

## CHAPTER 16

### RETURNING TO HOGWARTS

The return to Hogwarts was anything but idle. Harry's last minute request to take the Hogwarts' Express to the castle, one last time, had Lupin and the rest of the Order scrambling to design the appropriate accommodations to secure Harry's absolute protection.

With consent from the Ministry, Hannah connected the secret corridor of Grimmauld Place to platform 9 ¾, thus relieving much of the Order's tension determining the proper means of transporting him securely to the train station. Hannah, Lupin, Arthur, Shackbolt, Mad-Eye Moody, Fred, and George, were flagged as his advance guards for the afternoon and had prearranged to assemble in the secret corridor outside of the kitchen pantry in preparation for their journey. Much to Remus' dissatisfaction, Hannah and Harry were the last of the group to arrive at the doorway, several minutes late. This was the result of Harry having set aside his packing until the last possible minute, exemplifying his tendency to lean towards procrastination.

"Finally!" spat Lupin. "What in Merlin's name took you lot so long?"

"Sorry, Remus. I was helping Potter organize his things to fit into his trunk. *Honestly*, after seven years of packing and unpacking his belongings, you'd think he'd have a knack for it!" said Hannah exhaustedly, twirling her wand over her head to summon Harry's effects to float along behind them.

Harry blushed.

"I'm only teasing, Potter," said Hannah, playfully nudging him in his side with her elbow. "Are we ready to head off, Remus?"

Remus moved to block Hannah's path, approaching her with a severely disgruntled expression as his coffee-brown eyes swept over her promiscuous attire. He looked from the plunging neckline of her black lace tank top, to the bottom hem of her hip slung, cut-off denim mini skirt, down to the stiletto heels of her black sandals, and spouted off in protestation, "You are NOT wearing *that* for guard duty!" He acknowledged to himself that if she wore pasties and a band-aid, she would have seen better coverage.

"Oh, I most certainly *am!*" she countered him defiantly.

"Tell me, Hannah; how do you expect to outrun anyone in those heels should the Death Eaters choose to feign an attack on us at the train station?"

“Remus, I can move better in these shoes than you can in yours. As for the outfit, it’s 90 degrees out and I’m quite sensitive to the heat. Now, back off! Go terrorize someone else for a change. Or, better yet, save some of that energy for these rivals of ours that you so anticipate we will encounter,” Hannah snapped.

“You truly enjoy the practice of arousing men and tormenting them with rejection, don’t you?”

“Are you speaking from personal experience, Remus, or is that sheer speculation?”

Remus growled and pushed to the front of the group.

“Don’t listen to him, Hannah,” started George, in a raspy whisper. “We think you look fantastic.”

“Spectacular!” agreed Fred more loudly.

“Brilliant!” added George louder yet.

Ron opened his mouth to chime in, but caught sight of Hermione’s intense disapproving glare out of the corner of his eye; he quickly snapped his mouth shut.

Hannah winked at them and pressed forward past Harry, who had also taken the occasion to revel in the vision of every bit of Hannah’s strikingly exposed creamy flesh. He studied her from her delicate shoulders, to the captivating cleavage of her bountiful, firm breasts, down to her long, lean, and shapely legs, finding it difficult, but necessary to look away. After all, he only required *two* of his legs to walk to the station properly.

The Order ushered Harry along the door-speckled secret corridor until they reached a peculiar protruding stone slab archway off to their right. The odd spectacle resembled a portion of a bulky brick partition that had been carved into the shape of a stout, rounded entryway and pasted onto the secret corridor wall. Upon further examination, Harry recognized the materials to be those identical to the magically enchanted center post of King’s Cross Muggle train station in London which they were required to pass through in order to reach the landing of platform 9  $\frac{3}{4}$ .

“Alright,” started Remus, turning to address Hannah. “I expect we are to simply step through this enchanted archway and we will be directly transported onto platform 9  $\frac{3}{4}$ . Correct?”

“Yes,” she concurred simply. “Although, I recommend that we pair up and go two at a time for added precaution. I’ll take Harry,” she said instantly, reaching for Harry’s hand and weaving her fingers firmly between his.

Harry felt his face grow hot and his heart parade around in his chest like a big brass band as he procured her touch.

“Good idea,” said Arthur. “Remus and I shall go first to secure the area. We’ll signal for the rest of you once we determine the all clear. Fred and George, you lot can pair off; Ron, you go along with Shackbolt; and Hermione, you go along with Mad-Eye.”

“Um, perhaps Harry should go with me, Arthur,” interrupted Lupin, tugging at Harry’s free arm.

“Remus, I assure you, Potter be well protected under my charge,” said Hannah impatiently, pulling Harry back in her direction.

The rest of the Order stood by, transfixed, darting their gaze back and forth between Lupin and Hannah as the two proceeded to engage in a highly spirited game of tug of war, using poor unfortunate Harry as their human rope.

“Really, I believe it would be best if I take him,” said Remus firmly, tugging aggressively at Harry.

“Remus, I tell you, I’ve got it under control!” growled Hannah, yanking Harry so hard toward her that his feet left the ground temporarily.

“Hannah, *I* have been elected Harry’s legal guardian, as per Sirius! It was in his will!” grunted Lupin, swiping at Harry and cleaving tightly to his arm.

“And *I* have been appointed as Harry’s official sentinel per the Ministry of Magic AND Dumbledore!” snarled Hannah, jerking Harry back in her direction.

Harry finally responded by shaking himself off the both of them and asserting irritably, “Hannah, Remus, enough! We’re going to miss the train!”

“Right. Sorry, Harry,” said Remus with a solid clearing of his throat and a blatant releasing of an air of discomfit once he met the perplexed gaze of the rest of the Order.

The group continued to stare between Remus and Hannah in astonishment of their juvenile conduct over something that appeared to be entirely frivolous to the lot of them.

“What the bloody hell was that all about?” mumbled Ron to Hermione after the quarreling had ceased and the rest of the group had emerged from their awkward gawking silence.

“I don’t know. If you ask me, Hannah has more than just Harry’s best interests at heart, and I don’t think Remus approves,” whispered Hermione quietly in return, moving ahead to partner up with Mad-Eye Moody.

Arthur stepped forward, sticking out his elbow and nudging Remus in the side, rattling off, “Shall we, Remus?”

“Well, I suppose,” replied Remus reluctantly. Turning to Hannah, he mouthed the words, *We’ll discuss this later*, to her. Then, he disappeared at Arthur’s side through the enchanted brick entrance.

Hannah rolled her eyes and turned to Harry to reclaim his hand. In a soft-spoken voice, delivered exceptionally close to his face, she said, “We’re to go last, Potter.”

Harry shuddered as her succulent breath washed over him like sweet honeysuckle.

An instant later, a brilliant electric-blue current burst through the entryway signaling the “all clear” for the group to pass through the portal. Once the last of the group escaped into its magic, Hannah led Harry through the enchanted entrance, flicking her wand lazily overhead to bewitch his school trunk and Hedwig’s cage to track along behind them.

Upon their emergence onto platform 9  $\frac{3}{4}$ , Harry took to screening the remarkable wizarding train station, reasoning that the sight unfolding before him compared very much so to the likes of a Muggle circus, (minus the laser light spectacles): The actively bustling throngs of anxious first year students and their clearly overly challenged parents were hustling across the platform in a complete state of disarray, having to shuffle through the clutter of the masses of other people, mounds of scattered luggage, and heaps of animal cages that housed either madly hooting owls, loud croaking toads, or unhappy and howling felines. Many of the older students stood in loose cliques around their belongings, socializing, showing off their new brooms and recently mastered spells, while the first years wandered aimlessly about, colliding with, and occasionally tripping over one another as they reviewed every inch of the magical space in wonderment. The parents, on the other hand, looked far busier than they were keen on, having to tend to the hectic task of boarding their children, along with their children’s luggage and restless pets onto the Hogwarts Express before its eleven o’clock departure.

Chaotic and taxing as the scene may have appeared to the average wizard, the energy emanating from Harry’s peers ignited in him a newfound sense of satisfaction. He came to fully appreciate how he had officially managed to arrive, fully intact, at the threshold of what would be his seventh and final year at Hogwarts. He had made it through the mystery of the Sorcerer’s Stone, escaping Voldemort’s wrath, and thwarting the Dark Lord from using the stone for immortality. He destroyed the monster basilisk in the Chamber of Secrets, sparing the lives of the innocent Muggle-borns in the school, and destroying a piece of Voldemort’s soul along the way. He revealed Wormtail to be the true traitor who defied his parents, clearing his godfather, Sirius,’ good name. He won the Tri-Wizard tournament and escaped Voldemort’s wrath, again, in his fourth year. He fell in lust twice, and found lifelong friendships in Ron, Hermione, Lupin, and the Weasleys. Perhaps most significantly of all, he discovered the secret behind Voldemort’s Horcruxes, last year, just before witnessing the dreadful demise of the school’s headmaster, Dumbledore, the greatest wizard of the age.

Yet, despite these many great and trying challenges, there he stood, ready and willing to take on whatever was set his way, facing the coming school year with a divine sense of bravery that was surely unprecedented to most.

The unexpected sharp tooting of the brick red locomotive's whistle, signaling five minutes until its departure, made Harry's ears twitch. The piercing reverberation echoed in his head and throughout the space as he paced his way toward the rest of the Order, all of whom had gathered in an open circle a few feet away from the enchanted corridor entrance to receive them.

Upon approaching the group, he noted that his hand was still solidly intertwined with Hannah's and her grip on him was just as firm as it had been when they passed through the enchanted passageway together. He elected not to call her attention to it, as he was completely enthralled by the grace of her touch, no matter what her sentiments were behind it. Remus, however, shook his head in blatant condemnation of Hannah the instant he noticed the affectionate handholding exhibition. Hannah renounced Remus by intensifying her grip on Harry and carting him boldly past the rest of the Order, toward the train. Ron and Hermione chased after them.

"We'll see you at the feast in the Great Hall, Harry," said Hermione, stepping up her pace to connect with him and yanking Ron impatiently along with her.

"Yeah, since we're Head Boy and Head Girl, Hermione and I have to ride in the prefect's carriage the *whole way* to Hogwarts, and then shuffle all the sniveling little first year prats through the castle to the sorting ceremony," grumbled Ron sarcastically.

"You should be *proud*, Ronald! This is an *honor!*" snapped Hermione.

"Yeah, right. I keep forgetting. Somehow, that ledge I was to jump off is looking a whole lot more welcoming to me," called Ron over his shoulder to Harry.

Harry sniggered.

"Ugh! Come on, Ron!" said Hermione impatiently, dragging him off to board the front cabin of the train.

"See you guys," said Harry nodding them off.

"Hey, Harry! Harry!" shouted three familiar voices erratically.

Harry looked off to his left to catch sight of Dean, Seamus, and Neville scampering along the platform, heading straight for him.

"Blimey," whimpered Seamus, screeching to an immediate halt before Harry the instant his wandering eye caught sight of Hannah. He proceeded to review every inch of her,

from her perfectly manicured toes, to the top of her flawlessly layered locks of sumptuously dark hair.

“Whoaaaa,” drawled Dean, bumping into Seamus and swaying slightly as *his* eyes danced over Hannah’s stunning and shapely form.

“Hey, Harry,” squeaked Neville, his eyes gladly joining in the thorough addressing of the dazzling statuesque brunette affixed to Harry’s side.

“Hey, guys,” said Harry, taking the occasion to flaunt the fact that he possessed the delicate hand of a young woman who he was fully prepared to deem as the world’s most gorgeous living creature.

“Hi. I’m Hannah,” she said, holding her free hand out to greet each one of the ogling trio members.

Seamus lunged forward, shoving his friends aside, throwing his chest out, and taking firm hold of her hand, shaking it vigorously.

“Hi! I’m Seamus and this is Dean, and, uh, this bloke here, this is, uh, er —”

“Neville!” snorted Neville.

“Yeah, right, Neville, Neville, yes,” said Seamus, still shaking Hannah’s hand firmly.

“Pleased to meet all of you,” said Hannah, wincing as Seamus tightened his grip on her. “Um, Seamus, do you think I could have my hand back?”

“Huh? Oh, yeah, sure,” he said. Yet, he continued to shake her with ever-increasing force, his conscious self fully engrossed in absorbing every ounce of her.

“It’s just that, I’ve kind of grown rather attached to it you see,” Hannah resumed more insistently, trying in vain to escape his striking grip.

“Seamus!” hissed Harry.

“Oh! Right...sorry,” chuckled Seamus awkwardly, finally releasing her.

“Thanks,” groaned Hannah, shaking her hand out to encourage the circulation to find her blood deprived and prickling fingers. “Harry, we should board the train. I believe Remus has gone ahead and secured three consecutive compartments up front for our group.”

“Sure,” said Harry.

Hannah ushered him through the doors of the locomotive, turning slightly to summon his belongings to follow.

“H-hey, wait up! Can we sit with you, Potter?” inquired Seamus, collapsing to the ground as the corner of Harry’s floating trunk clocked him hard in his left temple.

“Watch your step, boy!” shouted a tall cranky conductor, who was tending to the passengers behind Seamus.

Seamus blushed severely and scrambled to his feet, brushing out his robes, barely missing a beat as he skipped onto the train behind Hannah and Harry.

“Here we go, Harry,” said Hannah, waving him into the center compartment and hoisting his trunk and Hedwig atop the luggage rack. “You go on and have a seat. I’ll be right back.”

“Where are you going?”

“To the *loo*,” she whispered. With a quick reassuring wink, she shut the door behind her and disappeared down the left corridor of the train.

“Alright, Potter, spill it!” said Seamus, eagerly plopping down beside Harry. “Who’s the stunning bird with the killer legs?”

“You mean Hannah?” inquired Harry, trying to behave casually, though he was admittedly most amused by his friends’ overenthusiastic interest.

“Is she your...*girlfriend*?” inquired Dean with wonderment.

“No. We’re just friends. She’s my personal guard,” said Harry matter-of-factly.

“*SHE* is your personal guard?” slurred Neville in disbelief.

“Blimey! If I get Voldemort to come after me, will the Ministry send *her* for *my* protection?” inquired Seamus, intending to serve up his comment as a joke, but instead managing to sound overly serious.

Harry chuckled and responded, “I don’t think so, mate. Dumbledore assigned her to look after me just before he died.”

“So, do you like get to see her every day, or what?” inquired Dean.

“All day, all night, pretty much, when I’m on holiday or weekendening at Order headquarters.”

“All night? What does she do, sleep outside your bedroom door?” snorted Seamus sardonically.

“No. We share a room,” said Harry purposely blasé, absolutely reveling in the sea of gaping jaws erupting from his friends’ faces.

“Y-You share a ro-oo-oom w-with *her*?” stuttered Neville.

“Yeah. It’s no big deal or anything. It’s totally innocent,” said Harry.

Seamus snorted, “*Totally innocent?* Sure, Potter.”

“Seamus, she’s got a boyfriend!” said Harry nastily.

“Oh, she has? Well, what was she doing holding YOUR hand then?” said Seamus confrontationally.

“For protection!” said Harry shortly.

“Hah!” Dean chortled.

“What?” snapped Harry irritably.

“So, tell us, Potter. This room that the two of you share...Where do *you* sleep?” inquired Dean.

Harry squirmed in his seat before retorting cleverly, “In a bed, Dean! Alright? Could we change the subject, please?”

Dean and Seamus cheerfully obliged when their focus had inadvertently drifted through the plate glass window of the cabin door and into the corridor, allowing them to attain a particularly arresting view of Hannah. She was bent forward, facing them, assisting a drippy looking blond girl gather a knapsack full of schoolbooks that had spilled across the corridor. Hannah’s dexterously split-legged stance left her flaunting every inch of her impeccably toned, silky long legs, from stem to stern. Meanwhile, the integrity of her black lace tank-top had far surpassed its capacity to hang onto her bodacious bosoms as she bent down, allowing for far more than ample amounts of her cleavage to be exposed.

“Damn, Potter! You must be the luckiest bloke alive,” Seamus gasped beneath his fixed deer-caught-in-the-headlights expression.

“Yeah,” agreed Neville breathlessly, gaping at the fanciful sight blossoming out of Hannah’s garments.

“The *luckiest*,” echoed Dean equally as transfixed.

Harry followed his friends’ river of drool to the corridor outside of their cabin. He gulped upon catching the same vision of Hannah and having to agree wholeheartedly. He watched on, as she reverted to her full upright stance with the grace of a beautifully

lissome flamingo. With a similar solitary fluid motion, she reached forth, sliding the cabin door open to re-enter the space. She smirked in response to the sappy dotting expressions of the four highly aroused teenage boys who instantly rose from their seats to receive her. However, she, instead, backed away graciously, allowing Luna to pass through the entryway before her.

“There you are, Luna. Go on and have a seat next to Neville. He looks as though he could use some female companionship,” she said teasingly, with a twinkle in her winking eye that made his lower lip palpitate.

“Thank you,” said Luna in a spacey manner, shambling her way through the tangling cluster of legs, robes, and knapsacks, eventually claiming the window seat next to Neville, and across from Seamus. She settled heavily into her spot, and once she was comfortable, she popped on a pair of black and white spectroscopy glasses and fumbled through the latest edition of *The Quibbler*.

“Hannah, this compartment only seats *five*. Where are you to sit?” asked Harry sounding bothered.

“On your lap, of course,” said Hannah with a cunning smirk, plunking herself onto him, braiding her arms loosely around his neck, and proceeding to run her fingers seductively through the back of his hair, her stunning face a mere breath away from his.

Harry blushed, while his three male counterparts nearly fainted from the wrath of their envy toward him.

“*Ha, ha,*” drawled Harry, nudging her off him.

Hannah giggled. With a swift flick of her wand, she impelled the cushioned bench he was sitting on to stretch, making room for her to sit beside him.

The group swiftly channeled their focus on Luna, who had taken to crossing her feet at the ankles and bouncing them wildly from side to side while clicking her tongue and exuding the strangest humming noises. Harry thought she sounded very much like a cross between the resonant whirring of a UFO and a droning religious chant.

Hannah snorted and inquired sweetly, “What’s that you’re singing, Luna?”

“Hm?” Luna replied, staring vacantly out at the dumbfounded group through the black and white swirling springs of her spectroscopes and twirling her flaxen blond hair tightly around her forefinger.

“That song you were just singing, it sounds oddly familiar,” continued Hannah.

Luna gasped. “You mean, *you* know it?”

“Of course; doesn’t everyone?” replied Hannah casually.

Harry’s friends switched their attention between Hannah and Luna, entirely lost in the terms of this unique exchange. Harry, on the other hand, instantly recognized the precise direction Hannah was steering their dippy banter. He knew how much she prized the thrill of addressing any creature who clearly defied the laws of human nature, and Luna was most certainly one of those. Stranger than she was tall or wide, Luna had a habit of captivating even the most eccentric of wizards with her immeasurably bizarre antics and seemingly outlandish dialogue.

“*YOU* know the anthem of the *Mai Tai Tongs*?” gasped Luna in astonishment.

Seamus sat forward and spat out, “The *who*?!?”

“The *Mai Tai Tongs*,” Hannah answered him indulgently.

Harry smirked and chimed in, “Ah, yes, the *Mai Tai Tongs*. Yes, I do believe you taught me about them over the summer, Hannah.”

“Mmmm. You remember. Very good, Potter, very good,” murmured Hannah.

Harry buried his face in Hannah’s shoulder to keep from laughing.

“I-I don’t believe this!” gasped Luna, clearly outraged that her unconventional behavior had failed to weird out the whole of the group. “You know about how it keeps the *Mai Tai*’s from invading your brain and turning it to —”

“Soup. Mmm. Chowder, actually,” said Hannah knowingly.

“Chowder? Really?” Luna whispered in awe.

The rest of the group continued to listen in with the odd sense they had inadvertently been recruited as guinea pigs in some sort of candid hallucinogen experiment.

“Yes. I actually know someone in St. Mungo’s who was recently afflicted. Such a tragedy, as he was a terribly bright fellow.” Hannah let out a theatrical sigh and added, “He just, never took the occasion to learn the chant. He never found it viable.”

“What in bloody hell is she going on about!” whispered Seamus to Harry in frustration.

Harry laughed and whispered back, “It’s nothing, Seamus. Hannah’s just having a little fun with Luna.”

“Oh, whew! I thought I was going mental for a moment there,” replied Seamus.

Luna straightened out, challenging Hannah further by proclaiming, “Well, have you heard about —”

“*The Flattigott’s*,” finished Hannah before Luna had the occasion to complete her sentence. “Indeed. It’s a regional variation, diagnosed by the faint odor that is emitted from root of the victim’s hair.”

Luna brought her hand up to meet her mouth and rose slowly to her feet.

Hannah lunged forward and pointing excitedly at the paper Luna held in her hand and called out, “Hey! I see you’ve got the latest edition of *The Quibbler*. Mind if I have a look?”

“Sh-ure,” said Luna, studying Hannah with wonderment.

“Thanks,” said Hannah, snatching it from Luna’s hands and flipping animatedly through it. “God! The editor is my personal hero. I’ve been dying to make it with him, but he won’t take my calls. I even sent him some rather compelling pictures of myself in the buff.” — She raised her palms in the air — “Yet, alas, no response.”

“The editor *happens* to be my father!” said Luna, aghast, burrowing her fists into her hips and rising solidly to her feet.

“He *is*?” gasped Hannah, her eyes widening in a dramatic fashion. “Do you think — do you think you could get him to, you know, call me? I mean, he is single, right?”

“Ugh!” shrieked Luna, gathering her knapsack, swiping the paper from Hannah’s grasp, and storming out of the compartment.

“Was it something I said?” inquired Hannah, mocking her innocence with an amplified doe-eyed expression.

The group burst into hysterics.

Harry charged forward, pulling Hannah into his lap by means of a playful headlock, and laughed out, “You’re *mean*!”

“Oh, she’s just as bad, making up all that craziness for attention. Why doesn’t she just do like the rest of us girls and splash on a bit more make-up, flash a little cleavage, and call it a day?”

“I guess that’s what makes her unique,” proclaimed Harry in Luna’s defense.

“Aw, Potter! You like her, don’t you?” teased Hannah.

“I do not! Well, not in the way *you* mean, anyway. But, she is my friend,” said Harry, blushing a noble crimson red of embarrassment.

Hannah smiled.

“Say, Hannah, how did you know all that weird stuff Luna was thinking?” asked Dean.

“Hannah’s a gifted Legilimens,” interjected Harry.

“You mean —” started Seamus with a look of alarm.

“That’s right, Seamus,” said Hannah, confirming him with a cunning smirk and mischievous flash of her brow. “I can determine each and every thought in that wee little Scottish brain of yours, if I so desire; as long as I can make eye contact with you and you fail to possess the necessary skills of Occlumency to block me, that is.”

Seamus, Dean, and Neville simultaneously looked away from her.

Harry sniggered and nudged Hannah in her side.

“Oh, come on, boys!” exclaimed Hannah with a repentant pout. “I generally don’t invade people’s private thoughts unless they coerce me somehow. That Luna lass was just begging for it. All that *Mai Tai*, *Flattigott* nonsense. Then, when I learned that her father was the editor of that rag, *The Quibbler*, I just couldn’t help myself.”

“Hey, don’t knock *The Quibbler*,” countered Harry. “They were the only ones who printed the truth about me and Voldemort a few years back when no one else would hear of it.”

“Yes, I do suppose you’re right, Potter,” sighed Hannah. “I reckon we all manage to hit a bright spot in our vocations at some point, including those overindulgent tree mangling rubbish manufacturers.”

Harry frowned. Hannah appealed to him by leaning her head affectionately on his shoulder. Harry didn’t waste any more time holding a grudge.

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The Hogwarts Express came to a grinding halt as it approached Hogsmeade Station, outside of the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Much to Harry’s dismay, the train ride to the school, which once seemed to last an eternity, had passed by rather quickly, too quickly for his liking.

He gazed out of the cabin window, catching the dazzling early evening view of the illuminated castle looming large on the steep rocky plains overlooking the hypnotic ripples of great lake. The starry night sky lit the grounds with the effects of tiny floating

spotlights highlighting the students that passed beneath them. Harry felt an odd sense of emptiness encroach him as he surveyed these sights, realizing that never again would he witness this remarkable scene from behind the window of the charming locomotive. Moreover, this was to be his final ride in the Thestral drawn carriages from the train station up to the castle, and his last ingestion of the delectable tang of the Hogwarts' welcoming feast, which marked the start of every school year.

"Come, Potter," said Hannah gently, tugging at his arm.

Once Harry withdrew his inspection of the outer grounds, he realized that he and Hannah were alone in the cabin and were among the last to leave the train.

"They're good memories for you, aren't they, Potter, your travels on this train. Though your last journey has come, you can always find comfort in the memories." She handed him a small parcel and declared further, "Here. Inside that box is a pensive for you. They come in handy, as you well know."

Though Harry's face was lost beneath his wistful gaze, he felt a strange sense of peace and contentment rush over him. Invasive as Hannah's Legilimency skills could be on occasion, there were times, like this, when he couldn't be more thankful for her mastery of the skill.

"Let's go, Morley!" shouted Lupin, rapping impatiently on the outside window of their cabin, startling Hannah and Harry.

"We'd best be going, Potter. Remus's patience extends about as far as his tail!" said Hannah.

Harry chuckled, opening his knapsack and storing the parcel she had given him inside of it.

Stepping onto the platform of Hogsmeade Station, they were met by the customary sights and sounds of the masses of students hauling belongings toward the carriages and loading them aboard in their next step toward reaching the castle. He targeted his attentions to the undersized, fiddling first year students, who were collectively scrambling to work their way through the hordes of their older and larger peers.

The new and befuddled recruits took on the same mission to reach the vast hairy man who was standing off in the distance dangling an oversized lantern high in the air and declaring in a loud booming voice, "First years! First years, this way! First years, follow me!"

Harry instinctively followed the familiar calls until he reached the side of that vast, hairy man, and he called out, "Hey, Hagrid!"

"Alrigh', Harry?" said Hagrid.

“Yeah,” replied Harry soundly.

“Ms. Hannah,” said Hagrid, greeting her with an attentive bow.

“Evening, Hagrid,” said Hannah with a pleasant smile. Then turning to Harry, she said, “Lupin’s set aside some carriages for us. We should get going.”

Harry moved to consult her, “Um, Hannah, I was wondering if I could skip the carriage ride and sail along with Hagrid across the black lake, instead, if it’s alright with him?”

Hagrid smiled proudly. “Why, it’s fine by me, Harry. Yer have ter clear it with Lupin o’ course.”

As if on cue, Remus Lupin came plowing across the train platform, looking irritable and calling out, “What’s the delay, Morley? The carriages are all set and ready for us to take Harry to the castle!”

“Erm, Remus,” said Hannah apprehensively, “Harry has requested to cross the black lake with Hagrid, instead.”

Remus shook his head resolutely. “*No*. Uh-uh. He’s to go with us in the carriages as has been prearranged.”

Harry frowned.

“Oh, come on, Lupin!” snapped Hannah. “Give the poor bloke a bit of a break, would you?” Looking almost sinister in her blatantly intentional means of swaying Lupin’s decision in Harry’s favor, she inquired with a mocking innocence, “Or, don’t you have enough confidence to believe that Hagrid is capable of escorting Potter *safely* to the castle?”

Lupin grimaced. “I never said such a thing!”

“Oh, but you were thinking it,” said Hannah rebelliously.

Hagrid grunted, looking highly offended and equally as hurt.

Lupin scoffed, “Oh, *alright!* But you’re to go with him, Morley!” In a sardonic fashion, he declared further, “After all, you are his *official* sentinel.”

“Spectacular,” she grumbled. “I do so enjoy a refreshingly turbulent boat ride that brings me to vomit after. Can’t you go along with him? You know how horribly sick I become on any kind of watercraft, Remus!”

“Take it or leave it, Morley!” he said, with a horribly satisfied grin.

Hannah looked at Harry's desperate air and spat out, "Oh, very well!"

Harry beamed.

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The boat ride to the castle was everything just short of an outright nightmare for Hannah, who spent the latter half of the voyage draped over the side of the boat, purging the contents of her stomach. Harry held her hair away from her face, shooting harsh glares at the first year students who stared after Hannah in wonderment, taking in her retching act as some sort of prelude performance to the feature event of their official ceremonial induction into the school.

"I'm *so* sorry," whispered Harry to Hannah, repentantly.

"It's alright, Potter." She retched again. "I'll rest easy knowing that you owe me, **BIG TIME.**"

"You bet. Anything. Just say the word."

The fleet of tiny boats glided toward the cliffs surrounding the castle and drifted through a long tunnel beneath it, finally reaching the water's edge and docking along a slanted pebble-ridden shore. On Hagrid's instruction, the students clambered out of the boats and congregated along the shoreline. They watched on as Harry guided an entirely worn out and weakened Hannah out of the boat.

"Alright there, Morley?!" called Remus cheerfully, stepping up to meet her, slapping her briskly on the back, and reveling in her lime-green-about-the-gills exterior.

"I'd watch myself if I were you, Lupin!" she growled eerily. "I might get the urge to purge again and perhaps hit my intended mark!"

Remus chuckled fearlessly. "Come, Harry. We're to go to McGonagall's office before the feast."

"Oh, but I'll miss the sorting ceremony!" said Harry regrettably.

"There's nothing I can do about that, Harry. It is McGonagall's orders that we see her upon entering the castle. Let's go; unless Ms. Morley needs a moment, of course."

Hannah's face contorted into a weak, but ugly scowl. She clutched her abdomen as she trailed up to the castle hunched over beside a still gloating Lupin, who, in his defense, was considerate enough to lend her his arm for support.

The first year students had trudged far ahead of them, ooing and ahing over their surroundings, their little legs pumping along madly in an effort to match Hagrid's

gigantesque strides. They hauled up the steep stone steps of the castle, pushed through the pair of great oak doors that marked the main entrance, and spilled into the vast open foyer of the first floor.

“We’re to head this way,” said Lupin, directing Harry and Hannah away from the first year students that had gathered around Hagrid at the foot of a great marble staircase.

Harry’s next steps found him nearly stumbling directly into the two unwelcoming, wide, and muscled forms of Crabbe and Goyle, both of whom were looking as thick and apish as ever, yet strangely incomplete without the likes of Draco Malfoy present to order them about. Much to Harry’s satisfaction, the two bullies did nothing to him in terms of confrontation, other than to furrow their brows and shell out collective brief and harmless teeth grinding exhibitions in his direction. Unanticipated by him, however, was their extremely fond addressing of Hannah by name.

Hannah waved to them in acknowledgement.

“You *know* them?” asked Harry disquietly as they passed by.

“Sort of. I happened upon them a few times whilst tending to my studies here,” replied Hannah simply.

“You *happened* upon them?” inquired Harry skeptically.

“In all fairness, Potter, those two are pretty hard to miss. Not to mention, they are quite keen on wandering the castle, particularly at night, which is when I tended to most of my studies here. I would bump into them occasionally, and we’d engage in some idle chitchat. Though, I must say, they look oddly incomplete without their master, don’t you agree?”

“You know Malfoy, too?” asked Harry, his eyes growing wide.

Hannah chuckled. “Don’t be so surprised, Potter. It’s not as though I lived out my childhood as a total recluse. I met a few handfuls of students here in the castle, mostly from the Slytherin house, since I studied so much with Snape. I usually bumped into people when leaving his classroom or his office.”

Remus cleared his throat in a loud and critical manner.

“Oh, that’s right,” said Hannah in a harsh enough whisper that she could be heard clearly. “Remus doesn’t like Severus.”

Remus’s expression hardened.

“Who does?” said Harry sorely.

Hannah face instantly took on a brazen condemning frown that threw Harry for a loop. He couldn't figure out why she seemed so intent on defending the honor of such a hideously repulsive man, especially one who had proven himself to be every bit the deceitful and murderous coward that Harry had always deemed him to be.

Hannah scoffed and stormed away. It was almost as though the mere sight of Harry and Remus had suddenly become so unappealing to her, she would surely have been driven into another retching fit had she not withdrawn herself from their company. Lupin shook his head subtly in dissension and proceeded silently at Harry's side.

When he and Harry rounded the last corner of the seventh floor corridor, they reconnected with a still disgruntled looking Hannah, who was lingering impatiently before the great golden winged gargoyle statue that concealed the entrance to Dumbledore's former office.

"Custos Morum," called out Lupin quietly when he met the statue. Afterward, he was careful to flash Hannah a solid look of reproach, to which she responded with an embittered rolling of her eyes and a severely disgusted twitching of her upper lip.

The enchanted statue swiveled open, revealing a narrow spiral staircase within it.

"Come, Harry, Hannah," urged Lupin swiftly, waving the two in front of him.

Harry felt an odd sense of foreboding encroach him as the wooden stairwell rotated and hoisted them upward. He instantly recognized his terrible sentiments to be the dreadful recollection of his last visit there, the night that he and Dumbledore had set off to fetch the Horcrux, the same night Dumbledore was murdered. Out of nowhere, he found himself confronting the necessary compulsion to liberate himself from every portion of his insides. He had completely overlooked the fact that naturally McGonagall would take over the office space once she claimed Dumbledore's post as head of the school.

When they reached the landing at the top of the staircase, Lupin rapped lightly upon the face of a doorway, but received no response.

"She must be tending to the Sorting Ceremony. No matter," said Lupin, piping open the door, ushering Hannah and Harry through it, and then sweeping along behind them. "Let's have a seat and wait, shall we?"

"I think I'll stand, thanks," said Harry distractedly, pivoting to assess the great circular space.

He noted it looked precisely the same as when it belonged to Dumbledore: The unaltered whirring, spinning, and whistling trinkets resting on their broad silver spoke spindles in full steady motion, spurting out blinking puffs of silver smoke; the enchanted, moving portraits of the former Hogwarts' Headmasters and Headmistresses hung consecutively in a perfect spiraling ring from the ceiling to the center of the rounded walls. Some of the

figures in the portraits lay sleeping, while others called out their signature catch phrases sporadically, leaving the balance of them seemingly staring out at one another or studying the living subjects in the room.

Harry's eyes circled the upper row of portraits until his gaze found the visual rendering of Dumbledore, who sat snoring soundly at a desk within the enchanted framework. His heart sank at the sight of the former Headmaster, and he found himself struggling to find a new point whereupon he could bestow his attentions.

Out of desperation, his eyes took leaps and bounds across the room until they reached the wooden mantle above the fireplace, where upon there rested an elaborate silver sword on a mounted onyx marble plaque. Encrusted within the handle of the sword were three rubies the size of eggs. The boldest one, the ruby in the center, gleamed far brighter and appeared almost liquid in content. Engraved just below the hilt, was the name of Godric Gryffindor, who, in Harry's opinion, was the boldest and bravest of the four co-founders of the school.

Harry moved toward the phenomenal silver vision, instinctively reaching forth and unsheathing it. As he cradled the weighty rapier in his hands, he slowly ran his forefinger along the full stretch of the blade. He thought of the last time the stunning spectacle rested so heavily in his hands, in the Chamber of Secrets, when he fought Voldemort and killed the giant basilisk.

"I'd forgotten how brilliant this piece is," he said breathlessly, fully mesmerized by the golden gleam of the firelight reflecting off the flawless surface of the blade. "I mean, the craftsmanship alone...Look at the rubies. The one in the center looks almost liquid," he said, as he fingered the middle jewel. "I can see why Voldemort wants this so badly."

Hannah stepped forward and traced over the center ruby with her finger.

"May I, Harry?" she asked graciously, holding out her hands to receive the sword.

"Yeah, sure," he said, releasing the article into her possession.

Hannah held the weapon by its blade, lowering the handle to meet the light of the fire, rocking it in slow motion, squinting her eyes and crooking her head to complete her view. She gasped lightly.

"What? What is it?" asked Harry with a touch of alarm.

"Nothing, nothing," said Hannah dismissively. "It's a remarkable piece, is all."

Harry raised his brow to her.

"Here you are," she said quietly, returning the sword to Harry.

“Good evening,” called a shrill pitched voice behind them.

“Professor McGonagall,” said Harry, slightly startled.

“Nice to see you again, Potter,” said McGonagall in an almost weary tenor.

“You too,” he replied solemnly. “I was just looking at the Gryffindor sword.”

“It’s a stunning article. I can certainly understand your attraction to it,” said McGonagall.

Harry nodded slightly and returned the sword to its sheath. He turned to face the Headmistress, who stood newly fixed before the empty perch where Fawkes had once rested.

“She’s yours now, Potter,” said McGonagall quietly, her gaze following his to the vacant burnished golden post behind her. “Since Dumbledore is gone, you have become the sole living descendent of Godric Gryffindor, and she’ll only abide by the heir. Her charge is to watch over you from afar until Voldemort is destroyed. She’ll find this perch again, once you have succeeded in your mission, and then you’ll take her back to Grimmauld with you.”

“Dumbledore was an heir to Gryffindor?” Harry gasped in astonishment.

“That is correct, Mr. Potter.”

“I — I never knew. He never told me.”

“Albus never found it essential to boast about his heritage, Potter. His skills alone were legendary.”

“But, what about his brother, Aberforth?”

“Half brother. Dumbledore’s natural mother was the original heir and died shortly after Dumbledore was born. His father remarried and his new wife later gave birth to Aberforth.”

Harry did not know how to respond. He settled on asking the only hopeful inquiry he could think of. “Professor, were Dumbledore and I...related?”

“Not directly, but all of the members of the noble house of Gryffindor were inter-related to some degree, no matter how great the distance.”

“Oh,” replied Harry with a relative sense of disappointment woven into his response.

“Please, have a seat, Potter,” said McGonagall insistently, shuffling him across the floor and setting him upon one of the two scarlet leather backed chairs positioned before her desk. “We need discuss the terms of your studies here.”

“*Terms, professor?*” inquired Harry, looking befuddled as his gaze passed between her, Hannah, and Lupin.

“The Ministry’s plans for your security, Harry,” interjected Lupin in a reassuring whisper. He patted Harry comfortingly on his shoulder.

“As I was saying, Potter; the Ministry of Magic, and the staff here at Hogwarts, as well as the Order of the Phoenix have worked meticulously throughout the summer to restructure the security of the castle and the grounds. We have done so in order to ensure that the proper precautions are being administered to guarantee the welfare of all of the students, particularly you, whilst you remain under our direction. *Surely*, you have come to realize we have found ourselves in a new age, one that is far more perilous than imaginable?”

“Subsequent to last years’ calamity with Draco Malfoy’s transport cabinet in the room of requirement, which allowed for several Death Eaters to find their way onto the school grounds, the ministry has insisted that we *maximize* security in the castle or be forced to close the school.

“As a privileged member of the Order of the Phoenix, Potter, I am certain that you are well aware that Order has deemed it *essential* to provide round-the-clock patrols throughout the castle corridors during the school year. In addition, there is to be an advanced guard from the Order of the Phoenix stationed outside of Gryffindor tower, at all times, to escort you about the castle should you choose to venture about.”

“No offense, Professor McGonagall, but I don’t believe it’s necessary for me to have a personal guard walk me everywhere I go.”

“If you’re to study in my school, Potter, it most certainly is. You must realize that I am wholly responsible for your welfare whilst you reside within these castle walls. Now, if I may continue,” she said tersely.

“Sure. Sorry,” grumbled Harry, becoming most aggrieved with the reality that he was being ordered to consent to the services of a round-the-clock babysitter at the ripe old age of *seventeen*.

Professor McGonagall advanced on him and said, “I should have you know, Potter, that Dumbledore shared with me his strict instructions to have Ms. Morley be the one to take watch over you upon the happenstance of his untimely demise.

“It is my understanding that Hannah has since proven herself quite eloquent in executing her task of securing your protection during your stay at Grimmauld over the summer holiday. Moreover, she has expressed her keen interest in continuing to lead in the role as

your protector under Remus' direction. For these reasons, I deem it only appropriate that *she* is to be appointed as the witch who is to perform the essential duties as your personal escort during the school week. She is to see to your safe arrival from class to class and meals and such, returning you to the Gryffindor common room during your free periods. If, however, you wish to roam about the school grounds, or any part of the castle, you will need to secure her company, or the guidance of another member of the advanced guard before doing so."

Harry felt his heart lift. The opportunity to have Hannah by his side, at his beckoned call, Monday through Friday, morning, noon, and early night, made the hideous burden of being stalked by the Dark Side almost well worth sheltering.

"Great!" he said with far more enthusiasm than he intended to publicly admit.

Hannah smiled and winked at Harry, whose already euphoric state had him nearly defying gravity as his spirit soared, virtually lifting his body off the ground.

Professor McGonagall cleared her throat and added, "To ensure that your safety is never compromised, Ms. Morley and the advanced guard members of the Order of the Phoenix have been granted *full* access to the Gryffindor common room and to your dormitory. The other members will split the principal duties of acting as your minders during the after-hours' shifts and on the weekends you spend here in the castle.

"Now, as far as weekend trips to Hogsmeade are concerned, Lupin has granted consent for you to visit the village during your free weekends, provided you allot him enough time to secure you the proper protection, and as long as no harm befalls you whilst you are there."

Hannah stepped forward and declared, "Harry also has the option of returning to Grimmauld Place on the weekends he has free from Quidditch matches or practices, Minerva." Turning to Harry she persisted, "I do believe you've mentioned an interest in spending those weekends with me, have you not, Harry?"

"Yeah, yeah, I'd like to," answered Harry eagerly.

Lupin frowned slightly.

"Very well," started Professor McGonagall. "So long as you remember, Mr. Potter, your every move will remain under my strict scrutiny. Your protection and well-being are the top priority of the whole of the Ministry, of the Order, and of the entire staff here at Hogwarts. Our only requisite for you is that you abide by the house rules and follow the instructions and the safety procedures that we have put in place for you. It is essential that you understand the importance of abiding by our guidelines."

"Yeah, I — I understand," said Harry.

“Therefore, I can rest easy with the knowledge that you will abide by ALL of the house rules, not just those that do not represent a quandary for you?” inquired McGonagall.

“Yes. I mean, I’ll listen,” said Harry, stretching to stand to his feet.

“In that case, unless you have any questions or concerns for me, Potter, I suggest you proceed off to the Great Hall for supper,” said McGonagall, escorting him to the door.

“Right,” said Harry.

“Good evening, Mr. Potter, Hannah, Remus,” said McGonagall.

“Minerva, I’ll be in touch,” said Remus with a quick nod.

With Hannah and Remus at his side, Harry pushed his way toward the Great Hall.

Remus drew to a halt just before allowing Harry to enter the space and said, “Harry, Hannah will meet you in the Gryffindor common room at seven o’clock tomorrow morning to take you to breakfast. You’re not to leave Gryffindor tower until she comes for you.”

“Right,” said Harry, flashing a contented and sappy grin in Hannah’s direction.

“Tonks will escort you back to Gryffindor Tower after supper, and she will be standing guard tonight outside the portrait hole, should you need anything.”

“Sounds great,” said Harry.

“Have a good start of term. I shall see you soon,” said Remus, bowing his head to Harry.

Harry nodded.

“See you in the morning, Potter,” said Hannah, planting a kiss on his cheek.

“Yeah, see you,” Harry answered breathlessly, holding his hand to his face in an attempt to capture and relive the sensation of the instant her tender lips met and caressed his flesh. He watched after them as they turned away and strode down along the flag stone corridor, listening as their footsteps echoed throughout the entrance hall, the sound gradually fading as the two rounded the corner and disappeared from his sight.

Pushing through a broad set of heavy doors before him, the entryway parted, and his eyes and ears met and absorbed the compelling sights and sounds of the spacious Great Hall. His visual assessment stretched the full length of the welcoming space, from the white candles hovering in mid-air, to the torch-infested borders of the room, to the star-filled enchanted ceiling, which mocked the night sky outside that was gleaming boldly through the high windows. Lowering his gaze, his eyes met the four house tables packed beneath

the brimming masses of students, all of whom were eagerly consuming their supper. They were sputtering along enthusiastically to one another through their mouthfuls of nosh, rambling on about their summer holiday escapades and taking sporadic breaks to greet fellow classmates sitting at other tables. As he moved deeper into the room, he noticed that the entire student body was taking turns addressing him with waves of gawking stares and surges of incessant gossipy whispers. Every so often, a bolder student would rise from their seat and wave proudly to him.

Harry was used to this sort of treatment, annoying as it was. He had endured six years of it and, by his fifth year, he had officially declared himself totally immune to it.

“Harry!” he heard Ron exclaim from his usual seat in the center of the Gryffindor table.

Harry took his place beside his best friend, and much to his dismay, next to Seamus, who still had not given up his quest to pump Harry for further details about Hannah.

“So, Potter, where’s your girl?”

“She’s *not* my girl,” snapped Harry rudely.

“She’s his *guard*,” chimed Hermione.

“So, where is she?” pushed Seamus.

“She left. She’s off duty till the morning,” said Harry.

“Don’t worry, Seamus. I’m sure you’ll have plenty of time to salivate over her tomorrow,” said Hermione snappishly.

Seamus frowned.

“So, where’ve you been? You missed the sorting ceremony,” inquired Ron concernedly.

“In McGonagall’s office, being lectured about having a full time guard escort me about the castle,” answered Harry.

“Yeah, dad said something about Hannah taking up that post during the school week,” said Ron.

Seamus perked up, but Harry looked peeved.

“Thanks for telling me! I’ve only just been told!” snapped Harry, piling roasted chicken and parsley potatoes grudgingly onto his plate.

“Geez! Relax, Harry! So was I, while on the train! Dad and Remus were briefing all of the prefects about the new house rules and about the Order’s function in the school.”

“Why is it I’m always the *last* to find out such things? It’s maddening!” huffed Harry.

Hermione leaned forward and said reassuringly, “Harry, they probably just don’t want to overwhelm you, that’s all. I mean, think about it; your situation is anything but ordinary.”

“Yeah, I suppose you’re right,” he grumbled, stabbing crossly at his potatoes.

“Hey, ease up, would you!” snapped Seamus, wiping off several bits of potato from the side of his cheek, compliments of Harry’s feverish forking display.

“Sorry,” mumbled Harry insincerely.

“Say, Harry,” interjected Ron, “did you hear that Susan Bones hasn’t turned up yet? Neville said he heard McGonagall telling Flitwick that no one has heard from her, *or* her family.”

“That’s strange,” said Harry curiously, eyeing Susan’s empty seat at the Hufflepuff house table.

“Well, I’m not a bit surprised that she hasn’t returned,” said Dean. “Loads of students opted to stay home since Dumbledore’s murder last spring. I reckon their parents feel the school isn’t safe anymore now that he’s gone.”

Harry lost himself in Dean’s words, temporarily feeling his stomach tighten with distant, yet powerful pangs of despair as he envisioned that fateful night once again. His glance found the teacher’s table, where in Dumbledore’s seat, sat Professor McGonagall, and in Snape’s former seat, sat Tonks.

He felt his heart do a strange flip-flop, twisted dance. On one hand, he was elated that he no longer had to deal with Severus Snape’s repulsive face and daily taunting. But, on the other hand, it made it all the more difficult for him to imagine how he would get his hands on the revolting greasy haired traitor and make him pay for murdering Albus Dumbledore...

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Harry rose early the next morning, spending over an hour fussing with his hair and clothing until he considered his appearance decent enough to make Hannah’s acquaintance. As he rounded the base of the dormitory stairwell and peered into the open space of the Gryffindor common room, he spotted her leaning over one of the desks, diligently perusing the pages of *The Daily Prophet*. He lingered discretely in the entryway for several moments, beholding the eye-catching vision of her dressed in some rather flashy attire. She donned a burgundy sequined corset top, black leggings, and a pair of black, fitted knee-high boots. Following what he deemed was a necessary and finely executed ogling session, he settled on a subtle clearing of his throat to announce his arrival.

Hannah raised her head to greet him, smiling sweetly as she said, “Morning, Potter, how are you?”

“I’m fine, and you?” he replied, fidgeting timidly with the clasp on the front of his knapsack.

“A bit sleepy, but otherwise alright,” she said, stretching out while she slinked over to him. “So, are you ready for breakfast?”

“Yeah, sure,” said Harry, stepping after her as she turned and headed for the portrait hole.

“So, Harry, I was sorting through the secret room last night and I stumbled upon something that you forgot to pack,” said Hannah conversationally.

“You did? What’s that?” asked Harry curiously, plugging along beside her.

Hannah pulsed her wand in the air, conjuring a small square enchanted two-way communication mirror and handed it over to him.

Harry’s heart knotted up. He halted in his tracks, his throat tightening with each word he choked out, “W-where d-did you get this? It was broken, and I couldn’t fix it. I threw it away.”

“I know. I found it when I was emptying the dustbin in the loo. I managed a rather complicated spell in order to put it right. I figured you’d want it back.”

Harry scoffed, “For what? It’s of no use to me now. Sirius is dead and he had the other one. All his things have since gone missing.”

“Correction,” said Hannah. With a brisk plinking of her wand, she conjured the mirror’s twin. “I have the other one.” Her grin stretched wide as Harry’s eyes met the reflective spectacle with awe.

“But, how?”

“I nicked it from Sirius’s bedroom just after his murder, along with some of his other mementos. I figured that maybe you and I could use the mirrors to communicate when I’m not in the castle. You know, in case you should need anything,” she finished awkwardly.

Harry smiled serenely. “That’d be great!”

“Excellent. You might want to tuck it away in your knapsack for safekeeping. Oh, and please don’t let Remus know you have it. I’m most certain he wouldn’t approve of you

fraternizing with your guard whilst you should be tending to your studies,” snorted Hannah.

“Of course,” said Harry, shrugging his knapsack into the palm of his hand, unfastening the hooded flap, and slipping the reflective piece into one of the pockets.

He truly believed, most certainly, that there was an alternate motive behind Hannah’s taking such an interest in the frivolity of these mirrors. There was something about the way she seemed almost determined to stay connected to him, even when she wasn’t on duty.