Like an Erumpent in a Graveyard

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Like an Erumpent in a Graveyard

by tyrannic_puppy

Summary

We've all experienced moments of dread. A gut feeling that something was very wrong, but Harry Potter has been through so much more than most in his short life and has a higher threshold for weird feelings. Meaning when he gets one, he listens to it. So, what happens when he gets this feeling before grabbing the Triwizard Cup and instead accidentally knocks it into one of the many dangerous beasts in the maze with him?

Notes

Beta’d by the wonderful AlexandraO and Elwyn (Iltazyara), both of whom have some superb pieces of their own, please go check them out.

See the end of the work for more notes

It felt like he had been running through this damned maze for hours. His chest was heaving from all the running, his heart thumping from the adrenaline and encountering trap after beast after mind fuck. After so much casting in such a small time, he felt drained. To sum it all up, Harry Potter was not a happy camper. He hadn't even wanted to be a part of this stupid tournament.

Only two things kept his legs moving presently. Fear of being snuck up on from behind by one of the horrors that Hagrid had so cheerily filled this Merlin-be-damned maze with, and the fact that this was the third and final task. Win or lose, this was the end of it all. At least, the end of the hell this year had decided to serve up for him.

All his physical aches and pains paled in comparison to the throbbing headache that had been growing for hours now. When it had begun hours earlier, it had been a nuisance, but now, after however long they had been lost in this dark twisting labyrinth, it was almost as bad as the pain he had felt in the presence of Voldemort in front of the Mirror of Erised.

Harry knew he had to be close now. The sphinx had told him the way past her had been the quickest path, but maybe she'd been lying to him. It would certainly fit better with the way the rest of this bloody tournament had gone for him. Harry swung left at a bend and was momentarily frozen. Directly in front of him, not blocked by any trap or creature that he could see, was the Triwizard Cup. The end.

The passage between the hedges led directly there and had no intersecting paths before hitting the open clearing beyond. He had done it. He'd made it to the end of this tournament, so many were sure would kill him—that he had been sure would kill him.

His legs began to move once more, and he felt that image of himself holding the Cup aloft penetrate his mind once more. Could he really succeed? Be the youngest Triwizard champion in centuries? He hated how that thought felt in his mind but could not stop it from passing through regardless.

As he burst out into the clearing, a new swelling belt of pain leapt through his head, and excitement not his own surged through Harry. And it left only one thought pummelling his mind as he fell to his knees mere metres from victory.

Portkey…

Rushed footsteps sounded off to Harry's right, and he knew that Cedric had found his own path to the Cup as well. The boy was giving his last to achieve that long-sought glory for Hufflepuff House, and Harry was sorely tempted to stay on the ground and let them take it. He certainly didn't need the fame or the money.

As this thought went through him, anger surged and the desire to grab the cup redoubled. Something felt alien about the desire, and Harry used what was left of his willpower to crush it back down. He was better than that. He would not cost an entire house of people something they so rightly deserved and had worked harder than the rest of them to achieve.

TAKE THE CUP!

Harry growled as he fought with this demanding presence, something in the corner of his mind telling him that he had felt it before, but he was too tired to make any deductive links right now; he just wanted this to be over so he could curl up in bed and rest.

“NO!” He shouted, clutching at his head as the footsteps to his right continued to get louder and louder.

TAKE THE FUCKING PORTKEY!!!

Harry threw his head back and screamed in frustration.

“NOOOOO! *DEPULSO* !”

The spell rocketed out of Harry’s wand and collected the Cup with a mighty clang. He glanced in the direction of the sound to see Cedric panting heavily and staring at him with a look of betrayal. His hand was hovering over the dais, mere centimetres from where the Cup had been standing. A deafening roar drew both their eyes as the Cup disappeared in a bright flash, taking something large with it, but what it was, Harry couldn’t tell.

All that was left in the clearing now was a pair of panting, exhausted Hogwarts students, an empty dais and a melted hole in the hedge opposite Harry.

“Sorry… I didn’t mean to.” Harry began, massaging his temples as the headache that had been thrumming through him lessened. “I wanted you to take it. To win…”

Cedric was looking at him like he was crazy. “You wanted to lose?”

“I’m rich. Tonnes of gold... in my vault... from my parents.” Harry was still fighting the throbbing in his head as he let himself fall back onto his arse. “And name someone more famous than the *Boy-Who-Lived*, in Britain right now, and I’ll eat my left shoe. Hardly need fame, do I.” Harry spat the hated title with disdain.

Cedric gave a soft chuckle at the idea. “I guess not.”

“Hufflepuff, though… You guys are the backbone of this school. The loyal and hardworking, who never get the recognition you deserve. You should win. And besides that, you won every single event. You earned it.”

At this, Cedric fell to the ground beside him and began to laugh heartily. “You really didn’t do it, did you?”

“Do what? Enter this death trap in search of fame and fortune? Hell no. I’ve had more than enough excitement in my time at Hogwarts to last me a lifetime, and I’m only fourteen!”

“Come on, school isn’t that bad,” Cedric said with a smile.

The elder boy gently nudged Harry in the shoulder, which, given his level of exhaustion, caused Harry to fall flat on his back on the ground. Harry gave in to gravity, settling back and

letting his body rest after all the crap he'd subjected it to. He let his gaze wander amongst the sparkling stars easily visible in the wide-open space of the clearing.

"School is fine. I mean, 'Mione can be a little overzealous with the studying. But it's the dodging deranged Defence Against the Dark Arts teachers every year and killing ancient monstrous beasts in dank caves under the school that really bug me."

"Monstrous beasts?" Cedric asked with a laugh.

Harry tilted his head slightly to look directly at Cedric. "Well, what would you call a thousand-year-old pissed-off basilisk? Blinky?"

Cedric's face fell as he looked down at the younger boy. "That wasn't a joke? I heard those rumours, but you can't be serious?"

Harry chuckled as his thoughts ran to his godfather, but he resisted making the joke; Cedric wasn't really in on the punchline anyway. He hefted his right sleeve up past the elbow and angled it so that what little light there was in the clearing, without the brightly glowing cup, caught on the angry scar.

"What's that?"

"Where the bloody thing bit me. Basilisk venom hurts like hell. Thankfully the Headmaster's phoenix took pity on me and cried over the wound. Still hurts to move it too sharply, though sometimes. I wasn't holding my arm at the best angle when the skin knitted back together. It's not quite as elastic as the rest, so it pinches when I move it suddenly."

Harry drifted into his thoughts of the encounter as he gently opened and closed his elbow, slightly stretching the skin of the scar. It was a few moments before he realised Cedric hadn't spoken for a while.

"What?" He asked, turning his head to see the elder boy looking at him with his mouth hanging open. "I'd close that if I were you. Hagrid's probably got something nasty in here that'd fly on in and mess you up big time."

Harry rolled over onto his stomach and pushed up to his knees once more, now facing back down the dark pathway he'd entered through. "Speaking of, we're being a bit stupid, aren't we? We're smack in the middle of the most dangerous place in Hogwarts right now. This place is still crawling with all the things Hagrid considers fun."

Harry stood and extended his hand to Cedric, helping the other boy, who still seemed unable to speak, to his feet.

"I'm thinking that maybe the Cup was meant to take us out, but what about the rest of us afterwards? Were we just supposed to walk back out again?"

"Why did you do it?" Cedric finally asked, looking at Harry in confusion.

"The stupid thing hurt my friend and was petrifying the school. And I took Lockhart with me, figured for once I'd make the teachers do the work. Instead, the imbecile tried to wipe my

memories and ended up scrambling his own brains”

“Not the basilisk, though I still can’t really believe that one. The Cup. You said you wanted me to win; why’d you stop me grabbing it?”

“I had a really bad feeling about it. Not sure why, but I was sure it was a portkey, and something really wanted me to take it. And I don’t think whatever caused it wanted me to be a little richer. So, I knocked it away to reduce temptation. I honestly didn’t even see you standing there until I’d done it.”

Harry and Cedric look about the clearing, hoping that perhaps there were secondary portkeys to take the other three Champions back once the event was over.

“Hang on…” Harry said, stopping next to the pedestal. “Why do I always do it the hard way. *Periculum*!”

Red sparks shot up into the dark sky, and Cedric raised an eyebrow at him. A moment later, a very familiar house-elf was standing before him.

“Dobby? What are you doing here?”

“Dobby volunteered Harry Potter, sir. The teachers needed to be able to get the Champions out of the maze at a moment’s notice if something went wrong. They can’t apparate because of the wards, and portkeys wouldn’t be quick and accurate in a changing maze. Brooms take too long, so they asked for four house-elves. One for each Champion.”

“And you volunteered to be mine?” Harry asked, getting a very enthusiastic nod from the wee elf. Harry stepped over and, dropping to a knee, wrapped Dobby in a tight hug. “Thank you.”

After rising to his feet once more, Harry waved Cedric over. “Grab his hand, Cedric. Whenever you’re ready, Dobby.”

With a loud pop that filled the eerie air of the maze, the three popped away into a whole new world of trouble.

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Lord Voldemort was giddy. The boy was coming; he could feel the portkey approaching, and soon he would be reborn once more.

“Get ready, Wormtail. He comes.” His raspy voice ordered the pathetic wizard he clutched to the chest of.

Dignity was reserved for those who could care for themselves, though. As incompetent as the fool was, he had managed to find him, help him into this temporary form and then keep it alive until the plan could be completed. And now he was moments from his victory.

“Is everything ready?”

“Yes, master. The cauldron is at the perfect temperature, and we just need the blood.”

“Good. Here he is.”

With a colourful swirl, a bright shining Cup hit the ground and bounced away into some bushes, leaving behind a very large and very angry erumpent. It was glaring at Wormtail. It huffed several times at them, but Voldemort could not tear his eyes from the glowing and pulsing sack at the base of the enormous creature’s horn. It sniffed the air, and Voldemort was painfully reminded of one of the ingredients of the potion that would have seen his rebirth. Heart valves of three infant erumpents.

The beast’s eyes widened, and he knew she had caught the scent. They were one of the last ingredients added to the concoction, and so their smell still lingered in the air.

“Kill it, you fool!” Voldemort screeched as Wormtail flailed about for a wand.

He didn’t flail for long, as with a look of triumph he raised the pale yew wood and looked up, just in time to be swatted aside by a solid mass of dense keratin connecting with his head. Voldemort yelped as he fell from the wizard's grasp, crashing heavily to the ground.

Luck seemed to favour him, however, as the beast leapt over him and charged the giant statue of death perched above his father’s grave, spearing it deeply with its horn, setting the stonework melting almost immediately. So, luck only favoured him as far as not crushing him into the ground beneath the creature's rampaging feet.

With a resounding boom, the entire grave was obliterated, bodies and all, as shrapnel began to clatter down against the other headstones. Voldemort gave another shout as the tip of the long stone scythe lodged into the ground right in front of his twisted face. Panic began to settle over him as he used his tiny arms to try and drag himself away from the now even angrier beast.

Another rending sound filled the air, and even curiosity at the strange bubbling sound could not cause him to turn. He needed to get away from the beast before it ruined this form. He would not be a spectre again. Not when he was so close.

A huge explosion erupted behind him, and Voldemort was flung violently across the graveyard, hitting several of the very solid headstones on his path, knocking him unconscious in the process.

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Alarms were sounding loudly throughout the department. Wizards were running left and right as they gathered supplies and sent messages. This was gearing up to be a disaster.

“Leighs… Get to Hogwarts now and grab Amos. He’s the only one with prior experience with this breed. Give him the location and tell him I don’t give a damn about the Tournament. Get him there now.” The department head announced, passing him a note and pointing at the enlarged section of the detection map showing a graveyard outside a muggle village called Little Hangleton.

The newest addition to the Department of Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures nodded as he grabbed his ready bag. Thankfully, they had several emergency portkeys, one of which led straight to Hogwarts tonight, in case one of the creatures got loose.

Leighs grabbed the little orb and was whisked away in a blur, landing beside the stands full of spectators watching the swaying hedges of the maze. He ignored their looks as he rushed over to the entryway where he saw Amos Diggory standing beside Pomona Sprout, casually chatting away.

“Sir, emergency. You have to come now.” Leighs demanded as he slid to a halt in front of Diggory. “Boss's orders. We’ve got an erumpent loose in a muggle area.”

Amos rubbed his temple while glancing to Pomona. “I wanted to be here when he won.”

“Go, Amos,” Pomona replied, patting his shoulder. “He’s a good lad; he’ll understand.”

He nodded as he took the ready bag from the newbie, who then passed him a length of rope. “Pre-set? How far out?”

“Couple of hundred metres. The target site is on the outskirts of the town, so we don’t think the muggles are aware yet. Thankfully the detection grid works. A Four-X in a muggle town without warning would be a disaster for the Statute.”

“Very good,” Amos stated, drawing his wand and tapping the rope and with a flash, he was gone.

Pomona looked over the wee lad before her with a slight smile. He’d graduated only a year before from her house. “Well, Leighs…” She began before a soft pop to her right drew her attention. Standing there were Cedric, Harry, and the tremendously excitable elf assigned to the Potter lad.

And the Triwizard Cup was nowhere to be seen.

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Amos landed lightly, very well practised at portkey travel after the many callouts he had been forced to attend to over the years. None for such a dangerous creature in the past few years, but he would do his job. He glanced around and noticed the capture team were already preparing the enclosure and a set of Obliviators were heading in the direction of the town.

“Alright lads,” Amos began but was interrupted and knocked on his arse by a huge explosion from further in the graveyard. “Bugger me! That was too big for just an erumpent. There is magical material on site. Be extra careful approaching. We don’t know what substances might be here. And keep a watchful eye. This is a muggle area, so those substances had to be brought to site by someone.”

The subjugation team all nodded, drawing their wands and advancing with Amos in the direction of the explosion. He was worried now. An erumpent was generally pretty easy to

calm as long as their young weren't being threatened. But throw wizards into the mix, and it became a lot harder. Animals are predictable; humans not so much.

As he rounded a particularly large, almost house-shaped grave marker, Amos saw the beast struggling up from where the explosion had knocked her resilient form. She was big, probably going into heat by the look of her. And she was angry. The pulsing sack of explosive fluid was throbbing and glowing a violent red.

"Bugger! She's riled, boys. Take care."

The crew spread out, trying to get around the very agitated creature. No one dared to breathe too heavily or fire a shot until everyone was in position. While none of the crew had captured an erumpent before, they were all creature experts, and they knew the danger this current situation posed to them. No one was going to jump the gun.

Amos kept his voice low but was still clearly heard as the last man moved into position. "Steady yourselves."

The beast charged another grave marker, and a much smaller explosion erupted from the small stonework. Small pieces littered the graveyard, and all the wizards conjured a shield charm to divert the material from causing injury.

"Team Takedown. Decide now, one stunner, one roper."

The groups of two made their choices, and everyone signalled they were ready as another pair of items exploded under the effects of the rampaging creature.

"On three. One. Two. THREE!"

The moment the last syllable left his lips, the group unleashed a wave of stunners at the thick hide of the large animal. She roared and reared back onto her tiny little back legs, unfortunately bearing her softer underbelly subject to a volley of the spells. When her front legs again met the dirt, they caved beneath her under the waves of spells, and she shook her head violently.

"ROPES!" Amos called, and the teams split their casting, half continuing to cast volley after volley of stunning and calming spells at the grunting beast, while the others worked together to cast a net of magical ropes around her large form, tying her down to the ground.

Her back legs gave way under the force of the spells, and with a mournful moan, the wizards all switched to casting the rope charms, quickly securing her to the dirt and as many intact headstones as they could.

Amos approached her sweeping head, seeing the fear in her eyes. He stepped closer and began to gently stroke the sack where it met the horn. He thanked those few years he'd had with old Newt, when he had learnt this trick for calming the beasts.

"Easy, girl. We'll get you home again, don't you fret about that." He continued his stroking and soon the erumpent succumbed to the plethora of stunning charms that had been cast at

her, dropping into a slightly restless sleep.

“Amos,” One of the capture team whispered from behind him, drawing his attention from the slumbering creature.

He nodded as he stepped away, the subduing over; it was now to the capture team to get her into the enclosure and ready for transport back to the nearest preserve. The other wizard guided him over to a massive crater.

“Looks like this was ground zero of that explosion after you arrived. We’ve not got a full analysis yet, but there is a good bit of potion residue in a bowl-shaped bit of stone over behind that grave. Looks like some moron decided to hold a ritual in here and for some stupid reason brought the erumpent along.”

“Maybe the ritual was to agitate the beast and set it loose on the town. Some out there think we’re better than the muggles and that they should be nothing more than playthings because of it.” Amos replied, inspecting the rubble around the crater.

Whatever had been in that cauldron had reacted very badly with the erumpent fluid. Lumps of the stone cauldron were buried in the dirt, and he reckoned clean-up on this one was going to be a nightmare.

“The boys in MugWE are gonna have their work cut out here. Not often you find a gas main in the middle of a graveyard. Not to mention the charms required to cover up all the melted stone”

“Lads!” A louder voice summoned them towards the lone female member of the team tonight as she stood over a dark lump on the ground. Amos approached and waited for her to explain her summons. “Correct me if I’m wrong, but is that Peter Pettigrew?”

Amos’s eyes were violently dragged to the face of the hunched wizard lying unconscious and bleeding on the ground. He’d not known the boy well, as he’d long finished at Hogwarts before that crew had gone through. But the papers had plastered his face on the cover when he’d received his posthumous Order of Merlin. He was clearly older, but it was definitely the same man.

“Bloody hell. Someone summon the Aurors. They’ll want to question him at the very least, given he’s meant to be dead going on thirteen years. Hope he wasn’t involved in whatever stupid ritual they were trying out here.” Amos stated, glancing around the immediate area.

A soft glow in a nearby bush drew his eye as he stepped away, the wizard and witch beside him securing the unconscious Pettigrew. He reached into the bush, stretching to reach the glowing object, and when he felt his hand close around the rough handle, he felt a hook behind his navel and was whisked away.

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Applause erupted as a bright flash signalled the arrival of the Triwizard Cup to the platform that had been erected after the Champions had entered the maze. And ended just as quickly

when those watching realised it was not one of the Champions holding said Cup.

“Amos? What the devil is going on here?” Shouted Minister Fudge as he stepped up onto the platform.

Harry was surprised to see Mr Diggory standing there looking between himself and Cedric, having interrupted the interrogation they’d been receiving from the judges.

“Cheater!” Karkaroff roared, looking fit to burst. “First both your students work together to attack my Champion, and now one of their fathers arrives with the Cup. I protest this!”

“Now, Igor, I’m sure there is an explanation.”

“I would like to ‘eer it, Dumblydore.” Madame Maxime interjected, a rather unhappy-looking man in a dark suit that Harry still did not know, at her shoulder nodding as well.

“Where did you find that, Mr Diggory?” Harry asked, ignoring the bickering judges.

“Um, it was in the graveyard.”

“Graveyard? Stop talking nonsense, Amos.” Fudge spluttered, reaching for the Cup. “The Cup was placed in the centre of the maze and was to bring the first to touch it back here to receive their winnings. Hand it over.”

“The one in Little Hangleton. An erumpent had gotten loose there somehow. This was in the bushes a few feet away from… a wizard there. I don’t think anyone should touch it until it’s cleared as evidence, Minister. It’s clearly a two-way portkey.” Amos replied, trying to keep Fudge from touching the Cup.

“Oh, um…” Harry mumbled as he felt Hermione arrive at his side and squeeze his arm tightly. “I think that might be my fault, sir.”

Amos looked at him carefully. “What are you talking about?”

“I had…” Harry glanced at Hermione and then Dumbledore. “A bit of a panic attack when I got to the clearing with the Cup. I was convinced it was a portkey and it would be dangerous to touch it. So, I, err… banished it off the stand. It hit something, but we didn’t see what.”

Amos nodded to himself as he considered it. It would explain such a large magical creature being present at the graveyard if the Cup had portkeyed it there. But if that was the case, what was the ritual taking place and why was the Cup a portkey to that location?

A shining light appeared in front of Amos and took the form of a medium-sized dog. A woman’s voice came from it, addressing Mr Diggory. “Amos? Where are you? Clean up says you found Pettigrew. We’ve found something else too, something much worse. You need to come to the office so we can sort this all out. If you’re back at Hogwarts, bring Potter too. Croaker wants a word with him.”

Pandemonium erupted as too many voices to count started yelling at one another. Harry was surprised to hear Pettigrew’s name in the message and wondered just what the traitor had

been doing. That was when it all clicked in his mind. The Cup was a portkey to a graveyard where Pettigrew was waiting. And he knew for a fact that Pettigrew was working for Voldemort again.

He tore his arm accidentally from the firm grip Hermione had on his arm and rushed over to Dumbledore.

“Professor… I think I know what is going on.” He yelled, trying to be heard over the clamouring judges. “Pettigrew…”

“Not here, Harry. We need to get you inside.” Professor Dumbledore stated, gesturing Professor McGonagall over. “Take Harry to my office, Minerva.”

“Of course, Albus.” Professor McGonagall gestured for Harry to follow her, and his head drooped as he realised the adults were refusing to listen to him again.

“*Stupefy!*” Hermione’s voice sounded from close behind him, and Harry whirled to see Professor Moody fall to the ground behind him, his wand still pointed in his direction. Hermione rocketed to his side and this time grabbed hold even tighter to his entire chest. “He was… he…” She mumbled into his side as she kept her wand trained on the unconscious Auror.

The noise level intensified as everyone was clamouring to be heard about the unusual occurrences. Well, unusual for anyone who wasn’t Harry Potter. This was just another Saturday at Hogwarts for him.

Several resounding cannon blasts shot into the sky, and the noise died down quickly.

“What the devil is going on here?” Came the same voice that had delivered the message to Mr Diggory.

“Amelia, things are quite well handled…” Dumbledore began.

“Oh, shut it, Albus. I want the truth, not a bloody endless speech that tells me nothing. Amos?”

“I’m still not quite certain, Amelia. But I think you'd best take this into evidence. It’s a two-way portkey. It took the erumpent to the graveyard and brought me here when I picked it up.”

Mr Diggory quickly rushed over to the newcomer’s side, and one of her group conjured a large container to hold the Cup safely. Harry was distracted from their actions by a loud gasp coming from Hermione, and he quickly followed her gaze to see that Professor Moody was shuddering on the ground, his left eye bulging and his leg bending to an odd angle. After a moment, both popped free from his body but were replaced by a real leg and eye taking their place.

Now in the place of the gruff Auror that he'd thought to be his teacher all year was a pale-skinned, slightly freckled man. His hair became shaggy and straw-coloured while his body seemed to shrink down, looking almost comical in the large robes.

“Hang on. That’s the man from your memory, Professor.” Harry stated as the twitching stopped. “Barty Crouch Junior.”

“Nonsense.” Fudge roared, storming over to where he was standing. “Bartemius Crouch Junior died in Azkaban years ago.”

He went silent as he looked down at the man on the ground. Harry could see the vein in his forehead pulsing harshly as it peeked out from beneath his green bowler hat. His eyes took on an almost crazed appearance. “Dawlish! Bring it over… We’ll set this right.”

Harry felt a wash of cold and looked behind him to see a red-robed Auror approaching, accompanied by one of the things he hated most in this world: a dementor. They had brought a real dementor to a school full of children during an internationally attended Tournament.

“What are you doing?”

“Be quiet, boy. If this is an escaped prisoner, he’s getting what he deserves.” Fudge replied, looking manic.

“If?” Hermione asked, “you’re not going to question him first?”

“Quiet! I am the Minister of Magic. I will not be questioned by children.”

“But you will be by me! Dawlish, stand down now!” Amelia roared, approaching the group that had been growing in size since Mr Diggory had flashed into place. “I’ll be questioning him along with Pettigrew.”

“Pettigrew is dead. I’ve heard enough of this nonsense from the boy. Black is guilty, and he’s going to get the same treatment as this one. Kiss him, now!” Fudge roared at the dementor.

“Stand down, Minister. I have a malicious and dangerous ritual that this portkey led directly to that needs explanation. This man is a key witness to my investigation. We found a damned construct at the site that is claiming to be You-Know-Who!” Amelia cried, now staring the Minister down from across the body, unable to get closer with the gathered spectators.

“ENOUGH! I shall have your badge for this woman. KISS HIM!”

The dementor leaned down, the same horrid sucking sound Harry had heard before leaching outward from under its hood. He could hear his mother screaming in the back of his mind, and his exhaustion built as the monstrous beast approached.

“No.” He mumbled, trying not to succumb to the darkening thoughts in his head. He could feel Hermione practically choking the blood flow in his chest as she clung to him, and his mind cleared slightly. She must be suffering every bit as badly as he was, and this caused a surge in him. He would protect his friends.

“Ex… *Expecto Patronum!*” He yelled, unable to summon Prongs, but still conjuring the silvery shield form between the dementor and the prone body on the ground.

The adults all gasped at the sight, and Dawlish fell backwards on his arse, knocking both Professor Dumbledore and Amelia to the ground. Several others were knocked down in the chaos, and the dementor began to look about frantically. It swirled in the air before grabbing the nearest person and pulling their face to its own.

Harry watched on in horror as the dementor kissed the Minister for Magic and dropped his limp body back to the ground. Hermione shrieked as she held onto him for dear life, and a renewed surge of anger and strength ran through Harry. He focused on the happiest memory he could and recast.

"*EXPECTO PATRONUM!"* He roared, putting everything he had into the spell this time. Prongs shot out the end of his wand and skewered the dementor on the end of its antlers. The glowing form stuck right through the horrid creature, and the most horrific screams of pain rent the air, causing everyone around to grab at their ears in pain.

Light began to spill from the wound in the dark-cloaked creature, and it melted around the pulsing antlers as its screams died away, leaving only a few scraps of cloth on the glowing form of Prongs and a bright collection of light that shot away in a hundred different directions. One shot into the chest of Minister Fudge, who gulped a deep breath before falling back on the ground still.

Harry tried to keep his eyes open, worried that something else might happen. But the exhaustion he had been feeling before was weighing heavily on him. That last spell had taken everything he had left, and with a scream from beside him, Harry blacked out.

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Hermione was terrified. All the adults were still screaming at one another hours later; Harry was still out cold on the bed in front of her, and she was still having trouble shaking the memory or dream, really, that being so close to that horrid creature had made her see. Both her parents were dead at her feet as Voldemort laughed in her face and raised his wand. At least she assumed it to be Voldemort. She'd never actually seen him in the flesh as Harry had. The idea had haunted her nightmares since the summer after first year, and now the dementors ripped it out of her whenever they came near.

She could hear Professor Dumbledore's raised voice coming from outside the Hospital Wing, likely directly outside the doors that Madame Pomfrey had locked them all on the other side of after one too many noisy arguments had broken out in her domain. Hermione was glad she had been able to remain on this side of them. As much as she hated seeing him hurt, it was so much harder to take when she couldn't be by Harry's side when he was. She needed to see his chest rise and fall — to confirm to herself that he was still alive after yet another hair-brained scheme.

"Patience, Miss Granger." Her head shot around at the sound, and she noted that the Healer was standing only a few feet away. "He's always been a bit of a difficult patient, but he always comes around in the end. It's just exhaustion."

"I know. I just hate seeing him like this." Hermione replied, gripping his limp hand tighter.

Madame Pomfrey walked over to her, and she felt the matron's hand on her shoulder. "Rest, dear. He'll come back to us soon."

Hermione nodded as she laid her head on his stomach, making sure she angled her face so she could still see his. The smooth pattern of his soft breathing soon had her out like a light, giving her some much-needed rest after such an ordeal.

And she dreamt the most wonderful dream. Of sitting in the common room, toasty and warm before the fireplace, snuggled deeply into Harry's arms as he gently stroked his fingers through her hair. A dream she had often had during the year, starting after their little time travel adventure the previous year and bolstered by all the time they'd spent with one another throughout the year. The only dark spot being his failure to ask her to the Yule Ball. But the way he had looked at her as she descended the stairs, she knew she had succeeded in drawing his eye.

Hermione moaned softly at the feel of his fingers as she buried her face deeper into the soft flesh of his… shoulder? Wait? Her mind tried to shake itself loose of the conflicting thoughts and was aided in this journey by the fingers in her hair catching on a particularly nasty knot.

"Ow." She mumbled, her eyes flaring wide as the hand stilled. Her body shot up, and she regretted it as the hand was buried in her messy locks. "Harry?"

"Um, sorry. It was so soft; I couldn't help it." He replied, looking bashful as he extricated his hand.

The moment she had full free movement once more, Hermione launched herself at the boy, arms entwining about his body. She felt his chest vibrating as he chuckled at her behaviour, but his arms soon encircled her as well.

"How are you feeling?" She asked without pulling away, relishing in the feeling of actually being in his arms.

"I'm…"

"Do NOT say fine, Harry Potter!"

"I'm much better now." He smirked as his hand once more began running through her hair, and Hermione sighed into his chest. "What happened after I blacked out?"

Hermione took a few deep breaths, swimming in his scent as her arms tightened about him while her mind returned to the horrible scenes a few hours earlier.

"A lot of yelling. Mr Diggory wouldn't let Cedric out of arm's reach. A bunch of the Ministry people wanted to arrest you for killing a dementor. Several wanted to run tests on you because you killed a dementor, something that is supposed to be impossible. Madame Bones fired off the cannon sound again and started ordering the Ministry people about. Dumbledore asked me to let you go so they could get you up here, but… I couldn't. You were so pale. I was so scared."

The hand running through her hair stopped and pressed her tighter against his body. “Shhh, I’m still here. And by the sound of things, a lot better off than I could have been tonight.”

Hermione smiled at this and continued. “He conjured a stretcher and levitated us both onto it. Then another for Fudge. He’s alive, by the way, more responsive than they expected, but he still hasn’t woken up. I think you’re going to be in interviews until you graduate, with all the noise they’ve been making about it all.

“Turns out that You-Know-Who and Pettigrew were both captured at the graveyard. It seems they were expecting an exhausted fourteen-year-old and not a four-tonne, rather angry erumpent to portkey in. The erumpent wrecked the graveyard, and because it is his area of expertise, they took Mr Diggory to calm and capture it. He found the Cup there, and it brought him back.”

“And are the adults aware that you were listening to every word they said about all of this?” Harry asked with a chuckle.

Hermione blushed and snuggled closer. Harry shuffled a bit and she was soon laying beside him properly, tucked under the covers as well. Her face flushed even brighter, but she ignored it, not wanting to be any further away right now than he would let her.

“You know Madame Pomfrey is probably going to yell at us for being like this?” Hermione asked.

“Don’t care,” Harry replied as he pulled her tighter against his body. “I’m done pretending you don’t mean the world to me. The rest of them can go to hell for all I care.”

Hermione's heart soared at his words, and she allowed herself to drift once more, safe in the knowledge that maybe her little crush wasn’t so one-sided after all.

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“I really must protest, Amelia.” Harry awoke to the voice of Albus Dumbledore, a lot closer than he was really ready to deal with right now.

“And I don’t care about your protests. Pomfrey says he’s fine. So, he’ll be coming in as soon as it can be arranged, and we’re going to get to the bottom of all of this. If you have a problem with that, you can go jump off the damned Astronomy Tower for all I care. Every test we’ve run says that disgusting little creature is You-Know-Who, and Croaker says that Potter is needed to sort everything out.”

“Voldemort?” Harry croaked, causing the adults to turn and look at him. “You have him?”

“Harry…” Dumbledore began before Amelia cut him off.

“Yes, Mr Potter. We do. Along with Peter Pettigrew, who had a few things to say that I think you both need to tell me about. And Bartemius Crouch Junior, another man who is supposed to be dead. Not to mention the boys in the Department of Mysteries are dying to talk to you

about how you killed a dementor. Seventeen people in St Mungo's spontaneously woke up this morning after balls of light entered their chests."

Harry groaned. "Why can't things just be normal for a change?"

He jumped slightly when the witch in his arms gently pinched his shoulder. "Be nice, Harry."

"Ok. I'm sorry, ma'am, but I didn't get your name."

Amelia stepped up to the bed and held out her hand. "Madame Amelia Bones, Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. My niece Susan is in your year in Hufflepuff. And rather proud of you, I'm told."

"Proud?"

"For telling everyone that Cedric won the Tournament fair and square and you wouldn't take a Knut of the winnings, despite his insistence that you tied."

"Cedric deserved to win. He won both the first and second tasks. And he was about to grab the Cup when I blasted it into the erumpent. He won. How is Minister Fudge? Am I in trouble for getting him Kissed?"

Madame Bones smiled at him. "He got himself Kissed; you not only saved his life but protected a material witness in the biggest case that we've seen in a decade. You keep that behaviour up, and I'll have a position ready and waiting for you when you finish here at Hogwarts. But as for his condition, Cornelius is awake and rather apologetic towards you. It seems he has reconsidered his position from last year. Any idea what he means by that?"

"Probably that he believes me now that Sirius is innocent."

"Indeed. Mr Pettigrew had quite a tale to tell when we questioned him. The Wizengamot was unanimous in their verdict and rather harsh with the sentencing. On both he and Crouch." Harry looked at her in confusion. "Both were found guilty and sentenced to be sent through the Veil of Death. Sentences which I witnessed being carried out just before I left this morning. Your godfather has been declared innocent, but we request he come into the Department for questioning so that we can make sure it is all correctly noted in his file. You wouldn't happen to know where we might be able to contact Mr Black?"

Harry noticed the large black dog wagging its tail on the bed opposite him and raised a single finger to point at the mutt. Madame Bones followed his finger and stared at the dog. It barked once before turning back into Sirius.

"Snitch!" he scowled at Harry.

"He's a seeker; what did you expect?" Hermione added, making most of them laugh.

Madame Bones turned to face Dumbledore. "You and I are definitely going to be having words later. Mr Black, if you'll come with me. Mr Potter, as soon as you are ready, please let me know. We need to get your interview done as soon as possible. The Department of

Mysteries are keeping You-Know-Who under lock and key until we know what to do with him."

"Call him Tom, Madame Bones. It's easier." She now looked at him with confusion. "It's his name after all. Tom Marvolo Riddle. You might want that for the paperwork. Keep everything above board."

With another glance at Dumbledore, which became a scowl at his lack of response, Madame Bones nodded before heading for the door. Sirius walked over to the bed and ruffled Harry's hair.

"Get well soon, Pup. We have a lot to talk about when I get back."

And with a wink at Hermione, who blushed again, he left, with Dumbledore following along.

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It took another day before Madame Pomfrey was willing to give him a clean bill of health. While he hadn't done himself any real injuries during the task, he was properly exhausted, not only magically, but also by the events. Hermione had not been allowed to spend the second night in the hospital but had returned first thing the next morning and would not be separated from him now that he was awake again, not that Harry minded.

"I see you are up and about, Harry," came the voice of Dumbledore, as Harry finished his breakfast.

"Indeed, I am, Headmaster."

"Miss Granger, I am afraid I must take Mr Potter with me now. He has an appointment at the Ministry."

"Hermione's coming too," Harry stated, staring down the older man who looked like he very much wanted to argue.

With a deep sigh, he nodded and held out a length of rope for them both to grab onto.

"This one definitely goes to the right place?" Harry asked, eyeing it suspiciously.

A second deep sigh escaped their Headmaster. "Yes, Harry. I made this one myself. It's perfectly safe."

With a glance to Hermione, who nodded back, the pair grabbed the rope, and the trio disappeared from the hospital wing.

They reappeared in a dank-looking round room with several levels of descending stone steps or benches that seemed to be carved out of the very rock. A raised dais came up out of the floor, and perched on it was a large stone archway that looked to be carved from the rock of the room and very, very old. Several people in dark, grey, full-body robes were standing around it, and a small lockbox sat on the ground in front of it.

Dumbledore indicated they should step up to the dais, and with Hermione's hand firmly gripped in his own, Harry moved over to the gathered people.

"Greetings, Mr Potter. It's good to see you up and about." A distorted voice came from the closest of the hooded figures.

"And you are?" Harry replied, very wary of the situation he found himself in and itching to grab for his wand.

"Croaker. Head of the Unspeakables. Today is an auspicious day, Mr Potter," he stated, holding out his hand to Harry.

"Really, why is that?"

"Because today," Dumbledore called, stepping up behind him, "you get to finish this war before it even begins."

"What war?" Hermione asked.

"Voldemort's Second Blood War," Croaker replied, indicating the lockbox on the ground.

"That's Tom?" Harry asked, looking at the box with disgust.

"Indeed. He made steps to try and avoid death, and that allowed him to survive your first encounter. Thankfully, we have the best legilimens in the world here. We found out what he had done and how. And we've cleansed them all. He won't be surviving this time."

"Good. Sounds like you have it all under control. What do you need me for?"

"You have to do it, Harry," Dumbledore stated, looking rather forlornly at him.

"No. I've already killed Professor Quirrell because of that monster. I don't need any more blood on my hands, thank you very much."

"There is a prophecy, Harry. Held in these very walls. Three doors that way." Dumbledore pointed to one of the doorways leading out of the deep room. "That says that: *either must die at the hand of the other.* You must be the one to finish him off."

"Divination? That's why we're here?" Hermione scoffed at his side.

"Despite her serious lack of subtlety, Sybill Trelawney is indeed a seer. She has given four confirmed prophecies in her life. Of those, one she gave to Professor Dumbledore here, the one he is referring to. And one to Mr Potter himself." Croaker defended. "The subject of Divination is a joke these days at Hogwarts, but we have many individuals here who study its depths, and I can assure you, Miss Granger, prophecies are very real."

"So, what? I've got to stab the bastard through the heart or something?" Harry had a deep look of disgust on his face at the idea.

"Nothing so barbaric, Harry."

“This,” Croaker said, indicating the archway, “is what we call the Veil of Death.”

Hermione squeaked next to him, and Harry couldn’t help but smile.

“It seems you’re familiar. We put Mr Pettigrew and Mr Crouch through it just yesterday for their crimes. Given we can’t really be sure that the Dementor’s Kiss will hold any more.”

“You used to execute people using those foul monsters?” Hermione was aghast at the very idea.

“Not all of us get to determine the law, Miss Granger. But we are all bound by it.” Croaker defended. “We’ve studied this archway since before the Ministry was founded. It was already here in this cave. It’s why we built the Ministry here. One thing we are certain of, though, is that anything that goes through doesn’t come back. You toss Voldemort through there, it’s over.”

Harry glanced at Hermione, who looked torn over the whole idea. Voldemort definitely needed to go, but they were asking him to commit murder, no matter the weapon used.

“It’s up to you, Harry.” She whispered in his ear. “But I’ll love you no matter what you choose.”

Harry’s heart skipped a beat, and he looked into her eyes once more. The beautiful brown eyes he had steadily fallen in love with over these past years. And which loved him in return. Which Voldemort would do anything to close forever if he ever regained power.

“I’ll do it.”

Croaker just nodded and directed him to the box. This close, Harry could see the box was shaking slightly and wondered exactly what form the thing inside would take. He’d seen several forms of Tom over the years, but this one seemed a lot smaller than the others.

Croaker and the other four Unspeakables tapped the box and recited an odd chant Harry could not understand. The box melted away and in its place was the most pitiful and yet horrific thing Harry had ever seen.

“POTTER! I’ll kill you for this. I’m going to…” Voldemort became silent as he stared up at Harry.

He carefully inspected Harry, spending a great deal of time staring at his scar. And then he began to laugh.

“You are all fools. I shall live on. I will return stronger than ever.”

“One moment, Harry,” Dumbledore called as he reached for the horrid creature.

The aged Headmaster stepped up beside him and quickly drew his wand, tapping it to Harry’s scar and casting several spells. With a soft smile, he glanced down at the creature.

“Clever, Tom. Surely accidental, but clever.” The creature scowled in return as Dumbledore began a chant and wound his wand tip in circles about Harry’s scar, a soft white line appearing to bury inside it, before pulling away, drawing what looked like an ethereal white chain. He tied the other end of the chain to Voldemort and finalised the spell before nodding to Harry.

“Go ahead.”

Harry didn’t want to touch the foul creature, but bent down nonetheless, slightly distracted by the white chain swaying in front of his eyes. He picked up the wretched bundle and held it for a moment at his eye level, red eyes locking with green and Voldemort looking at him with a deranged smile.

“Goodbye, Tom.” Harry smiled as the creature looked at him angrily. And without another word, Harry threw the vile thing into the archway, where it somehow became stuck, half-buried in the fabric swaying in the veil and began to cry out, emitting an unholy screech.

Fiery pain spread through Harry, and he fell to his knees in agony. Hermione was on him in a second and was holding him tightly as he felt something horrible being yanked from his body, through the scar.

“No! I am immortal. I cannot be killed. I will get you, Harry Potter!” Voldemort screamed as, finally, a horrid black ooze came free from Harry, tied tightly by the white chain and shot towards Voldemort.

When the two came into contact, both were flung backwards into the Veil and disappeared forever.

The pain in his body lessened almost instantly as the screams stopped and Harry felt lighter than he could ever remember being. He opened his eyes to see the greatest sight he could recall hovering just in front of him. Hermione looked scared for him, and he ran a hand across her cheek, relishing in the soft feel of her skin.

He smiled softly at her, before pulling her closer and pressing their lips together. His heart felt so full of love as he tasted her delicious lips that he wasn’t entirely sure he hadn’t just died and gone to heaven.

When at last they pulled apart, Harry could clearly see the love Hermione held for him in her eyes, and he knew beyond any doubt he felt exactly the same.

“I love you, Hermione.” The vibrant smile that spread on Hermione's face at this statement made his heart race. "Let's go home."

End Notes

And there we have it. I hope you enjoyed it, as I am issuing it as my first-ever proper challenge: the 'Magical Bull in a China Shop' challenge.

Requirements:
- Harry accidentally knocks, spells or otherwise causes the TriWizard Cup Portkey to hit a creature in the Maze during the Third Task
- Creature must result in a team being sent from the Ministry to investigate the Graveyard
- Can be any rating from X - XXXXX
- Must interfere with the ritual
- Show how the Champions return to the front of the maze without the Cup
- Those at the school must learn of the event before the crowd disperses

Recommended:
- Prefer pairing of Harry/Hermione if any
- Tom and Peter do not need to be captured, but it is preferred
- Canonicity of the fic is entirely up to the author as long as Harry is in the maze

Length is entirely up to the entrant. But I do love a long story if you choose to do so.

Please PM me if you take on the challenge, as I want to read all entries. Also, if you have any questions.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!