

CHAPTER 3

THE 7TH HORCRUX

They worked frantically over the next several minutes to pack up his trunk, careful to erase any signs that either of them had been there. After piling his belongings into a vast mound in the center of his bedroom, Harry took one last look around his room, inhaling deeply, as though he were taking in the past seventeen years of his life. He realized this would be the last time he would ever find himself inside # 4 Privet Drive. Never again would he be subject to the unpleasant management of his nasty Aunt and Uncle, nor would he have to tolerate his Cousin Dudley's atrocious behavior. He would finally be rid of them, for good.

Nonetheless, it was a bittersweet moment for him. The circumstances in which he had been obligated to depart Little Whinging were anything but encouraging. In fact, he nearly had himself convinced that he would gladly be willing to live a life of complete misery in his Aunt and Uncle's house, forever, if it meant Dumbledore would be alive again and he and his friends would finally be safe.

Exhaling briskly in a desperate attempt to expel his worries, he rattled off, "So, how shall we get there? I suppose we could wait for the Knight Bus, or should we just go ahead and fly, then? I have an invisibility cloak. I expect we could ride together and hide beneath it."

Hannah tossed her head resolutely and answered, "No, Harry, it's too risky. Voldemort is capable of sensing the traces of magic that invisibility cloaks leave behind. He'll be watching for you to escape this place. I'm certain of it. It would be best if we Apparate. It's quick, clean, and virtually untraceable."

Harry blushed slightly. He wasn't set to take his Apparition test until September and he hadn't quite mastered the skill. On occasion, he was known to leave an ear, a hair, or a toe behind. However, he did manage to successfully Apparate himself and an ailing Dumbledore back to Hogsmeade, last year, the night they had retrieved the locket Horcrux. He thought about taking the risk again, but knowing better, he 'fessed up.

"Ummm, I don't have a license for that just yet. I mean, I am seventeen; it's just, I haven't taken the test, you see," he said, dropping his focus to his trainer-capped feet, self-consciously scraping the tips of them against the splintered floor in alternating strides.

Hannah unveiled a look of surprise, but quickly recovered her expression with a humble and reassuring smile as she said, "It's okay, Harry, take my hand. We can Apparate together."

Harry clapped his hand in hers and reached forward, holding tight to all of his belongings. He felt a bit uneasy having been forced to use such an uncomfortable method of transportation with her, as he always hated the odd sensation he felt during transit. It would have been much more comfortable for him to risk flying there, even in a horrible rainstorm.

He watched as she nodded reassuringly and uttered a mouthful of incantations. Suddenly, he felt the familiar jolt and pull of his insides churning as he endured the typical unpleasant squeeze of his whole body being forced through a narrow tube half his size. Finally, he heard a familiar POP and they landed smack dab in the center of their destination.

It was Grimmauld Place. Harry recognized it instantly. His eyes swept along his familiar surroundings: the darkened, stained, and faded grey walls; the empty cathedral ceilings; the tattered, velvety draperies; and the winding, rickety staircase that connected the upper and lower levels of the house, which were dotted with trolls' heads mounted on black marble plaques. He looked to the shoddy wooden doors and trims and inhaled the faint rotting smell permeating the air. Just standing inside the neglected and abandoned old home sickened him entirely.

A hefty lump filled in his throat when he recalled how much his deceased godfather, Sirius, had hated living there. In his mind, he could clearly picture Sirius's sunken eyes, his filthy, worn wizarding robes, his drawn, miserable paled face, and his solemn and depressive attitude. It always haunted Harry how they had reunited after thirteen years, only to be brutally robbed of their time together a few short years later by Sirius's cousin Bellatrix, who brutally murdered him. He closed his eyes for a moment and thought to himself that he would rather be any place else but there.

"I know, it's just dreadful, isn't it?" said Hannah sympathetically. "No worries. I'm working on a few intricate spells to retract my miserable Grandmother's ancient protective charms so that I can redecorate. I believe I'm nearly there.

"I'm not certain if you realize this, Harry, but technically we're co-owners of this house, seeing as how I'm the last living descendant of the Black Family and Sirius willed his share to you. So, it looks as though we're stuck with one another," she said in a joking tenor, her obvious endeavor at lightening his mood.

Harry nodded vigorously in a desperate effort to shake his mind clear. By using the welcoming aid of distraction, he managed to force out, "Yeah, sure, that's fine. Is Remus or anyone else from the Order here?"

"No. Remus is on duty in Muggle London tonight and the rest of the Order isn't set to show until later this morning. I sent an owl to Remus a bit ago letting him know why I had set off to retrieve you so early. He should receive it shortly. In the meantime, let's get your things upstairs, shall we? I believe we would both do well with a good night's rest."

Hannah grabbed Hedwig's cage and one end of Harry's trunk and began hauling them up the staircase. Harry quickly snatched up the other end of the trunk and followed her, all the while sorrowfully absorbing his dismal surroundings.

As they ascended the rickety staircase, he couldn't help but get the impression that Hannah was withholding some pertinent information he most certainly needed to know.

Before he realized it, he had come to a halt and was blurting out, "Hannah, wait! There's something more you haven't told me, isn't there?"

Hannah ceased her ascension to the top of the staircase and studied him heavily before responding, "Yes, there is Harry, but perhaps it would be best if we talked another time. I believe I've given you plenty to absorb already."

She whirled around, clearing the top of the stairwell, when Harry pleaded more insistently, "Please, Hannah, I've come all this way. People are dying. So many people I've LOVED have died, and many more are sure to be tortured, perhaps even killed, because of me. I don't want anyone else to have to sacrifice themselves for me. I need to know *everything* it is that you know. I need to know it now."

Hannah considered him for a lingering stretch before she set Hedwig's cage on the staircase and released her grip from Harry's trunk. She sighed heavily in her approaching response, making it apparent that she was doing so against her better judgment.

"Alright...I'll tell you," she said, perching herself atop the rickety staircase. "As you well know, seventeen years ago when Voldemort discovered the first part of the prophecy, he thought that in order to stay in power he would have to destroy you, right?"

Harry nodded.

"You're also aware that the night he went to execute the prophecy, just before he killed your mother and turned his wand on you, something your Mum did merged with her unconditional love for you and his curse, and all but destroyed him. In addition, it mysteriously transferred some of his powers to you and miraculously spared your life, correct?"

"Yes," said Harry.

"Well, Harry, part of the magic your mother used that night was that of an ancient magic, one that few wizards know. It's not a magic that can be learned, only inherited. It's the very powerful, rare and complex magic of Norsic Elves. Harry, your mother had Norsic Elf blood in her veins."

Harry made a face, having been totally blindsided by this.

Hannah scoffed lightly in frustration, “Come on, Potter! You’ve seen pictures of her! Surely, you must have noticed her eyes! They were such a prominent part of her face, stunning and wide, a radiant shade of green...like mine...and yours.”

Harry looked to Hannah, again. He recalled how he had been so completely enamored by the power that seemed to linger behind her eyes the instant he met her. He thought of all the pictures he’d seen of his mother and began to recollect how so many others had pointed out to him that he had his mother’s eyes. It used to annoy him, but now it intrigued him.

“So many people have said—” started Harry.

Hannah interjected, “I know. You have your mother’s eyes. You have it too, Harry, the rare and prized ancient magic of the Norsic Elves. You just need to know how to control it. Surely, you’ve managed an intricate spell or two without your wand!”

Harry thought of all the times he accidentally created magic without his wand: the glass disappearing from the snake pit on his cousin Dudley at the zoo when he was eleven, blowing up his Aunt Marge when he was thirteen, throwing out stinging and slashing hexes at random anytime he was angry or scared. It all started to come together for him.

Hannah rested her hand gently on his shoulder and said, “Harry, there’s more. The night Voldemort killed your parents, he planned to make his 7th Horcrux with your death and plant it inside something of Godric Gryffindor’s. Only, the curse that Voldemort performed on you collided with your mother’s extraordinary magic and ripped that piece of his soul from within him, attaching it to your soul, and creating...that scar.” Her voice tapered off to a marveling whisper as she moved to address the lightning bolt mark on his forehead.

Harry felt faint. He grabbed hold of the railing post and tumbled, weak-kneed, into a scattered sitting position in the center of the staircase.

“Part of Voldemort’s soul...is...connected...to mine?” he gasped in horror.

“Yes, Harry. Here, look at it closely,” said Hannah, conjuring a silver hand mirror and holding it up to his forehead. “It’s in the form of a lightning bolt, right? But look what happens if I cut the scar in half, from left to right.” She gently set her finger to his forehead, making the motion of horizontal line from the left of his scar to the right of it, and then said, “It’s in the shape of two sevens. As you already know, Voldemort created seven Horcruxes, and Harry... you’re scar IS one of his seven parts; it’s connected to all seven parts of your soul.”

Harry studied his scar in the mirror. Indeed, when he divided it in half, horizontally, the top part resembled the seven upside down and backwards, and the bottom was a perfect seven. He was thunderstruck. All the years of him prepping himself before the mirror, everyday, he NEVER thought to see his scar for what it truly was. Now it all made sense

to him: the pain every time Voldemort was angry or happy, the ability to KNOW and dream of what Voldemort was thinking and feeling, Voldemort's employment of Occlumency against him, and Dumbledore's avoiding his eye contact for the past few years. Harry couldn't believe how it had become so obvious.

"But, if I'm really a Horcrux, why would Voldemort want to destroy me?" If I die, the Horcrux will die with me," said Harry.

Hannah's face grew very serious as she said, "Harry, I do believe that Voldemort realizes you pose such a great threat to him that he is willing to sacrifice a *piece* of himself to see to your *complete* annihilation. I believe that is why he wants to be the one to kill you. He doesn't want to allow anyone else the privilege of performing such a significant task."

Coming swiftly to a horrific revelation, Harry shot straight up on the staircase and blurted out, "So, basically, you're telling me that I'm going to have to die in order to destroy Voldemort once and for all!" He gulped and sunk hopelessly onto the staircase.

Hannah knelt on the step below him and cupped his hands in hers. Speaking reassuringly, she said, "Harry, listen to me. No ordinary wizard could have crafted the charm your mother used that night. It is as I said before; it was extraordinary magic, combined with her deep love and affection for you. I can't even say if she had anticipated that this would be the outcome. Voldemort never saw it coming. *I* don't even fully understand the magic your mother used and its part of my heritage. What I'm trying to say is this: there's got to be a way to destroy Voldemort AND spare your life; we just need to find it."

Harry's expression was blank, unreadable. Hannah cupped his hands with hers and stood up, pulling him to meet her height.

"For now, I suggest we put this behind us and try and get some rest. There are ways in which we can deal with this, Harry. *Not everything is as it seems.*"

She had said it again, the same phrase she had recited earlier when he was ranting and raving about Snape.

Not everything is as it seems? Whatever does she mean by that? Harry wondered.

Hannah leaned closer to him and with a strong sense of significance in her tone, she said, "Harry there's something very important that I need to ask of you. You must promise NEVER to reveal my identity to anyone. It would mean my life and the life of my informer if anyone found out. Moreover, we must not discuss the existence of the Horcruxes with anyone. If we do, it could increase the likelihood that Voldemort would realize his secret has been discovered. Rest assured, if he knows his secret is out, he will most certainly move to conceal the mutilated pieces of his soul where no one will *ever* find them."

Harry eyed her over reluctantly before replying, “Sure, I understand. But, there’s something you should know. My best friends, Ron and Hermione, know about the Horcruxes. Dumbledore told me to tell them, you see.”

Hannah switched on an air of passionate concern as she thought aloud, “He must have had you tell them as a precaution in case anything should happen to me. No matter, are they trustworthy?”

With undeniable certainty Harry said, “I would trust them with my life.”

“Very well, we shall keep that bit of information between us. But, you are to tell them no more than what they already know and you must insist that they remain closeted about the information they have already acquired from you. It is absolutely critical that you stress to them the importance of your mission,” said Hannah.

“I know they can be trusted.”

“Alright,” said Hannah briskly, and she swung away from him.

With that, they entered the open hallway, coming to a standstill halfway down the wide-open corridor. Hannah plied her wand in brisk, magnificent swirling motions against the bare stained wall, mumbling an elaborate set of incantations.

Amidst a loud, prolonged stretching and creaking sound, a large wooden door with tarnished golden trim appeared out of nowhere. Harry’s jaw practically left its hinges as she turned the tainted golden door handle and threw open the door.

The entryway unfolded into a beautiful, spacious, split-level room with shimmering powder blue and off-white sponged-painted and picture-speckled walls. The space was magnificently decorated with compelling hues of darker blues, off-white, and silver. It was immaculate, almost unnaturally clean, and a wonderful aroma of lavender and vanilla lingered gingerly in the air. The extraordinary space almost seemed to be a separate entity from the rest of the house.

The floors shone a brilliant, soft-hued, oak hardwood and were partially carpeted with a large, powder blue throw rug that was laced with a midnight blue, off-white, and silver-speckled floral print. A massive cherry-oak four-poster bed stood thoughtfully arranged against the back wall of the room. Thick, silk, midnight blue draperies and long strands of shimmering silver and powder blue beads dangled gracefully from the top of each post, brushing delicately against the floor. A matching duvet cover lay flawlessly draped over the mattress, and an array of decorative patterned pillows of various shapes and sizes peppered the head of the bed.

Two tall, cherry-oak nightstands stood neatly positioned against the walls on either side of the bed. Placed atop the left stand was a fully lit hurricane lantern with a shiny silver base; a tiny matching silver time clock; and a gorgeous bouquet of flowers that stretched

upward in a tall glass vase. The opposite nightstand was topped with a rounded silvery blue stone tray, which housed several illuminated off-white candles. There were two doors positioned on either side of the back wall. The one on the left opened into a spacious off-white marble bathroom with muted silver fixtures. The door on the right belonged to that of a sizeable walk-in wardrobe.

Along the left wall of the room, there stood a tall, bulky armoire, crowned with a gorgeous flowing bouquet of off-white colored orchids. Located next to it stretched an elongated bay window surrounded in several rows of floor length, silk draperies and bead strands identical to those hanging from the bedposts.

Flushed against the middle of the right side wall of the room was a massive dresser at least six feet long and nearly chest deep, crowned by a huge oval-shaped and silver trimmed mirror.

In the front right corner of the room, a door leading to an ascending staircase stood partially ajar. Along the front wall, the room dropped several feet into a spacious lower level by means of three steep hard wood steps that surrounded it. Several pieces of elegant furniture sat neatly arranged atop a dark blue throw rug within that space. There was a wide cornflower blue sofa garnished with printed throw pillows; an off-white chenille throw; two broad, floral printed chairs resting on either side of the sofa, each paired with small rounded glass side tables, and topped with dimly lit silver lanterns; and a matching long and oval shaped glass coffee table with silver-coated hardware, which remained perfectly situated in the center of the assemblage.

Facing the furniture and flushed against the front wall prevailed a spectacular stone-inlaid fireplace, topped with a long cherry oak mantle and a stunning portrait of a starry midnight sky. Harry stared into the fireplace and realized how completely entranced he had become by the flames as they subtly glowed and crackled in the grate, creating the warmest and most sensational ambiance.

“Do you like it?” asked Hannah. “I re-decorated it myself after my father died. I merged everything it into one big space. I think it makes a better impact. You know, it avoids the choppiness of housing a bunch of small rooms.”

“This is spectacular!” said Harry, moving into the center of the space and remaining in complete awe of his surroundings.

“The fantastic thing about it is that it’s created entirely with elf magic,” said Hannah. No other witch or wizard can see it, or enter it, unless granted permission by me, no exceptions. I’d prefer to keep it that way, if you don’t mind. Oh, and did you notice the doorway in the front corner with the staircase behind it? It leads up to a decent kitchen. If you get hungry or thirsty...help yourself. I keep it fully stocked with just about every food and drink you can imagine.”

“Okay, sure, thanks,” said Harry, watching Hannah set Hedwig’s cage on the dresser next to the bay window. His eyes followed her over to the bed, where she sat down upon it and began to unlace and remove her boots. He felt a bit awkward when he looked into the walk-in wardrobe and noted what appeared to be all of her personal belongings stashed neatly inside of it. Very clearly, she wasn’t going anywhere.

Having been cognizant of his every thought, Hannah was quick to offer him an explanation.

“Harry, I realize this may be a bit uncomfortable for the both of us, but I feel it’s best if we stick together, you know, just in case. This is the safest room in the house. I guarantee it. Even if someone were to find a way to break through the secret that hides Grimmauld Place, NO ONE could ever find or enter this room unless I permit them to. Not even Voldemort can gain access to it without my permission. We’re completely safe. Trust me. I’ve lived here since I was a little girl and have remained totally undetected ever since. Reason being, there are about a half dozen magical, secret entry and exit ways connected to this room that lead to just about anywhere you can think of. I usually use the main secret corridor to get to my desired destinations. My point being, you can get in and out of here secretly without ever having to enter the rest of the house, if you prefer. It’s quite an ingenious security layout, actually.” She smiled proudly, planting her hands firmly to her hips. “Oh, also, we burnt a Circle of Faith in your name around all of Grimmauld for your added protection.”

“Circle of Faith?” asked Harry, perplexed.

“Yes. It’s a rather intricate ancient elf spell that requires witches and wizards of all different magical backgrounds and talents to execute. We gather in a circle and write our names on a piece of parchment, and then burn them together while uttering the appropriate incantations. The Circle of Faith will only permit those who are mentioned in the ritual to gather within the walls of Grimmauld, unless accompanied by you or me. In addition, you can only leave this place on your own accord. This means no one can remove you unwillingly, or with harmful intentions for your welfare. The circle will burn bright green upon your entering and a bright blue when you exit. If anyone attempts to tamper with the conditions of its magic, it will burn a flaming red, creating a massive wall of fire in its wake to block out intruders.”

Harry was entirely amazed by the enchantments that were used to keep Grimmauld Place and the secret room so properly concealed. He realized she was right; if anything should happen, it would be best if they stuck together, remaining tightly concealed within the exceptional security of the space. After all, he thought, there were far worse punishments than being hauled up in a secret room with a beautiful woman!

Hannah faded into the vast darkness of her walk-in wardrobe, snatched up handful of clothes, and slipped into the bathroom to change. Minutes later, she emerged from the space donning a short, burgundy negligee and a sheer matching robe.

Harry noted how her well-endowed chest flowed magnificently over the edges of the plunging neckline of the gown and how perfectly the fabric embraced her body, complementing every inch of her sensational womanly curves. He truly believed she had the sexiest, most incredible figure he had ever seen. Glancing down to her tiny bare feet, he noticed that even they were amazing: perfectly manicured, her toenails painted with a clear, shiny polish, and flawlessly sprinkled with an iridescent glitter. In short, he didn't recall ever having met a witch, wizard, or a Muggle, for that matter, who was so impeccably groomed.

"Sorry, it's all I had clean," said Hannah awkwardly, wrapping her robe tightly around her and crossing her arms in front of her chest for additional cover. "I wasn't expecting to be the one to get you."

Harry tried not to stare, but he couldn't help it. He thought she was absolutely stunning. It took everything he had not to want to take her in his arms and ravage her. He actually began to fantasize about it, momentarily. He pictured himself closing in on her, removing her robe, leaning into her, his lips meeting hers...

"Huh-hum, you okay, Harry?"

Harry was suddenly jolted back to reality by the sound of Hannah's voice, and he blushed severely. He'd forgotten about her Legilimency skills.

"Is everything alright, Harry? I'm not, you know, making you uncomfortable, am I? Because, I could throw on a pair of jeans and a jumper until I get a chance to launder my clothes, if—"

Harry was swift to interject, "N-No! Everything's fine, really. I-I was just thinking about...everything, you know, about the Horcruxes, and my scar." (Of course, he had lied, all the while praying that she wasn't using her Legilimency on him.) The fact was, he couldn't believe he was able to think of anything other than Horcruxes, right then. Perhaps, it was something in the way she spoke to him, the way she reassured him earlier that made him feel...safe. He truly believed that in the end, everything would be okay. "Well," said Harry nervously, "I'm just going to...go and change into something...uh...else, then."

He snatched his nightclothes from his trunk and dashed into the bathroom. Slamming the door shut behind him, he shoved his back up against it, and sank onto the elaborately swirled marble floor, breathless. He was totally embarrassed by his silly, adolescent behavior, wondering how he could possibly spend an entire night in the same room with her without making a complete fool of himself.

"Get a grip!" he coached himself. "She's just a woman...she's just a woman," he continued to repeat. "A beautiful, brilliant...ugh!" he groaned hoarsely and slapped himself in the head. "No! This is not the time to fall in love, Harry! You have to focus! Just focus!"

After many spirited words of encouragement from his conscious self, a few more fine slaps, and perhaps an oceans worth of splashes of cold water, he eventually managed to reclaim his composure long enough to change into his night clothes. He took one last deep cleansing breath and threw the door wide, spilling into the bedroom at a quickened pace. He saw that Hannah had already settled herself comfortably under the covers of the four-poster bed. She was laying on her right side, facing him, still wide-awake. He hustled past her, his sights set for the couch by the fireplace.

Suddenly, Hannah called out to him, "Harry, there's plenty of room here in the bed with me." She smiled reassuringly, patting her hand gently on the mattress.

Harry hesitated for a long and intense stretch, staring tentatively into the fireplace as she continued to coax him over.

"Really, Harry, its fine. We're both adults, for goodness sakes," said Hannah.

"Yeah, um...sure, of course," he agreed reluctantly and headed for the four-poster, climbing into the remarkable softness of the feather bedding beside her.

Hannah smiled, rested her chin on the back of her intertwined hands, and said pleasantly, "Well, goodnight, then."

"Yeah...erm...goodnight," muttered Harry uncomfortably, and he turned to fluff his pillow.

He addressed the timepiece on the nightstand before turning down the bedside lantern and laying flat on his back, his eyes glazed wide open. It was quarter till three. He couldn't believe all that had happened in such a short amount of time. He wondered if the Death Eaters had arrived at his Aunt and Uncle's house. He felt a bit guilty when he imagined what would become of them once they met the wrath of the Dark Side.

Even so, nothing could seem to keep him for too long from where he was at that precise moment. The girl of his dreams, the most beautiful, incredible woman he'd ever had the privilege of meeting was lying beside him. She had risked her life to save his and she didn't even truly know him. He couldn't stop thinking of how grateful he was to her, or how he could ever possibly thank her enough.

Just as his eyes and body folded to the welcoming appeals of sweet slumber, Hannah whispered to him affectionately, "You're welcome...Harry Potter."

Harry blushed. She had found his thoughts again. But, for some reason, at that particular moment, he was quite glad about it.