curse."

"Oh yeah." Laughing a little at his own forgetfulness, Harry rubbed the spot. "You think it's going to leave a mark?"

"We'll see." Moony's tone, posture, and scent all combined to indicate that he hadn't a care in the world.

*Which he doesn't. You don't, once you're dead.*

"In the meantime, you have one piece of unfinished business," Moony continued, pointing to a spot behind Harry.

Harry turned and jumped slightly. He hadn't realized it until this moment, but they were still in the hall where he'd died, and they weren't alone. Lord Voldemort himself lay crumpled at the other end of the room, his long-fingered hands empty, his face frozen in lines of anger and disbelief.

"What's he doing here?" Harry asked loudly, waking Ron and Luna. "He doesn't deserve what we get!"

"You've got the wrong end of the wand, Greeneyes." Moony helped Danger sit up and nudged Letha's foot, making her stir and mumble a few words half-intelligibly. "He deserves exactly what we get, because to him, it will be the opposite of what it is to us."

Harry was about to say he didn't understand when Ginny yawned beside him, diverting his attention to how cute she looked when she did. She was here, and she was his, and no one could ever part them again...

*A-ha. Got it.*

"He split us up and hurt us," he said, looking back at Moony. "And used some of our pain to make the rest of us hurt more. But now we're back together, we're all right again, and he can't do anything about it, ever."

"Now you've got the idea."

Harry glanced at Voldemort. "Does he know?"

"Not yet."

"Can I tell him?"

"That depends on how you're planning to do it."

"I'm going to gloat." Harry held out a hand to help Ginny pull herself upright beside him. "Because I have everything I want, and he has nothing, and it's going to be that way forever and ever."

"You are a wicked young man, Harry Potter." Moony shared a satisfied look with Padfoot. "I knew we raised you right. Go ahead."

Harry drew his wand, took careful aim, and thought a particular word as hard as he could.

Voldemort emitted a muffled yell as he was dragged into the air by his ankle, his robes falling over his head and answering a question Harry had never wanted to ask (briefs in what looked like black silk). The girls all burst into giggles, and Harry held the spell for a few more seconds before letting the Dark Lord fall.

"Good morning, Mr. Riddle," he said in his chirpiest imitation of Meghan's firecall voice. "This is your wake-up call."

The red eyes, slits though they were, opened wide for once, and the lipless mouth hung agape as Voldemort fought his way out of his veiling robes to see who had done this to him. "No," the Dark Lord breathed, reaching into his pocket only to find, as Harry had expected, that his wand was gone. "No. I killed you."

"Yes, you did." Harry put his arm around Ginny. "And I was your last Horcrux. We found all the other ones already, and destroyed them, and you never knew about it. Maybe you shouldn't have split your soul so small." A tiny vestige of pity rose in him at the panicked, dumbfounded look on Voldemort's face. "It might not be too late, you know. If you try for some remorse, really try, you might be able to get a few of the bits back, do a little healing..."

"Silence," Voldemort commanded. "Tell me what trick you used to stay alive or you will regret it, Harry Potter."

Harry shook his head. "You really don't get it, do you?" he said. "I didn't use any trick. You killed me. But you killed yourself too. You destroyed your own last Horcrux, and it dragged you down with it." Ginny was tracing letters on the back of his hand, and he nodded to show her he understood. "You're dead, Tom Riddle," he said deliberately. "D-E-D, dead. Do not pass Go. Do not collect 200 Galleons. Dead."

Voldemort made an odd gasping noise, clutched at his chest, and collapsed. Harry laughed. "Did he just die *again*?"

"Er," said Draco. Harry turned to see a familiar expression on his brother's face, the strained smile of someone who'd set a trap for a knarl and caught an erumpent. "About that..."

## Take Me With You How It Really Ended

Harry eyed Draco suspiciously. “What did you do?”

“It was an accident, I swear.”

“What was an accident?”

“My playing the world’s worst prank on you.”

“How do you accidentally play a prank on somebody?”

Draco rubbed his closed eyelids with his fingertips. “How about I just tell it to you from the beginning?”

“What a good idea. Maybe then I’ll understand it, which right now I don’t.”

“Fine.” Draco scooted back to share the wall with Ron, and the rest of Pack and Pride disposed themselves comfortably for listening. “So after you’d knocked Neenie’s cage down—that was you, wasn’t it?”

“Yes, that was me.” Harry glanced down at Ginny, who had emitted a soft noise, and raised his eyebrows, asking silently, *Something for you?*

*You’ll like this*, Ginny signed, tapping her index and middle fingers above the corners of her mouth. *Now, hush!*

“So you saw what happened next.” Draco twined fingers briefly with Hermione. “I caught her, got my hand inside there, we touched and I had magic again, but before I could do anything she was shouting at me, reminding me we were being watched and there would probably be Death Eaters in any second. So I hacked into the scry.”

Harry blinked. “You what?”

“I broke into it. Fuzzed it out.” Draco wiggled the fingers of his left hand. “Blood doing me some good for once. You do realize where we are?”

“Well, now I do.” The large amount of space in the manor house, the ease with which the Death Eaters had moved into it and set up their various grotesque amusements, the role of Lucius Malfoy in setting up the scrying spells, were all making sense to Harry now that he thought about it. “I remember your scry did go fuzzy, right before—”

“Before Lucius walked in,” Draco took over. “I don’t know what he was expecting, but he didn’t even have his wand out yet. I took him down without a fight.”

“You took him down?” Harry repeated. “But I saw—”

He broke off again as the implications of Draco’s “hacking” became clear to him. “I saw what you wanted the Death Eaters to see, didn’t I?” he said.

“Yeah.” Draco’s cheeks were turning pink. “I had to work fast or they’d come to see what was messing up their scry, and I had to make sure they wouldn’t think we’d be any more trouble, so I fed them what I thought they’d like. It wasn’t until we were both ‘dead’ and I’d blanked ours out that Hermione asked me to trace the spells and I realized you were watching the same ones Voldemort was. Except he had one on you as well.”

Harry nodded slowly. “And everyone else?” he asked, glancing around the circle.

“We were next up,” said Ginny, leaning against Harry’s shoulder. “Neville and I. Hermione could see he was reaching into his pocket, and knew he probably had something there...”

“Just holly,” Neville said, displaying a withered red berry. “But I’d been working on them, making them more potent, so no one could stop us.”

“And once Draco could get into the scrying spells, he could also speak to me,” Luna added. “So we had our own plan for how to help Ron and me.”

“I heard about that,” Harry said. The full implications of the story were working their way forward in his mind, but he was being careful not to look at them just yet. “But if you could change what the spells were showing...”

Draco looked away. “I could only do one at a time,” he said quietly. “It’s complicated, and if I’d made even one mistake, they’d have known something was wrong, and then—”

“I’m not blaming you,” Harry interrupted. “I just wanted to know. So you changed Neville and Ginny’s scry...”

"Not all of it," Meghan piped up. "Ginny really broke his Imperius."

Neville nodded. "And I was about to use the berries when Luna's Patronus popped up and told us not to panic, to sit down and wait. So we did, and pretty soon she was there to let us out."

"In Hermione's body," Ginny added. "Which was incredibly bizarre to see."

"Yes, how did that work again?" Harry shook his head, baffled. "How do you just swap souls with somebody?"

"It wasn't easy," Draco admitted. "But since Neenie and I are blood-sibs, and Luna and I are handfasted..." He shrugged. "It was basically Find the Lady with souls. I'll draw you a diagram sometime. What matters is, it worked."

"It left me in Hermione's body, in the room with Draco," Luna took up the story. "We were all right, but Draco couldn't leave there because he had to stay touching the house to keep control of the scrys, so I had to be the mobile partner." She smiled reminiscently. "I took Mr. Malfoy's wand for myself, and stole a few more from the Death Eaters who were watching the scrys. They never noticed me at all."

"From there, it was just timing." Draco massaged his temples. "I was scared to death someone was going to notice how neatly sequenced everything was, how none of it was happening at the same time as anything else, or how over the top some of those little speeches were..."

"How did you stop them from really doing anything to themselves?" Harry asked.

"Patronus messenger, with the scry faked just long enough to disguise it showing up," said Padfoot. "At least, that's what I got."

"Me too." Meghan giggled. "Mine told me to make a great big fuss, then pretend I took the potion when I didn't—and it was so dark in there, no one could see me!"

"I wish we could have sent you one, Harry," Letha said quietly. "But Voldemort was watching you harder than he was watching any of us. If you'd shown even an instant of relief, if you hadn't been completely believable..."

"I was believable because I believed it!" Harry snapped. "Because I honestly thought you were all dead!"

"And we're not." Letha indicated the circle of people. "But we might have been, if you had known any different."

"Yes, well..." Harry growled under his breath. "None of this explains me. That was the Killing Curse he used on me."

"It was," said Moony. "But I'm afraid I told you a fib when I spoke to you through Draco's link with the scrys. The effect of your being a Horcrux was not to kill Voldemort when he killed you, but to make him effectively also a Horcrux for you. Thus you survived his Killing Curse."

"What died was the bit of his soul in you," Danger put in. "So the moment that curse hit you, he became as mortal as anyone else."

"We were here for it." Padfoot stretched his arms. "As soon as you two went down, we took out the Death Eaters from behind, tied them up and hauled them off, set up den here, and waited for you to come out of it."

"And didn't bother to tell me we were all alive," Harry muttered.

"Because we were hoping you'd do what you did," Moony returned. "Scare Tom Marvolo Riddle quite literally to death. The prophecy is fulfilled, and you never had to become a murderer after all."

"Wonderful." Harry punched a pillow moodily. "So what do we do now?"

"Live?" Neville suggested.

"Thank you, Captain Obvious."

"You're not too angry?" Draco said tentatively. "I just didn't think..."

Harry started to smile as the last of his anger bled off, impossible to sustain in the face of the knowledge of his family's survival. "Of course I'm not angry," he said. "How could I be? You saved our lives. I'm even going to give you a reward!"

"A reward?" Draco looked half interested, half apprehensive. "What kind?"

"One that lasts and lasts." Harry spread his arms expansively, nearly hitting Ginny. "When you have kids, they'll never need to spend a Knut on pranking supplies!"

Draco groaned aloud as the rest of the Pack and Pride burst into laughter. "I'm *doomed*," he said, dropping his face into his hands.

Luna patted his back. "Don't worry," she said sweetly. "I'll protect you." A glance around the group and a small smile that left Harry wondering if a little of Hermione hadn't stayed behind. "Maybe."

Harry laughed again with everyone else. He didn't know what tomorrow would bring, but as long as the Pack and Pride stuck together, he was sure it would be all right.