

Irony Bittersweet

Irony, Part One – Bittersweet

When the last Horcrux was found and destroyed, it almost cost Harry Potter his right eye. In the short period of time he allowed for recovery, he made plans with Hermione and Ron to find and kill the most powerful Dark Wizard in a century. The finding part wasn't that difficult, as Voldemort had taken Azkaban, the Wizarding prison, as his headquarters a year ago, just after Dumbledore had been murdered. It had taken Harry and his friends a long, difficult year to track down and destroy the separated bits of Voldemort's soul that anchored his twisted spirit to the earth. Harry thought that now that they were gone, he could fulfil the prophecy and, at long last, find peace.

Fate was neither kind nor cooperative.

As they sat within the Gryffindor common room, planning their attack on Azkaban, Voldemort brought the fight to them, penetrating the walls of Hogwarts Castle before they could mount an effective defence. Destroying the Horcruxes had weakened the man once known as Tom Riddle to the point that when he assaulted the last safe place afforded the forces of the Light, he was half the wizard he used to be. Still, half of Voldemort was more than a match for just about any witch or wizard in a duel to the death, but Harry Potter was no longer just any wizard – he had destiny and determination.

When the trio battled through to the Dark Lord himself, Hermione and Ron worked as a team to ensure that Harry had his shot and when the time came, they stood on the sidelines to make sure that Voldemort didn't escape. Harry was not going to be denied.

The final spell in that duel was unexpected. Harry had learned many spells during the year he'd spent searching for the Horcruxes, not the least of which was a load of Dark Magic. "You have to know what you are facing," Hermione had said in an eerie echo of former Auror, Alastor Moody. Harry took the advice to heart, and voraciously learned the spells that Voldemort had discovered many decades prior. Then, he learned how to counter them, and developed a few that the world had not yet seen. As they engaged the enemy of the Wizarding and Muggle worlds, Voldemort found he could not beat Harry Potter as he was armed and supported by his friends. Voldemort could not Apparate away, Hogwarts' magic trapping him to the place he had fought to enter. When he tried to attack Harry directly, he was always countered. Soon, Voldemort found himself cornered in an unused classroom just down from the Great Hall.

Without pausing to say a single word to his opponent, or to allow him any opportunity to fight back, Harry raised his hand. Hermione and Ron covered him as he conjured up the memories of his friends, his parents, Dumbledore, and everyone that had sacrificed so much to help him get this far. He heard Ginny enter the room and out of the corner of his eye, saw her battered and bleeding face. To the memories he added the love within him for that witch, which swelled to fill him with light, almost blinding everyone in the room before it uncontrollably shot out the end of his hand in a giant pulse of magic. The light surrounded, and then entered Voldemort. As darkness was illuminated with love, Voldemort's scream was heard for miles around. Light shone in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

All of Voldemort's Death Eaters died that day with their lord, their link with him sealing their fate as a final service to a now dead villain. The irony to all of this occurred immediately after this penultimate event of modern Wizarding history. Just when Voldemort's second reign of terror had ended and the free witches and wizards of the world breathed a beleaguered sigh of relief, Harry Potter was arrested.

"Seize him!" yelled an apoplectic Cornelius Fudge. The former and now acting Minister for Magic had somehow been appointed back to the position after Scrimgeour was murdered. It seemed that no one else wanted the job. Fudge had spent the better part of six months trying to hunt Harry down and arrest him on trumped-up charges. Now, when Harry had spent himself defeating Voldemort, it looked as if he would finally have to yield.

Ron and Hermione stepped in front of Harry to defend him, but Harry, with his last ounce of strength, Petrified both of them. Ginny, too, tried to protect Harry, but he shook his head and watched her nod in understanding. If he was going to prison, he would need his best friends and his girlfriend at liberty, free to help him.

"Harry Potter," Fudge spat with a trace of madness in his voice, "you are under arrest for practicing Dark Magic," Ginny gave a startled gasp, "conspiracy to commit murder, conspiracy to overthrow the government, and the murder of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named."

Harry smirked as the magical handcuffs were fixed onto his hands and his wand seized. He didn't say a word as they dragged him to Azkaban, placing him ironically in the cell that once held his godfather. The last thing he remembered before succumbing to his exhaustion were the trails of wetness on Ginny's cheeks as they led him away.

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Harry awoke to the sound of his cell door opening. Four Aurors walked in, including the newly-named head of the Auror Department, Kingsley Shacklebolt. Harry didn't know if he should be glad of the man's company or wary. The four serious-looking men pointed their wands at Harry and surrounded him. Then, as they gave each other nervous looks, he saw three more people enter the cell.

“Lo,” Harry said with a weak wave from his still-manacled hands.

“Harry!” Hermione exclaimed and took a step toward him. She stopped when two of the Aurors made a swift movement with their wands that indicated she should not go further. She looked torn between wanting to hug him and slap him for Petrifying her.

“You alright, mate?” Ron asked sheepishly, keeping one wary eye on the closest Auror. “At least the Dementors aren’t back.”

Harry gave his best friend a wary grin and then locked eyes with the third visitor. “Thank you,” he said to Ginny. Her face was passive, but knowing her as he did, Harry could detect a thousand thoughts going through her mind, none of which featured an intact Minister of Magic.

“Oh, Harry,” Hermione gushed. “We’re working on getting you released right now. Fudge has just *got* to let you go. The charges are baseless; the public is demanding your release but he’s just not budging an inch.”

Harry smiled again and tore his gaze from Ginny. “It’ll be all right, Hermione. He has to release me unless he formally charges me in front of the Wizengamot before noon tomorrow. I don’t think he has the balls to do that.”

Hermione’s cheeks flamed red and Ron snorted. “Too right,” the redhead said. “Hermione’s going to keep trying the *legal* channels. I’ll work on the...” he shot another glance at the Aurors and continued, “...not-as-legal ones.”

“Visiting time is over,” said Kingsley with distinct authority. The other three Aurors immediately began to push Hermione, Ron, and Ginny out the door. When Harry caught Ginny’s eye for the last time, he nodded and she offered him a hesitant smirk. She knew just what that nod meant.

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At noon the next day, Harry looked up from where he sat in his cell. Fudge hadn’t charged him and Harry was to go free. It was curious then, that no one made the walk down the long hall to his cell. Not a single Auror ventured to unlock the door or to pass any word along at all as to his fate. Harry grimaced at the bars of his cell, knowing that Fudge would not ever let him leave Azkaban, just as Sirius had been railroaded into jail without a trial and without justice. He smiled because he had anticipated this and as soon as his dinner tray was brought at six o’clock, he reckoned he’d leave one way or another.

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Dinner was day-old fried chicken and stale bread. Harry could smell it as soon as the outer door to the cell block was opened. There were only three other prisoners in his block; he was the last to be fed.

“Dinner time, Potter,” came the gruff voice of the newly-appointed warden. He motioned to the guard and a polished steel tray was pushed into the cell through a slot in the door. “Eat up.”

Harry stood and walked to where the tray sat on the broken granite floor. “When am I going to be released?”

The warden snorted. “Never,” he replied and turned to walk away.

Harry let out a dramatic sigh that stopped them in their tracks. “Then I guess I’ll have to leave on my own.”

“What?”

Harry did not reply. Instead, he held his chained arms out in front of him, recited the three D’s and turned on the spot.

A thunderous groan shook the prison on its foundation and then an almighty *crack* was heard as Harry disappeared. The warden made to pull out his wand, but stopped as he witnessed the impossible. Harry Potter had just Disapparated through the most hardened Anti-Apparation wards in the world.

*

Appearing in a familiar living room, Harry stumbled into the waiting arms of a short, pleasantly scented woman. He lingered in her arms, drinking in the familiar smells of her perfume.

“Perfect timing,” Ginny said and held him stiffly in place. “I don’t know how in Merlin’s name you did it, but you’re here.”

Harry squirmed in her arms and let her plop them both down on a nearby settee. “Thanks,” he said breathlessly. “I don’t think I could stand another second. Breaking the ward without a wand takes a lot out of a person.”

Ginny gave a shallow smile. “You mean breaking through *four* layers of Anti-Apparation wards takes it out of you.” When Harry gave her a confused glance, she sighed. “Can I ask you something?”

Sensing her discomfort, he nodded.

She looked him straight in the eye. “Did you use Dark magic to kill Voldemort?”

It was Harry’s turn to sigh. A thousand memories rushed through his mind, but he matched her gaze and gave an answer. “No. I’ve never used Dark magic against a person, Ginny.”

Her shoulders slumped in relief. “Thank Merlin.”

He let her relish the relief for a moment and silently thanked her for trusting him despite her suspicions. "How did you know so much about the wards at Azkaban?"

She snorted. "Being the only sister to a Gringott's Curse-Breaker has its benefits. I cased out the defences in the event we had to bust you out."

It was Harry's turn to snort.

She reached over and pulled him into a tight hug, but it was only for a moment. "As much as I'd love to just sit here with you, we need to get a move on. It'll only take a few minutes to track where you Apparated."

He held up his hands in a mute plea to be free of his bonds.

"Right," she said and placed a forefinger and thumb in her mouth. One ear-splitting whistle later, Fred and George popped into the living room.

"Oi!" Fred said as George clutched his chest in shock. "How'd you...?"

"They locked you up!" George added with his usual dose of eloquence.

"Very observant," Ginny said dryly. "He's just Apparated here and needs some help getting these lovely bracelets off. Care to help?"

There was a pause as the two gobsmacked wizards continued to stare at Harry. Fred was the first to recover. "Apparated?"

"That's not possible," said George, and then grinned. "But then, this is our Ickle Harrykins we're talking about."

Fred grinned, too. "Pride of the wizarding world..."

"Apple of every witch's eye..."

"Not to mention the original and sole investor in Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes."

"Boys," Ginny said sharply. "There isn't time for reminiscing. The handcuffs?"

Fred's smirk shifted effortlessly into a mask of concentration. "Right." He turned to George. "The prototype?"

George nodded and they both disappeared with a small *crack*.

They were back before Harry could coax Ginny's face closer to his, seeing as how he could hardly lift his head, let alone reach up for a kiss.

They got to work immediately, taking an oddly-shaped contraption from a paper bag and attaching it at various points on the cuffs.

"And we'll need transportation away from here as soon as possible," Ginny said as they continued to work on Harry's restraints. "They'll track his trip here soon and we need to be far away before anyone else sees him."

"Not to worry," Fred said distractedly. He rotated a knob on the contraption and George pressed a lever. There was a click and the glow around the cuffs faded.

"Success!"

There was a moment of silence and then an ear-splitting screeching filled the room.

"Bugger!" Fred said and snatched the cuffs from Harry's swollen wrists. "They were alarmed – didn't they trust you?"

George fished around in his pocket and extracted a small, smooth stone. He handed it to Ginny. "This'll take you to our flat. Hold it and say the full name of our late Headmaster."

The alarm seemed to grow in volume and Ginny stood, pulling Harry with her.

The door burst open and Molly Weasley appeared. "What in the name of..." she began and froze when she laid eyes on Harry. Fred and George stood shoulder to shoulder in front of him and Ginny began to recite the Portkey trigger.

"Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore." There was a pull on his navel and they disappeared with a *pop*.

"Mum," George said seriously as soon as they vanished, yelling over the din of the alarm. "You didn't see anything, did you?"

"Did you?" Fred added, arching his brow for emphasis.

Molly blinked, her mouth open to tell them off and then she closed it. "Of course I did! You two are up to your old antics again. Explosions, screeching handcuffs.... Why I thought you two were mature enough to be out on your own is beyond me."

Fred grinned and before a team of twenty Aurors stormed the Burrow five minutes later, the handcuffs were buried ten feet below the surface of the family pond with Molly waxing indignant. Those who didn't know her thought she was incensed with the idea that she would harbour criminals at her house. Harry Potter had escaped.

Harry collapsed immediately upon arriving in the small flat shared by Fred and George. Ginny struggled to position herself under him before they fell to the shabby carpet and was rewarded with the sound of her breath being forcefully expelled from her lungs.

Pushing him off her body, she noticed that he'd slipped into unconsciousness. According to her discreet inquiries to Madam Pomfrey the previous evening, magical exhaustion should have overcome him midway through his Apparation. The fact that he'd made it five minutes beyond that was a testament to his raw power.

Ginny flicked her wand and levitated his sleeping form onto the closest bed. She tucked the covers around him and felt his forehead. Drawing back her hand, she frowned. She ran her fingers through his fringe and pushed the hair back, completely exposing the skin between his nose and hair line. It was perfectly smooth, with no sign of the trademark lightning-bolt scar that had graced his head since he was a year old.

Drinking in the rest of his features, Ginny let her hand caress his cheek and then rest on his slowly rising and falling chest. Dipping her head, she placed a lingering kiss on his lips. "Sleep for now, Harry. We'll get you out of this mess soon."

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In a section of London hidden from Muggles and all but a handful of wizards, Hermione was in a snit.

"No, *Ron*. I need the *Ancient Wizarding Law* from 1265, **not** 1567."

She let out an exasperated sigh and shoved *Magical Law and You* to the side of her increasingly cluttered desk. A headache had been blossoming in her temples and she pinched her thumb and forefinger onto the offending areas to stem the pain. Hermione had always depended on books when faced with a problem (rightfully so, her brain reminded her). This time, however, it seemed that she couldn't sort through them fast enough to find the solution. This time, it wasn't searching for hidden bits of an evil Dark lord, but something far worse – navigating the tempestuous and confusing waters of magical law to free her best friend from a fate worse than death.

"I could grab a headache draught," Ron said as he sat the dusty tome down in the empty space before her. "Remus just brewed one up yesterday."

She let out another sigh, this one less exasperated and more relieved, and leaned back in her chair. "No, I just need to relax." She turned her smile to him and was heartened by his answering grin.

His grin quickly turned from amusement to disbelief. "You do realise that those words have never escaped your lips before?"

Hermione crossed her arms defensively and huffed. "I can recognise the need to let my hair down from time to time. *You*, on the other hand, could apply yourself a bit more."

Ron snorted and patted her on the head, infuriating her even more. "I'll just go get that headache draught, shall I?" he said and was gone without another word.

Hermione huffed again and wrenched open the book in front of her, sending a spray of dust into the air that obscured her vision. She grabbed her wand and muttered an Evacuation Charm that cleared the room and sent the pages of the book fluttering. When the dust cleared, her eyes fell on the page that had been randomly opened. Something caught her attention and she began to read faster and faster through the ancient text. She grabbed a quill and spare bit of parchment, writing furious notes even as she continued to read. Her headache long forgotten, Hermione let a ray of hope penetrate the clouds of despair that had been her constant companion for the last two days. She'd have to do some checking, but if what she read was correct, Harry would not only be out of prison in no time, they'd be able to get rid of Fudge once and for all.

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A warm breeze gently brought Harry back into consciousness. The warm breeze was accompanied by a rhythmic sound that strongly resembled breathing and he detected a warm weight spread across one side of his body from shoulder to knee. When he was finally awake enough to blink open his eyes, he saw red hair splayed across his chest and instinctively brought his arm around the back of his sleeping companion to pull her closer. She stirred and her breathing hitched.

"You're awake," Ginny said. The fog of sleep on her face did something funny to his insides.

"Looks that way," he replied and pulled her down for a chaste kiss. "We still at Fred and George's place?"

She nodded and, much to his chagrin, pulled herself away from him and stood. "We need to get something in your belly." She held out her hand and helped him stand. "You've been asleep for two days and even you have to be starved."

Harry nodded and felt the room spin for a second before he found his balance. Fred and George's flat was small and sparsely decorated. A single photo of the entire Weasley family hung on a dull wall by the front door. Upon closer inspection, he saw that Percy had been charmed to stay in the photo, but it looked as though the photographic versions of Fred and George took that as an opportunity to fire repeated, nasty curses at their brother.

The sound and smell of cooking bacon pulled Harry to the tiny card table shoved against the opposite wall. It was crammed between the cold pantry and the stove, so Harry could observe Ginny as she continued to cook what was rapidly becoming a Molly-like breakfast. He secretly hoped that he'd get to see her cook like this very often in the future.

Once they had eaten breakfast, Ginny steered him to a small sofa in the living room. She snuggled her head onto his shoulder and began to twirl

her fingers in the hair at the nape of his neck, sending little shivers of pleasure down his spine. "I was really scared for you, Harry," she said softly. He wondered if she meant when he was duelling with Voldemort or when Fudge had taken him prisoner, but her fingers soon pushed all thoughts from his mind. "When you didn't Petrify me, I thought it was because you didn't trust me. But when you were in Azkaban, I realised that it was because you *did* trust me and that you needed me."

She lifted her head and looked him in the eye. "I like to be needed." She regarded him with an intensely gentle gaze, as if searching for confirmation that he did indeed trust her.

"Ginny," he said, taking her hand. "You *are* the only one I trust. I mean, I trust Ron and Hermione, too, but with you it's... different."

She smiled and nodded. "I understand."

"I knew you would."

They sat there for a while longer before Harry made to stand. "I need to go get some things at the Ministry. I'll be back in a little while and then I need to leave the country for a few months to let things sort themselves out. Can you get some clothes and things for me?"

Ginny frowned. "What do you mean *you* are going to leave? I waited for five bloody years for you to notice me, so I reckon I'm a fairly patient girl, and then I waited another year for you to kill Tom, but I'm *done* waiting, Harry Potter. I don't care if you're a fugitive and we have to run for the rest of our lives, I'm not ever going to sit on the sidelines again."

Maybe it was the fierce look on her face that made him reconsider what he was about to do, or maybe it was the fact that he knew she'd react this way. Whatever the reason, he was extremely glad that he didn't have to face the future on his own. "I'd hoped you would feel that way." She smiled again, the secret smile that she reserved for only him. "Fine, then. Can you get *our* stuff ready to leave the country?" he asked with a smirk.

"Yes."

He stood and she came with him. "I'll be back in a tick." Then he strode over to the small fireplace, threw in a handful of green powder and was gone in a flash.

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Appearing in a cloud of green flame at eleven o'clock in the morning in the atrium of the Ministry, Harry Potter stepped out of the Floo in a dignified manner for the first time in his life. He casually brushed the lone speck of ash from his robes and strode to the elevator at the end of the hall. Several witches and wizards gave him curious glances as he passed. He nodded or waved to each one and as soon as he made eye contact, they fled — eyes wide in recognition. It wouldn't be long before everyone knew he was there.

The elevator dinged at the correct level and Harry stepped off the lift and into a hail of spells. It wasn't luck that his shield had already been erected, sending each bolt of light back toward its caster. Having been completely caught off guard by the strength of his shield, the Aurors and MLE officers that had ambushed him were all Stunned, Petrified, or otherwise impeded before Harry had taken two steps forward.

The bad thing was that Harry's magical shield was now almost completely spent and he didn't have the energy to cast another one. It would take all of Harry's skill to get to the containment unit at the end of the level and find his wand. Once he had that, however, it would be relatively easy to create a Portkey (the only spell that he couldn't perform wandlessly) and be on his way back to Ginny.

Another spell was fired from his right and Harry ducked, running forward and into the maze of cubicles. Three wizards appeared on his left and Harry was just able to conjure a shining golden metal shield before their spells slammed into it and sent Harry barrelling into a cubicle wall. He held his own and sent a wandless Stunning Spell at the three men.

Regaining his footing, Harry resumed his march to the end of the hall. Something snapped, like a piece of fine thread, as he placed his foot down and he dropped into a rolling ball, barely missing a burst of flame that leapt from the two cubicle walls on either side. When he completed his roll, he came up with the shield facing forward and immediately felt the clanging of repeated spells hitting its now dented surface. He swiped his hand under the shield, sending a wide-swath Cutting Hex into the knees of his attackers. There were several cries of pain and he glanced over his shield to see that the coast was clear.

He ran through the final set of cubicles and, not meeting any further resistance, made it to the Head Auror's office.

"Hello, Harry."

Harry halted upon seeing the man seated behind the oak desk. Kingsley Shacklebolt idly twiddled his wand at the wall and a sheen of red light surrounded Harry. "It's the failsafe shield," Kingsley explained. "No one can get past it, not even you."

"Let me go," Harry warned. "You know I'm innocent."

Kingsley smirked. "Yeah, I know you aren't trying to destroy the government, but I got orders and they say I have to arrest you and chuck you back in Azkaban."

"Bollocks on your orders." Harry felt his rage build inside him and then he heard Ginny's voice inside his head. Just as when he defeated Voldemort, he felt her presence calm him and give him focus. He reached out a finger and touched the shield, but retracted it as soon as he did, a sharp electrical shock coursing up his arm.

"I wouldn't try that if I were you," Kingsley explained. "If you surrender, I can help you. If you resist, then there won't be much I can do. It'll look like you

really *are* trying to take over the Ministry.”

Harry wasn't listening, however. He reached out with his magic, sensing the construction of the spell that was holding him. He sent his senses with the magic and focused on one particular spot. A separate part of his brain recognized how similar it was to the spell Voldemort used to protect the locket Horcrux. Instead of blood, however, this spell required something else to disarm it.

Opening his eyes, Harry smiled. “Let me out, or I'll not be gentle with you, Kingsley.”

The Auror simply chuckled. “I don't think you appreciate your situation, Mr. Potter.”

At that moment, Harry jammed his wand hand into the shield, feeling the waves of electrical shocks flow into his body. He opened his magic to it, pulling the latent energy into himself, and the shield blinked and fell.

His breath coming in short gasps, Harry pointed his now glowing-red arm at a completely gobsmacked Kingsley. “I – warned – you.” Then he let the magic loose and watched as the Head Auror crumpled into a heap on his office floor.

Without wasting a second, Harry leapt to the rows of locked cabinets along the back wall of the office and briefly wondered how he was going to know which one held his wand. Then, in a flash of inspiration, he extended his hand and Summoned it. There was an instant reaction. One of the drawers burst open and his wand flew into his hand. Harry waved it, Summoning the rest of the contents of the drawer into his hand. Then, he pointed it at a half-used pack of chewing gum and watched it shudder in his hand. Touching it with a finger, he was swept from the Ministry.

*

When Harry landed back in Fred and George's flat, he felt his knees give way but was once again caught by Ginny's deft and amazingly strong arms. “Have I told you how much I love you?” he asked.

Ginny's face glowed pleasantly and she shook her head. She guided him to the small sofa and sat down with him.

“Well, I'm a right git,” he replied and produced a padded velvet box from among the things the Ministry had taken from him. “How about I make it up to you?”

Her eyes flew open in shock as he flipped the lid to reveal an engagement ring. “Marry me?”

She gaped at him, speechless while he held the ring. “I – I – I wasn't expecting this!” she finally managed.

He quirked an eyebrow at her. “You were right, Ginny. What you said earlier about wanting to come with me wherever we go in the world. I... I want that too.”

Ginny's face softened and she took the ring from the box. Harry lowered his arm and watched as she regarded the single diamond. “I don't know,” she said and put it on the appropriate finger, watching the light play with the facets. “I was never big on diamonds or keen on big weddings.” Her eyes met his and a glint of mischievousness sparkled back at him. “Mum will want to invite every relative and plan every detail to the nines. You know how she was with Bill and Fleur.”

Harry nodded solemnly. “Good point. I guess we'll just have to get married in secret, then.” Feeling the blood returning to his legs, he stood and extended his hand to her. “Shall we?”

“What?” she asked, but took his hand anyway. “Elope?”

“Yeah,” he replied and shoved the ring box back into his robe pocket. “How about tonight?”

“Tonight?” The shock was back on her face. Harry rather liked surprising her.

“What time is it in Paris?”

Ginny looked at her watch and Harry took the opportunity to Summon their suitcases from their spot near the door.

“About two?”

Harry snaked an arm around her, took the suitcases with one hand and idly thought about his destination. “Perfect.” Then, he Apparated them to the continent.

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It took them an hour to track down Bill and Fleur in Paris. Ginny had only written to him a handful of times since they were married and only remembered snatches of the address. When they told them of their plans, Fleur was delighted, but Bill was stern and insisted that he talk to Ginny alone.

It was over in a few minutes, by which time Harry had declined Fleur's offer of coffee six times and cringed as she fussed over his pallid complexion. “You seemly need to get more sun.”

“I'll try, Fleur,” he said graciously. “Azkaban wasn't exactly a resort.”

“Non,” she agreed. “Take Ginny somewhere nice. Be good to her.”

Ginny appeared then, her face red and contorted with anger. "Let's go, Harry," she said stiffly.

Harry stood and looked from her to Bill, whose face was just as red. "Are we going alone?"

"No," Ginny said. "Bill and Fleur are coming, too, but I had to threaten to try out a brace of new curses on him."

Bill looked like he had bit into a lemon while Fleur simply chuckled. "I will call ze Minister. See you zer in an hour?"

"Thanks, Fleur," Ginny said, her colour slowly returning to normal. "Make sure the git is dressed nicely."

Bill poked out his tongue and Ginny rolled her eyes. "Come on."

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They made a mad dash through a Muggle formal shop for clothes and then to a flower shop for a bouquet. Ginny was a simple girl and so their clothes reflected her tastes. Since neither of them spoke French, they had to use a Translation Charm, but Harry must have flubbed it because the flower shop owner chased them out after Harry complimented him on his selection.

"I think you said he looked like a pig," Ginny said with a giggle.

They wound their way through the streets of Paris, while Harry squinted at the street signs. "Why didn't you say anything?"

Ginny giggled again. "I only know enough French to know you screwed up, not enough to get you out of it."

There it was. The sign matched the one on the slip of parchment in his hand and he led her down the alley and into a dusty pub that was concealed from Muggles. *Le Révolución* was the entrance to the French Ministry for Magic. Fleur had assured them that Harry would not be arrested for his outstanding charges in Britain and contacted the Minister's office to let them know that they were coming.

Following the instructions on the parchment, Harry ordered a red wine from the bartender and lifted the glass above his head. "*Viva La France!*"

A door popped open behind the bar. The man opening the door ushered Harry and Ginny inside.

The interior of the French Ministry building was much different from the British one. Thin, tall windows reached from the floor to the ceiling, allowing a copious amount of light into the spacious hall. A wizard with a beret and a set of flowing purple robes was waiting for him.

"Mr. Potter? Miss Weasley?" he asked without the hint of an accent. They nodded. "Please follow me this way."

Obediently, they walked behind the wizard into a room just off the long hall. The room was small, but opulently decorated.

"Please change here and proceed to the next room when you're ready." He left through the same door they'd entered from and shut it behind him.

Ginny took her dress to the changing screen and ducked behind it. Harry followed suit, stepping behind another screen and soon, they were facing the door to the chapel.

"Ready?" she asked, slightly breathless from the rapid changing.

"You can still back out now," Harry offered, smoothing down a crease in his dress robes.

Ginny whacked him with her hand. "Prat. I told you I'm not going anywhere without you."

Harry smiled and fought down the pack of Hippogriffs that had Apparated into his stomach. "Let's do it."

They opened the door and stepped into the small chapel. There were three or four golden pews facing a small altar behind which an elegantly dressed man stood looking expectantly at them. Fleur flashed a stunning smile as they entered and rushed forward to greet them.

"Eesent eet wonderful?" she said and kissed Harry on both cheeks. "You were at my wedding, and now we are at yours."

Bill glared at them from the front of the hall, but it was the two other bodies that shocked Harry.

"Mum? Dad?" Ginny asked in surprise. "What... how?"

She rushed into her mum's arms and was crushed into a loving embrace. "Oh, Ginny. Why didn't you tell us?"

Harry watched as Ginny traded hugs with her father and explained the situation to them. "We knew the Ministry would trace the Portkey to Fred's flat, so we left straight away."

Mr. Weasley gave Harry a stern look. "I would have preferred to arrive at this day under different circumstances." Harry wondered if perhaps Mr. Weasley did not believe his innocence. "However, seeing as how you are a wanted man in England and given that my daughter has granted her permission to marry you, I can't begrudge *either* of you a bit of happiness. It's been too long since anyone has had any."

Harry felt his hand being shaken, and a gentle shove toward the altar. In a daze, he took Ginny's hand. They exchanged quick but meaningful vows read to them by the Minister, who, it turned out, was *the* French Minister of Magic. By sheer coincidence, he was the only one authorized to perform magical marriages who was available on a Saturday.

When the Minister pronounced Harry and Ginny husband and wife, Harry jerked himself out of the numb stare he'd fallen into and was thoroughly kissed by Ginny. Fleur and Mr. and Mrs. Weasley clapped loudly, the latter wiping happy tears from her eyes. Even Bill managed to clap a bit now that his parents were there to approve.

Ginny wiped his lips with the cuff of her dress, heedless of the red stain that remained on its once white surface and beamed at him.

Their family — *Harry's* family — surrounded him in a ring of congratulations. Unfortunately, Harry knew his time there needed to be short. "We *really* need to leave," he said after signing the marriage certificate and handing it to Ginny. She folded it and slipped it into a concealed pocket in her dress.

"Where are you going to live?" Bill asked, the guarded expression returning.

Harry shrugged. "When I can come back to England, I'll — *We'll* probably look for a flat somewhere." He gave Ginny an amused look, finding it wonderfully strange that he was not alone and would never again have to be.

"Where are you going to go now?"

Harry shrugged again, but Ginny answered for him. "That's for us to know, brother of mine. Honeymoons are supposed to be secret and this one even more so."

Bill seemed mollified at this and simply nodded.

"If you are ready?" the French Minister asked.

Ginny gave her mother one last hug and Harry watched as she said a tearful goodbye to her father. Harry was most unprepared when Mrs. Weasley pulled him into a strong embrace.

"Take care of her," she whispered fiercely into his shoulder. "She really loves you."

"I will," Harry whispered back, a prickle of tears welling in the back of his eyes. "I know."

They quickly followed behind the French Minister and into a hidden cupboard behind the altar. Soon, they were in an efficient office with no furniture save a single file drawer. On the wall above the file drawer were about two dozen city names.

"In the top drawer is a one-time Portkey made from a sandstone pebble," said the Minister. "Hold the pebble in your hand and think about the city you wish to go to. Then, tap your wand on the pebble and it will be programmed with the destination. You will have one minute before it activates."

Harry gave Ginny a nervous glance. "That's it?" he asked suspiciously.

"That's it," he said with a slight bow. "I will now return to my office. I'm sure I won't have the slightest idea who has taken this Portkey when my assistant informs me it is missing. Good luck."

The Minister winked, gave another bow, and then disappeared through the same door they had entered.

Looking at each other again, Harry shrugged at Ginny. "Where to, Mrs. Potter?"

He could feel heat creeping across his cheeks as he said it, as if he'd crossed some invisible line. It felt too soon, but Ginny looked pleased. "Say it again," she said.

"What, you didn't hear me?" Harry replied.

"No, I want you to call me *Mrs. Potter* again! I don't care where we go as long as I'm there with my *husband*."

The heat bloomed more predominantly upon his face. "Yes, Mrs. Potter." He averted his gaze to the cities displayed on the wall. "Athens?" he asked tentatively, trying to divert his thoughts away from the floating feeling he got every time he thought of Ginny as his *wife*.

"Too close," she said with authority.

"Fiji?"

"Too hot."

"Australia?"

"Too boring."

"New Zealand?"

There was a pause and she seemed to consider it for a moment before, "Perfect."

He took the stone from the drawer, thought *Auckland*, and tapped the Portkey with his wand. They stood there, hand in hand, Harry holding the stone, Ginny holding their luggage and waited for the Portkey to activate. In that moment, Harry held his breath and hoped that as bad as his past had been, his future with Ginny would be filled with an equal measure of happiness.

End Part One

A/N: A nod to my pre-beta Kokopelli, who has in a fit of graciousness completely eviscerated and then carefully re-built the first part of this instalment. And that was after going through five or six re-writes by me. Cheers, John. Thanks also to Sherry for the proficient and excellent beta job.

Irony Future Imperfect

Irony, Part Two – Future Imperfect

The door to a large office on the first sub-level of the Ministry of Magic closed and its occupant gave a beleaguered sigh. It had been ten years to the day that he'd first captured this office and now that he was back in it, he was bound and determined to stay there. It wasn't that he felt particularly threatened, especially since Dumbledore had died, but he knew that the only way to secure his post was to make sure that every witch or wizard knew that the only thing standing between them and unspeakable horrors was Minister Fudge, the guarantor of peace and stability. What better place to start than at the top?

Harry Potter, the man thought with derision. *So what* if he stopped He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named's reign of terror *again*? It was certainly not murder the first time as he'd only been a baby and the Dark Lord clearly hadn't died. But this time... *This* time, there was no mistaking it. Fudge had proof, had witnesses, and had an iron-clad reason for putting that boy away for the rest of his natural life. Potter was a killer, one who took the law into his own hands, standing as judge and jury. He was a threat to the people.

Anyone powerful enough to kill You-Know-Who was *too* powerful. That's why Fudge had been so suspicious of Dumbledore. He was too powerful too; but he was dead now, so he wasn't a threat any more. That's why he had to act *now* to ensure that Potter's influence didn't corrupt the Wizengamot before he could be dealt with. That's why he was badgering Shacklebolt every hour on the hour with a status update as to where the boy was.

Harry Potter was missing and Fudge's carefully crafted plan to keep him out of the limelight was at risk. If the Wizarding world caught wind that You-Know-Who was dead and that Harry Potter was the one responsible for it *again*, Fudge wouldn't be able to keep him locked up anywhere, despite the fact that he was capable of becoming a Dark Lord himself. It was the only thing that kept his carefully constructed house of cards from toppling over and Fudge spent all his remaining time (the time not spent looking for Potter) personally approving every single article that was to be published in every single Wizarding periodical.

Harry Potter must be caught and punished for his crimes. The people deserved no less, even if they didn't know that he was a wanted man.

*

Grimmauld Place was Harry's but Hermione Granger was borrowing it while he was unjustly held in Azkaban for crimes he did not commit. She rifled through her sheaf of notes on the link between the 1225 Prisoner Rights Decree and current established law. So far, she hadn't found any amendments and there were only three more books to search through.

"You 'bout finished?" asked Ron from the door to the library. "This place is giving me the creeps."

"Almost," she said distractedly and picked up one of the three tomes that focused on wizarding criminal law in the last decade. "I need to skim through this first, then we can take a break."

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Ron shrug and slink over to a sofa near the grimy windows.

She had just found the chapter on prisoner rights when they heard the sound of the door opening downstairs. A second later, there were two identical *cracks* as Fred and George appeared directly in front of Ron.

"We thought we'd find you here," said Fred at once.

Ron was clutching his chest. "Would you bloody wankers mind not doing that?"

"No time for that, now, Ronniekins," said George with a Cheshire Cat grin.

"We've got news about Harry."

Hermione slammed her book shut. "What? Has he been freed? Did Fudge finally charge him?"

They both shook their heads and, if it were possible, their grins got larger. "Harry's not in Azkaban any more," Fred continued.

"It seems that Fudge underestimated Mr. Potter and provoked the poor lad."

"Broke through the Apparition Wards and everything."

"We just saw him at the Burrow before a squad of Aurors descended on us like ants on a cucumber sandwich."

Hermione threw a hand over her mouth. "Did they catch him?"

"Nope. We gave him a Portkey to our flat, but that was over an hour ago. Kingsley had us questioned three times by three different Aurors."

Hermione stood and began to march for the door. She had to see Harry immediately. He had to give himself up to the Aurors, or the situation would be worse than before. They actually might have a case against him if he continued to resist. But before she got to the threshold, George had caught her arm.

"I wouldn't see him just yet."

Fred's eyes twinkled in the flickering light of the candles. "Ginny's taking care of him. I reckon he's a bit knackered after punching through those wards and she'll skin anyone that disturbs them."

Hermione relaxed her arm and turned back to her books. "He has to go back, Fred. If he runs, they'll be able to charge him for resisting arrest or worse."

She was expecting Fred or George to argue with her and had already formulated her response when, to her surprise, Ron spoke next.

"Let's give him some time to recover, first, Hermione. Finish your research, and then we can talk to him."

Her mouth was already open to reply, when she made the mistake of looking into Ron's eyes. There was a softness and concern there that she'd rarely seen. It completely disarmed her and she found herself nodding. "All right," she said softly and sat down in front of the stacks of books and parchment. "I'm almost ready to get him cleared."

Then, glad for the company, and equally glad to have a distraction, she dove back into *Criminals and Laws That Protect You From Them*.

*

Two days later, the last 'i' was dotted and the last 't' crossed on Hermione's outlined defence for Harry. She and Ron Flooed to the Burrow and were pleased to see Ron's parents there. Only, they were teary-eyed as if they'd just lost a pet crup.

"Mrs. Weasley?" Hermione asked tentatively. "What's the matter?"

"Oh, it's wonderful," she said tearfully. "It's just wonderful."

Ron looked askance at his father. "I didn't realise crying and wonderful went so well together."

"It's Harry," Mrs. Weasley said and collapsed on a nearby chair. "And Ginny."

"What about them?" Hermione asked quickly, looking between Mrs. Weasley's misty-eyed expression and Mr. Weasley's satisfied smirk.

It was Mr. Weasley that answered. "They're married."

Hermione's jaw dropped. "They're *what*?"

"It was such a lovely service, too," reminisced Mrs. Weasley and then her eyes came into focus. "We'll have to have a more formal one, of course. When they get back."

"Where have they gone?" Ron asked incredulously.

"Don't know," replied Mr. Weasley. "That's the whole point of a honeymoon, isn't it?"

Hermione felt as if her lungs had all the air sucked out of them and she couldn't make them inhale any more. "Married?" she said dazedly. "I can't believe it."

"I'm going to get some plans together right away," Mrs. Weasley announced and Summoned a pad of parchment and a quill. "Flowers, invitations, catering..."

"Mrs. Weasley," Hermione interrupted. "We've got to clear Harry of his charges *first*!"

The older woman nodded and made another note on her parchment. "Yes, of course, we'll have to do that too." She turned to her husband. "What do you think, Arthur? A spring wedding?"

Hermione tuned them out and engaged her mind to this new twist to Harry's situation. He was out of the country, which meant that he would have to be incognito or in a country that didn't support extradition to Britain.

"Mrs. Weasley?" Hermione said suddenly. "Where did they get married?"

"Paris," she replied, not taking her eyes off the list. "In the Ministry chapel. It really was lovely. And romantic too, despite the circumstances."

Hermione grabbed Ron's arm and pulled him back to the Floo.

"Where are we going?" he asked, but did not offer resistance.

Paris," she replied. "We're going to find Harry before he can get into any more trouble."

*

Hiking, Harry decided, was an activity one engaged in when not in need of distracting conversation. It was difficult to keep one's concentration both on the subject being discussed and on the shifty footing that seemed common among the mountains of Southern New Zealand. Because of the nature of the task, it also required a certain amount of deep breathing, which made any attempt at speaking sound like a competition involving a pair of trampled bagpipes. Forced into silence, Harry fondly ruminated on the past two weeks.

Harry and Ginny had decided to spend their honeymoon in a Commonwealth nation, and because it was technically a foreign country, they would normally be required to check in with the local Ministry and register as a visitor. Unfortunately, that would have tipped off the British Aurors of his location and Harry and Ginny would have spent half their honeymoon duelling with various witches and wizards from the British Ministry. As that wasn't quite what Harry had in mind for his first week as a married man, he was pleasantly surprised that their Portkey from France delivered them to a deserted play park in Auckland instead of to the local customs office. The park had been deserted because of the late local hour and Harry and Ginny quickly found a nearby hotel to spend their first night as husband and wife.

Over the course of their first week in New Zealand, they took Muggle transportation from Auckland to Christchurch, stopping in various locations for a day or two until they took a ferry from Wellington to the South Island. They spent the next week sampling the local scenery through various leisure activities. Canoeing, camping, hiking, fishing, punting... It was all part of a life that Harry had only dreamed of living. Now, married to Ginny and shod of the prophecy and Voldemort, he was finally living it.

Their wedding rings were unremarkable if one took only a passing glance at them. Hermione would be over the moon with their true nature, however, because of the careful way in which Harry had enchanted them. The normal eighteen-carat gold had been infused with several powerful charms. On the exposed surfaces, Harry had then cast a Shield Charm and on top of that a virtually unknown spell that negated the effects of magic altogether. The result was a pair of rings that shrunk and grew with the wearer's finger, could never be removed except by the wearer, were completely unbreakable, and because the inner surface of the ring was not shielded, they allowed Harry and Ginny to communicate non-verbally. Finally, because of the anti-magic charm, their abilities were completely undetectable. The only catch was that the charms would have to be recharged every year, which wasn't nearly as difficult as casting them all over from scratch.

Harry smirked to himself as he thought about the rings. A spray of loose rock spit out from under his boot as he and Ginny hiked along a level ridge-line some distance from Christchurch. He threw out his arms to keep from toppling over and let out a breath of relief when his feet stopped shifting. Ginny turned around at the noise and gave him a worried glance. "Feeling a bit dizzy?"

Harry straightened and took the opportunity to look out over the trail behind them. A breathtaking view of the Southern Alps stretched before them, complete with snow-dotted peaks, and grass strewn valleys. "Nah," he said, turning around to catch up to her and re-adjusted his pack. "Just got distracted by your pretty bum."

Ginny gave him a lopsided grin. "It'd be a pity to have to put that on your tombstone," she said as they continued to hike side by side. "Boy-Who-Lived done in by Ginny's backside."

With a low chuckle, Harry slipped a thumb under one of the straps of his pack and his other hand into Ginny's. He leaned his head close to her ear and murmured, "I can think of worse things to be done in by."

She smiled conspiratorially but otherwise didn't reply as they started to hike up a steep incline.

Several minutes later, Ginny had once again taken the lead and was well ahead of Harry.

Don't worry about me, Harry said through his ring. *I'll be the bloke passed out under the overly-large backpack on the side of the trail.*

Harry heard Ginny laugh. *No pity parties for you, Mr. Potter. I'll be waiting for you under a stand of trees.*

Taking a set of deep breaths, Harry grumbled through their link and continued on.

The trail narrowed and curved until he spotted Ginny chewing on a large apple under the aforementioned trees. There were a few flat rocks and fallen branches that looked like good spots to rest on. Harry bent over and wheezed dramatically before he began to unfasten his backpack.

Ginny rolled her eyes, took out a water bottle, unsnapped the lid and took a long drink. "I just can't get over how beautiful this country is," she said, completely ignoring his theatrics.

Harry stopped breathing as hard as he had been, but found that he needed the oxygen more than he'd thought. When his heart had slowed to a manageable pace, he took a drink from his own bottle and sat down on one of the flat stones. "Much better than dodging Fudge's goon-squad back home," he agreed.

She capped her bottle and motioned for him to help her offload her backpack. He pulled himself to his feet and held her pack while she disengaged her arms. "We really should owl Ron and Hermione. You know they'd want to hear from us about... everything."

It was something they'd discussed off and on ever since that first morning in Auckland. It's not that Harry didn't want to tell them about their wedding and his escape from Azkaban; it wasn't even that he felt that sending them an owl would somehow compromise their security. He really couldn't put a finger on why, except that he just wanted to have his time with Ginny all to himself. For once in his life, he needed to be completely unbound to anyone but her.

"I know," he finally said, propping her pack against the trunk of a tree and sitting down on a rock.

She regarded him for a moment and then leaned against the tree. "Do you want me to write the letter?"

He hung his head between his knees, knowing that he was going to relent. "Yeah. I guess they need to know, sooner rather than later. We'll do it when we get back to the hotel tonight."

Ginny nodded in agreement and offered him a conciliatory smile. "Care for an apple?" She began to fish in her pack when they heard a pair of *cracks* .

Harry's wand was in his hand in an instant and the first syllable of a Disarming Hex on his tongue before he saw who it was and barely stopped himself.

"Hermione! Ron!" yelled Ginny in shock, her search for food momentarily distracted. "What are you doing here?"

They were clad in Muggle clothes and looked decidedly dishevelled. "Finally!" Hermione gasped and collapsed on a nearby tree trunk. "We've been looking for you for *ages* ."

Ron looked equally relieved, and stood next to Hermione. "You all right?"

Harry lowered his wand. "How'd you find us? No one knows we're here except..."

"The guide at Tuatara Tours, yeah, we spoke to him an hour ago," finished Hermione.

Ginny looked sceptical. "And you've been popping around the countryside ever since?"

"That about sums it up," replied Ron, who reached into her pack and took one of her granola bars. "Before that, we were in Auckland, Majorca, Jamaica, Fiji, and... Paris."

Ron took a bite of his pilfered food and pointed the uneaten bit at Harry. "When were you going to tell us about your wedding?"

Harry pocketed his wand and gave Ginny a pleading look. "We wanted to have you there, Ron," he began. "Things just sort of... got out of control."

Ron's eyebrows rose. "I don't like hearing that you were out of control when it comes to my sister."

"Oh, put a sock in it," Ginny said and grabbed her granola bar back. "Harry broke out of Azkaban, I nursed him back to health and then we had to leave before Kingsley got wise to us. Harry took on the Ministry single-handedly and we left that very night."

"You could have sent us an owl!" Ron said hotly. "I'm your brother!" He whirled on Harry. "And *your* best friend!"

Harry hung his head once again. "I know and I'm sorry. You did matter to us, Ron, Hermione. We wanted you to be there, but we really didn't have a lot of time." He raised his head and met Ron's fiery gaze. "We didn't even tell your parents. Bill did that."

Ron's eyes softened just a little and Hermione took advantage of the lull to step forward. "Harry, I've found something that might help you fight the charges against you." She produced her three page summary and handed it to him.

Harry scanned the documents and the longer he read, the higher his brows rose on his forehead. When he got to the end, he gasped. "Hermione," he said in awe and handed them to Ginny. "You know this isn't what I want."

"Yes, Harry," she said softly. "I know. But you don't have a lot of other options. Fudge can't legally hold you without a trial, but since you escaped from Azkaban – which was completely impossible, you know – and blew up the Auror Headquarters, Fudge can charge you with lesser crimes and make them stick. He could hold you *legally* for a long time."

Ginny's face mirrored his own in shock and disbelief as she got to the end of the last page. "Harry?"

"I know," was his reply and they locked gazes, each one questioning the other.

"There's more," said Ron, who seemed to be more at peace with them now that he'd got to air his gripes. "We saw some wizards snooping around the Tourist office. They looked like Aurors."

Harry sighed and stood, taking his pack and slinging it onto his shoulders. "Let's go." Ginny struggled with her pack and took Harry's hand. "Let's go back home and get this over with... one way or another."

Hermione offered a warm smile and Ron simply nodded. They'd faced worse than Fudge in the past. This time, however, Harry was going to use his fame for something useful.

*

Harry's first stop after Apparating to the U.K. was to the newest shop in Diagon Alley. It was early morning, so the "Closed" sign was facing out and the lights were off. As soon as he and Ginny appeared in the cluttered but successful business, there was a muted, high-pitched tone from somewhere behind the counter and Fred and George instantly appeared from a concealed door.

"Mr. and Mrs. Potter," declared Fred after surreptitiously placing his wand back in his pocket. "We weren't expecting you back for a few more weeks."

George propped himself against the counter holding the till. "Yeah, we figured you'd be 'busy' for at least a few weeks," he said with waggling eyebrows.

Ginny cast her brothers a cold glare and then smirked as an idea formed in her mind. "Who says we're done with our honeymoon? We're just on break for a little while. Dodging Aurors isn't exactly conducive to romance..."

Fred snorted. "So why have you graced *us* with your presence?"

Harry stepped forward. "We need some help from you two."

"Us?" George asked with feigned humility. "What could we possibly have to offer the great Harry Potter?"

"And his new bride," piped in Fred.

Taking another step forward, Harry lowered his voice and produced a piece of parchment. "We need you two to launch a propaganda campaign against our esteemed Minister of Magic."

"We need you to get the word out on the street that Voldemort's gone and Harry's the one responsible for it," added Ginny.

Harry pointed to the parchment that both Fred and George were now reading with rapt attention. "It's all there."

Fred was the first one to look up. His grin was feral. "How very *Slytherin* of you, Harry."

"We didn't know you had it in you."

"Actually," Harry replied. "It was Ginny's idea. She's the conniving one."

Fred and George exchanged anticipatory glances. "When shall we begin, brother of mine?" asked the twin on the left.

"It'll take us a couple of hours to get some of this together, but I'd say by the end of the day, there won't be a witch or wizard who doesn't know ickle Harry is a bloody hero," answered the one of the right.

"Again," they said in unison.

"I guess we found the right pair of troublemakers," Harry said and pulled Ginny to him. "Now... I need to give myself up."

Ginny's face grew concerned, but it was mingled with determination. "Let's go find Tonks."

*

Owls. There were hundreds, if not thousands, of owls flying all across the country bearing the news of Harry's triumph over He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. It broke like a wave on the Wizarding world, sending witches and wizards into the streets in both the magical and Muggle worlds. It was the cause for intense celebration, surpassing the last time Voldemort fell, because this time, he was truly gone.

Cornelius Fudge looked at the front page of the *Daily Prophet* in apoplectic fury. How could the front page story have been altered? Had he not personally sent the approved copy through to the printing press? The only answer to these questions, of course, was that Harry Potter himself had made this happen. It was the only way Fudge could be kept from justly incarcerating Harry, for the public wouldn't allow it, and of all the things Fudge was sensitive to, it was public opinion.

Knowing that his careful plan was rapidly spiralling out of control, he flipped through his address list until he found the name of his Public Relations Officer. It was a last ditch effort, but Fudge had to appeal to the sensibilities of the people soon, or there would be no containing the diabolical plans that the Potter boy no doubt had in store to take over the Wizarding world.

*

A restless ripple swept through the crowd of witches and wizards assembled in the largest section of Diagon Alley. It was almost noon on the day that the public had learned that Voldemort was vanquished. A podium had been erected on the steps of Gringotts, which had closed for the newly minted holiday and the Minister of Magic had just stepped up to deliver a highly anticipated address. Little did those present suspect that instead of hearing about the great deeds of their hero and getting a chance to see him receive the honours and respect that he had earned, their Minister was about to tell them about Harry Potter's wickedness and his threat to their safety.

Fudge began with a terse acknowledgement of Voldemort's passing and then began to hoist Harry's character upon a very personal and pointed petard. Fudge painted an awful picture of disobedience, a blatant disregard for authority, the illegal use of Dark Magic, and finally, his capture and escape from Azkaban.

The crowd was shocked into silence as each charge was publicly levied against Harry. Then, as Fudge concluded his speech with a spittle-filled command for every witch and wizard to be on the alert for a "new and rising Dark power in Harry Potter", the subject himself appeared on the podium next to him.

"He's a menace to society and must be apprehended at once," Fudge said regally, not noticing the newcomer.

"You say that so convincingly – you must have practiced for hours in front of the mirror to get that look just right," Harry said, moving in from the shadows and stuffing his Invisibility Cloak into a pocket. "If you're so convinced that I'm a menace, how about if we see whether you have the

courage of your convictions?"

"Aurors, arrest this man!" Fudge cried shrilly. "I want him in Azkaban by nightfall!"

Harry held up a hand and the four men were instantly frozen. Moving the same hand into an approximation of a square, as if swearing an oath, he whispered, "*Contra proferentum* ."

Fudge was staring at Harry, flapping his hands in impotent dismay. "*Contra proferentum* ?" he replied, and then jumped as if his hand had been shocked.

Harry smirked at him with a satisfied look.

"This is the end for you, Potter!" Fudge said, his jowls shaking in rage.

"Oh, be careful what you wish for, Minister," Harry said, waving his hand once more to release the Aurors. He held out his hands to accept the restraining bond, much to the Minister's surprise.

There was an instant uproar from the crowd. A thousand boos and hisses reached their ears as the Aurors used the same magical handcuffs to bind Harry's hands behind his back. They searched for his wand amid a hail of rotten produce from the nearby grocery shop and chants of "Free Harry!" When they noticed his ring, they raised their eyebrows, but did not attempt to remove it.

Despite being bound for the one place he never wanted to see again, Harry smiled. When he locked eyes with a pair of brown ones framed by long, red hair, he nodded and, through his ring, said, *Are you sure about this?*

An evil grin met his nod and he heard Ginny's voice in his head. *Fudge'll never know what hit him* .

*

Harry looked out of the bars of his cell and saw the warden sneer at him as he passed in his morning check of the prisoners. Harry gave a cheerful wave back and watched a witch pass with him. He waited for the man to pass the next cell. As if on cue, there was a rustling and then a clunk as a pair of manacled hands hit the metal door.

"Jocelyn! I can't believe it. You made it!"

There was a bout of indecipherable mutters and then, "What do you mean I can't leave?"

At that moment another face appeared in front of Harry. Hermione Granger, dressed in a slim Muggle business skirt and blouse, accompanied by Tonks and Kingsley Shacklebolt appeared. "Hiya, Harry!" Tonks said brightly. Kingsley snuffed nervously half-behind Tonks, keeping his eyes glued to the floor.

Harry made a motion to be quiet and pointed toward the cell next door.

"Minister," said the female voice that was obviously Jocelyn. "I'm afraid there's nothing I can do. You got yourself into this and you'll have to get yourself out."

"But you're my solicitor! I'm the Minister, for Merlin's sake. Certainly there's something you can do?"

There was the sound of shuffling papers. "Here is my outline of your case , Minister," she said coolly.

"What does this mean? You... You're leaving?" asked Fudge, his voice quavering in dismay.

Jocelyn chuckled. "Minister, I signed on with you because I thought it would look good on my C. V. I didn't agree to go down with the ship."

Fudge spluttered for a minute as the sound of high-heeled shoes echoed down the hallway.

"Bloody career-minded witches," Fudge spat and then they heard his retreating footsteps.

Hermione smirked and then motioned for Tonks to open the cell door. Harry stepped back and shoved his hands in his pockets as the three of them entered.

Tonks whistled low and long. "Do you think you could at least *pretend* to be in prison, Harry?"

"What?" Harry asked with a shrug. "You not like my amendments?"

The first thing Harry had done when he'd arrived back in his cell was to lose the manacles. Having not just depleted his magical reserves from titanic battles, he was able to concentrate on the magic binding his hands and wandlessly break the spell, as he'd done with the shield in the Auror Office. Then, he'd redecorated his cell into an approximation of the Gryffindor common room and then Transfigured his bunk to a full-sized four-poster bed, complete with a red duvet and matching bed hangings.

Kingsley was still keeping Tonks between himself and Harry. Harry was through playing coy with the man.

"Kingsley?" Harry said and sat down in a squashy recliner. The bald chief of the Auror Department raised his head in time to see a butterbeer fly from a nearby refrigerator. He caught it with a deft hand and looked incredulously at it for a second. "Pull up a chair and have a cold one on me."

Kingsley looked like he was going to refuse, when Harry waved his hand again. A chair pushed into the back of the man's knees and Kingsley fell into it with a wobble. "Okay."

"Let's get something straight," said Harry, popping the top off his own beverage and passing one to Tonks and Hermione. "I don't hold a grudge against you for following orders, but I *do* think you should have used better judgement when I raided your office."

Kingsley nodded sullenly. "I can see now that what a ponce I was. Forgive me?"

Harry grinned. "Definitely! I wouldn't want to be at odds with my future boss, now would I?"

His head shot up at this, his drink forgotten. "What do you...?"

"As soon as all this business is behind us, I'm going to apply to the Auror Academy. Do you think I have a chance of making the cut?"

Kingsley choked and Tonks slapped his back a few times before he was able to recover. "Er?"

Hermione took that moment to plop down on the recliner next to Harry. "Stop torturing the poor man, Harry," she said and handed a manila folder to him. "Here's a summary of Fudge's case and our defence."

Harry waved his hand and the air seemed to press in on their ears. "Silencing Charm," he explained when the Aurors gave him a questioning glance. "Don't want Fudge to get the goods on Hermione's defence, do we?"

Leafing through the twenty-page document, Harry quickly became dizzy with the legal mumbo-jumbo he was faced with. "Can you give me the quick and dirty, Hermione? What's Fudge's solicitor all bent out of shape about?"

"*Contra Proferentum*," Hermione began, assuming her 'Professor' tone, "is a lovely legal phrase for 'against the writer', which in this case means that the accuser gets the same treatment as the accused."

"So that means when I got Fudge to say that, he agreed to..." said Harry, his mind quickly catching up with all that had happened in the past day and a half.

"By ordering you into pre-trial confinement," Hermione supplied, "he agreed to be subjected to the same treatment as you. In fact," she continued, her eyes alight with mirth, "he has to endure whatever he does to you." She began to tick things off on her fingers, "If you're deprived of liberty, he is deprived of liberty. If you're set free, Fudge is set free. If you're tried and acquitted, Fudge is sentenced to the punishment sought against you..."

Tonks jaw was somewhere near her knees and Harry found himself almost as surprised. "Wow," was the first thing that came to mind. Then he leered at the wall separating his cell from Fudge. "He has no idea, does he?"

"He might, now that he's spoken with his solicitor. I saw her flipping through the same book I found this in." Hermione took a swig of butterbeer. "But that's not the best part, Harry."

"How does it get better than this?" he asked incredulously.

"Well, there's an addendum to the law three years later that managed to stay on the books. It was attached to another law that gave certain peasants the right to sue their masters."

"So what did it say?" asked Tonks, who was hanging on the edge of her seat.

Hermione told them, and for the first time in his life while not under the influence of a Dementor, Harry fainted dead away.

*

The courtroom was packed. Demand to see the trial had been so great that the Wizengamot had decided to expand the bowl-shaped room to the size of a Greek amphitheatre. Instead of a hundred or so visitors in the galley, there were now almost thirty thousand. There were people from various countries, each in their best local robes. It reminded Harry strongly of the Quidditch World Cup in 1995.

In the stands overlooking the accused sat the entire Wizengamot, headed by Gawain Robards, who took the post after leaving from his position as head of the Auror Department.

Harry was led into the 'room' by a contingent of six Aurors, among them Kingsley Shacklebolt. There was an instant reaction from the crowd as they all rose to their feet and clapped loudly. Harry bowed his head and smiled at the cheers and yells of support that rang out over the din of applause.

Chief Warlock Robards stood and banged his gavel noisily. "Order, order," he called and the crowd quieted as Harry sat and was magically chained to the defendant's chair.

Robards was a thick-set man with ink-black eyes and a crop of short grey stubble on top of his head. He wore a majestic set of creased, royal blue robes upon which was perched five rows of ribbons indicating his accomplishments as an Auror. Harry detected the glimmer of a bright gold crest set upon a red and blue ribbon that meant the man had been given the Order of Merlin, first class.

Robards cleared his throat but remained standing. "Harry James Potter. You are accused of using Dark Magic on Lucius Malfoy and Severus Snape, and of murdering the man formerly known as Tom Marvolo Riddle. How do you plead?"

Harry was surprised that there hadn't been more charges and said as much to Ginny through their rings.

Hermione talked them down to those three charges, citing lack of evidence , Ginny replied.

So does that mean they have evidence of the others ? he asked, but was interrupted by Robards.

"I asked, how do you plead, Mr. Potter?"

A shiver ran through his body and Harry swallowed. "I plead not guilty, your honour."

A ripple of hushed conversation broke out among the audience and Robards clapped his gavel a few more times. "Very well," the wizard said. "Who will read the charges?"

Minister Fudge bustled forward, a thick folder under his arm and took his place at a podium to the left of Robards.

Fudge put on a pair of tiny spectacles and perched them on the very tip of his nose. "Hem," he said, parroting his former assistant and sneered over his glasses at Harry. "The defendant, Harry James Potter, is accused of using the Imperius Curse on Lucius Malfoy, the Cruciatus Curse on Severus Snape, and the Avada Kedavra curse on Tom Riddle."

There was another ripple of noise from the auditorium, but this one was much more subdued. The onlookers were obviously shocked by the specifics of this information.

Harry raised an eyebrow at the bit about Malfoy and Snape, but resolved to let the trial continue as planned.

"You may proceed with your arguments, Minister Fudge," Robards said and sat down behind the podium.

It was a long hour and a half as Harry listened to Fudge ramble on and on about things that clearly never happened. He looked over to his barrister and she gave him a reassuring smile. They already knew the case against them and had planned accordingly.

Fudge sat and Hermione approached the podium on the right of Chief Warlock Robards.

"Ladies and Gentlemen of the Wizengamot and of the Magical Community at large," she began, standing tall, with her back ramrod straight. "I intend to prove beyond reasonable doubt that Harry James Potter is, in fact, innocent of the charges presented this day and furthermore, to demonstrate that Minister Fudge," she said this with great derision, "has fabricated every single piece of evidence that will be presented today. Thank you." She sat primly on her chair and winked at Harry. He smiled.

She's good , Ginny commented.

You got that right .

"Minister Fudge," Robards said briskly. "You may call your first witness."

"I call Boris Borgin to the stand."

Borgin stood from among a group of wizards on the front of the visitor's bench and proceeded to a chair opposite Harry in the middle of the room. There was a patch over his right eye, where Harry recalled he had been stabbed by a wand the previous year. Borgin was sworn in by a court clerk and Fudge began to rifle through his notes.

"Borgin, where were you on the night of June 5, 1998?" asked Fudge.

The man cleared his throat. "In my shop, sir. Borgin and Burkes."

"Who came into your shop that night?"

"Two men came in about nine-thirty and two more about fifteen minutes later."

"Can you identify the four men for the court?"

Borgin nodded. "The first two was Mr. Lucius Malfoy and his son. Very respectable wizards."

"And the second pair?" Fudge asked quickly as if he didn't want to be bothered with any extraneous details.

"Mr. Ronald Weasley and Harry Potter." Borgin's eyes narrowed on Harry's as he said his name.

Fudge seemed much happier at this information. "What happened when Mr. Potter and Mr. Weasley saw Mr. Malfoy?"

"Well," the oily man said as he adjusted himself on the chair. "It was like this, see. Mr. Potter pulls his wand and hexes young Draco, quick as you please. Mr. Malfoy took his wand out to defend himself and that's when Potter hit him with the Imperius Curse."

Fudge was dancing with glee as Borgin finished his account. "Very good. Very good," Fudge said and closed his notes. "Just as I suspected!"

"Are you finished with the witness?" Robards said imperiously.

"Yes, yes," replied Fudge and took his seat.

Miss Granger? You may cross examine.”

Hermione wasted no time, having a single sheet of parchment already in hand. “Mr. Borgin, would you mind telling the court what Mr. Potter asked Mr. Malfoy to do after he cast the Imperius Curse?”

Borgin’s face fell ever so slightly and his eyes flicked obviously to Fudge. Fudge looked pained as he was forced to nod at the man, as if to say, “Go on.”

It was almost comical as Harry watched almost all the men and women in the Wizengamot raise their collective eyebrows as this interaction.

“Well... er...” Borgin said lamely. “That is to say, I didn’t exactly hear what Potter said after that.”

Hermione simply glowered at the man. “Your description of the defendant’s actions seemed rather detailed, Mr. Borgin. You mean to tell me that your powers of recollection simply stop after Mr. Potter supposedly cast an Unforgivable Curse?”

“Er... that’s right,” Borgin said with another eye flick to the Minister. Fudge hid his face in his hands.

“I find it hard to believe that the defendant simply cast the Imperius Curse without then issuing some kind of command,” Hermione continued. “In fact, there is nothing illegal with simply casting this particular curse, only if the cursed party is made to act against his or her will.”

Borgin’s mouth simply hung slightly open while Hermione continued.

“Objection,” Fudge said quickly, his face a ghostly white.

“Overruled,” was the reply from Robards.

Hermione smirked. She pulled another parchment from her stack and handed it to Chief Robards. “This is a sworn statement from seventeen witches and wizards that saw the defendant at a wedding reception that night. You’ll find it interesting to note that several of the signatures match people currently sitting on the Wizengamot and I’m sure their memories of that night will be clearer than the Minister’s witness.” She walked back to her podium and waved at Amos Diggory and Marjorie Clearwater, who was sitting next to him. Marjorie was Penelope’s step-mother and Percy’s mother-in-law. It was Percy and Penelope’s wedding they had attended with Amos.

Robards looked sternly down his nose at Borgin. “Do you have anything to say for yourself, Mr. Borgin?”

His power of speech seeming to have left him, Borgin sat and gaped at Fudge.

“Very well.” Robards snapped his fingers and manacles appeared on Borgin’s wrists.

This seemed to bring him out of his stupor. Borgin stood and shook his bound fists at Fudge. “You promised me protection! You said I wouldn’t be punished!”

Robards narrowed his eyes and pressed a button on the podium. Borgin vanished with a pop, apparently having been transported to a detention cell awaiting a trial of his own.

Sporadic applause broke out among crowd. “We knew you didn’t do it Harry!” cried a middle-aged witch from halfway down the seats.

She was sporting a large handmade sign that read, “I Love Harry Potter.” His cheeks tinged pink and Ginny’s voice rang in his ears. *Don’t even think about it, Harry. You’re mine.*

I wouldn’t have it any other way, he replied and focused on Fudge, who, once again, took his place at the podium.

“Very well, very well,” he said briskly. “I call...”

The next witness, a witch who resembled Rita Skeeter far too much for Harry’s liking, was just as damning to Fudge’s case. She obviously knew that Fudge’s promise of protection was useless and had no desire to end up in Azkaban on contempt and perjury charges. Because Snape had disappeared after Voldemort’s defeat, there was no one else to testify against him. That left the last charge. Killing Voldemort with Avada Kedavra.

With two of his charges flushed thoroughly down the proverbial toilet, Fudge seemed at his wits end.

“I personally saw Potter kill He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named!” he roared. “He used Dark Magic and he must be punished!”

Robards frowned. “Mr. Potter, would you care to tell us what happened from your perspective?”

With a sigh, Harry nodded. He knew it would come to this in the end, but he also knew that it was better to get the truth out in the open. “Hermione, Ron, and I spent the last two years searching for Horcruxes made by Voldemort.” There were instant whispers and hushed conversations around the room. Even Robards didn’t seem to mind, however, as he looked completely shocked by this information. “There were six of them, and we destroyed them all. When Voldemort attacked the school, we cornered him in one of the classrooms.”

Harry paused and noticed how silent the courtroom was. Even Fudge seemed to lose his agitation as everyone leaned in closer to hear Harry’s testimony. “Voldemort tried to Apparate out, but the wards were too strong. I knew I couldn’t cast Avada Kedavra, and frankly, I thought he might have come up with a way to block it after the last time I killed him. So instead of using hate to kill him, I used love.”

Hermione sniffed. “What was the spell, Harry?”

"It was a Cheering Charm. Only... I used it like a Patronus. I concentrated on all the love everyone had ever given me and then cast it at Voldemort. He... just couldn't stand feeling that amount of love and he died."

Harry sat and thought about that day and all that had happened. It was the first time he'd really contemplated what he'd done and, while the thought of killing anyone brought a sharp, nasty taste to his mouth, he felt that he'd done it right. Voldemort had to die and he died from the one thing he couldn't stand – love.

"Rubbish!" yelled Fudge, breaking the silence that had followed Harry's remarks.

"It's the truth," Harry replied quietly.

"You lie!" he said once more before Chief Robards cleared his throat.

"That will be enough, Minister," he said calmly. "The Wizengamot has enough evidence to reach a verdict, I believe."

Several heads bobbed in agreement and the collection of witches and wizards cleared the room.

*

It was a tedious three hours later that Harry was led back into the courtroom. The air was much lighter than before and he could feel the sense of foreboding lift away even though he didn't know *precisely* what the verdict would be on the last charge. Hermione had been consoling in her own way, but positively fretful at the amount of time it took.

"They should have been able to deliberate much quicker than that!" she'd said while anxiously twisting her robes.

As Chief Robards approached the podium to read the verdict, he noticed that Kingsley and Tonks flanked Fudge in his seat. Harry swallowed and held his breath.

"The Wizengamot has reached a verdict. The defendant, Harry James Potter, is formally cleared of all charges."

There was an instant uproar of applause and cheers from the crowd.

Ginny's voice chanted a familiar phrase in his head. *He got off. He got off. He got off.*

Harry smiled and found her beaming face in the stands. Hermione, however, was less than pleased.

"What took you so long to decide something so obvious?"

The Chief smirked and ignored Hermione's brashness. "Well, you see, we were all on per diem as long as the panel was deciding the case. We couldn't decide where to go to lunch." He shook the hand of Amos Diggory and walked away from the podium. "Now if you'll excuse us, we're going back for pudding and coffee."

Hermione gaped after him as Harry's shackles fell away. Fudge stood and was about to rush the stands, when Kingsley Petrified him. Tonks winked and produced a pair of handcuffs – the same ones Harry'd just had on his own hands.

The last time Harry saw the former Minister for Magic, he was being read his rights as he was carried away to Azkaban, his face frozen in fear.

*

Harry was instantly released (he wouldn't have settled for anything else) and Ginny was at his side in an instant. They hugged and kissed, heedless of the tens of thousands of onlookers. When a dozen flashes flared in their periphery, they still didn't stop their private celebration. When one of the reporters caught a glimpse of Ginny's diamond ring and exclaimed, "Is that a wedding ring?" they broke apart.

"Yes," Harry confirmed, straightening his glasses. "Ginny and I were married two weeks ago in Paris."

The throng of reporters grew tenfold and Harry instantly became tense. "We'd love to answer more questions, but we really must be going." He started walking toward the courtroom doors, but the ring of reports grew tighter and they began to pepper him and Ginny with questions. Ignoring all of it, Harry closed his eyes and gritted his teeth.

Ginny, I've had enough of this. Are you ready to make a dramatic exit?

Harry felt her squeeze his arms very tightly in response and just as the din of questions and popping camera flashes reached their zenith, Harry Apparated out of the courtroom.

*

Two weeks later, Harry and Ginny returned from New Zealand where they spent the rest of their honeymoon. They went to the Burrow first, as Harry hadn't had time to find a house or flat to call his own. It was early in the morning when he wandered downstairs for a cup of tea, his body still not adjusted to the time change.

"Morning, Harry dear," beamed Mrs. Weasley and handed him a warm cup of wakefulness. "Have a good sleep?"

"The best," Harry said after swallowing his first sip. "Don't know how I managed to sleep alone before."

“Isn’t that the truth,” she said with a knowing smile. “Luckily for me, it’s been long enough that I don’t remember not having Arthur there.”

As if speaking his name brought him there, Mr. Weasley stepped down the stairs in his dressing gown, a newspaper tucked under one arm. He sauntered over to his wife and gave her a peck on the cheek. “Morning, dear. Morning, Harry.”

“Morning,” they chorused back.

Mr. Weasley took one of the remaining cups and took a long sip. “Mmm. Good as ever, luv.” Then he turned to Harry and plopped the paper in front of him. “Seen any papers on your honeymoon?”

Harry shook his head and peered at the front page of that morning’s *Daily Prophet*. “Not a one.” The headline caught his immediate attention, as well as the one at the bottom of the page:

Minister Potter out of country for extended holiday. No mention of interim leadership until his return.

What will Minister Potter do differently? Youngest Minister ever likely to revamp entire Ministry.

Skimming the article, Harry snorted and pushed it back at his father-in-law. “Same song, different subject, I suppose. Just because I got the post from an incompetent fool doesn’t mean I’m destined to do a better job.”

Ginny descended the stairs and blindly made her way to Harry’s side. “You left without me,” she whimpered and planted a kiss on his cheek.

“Sorry, luv,” Harry said and pulled the remaining tea in front of her. With a flick of his hand, the right amount of milk and sugar fell into it and began to stir itself. “Have some tea. It’ll make you feel better.”

Ginny made a non-committal noise and took the steaming mug into her hands, cradling it as if it were a newborn child.

“Well,” Harry said, pointing back to the paper. “They got one thing right. I’ll be shaking things up. I mean, I knew it was corrupt, but when I attended my first cabinet meeting, I was shocked at how deep it ran.”

It was Mr. Weasley’s turn to snort. “I don’t doubt your sincerity, son, but there have been attempts at reform before. Many a powerful witch and wizard have met their political doom in the face of the slippery ghosts of politics.”

Harry took another sip of tea and reached an arm around his wife, pulling her close. She set her head on his shoulder and let out a sigh. “Maybe,” he said slowly, staring through the steam of his mug. “But then, there’s never been a Minister in office that wasn’t elected and doesn’t give a damn about politics or being re-elected.”

Mr. Weasley was shocked speechless at this pronouncement, but then a grin spread across his face.

Ginny lifted her head and pulled a face. “You know, I’m not sure what your plans are, Mr. Potter, but my husband had better give some thought into how he’s going to provide for me and our children.”

Harry choked on his tea. “Children? What are you saying?”

With a glimmer in her eye, Ginny smirked. “I’m saying that *when* we have babies – and we’ll have lots – you’d better be able to provide for them. If you burn all your bridges on your first job, there won’t be many doors open to you.”

Considering her practicality, Harry nodded. “All right; I’ll make you a deal, dear. I won’t do anything that gets me sacked, or that is absolutely wrong.”

Ginny looked up to him. “And what will I be doing?”

Then, as a memory surfaced in Harry’s head of a lesson one day in his fifth year, he kissed Ginny’s forehead. “You’re going to give birth to twelve children and I’ll live to a ripe old age working as Minister for Magic.”

Mrs. Weasley gasped while her husband chuckled. “Twelve?” she asked.

Harry’s eyes glistened with mirth. “Oh yes, I heard it in a prophecy.”

The End