

*Kokopelli*  
*FanficAuthors.net*

# The Unexpected Horcrux

## Chapter the First

### Chapter the First

I know that Harry expected that we'd find and destroy the Horcruxes on our own, just the three of us, but I knew from the beginning that we'd need more help. Confidence is one thing, but I knew that two just-turned-adult wizards (and one fabulous witch) were in way over our collective heads. Harry explained *ad nauseam* his pledge to Dumbledore to keep this secret; which made sense, given Harry's somewhat selective, but very fierce sense of honour, but I always believed we'd need to call in help. I suppose from my years at school that I should have expected that help would come when we called, and from unexpected sources, but never in my life did I expect what happened.

We found the locket, of course, once we figured out who "R.A.B." was – the most-wretched Kreacher finally being useful for once. The cup was a bit more effort; but "the team" as Harry called us was equal to that task. Finding Horcruxes, however, isn't the same thing as destroying them, and we were fresh out of Basilisk fangs.

After a week of stewing about solutions that went nowhere, Harry finally broke down and suggested that we contact Professor Lupin. That was a good thing, because I wasn't sure that I could stand biting my tongue any longer.

We arranged a meeting near Penzance, walking for most of a day to get to the rendezvous point so as to not generate any detectable magical signatures. Professor Lupin had done the same, but unbeknownst to us, he'd been spotted by a relatively minor Death Eater who decided to trail him on a lark. The rendezvous turned into an ambush. Harry was scuffling with a large, but stupid Death Eater when he was stunned by yet another Death Eater a moment before I petrified the large one as well as the one that had just stunned Harry. Ron and Professor Lupin were holding their own nicely against four Death Eaters, when another six showed up. I tried to be brave, but at the moment the only two things that I could think of were first that I didn't want to die, and second that I certainly didn't want to wet my pants.

Harry chose that moment to revive somehow, clutching a dagger that he'd wrestled away from the large, stupid Death Eater in his right hand, and his wand in his left hand, blasting away with both until there were no Death Eaters left standing. He flicked his hair out of his eyes and then called out, "Nice of you to show up, RJ, but if you don't mind me saying so, you look like hell."

Professor Lupin turned pale – really pale, which was saying something, because we were just a couple of days past the Full Moon and he already looked peaky. "Lily?" he called out, his voice just above a hoarse croak.

Harry nodded, placing a hand on his hip. "You were expecting the Easter Bunny?"

~+~

The first thing we did after that was truss up the Death Eaters like so many postal bundles. Harry wanted to kill them all, but Professor Lupin talked him out of it, and then we sat down and watched the most amazing conversation between Harry and Professor Lupin, the latter asking questions that could only be answered by Harry's mum. Harry answered them all. It turned out that it was exceptionally fortunate that Professor Lupin was there, because Harry didn't recognize Ron or me, which was a big surprise.

The even bigger surprise was finding out that Lily Potter was alive and well (after a fashion) buried somewhere deep within the mind of her beloved son.

After cleaning up from the ambush, we relocated to another place, one that we knew was safe, a place I still won't disclose to just anyone. Professor Lupin spent hours interviewing Harry-channelling-Lily, muttering to himself when he took a break that the whole thing violated any number of the known rules of Arithmancy, not to mention his tidy world-view.

To me it was rather creepy to watch my best friend look at me as if I were a new acquaintance, speaking with very different speech patterns, his face and body language animated with clearly effeminate patterns that would be more appropriate to a twenty-something witch, rather than a newly-seventeen wizard.

Lily certainly didn't mince words.

"So, who are you?" Lily-in-Harry asked.

"I'm Hermione, Hermione Granger," I replied.

Lily extended her hand, a gesture that I responded to without thinking.

"I'm pleased to make your acquaintance. What are you to my son?"

"Uh, I'm, uh, one of his best friends?" I stammered in reply.

"Best friends as in chums, or angling to become the next Mrs. Potter?" Lily asked.

"Best friends – I *have* a boyfriend, thank you very much," I replied frostily.

"The red-haired chap that looks like a Weasley?" she responded.

"Right in one," I said.

"Good choice. I assume he's one of Arthur and Molly's brood?"

I nodded.

"I'm sorry if I'm coming on a little strong, but I'm as taken aback by all of this as you are, if not more so. The last thing I remember before today was staring down the wrong end of Voldemort's wand, hoping that James' crazy, demented experimental spellwork would do something to protect Harry, and now I'm here, inside my son's body, sixteen years later. It's enough to make anyone a little crazy," she said, leaning back into her chair, running her fingers through Harry's hair.

She smiled. "Even this, it's a lot shorter than I'm used to," she said.

"I know, I've seen your pictures. You were very pretty," I replied.

"So, what happened, after I died that is?" she asked.

And so we began retelling the saga that is Harry's life, starting with the details that every good little witch and wizard knows about the Boy-who-lived, segueing into the less glamorous story that was Harry's life before Hogwarts. It wasn't an easy story to tell, as there were frequent interruptions.

"Dumbledore put him with Petunia and Vernon?" Lily screeched. "I'm going to kill him – I made myself quite clear on that point when we set up the will and the trusts."

"You're too late - Dumbledore died months ago," I interrupted, noting the look of disbelief on her face.

"Keep on with the story, I'll be a good little witch and try to not interrupt you," Lily said.

We finished with the saga in the early hours of the morning.

"You need your sleep, dear," Lily said after a long moment of silence. "I've got lots of questions, but you can answer them when we're both awake."

~+~

I woke the next morning to the smell of breakfast coming from the kitchen. I'd thought that Professor Lupin must have started breakfast, but when I entered the kitchen I found it was Harry, or at least it looked like Harry.

"Harry?" I asked timidly.

"Yessss?" he answered in a high falsetto, turning his head over his shoulder, batting his eyelashes furiously.

It was Harry all right.

"Good to see you again," I said, placing a hand on his shoulder.

Harry smiled. "Good to be back. Lupin filled me in on what happened. Kinda weird, huh?"

I took the mug of coffee that he offered.

"You've talked to Lily," he said, shuffling toast, eggs and bacon, all in varying stages of completion. "But as far as I'm concerned, I got knocked out during a fire fight with Death Eaters. How was it, talking to Mum?"

"Weird," I replied.

"Yeah, well, welcome to my life. Everyone gets to meet my mum but me," he said quietly before placing the rashers of bacon on a pile of paper towels.

~+~

Lupin didn't come back until almost supper time, so it was just Ron, Harry and me in our little hideaway. During the day Harry had pumped both of us for meagre scraps of information we had on his mum, and then retreated to his room.

He doesn't know that we both know what he does when he locks himself in the bedroom. In a turn-about to our usual roles, it was Ron who'd tipped me off about it, several months ago. I was so used to Harry being withdrawn and sullen; I'd never noticed that he'd made a pattern of withdrawing at least once a day.

"Off to write some more," Ron muttered a few months ago when we'd come back from scouring a field in Wales, in the rain. We were back in the multi-room tent we were using as our base of operations at the time.

"No, actually," I replied, "I'm going to finish the book I've been reading on Runes."

Ron smiled the lopsided half-smile that had the power to melt things inside me.

"Not you," he snorted, "him."

"What's he writing?" I asked.

"Letters, to *her*," he replied, searching for his towel before he stomped off to take a warm shower.

I waited patiently, trying to not think about him while the hot water was coursing over his pale freckled skin. Who says it's only boys that have problems with randy thoughts?

When Ron came out of the now-steamy bathroom, rubbing his shoulder-length hair with a towel, I resumed the conversation.

"Who's Harry writing?" I asked.

Ron stared at me, apparently incredulous that I was asking this question.

"My sister. He writes a letter every day. He doesn't post them – he said that would be too dangerous for her. He does something with them to make them disappear. I think he's charming them, or maybe transfiguring them into beads or something. You didn't know?" Ron questioned.

"No," I replied. "I just thought he was being moody again."

"Well, he is – what he really needs is a ripping good snog session, as much as it pains me to say that," Ron said.

"They were happy together," I pointed out.

"Don't say it in the past tense," he objected.

"They'll be happy again, when this is all over," I said.

"That's the ticket," Ron said. "C'mon over here, woman, this tent isn't big enough for two moody teenaged boys."

~+~

Lupin came back with a healer, a black-haired woman I'd seen at Grimmauld Place when an Order meeting had let out -- it must have been the same year that Ron's dad was bitten by that snake. The minute she opened her mouth I remembered her accent, unmistakably Ulster. I had a great-Aunt from Ulster who was a college librarian; until I discovered magic, she lived the life that I wanted; but I digress. Clarissa O'Neill gave Harry a most thorough examination and then began running diagnostic tests that I couldn't begin to fathom. The last test involved what looked like a miniature tea-kettle, which poured a shiny vapour from its teeny little spout. She frowned at the stream of vapour as if that were the wrong answer, until she lit her wand, bathing the area in an odd blue light. The vapour was now green in colour; two different shades of green. She smiled triumphantly, slapping the table with her palm. A minute later all of her tools and gadgets were tucked back into her oversized purse and she made like she was leaving.

"Well, Mr. Lupin, I've never seen such a thing, but there are two souls in this lad and nary a sign of possession. I'll let you draw your own conclusions," she said before she turned to Harry. "Keep your chin up, lad, there's more people rooting for you than you know."

Harry smiled and nodded, the polite smile leaving soon after she'd closed the door.

That evening was spent with experiments, stunning Harry, spelling him to sleep, even an attempt at putting him into a hypnotic trance, all of which worked after a fashion, but none of these techniques yielded anything other than a sleeping, stunned or entranced Harry, who began to lose his patience with this after Professor Lupin began the second iteration.

"Give it a rest, Moony, wherever Mum is, she evidently doesn't want to talk to you right now," Harry said after being Enervated. "I know you miss her, but what's the big deal?"

A cascade of emotions rippled across Professor Lupin's face, but he said nothing until he'd had a chance to take a breath.

"Lily was to me what Hermione is to you, Harry, but that's not why I'm trying so hard. Before they were murdered, your mum and dad were doing war-related research – it turns out that they were studying Horcruxes," Professor Lupin said with some dignity.

I didn't bother to correct his word choice. Everybody knows it's one Horcrux, two Horcruxes, but I'm trying really hard to not be a swot this year.

"Oh," Harry said as he stood up and pushed his chair into place at the table. "Well, I'm *still* going to bed."

Professor Lupin nodded, murmuring goodnight before he went back to jotting down notes on his portfolio pad. I had a hunch, so I decided to act.

I stunned Professor Lupin and then stunned Harry in the back as he was opening the door. Ron jumped off of the kitchen counter where he'd been watching things.

"Blimey, Hermione, have you lost it?" he shouted before I laid down a band of fire, separating him from the others. I then laid down a second band of fire, between Harry and the door. If this didn't work, I was going to have a lot of apologizing to do.

Harry pushed himself up from the floor, shaking his head before he grabbed his wand, with his left hand, moving to extinguish the flames.

"What are you doing, girl-child?"

I smiled. "Good to see you again, Lily."

~+~

Lily, it turned out, knew a lot about Horcruxes. Apart from the fact that the thesis would most likely have been classified as a state secret by the Ministry of Magic, it would have made an excellent Mastery project in Charms. During the First War, Dumbledore had intelligence to the effect that Voldemort was working on that area of magic, so he'd assigned the area for research to his favourite pair of newly-weds. Lily had done the bulk of the basic research before Harry was even born, and then, once they went into hiding, experimented with ways to detect and destroy them, but I'm getting ahead of myself again.

"Miss Granger, *what* were you trying to do?" Lupin roared, after he'd been revived.

"What you couldn't do, RJ," Harry as Lily drawled.

And thus began a conversation that went on into the wee hours of the morning, fortified by a couple of pots of coffee.

It turned out that Lily had been toying with the notion of using a Horcrux as a device for protecting Harry. She'd tinkered with the basic Spellwork, creating what she called a "coating" for the Horcrux, allowing it to lie dormant. Normally a Horcrux will attempt to dominate a living host – ask Ginny if you want proof of that. Lily figured out a way to make it go dormant, but left a kernel of magic that would sense when the host was facing a threat to life and limb and unable to defend itself. I'd figured that out sometime that evening, but didn't want to speak up until I'd had a chance to think about it some more. I guess being Ron's girlfriend has rubbed off a bit on me – the old Hermione would have never tried something that impetuous, guided only by guesswork and intuition. At Lily's request, we nullified the outermost layer of the magical kernel before she finally went to bed at 7:00 the next morning. Remus had a journal and a half filled with very detailed notes. Me, I had a full journal filled with questions and notes to my self. I'd grown used to sleep deprivation as a way of life during exams, but I reckoned that certain things would be clearer when I was operating on something approximating a full night of sleep.

Harry was a bit cranky when he finally woke up the next day, dazed and more than a bit disoriented.

"Good morning, sunshine," I said cheerily, pouring a mug of coffee to go with the toast that I was going to eat myself before Harry stumbled into the kitchen. Harry grunted something unintelligible, grabbing the mug and cradling it with one hand while gnawing on the first slab of toast. "Sleep well?" I asked.

Harry gave me a glare that could have blasted the tarnish off of a school cauldron. He went back to munching on the toast.

"Not particularly – my head seems to be a little full right now," he said after finishing the toast.

I didn't say anything – something I'd learned living cheek-by-jowl with Ron and Harry – they loved me both in their own ways, but they didn't particularly want to talk all of the time.

"It seems that Lily is dreaming now," he said.

"How do you know it's Lily's dream?" I asked.

He pantomimed a pair of breasts on his chest, cracking a wan smile as he did so. "Different equipment," he said. "Really weird to be nursing a baby boy that I know to be a younger version of myself. Kinda nice, though – snugly. Something to look forward to."

"For you?" I asked.

"No, I meant for you," he said. "Weasleys being fertile and all."

"We're not at the sprog hatch phase yet, and Grangers aren't particularly fertile," I said.

"I'll put my bets on the Weasley magic winning out," he said, draining the coffee mug. "Resistance is futile, you *will* reproduce."

"I'll take it under advisement," I responded.

"So why is Mum in my head now?" Harry asked.

"Professor Lupin removed part of the coating that kept her from integrating with your mind," I explained.

"Isn't that something that I should have had some say in?" Harry asked irritably.

"A bit hard, Harry, I had to put you into a life-threatening situation to wake Lily up last night. We need the knowledge that's in her head – she knows how to destroy Horcruxes," I said, hoping that I wasn't going to push him over the edge.

"Oh, well," Harry replied before rolling his eyes. "Thanks, Mum."

"I don't think she can hear you right now," I said.

"I wouldn't bet on it," Harry said dourly.

+++++

Kokopelli20878@yahoo.com

Author's notes: Horcruxes/Horcruces – you'll see it spelled two different ways in this story – that's not a mistake. Hermione uses the correct Latin form – one crux, two cruces, which is why the town in New Mexico is called Las Cruces, not Las Cruxes – everyone else in this story uses the more conventional (but wrong) spelling. It's the issue that first got me in trouble at PhoenixSong.net, so it's a bit of an inside joke with me. According to plan, this should be a two or three chapter story, but I've been wrong about those things before. As always, thanks to my betas, Runsamok (who I hope is feeling better) and GardenGirl (who should have her tomatoes in by now).

*Kokopelli*  
*FanficAuthors.net*

# The Unexpected Horcrux

## Chapter the Second

The Unexpected Horcrux

Chapter the Second

I normally didn't think of myself as an eavesdropper, but some conversations are simply too riveting to ignore. The day started with me noticing Harry eating breakfast in the sun room with a bandaged left hand. I slipped into the kitchen, desperate for coffee. Remus Apparated into the foyer while I was rooting around in the kitchen, trying to find the coffee filters.

"Lily?" he asked.

"Right in one," Lily-in-Harry responded.

"What happened to your hand?" Remus asked.

"A fit of immaturity," Lily responded.

"Oh, come now," Remus protested.

"Oh come now, yourself, RJ. I broke the frigging mirror because I'm tired of seeing my husband's face every time I look in it!" Lily shouted. "He's dead, I'm as good as dead, I'm screwing things up for my son, and we're back in the middle of the war again. All of the old crowd are gone, except for you, RJ, and I think I'm losing what's left of my mind! There, are you happy now?"

I didn't hear Remus' response, aside from a murmur as Lily cried on his shoulder a while. I finally managed to find the coffee filters, which, inexplicably, got put away with the onions and started a pot brewing, trying to make as little noise as possible.

"Hermione?" Remus called. "Could you join us?"

In retrospect, I'm glad the pot of coffee was still brewing, because if I'd brought a cup of coffee with me, I would have dropped it for sure.

Remus was sitting at the table in the sunroom, and there, bandaged hand and all, was Lily!

Not Lily-in-Harry, but a red-eyed, blotchy-cheeked, twenty-something redheaded woman, wearing a light green sundress.

"So, what do you think?" Lily asked. The voice was different – a higher-pitched voice with a pleasant lilting quality to it.

"Glamour?" I asked.

Lily nodded. "Voice shifter too – Remus always had a good ear. I'm still in Harry's body under all this magic, but this is nice," she said.

"So, how is it, being a girl, trapped in a boy's body?" I asked, still shocked at seeing my best friend transformed into his mother.

"Well," she began, gesturing with her hands, "it has its up and downs."

"What's the up-side?" I asked.

"I don't have to wear a bra any more," she said with a knowing smile.

"And the down-side?"

"I have to be very careful how I sit down or cross my legs. Now I finally understand why men are always adjusting their trousers," she said.

We all laughed a bit.

"RJ, could you be a dear and fetch me something I can sketch with?" Lily asked pleasantly.

Lupin nodded and withdrew from the sun-room.

"Harry doesn't need to know about my little outburst," Lily said.

"So, I'm supposed to lie to him about how his hand got hurt?" I asked, incredulously. "If there's one thing that will surely set Harry off, it's keeping secrets from him."

Lily looked pensive, and then resigned.

"I'm sorry, I shouldn't put you in that position," she said.

Lupin reappeared, bearing a sketch-pad and a fistful of drawing papers.

"Will these do?" he asked.

“Admirably, RJ,” Lily replied.

Lupin moved into the kitchen, opening and closing cupboard doors. Once he finished his reconnaissance, I’m sure he’d start cooking something, which meant that I was off the hook.

Lily flipped open the sketch-pad, looking at the blank sheet of paper before closing her eyes. She barely opened her eyes as she began to sketch out a face with a charcoal pencil. It was a fair picture of Ginny, leaning forward, her characteristic smile reaching her bright eyes.

“So, who is this girl?” Lily asked.

“That’s Ginny,” I said. “Ron’s sister.”

“And, apparently, Harry’s lover,” Lily said with some distain.

I didn’t quite know how to respond to that statement. “I rather much doubt that – they were in a relationship when we were in school, but they broke that off months ago.”

“Does he still have strong feelings for her?” Lily asked.

I nodded.

“I want to meet her,” Lily said.

I shrugged.

Lily’s eyes flashed. “I have a *right* to meet her,” she growled.

Lupin entered with a tray of breakfast foods.

“No one is disputing that, Lily, but Harry broke things off with her to protect her while he was hunting Horcruxes, and you can’t exactly go about in public without setting off a firestorm,” Lupin said soothingly. “She’s in school now.”

“Students have been called home on the weekends,” Lily protested.

“I’m not saying ‘no’ Lily, I’m just saying that the logistics are a bit complicated and I’m not going to snap my fingers and produce her, no matter how much you pout. If you remember, it was James who was putty in your elegant fingers, not me,” Lupin said.

Lily made a face at Lupin and then brought her emotions under control. “Thanks, RJ,” she said.

“So, why all the interest in Ginny?” Lupin asked, spreading marmalade over toast.

“Harry was dreaming about her this morning,” Lily said.

“So, it was one of *those* dreams?” Lupin asked.

Lily nodded.

“And you feel no shame looking in on his dreams, uninvited?” Lupin asked, looking a bit scandalized.

“Harry says he’s seeing Lily’s dreams too,” I volunteered.

Lupin gave me an odd look.

“Indeed,” he said with a harrumph.

~+~

The discussion over breakfast changed to less emotional topics – having gathered up a number of the Horcruxes, we were now making plans for destroying them. According to Lily, the primary danger from destroying the little monsters came from the energy backlash as the vessel containing the soul fragment was broken; the secondary danger was from the soul fragment itself, which, if given the chance, would attempt to re-host itself before dissipating. Lily had generated a laundry list of mechanical items that we needed to procure. As all of the items were Muggle, I was the obvious candidate to go scrounging.

With Harry’s reserves at Gringotts, budget wasn’t much of a problem, but growing up with two academic parents had given me a keen appreciation for not paying retail for things, especially if we were likely to blow them up the first time we use them.

Later that day, Ron and I, appropriately dressed a Muggles with glamours changing our appearances, went shopping, visiting a series of iron-mongers, salvage yards and industrial supply houses. By the end of the day, I had a purse that contained a nice supply of fifty-tonne hydraulic jacks, cutting tools and a press, all magically shrunken in size and lightened so that I could actually carry said purse.

I set the purse down with a bit of a clunk when I got into the kitchen, which woke Harry, who’d been dozing, a journal and an open book in front of him. Ron disappeared into the loo.

Harry cleared his throat. "So, you must be the floozy that my mate's been carrying on with," he said, extending his hand to me. "Harry Potter."

I shook his hand, trying hard to figure out the joke, when it hit me that I still had the glamour engaged, and I was a thirty-something platinum blonde with very straight hair. "Uh, yeah, right," I stumbled. "Croft, Laura Croft."

"Laura Croft's not a blonde," Harry said, scowling.

"Sorry, it was the first name I could think of – when I was out today, I was Carmody Gaba," I said.

"Who's that?" he asked.

"A distant cousin," I replied.

"So, how's Mum?" he asked, changing the subject.

"Sad, I'd say," I answered.

"About what?" Harry asked.

"Oh, I don't know," I replied sarcastically. "She's a widow, all of her friends are dead, and she's trapped in the right hemisphere of her son's brain, but she can't talk to him."

"Yeah, well, other than that, what's she sad about?" Harry asked.

"You're impossible," I replied.

"Thank you. Why don't you cancel the glamour – I'd rather talk to my friend than some ditzy bottle blonde."

"Harry, just because a girl's hair is blonde, it doesn't mean that she's stupid," I said, peevishly.

"So, why aren't *you* a blonde then?"

"Well, for one, Ron likes me just fine the way I am, and for another, I'd have to be constantly touching up my roots."

"Are you a witch or not?" Harry asked.

"Point taken – the fact is, I don't care – I was born a brunette and I don't see that as anything other than an accident of genetics," I said, wondering where this was going.

"Ron doesn't care for you being a blonde," he said.

"What?" I said, rather shrilly.

"Think back to last year – low point in your relationship – certain blonde roommate who was trying to suck Ron's tongue out of his mouth in the common room on a regular basis," Harry said.

"Oh," I said, the light suddenly dawning. I did look like an older version of Lavender Brown. No wonder Ron was so distant today. With a few wand flicks, I was twelve years younger, ten pounds lighter, and a frizzy-haired brunette again.

"Much better," Ron said as he exited the loo.

"Hermione, next time Mum is around, could you make sure she gets this?" he asked, handing me an envelope.

"Sure," I replied, shoving it into my purse.

I was starved – it was time to do my kitchen thing, and then have a chat with Ron. It was time to kick the last ghost of Lavender Brown out of our relationship.

~+~

Speaking of ghosts, I didn't see Lily again until breakfast, and even then, the envelope in my purse slipped my mind until I'd almost finished my tea and toast. Lily had been explaining the difference between a true Horcrux, namely the items we'd collected, versus the magical construct that James had developed sixteen years ago. It seemed that the principal difference was that a true Horcrux was bound to a physical object, whilst the Horcrux that James invented was bound to a bit of magic, instead of a physical object.

"So, you don't *have* to stay in Harry's body?" I asked.

"No," Lily answered, "but it's not like I have a lot of other places I could go right now. James saw this as a last-ditch line of defence, rather like a lifeboat."

"So what was the plan?"

Lily sighed, wiping her mouth daintily with a napkin before answering. "He figured that our chances of dying were greater than Harry's chances – prophecy or no prophecy – so if we were facing death, we were to encapsulate bits of our souls and stash them somewhere safe until we could then

be reconstituted.”

“Reconstituted?”

“The easiest solution would be the body left after a Dementor’s kiss,” Lily said with a measure of disdain. “They were rather easy to come by during the first war.”

“What did you think of the idea?” I asked.

“I thought it was mad – and even if it were to work, I thought it was only a step above necromancy,” Lily replied.

“But it saved your son’s life,” I said.

“Yes,” Lily said thoughtfully.

“Which reminds me, Harry left me something for you – I think it’s a letter,” I said, my cheeks burning as I belatedly remembered Harry entrusting it to me.

Lily slit the envelope open with abandon, flattening out the pages inside with one hand while summoning a cup and saucer from the kitchen. I recognized Harry’s messy scrawl and was frankly amazed – he’d written what looked like six pages, twelve if you counted the back side of the page. I’d never received a letter from him in the seven years I’d known him that exceeded a page in length, but then again, I’m not his mother. I considered leaving to let Lily read in peace, especially as she started to sniffle a bit, but she waved at me with her now free hand, motioning that I should stay.

I got up, went to the kitchen to pour my own cup of tea, and then sat across from her again as she made her way to the last page. Lily wiped her face with her hands and then rubbed her palms on her skirt.

“I suppose I look a fright,” she said.

“We all do after a good cry,” I replied.

“Do you want to talk about it?”

“Not particularly – do you know if there’s a typewriter in this house?” she asked.

“Not a chance – why do you need one?”

“Harry’s written me a letter full of questions, and I want to write a proper reply,” Lily said with a smile.

“Wouldn’t a dictation charm work just as well?” I asked.

Lily slapped her forehead with one hand.

“Yeah, I know, you can take the witch out of the Muggle world, but you never do manage to take all of the Muggle out of the witch,” I volunteered.

“That’s not an entirely bad thing,” Lily countered.

“I never said that it was.”

Lily rummaged around until she found a fresh pad of paper and then went up to Harry’s room. I could hear the murmur of her dictation through the closed door. By dinner time she’d assembled a quite fat letter that she entrusted to me for Harry. She volunteered to let me read Harry’s incoming along with her reply, but I shook my head – some things were not for my eyes.

~+~

The next day at breakfast, I passed the note to Harry, who nodded at me and then went back up to his room. By that time we were on a day-on, day-off cycle, in which Lily alternated with Harry on the even and odd days – it was odd arrangements, two people sharing one body, but surprisingly, it was fairly workable. It was lunchtime before I saw Harry again. I hadn’t seen him this happy since he’d been with Ginny last year.

“I take it that your mum is quite the letter writer,” I said.

“Yeah, I’d say,” Harry replied.

~+~

We spent the afternoon tinkering with the rig that Lily had designed for destroying the first Horcrux we’d found. Without going into too much detail, it involved three bottles of MAPP gas and a hydraulic press. The flames from the MAPP bottles would soften up the Horcrux, then the press would crack it like a very dangerous walnut. The controls for this contraption were all mechanical, which, once I saw the rig in operation, I finally understood. We tested it without flames a couple of times until Remus was convinced that it would work ‘under duress.’ The next day, on Lily’s watch, we blew the first Horcrux.

We started with the cup; from what we could discern, it didn’t have any nasty surprises or defensive mechanisms. We all took cover behind a lovely barrier we’d built yesterday, and then started the two torches. MAPP gas burns hotter than propane, a fact not lost on me when I’d helped my dad with household plumbing task a lifetime ago, before I’d started Hogwarts. I was surprised that the cup didn’t melt under the torrent of heat the

torches were producing, but the cup did start glowing, a nice cherry red I might add, after five minutes or so. Per Lily's instructions, we torches the cup for a nice even twenty minutes before turning the torches off and then starting the hydraulic press. I knew from the dry runs we'd conducted the day before that the press could crush a brick into grit and pebbles with a few strokes of the lever. We were on stroke ten before we heard a groan and a crack, and then the third bottle of MAPP gas opened, just as the Horcrux finally split and yielded its foul cargo. I pulled the string that triggered the final spark, the one that lit the cloud of MAPP gas that had pooled about the now shattered cup, immolating the lost bit of soul as it circled about the rig. The ease with which we dispatched the first Horcrux was misleading; the next one we destroyed, the broach, went up with a tremendous explosion, destroying our equipment.

We'd reckoned that we might need spares, so I had extras of almost everything, but that still didn't make me happy that I had to build a new rig from scratch. The annoyance of building a new rig, however, was tempered by the notion that it'd worked, we'd destroyed two of them without being killed or maimed in the process. We had a celebratory pizza that night, drinking a light May wine while Lily and Remus told stories and sang songs. The house we were using had an old upright piano, which Remus could play a bit, but Lily could make the instrument sing, alternating between formal, classical pieces and a stride piano style that I'd always associated with pubs and jazz.

The next morning, I tried to repeat, verbatim, some of the stories that Lily had told the night before, only to be waved off by Harry as he drank tea and ate toast.

"Mum wrote that story out for me, it was one of the questions I'd asked her in my first letter," he explained.

I then gave a blow-by-blow account of the destruction of the Horcruxes, which he listened to avidly, without interruption.

We blew the locket that day, after lunch. It, too, went with a bang; the final fireball incinerated our equipment, melting yet another twenty-tonne hydraulic press. That was a part that we didn't have a spare for, so we had to wait until the next day, when the ironmongers were open again, before we could destroy the next Horcrux, a ratty looking tiara that supposedly belonged to Rowena Ravenclaw.

"You know what this means, don't you?" Harry asked, his face alight with something I hadn't seen in a while.

"What?" I replied, not wanting to guess.

"We're almost done," he said, giving me a quick hug before retreating back into the house again.

~+~

That night at dinner, Remus looked up from his pudding when a smoky Patronus, shaped oddly enough, like a Welsh Green Dragon, passed through the back door and into the kitchen. Remus tilted his head while listening to something that only he could hear, and then smiled cryptically. "If you will excuse me," he said. "I have to attend to some Order business."

Remus went to the front of the house – we all heard the front door open, but it didn't close. A few minutes later he called in to us.

"Harry, could you come help me bring in some supplies?"

"Sure," Harry said, wiping his mouth with a napkin. "We were expecting supplies?" he asked me.

"No," I answered.

The kitchen door opened with a bang.

"How about a surprise then?" asked a beaming Ginny Weasley.

Harry stood, frozen, a happy grin on his face before Ginny launched herself at him. Nodding to Ron, we slipped out to give them some privacy.

~+~

Ron and I went for a walk on the grounds, taking care to stay within the defensive borders. It was a beautiful night under the stars, and we didn't let it go to waste. Because I knew we'd be out early in the morning again, I turned in at a reasonable time. There was a spare bed made up in my room, but I didn't expect anyone in it.

As sometimes happens, I was wrong on that guess.

Ginny pushed the door to my room open as the clock struck eleven.

"I didn't expect to see you here tonight," I said, turning the light up a notch higher.

Ginny deposited a small valise on the guest bed and then ran her fingers through her hair.

"I didn't either, but Moony chased me out of Harry's room," Ginny said with a conspiratorial smile.

"So, are you going to wait until they're all asleep before you sneak back?" I asked.

"That's a lovely thought, but honestly, I'm knackered and sleep sounds really good right now," Ginny said with a yawn. "Harry and I will catch up tomorrow."

*Probably not.* I said to myself.

Tomorrow was Lily's day. While that promised to be quite interesting, I too needed a good night of sleep. If I started telling Ginny about things (being certain that she and Harry had better things to discuss than the unexpected Horcrux we'd found inside of him) we'd never get to sleep.

+++++

Copyright © 2007 – J Cornell – All rights reserved

Kokopelli20878@Yahoo.com

*Kokopelli*  
*FanficAuthors.net*

# The Unexpected Horcrux

## Chapter the Third

The Unexpected Horcrux

Chapter the Third

When I woke the next day, Ginny was still sleeping the sleep of the just; the only evidence that she was actually in bed at all was the small swatch of scarlet hair peeking out from under the covers. I shuffled across the hall to the loo and after doing what needed doing, felt competent to find the kitchen, hoping that someone had made coffee already. I was in luck - Lily was up, and from the debris strewn about the kitchen, she had been up for a while. I smelled something baking in the oven, and saw that the coffee pot was two-thirds full. The day was looking up already.

"Scones will be out in about a minute," Lily said.

"Bless you," I said, scrubbing out a mug that looked like it had been previously cleaned according to teenaged-boy-standards-of-cleanliness.

"Don't mention it," Lily replied.

We sat in satisfied silence – Lily cleaning up the counters where she'd been working, me sipping the first coffee of the day.

"May I impose upon you, Hermione?" Lily asked, breaking the silence.

"Sure," I replied. "What can I do for you?"

"I'd like to use a Pensieve to look at your memory of Ginny arriving last night," she said. "It's much less invasive than Legilimency."

I didn't say the first thing that came to mind, namely that she should mind her own business on the topic of Harry and Ginny.

"You're a Legilimens?" I asked.

"I'm not an expert, but yes, I can do that," Lily said, shrugging her shoulders as if that was nothing.

"Harry had the most difficult time with Occlumency," I volunteered.

"Was Albus his teacher?" she asked.

"No, Professor Snape," I replied.

Lily snorted in derision. She twirled Harry's wand in her fingers like a miniature twirling baton before summoning a teacup from the cupboard. Several transfigurations later it was the size of a soup bowl and filled with a swirling, pearlescent liquid.

"Think of Ginny last night," she said. I complied, trying to remember the scene as I saw it. Lily murmured something softly and I felt the tip of her wand leave my temple, drawing a gooey strand of memory from my head as it moved. I felt mildly dizzy, but otherwise okay. I tried to remember the event that I just recalled – it was still there.

"It doesn't remove your memory, Hermione, it's rather like a copy," Lily explained.

"So you could replicate someone's memories?" I asked.

"It's not a trivial task, but yes – several generations ago, witches with too much time on their hands crafted enchanted diaries that way, which is why magical diaries need to be carefully examined before chatting with them," she said.

"Ginny was possessed by Voldemort through a diary," I said.

"Yes, I remember you telling me about it," Lily said. "I never figured Riddle as the diary-keeping type, but given his love for seduction, it's a perfect fit."

"Did you find what you wanted?" I asked, motioning towards the newly-created Pensieve.

"Yeah, pretty much – I wanted to see Harry's response as Ginny arrived," Lily answered.

"And?"

"She appears to make him happy," she said cautiously.

I nodded. As much as I love Ginny and heartily approve of her relationship with Harry, I wasn't getting in the middle of this particular cat-fight.

"Ginny is eager to meet you," I volunteered.

"I'm looking forward to it," Lily said, fishing the thread of memory from the stone bowl. "Let me put this back where it belongs."

Receiving a memory back again was as disorienting as yanking it out in the first place. My vision blurred for a moment, but after blinking madly for

a bit, I was back to normal.

I heard a rustling down the hallway – my bet was that it was Ginny, as I thought we'd be lucky to see Ron before lunchtime. A minute later I was proved correct – Ginny pushed open the door with one hand, the other arm wrapped around her middle as if she were cold.

"You must be Ginny," Lily said warmly.

"And you're Harry's mum," Ginny replied warily, a disarming smile on her face.

"Let's go for a walk, I think we have a lot of things to chat about," Lily said.

Ginny looked at me pleadingly, before smiling again.

"Sure, I'd like that," she said, picking up her cloak before heading outdoors.

I finished cleaning up the kitchen, which mainly amounted to filling the sink with cooking tools and soap, and then prepared breakfast for myself – it didn't look like anyone would be joining me soon, and I wasn't polite enough to wait for them. I was finishing my quickly scrambled egg when I saw a glimpse of something in the hallway. I grabbed my wand and coffee cup and went to the doorway. A silvery wolf was pacing the hallway as if trying to figure out which door it wanted to go through. It sat down and then scratched its ear with its hind leg – correction, her hind leg, if a wolf-shaped messenger Patronus can be said to have gender at all.

"Professor Lupin, there's a Patronus here, looking for you," I called, not particularly caring if I woke Ron with the noise.

"I'll be right up, Hermione," he called.

I moved into the sunroom, followed by the silvery she-wolf. Although I'd seen a number of patroni, I still find the messengers fascinating. Lupin came thundering up the stairs and entered the sunroom beside me. The wolf stopped pacing and stood, looking at both of us before speaking in a familiar voice.

"Wotcher, Remus. It seems we nabbed an old school-chum of yours and we're trying to keep him away from the other players. Can we Portkey a package to you?" Tonks voice asked through the mouth of the wolf.

Lupin looked to me – I nodded – the rest of the Order didn't know where we were, and I intended to keep it that way, but I thought we could trust Tonks.

The wolf circled twice and disappeared.

~+~

The school chum – whoever he or she might be – was wrapped up like a mummy when a Portkey deposited the neatly wrapped package in the sunroom. Lupin hustled the package into our last remaining bedroom before commandeering the kitchen to prepare what I recognized as a healing poultice. Tonks arrived by Portkey as the poultice came to a boil, standing on tip-toe to kiss her husband before greeting me with a "Wotcher, Hermione." With that marvellous sense of timing he's famous for, Ron padded into the kitchen.

Ron appreciated the breakfast I'd made – it was, after all, prepared, hot, and plentiful.

"Oi! Tonks!" Ron called as Tonks walked out of the kitchen.

She stuck her head into the kitchen, crossing her eyes before turning her nose into a prehensile snout. "Yeeessss?" she said in a goofy fashion.

"So, who did you bag today?" Ron asked.

"What makes you think that I bagged anyone or anything today, Ronald?" Tonks asked, shrinking the nose back into her face before turning the left side of her face into a credible replica of Ron's Aunt Muriel.

"Oh, I dunno," Ron replied. "The fact that you're playful, the fact that you're here at all, the fact that you Portkeyed into our bolthole while my beautiful and brilliant girlfriend was fixing breakfast, you know, that sort of thing."

"Is she still brilliant and beautiful on the mornings she doesn't fix breakfast?" Tonks asked.

Ron pondered that. "Yeah, pretty much," he replied. "But on the mornings that I make breakfast, she's fiendishly brave, too."

"She'd have to be, to eat anything that you'd prepared," Tonks quipped.

She then walked away without ever answering Ron's question.

Smart girl, that Tonks.

"Where's Ginny?" Ron asked.

I replied that she was out walking the grounds with Lily.

"Wouldn't you like to hear *that* conversation?" he asked.

I could feel my face warming a bit. "I'm not *that* much of an eavesdropper, Ron, and besides, you're going to get yours soon," I replied.

"Whatcha mean?" he asked.

"Sooner or later, after all of this is over, you're going to need to meet my parents," I said sweetly, savouring the brief look of panic that crossed his face.

Then I kept him busy, thinking about something else.

~+~

Ginny came back from her walk with a very smug smile on her face – both women (for I now thought of Lily-in-Harry as such, notwithstanding the fact that her femininity was rather ephemeral) having the bright red cheeks that come from walking in the winter wind.

Tonks and Lupin were in the parlour opposite the kitchen. (It made things too confusing to think of them as 'Lupin and Lupin.')

They looked at each other before Mr. Lupin pushed up off from the couch and then bent down to whisper something into Lily's ear. Lily looked surprised, and then whispered back to Lupin. It quickly became a very animated discussion.

"I don't agree, RJ," she said before turning to me. "Hermione, we're going to be interrogating a prisoner today. Mister Lupin wants you to be off the premises while we do it."

"What, you going to torture him or something?" I asked.

"Or something," Lily replied.

"Who's the prisoner?" I asked.

"Severus Snape," Tonks replied, getting up from the couch.

~+~

As much as I resented being shunted out of things, yet again, by the Order, I made myself busy in the cellar, rebuilding Mark III of the Horcrux smasher. Ron provided a useful second pair of hands, and Ginny asked questions throughout. After the "adults" had been at it for a half hour upstairs, Tonks came into the cellar to borrow a canister of MAPP gas and a torch head. Ron held his tongue until Tonks left the stairwell.

"They're not going to burn him, are they?" he asked, his eyes wide.

"I don't think they need the torch for warming their tea cups," Ginny responded drolly.

I didn't say anything for a long while, concentrating on bolting two pieces of angle iron together. On the one hand, Severus Snape was a despicable, disgusting excuse for a human being; while on the other hand, I found the notion of our side stooping to torture to be equally despicable and disgusting.

"Ron, please hand me the 7/16 spanner," I said, hoping that my internal struggles weren't showing on my face.

~+~

We finished building the Horcrux smasher in time for lunch – and once we tumbled out of the cellar, there was no sign of Tonks, Lupin or Snape. We didn't hear any screams, bloodcurdling or otherwise, and there weren't any strange smells in the house, but when we went up to the hallway outside of the guest room, we all sensed the dead zone caused by multiple silencing charms. I shrugged and turned around, deciding that I wasn't going to get any answers until after the "adults" made an appearance, and maybe not even then.

~+~

Tonks and Lupin made an appearance as we were drying the dishes from lunch. Tonks pulled leftovers from the refrigerator, while Lupin made tea.

The Weasleys weren't being any help, so I broke the ice.

"Where's Lily?"

Remus pulled a face and then smiled. "She wasn't hungry – or so she said."

"Can I have my MAPP torch back?" I asked.

Tonks looked at me quizzically and then with a flash of understanding. "Is that what that yellow can is called?" she asked.

"Yeah," I replied. "Plumbers like it because it gives a much hotter flame than propane."

"Didja read a book on plumbing, Hermione?" Ron asked.

"Actually, no, Ron. I used to help Da at the surgery, everything from going over the books to fixing the pipes after they froze. Da couldn't get a particular joint to solder correctly until he switched from propane to MAPP," I said, giving Ginny a wink.

Tonks gave me an appraising look, and then said, "it's still full."

"You could use it all, I've got another," I said, trying to stifle the queasy feeling in my stomach.

"It was a prop, Hermione," Lupin said gravely. "We had to convince Severus that we were deathly serious."

"Did it work?" Ginny asked.

"He sang like a nightingale," Tonks replied. "Whether any of it is more than tosh and rubbish will take some checking, but if he was telling the truth, we may be able to ambush a Death Eater meeting two days from now."

Lily took that moment to make an appearance through the back door. Her cheeks and ears were flushed with the red and white colours a body gets when going out in the cold and wind without protection. Lupin handed her a mug of tea, which she cradled in her hands appreciatively.

"It all checks out, RJ," she finally said, looking first at Lupin and then Tonks. "We've got a bit more than 36 hours to set everything up."

"Another operation?" Ginny asked.

"Two days from now, it may all be over," Lily said.

"You're not going, are you?" Ginny asked.

"Sorry, dear, but I have to," Lily replied. "I was there when it began; I have to be there when it ends."

She then pulled out a pad of paper and began writing furiously. She filled out sheets and sheets of paper with her slender, slanted script.

My sheet of paper was a shopping list – it appeared that I was going out to the ironmongers again.

+++++

Copyright 2009 – J Cornell – all rights reserved.

Kokopelli20878@yahoo.com

---

*Kokopelli*  
*FanficAuthors.net*

# The Unexpected Horcrux

## Chapter the Fourth

The Unexpected Horcrux

Chapter the Fourth

I have spent most of my young life worrying about things that haven't happened yet, or, perversely, when it comes to exams, I worry about things that I've just done, but can't undo. It never fails that after taking an exam; truly brilliant answers come to me, rather than the muddled, confused stuff and nonsense I'd just regurgitated. I know that it's silly for me to obsess about this, as from age five; I've received nothing but full marks at school, for every subject other than Potions. Well, full marks in everything but Potions and Physical Education – which I despised, but that's another story.

"Well, that's the last of them," Ron said, rolling the canister from the deck of the lorry we'd rented. Several of the items on my list didn't take too kindly to being miniaturized by magic, so we went thoroughly Muggle and engaged a lorry to transport those items. Fortunately, I'd earned my driving license before we'd begun what Mum calls my "European holiday."

We'd been working most of the day to acquire the items on Lily's list. I wasn't privy to what was on everyone else's list, but from what I could reckon, we'd just acquired enough bottled gas to hold a propane-powered ox roast – or, alternately, we were branching out from building Horcrux smashers to infernal devices. One could argue the evidence either way.

Ron had been a good sport throughout the whole shopping trip. I know by now that he hates wearing disguises of any sort, and I appreciated not hearing a litany of complaints while we were out today – he really is growing up. This time around he looked like a brunette version of his brother Bill, complete with dangling earring (not a dragon tooth, mind you, but you get the picture) while I looked like a slightly chubby version of Cho Chang. There are limits to glamours, don't you know.

"C'mere woman," he said, pulling me to him. I didn't mind the kiss, even though we were both dirty and more than a little fragrant from the day's labours. The kiss was brief, followed by an embrace that left his hands wandering on my backside.

"There will be plenty of time for that after we finish," Lily said in a slightly amused tone.

I jumped a little when I heard her voice. I hadn't seen her in the garden when we were unloading the lorry. It wasn't quite like being caught in a clinch by Mum, but it was close enough.

Ron gave one cheek an appreciative squeeze before retorting, "You promise?"

"I don't promise anything, Weasley," she said, giving him a saucy wink.

Lily turned to me, a look of anticipation on her otherwise tired face. "Did you find the book, Hermione?"

"The first shop was out, but we found a used copy at the second store," I replied, digging it out of my handbag.

Lily took the oversized purple book from my hands, looking like a child on Christmas morning. She flipped through a few pages and then closed the book. "Ginny's kept dinner for you – everyone else has already eaten. Bill's back to Shell Cottage and Mister and Missus Lupin are back at their flat too."

"Ginny been good company?" Ron asked.

Lily gave the two of us an appraising look. "We – get along," she said diplomatically. "I'm fairly certain that she'd rather spend time with the *other* occupant of this body."

I wasn't going to bet against that proposition.

Ron and I untangled and then headed into the house. I heard Lily poking through some of the items, and then I looked back to see her head to the semi-detached carriage house. As much as I wanted to chat with Lily and satisfy my aching curiosity, my stomach was aching too.

Dinner was a very comforting stew, some bread from the bakery in the village, and carrot cake without frosting. Ginny is fairly accomplished in the kitchen, which is no great surprise, given her mother's talents in that domain, but if you value bodily integrity, don't say anything remotely resembling "oh, you're just like your mum." I've seen the results first hand – it's not pretty.

Ginny served us up our meal, and then disappeared from the kitchen, making excuses about an essay that was due upon her return to Hogwarts.

"What's she all ablaze about?" Ron asked, after swallowing the last of his baguette.

"Ron, what's tomorrow?" I asked.

"Friday?"

I flicked an imaginary bit of nothing at him.

"True enough, but tomorrow is Harry's 'on' day," I explained.

"Ah, got it," he said. "That's got to be weird for her."

"For Lily or Ginny?" I ask.

"Both, probably," he replied. He spooned his way to the bottom of the bowl and then looked up at me. "Did Ginny ever tell you how her chat with Lily went?"

"Not in detail," I said. "She said it was a little bit like spending an evening writing with a blood quill, except that it felt good when it was over."

"That rough?" Ron asked.

"I think Lily had some false assumptions about the relationship," I replied.

"Huh," Ron grunted. "I don't want to know what they get up to when they're alone; all I can say is that Harry's been a lot happier since Ginny came to visit."

"He needs her, Ron," I explained.

"Yeah, this summer's been rough on all of us, but at least we've had each other," he said sagely.

Next he pulled me into a hug – a proper hug, not a grope. When first I thought of experimenting with a relationship with Ron, I wondered if his immaturity would drive me crazy – or crazier. Either my perspective is changing, or he really is getting better.

~+~

The day-on, day-off cycle between Lily and Harry was proving to be a right pain in the bum. After interrogating Snape, Lily came up with the notion of striking at the Death Eaters. She assumed that we'd be working hand-in-glove with the Order of the Phoenix. When we explained that at the end, even Dumbledore didn't fully trust the Order, but did trust Snape, she concluded that he was stark raving mad, and that if she hadn't been able to kill him personally for putting Harry with the Dursleys, she would certainly have been pushed over the edge by this exercise of discretion. We reached a compromise – we would work with the Order on this strike, but we'd still maintain operational security on the Horcrux hunt. Lupin knew, but Tonks didn't, which must have been odd, but obviously they'd worked out an understanding. Whether or not Harry had ever told Ginny, I wasn't certain, but now that I think of it, it's entirely possible that *Lily* might have told Ginny, which certainly posed interesting questions.

~+~

On the whole, Ron doesn't have much use for the Muggle world – whatever caused Arthur's fascination for all things non-magical, it certainly wasn't transmitted to the next generation genetically. This being said, Ron really likes Muggle movies, which was how we finished the day. Two of the amenities at our cottage hideout are a serviceable colour television and a second-hand VCR that I picked up at a jumble sale. I'd fallen asleep that night on the couch, watching a movie with Ron. I found out later the next day that Ron had finished the movie and then covered me up with a blanket. I was a bit disoriented when I woke up, but the blanket, the couch and the noises coming from the kitchen clued me into where I was.

I washed up in the loo, and then searched for my morning coffee.

Harry was up and about, opening and shutting cupboards, a part of his *modus operandi* in the kitchen. We've used this cottage off and on for months – he knows where every cup and morsel of food is and does the lion's share of cooking, but every time he starts working in the kitchen, he opens and shuts cupboards. I don't think it's that he can't remember where things are; I think it's just his way of organizing the job. As I entered the kitchen he closed the last cupboard door and flashed me a smile, pouring me a cup of coffee – cream, one sugar.

"Been up long?" I asked after swallowing my first taste.

"Couple of hours," he answered. "Bill came by and swept Ron away. They're working on the target."

"So someone's told you about the plans?"

Harry smiled. "Yeah, I got it from the horse's mouth, as it were. Mum and I talked most of last night when we were sleeping. I've had a lot of strange dreams, but last night was a bit over the top."

I arched an eyebrow at him.

He shrugged and then turned to reach for his wand on the counter. When he turned around again he was Lily, complete with a tattered yellow bathrobe. She was now twirling the wand in her left hand, a complicated manoeuvre that sent the wand over and under her fingers at a blinding speed. Remus says that she used to drive people to distraction when she did it during study sessions.

"The dividing line between us is getting pretty thin," Lily said.

"Can you turn it off and on?" I asked.

She turned around and in a blink was Harry again, *sans* yellow bathrobe, wand back in his right hand. There were some very sophisticated charms and transfigurations going on here.

"It's like jumping in and out of a room – only one of us can be in the room at a time, and I can't hear what's going on in the other room – not very well at least, but she can speak to me in passing. I dunno, it's hard to describe without experiencing it," he said.

Last night was the first time that we could talk to each other, when this body was asleep. I'm not sure now if it's my body or hers," he said with a smirk.

"Maybe Ginny could help you with that," I quipped.

"My, my, was that a semi-lewd suggestion coming from the prim Gryffindor prefect's pure little mouth?" Harry asked.

"I plead early morning," I said, smiling at him over my coffee cup.

"Your deviant secret's safe with me," Harry confessed. "Nobody would believe me anyway."

"Probably not," I agreed.

"So what is the plan?" I asked.

Harry smiled and turned to the stove, igniting a burner under a cast-iron frying pan.

"Later," he said. "I only want to explain this once, and Ginny's not awake yet."

I bridled at this rebuff, but chalked it up to early-morning crankiness. Harry opened the refrigerator, pulling out eggs and butter, beginning his smooth, practiced movements. Ginny and Ron may admire him on a broom, but he's pretty smooth in the kitchen too, and cleans up as he cooks, which my mum always considered a bonus.

Ginny's timing was superb, entering the kitchen just as the toast popped in the toaster. After a moment's hesitation, she hugged Harry from behind. Harry twisted in her embrace and then gave her a fairly ostentatious kiss. Other than that first time in the Gryffindor common room, they weren't much for public displays of affection. Harry, apparently, was reading my mind, or at least predicting the destination of my train of thought.

"It doesn't count in front of you, Hermione," he said, giving Ginny a final quick peck on the lips before breaking out of her embrace.

Cups and plates and flatware clattered as Harry summoned all the components to the counter before loading three breakfast plates. My plate was neatly arranged with toast at the top of the plate, eggs at the bottom left, and tomatoes at the bottom right. Harry only looks oblivious; evidently he'd been paying attention during our years at school, where I'd arranged my breakfast in this same pattern since I decided in second year that I really did like tomatoes. The bacon was on a separate plate in the middle of the table.

We ate in companionable silence, passing dishes and pinching rashers of bacon from the common plate. Harry finished first, putting his knife and fork on the plate and then wiping his mouth and fingers on a napkin. He then summoned what looked like a large, ugly doll house from somewhere else in the cottage. It was amazingly detailed, complete with trees and shrubs; it settled with a muffled thump on the end of the kitchen table.

"The Carrows leased this house when they started teaching at Hogwarts this year. They stay on the grounds during the week, but often escape here on the weekends. Apparently, if Snape's information is to be believed, there's to be an all-hands meeting of Riddle's little gang on Saturday morning. Exactly what *he* plans for the day is not all that important to me right now, but the opportunity to catch them all in one place is not to be missed," Harry said, adopting the quiet lecturing tone he used when he was in the DA. When he got really intent while instructing, his voice would go soft, forcing a weird silence on the group. Today was no different.

"So are we calling in the Aurors?" Ginny asked.

"Not exactly," Harry said with a cold smile.

"What then?" I asked.

"Once we're sure that Riddle is on the premises, we're blowing up the house," he said with satisfaction.

"Who is 'we'?" I asked.

"Same as now, friends from the Order, friends we know that we can trust," Harry said.

"Collateral damage?" I asked.

"Not likely, the nearest house is more than a mile away. The Carrows like their privacy, it would seem," Harry said.

"So, we're flooding the cellar with propane?" I asked.

"Ooh, very good, five points for Gryffindor," Harry said with a broad grin. "Ron and Bill are loading the cylinders into the cellar as we speak."

"Won't that be detected?" Ginny asked.

"Bill will make sure that not a trace of magic is left at the house," Harry said. "If the Death Eaters follow their usual procedure, the Carrows will arrive at the house early on Saturday morning, and they'll sweep the place for magic. They don't do much with the cellar, as far as we can tell, so it's not too likely that they'll notice some Muggle junk in a corner already strewn with Muggle junk."

"Alecto Carrow thinks that Muggles still use gas lights and ice boxes," Ginny added. "They won't notice anything Muggle."

Harry drew a circle around the doll house with the tip of his wand. "There's some sort of security perimeter that the Carrows activate once they're

inside. Only marked Death Eaters can pass through without harm," Harry explained. Looking up to meet my eyes he added as an aside, "Ask Bill how it works, my eyes glazed over when he tried to explain it. The guests will arrive here," he said, pointing to a gap in the hedge surrounding the grounds. "Once we're certain that most of the Death Eaters have arrived, we'll open the propane canisters with a remote device and then, once the cellar is inflated, we'll trigger the air-gas mixture. Mum's explanation is that we're turning the house into a bomb. As we flood the cellar with propane, we activate a containing field outside of their security perimeter – Bill says it should stop Apparation and Portkeys, as well as any type of physical movement. Lupin's not sure that it can't be broken, but the window of opportunity for the Death Eaters discovering that they're sitting on a bomb is rather small."

We were silent for a moment.

"What about Nagini?" I asked.

"Well, first off, I'm not certain that she really is a Horcrux – that was just a guess on Dumbledore's part. Second, if she's there, she'll be blown up with the rest – if we have to burn the wreckage with fiendfyre to make sure, I think we'll have time to do that too. If she's not there, I have a pretty good notion where she is, and once Riddle's gone, she shouldn't be too hard to dispatch."

"So what can go wrong?" Ginny asked, staring at the doll house.

"Oh, lots of things," Harry said glibly. "Riddle could get hit by a lorry on the way to the meeting, the Carrows could decide to clean up the cellar before the meeting; the meeting could be called off. Riddle could get away."

"But you said the containing field should stop anything," Ginny objected.

"That was Bill's opinion, actually. While I value his experience in this area, I've studied Riddle for a long time now – he usually has several layers of planning and fallbacks to his fallbacks. If Riddle gets away, I'm going to have to go after him."

Ginny bit her lip, struggling to stay silent.

"I'm the only one who can kill him," Harry said.

We didn't have any argument to counter that.

"We're going with you," Ginny said, chin set resolutely.

"No, you're not," he said adamantly. "Look, you two are two of the most important people in my life. I *know* that you'd die for me – but that's exactly what I don't want. If I'm putting my life on the line, it's so that *both* of you can live. Ginny you're the best thing that's ever happened in my miserable life, but I want *you* to have a life – too many people have died for me already. Hermione, it's got to be this way so you can grow old and tie the Ministry of Magic in knots. I can't be distracted with whether or not you're safe, and I don't want either of you taken hostage."

"So, Ron's not what you value most these days?" Ginny asked.

"Wrong Weasley," he said with a grin, looking from Ginny to me. "Love kind of reorders a bloke's priorities, I guess."

I don't think Harry noticed Ginny flinch. Knowing him as I do, I rather doubt that he's yet come straight out and said that he loves her. As declarations go, this was rather unambiguous – for Harry at least.

"Are you going to make us swear oaths?" Ginny asked peevishly.

"No, that's something that Riddle would do," Harry answered. "I've just explained my reason, and now I'm going to ask you both to not come with me."

Harry caught my eye, and then Ginny's.

"If ever you loved me, please don't follow me if I have to chase after Riddle."

The mantle clock in the living room chimed the half-hour.

Ginny smacked the table with her fist and stormed out of the kitchen. "I hate you, Harry Potter, I do!" she shouted as she slammed the kitchen door for emphasis.

Harry stared at the doll house, and then looked at me. "That went well, I suppose."

I tossed my napkin at him. "You prat, go after her," I commanded.

"This is one of those mad girl things, isn't it? Leaving means 'come follow me,' and 'I hate you' means 'I love you?'"

"You're catching on, Harry. Go mollify your Weasley, I'll clean up," I volunteered.

Harry nodded and followed Ginny's trail. Given the amount of noise she was making, it shouldn't be too hard to find her.

Once again, I was left to clean up the kitchen, but this time I didn't mind.

Harry's right, love does reorganize your priorities.

~+~

Harry took off after Ginny, who'd just left the kitchen in a snit, leaving me to clean up breakfast and do the dishes. This vision of domesticity was not exactly my notion of my place in this narrative, but I was willing to let it slide for the moment. That time in front of the sink was my last quiet moment of the day.

The cottage became the hub of activity. Bill and Ron came back from their errand, covered in a musty layer of grime. After a very quick clean-up, we were all out again, digging holes in the moor surrounding the Carrows' rented house. The notion that in a few days someone, somewhere was going to have to explain to the landlord just what exactly had happened to his rental property was somehow hysterically funny at that moment, which was my tip-off that my stress level was winding up to mania.

The holes were an interesting bit of manual labour. For three of the five holes we were able to dig up a divot by hand and then use a power auger to drill a neat hole. We then inserted a rune-covered granite obelisk into the hole, and covered it neatly with the turf we'd displaced with our spades. The two remaining holes were, of course, much more troublesome. Because we couldn't use any magic that would leave traces, Bill and Ron were reduced to pulverizing rocks with a long iron rod and pulling the debris out of the hole by hand. I tried to take a turn at the rock-breaking duty, but I am not built for the job, however much Ron enjoyed watching me. The obelisks were designed to anchor the containment field we were going to raise as we sprung the trap. In between rock pulverizing sessions, I got a quick tutorial from Bill in the charm-crafting that went into the obelisks and the field itself. It is a fascinating area of magic, one that ties together a number of areas I'd studied at Hogwarts as separate disciplines. Contrary to my reputation, I am far more interested in applied magic than pure theory. There's only so much excitement to be found in Arithmancy equations.

Bill carefully tested each site for traces of magic, and after he was satisfied that none remained, we groomed the sites physically, so they would look like any other bit of moor.

It was dusk when we finished the last site, which was pushing our schedule a bit. We made it back to the cottage, where Remus had take-out waiting for us. The guest list at dinner was Remus, Bill, Ron, Harry, Ginny and me. Tonks was out on the moors, conducting surveillance of the Carrows' house. She signalled when the Carrows arrived, as expected, at 7:00 p.m. Now was time for waiting – something that I had a lot of experience doing, but not much affection.

Harry slipped out some time after dinner, and to my surprise, I didn't notice it until Tonks reported in at 9:00 p.m. that the Carrows were down for the night without any apparent alarm. By that time, at Ginny's suggestion, I'd been teaching Bill, Remus and Ron how to play a Muggle board game. Ron whinged a bit about it, but after converting Pounds Sterling into Galleons and an introductory trip around the board, he was an avid convert. Having enough money to purchase Park Lane and Mayfair cinched the deal. The game broke up, by mutual consent, at 11:00 p.m. – Bill having been reduced to mortgaging all of his properties to Ron.

Tonks was relieved of her sentry duty by someone I didn't know from the Order. A part of me was wondering if we had too many people from that group involved in this operation, but I put that worry away for another day. Bill excused himself to go home to Fleur, and Remus made some tea for his wife, who was rather chilled by the end of her shift.

"Besides the obvious, is something bothering you, Hermione?" he asked, handing me a cup of tea that I hadn't asked for.

"Just a bit of unease about tomorrow's operation," I said. "It seems too much like mass murder."

Remus pondered this for a bit before replying.

"The Death Eaters fly no flag, and have no declaration of war, yet they seek to overthrow Britain's magical government. If they win, it's an open question which of us will die or be imprisoned first, dark creatures or the Muggleborn," Remus said wearily.

"Since Tom Riddle returned, Hermione," Tonks added, "we have thirty-two missing persons otherwise not accounted for and over a hundred confirmed murders perpetrated by the Death Eaters. I admire Lily's plan – it's neat, effective, and only deals death and destruction to the bad guys."

"If it works," I quibbled.

"Yes, if it works," Remus said. "If we wait for the government to act, we might as well surrender. The Minister is well intentioned, but the Wizengamot is split and the Ministry is heavily infiltrated. This is an irregular war, and it's up to us irregulars to finish it."

"Isn't 'irregular' just another word for pirate?" Tonks asked.

"Yes, love," he replied, giving her a wink.

"Arrr," Tonks said. "I seem to have misplaced my hook and my patch."

"Maybe you left it with your parrot," Harry said.

We all startled a little and looked into the hallway where Harry was taking off a coat and muffler.

"Where have you been?" I asked, realizing after I'd spoken that it sounded rather cross.

"Hermione, I have one mother already, dogging my every move, I don't need another," Harry said, tapping his forehead with one finger.

"Sorry," I said, in a much nicer tone.

"It's all right," Harry responded. "To answer your question, I went out to fetch some documents for Mum – she wanted to go over some of her old notes."

"Her notes survived?" Remus asked incredulously.

"Better than she did, apparently," Harry said. "She had a dead-drop system – very cloak-and-dagger, but it worked."

"I had no idea," Remus mused. "I thought it all was lost in the fire at Godric's Hollow."

Harry pulled two old ledger sized notebooks out of a satchel, plopping them on the table. "Mum said you two might want to go over the notes sometime."

"You're okay with us looking at them?" I asked.

"Yeah, but not tonight – we all need to get to sleep if we're going to be up at dawn," he said.

Lupin murmured assent to this notion, and Tonks volunteered to whip up some sleeping cordial. No one took her up on the offer.

I noticed with some interest that Harry and Ginny still seemed to be avoiding each other. I resolved to officiously interfere at the first opportunity, probably after I kissed Ron goodnight.

~+~

Ginny volunteered to brush out my hair after I was dressed for bed. Her own hair was already plaited. I was indulgently savouring the luxury of her attentions when there was a knock at the door.

"Who is it?" I asked, sounding more peevish than I'd intended.

"Lily."

Ginny and I exchanged glances and then Ginny stood to open the door.

Lily smiled when she saw Ginny, motioning for her to draw near. She whispered something into Ginny's ear, and then the two of them went out into the hallway. I grabbed the brush and resumed combing out my brown thatch.

By the time Ginny returned, I'd plaited my hair and was in bed, reading.

Ginny mouthed "Sorry" and pushed the door closed behind her.

"So," I began, "you're now on speaking terms with her, but not him."

"It's complicated," Ginny said.

"It always is," I replied.

Ginny plopped down onto her bed. "Harry and I – we're actually better than we've ever been. It's just – I was so *angry* with him, thinking that he has to protect me like some little china doll. Tom Riddle took a lot from me, and I want payback," Ginny said, hissing the last word.

"So what did Lily want?" I asked boldly.

"To talk about Harry, of course," she said.

"She's worried about what he's going to do?" I asked.

"Of course, so she turns to 'the girlfriend' for help," Ginny said, lacing the phrase with an acid tone.

"What did she want you to do?"

Ginny snorted. "If Harry goes running off after Riddle, she wants someone to be able to find him afterwards."

"The fireworks and explosions won't do that?" I quipped.

"That was my thought too," Ginny answered.

"So what did she propose?" I asked.

"Something like the trace that the Ministry puts on the wands of under-aged wizards and witches," Ginny said.

"Did you agree to it?" I asked.

Ginny nodded.

"So, what's the plan for patching things up with Harry?"

Nothing,” Ginny said. “It’ll blow over – we discussed it, reached some agreements, and concluded that we’d both have a different perspective tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow’s Lily’s day,” I objected.

“The day-on, day-off thing is over – they can switch back and forth seamlessly now,” Ginny observed.

“So who said goodnight to you out in the hallway?”

“Who do you think?” Ginny answered with a grin. “I may be a Weasley, but I don’t stay mad forever. It was kind of romantic in a clunky sort of way – ‘Ginny, I don’t want you mad at me – I might die tomorrow – I love you.’ Not every girl gets to hear those words in just that sequence.”

“Ginny, how wonderful!” I gushed. “Was that the first time?”

“Straight out ‘I love you?’ – yes. But we’ve had other – conversations.”

“Like this morning at breakfast?” I asked.

“It was *after* breakfast,” she quibbled, “but yeah, like that. Harry’s not much for talking about his feelings, but when he does, it’s eloquent – in an awkward sort of way.”

I turned out the lights and we continued chatting in the dark until Ginny fell asleep – at least I think Ginny fell asleep first, but don’t quote me on that.

~+~

Fleur Weasley shook me awake before dawn, placing an elegant finger on my lips as I began to protest. I shook my muzzy head and then pulled on the clothes I’d laid out just a few hours earlier. By the time I made it downstairs for breakfast, the kitchen looked like a committee meeting of the Order of the Phoenix. Bill and Fleur were there, of course, along with the Lupins, Kingsley Shacklebolt and a one-eyed witch I recognized as an Auror, dressed in civilian clothes today, but still wearing a rakish looking eye-patch. I didn’t know her name. Harry and Ron and Ginny were huddled together over something, each of them cradling a steaming mug of coffee.

I pulled up a chair next to Ron. Fleur appeared next to me as soon as I was sitting, brandishing a mug of coffee (black) and some sort of bun filled with meat and potatoes. Ron passed cream and sugar to me without asking, and more out of routine than hunger, I began to gnaw on my bun.

Half-way through the mug of coffee, I felt awake and human. It was still rather dark out. Remus brought the doll-house model into the kitchen and set it down on the table.

“I’m not going to repeat myself, but if all goes well today, we may well break the back of the Death Eater organization,” he began.

“Hear, hear,” Kingsley said.

“Shush, Shack,” Tonks said.

“Fred and George Weasley are on lookout right now. We intend to Apparate to spots close to the runic anchors for the containment field and monitor the target area. About an hour after dawn, we expect the first visitors to arrive, with the remainder arriving an hour after that. We expect that we won’t have to do anything other than monitor the anchors, to insure that they are not disturbed,” Remus said, pausing to take a swig from his own coffee mug. “Any questions?”

“What are we supposed to do if we see anyone in the area?” the unnamed one-eyed witch asked.

“Good question – rules of engagement are wide open – you can safely assume that anyone you don’t recognize who is carrying a wand is on the other team – act accordingly. You’ll have Muggle mobile phones for communication – they have a silent signalling capability. If for any reason you need to approach a station other than your own on foot, you need to use one of these clickers to announce your approach,” Remus said, holding up a drab coloured clicker. “Once we’re in place, I don’t recommend Apparation – the containment field may interfere with your trip.”

“Will the containment field interfere with the mobile phones?” I asked, raising my hand as if I were still in class.

“We tested that yesterday, Hermione. No, there’s no interference. If we get into a fire fight hurling hexes and curses, I make no guarantees, but our best hope of avoiding detection by whomever is on their security perimeter is using no magic that can be detected. None of you are smokers, so lighting cigarettes won’t be a problem.”

“No camp fires then?” Kingsley asked in a jocular tone.

“Uh, no – that’s a definite no,” Remus said firmly.

“Warming charms?” the one-eyed witch asked.

“No.”

“So,” Tonks drawled, “we basically need to freeze our arses until we blow these buggers up.”

“That about sums it up,” Remus said, smiling at his wife.

No more questions? Let's go then," he said quietly, all levity vanishing from his face.

~+~

Right up to the end, it held about as much excitement as waiting for a train. My station was the highest, affording a nice view of the front entrance to the Carrows' house. We'd been there for about half an hour before the first Death Eater Apparated to a bend in the road leading to the house. It looked like a man, but I wasn't sure at that distance. He walked slowly to the house – as he approached an amber coloured wall became visible. Baring his left arm, he approached slowly until an opening appeared and then passed through it. I leaned over to whisper to Remus.

"I assume it's keyed to the dark mark," I whispered.

"Right in one," he replied.

"What would happen if I approached it?"

"How do you feel about immolation?" he replied.

"Not today, thanks," I said drolly.

"Why don't they leave it up all the time? It seems like a neat bit of security."

Remus paused for a moment before speaking. "Two reasons," he began, "it takes a fair bit of power to establish that ring. The effect breaks down after an hour – the longest I've seen one last was two hours during the last war. Other than that, it's a bit of magic that can be detected from a distance, so if you know what you're looking for, you might as well erect a blinking sign saying 'here I am, come and get me.'"

That was the last thing he said to me for the next hour. He had a small notepad and a pair of Muggle binoculars and was writing down the arrival time of the Death Eaters, writing in names when he could identify them.

When the head count reached 60 a cluster of figures appeared, including one with a smooth, hairless head.

"Looks like the guest of honour is here," he said, picking up his mobile phone. He thumbed in some numbers and then pressed 'send.'

"Now what?" I asked.

"The valve has opened on the gas – the fuse will be lit when we throw up the containment field," Remus said, looking down at his watch.

Remus punched in another set of numbers and pressed 'send' again. I saw something moving at the Death Eater's Apparation point. I tapped Remus' arm and pointed. Remus looked and then pulled the binoculars to his eye.

"Son of a bitch," he gasped.

"Who is it?" I asked.

"Snape."

The figure now identified as Snape was walking with a pronounced limp. He passed the Death Eater's barrier and then limped towards the house.

"Is he going to sound the alarm?" I asked.

"He doesn't know that we're doing this."

"But he knows that he told you about the meeting," I objected.

Remus shook his head sadly. "No, he doesn't – all he remembers is injuring his foot in an accident in his laboratory."

"Will Voldemort be able to tell that his memories have been modified?"

"Only if he goes looking for it, and by the time he does that, it'll be too late," Remus said.

"What's your confidence in that?" I asked.

"Fairly high."

I never heard anything, but I felt a humming come from the runic anchors – rather like being close to an electrical transformer. Remus' phone buzzed quietly.

"Yeah, I know," he spoke into the phone. "No, nothing's changed."

I could see a shimmering dome over the house, the soft folds of light puckering as they came towards the ground. I heard a crack like a rifle shot and then the dome collapsed. Remus shouted something, but I never made out what it was. He pushed me to the ground as the house exploded. Most of the force went straight up, but a lot of debris went out in all directions. Some of it fell like hail, falling around me. Although my ears were ringing, I heard Remus' mobile buzzing. Remus got up off of me and put the phone to his ear and then brought it down again. He did a swishing movement with his wand on either side of his face, and then repeated it on me. The ringing in my ears stopped.

"Station Two – report in. Okay. Station Three? Okay. I heard you Station Four – can anyone see Station 5?" Remus barked into the phone, no longer taking any effort to be quiet.

"Anyone hurt?" I asked.

"Go ahead Station Five," Remus said, holding up a hand.

Remus nodded and then gave the signal to meet up at the cottage. My guess was that we'd comb through the wreckage when the dust settled (literally) and the fires burned themselves out. How we planned on keeping the Muggle neighbours from calling in an explosion to the Police and Fire Department wasn't something I'd anticipated.

"We're all good," Remus said. "Let's go home."

~+~

It wasn't quite like the Gryffindor common room after winning a Quidditch game, but it bore a strong resemblance to it. Fleur had opened a bottle of Champagne and was pouring it out liberally to anyone with a glass. I scanned the room and then shouted, to be heard over the chaos.

"Where's Harry?"

+++++

Copyright 2009 – J Cornell – all rights reserved.

Kokopelli20878@yahoo.com

Write to me – I write back.

A note about canon – this tale is HBP compliant, but not DH compliant. In this alternative to canon, Voldemort attempted to overthrow and replace the Ministry of Magic, but failed. The taboo on Voldemort's name is not in place. The deus-ex-machina of the 'Deathly Hallows' has so many logical inconsistencies that I can't even begin to unravel them, so no, there is no Resurrection Stone or Elder Wand in this non-canon universe – it's fanfiction, so deal with it.

*Kokopelli*  
*FanficAuthors.net*

# The Unexpected Horcrux

## Chapter the Last

The Unexpected Horcrux

Chapter the Last

Bill had been displaying something from an Omnicular – with some effort I recognized it as an aerial view of the Carrow's house – or what the Carrow's house had looked like less than ten minutes ago when it still had a roof.

I looked around the room, saw Ron, saw Ginny, and then looked for Harry

"Where's Harry?" I heard someone asked.

Then I realized that *I'd* been the one to ask it. I think the shock wave from the explosion had me a bit rattled.

This led to another random thought – would 'Where's Harry?' look at all like 'Where's Wally?'

Yes, I was definitely rattled, but if you realize that you're out of it, you're still okay – at least that's how I think it's supposed to be.

There was a sudden silence in the room, which had been quite loud and confused.

"Wasn't he with you, George?" Bill asked.

"He left to visit your post," George replied.

"He did, but then he went back to your post," Bill said.

"Nope, never returned," George said.

The room returned to cacophony, many people speaking or shouting at once.

I looked to Ginny, who had a look of horror on her face. She made eye contact with me. I mouthed "can you find him?"

She nodded, and then twisted her head, looking towards the stairway leading to the upper level.

~+~

"If you've got some way of tracking Harry, this would be a good time to pull it out of your purse, Ginny," I said urgently.

A look of panic washed over Ginny's face and then she pulled herself together.

"Get me a glass of water, some salt and something sharp – a needle or a knife or something," she said.

"Don't you want to do it downstairs?" I asked.

"No – just do what I ask for once, Hermione," she said, wrapping her arms around herself. Her eyes were brimming, but no tears were flowing yet.

I hurried down the stairs and pushed through the crowd, aiming for the kitchen sink, filling a glass of water. I had a needle in my bag, along with all the other supplies I'd been carrying around for months, and if push came to shove, a pen knife in my pocket.

"Is Ginny okay?" Tonks asked.

"She's trying to pull it together," I answered truthfully.

I pushed my way back to the stairs. Ron tried to catch my eye, but I mouthed "later" and went back upstairs. Ginny was sitting on the windowsill of the bedroom we'd shared the past few days, looking out onto the grounds. I doubt very much that she was seeing anything outside.

She took the glass from me without a word, taking a small sip from it before setting it down on the windowsill. She took the needle from me and pricked the pad of her left ring finger, squeezing a drop of blood into the glass. The drop of scarlet hovered on top of the water before fading into invisibility. Once she had a handkerchief wrapped around her pricked finger, she passed her wand over the glass. The water inside swirled for a bit and then turned a bright scarlet.

Ginny let out her breath with a big whoosh.

"He's alive," she whispered.

"Well, that's half the problem solved," I said. "Where is he?"

"Just a mo," Ginny said, reaching for the salt.

Ginny sprinkled a pinch of salt on the surface of the water in the glass. To my surprise, the salt didn't dissolve, but instead congealed into little

golden blobs on the water's surface, moving about until they formed a little inverted v with three lines underneath the mouth of the v. Ginny then looked out the window, apparently trying to get her bearings.

"He's about thirty miles away from here, north by north-east," she said with some finality. "Get Remus, we need to go after him."

I went downstairs without argument.

~+~

I've never ceased to be amazed at how neatly people line up into two categories: in a time of genuine crisis, there are those who will fall in line to meet the crisis, and then there are those who want to ask questions and argue.

Remus, Ron and Tonks fell into the first category, while Bill Weasley, bless his cursebreaking soul, fell into the second. After explaining that Ginny had a line on Harry's whereabouts, and that we needed to mobilize to his aid, Bill demanded to know the nature of the magic involved. Ginny gave the name of the charm (I assumed that it was a charm) which meant nothing to me. Remus flinched a little, but Bill got agitated and began asking a string of questions.

"Bill, do we really care about this charm if we know where Harry is?" Ron asked, exercising what for him amounted to tact and diplomacy.

"It's a blood-bind, Ron, the Warrior Kings of Sumeria bound their servants with this before they'd go out into battle," Bill explained. "It made the Kings easier to find when wounded, and boosted their power."

Ginny's temper flared.

"Bill, I knew the risks, *all* of the risks, before I agreed to this," Ginny explained.

"Did he explain that he now has a direct tap into your magic, and that if he's killed, the tap may kill you too?" Bill snarled.

"Yes, Bill, *and I thought it was worth it*," Ginny hissed.

She didn't bother to explain that it was Lily who set this up, not Harry. Bill wasn't cleared for any information on the Horcrux hunt, including the unexpected Horcrux we discovered.

The charm in question was a variety of Blood Magic, and if Bill's reaction was any gauge, it was just over the line from Necromancy. Remus took charge, assuring Bill that we could sort it all out later, but that for the moment, finding and aiding Harry was the priority.

Bill put whatever discomfort he was experiencing about Ginny and the trace into a mental box and then pulled out a rather detailed map of the area. We found our own location and then measured out thirty miles, north by north-east. Llandrindod Wells was the nearest town of any size, but Tonks dismissed the notion that we'd find him there.

"There's an old manor house outside the city – the Aurors have raided it a time or two in the last two years, but we never find anything but cold trails," she explained. Pointing to an orange blob on the map she added, "There's a bird sanctuary here – probably the best place for Apparation – if there are any Muggles about, they won't care – they don't care about anything that's not a bird."

~+~

Tonks, Kingsley and the other Auror took off on business – apparently there was a need to coordinate with the official forces, if after the fact. Fleur went back to Shell Cottage for supplies. When the dust settled, it was Remus and Bill, holding down the "adult" contingent, and three students – Ron, Ginny and me. We Apparated to the corner of the bird sanctuary closest to the manor house. It didn't take a Ravenclaw to figure out that Tonks' guess was spot on – the manor house had smoke pouring out of a broken window at one end, and ghastly flashes and explosions were heard from the other end of the house. The morning mists had burned away, so we approached the house in full daylight.

Bill did a quick scan and determined that there were only two people alive in the house. We drew closer with caution. The end of the house where the fighting was taking place contained some sort of great room with a huge window fronting onto a large pond. Ginny looked like she was going to sprint to the house, when Bill checked her. He made an intricate pattern with his wand that included several flicks in the direction of the house. A shimmering sheet appeared which seemed to cover the house.

"Containment field?" I asked.

Bill shook his head. "No, not that," he said. "Something like Anti-Apparation, but it's different."

Remus nodded.

"Yes, I've seen it before," Remus said, nodding knowingly at us.

"Is it dangerous?" Ginny asked.

Remus looked at Bill before answering. "If you were to pass through the field right now, you'd collapse it, which might distract Harry. You can't shoot anything through it, either way, so it appears that Harry, or Lily, hoisted the field to keep Voldemort contained."

"So we just watch?" Ginny asked incredulously.

"We watch for an opportune moment," Remus replied. Bill nodded in agreement.

We drew in close.

I'm not a big fan of fighting of any sort – my own history makes me want to avoid fights, and if I'm in a fight, I want it to end as quickly as possible. This fight, however, was a macabre thing of beauty.

Voldemort was lean and powerful, moving like a dancer. His clothing was in shreds; he was bleeding and burned.

Harry was moving quickly, a wand in each hand. It was close to impossible to determine whether Lily or Harry was directing the fighting, as he (she?) was adept with both hands. He would advance and retreat, lunge, parry and feint, all the while driving Voldemort backwards. It became plain to see that Voldemort was tiring, and was desperate to escape. It became equally plain that Voldemort was dueling two people, Harry and Lily.

Harry caught my eye and nodded, acknowledging our presence for a fleeting moment. He then exploded in a flurry of attacks, most of which were successfully parried by Voldemort, all except for the last, which left a gaping slash along the left side of Voldemort's ribs and down his thigh. The wound didn't slow him down much, but he was bleeding freely, and no one can bleed at that volume for very long.

Harry then advanced to his right, forcing Voldemort to retreat, crablike to his right, until Harry's back was to the window. He then crossed his arms in front of his chest. Whether this was a tactical move gone badly, or was intentional on Harry's part, I couldn't tell, but Voldemort used that instant to strike with the Killing Curse.

I expected Harry to dodge or counterstrike, but he just stood there. Time seemed to slow down or perhaps reverse as the sickly green light filled the room. When the light hit Harry, the room filled with a flash of golden light. I heard Ginny scream and then everything exploded.

This time it was Bill pushing me down to the ground.

The routine of getting blown up and shoved into the dirt was getting old. My only consolation as I picked myself up from the damp ground was that Ginny appeared to have been pushed down the slope, picking up more dirt and grime than I'd just collected.

Ginny sprinted up the rise leading to the manor, vaulting over a flowerbed to jump into the house through the now-shattered window. She gave the smoldering corpse on the far side of the room a quick glance before racing to Harry's fallen form. Ron vaulted over the window ledge, stopping only long enough to help me over.

Ginny was pressing a handkerchief to Harry's forehead, which was bleeding freely, while checking him over with her free hand for injuries. Without turning her head to face us she stated, "We've got to get him out of here."

"Shouldn't you make sure he's stable first?" I asked.

Ginny turned to face me, grimaced, and then pointed to the ceiling.

When Voldemort tried to kill Harry, there was some sort of backlash – we saw it as a golden flash and an explosion. In addition to blowing out the windows, the wall nearest to where Voldemort had been standing was gone too. The ceiling above was shredding as it rippled and churned. Ginny hauled Harry onto her lap, cradling his head while pushing down with one hand on his forehead. A determined expression settled her face and she looked back out through the window – and disappeared with a sharp crack.

"Time to get out of here," Bill announced.

"What about Voldemort?" Ron asked.

"Remus is securing what's left of his body – we need to scram," Bill said, raising his voice to be heard over the groaning joists and beams.

I took a quick look around this scene of destruction, trying to commit as many features to memory as possible, and then decided that I'd had enough of explosions and shattered buildings for one day. I hopped lightly over the windowsill, distracted for the moment with a question of why getting out so much easier than getting in. I then waited with Ron by a willow that was standing majestically in the lower garden. The house continued to groan ominously while the fire from the far wing of the building spread quickly.

Bill put his head next to Remus, who nodded in reply. They Disappeared from the house, reappearing next to us in twin cracks.

"Is it over?" Ron asked.

Bill put a grimy hand on Ron's shoulder. "Yeah, it is."

"Back home then?" Ron said, looking to me.

I nodded, but I wasn't quite sure where home was anymore.

~+~

Home, it turned out, was a series of transitions. When Ginny disappeared, it turns out she'd performed a Side-Along Apparation to evacuate Harry to our cottage. I wasn't aware that she'd ever performed that bit of magic, being underage, but I had no doubt that she had determination and deliberation to spare for such work. Harry had a serious flash-burn on his face and a collection of scrapes, scorches and lacerations consistent with a no-holds-barred firefight with an accomplished dark wizard. The signature scar on his forehead was now gone, an angry gouged furrow being left in its place. The bleeding from that laceration was quite showy, and that's what Ginny had been applying pressure to when she pulled him from the soon to be collapsed manor house. Harry was drifting in and out of the conscious state at the time. Some part of him, however,

recognized Ginny, and he had a death grip on her hand for most of that day.

Shell Cottage was the next step – although Fleur wasn't a healer, she was a quite accomplished witch with a fair amount of experience in healing burns (from Charlie's visits) and curses (from Bill's injuries on the job). She was the one who spotted that Harry was apparently blind, noticing that he was totally unresponsive to light during the moments when he was lucid. Shell Cottage became a bit of a madhouse that day, with various Weasleys and members of the Order popping in and out. We managed to keep the more obnoxious members of the Ministry of Magic away, but we were all individually and collectively debriefed by either Kingsley Shacklebolt, or Tonks, acting in this instance in their official capacity. Our testimony was eventually made part of the official inquest, proving, I guess, that Voldemort was really most sincerely dead. Sometimes the obtuseness of government amazes me.

Healer O'Neill came to Shell Cottage before lunchtime and spent most of the day hovering over Harry, healing the superficial wounds, regrowing the burned flesh, and using various diagnostic charms on his eyes, which were still unresponsive. I noticed a few other diagnostic charms that I'd seen before, but Healer O'Neill said nothing about the results. Towards dinner time, Harry came to consciousness and stayed there, although when I asked how he was, instead of answering "Fine" he said "Not too well, actually," before smiling in my direction.

Ginny was steadfastly at his side, although when he was finally awake, he did manage to relax his grip on her hand. She excused herself before dinner, and after a quick bite to eat and a shower, looked far more presentable than when we'd arrived at the cottage. Healer O'Neill smiled when Ginny came back into the room, slipping into the chair beside the bed as I vacated it.

"So, what's the word?" Ginny asked as O'Neill began to pack up her bag of supplies.

O'Neill put a finger to her lips and motioned towards the door. Ginny slid out of the chair and followed her, noiselessly into the hallway.

"She doesn't want to say how I'm doing, does she?" Harry asked, turning his head towards where I was sitting.

"I suspect that she feels it would be inappropriate to discuss in front of you," I guessed.

"So, how bad am I?" he asked.

"I've seen you worse at the end of a Quidditch match," I said evasively.

"Right," he replied. "I've still got bones in my arms." He raised one arm and then the other, shaking his hands in the air.

"Do you remember what happened?" I asked.

"Some of it," he said. "Mum and I were switching back and forth, which made it a bit of a madhouse."

"What happened at the Carrows'?"

"Something tipped Voldemort off, maybe it was Snape, maybe the containment field going up, I dunno," Harry said wearily. "He used Bella to punch through the containment shield and then did a runner."

"How do you know that?"

"She splinched as she popped through the field – it wasn't pretty, and it wasn't reversible," Harry said, a macabre smile passing his lips briefly. "I slapped a tracer on Voldemort when he did a runner and followed after him."

"Remus says that you can't trace someone who's Disapparating," I blurted.

"Always the swot, Hermione, but I love you for it," Harry said. "Yes, the Ministry knows of no way to trace someone who is Disapparating, but that doesn't mean that it can't be done."

"Lily?"

"Yeah, Mum never took 'no' for an answer – even when confronting the laws of Magic," he said proudly. "Scary-smart woman, Mum is, reminds me of you, actually."

"Thanks, I think," I replied.

"I meant it as a compliment," he said. "So we followed him to a house deeper in Wales, and then it was a matter of going after him, hammer and tongs. The blighter wanted to get away, can you believe it?"

"Did you know that Lily put a blood-bind on you?" I asked.

Harry pulled a sour face. "Not really, but I figured it out – she had a plan, it seems, that she hadn't told me about," he said, touching the edges of his face tentatively with his fingertips. "Did you know that I was a Horcrux?"

"Of course, you had a bit of Lily in you," I answered.

"That wasn't all it seems. I had a bit of Voldemort in me as well. Having Mum in my head seemed to shield me from the side effect of my *other* personal Horcrux. You know how bad we felt when we were carrying the other Horcruxes?"

I nodded, silently pleased that he was using the correct form of the noun and then, realizing that he couldn't see me, said aloud "Of course."

"If I hadn't had Mum in me from the day I lost Mum and Dad, I probably would have been a nutter," Harry said in a matter-of-fact manner. "You know, of course, that when you break a Horcrux, you rip open a powerful bag of energy."

"Yeah, we saw that with the Horcrux smashers."

"When Mum saw that you were in place, she stopped fighting, hoping that Voldemort would throw the Killing Curse. Very predictable lad, that Tom Riddle," Harry explained.

"Do you remember that part?"

"Yeah, very clearly," Harry said. "I saw Voldemort across the room, heard him invoke the curse and then I saw the green flash. It was kind of like what I used to see when I was with the Dementors, but instead of hearing Mum scream, the last thing I heard today was Mum shouting 'I love you, Harry' and then there was a big flash – I felt like I'd been plowed by a Bludger."

"Anything after that?" I asked.

"Not really – bits and snatches. I heard Ginny, I felt her hand. I knew if Ginny was around, I must be okay," Harry said.

"And don't you forget it, mister," Ginny said, pushing the door to the bedroom open.

"How much of that did you hear?" Harry asked.

"Most of it," Ginny admitted.

"Good, I'm tired, I don't want to repeat it," Harry said.

"Healer O'Neill says that there's nothing wrong with your eyes, and that your vision should return within a few hours, a day at most," Ginny said authoritatively.

"For that she had to take you out into the hallway?" he asked.

"Nothing mysterious, Harry, she just had to use the loo," Ginny explained.

"Right – another one of those mad girl things – going off to the loo to chat," he said.

I tossed a pillow at him. To his credit, he snatched it before it hit him.

~+~

So that's the story, the real story, of how the Second Rising ended a week before Easter, in the year 1998. We left Shell Cottage to go back to 12 Grimmauld Place, and then on to the Burrow. Kreacher was solicitous of his new master, obsequiously so when he learned that Harry had once again prevailed over Voldemort.

Harry leased Grimmauld Place to the Lupins at the princely sum of one galleon per year, payable in advance on New Year's Day. I went to Australia to retrieve my parents, and when I returned, I was surprised at what had changed, and what had not.

A purge was underway at the Ministry of Magic – Scrimgeour finally had the auspicious combination of low opposition and high popularity. The vacuum in Wizarding society caused by the simultaneous elimination of the top echelon of Death Eaters had an oversized impact on Britain's small Wizarding population. A trial was quietly held for the collaborators and the few low-level Death Eaters who'd somehow failed to make the meeting on that fateful day.

Harry spent the balance of that year and the summer at the Burrow. Ginny, with some protest, went back to Hogwarts after the Easter holiday. She was home every weekend, and many evenings as well. If anyone objected to this arrangement, they had the good sense to keep it to themselves. Shortly after she'd started up again at school, an Apparation license was Owled to the Burrow with all of Ginny's pertinent information filled in, except for the date of birth, which was inexplicably left blank – imagine that.

When September arrived, we were all back at Hogwarts, joined by a number of our classmates who'd withdrawn from, or been expelled from school during the prior year. Harry declined the offer of Prefect, Head Boy and Captain of Gryffindor Quidditch, although he did keep his spot on the team as Seeker. Headmistress McGonagall offered me the Head Girl position, but I also declined. I had a year of study to make up, and didn't want to take on the extra work the position entailed. At this point in my life, I didn't particularly care if I had "Head Girl" on my resume. Ginny was offered the position, but she declined as well, so Amanda Sackett took the job, much to the delight of Hufflepuff.

After living on the run for almost a year and then ending the adventure with a bang, (or a pair of bangs, if you want to be particular) the normality of just being students without conspiracies or looming threats was quite a novelty for all of us. By All Hallows Eve, Ron and I mutually concluded that we would pack it in as boyfriend and girlfriend. I loved Ron, but I wasn't *in love* with Ron, and vice versa. As breakups go, it was amiable, much better than many of the dramatic screaming matches that I've witnessed in seven years at Hogwarts. Would we ever try to pick things up again? Maybe – but I wasn't in any hurry – I have a whole lifetime to explore, and I didn't want to be tied down yet.

Harry was different back at school, which isn't all that surprising, given the fact that he was now no longer hosting the two Horcruxes he'd carried for most of his life. Without them he was different – calmer, more open and friendly, less of the mercurial temper we'd all endured over the years. He was doing much better in all of his classes, doing what he could to avoid fame, spending a great deal of time playing Quidditch and when not on the pitch, spending time with me, Ron and Ginny – particularly Ginny. By Christmas I was fairly certain that Harry was going to propose to her. It turns

out that I was off by one week – Harry proposed on New Year’s Day. To absolutely no one’s surprise, Ginny accepted.

Harry bequeathed Lily’s notebooks to me as a long term loan. What I could understand was fascinating – there was enough material there for years of research, as well as some very well documented dead ends. I read through them and then put them into my trunk, promising myself that I’d get back after finishing my N.E.W.T.s.

I never really met Lily – what I’d lived with for less than a week last year was just an echo or sliver of her essence. That didn’t matter to me, though; because she was such an oversized personality that I believed that she couldn’t possibly be dead. I’d had similar thoughts about Dumbledore, so this wasn’t a new feeling. I think some part of me expected to see her leaning against the kitchen counter again, dressed in a yellow bathrobe.

I dismissed that as folly until the very last week of school, when I was studying for my final N.E.W.T.. I was sitting in the Common Room with Ron and Harry and Ginny.

Ginny was revising her notes from Advanced Potions, holding the book in her lap with one hand while twirling her wand in the other. It was a dazzling, distracting display with her wand tumbling over and under her fingers.

The wand was tumbling over the fingers of her *left* hand.

FINIS

+++++

Copyright © 2009 – J Cornell – all rights reserved

Kokopelli20878@yahoo.com

Write to me, I write back.

Thanks for reading, thanks for reviewing.

Thanks also to the people who have served as trusted, thoughtful readers over the years: MrIntel, FullPensieve, MadderBrad, Amulder.

Thanks also to a series of betas over the years at various sites: Aibhinn, Musings, HDiFranco, PirateJenn, Runsamok, GardenGirl and Aaron StVines.

Ideas come from a lot of places. I don’t think that JKR plays fair with her interviews; my recollection is that in one interview she says that Harry’s not a Horcrux, and then in book seven it turns out that he is.

So if he *was* a Horcrux, how did he maintain his sanity, given the negative effects of being close to a Horcrux?

This pondering, along with JBern’s [The Lie I’ve Lived](#) (a Harry/James fusion) sparked me to thinking about Lily as a Horcrux.

The whole Horcruxes/Horcruces nomenclature is a bit of an inside joke with me – as fighting about that nomenclature got me in deep kimchee at one of my prior archives. Don’t write reviews saying that I have to defer to JKR on this point – if the word follows the rules of Latin, it’s one crux, two cruces.

Well, thus ends my last unfinished story in the HP fan fiction universe.

It’s a small world, but you’ll probably see me again, sometime.

I have three teenagers under my roof right now, so I’m putting writing on the back burner. God willing, I’ll get back to it someday – or not – who knows?

Until then, may God bless you all.