

Chapter XV

Coming Together

Sunday, July 23, 1972

"So, was Harry as bad as you thought he would be?" Lily asked Petunia.

"Actually, no," Petunia admitted. "Now you tell me, are he and your friend Ellen typical? I mean, would the others fit in as well?"

"No," Lily admitted. "Some could fit in easily enough, while many could but are too lazy to try. Some others are just plain too weird to pass in either the Muggle or magical worlds without being noticed, and some just seem to hate everything about the 'regular' world, just like you seem to want to hate everything magical. Most probably fall in between."

"Well, I hope you can at least keep the weirdos away," Petunia said, stomping off to earn some pocket money. She wanted to look nice for Vernon on their next date.

Lily watched and wished Petunia would be more open to the magical world.

It couldn't happen of course. Petunia would always be jealous of Lily, the prettier, smarter, younger sister, who not only had all those advantages but was magical as well. Still, this Petunia would not grow to loath magic quite so much -- this time she wouldn't be terrified the hearing of the murders of many of Lily's friends (such as Ellen and her family), especially those with Muggle backgrounds. Their own parents would not die under mysterious circumstances, nor would James and Sirius terrorize her and Vernon nearly so much this time around (thanks to Harry).

Nor would she be forced to raise a magical child. She would have two more children instead. When a magical grandchild arrived in 2010, Petunia was far from thrilled, but she accepted the fact, much as she did a later grandchild (Dudley's only child) with Down's Syndrome.

Vernon would be more accepting of magic as well. He always liked Harry and Ellen, although he never wanted anything to do with James or his friend Sirius.

Friday, July 28, 1972

"Welcome to our home," Bonnie Jean greeted Harry when he almost fell out of the floo. (Harry was determined to master floo travel in this life.)

"Hi, Harry!" Ellen said. She and her twin Elaine quickly brushed Harry off, to his slight embarrassment, and then Ellen gave him a hug, which he returned. "This is my mum, and this is Elaine."

"Good morning," Harry said. The twins were indeed identical in face and form. The only difference between them most people could see was their hair (Harry could see the difference in their auras). Both had thick, light brown hair. Ellen's was naturally wavy and formed curls on the side, and she had let it grow since Christmas (only because Harry had said how much he liked long hair, although Ellen had not admitted that even to herself). It was now nearly reaching the middle of her back and had blonde and red highlights.

Elaine's, to put it simply, was bushier and only had blonde highlights. Harry wondered, seeing that Mrs. McGregor's hair was similar, if Ellen's was affected by her magic.

All three were beaming at Harry, because he had taken Ellen's hand in his without even noticing.

The next morning, Ian McGregor shook his wife awake at 6:20.

"What?" she growled.

"Come here and look," Ian said softly.

Bonnie Jean rolled her eyes and then rolled out of bed. She hoped he wasn't going to try to show her fairies or some other thing that only the magical could see.

It was Harry.

Bonnie Jean was glad they had a small enclosed back garden and that there were plenty of trees to hide what was going on. Harry was doing a routine that looked part gymnastic and part martial arts. She blinked as he started doing pushups while in a handstand. "Is that normal for a wizard?" Bonnie Jean asked.

"That's not normal for anyone," Ian said, "except maybe gymnasts and maybe a few commandos."

"The boy is driven," Bonnie Jean said. "I wonder. . . ." She stopped, as Harry apparently levitated a few small sticks and then destroyed them before they hit the ground -- all wandlessly.

"I've never even seen an auror do that," Ian said as Harry dropped and started one hundred sit-ups to end part of his routine.

"What does it mean?" Bonnie Jean said in a worried voice.

"Sometimes things work out in the magical world in ways that the Muggle world can no longer accept," Ian said.

"Meaning?"

"Meaning, there is a great evil in this part of the magical world. It looks like Magic has provided its opposite."

"Are you sure?" Bonnie Jean asked.

"If that's how and why Harry has this much power? No," Ian said. "Now, you tell me. Is that boy evil?"

Bonnie Jean thought back to the night before, of Harry smiling as he helped wipe the dishes; as Harry lost four out of five games of backgammon to her daughters, obviously caring more about their companionship than if he won or lost the game. "If he is, it's a kind of evil I never heard of before," she admitted.

"Mummy, don't be frightened of Harry."

The pair turned around and saw Ellen.

"You've seen him doing this sort of thing before, haven't you?" Ian asked as she came in, barefoot and only wearing her summer nightgown. She had been watching Harry from her bedroom and had heard her parents' voices, even if she did not know what they had been saying until their last exchange.

Ellen nodded. "Mrs. Potter said that the curse that made him lose most of his memories, that nearly killed him, did something to his magical core. He knows he's very powerful, and he hates it."

"Does he really?" Ian asked.

Ellen nodded. "He'd rather be a regular wizard, well, a regular wizard who is fantastic on a broom, anyway. She said there's a saying, 'with great power comes great responsibility'. Harry works so hard because he wants to be worthy of his power." She paused, thoughtful.

"What is it?" Bonnie Jean asked.

"I just realized something," she said.

"What?"

"You know that Meritocracy League I wrote you about?" Her parents nodded. "That was really just an idea some of the Ravenclaws were playing with. It was Harry who went over and became the first non-Ravenclaw to join and who encouraged the whole thing to grow into a real organization."

"And you just noticed that?" Ian asked.

"At the time, it just looked so. . . ."

"Spontaneous? Genuine? Natural?"

"Exactly," Ellen agreed. "It was Harry who encouraged the first Slytherins who joined. And even if we suspect that he has been behind some of the biggest pranks, he also keeps an eye on his brother and Black. They were pretty nasty at times, but he really got them to be at least a bit less nasty and bullying."

"A prankster?" Ian asked. "Well, he's not a saint, I see."

"Mrs. Potter called him a paladin," Ellen said.

"I think she might be right," Bonnie Jean said. "Well, we're having a big cook-out for dinner. What do you have planned for your paladin between now and then?"

"I thought I'd take him around to the used record store, and maybe those shops on Degas Street," Ellen suggested. These were mostly used books stores, curio shops, and used furniture shops, plus a few pawn shops.

"If you don't cross past McGrundy's," Ian warned. The shops further away from that large pawn shop led towards a rougher neighborhood.

"Do you think Harry would really like that?" Bonnie Jean asked.

"It's odd," Ellen agreed. "I mean, his family is really rich, and he must have a nice allowance. He likes spending money on other people, but doesn't like spending money on himself. I'm hoping he might if it's used things."

"And what about your sister?"

Ellen shrugged. "I doubt she gets past the record shop."

Elaine was indeed happy to tag along, and she did not go past the huge used/discontinued record shop. Assured that she would be happy in there for hours, Harry suggested they take a quick look at the other stores. They skipped the large pawn shop that marked the end of their route, along with the cheap

jewelry store and the various used clothes and furniture stores. That still left them with two used bookstores and six curio shops.

At first Ellen had been impressed by how much Harry was buying, until she reached for a book he had picked up and he had blocked her hand. "Sorry, but the book is cursed," Harry whispered. "If a woman touches it, she will be compelled to keep touching it, and the more she touches it the less fertile she'll be."

"Harry, are all these things magical?"

Harry nodded. "And dark for the most part. There's even a wand core in the walking stick. That book in Greek is filled with necromantic rituals. Wearing those amber earrings would mean you would get drunk more quickly. Should I go on?"

Ellen's face fell as they exited the store. "I wanted you to have fun."

Harry stood Ellen in front of him, and packed all the dark material, plus the walking stick, into a small pocket of his magical rucksack. "Well, I've cleaned this little corner of Greater London of its Dark items, which as certainly been interesting. And I've been with you, which is fun. What can I do to have fun that you'll approve of, before I buy you and your sister fish-and-chips?"

"You're my guest, I'll buy the fish-and-chips," Ellen stated. "Let's go get Elaine. They know her really well at that store, so she can leave the stuff and buy it, and more, later. After lunch, I really wish you would buy yourself some records."

"Sounds like a good plan," Harry said. "Is there anything else?"

"Would you hold my hand again?" Ellen asked, both shy and hopeful.

"Eew, girl cooties," Harry teased, taking her hand and kissing her cheek.

Ellen blushed, and they went to get her sister.

Harry turned most of the dark material over to his father, although he kept the walking stick and a few items he thought might be useful. Harold Potter turned it all over to the Ministry. A later investigation revealed a rather dark young witch lived in the area and liked putting dark enchantments on items and selling them around London.

When Sirius and Remus came for their next visit on August 4, Remus had heard about Harold's plans to teach Sirius and James about business, and

shyly asked if there was anything he could do. Harold therefore took all four boys with him each morning the next week.

Watching Harold deal with his messages was somewhat boring, but because he shared some of their contents, they could at least see why it was necessary. Some of it dealt with the Wizengamot, and Harry found that even more interesting.

From there, Harold took the boys to different businesses and explained how they worked. Harry, who had overseen the Potter Trust, was impressed at how well Harold knew the businesses, especially the Muggle ones.

James and Sirius teased Harry after they had visited one of the Muggle porcelain factories, where Harry had picked up an old-fashioned chocolate service in the factory store. Granted, the main color was a very delicate shade of light pink, but it did match the paint in Ellen and Elaine's room.

On the first weekend and the three nice afternoons of the week, the boys were in the air. The other two afternoons and most of the second Saturday, when it was raining, the boys played an elaborate version of hide-and-seek.

James, Harry, and Sirius didn't have as much fun the second Monday and Tuesday of Sirius' visit. Mary Potter kept them indoors much of the day and was tutoring them on geography, both physical, and political (Muggle and Magical), as well as deportment and dancing.

"All three of you are of the elite," she reproved them as they grew restless. "That does not make you leaders. Still, you must be able to move within the power-structure of our world as easily as you can walk through the Muggle world unnoticed. If you can do both, you will have a much easier and pleasant life."

Wednesday, Sirius and James were allowed to go with Harold. Harry was held back, although he would be going to commune with the Gringotts vaults on Thursday and Friday. The boys would still have to dance each night.

"You're up to something," Harry teased as they sat down.

"I am," Mary answered. "Tell me, what are your feelings for Ellen?"

"It's rather confusing," Harry admitted. "I like her. I like being with her. Sometimes, with James, Sirius, and Remus, it feels like I'm playing a game. It's almost like when I was minding Hermione and Luna's oldest children, who towards the end were ten and eleven respectively. Sometimes, especially with Remus, I forget I'm playing the role of a twelve year old. Lily mothers the pair of us so much, it's easy to fall into the role with her. But with Ellen, it's as if I am in large part a twelve year old. A very confident and powerful twelve year old, but not someone who's thirty-three."

"So, no improper thoughts about Miss McGregor?"

"Even though I certainly remember everything, it feels as if my libido matches my body," Harry said. "Do you want me to be really frank?" Mary nodded. "When I fantasize about making love with Ellen, it's based on what I think she'll look like around the age of twenty. Certainly NOT her at twelve."

"So you do fantasize about girls, or just her in particular?"

"Trust me, by last Christmas, I had to teach Sirius and then the other two silencing and cleaning charms," Harry retorted, "and yes. And the other women in my dreams haven't been born yet." "And why Ellen at twenty?"

"Ellen and her family were massacred at some point, I don't exactly remember when. Elaine was the only survivor, because she was staying someplace over night. Elaine's oldest daughter was magical and a few years behind me. She missed her family very much, and had all sorts of scrapbooks. She wasn't taking Muggle Studies, of course, but would take the books to show the classes. One day, some Slytherins hexed them, mostly hitting them with water charms. To make a long story shorter, a bunch of us spent the weekend restoring them, and I happened to see a picture of her mother when she won a beauty contest when she was twenty or so. She ended up as the runner-up to Miss England in the Miss Universe contest." Harry smiled. "I remember Hermione remarking that it was a tribute to Elaine that she got so far, as those contests rarely select shorter, very busty women."

Harry grinned. "Aren't you sorry you asked?"

"A little," Mary admitted. "What would you think of a fully-arranged marriage with her?"

Harry was stunned. Finally, he said, "What?"

"You do know the components of a fully arranged marriage, don't you? No? Well, it would first entail what's miscalled a compatibility spell. Actually, what it measures is if you two really like each other. If you do, then the betrothal spells are cast. You will grow together, you will love each other. You may fall in lust with another now and again, but you will still love each other." She gave Harry a twisted grin. "If you don't start out liking each other, you're as likely to end up hating the other person as loving them."

"Why?" Harry managed to ask.

"Several reasons," Mary answered. "First, I think having her in your life will give you something to live for other than your mission. You're too driven, Harry. Also, there are loyalty oaths built into the full betrothal and you can add more. You'll be able to safely share your secret with her. That will help you deal with the pressures you're under. Who knows, maybe you'll sleep more than a few hours every night. And, while her family isn't nearly important enough to marry ours, they are very good people. The old bloodlines can stand to be renewed."

"Now, from the McGregors point of view, they know you're going to be rich, and from some discrete inquiries I gather they saw you training and have a good idea that you're going to be very powerful. They also like you, even if they are a bit scared of your power. They also know Ellen is crazy for you. All parents of adorable girls who are going up to be drop-dead sexy are worried about what their little girls are going to be up to with nasty little boys. Under the betrothal spells, you will not be having sex until the wedding night."

Harry smirked. "That depends on how you define 'sex'," he said.

"If you know ways around some of the supposed restrictions, I suggest you keep them to your self," Mary scolded. "If you actually have intercourse before the wedding and final magical bonding, it will severely injure your magic."

"That I do know," Harry agreed.

"So?"

"So?" Harry asked. "so would I be willing to become betrothed to Ellen? Yes. When?"

"Tomorrow."

"What!"

"Well, actually, we'll do the compatibility spell tomorrow night, if Ellen agrees this afternoon. We'll do the betrothal Friday. On Saturday, there is a family get-together of Bonnie Jean's most prominent magical family, the Crouches, and their relatives. It will be announced there."

"Is this why we are learning to dance?" Harry asked.

"Yes," Mary said. "Sirius will be escorting Elaine, and James will be escorting Lily."

Harry looked at her.

"As Ellen's best friend, she may be present at a family announcement," Mary defended herself. "The same with your brother, and a guest under houseroom."

"Yeah, right," Harry said, amused at his mother's match making.

A very elderly witch conducted the compatibility ritual the next morning. She pronounced the couple was as compatibly as they could be. Everyone then left the couple alone for half an hour.

"I can't believe you agreed to this," Ellen said, her voice filled with emotions.

Harry was glad she was not crying. He'd hate to think he would be marrying a Cho. He took Ellen in his arms and said, "I'm glad you agreed. I think I need you in my life."

Ellen hugged him back, smiling.

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