



A codex takes scrolls of parchment, and cuts the thin skins into sheets. The sheets of parchment are then sewn together on one edge with a cover material, usually a thicker skin or thin piece of wood. Many codices are similar to a modern day journal purchased from a stationer or bookshop, blank or mostly blank and added to by the owner. Because they are from the pre-printing press era, codices are usually one-of-a-kind books.

Riddle assumed Slytherin's *Continuo Aetas* was unique, but he was not entirely correct. Slytherin and his wife Rowena Ravenclaw did their initial research into Soul and Spirit magics together, producing the core readings on the two subjects as partners, and identical portions of this material were included, in their own hands, in both their copies of *Continuo Aetas*. The couple separated at the time of the split of the founders. The entries made in subsequent years were unique as each continued their research independently. Salazar chose to focus on Soul magic, while Rowena further explored Spirit magic.

Spirit magic as Rowena Ravenclaw's copy of that original codex stated, takes a person motivated by supreme love, who, in premeditation, gives up his or her life to protect another. Rowena further expounded on the practice of Spirit magic: "It is considered virtually impossible because suicide is the only sure method to give up one's life at the time of perfect preparation, and suicide runs contradictory to perfect love. If one is killed, there is usually no time to prepare properly to perform Spirit magic...."

Although Rowena's conclusion was correct, circumstances have aligned to allow the successful performance of Spirit magic on at least three occasions in history. The details of these instances have never been released to the general populace before now.

A noted Seer, Rowena foresaw both her own death at the hands of her ex-husband, and the subsequent final battle between Salazar and Godric Gryffindor. Salazar had left the three other Founders nearly two decades earlier, but now planned to return with an evil army that vastly outnumbered the forces of the Light protecting Hogwarts. Rowena divined that Salazar had not created a Horcrux regardless of his fascination with the concept. He had rightly feared the ultimate consequences of such actions when they were still partners, and she was relieved to scry that he had not and would not change his mind.

Sobering though was the reality that while the rest of their forces faced Salazar's army, Godric would battle not only Salazar Slytherin, but also a death squad of twenty wizards and witches specially trained by Salazar himself for the purpose of defeating Godric. Salazar had spent fifteen years preparing this cadre to defeat the Lion Founder, because of a prophecy that declared the fate of Hogwarts would rest on Gryffindor alone.

Salazar snuck into the castle one night using the passageway the Weasley twins would find closed centuries later due to a cave in. He came to Rowena hoping to persuade her to accompany him to safety. Rowena refused to go with him, and Godric came upon them, having detected Salazar's entry into the castle.

In his frustration, Salazar pulled his dagger and killed Rowena. Having foreseen him do just that, Ravenclaw began the silent magical incantation to perform Spirit magic, completing the words just as the dagger slit her carotid artery. Slytherin escaped and Godric held Rowena for her few remaining seconds. Her last mental communication asked him to read a letter in a bottom drawer of her desk after he defeated Salazar.

In that final battle Godric Gryffindor fought like the lion of his namesake, even though he was hit by spell after spell and blade after blade. He should have died many times that day before his final confrontation with Salazar. Amazingly he survived not only the battle, but for many years afterwards, though not without scars, both physical and mental.

At the end of the day Slytherin drew his wand and his blade hoping to defeat his nemesis at last, but in the last moments of his life Salazar saw Godric's brown eyes change to Rowena's eyes of blue. He knew then that his wife had successfully performed Spirit Magic. Her entire spirit essence now existed inside of Godric Gryffindor. Accepting that she had been right all along Salazar didn't bother attempting to block the killing thrust of the even then famous, Sword of Gryffindor.

Godric stood perplexed at his good fortune to survive so many deadly curses and blade strikes. Only when he read Rowena's letter and found out about her sacrifice did he understand. Godric decided to hide his sword forever, only to be called up by one who truly was a Gryffindor, regardless of bloodline.

Godric and his wife Helga followed Rowena's exact instructions to release her spirit essence from Godric and send her on to the Next Great Adventure. They also found and delivered Rowena's codex into the hands of her favorite student Anselm Potter, as she requested.

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Little else has been written on Soul or Spirit magic and that was mostly idle speculation or fiction. However, the concept of making a Horcrux was known among serious aficionados of arcane and Dark magic lore.

The Slytherin and Ravenclaw codices are the only works to describe step-by-step how to perform both Soul and Spirit magic. Salazar's codex rested in the Chamber of Secrets waiting to be found by Tom Riddle, who assumed upon finding it that he possessed the only copy. Tom had first heard of Horcruxes when Horace Slughorn mentioned the concept in one of his informal get-togethers. That casual comment had started Tom on his search for the definitive work on immortality. He read of Horcruxes in several dusty tomes in the Restricted Section of the Hogwarts Library, but there was no information to be had on how to actually make one. Then Tom found the Chamber of Secrets. It was only a year later, after Tom had made his first Horcrux and decided it was a fragile thing indeed, that he asked the vain Potions master how many times a person might split his soul.

Although at the time of their separation, Salazar's codex was a mirror image of Rowena's work, Tom ignored the early references to the self-sacrificial Spirit magic. Salazar himself had penned notes in the side margins proclaiming such actions as ludicrous. Consumed with achieving his own immortality, Tom focused instead on the later entries-- Salazar's unique additions which focused on Horcrux making.

In Rowena's codex she bluntly discussed Horcrux making and the personal horrors of shattering one's soul. She penned a bold statement at the start of the section on Horcruxes soundly condemning the practice. Instead, her codex focused on the grand design of giving one's life for another. It

went into great detail on how to give up one's complete spirit essence to imbue another with a protection that only the purest of premeditated love and sacrifice could produce.

The Good Book states, "Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it." You need not believe any religion or faith to see the higher truth in these words. Rowena proved it worked.

Tom Riddle sought to preserve his life for eternity. In doing so he made himself less than human, condemning himself to an evil existence regardless of his immortality or eventual death. He shattered his soul, and in selfishly seeking to safeguard his life, Tom sowed the seeds of his demise.

However, the second half of the saying from the Good Book is also true; he or she who gives up his or her spirit shall live forever. Death really has no power over such a sacrifice.

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When Riddle's last Horcrux was formed, *Tom* didn't make it as he'd planned. That soul fragment came to rest in a receptacle *very unlike* the previous five. The diary, ring, cup, locket, and dagger were all inanimate objects and the fractured pieces of Tom's soul completely permeated them. The last Horcrux receptacle was different, and Riddle never meant it to be the depository of the final smattering of his wretched soul. He meant to possess a first edition copy of *Moste Potente Potions*. However, the book didn't become the Horcrux, a living being did-all because Tom changed the steps in the ritual.

And so it was that a simple procedural modification eventually led to the downfall of the most evil Dark Lord since the days of Egyptian magical mass murderers thousands of years before.

The second Horcrux Riddle created was not Helga's cup or Salazar's ring as Dumbledore had speculated. It was Godric's dagger, or rather, what Tom believed was the blade that previously belonged to Godric Gryffindor, as Borgin wanted everyone to believe. It was a beautiful dagger, definitely created in the time of the Founders, and did resemble Gryffindor's sword, though no one had seen that weapon in centuries. The dagger had actually belonged to a wealthy wizard of limited power who commissioned its creation after seeing the sword of legend.

That fact is of little significance, for almost anything can be made into a Horcrux, and it was only Voldemort's vanity that insisted on historical memorabilia for such purposes. If he had embedded a fragment of his miserable soul in a mundane horseshoe, incased it in glass, and then tossed it into the North Sea, his dubious immortality would have been assured.

Vanity, thy name is Voldemort.

Riddle discovered that a distraction during the moments right after the killing required to split his soul could cost him the ability to make the Horcrux at that time. To make the dagger Horcrux Tom planned to kill a particularly irksome Gryffindor who'd dogged his early days at Hogwarts. This person had been a sixth-year prefect when Riddle was a first-year, and had watched him closely. The lion's pride had gone on to the Auror Academy, and he was the first Auror Riddle killed.

The problem was that Aurors hardly ever travel alone. Riddle had observed this nemesis for nearly an hour before taking his life to make the Horcrux. Riddle never knew if it was simply bad luck that the dead Auror's partner appeared during the simple ritual, or if the bothersome interloper had responded to some signal from his partner.

The long and short of it is that in mid incantation Riddle was forced to drop and roll to avoid a Stunner. The short battle upset the limited time schedule allowing the creation of the Horcrux. Tom didn't use the death of the second Auror for this hideous purpose because it disturbed the balance of the mental preparations required for the nefarious task. Observing the rites and timing of this necromantic ritual was everything.

Another victim was easily found, but before Riddle attempted the ritual again, he rearranged the steps so that everything could be prepared *before* the Killing Curse, including the chant splitting his soul. This reordering of the steps caused the soul piece possession of the Horcrux to occur automatically right after the murder. It took several attempts to perfect the ritual changes before the dagger became Riddle's second Horcrux, but a shortage of people to kill had never been a problem for the indiscriminating young Dark Lord. Following the successful possession of the dagger, the locket, the cup, and the ring received their particles of rancid soul in the newly prescribed manner. So when it was time to create the final Horcrux, Riddle gave little thought to what *might* happen, as his reordered ritual was now well tested.

Riddle loved the idea of killing baby Harry Potter, Dumbledore's prophesied hope, to create his final external Horcrux. Instead, it proved to be the death of Voldemort's body that provided the catalyst for this last containment of evil.

Had Riddle not already been protected by the existing Horcruxes, he would have simply died when the Killing Curse rebounded from little Harry, and if the ritual had not been changed to automate the process, the final soul split would not have occurred after his disembodiment.

But the process *was* automatic; therefore, the final soul split did occur and the final Horcrux was created. However, the copy of *Moste Potente Potion*, did not become the bearer. All human knowledge, magical and Muggle, knows not exactly how it happened. The mere possibility had never been speculated upon in any manner. After all Riddle is the only one to have ever made more than one Horcrux, and such a possibility never occurred to him.

But that doesn't mean there was no explanation for what happened, it was simply unknown-until now. There is a reason for everything. Some explanations are legalistic, some are scientific, some are metaphysical, and some are spiritual, but there is a reason for everything.

The previously unknown truth is that soul fragments are drawn to other soul parts or spirit essences existing in close proximity to the location of the soul-fracturing event. That is, if an item already bearing a soul piece or spirit essence is in close proximity to a newly released soul particle (that which makes a Horcrux), the released partial soul would be drawn to the container already embedded with a divine spark-- even if the person

splitting his soul has prepared another receptacle according to the prescribed necromantic ritual.

Plainly stated, the final released bit of Riddle's soul ignored the prepared and intended *Moste Potente Potion* and went right into little Harry Potter at the point from which the Killing Curse rebounded. This occurred because Harry already contained a spirit essence before the curse was cast. That pre-existing spirit essence is also why the Boy-Who-Lived, lived.

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When Riddle's soul fracture entered Harry that fateful night in 1981, the baby's soul and spirit, along with his magical core helped the more powerful spirit essence already within him to subdue Riddle's soul particle and confined it to the curse scar. This epic battle was over in nanoseconds.

When Harry plunged the basilisk fang into the diary, another particle of Riddle soul was released—not destroyed. Had nothing attractive to that soul remnant been within several miles, it would have dissipated into the ethos, realm beyond, perdition, or who knows where. Instead, it also entered Harry. The diary soul piece joined the fragment that had resided in the boy since Voldemort's defeat in 1981. Now two-sevenths of Riddle's anima resided in young Potter. That along with the emigre whole spirit essence ensured the Boy-Who-Lived would not become the Boy-Who-Was-Poisoned-to-Death. Although Fawkes received the credit for saving Harry's life, he merely helped him to heal more rapidly than would have been the case without the phoenix's assistance. Of course, this time the boy's own soul, spirit and magical core were much better developed and helped the spirit essence to a quick victory over the newly released piece of Riddle.

The triumvirate - soul, spirit, and magical core - are very important to this scientific explanation of Voldemort's defeat.

Muggles have a soul, spirit, and body. Magical folks do too, but they also possess a reservoir of power that makes them not Muggles. This so-called magical core overlays the soul and spirit. Though in direct contact, the soul and spirit don't really interact with the magical core. Until Harry.

When each Horcrux contaminant entered the lad, it attempted to completely take over. In each attack Harry's spirit and soul joined his magical core to help the unique spirit essence acting as a benevolent, protective barrier. The attacking Horcrux scrap tried to assimilate the baby, and Harry's little spirit, soul, and core joined the emigre spirit essence to defend its rightful place.

This action greatly stimulated Harry's magical core. Magicals rarely have that much intense interaction between their spirits and souls, and their magical cores—particularly at the tender age of one year old.

As stated earlier, at the destruction of the diary, Harry's partnership of spirit, soul, and magical core helped the spirit essence greatly, and the three became much more powerful as a team.

Potters have always been powerful wizards and witches, and Lily Evans brought many great strengths to the Potter gene pool. Harry Potter would have been a very powerful wizard had none of what is known as the Harry Potter Story occurred. But not even Merlin had the advantages that Harry would receive from his spirit, soul, and magical core interacting and integrating so.

This mingling and cooperation of spirit, soul, and magical core not only allowed Harry to produce a Patronus in his third year at Hogwarts, but it also enabled him to produce a fully corporeal Patronus powerful enough to drive off a hundred dementors. A fully corporeal Patronus from a thirteen-year-old was unheard of, and no witch or wizard had ever dispatched a hundred dementors with one *Expecto Patronum*.

Harry summoned his Firebolt from the castle to the Quidditch pitch in the First Task of the Triwizard Tournament. It was a feat impossible for Filius Flitwick, one of the best Charms mages in the recorded history of Hogwarts.

Harry defeated Riddle in the graveyard. A *Priori Incantatem* would kill a caster if it was driven back to the wand of one of the two so entangled. Voldemort only survived because of his existing Horcruxes. Harry's victory in that situation is even more profound when one considers that the two-sevenths of Riddle's soul residing in his curse scar fought the Boy-Who-Lived from within as Voldemort attacked him from without.

Harry did not really duel with Riddle in the Department of Mysteries, but he could have. The results are unpredictable as with any other never-to-have-occurred events in history. The lad's lack of confidence might have reduced his ability to succeed, but the power that Harry always found when it was desperately needed was there for his asking.

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During Harry Potter's sixth year a third-seventh of Riddle entered his being when Dumbledore shattered Slytherin's ring. Once again all that is Harry in his ever-increasing state of magical growth combined with the protective spirit essence within him to fight the joining of Riddle's parts and their renewed assault on their host. The fight lasted for just over a second and caught Harry asleep. He awoke screaming and thought it was another Voldemort dream - though the gist of that particular nightmare completely eluded him.

All of Harry's sixth year the three-sevenths of Riddle roiled around in our hero. As a result Harry suffered in many ways - nightmares, slight bouts of depression, fits of anger, and general moodiness. It even affected his friends. The three-sevenths of Tom Riddle felt sure that if it could just gather to itself another seventh, it would be successful in dominating its elusive host. So the evil within Harry's curse scar tested its barriers, causing these mental and emotional disturbances.

The fact is, the three-sevenths of Riddle was correct. Four-sevenths of Riddle in its evil, malicious state very well might have overcome all that was the young man Harry Potter, despite the aid of the emigre soul essence and despite the increased powers that Harry had derived from the struggle.

But that would not be a problem. You see, when Harry found and finally destroyed Helga Hufflepuff's cup, all that is Harry, and the original emigre spirit essence, were no longer alone in the fight.

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Harry Potter, Hermione Granger, and Ron Weasley plotted and planned in the expanded and partitioned Dudley's second bedroom until Harry's seventeenth birthday. The Dursleys were given no choice in the matter with two fully authorized and of-age wand-wielders pointing their 'stick-thingsies' in the Muggles' faces. The three Disapparated away on his birthday without a word to Harry's relatives.

On August sixteenth the three found Helga Hufflepuff's cup in a small abandoned shack in the magical forest in Albania. Three Death Eaters lay in ambush, and succeeded in wounding Harry's two friends before our hero dispatched them. A fourth Death Eater Apparated to the shack as Harry stepped out with the cup hovering before him. Potter divined the wordless attack and ducked the *Sectumsempra* cast his way. Harry rolled and came up with his wand ready and Apparated to a place between the Death Eater and his wounded friends to protect them. This brought him not ten feet away from the attacker.

The Death Eater removed his mask and the sneer of Severus Snape appeared from the hood of the black robe.

"Shall we, one more time, Potter, talk of the failings of your father and the dotage of that old man Dumbledore who left you so ill prepared to face even me, much less my Lord? Why I'd--"

Harry interrupted the diatribe saying, "Let's not," and cast a spell.

Snape's common battle practice was to use Legilimency to surface read the thoughts of anyone he encountered. He'd used it successfully against Harry the night the potions master killed Dumbledore. Harry had run after Snape almost broadcasting aloud which curse or jinx he planned to cast, and Severus had flicked each attack away as if batting at gnats.

On this August afternoon, knowing Potter had no discipline and could not have improved much at all in his fighting skills in the past two months; Snape read Harry's surface thoughts and discovered Potter was about to cast a Stunner. The red flash of light headed his way and Snape raised the appropriate Shield spell to deflect it. The red beam of light passed right through his *Protego* and slit open the potions master's gullet. There have been a number of invasive cutting spells, charms, and curses conceived over the years, and Hermione had found one that produced a red beam of light just like the Stunner and could not be stopped by a basic Shield spell.

Snape vainly tried to hold in his entrails for the minute he remained alive. Harry stepped up to him and simply said, "Not only did I practice my Occlumency, I trained myself in deceptive mental signal casting to surprise you. Hermione taught me actually. Amazing what I can learn from a real teacher, but then Hermione is the only one who ever taught me anything about potions--enough to enter N.E.W.T.s level and excel."

Snape opened his mouth to make his last retort but Harry quickly cast a Silencing spell.

"No, Professor. No last words for you. Just a last thought for you to take to Hell with you. A Know-It-All Mudblood, a blood traitor, and the son of James Potter have outsmarted you and will defeat your half-blood Dark Lord." Snape opened his mouth again but Harry stopped him. "Nothing for you to say. We know where all the Horcruxes are, and I've discovered the power the Dark Lord knows not. That's what the last half of the prophecy stated, that I would find a power he doesn't know and kill him. You lose and he loses."

Harry could tell his second most hated enemy would die in seconds, so he fabricated another lie to torment Snape's last moments. "I will tell Neville Longbottom you died crying for mercy, urinating on the ground, and voiding your bowels in fear of the unknown. Neville should make a grand Patronus with that thought."

One last half second of disdain crossed the potions master's face, before Snape never made an expression again.

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When Harry brought Hufflepuff's cup out of the old shack, the warning bells had sounded at Riddle Manor in Little Hangleton. Snape had Apparated to the scene immediately, while Wormtail scurried off to tell his master. Riddle silently Apparated to the scene, Disillusioned, just in time to see a basilisk fang drive into the basin of the cup and release his soul smattering. Riddle drew his wand to kill Potter, the bane of his existence, but paused when the fourth seventh of his soul exited the cup and immediately entered Potter's famed curse scar. Ever the pragmatist, Riddle waited before acting, curious to watch and analyze what was to follow.

The discovery of Horcrux creation had not ended Tom Riddle's interest in various methods of maintaining his immortality. He had not found another way to accomplish what the Horcrux did, but he had discovered a number of interesting tools and techniques to analyze death and dying.

He now utilized one of those tools--a form of magical sight that allowed him to watch the battle inside Potter for control of his being. This magical sight was limited to souls only, so Voldemort could not see spirits or magical cores. He only saw Harry's soul fighting the pieces of his own soul. It never occurred to Riddle that Harry's soul did not fight alone. His magic and his spirit were also engaged in the struggle along with two additional spirit essences that dwelled inside Harry.

All that was Harry joined the original emigre spirit essence in fighting fourth-sevenths of Riddle's soul in a pitched battle. Five seconds is an eternity on the spiritual plane, and that is how long it was before the second spirit essence joined in to help them confine the newly strengthened evil within Harry's curse scar.

Harry had Portkeyed his friends away before attempting to destroy the cup. He Disapparated away after them the second his spirit-level battle was over and before Riddle could act. The Dark Lord had much to ponder, but after witnessing the struggle, Tom thought he might have just found the answer to a serious problem.

Riddle had recently discovered that his manufactured body was breaking down. Oh, various potions and incantations could prolong his mortality in this shell for some years, but the cauldron-created body would survive a decade at most.

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Unaware that his soul had successfully split the night he killed the Potters, Riddle tried to make his last Horcrux shortly after his graveyard reanimation. Voldemort did not know that he had made his last Horcrux in Godric's Hollow that Halloween night. His minions brought him an Auror who had defied Voldemort during the first war. Tom killed him and attempted to split off a piece of his soul into a pair of glasses belonging to the founder of the Auror Corps. It didn't work.

When Riddle pried the truth from Lucius Malfoy of what had happened to his diary, Tom liberally used the Cruciatus on the snobbish blond wizard. Then Voldemort tried again to make another Horcrux, killing an aged potions master who'd snubbed Tom Riddle in 1946. Once again no Horcrux consumed the pair of glasses.

There were no other resources on the subject, and he wouldn't destroy an existing Horcrux to experiment, but he did gather together and then rehide the cup, locket, and dagger. Riddle began to wonder if the final Horcrux had indeed been produced and if so what it had inhabited. Or, perhaps his inability to make new ones stemmed from his disembodiment.

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After observing Potter's internal struggle with the soul shard freed by destroying Hufflepuff's cup, the Dark Lord had an epiphany: Potter must be the final Horcrux. Riddle knew the boy was there when the diary was destroyed so surely the bit of his soul in the diary had entered Potter as well and joined the other piece of his evil anima. If that was true, the soul pieces from Slytherin's ring had joined with Potter just like the piece from the cup had. (Riddle discovered Dumbledore's magical signature on the Gaunt hovel when he went there to retrieve the ring.) So, Harry Potter now had four-sevenths of the evil mage's very being within him.

By midnight it had occurred to Riddle that if Potter contained six-sevenths of his soul, Potter would be under his control. By dawn Voldemort had decided that if he killed himself in the presence of a Harry Potter who already contained six-sevenths of his soul, then all that was truly Lord Voldemort would enter Potter and consume the healthy and powerful young man.

He, Lord Voldemort, would in all appearances *be* Harry Potter. In that form he could waltz into Hogwarts with his Death Eater's Polyjuiced like other students and conquer that last bastion of the Light in Great Britain, before taking over the entire magical world.

Voldemort rested until noon. Then he Apparated to retrieve the locket and the dagger. Then he began to lay his trap for Harry Potter.

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Harry spent weeks searching in vain for the locket, the last Horcrux besides Nagini. He didn't know it was a dagger, not the snake he sought, so the locket was his primary focus. Harry thought the note in the false locket was a significant clue, but in the end his assumption that the initials were Regulus Black's lead him nowhere. The note *was* from Regulus, but Riddle had caught and killed Sirius' younger brother hours after he'd written that note, recovering the locket. What was left of the next-to-last male Black inhabited a shallow unmarked grave, coincidentally less than twenty miles from number 4, Privet Drive.

Harry would have spent years, decades, futilely searching for Nagini. Dumbledore had incorrectly identified the creature as the last Horcrux. The snake had actually died of old age, being exhausted by the never-ending need to supply its master with blood to sustain his shell of a body. Lacking any emotional ties, Riddle ate the dead snake, hoping to gain a last bit of benefit from the reptile.

Incorrectly identifying the last Horcrux certainly wasn't the Headmaster's only mistake. Dumbledore had also misjudged Snape, poorly prepared Harry in Occlumency as well as other skills needed to actually fight Voldemort. Furthermore the ancient wizard had misled Harry -- unintentionally, of course -- by stating that Love, as enshrouded in an inaccessible room in the Department of Mysteries, would help him fight and win. All these failings aside, Dumbledore's last act to prepare the Boy-Who-Lived to become the Man-Who-Won, would be a watershed event on the journey to victory.

Oh, and Love *would* provide the victory, but not in the way Dumbledore had intimated. Harry wasted two days trying to convince Rufus Scrimgeour and others to allow him access to the Department of Mysteries. And yet those two days of bouncing around the ministry did bear fruit after a fashion. Somehow, by magic actually, a note ended up in his pocket as he walked out of the building.

Harry re-entered the Ministry after 5:30 on that Friday night and went down to the ninth floor. Harry exited the lift to find a vaguely familiar face sitting on a stool not ten feet in front of him.

Algernon Croaker, Head of the Department of Mysteries, sat there and quietly told Harry that the room he sought didn't exist, but offered to give Harry a complete tour of the department to prove it. He also offered any assistance available to help in Harry's search and fight. Their discussion proved most of the myths about the Unspeakables were fabrications. They weren't the great fighters or legendary battle mages. They were arcane researchers that uncovered useless trivia and more unanswerable questions rather than answers to the simplest of age-old questions.

Croaker did offer Harry one item of importance, and with a sense of foreboding he took it and thanked the little man sincerely.

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Harry should have known the lead to the locket was suspicious. When he returned to Borgin and Burkes, Mr. Borgin entered into conversation just a little too quickly, and he confided in Harry just a little too sincerely. Harry's glamour was flawless, but glammers can be pierced with the right detection spells. Borgin confided that the estate of a recently deceased wealthy wizard had asked the Dark-dealing company to estimate the value of certain items. A partial listing of the more significant and valuable objects just happened to include a locket matching the description of the one Harry sought -- a snake in the shape of an 'S.' It was entirely too obvious - in hindsight.

Harry broke into the house using the method he and Hermione had devised during the weeks spent at Privet Drive before Harry's seventeenth

birthday. It was an amalgamation of the techniques used by Aurors and curse-breakers. The wards were as ancient as the house and very powerful, but Dumbledore's personal library had included a fascinating book--Hermione's expression--on old family protective schemes. Harry was prepared. He drugged the huge wolfhound guard dog, pierced the wards using the techniques he'd studied, and started his search of the house.

The four-sevenths of Riddle's soul residing in Harry's scar helped our hero detect the locket in minutes. He opened the hidden drawer and thrust his hand towards the locket that wanted him as much as he wanted it. A familiar voice, two actually, shouted in his mind to stop, but his reactive grab had been swift and totally unpremeditated.

That terrible, hideous, gut-wrenching feeling of a Portkey activating told Harry he'd been stupid not to check the locket for enchantments other than being a Horcrux. A second after he landed, a Full Body Bind spell hit Harry in the back.

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"Good evening Mr. Potter, practicing breaking and entering now, I see." Tom took great delight in the mental anguish he caused the boy he so hated. All that was in him wanted to apply the Cruciatus Curse to Harry as often as possible right up to the point of shattering his sanity, and then backing off to allow the healing necessary to start another wracking torture session as soon as possible. Here was the cause of his thirteen years of pained existing as a half being. Here was the cause for his life force being tortured as if already with the damned in Hell, after being burned from Quirrell's body. Here was the cause of his Death Eaters doubting his eventual victory after the duel in the graveyard and the later confrontation in the foyer of the Ministry of Magic.

But Tom abandoned all of those plans of torture. Riddle did not want his future body to be harmed in anyway. He had plans to not only make new Horcruxes after his soul was reunited in a fresh, young, powerful physique, but he now knew ways to preserve and enhance this body's physiology to make himself an imposing form as well. He'd be feared not only for his magic, but for his raw strength as well. He would be the embodiment of desire for women around the world.

Riddle planned to be a god in many definitions of the word.

"I see, Harry, may I call you Harry? I see that you've been rather successful in finding and releasing three of my ensnared soul parts, and adding them to the fourth that has resided in you all this time, well, actually inside your curse scar." Voldemort watched Harry's eyes flit back and forth as he confirmed his scar was a Horcrux container. Tom delighted in the look of resignation that appeared in the troublesome boy's eyes.

"Do not fear, Potter." A false sound of assurance dripped from his words. "You do not have to die so that someone else can kill me. You will not die at all."

Riddle called for Wormtail. The rat-man shuffled in and placed a tray on the table in the center of the room. Pettigrew removed the tray's velvet covering with no flourish. There sat the locket and a dagger. All three in the room gazed upon them for several long moments. Harry forgot about Nagini; he knew these were the last Horcruxes.

With no real effort at all, Riddle casually flicked his wand at the table. The locket lit up for a second, and then shattered with a noticeable scream. The soul bit it held arose like sentient smoke and hovered there for a moment. Potter's face showed an unmistakably confused fear as to what the loosed soul fragment might do. At a speed that could barely be seen, the smoky soul bit shot towards Harry's forehead and crashed into his scar, even though he struggled in vain to turn away.

When it hit, Harry shuddered and shook so violently that he broke free of the Full Body Bind. Pettigrew pulled his wand and made to re-freeze in the boy in place.

"No, Wormtail. Let him be. I don't want to risk damaging his body in any way through his physical cavorting."

Harry's face told of his struggle and his progress. A similar tale could be told by the jerking of his body on the cold floor. His groans, shrieks, and cries of pains confirmed the anguish of his fight.

For perhaps three minutes Riddle, who did not consult a clock, noticed with glee that Harry seemed to be fighting and losing to the force trying to enslave him. Tom assumed the boy was losing the battle as he slowly ceased his struggling. Potter's face showed abject fear.

Then, it seemed to Tom as if his arch nemesis received a fresh dose of Horcrux-Resisting-Pepper-Up Potion or something equivalent. Potter rallied; he fought; he persevered. In the end, the exhausted peace that coalesced on Harry's face told Riddle that five-sevenths of his soul had not overcome the Boy-Who-Lived.

Voldemort begrudgingly admired the strength of the lad before him. The Dark Lord admitted Potter was a worthy opponent and his magical core must be more powerful than anyone, including the old fool Dumbledore, had suspected. The Dark Lord wondered whether he should immediately eject the essence of the lad once he possessed his body or attempt to take some of his spiritual or psychic fortitude as well as his magical core.

Harry stood slowly on wobbly legs. He visibly seemed to be renewing his strength. Riddle knew that one more effort should convert the lad to control by his combined soul fragments. Swiftly he plunged his yew wood and phoenix feather wand towards the dagger. It too released a smoking remnant that shot into Potter's head.

Voldemort had acquired many methods by which to examine magical spells, charms, wards, and enchantments over his decades of dark study. Over the next ten minutes he used every magical analysis method he'd ever tried or even read of to ascertain what Potter was going through. The excruciating pain was obvious. Harry quickly lost his voice screaming in agony. Even when reduced to an inarticulate rasp, he expressed his torture. Riddle contemplated and quickly rejected applying some light protections to prevent damaging what the evil one already considered *his* body.

In the end there was a peaceful smile on Harry's face that indicated to Riddle that his enemy had been subdued. Tom was not to be dissuaded. The defeat of his Horcruxes merely meant that he would personally break Harry Potter.

"Wake, boy."

Harry opened his eyes slowly, as if still exhausted after a long sleep.

"Yes, Potter. You now have six-sevenths of my soul in you and you barely survived the onslaught. But they are not the fullness of me. I hold the original spark of my life as some call it. *I am ME*. You have not truly faced *me* in your struggle against my soul-dominating abilities. Look at me boy."

There was venom in his voice - a coldness in Riddle's words that would have frozen many to their cores. Wormtail whimpered in a corner and tried to move back towards the fireplace. Potter just stared at him with a modest amount of disgust on his face, drained of all other emotion. "You see what I am in this physical life because of YOU?" Voldemort spat. "You as a babe stripped me of my handsome and vibrant body and landed me in constant torture for thirteen years. Even for the last two years I've been a hideous remnant of my previous physical self. These eyes, this nose, I like the looks of fear they generate, but I dislike being hideous." Riddle conjured a mirror with the barest swish of his wand, and stepped over to look at his face. He then said to Harry, "You are not as handsome as I was by any means, but you have a face many might consider pleasing. I will improve it with my very indwelling."

"This shell, this amalgamation of my wretched Muggle father, that worthless lump in the corner, and your blood, is dying. It will take over a decade, but it will decay away." He looked into Harry's eyes. "Ah, I see that thought appeals to you. Well, I've decided I will end this mortal casing and add my dominant and original soul piece to your Horcrux-containing scar. My fully reunited and reintegrated soul will easily take over and eject your pitiful essence into the ether. Your soul will die, that is unless you would like to kill Wormtail and prepare your own Horcrux. I'll allow your ripped away self to exist as I did for thirteen years. I do want you to experience the pain that makes a thousand *Crucios* feel like a pinprick. What say you to that proposal?"

The fear on Harry's face delighted Riddle. Pettigrew whimpered behind them, but did not move. Finally, his visage filled with resigned determination, Harry simply shook his head and hoarsely croaked, "No."

"Ah, Gryffindor to the end. I wonder, do you think you can defeat me in the battle for dominance within you, or do you think death is better than the half-life I lived at your toddler's hand? It makes no difference. I will defeat you, for you are nothing of consequence, and I know too well the pain I seek to avoid. You are of little substance or meaning for the future of the Wizarding world, whereas I have a destiny to fulfill as its leader. Goodbye, Harry Potter. Know that I will love using your body to kill all of your friends and loved ones."

Riddle decisively raised his wand to his head and cried out, "Avada Kedavra!"

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In fear, Wormtail loosed his bladder and bowels during the minutes of struggle following his master's suicide.

Harry looked like he was being ripped apart from the inside out. It appeared as if his body was a dead husk, and small, violent animals had taken up residence within it and chosen to fight to the death within the corpse. Several times during the struggle Harry actually levitated above the ground for brief periods.

His inner turmoil lessened slowly, but did not cease. Harry's countenance would look like the courageous Gryffindor he was for a moment, and then his visage would shift to imitate the evil and deceitful Lord Voldemort.

Finally, although his body still shook dramatically, Harry managed to stand very slowly by pushing himself up against a corner of the damp stone wall. Potter's body made its way to the table where Voldemort and Harry's wands lay. He reached for the holly wand, not yew wood. One might assume by this that the essence of Harry had won, but that was not settled by any means. The next action was calculated by one of the souls fighting within to claim control. It was a very effective action.

The body lurched and grabbed the yew wand, whipped up, and pointed at Wormtail. A still hoarse, but decidedly Voldemort's voice shouted, "Avada Kedavra!" Peter Pettigrew, betrayer and minion, was no more.

The evil grin that followed should have indicated who was the victor.

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Several times throughout the years Harry had thought he heard a voice in his head. We all "hear" ourselves think. Most people talk to themselves from time to time, a few do so out loud. Some strictly encourage themselves. Some constantly self berate. Most do a combination of pep talks and slap shots. Harry Potter was no different from most and told himself mentally from time to time both, "Well done," and "You thick prat."

On rare occasions before learning of the magical world and coming to Hogwarts he'd barely hear the whisper of another voice sometimes with an outlandish suggestion. One day it said, "Jump!" and Harry found himself on the roof of the school and safe from Dudley and his thug friends. Another time it softly comforted Harry into an instant sleep with the words, "It will grow back." The next day Petunia Dursley screamed when she awoke Harry and saw his unruly hair had returned.

One night at Hogwarts he had heard the inner voice say, "Grab his skin," and Quirrell's hand powdered up and fell away. Other nearly distinctive commands were, "The tooth," and "You cast the Patronus, not your Dad." By this time Harry recognized the voice as feminine, and usually thought of it as the voice of Hermione. His female best friend consistently gave him the advice he trusted most, so he assumed his subconscious had appropriated a Hermione-like voice to tell him what he should do.

He'd come to rely upon that voice.

In Quidditch games it sounded a bit like Ginny, but it never told him the Snitch's location. It did, however, warn him about impending Bludgers sometimes. Too bad it didn't do it all the time. He could have used a few less post-practice trips to the infirmary.

Before this final confrontation with Voldemort, perhaps the worse fight Harry had ever had with evil was the night Professor Dumbledore was murdered. Chasing after Snape he'd occasionally perform well, like when he waltzed through the Death Eater's chasing after Snape and Malfoy, but then when he faced the fallen Potions professor he'd battled more poorly than he did in the Department of Mysteries a year before.

While he fought Snape that night Harry felt like Dumbledore and Hermione were arguing in his head about which spell to cast. Only when discussing matters with temporary Headmistress McGonagall after the battle did Harry clearly recognize a masculine voice whispering in the winds of his mind. McGonagall immediately accepted Harry's input and suggestions that night. The staff still thought of Harry a boy, but now listened to him like he was more.

For his part, several days after Dumbledore's death Harry found himself much quicker on the uptake with anything he attempted to learn or do. His spell casting improved on an order of magnitude. He'd read and it would make instant sense. He had often spoken with authority before, but it had always been with the influence of an experienced and respected youth. Now he assumed authority with no qualifiers.

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When the four-sevenths of Riddle's soul demanded Harry instantly grasp the locket in the house he'd just broken into, that action was accompanied by two shouts of, "NO!" in his head, but too late. Harry Portkeyed away to be Body Bound seconds later.

Someone hit with *Petrificus Totalis* is fully conscious. Riddle wanted Harry awake, frozen in place, only able to move his eyes and express his fear with them. Harry could also think and hear his thoughts of woe. Voldemort wanted Harry to panic in his intellect, which would make the boy's mind more pliant for ejection later.

In fact, the opposite seemed to occur. Harry thought very clearly and for once the differing voices in his head were in complete agreement. Hearing voices above and beyond the usual self-thought had begun to bother him. The Muggle idea that 'hearing voices' as some sign of mental problems had occurred to him. Harry could accept being thought mad like many had considered Dumbledore mad. However, the possibility of true mental instability or actual insanity nibbled at the back of his thoughts. Harry soldiered on though, hoping to defeat Voldemort before he went off the deep end.

By the time Harry had destroyed the cup, he bleakly thought there was a solid chance he'd die fighting his life-long foe. He hoped he'd take the monster with him. That was his sole realistic desire. Victory *and* survival were a distant prospect at best in his manner of thinking.

While frozen in place, but before the locket was shattered by Riddle, Harry only partly listened to the evil incarnate before him. Instead, he listened to the voices within. Both voices spoke to him, and not the usual instructions per se, although there was a directive element to their words.

*"Harry, we are here. We will help you. Don't give up hope. There is a plan. I'll shield your mind to keep Tom out and unaware."* Finally Harry confirmed that the masculine voice was Dumbledore's. He'd suspected as much earlier this summer, but it would not be illogical that he'd hear his mentor's voice in his mind-think, hoping for some contact with the one he'd lost. At this point Harry realized this was more than memory or wishful thinking, particularly when his mental shields went up faster and more solidly than he'd ever managed before.

The second voice said, *"Harry, my dearest, I'm here as well. I've been here since the beginning, and I'll not let him win. This may be the best way. Hold on, son."* It shocked our hero to his core, when he positively identified the female voice he'd always attributed to Hermione or Ginny. It had always been familiar, but his only memory of that voice was the few shrilly shouted words he'd heard when dementors were near.

Knowing it was his mother's voice helped even before she calmly added, *"Harry, Voldemort's watching us. We'll only help a bit when he..."* Her words broke off because at that moment Tom broke the locket. The smoky cloud of Horcrux matter slammed into Harry and the battle was on. His soul and his spirit, already enhanced beyond anyone's understanding, combined with his magical core to fight a battle none knew existed. All that was Harry fought a determined and powerful foe in the five-sevenths of evil Riddle deposit. The Potter in him fought the Riddle in him to a draw, and the Lily-ness only had to help Harry cement his victory.

After each new Horcrux attack, Harry had needed the assistance of his mother's spirit essence less and less, but that was because he'd had time to rest between attacks. On this night, the next assault by Voldemort's soul shard would be minutes away at most. The Lily-essence only helped at the end of the fifth incursion, and did so exactly like she'd done with the cup, hoping Riddle's analysis would pick up no difference from the previous attack she'd assumed he'd observed.

The sixth Horcrux attack, however, came less than six minutes after the fifth began. Less than a minute after Harry subdued the Horcrux from the locket, the dagger released its evil content, and the six-sevenths of Riddle crashed into the soul, spirit, and magical core of the Boy-Who-Lived. The last thing Harry heard before this assault was the combined voices of Dumbledore and his mother telling him he *would* survive because they would do not allow him to lose, but they would only help as much as was absolutely necessary.

Ten minutes can never be an eternity. Frank and Alice Longbottom lasted much longer than ten minutes under the four combined Cruciatus Curses before their minds snapped. Harry had lasted on more than one occasion for longer than ten minutes in Quidditch practices with several broken ribs making every breath sheer agony. But the ten minutes during which Harry battled the six-sevenths of Riddle was the longest eternity he would ever face on this side of the Next Great Adventure.

When the six-sevenths of Riddle's soul was subdued, Harry lay at rest. He did not stir for a short while, and the two spirits within him told him of their plan.

*"Harry, dear, the professor and I will take the fight on completely once Riddle kills himself and begins his combined attack. We won't have to hide our presence once he's committed. Once we have contained him, we'll be able to destroy him."*

*"This will work, my boy, rest and let your mother and me fight now. You've done well."*

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Harry opened his eyes, peacefully, remembering what the two voices within him had just said. Harry saw Voldemort frown and begin his tirade explaining the degradation of his Cauldron-conjured body. Riddle's vehement words still spilled fear onto Harry's face, in spite of the words of assurance from his benevolent symbionts. They were quiet now, hiding their presence from Tom as he stared into Harry's eyes. In his arrogance the Dark Lord had not used Legilimency yet, but he could do so at any moment.

Riddle pontificated, ranted, and railed on. Harry declined his offer to make a Horcrux from Wormtail.

"Ah, Gryffindor to the end. I wonder-- Is it that you think you can defeat me in the battle for dominance within you, or do you prefer death over that half-life I lived at your toddler's hand? It makes no difference. I will defeat you, for you are nothing of consequence in the grander scheme of things, whereas I have a destiny to fulfill as the future ruler of the Wizarding world. Goodbye Potter. Know that I will love using your body to kill all of your friends and loved ones."

Riddle decisively raised his wand to his own head and cried out, "Avada Kedavra!"

The battle raged back and forth within Harry. Our hero's body stood, staggered to the wands, and then swiftly killed Pettigrew. Voldemort believed he had won, but the issue was still not settled.

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When Tom committed suicide, his seven sevenths of his soul took a few extra seconds reuniting into one evil completeness. Then Riddle took a few cosmic moments to relish his wholeness, something he had not felt since 1943. He then gathered himself and broke through the barrier which all-that-is-Harry had erected to suppress him. There, Voldemort did not meet Potter's soul, spirit, and magical core as expected. Awaiting him as the first line of Harry's defense were Albus Dumbledore and Lily Potter. Being a pragmatist, Riddle took only a nanosecond to wonder the 'how' of this and then proceeded to attack with all the confidence he'd ever possessed. He would win. He willed it so. He could defeat a hundred, no, a thousand spirit essences of good witches and wizards, because Tom knew there is no good or evil--only power--and no one had the will to use it like he did.

It was a cosmic battle in a microcosm. Philosophers and scientists in moments of fancy have speculated of an entire universe as we know it existing within a single molecule. The corollary is that our universe in turn is a molecule within another universe--one drawn on a scale beyond our imaginings.

It was as if every great land and sea battle in history was compressed into a few minutes inside of Harry. He could be described as a veritable tempest in a teacup.

Riddle first neutralized Lily, and Harry could not see or tell what had happened to her. In fact, Harry himself was relegated to the sidelines while Voldemort and Dumbledore warred within him. It was a legendary clash of titans making their earlier battle at the Ministry of Magic pale in comparison. No words could accurately describe it any more than a few sentences of Tennyson could fully relate all the horrors of the Crimean War.

When the internal struggle neared its end, both combatants willed his body to rise. They both willed Harry to pick up a wand. Dumbledore's presence seemed hopefully confident and encouraged Harry to help his body do as desired.

Riddle, however, had been marshalling his strength. He suddenly crashed forward, grabbed his own wand and murdered Wormtail. There is a foulness that occurs in any act of murder. The Killing Curse produces a particularly odious stain reaching to the very core of a wizard, even tainting those fighters for the Light who use said curse as a last resort to stem the tide of evil. When Riddle prevailed and killed Wormtail, the essence of Dumbledore suffered a telling blow that placed it in a limbo like the one encompassing Lily's spirit.

Riddle thought himself victorious and took several long microseconds to gloat before turning his attention to the small matter of evicting the three co-inhabitants of what he now deemed his body.

Lily's spirit essence had contained Riddle's Horcrux piece inside of the curse scar, but she could only do that. Since he was a toddler Harry Potter had battled the blinding headaches caused by his connection with Voldemort. Harry's dogged determination had enabled him to go on in spite of the debilitating pain--through Dursley cruelties, through Muggle school and Hogwarts - through DA meetings, Quidditch practices, and whatever else needed to be done, Harry subdued and defeated the constant head pain.

That experience of ignoring and overcoming the attacks through his curse scar now came to Harry's aid. In an act of desperation he threw everything that he was against the reunified soul of Tom Riddle and forced it back into his curse scar. Harry then walled it off from access to the control of his body.

Harry knew his slapdash barricade was a temporary measure, and although Voldemort was contained for now, he was not powerless. He thought of one desperate solution just as Voldemort induced another headache--no it was a full body assault that began in the curse scar but traveled into every fiber of Harry's being. Harry grabbed the abomination that had been Tom Riddle's body, reached into his pocket, and activated the Portkey he'd received from Algernon Croaker--a Portkey straight to the Death Room in the bowels of the Ministry of Magic, in the center of the Department of Mysteries.

Harry took two steps towards the Veil, dragging Riddle's body with him. He intended to fling himself and the corpse into the void, and trusted the Next Great Adventure would be kinder than this life. Regardless, his last thought this day was that Hermione, Ginny, Ron, Neville, and Luna would be safe.

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It was definitely an infirmary or hospital, but not Poppy Pomfrey's Infirmary. She habitually placed flowers--fresh and magically dried to preserve the fragrance--all around the rooms at strategic locations to counter the smells of the medicinal potions and salves. Maybe this is St. Mungo's he thought before passing out again from exhaustion and who knew what else.

Harry next opened his eyes when he felt someone touching them. The scream that followed caused him to reach out one hand. His wand smacked comfortably into it. His other hand met his glasses as they flew to his face, and in a fraction of a second he had them on and his wand pointed at the person trying to pry open his eyelids.

"FRIEND! I'm--I'm a Healer!" The woman's hands shot into the air, and the look of fear on her face told Harry she was not a threat--unless this was the most namby-pamby Death Eater he'd ever seen. He lowered his wand and yawned. The yawn probably did more to lessen her fear than the lowering of his wand.

Harry smiled to reassure her and asked, "Where am I and who are you? And while I'm at it, what were you doing to my eyes?"

The healer gulped, and pushed away from the wall she'd glued herself to. "I'm, er, that is, I'm healer Phyllis Breakstone. You're in St. Mungo's and have been for just over--thirty-six hours." She'd stopped to check the watch pinned to her lapel. "I was just going to use Legilimency to see if you were all right. It's standard procedure. We start at thirty-six hours of unexplained unconsciousness."

"I found you in the Death Room, Harry."

The voice came from a dark corner of the room, and Harry's wand moved toward the sound in a flash, erecting a shield between Harry and the healer, and the source of the voice.

The healer yelped and crashed back into the wall. Algernon Croaker did not move so much as slowly glide forward, his hands in plain sight. Harry lowered his defenses, and leaned back onto the bed.

"What happened?" Harry asked.

"I was alerted that our wards in the Department of Mysteries had been breached. The Portkey I gave you was tuned to warn us if anyone or anything came through the wards with you. Voldemort was dead and you were alive but unconscious. Fortunately the guard called me immediately. Unfortunately he also notified Ministry Security and everyone now knows that Voldemort's dead. You're the hero all over again, only more so."

Harry sighed and said, "Spare me and all the saints and angels."

Croaker chuckled. "I knew you'd hate the publicity. I helped you, Harry, because I hoped you'd defeat him somehow--send him through the Veil perhaps. I knew you'd take him through the veil if need be, but I'm glad it didn't come to that."

Croaker suddenly turned to Healer Breakstone and cast a Stunner. Before she hit the floor he swished his wand and she softly landed in place on the floor. "Obliviate." Croaker retracted his wand back in his sleeve.

"Necessary precaution, Harry. She's already heard more than I can let out about our department's involvement with you. When the Minister asked how you got in, I told him, 'He's bleeding Harry Potter. It's not the first time he's broken into my department.' For some reason he accepted that and didn't comment on our lax security. Maybe Scrimgeour assumes you used the street level exterior lift like last time--which is his responsibility by the way--or maybe he just doesn't want to know.

"Now that I've brought you up to speed would you please return the favor, Harry, and tell me what happened?"

"Ask for a minute to go to the loo, Harry." It was the voice of Dumbledore and Harry did as it requested. He thought to clutch his stomach a bit and Croaker made to help him. Harry waved him off and said, "This may take a bit."

Once Harry was "alone" a three way conversation began within his mind. His mother asked how he felt, and Dumbledore told Harry how proud he was of his victory. Once Lily had been reassured, Dumbledore asked how Harry had defeated Riddle and made it to the Death Room. Harry explained the methods he'd developed to partition off the curse scar headache pain and how he's used the same tactic against Riddle's last assault

"--but I passed out before I could actually drag him through the veil--it was the only solution I'd come up with. Do either of you know what happened once I lost consciousness?"

"It was my fault that you blacked out, Harry. I recovered myself at that moment and stopped you," explained Dumbledore. "I only meant to arrest your efforts to send yourself through, but your consciousness shut down. As you fell, I assumed control of your wand hand and voice, and chanted the spell needed to exorcise Riddle's soul from your body. I then cast the Soul Binding Spell and bound it to the nearest object I could find, a single loose stone from the floor. Once Tom was secured to the stone, it was a simple matter to banish it through the Veil."

"So, Tom is really gone for good." Harry could scarcely take it in, but there were other questions to be asked. "Will the three of us be together like this forever? And how are you two here with me anyway?"

Before any more could be given, Croaker called to Harry from the other room. Dumbledore assured him there would be time for explanations later. Harry stepped out of the loo and Croaker rose to help him, but Harry waved him off and returned to the bed under his own steam.

"Thanks. I'm much better now, just very tired," he murmured. Seeing that the clock said 11:13, Harry asked, "Eleven thirteen—is it day or night?"

"Night," Croaker replied. "Now what exactly happened, Harry?"

"It's simple," Harry said with a sigh. "Well, not actually simple, but here's what happened. Most of the battle was fought inside me so it wasn't really visual or spoken, and I honestly don't know if it took hours or seconds.

"Riddle tricked me into touching a Horcrux that also was a Portkey. He petrified me before I had a chance to react. Tom had decided that I was the last Horcrux, as we had guessed was possible. Since he had figured out that all his other soul bits were going into my scar when I destroyed the Horcruxes, Tom's plan was to kill his own body so that all of his soul could rejoin and inhabit me. Of course, the plan was to kick me out. I struggled and won. I couldn't cast Riddle out completely but I was able to confine his soul in my curse scar.

"I Portkeyed into the Department of Mysteries taking Tom's body with me. My plan was simply to get him through the veil one way or the other. I succeeded in exorcising Tom from my scar, so I bound him to one of the paving stones from the floor and banished it into the Veil. I passed out before I could send his body in after it. I hope you did it for me."

"No, it's in special stasis under every spell and charm we can think of to prevent anything from happening to resurrect it. The Minister, rightly I believe, thinks that you should dispose of it—Chosen one and all that rubbish—but I don't want to take any chances either. You should do the deed soon."

"When can I leave here?" Harry asked through another yawn. "I really feel fine."

"The healers say there is nothing wrong with you besides physical and magical exhaustion. They'll want to examine you once again tomorrow morning, before they turn you loose. The good news is that I have permission from the Minister to take you right to the Death Room to take care of Riddle just as soon as you're released."

"And the bad news?" Harry said, grinning ruefully.

Croaker smiled. "The bad news is that the Minister wants pictures of you with the body, and pictures of you banishing it into the Veil."

"Merlin's pogo stick."

"It could be worse, Harry. If it was Fudge, he'd have all the media there and want to have his hand on your shoulder when you did it. Might have even wanted to draw his wand and help you. Scrimgeour is thankfully a much better minister. He's a cold fish and ruthless, but he's accomplished all he's done so far because he's been a stickler for fighting this fight like it should have been fought all along. It's his efforts that are rounding up the Death Eaters."

"I'd forgotten about them. How's he doing it?"

"Well, he's had us working for months on a method to track a Dark Mark tattoo, and our device works. Under normal circumstances it can detect any Death Eater within a hundred feet or so. We first tried it out last week. It's that new. "We had two Death Eaters in holding cells at the Ministry. They had been our guinea pigs for the Dark Mark detection work, and we just hadn't had time to arrange their transfer back to Azkaban. The pair of them screamed and fainted about the time you stopped Riddle, and our new Dark Mark Detector went off louder than if a hundred Death Eaters were nearby. I Apparated in to check about your breach of the department, just as two other Unspeakables came running out with the detector. It's supposed to beep quietly when it picks up a Dark Mark, but the thing was honking like crazy, and the Death Eaters were several hundred feet away. We checked and it was our two resident Death Eaters causing the thing to go crazy.

"Their Dark Marks were almost glowing red, and they both had high fevers. Whatever this infirmity is, it's better than the bloody Wizarding Wireless Network broadcasting their presence. Loads of family members are bringing their Death Eater relatives to St. Mungo's not knowing why they're unconscious and sick. I think we'll be able to round up all of them.

"One of my bright lasses in the department suggested we hook the detection tool to the network of devices placed all over Great Britain by the Misuse of Magic Office, and it's working like a charm. Well, actually, it's several charms, two spells, a rune set, and a clever enchantment or three. Sorry, a bit of Arithmantic humor there. A lot of purebloods have dampened the detection fields around their homes so that their kids can use magic, but those dampeners aren't strong enough to block the Dark Marks blasting out, 'here I am.'

"Rufus has even leaked a false story to the press about a new, potentially lethal strain of the Wizard flu. As a concerned leader he urged anyone finding someone unconscious and feverish to bring them to St. Mungo's immediately. It will appear in tomorrow's paper and we expect a fresh wave of 'patients' to take to Azkaban. It took all the Minister's considerable leverage to have the Wizard flu story make the front page so it will displace some of the stories about you—for at least one day."

Harry groaned and Croaker chuckled. The younger wizard asked, "Do you like Minister Scrimgeour?"

"Professionally or personally?"

"Both, I guess."

Croaker sighed, and then answered slowly after almost a half-minute of silence. "I don't really like him at all personally. He has a grating way about him. You've talked to him, so you know he can be blunt and disagreeable on sight, don't you?"

Harry nodded and Croaker continued, "He took over when things were nearly as hopeless as they were at the height of the last war with Voldemort. The public just didn't know it. He did the hard things that needed to be done. Putting the war above politics, Scrimgeour used everyone from Fudge's regime including Fudge. However, this morning he told the former Minister his services were no longer required. Then he fired Delores Umbridge and had criminal charges filed against her. He was about to fire Percy Weasley but assigned him to his father, on probation, instead.

"For the last fourteen months Scrimgeour's pulled every trick and used everyone he could to win the war as best he could. Since you were discovered in the Death Room, he's started making changes to step off of a war footing, even though he'll never weaken the Auror Corp, the Hit Wizard Office, or my department, like Fudge and Bagnold did. In two days Scrimgeour's already reinstated a quarter of the civil liberties he stepped on in the interest of security, and I doubt he'll stop until all established freedoms are restored.

"Scrimgeour is sly, quietly arrogant and egotistical, but there isn't a politician or Ministry official who isn't at least a bit ego-driven, even Arthur Weasley to some degree, and for good reasons.

"Rufus is keen on Wizarding traditions, but he's no pure-blood bigot. His maternal grandmother was Muggleborn, and his wife has a Squib, a wizard, a witch, and a Muggle for grandparents. I think a lot of our Wizarding traditions are right swell, and I was Muggleborn myself."

Croaker spoke all of this staring into Harry's eyes. He looked away for a few moments, then looked back. "I've given you a long and roundabout answer to a simple question. I assumed you wanted to know about trusting Rufus as Minister or not, based on your bad experiences with Fudge, *and* the fact that you've had something of a rough time with Rufus so far. Is that right?"

Harry nodded.

"I don't like him, Harry. But I respect him and I think that he'll do a good job of rebuilding the Ministry and our society. He'll not tolerate any left over Voldemort sympathizers in the Ministry, but a few pureblood bigots will survive if they serve him well. Rufus wants to be the Minister for a long time, and he knows peace and prosperity for all will be the best way to stay in office. He won't succeed at everything, but he'll give it a fair swish of the wand and go down in the history books as one of the best Ministers of Magic for a hundreds years or more. But he'll never be beloved like Dumbledore might have been as Minister.

"Rufus will want to give you the Order of Merlin, First Class, and have his picture taken with you at the ceremony. He'll have a Ministry photographer of my choosing take the pictures of you banishing Voldemort's body, but will allow me to control the scene. He'll ask for a little help from you assuring the masses that Voldemort's truly gone and encouraging them to look out for future Dark Lords. He'll want more, but you can tell him no more than that if you choose, and he'll accept your saying so. If I were you, I'd take him at his word.

"That answer your question?"

"Yes, sir. Thanks."

"Something else on your mind, lad?"

"I didn't really expect to survive this. It's been a long time since I've been able to envision anything beyond defeating him. Now, I just don't want to face all of this, er fame. It was bad before when I'd just stopped him, now I've really killed him and I, er, well...--"

"Let me make a suggestion."

"Please!" Harry's desperation showed in his voice and on face.

"I'll come tomorrow and take you to the Ministry by Portkey. We'll see the Minister in my offices. He'll understand about the public and the press. He'll want to be there when you banish Riddle's body - outside the Death Room of course. His Auror bodyguards won't hear about him being in the same room.

"We have a talk and send off Riddle's remains. Then tell Rufus you're going back to Hogwarts." "Hogwarts?"

"Yes. It's only September 14th. You can go to classes and play some Quidditch. The first game isn't until late October, I believe. That Granger girl's smart as a whip, and she'll catch you up on your classes. Ask her to consider my department on her list of places to work after school. Come about Halloween our esteemed Minister can come around and give you your Order of Merlin. McGonagall's not like Dumbledore. She'll use the wards to keep out any press that you don't want around. Rufus will invite a few reporters who owe him to assure coverage that is fair and unobjectionable. Of course, after that kind of exclusive they'll owe Rufus even more.

"Hogwarts is a safe place for you, Harry, not so much from Death Eaters. Hopefully, they'll all be gone soon. But I mean safe as compared to wandering around in the Wizarding world at loose ends, now that the only goal you've ever considered has been accomplished."

Harry yawned. "You're right, sir. I'll see you in the morning."

~\*~\*~

The conversation the next day with Minister Scrimgeour was brief. Croaker had talked to the Minister ahead of time, covering the pertinent points of his discussion with Harry the night before. The Final Victor was Harry's new moniker, anointed by the press and probably created by the Minister's press agent. Scrimgeour had the good sense not to call Harry that during their chat.

Scrimgeour wisely asked Harry's assistance both in the press to reassure the Wizarding populace and in the Wizengamot, promoting two series of legislation the Minister hoped to begin introducing in the next two months. The first was a comprehensive bill to set a timetable to improve the lot of all sentient magical beings. He stressed that he planned to have representatives of each group with active votes on the committees drafting

proposals for their particular species. It may have been a little heavy-handed, but Scrimgeour started by stating he'd appoint Remus Lupin to the committee on werewolves. Heavy-handed or not, Harry appreciated the gesture.

The second governmental change the Minister asked Harry to endorse would place limits on pure-blood bigotries. Scrimgeour bluntly confessed that he knew it was impossible to legislate morality, but he hoped to put enact protections and to create new opportunities to balance the inequities of the past. He rejected out of hand anything resembling the failed Muggle attempts at racial quotas in the States. Instead Scrimgeour wanted the Wizengamot to create penalties for prejudicial practices in hiring, firing, pay grades and the awarding governmental contracts, but he would need Harry's help to make it happen.

The first plank of the two-tiered systems of laws the Minister wanted to enact was an educational initiative designed to attack some of the age old prejudices that fractured Wizarding society. It sought to educate pure-bloods about the magical world's dependence on Muggle food production, manufacturing, and innovation. It would also attempt to better educate those who are Muggleborn and Muggle-raised about the wonderful culture of the magical world and the benefits of living magically, instead of returning to the Muggle world after finishing Hogwarts and just using magic to keep the house tidy.

The Muggle-raised needed help to fully understand the magical lifestyle, as well as unbiased opportunities to succeed in the magical world. Both extremes of the pure-blood/Muggle-influenced situation needed a new outlook. Scrimgeour realized a societal change of this magnitude would take years, decades to accomplish. He sincerely asked for Harry's help in this important but very difficult effort.

Harry knew he was being asked to promote an agenda that would see Rufus Scrimgeour in place as Minister of Magic for decades to come. Pure-bloods were in a slight minority, and only a portion of that minority were pure-blood bigots. If Harry promoted the Minister's initiative, he would also be helping to position Scrimgeour as the designer of a better society in the eyes of a majority of the electorate. Harry still wasn't sure that he liked Scrimgeour, but he liked the man's vision. It would be worth getting involved in politics a bit, or at least political image making, to help achieve this well thought out plan.

After their meeting, Croaker followed Harry into the Death Room. A Department of Mysteries photographer was the only person to accompany them. It took a lot longer to release Riddle's body from the various stases and barrier spells, than it did to banish it beyond the Veil. When the body disappeared Croaker turned to the photographer to verify he'd captured the event. He turned back just in time to see Harry banish something else behind the Veil.

"What was that, Harry?"

Our hero turned slowly and said, "Just a package containing a letter to Sirius and a box of Bertie Bott's. He loved those candies. Said he even liked the disgusting flavors just for the surprise of it." The two looked at each other for several moments before they left the room.

Harry made his way to the private Apparation Point for the Department of Mysteries, and appeared before the Hogwarts gates seconds later. Newly confirmed Headmistress Minerva McGonagall met him there, and walked him back to the school. It was not quite 11:00 in the morning. Classes were in session, and no one saw him arrive. The two stayed in her office all day talking. House-elves served their lunch and later cleared the trays when bringing afternoon tea. Harry received a hero's welcome by the whole school at the evening meal and was truly grateful to be back with his close friends.

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## **The Night Before Riddle's Body Was Banished**

Shortly after Croaker bid Harry good night a mediwitch came in to check on him. He asked for water and a Sleeping draught, just in case. She brought both, and thanked him for what he'd done for all witches and wizards everywhere. Harry smiled at her kindly, and yawned. She closed the door behind her.

Harry left the bed and sat in the comfortable armchair by the fire. He raised his hand and wandlessly cast a Locking spell on the door and a Silencing Spell on the room. He looked at the fire and waved his hand again. The fire stoked up to roaring, but only gave off the exact amount of heat that he wanted. He was mostly interested in a broad and sustained swath of flames.

Had Harry continued with Divination he'd have studied Flame Sight in his seventh year. It's a little known art of seeing the future in a fire. Even more obscure is the use of Flame Sight to see spirits in the flames. Harry didn't hold stock with anything of Sibyll Trelawney's discipline, if you could even call it that. He had doubted to the end, and even now, the veracity of the Prophecy that started all of this before his birth.

But he had two confirmed spirits to speak to this night, and he wasn't calling them from the Great Beyond. They existed in his very being. They had talked to Harry. They had helped him defeat Riddle, and they were most definitely still there.

"Is all of my wandless and wordless magic yours, Professor, or were you good at that also, Mother?"

His mother's face appeared in the flames. "I had a slight talent for it, Harry, and your father was better than I. You should be stronger than either of us were. But this skill level comes from Albus."

Harry's mentor's face appeared beside her in the flames. "I have accelerated your mastery of certain of skills since the night on that tower, Harry, but do not doubt your own abilities. You've only acquired practical expertise that would have been yours in due time, just a little sooner."

"So, will you two be with me forever?" Harry asked. "How do we do this? Without you two would I be powerful at all, or did my ability to cast a Patronus in third-year come strictly from you, Mother?" There was no malice, grief, curiosity, or confusion in his voice, just a flat tone.

The two faces in the fire looked at each other and then Lily spoke. "Let us explain how we're here with you, my sweet boy. Just before I died I cast

the charm to add my spirit essence to your being, Harry, to prevent your death. Think of it as the opposite of a Horcrux, but it accomplishes the same thing sort of. Instead of a person killing someone else and then splitting his soul, I was killed and chose ahead of time to cast a spell on me to send my entire spirit essence into you to protect you. My presence in you that night when I died merely ensured you would not die from the Killing Curse. I had planned to silence you after that curse and then let you cry loudly once Voldemort left. You, Harry, *YOU* were the one to deflect the curse back on him. I was more surprised than anyone.

"The injury that left you the curse scar was the entry point for his Horcrux. I raced to contain it, and all these years my sole purpose was to restrain that piece of Voldemort. When you were just a little older you began to aid me, Harry, adding your own strength of will to mine and reinforcing me with the power of your magical core. Through the years I could do little else to help you, other than the occasional whisper in your ear. I was occupied fighting Riddle." She somehow cried within the flames, and as her tears fell they became manifest, hissing as they hit the coals.

"You were such a brave boy, Harry. You never became bitter or vindictive because of your sorrows at my sister's hand, or her despicable family's. Oh, the occasional burst of accidental magic was understandable, but you-- I wish-- I know you would have been happier if I had lived, but I don't think you could have turned out to be a better person. I'm very proud of who you are, Harry."

Dumbledore added, "I do apologize, Harry for your situation. I placed you in that house for all the right reasons and then failed it ensure your safety. I expect to do penance for that, and shall willingly accept it."

"You were at fault, Professor," Harry said, "but I forgive you. What's done is done and I've survived far worse than the Dursley's thanks to you. Don't waste any part of the Next Great Adventure with regrets on my account. I do forgive you."

Dumbledore now became a bit misty-eyed. "That is too noble of you, my boy, too noble indeed. I don't know if I'll be able to forgive myself as easily, but that does ease my load."

He looked at Lily, and she smiled and nodded to him. "You want to start, Albus?"

Lily and Dumbledore further explained the differences between Soul Magic and Spirit Magic. They told of Rowena Ravenclaw's work, Lily's further research, and Dumbledore finding the codex and Lily's journal during a visit to Godric's Hollow during Harry's sixth year.

"All of this is to say, Harry, is that contrary to how all of this looks, all of your powers strictly derive from your very own magic," Lily stated. "I could have helped you if I hadn't had to spend all of my effort confining the Horcrux in your curse scar. *You* had to come to my aid quite often."

Dumbledore stated, "Harry, you would have been very powerful anyway, but you are even more powerful than you would have been--not because of Lily's spirit essence in you, but rather because of the times you went to her aid. Those efforts stretched you and made you stronger. Your mother kept Tom bound in your scar. Her only other help came to you as encouragement on rare occasions.

"When the Horcrux from the diary hit you, Lily fought it, but you were already accustomed to helping her and joined in without knowing it. As a result you received a new burst of more power and ability from those efforts. Each subsequent addition of an attacking Horcrux soul piece only made you more powerful by exercising your willpower and magical core working together. That cooperation doesn't usually happen in magical folks.

"When I entered you," Dumbledore continued, "I only added knowledge, or rather understanding to your psyche. You already had the power to do wandless and wordless magic; I only gave you the practical experience to perform it so fluidly. Remember how difficult it was to levitate a feather your first tries, yet for years you've been able to levitate items with hardly a thought. I've just taken you to that point of familiarity in more advanced magics without the in-between time of struggling to learn. You're only doing what you'd be doing after a few years of study at most. You'll still need the theory to fully be able to explain what happens in the realm of magic, but you'll be able to teach what you know in the practical as capably as anything you taught the DA in your fifth year. And I am confident that your practical knowledge will make the theoretical a snap to acquire."

"So, you two being in me will help me along even if you go back to staying quiet?" Harry asked.

"No, Harry." Dumbledore stated.

"No? No, you won't help me? No, you won't stay quiet?"

"No, we won't stay with you, Harry," his mother said.

Harry looked like he'd been slammed in the gut. He gasped for breath, grasping at his sanity. "But... but, I don't want you to go. I'm just getting to know you a bit, Mum, and I have too much to ask you, Professor." He stopped and gulped. Tears welled up in his eyes. "Please don't leave me."

Lily and Dumbledore were both watery-eyed also, but Lily composed herself first. "Listen my sweet baby boy. We must go. If we both stay without the curse scar to fight we'll overpower you. And now that we've been in here together, we've developed spiritual links that will not permit only one of us to leave. Albus is eternally condemned to spend the Next Great Adventure with me, and therefore with James, and I am sure Sirius. But I want to save the good news for last. Let Albus instruct you on how to release us and make sure we go on to where we need to go."

"It's a simple incantation," Dumbledore began. "You'll point your wand at any inanimate object of little consequence, and our spirit essences will be transferred to it. Then, tomorrow after you've banished Tom's body beyond the Veil, you'll also banish the objects containing us. Once on the other side we'll be released to go be with our loved ones. And might I say, spending eternity with your mother, father, and godfather sounds pleasant to me. And someday, far, far into the future, you'll join us, and all those each of us have loved will be there too."

Harry sobbed. "But it's only about eight hours, ten at the most until I go to the Department of Mysteries tomorrow. It's not enough time to ask the questions I want to ask, or to talk to you."

"That's the good news, Harry." Lily said beaming. "If we leave this fire and go back into the realm of your spirit, we three can talk in a compressed

