

Death Among Friends

by silverdoe

Harry receives a letter from his aunt informing him of a death in the family. It is his first time out in public since the Final Battle. Who comes to see him? How do his relatives react?

The Letter

Chapter 1 of 3

Harry receives a letter from his aunt informing him of a death in the family. It is his first time out in public since the Final Battle. Who comes to see him? How do his relatives react?

The Wizarding world had been free from the megalomaniac known as Lord Voldemort for over six months. Harry Potter had spent most of that time hiding out in the castle. He hated people constantly fawning over him. When Minerva McGonagall had visited him in the hospital wing and asked him to help rebuild the school, he'd happily agreed. Unfortunately, Poppy Pomfrey had overheard and refused to let Harry leave until he was completely recovered from his injuries and had recovered some of his strength. So Harry had spent three weeks letting the matron nurse him back to health.

The only good that had come of his time in the infirmary was the tentative relationship he had developed with his ex-professor and spy, Severus Snape. The two had been kept in a private room at the back of the hospital wing to protect them from the hordes of reporters and well wishers that descended on Hogwarts daily.

After the events in the Great Hall, he, Hermione and Ron went back to the Shrieking Shack to retrieve the man's body. They were surprised to find him breathing and the worst of his wounds healed. Once they got him back to the castle, Pomfrey was able to finish healing him. It took him four days to be coherent enough for conversation.

Snape was a little surprised to wake up in the infirmary and not in Azkaban. But Harry and Minerva had explained that along with Harry's memories and the letters from Dumbledore, which were released by the goblins when Voldemort finally died, the Ministry had no choice but to grant him his freedom. Of course, it didn't hurt that a member of the Order was the acting Minister at the time.

In those few weeks together in the infirmary, Harry learned more about the professor than he had learned in the previous seven years. They discussed everything from their families and their upbringings to their hopes for the future. With the loss of nearly every adult male Harry looked up to, he had come to think of the stern man as a mentor of sorts.

Harry was having tea with Minerva and Severus Snape one afternoon in late November. These afternoon teas had become a ritual for the three of them. They would talk about the repairs or the recent gossip about Harry. Today's topic was the reopening of the school after the holidays.

The students would be returning after the holidays. The school year had been extended by six weeks, ending in mid August. Any student who would have finished school last June and the students that were to finish this June were combining classes. The teachers planned to provide them with all the information they needed to pass their N.E.W.T.s in the next few months.

In order to do this, extra teachers were being brought in to focus solely on N.E.W.T. students. Professor Snape had agreed to teach both Potions and Defense Against the Dark Arts to the older students. Slughorn would stay on to teach the younger ones. Bill Weasley was going to be taking over Transfiguration for Minerva. Minerva was going to teach the N.E.W.T. classes. Bill's wife, Fleur, had agreed to help out with Charms. The other teachers were arranging their schedules so they could also help out. There were going to be evening and weekend classes held in order to help everyone catch up. It was going to be an intense learning environment, but the teachers and the

board agreed it was better than the students missing the entire year.

Their conversation was halted by the arrival of an owl at the window. Minerva waved her wand and the owl flew in. It went directly to Harry, dropping a letter on his lap before disappearing out the window.

"More letters from your adoring fans, Potter," snapped Professor Snape.

"Nah, I have those directed to the head of my fan club," Harry replied smoothly.

Harry had grown used to his professor's barbs in the last few months. He knew the man was joking with him now. The hatred that they had once felt for each other had been replaced with mutual respect. Harry had grown up since the war ended, and Snape had come to realize that Harry was not his father. Neither of them would admit it, but they enjoyed each other's company.

Snape and McGonagall went back to discussing the teachers quarters as Harry looked at his letter. It was from his Aunt Petunia. He recognized her handwriting. He had written to her after the war to let her know that he had survived and that her family would be safe now. He had told her how to contact him if she ever needed him. He'd never expected to receive a letter from her. He'd figured they would be happy to ignore him for the rest of their lives.

After a few minutes of staring at it, he screwed up his courage and opened the letter.

Harry,

I know you never thought you would hear from me, but I felt it necessary to inform you that your Aunt Marge has passed away. She had a heart attack yesterday out in the yard with Ripper. I know you and Aunt Marge never got along. I am sure you will not grieve her loss. I felt that since you are family you should know.

Services are scheduled for Thursday at two. We decided to have them at the church in Little Whinging. There will be a small gathering afterwards at the house, if you would like to attend.

Sincerely,

Petunia Dursley

Harry was shocked. He sat there staring at the letter in his hands. He never noticed how his hand shook or that the professors were calling his name. The Dursleys had always hated him and treated him like trash, but to have one of them die. They were family. It seemed surreal. He had thought now with the war over, there would not be any funerals to attend for a long time. There had been so many funerals for fallen friends and Order members.

He had always disliked Marge. He even felt glad that she could no longer torment him. It was the idea of facing another funeral that had him so upset.

He flinched when he felt a hand touch his arm. He raised his head to see a concerned look in the headmistresses' eyes. The letter was taken from his hands by Professor Snape.

"Harry is everything alright?"

He couldn't respond. It wasn't that he was upset. It was a surprise and one he did not feel ready to deal with just yet. Snape had read the letter and handed it to Minerva. He reached into his robes for a Calming Draught. He removed the top and poured it into an unresisting Harry. Once the potion started to work, Harry began to relax.

"Sorry, I... It just took me by surprise."

"It is understandable. The death of a family member is always a little unnerving," Snape said.

"No, the death I understand. The woman was grossly overweight and had very unhealthy eating habits. I was surprised that Aunt Petunia took the time to inform me and then to invite me to the house."

The professors shared a look. Minerva turned back to face Harry, her mouth hanging open. Snape was looking at the young man as though he had never seen him before. Harry just grinned at their reactions.

"Come now, you two were members of the Order; surely you know how they treated me. Aside from Vernon, she was probably the worst."

"Harry, I knew that you and your relatives never got along and that various members of the Order had threatened them on a few occasions, but to be so nonchalant about your Aunt's death." Minerva was trying her best to not be disappointed with him.

"Professor McGonagall, my relatives hate me. They hate magic. When I left their house last year, I was fully prepared to never see any of them ever again," he said while looking at the headmistress.

He turned to Snape. "After all you saw during Occlumency and what I have told you these last few months, you really shouldn't be surprised either."

Snape was the first to recover. "Are you planning on attending the services?"

"I am not sure. I don't think I mourn the idea of her passing. Yet, I want to go, if only to find out why I was invited. I don't think I would feel comfortable going by myself, and Ron and Hermione are still in Australia with her parents. They decided to stay until school started in order to enjoy the summer months down there. I don't think I would want to subject any of my other friends to the stares and comments coming from my relatives."

"Mr. Potter, I can accompany you. I knew your aunt when she was younger, and I had the most unfortunate pleasure to meet your uncle on a few occasions."

"When did you meet my uncle?" Harry's curiosity was getting the better of him.

"Have you forgotten that I grew up with your mother and Petunia?"

"Oh, well no. I just didn't realize that Vernon and Petunia knew each other then."

"Petunia started dating him when she was sixteen. Lily and I were fourteen and still friends then. Vernon came by a few times that summer we were home. He was large then. I can assure you from what I saw during your lessons that he has only gotten bigger."

"He made the mistake of calling Lily a freak a few times when I was able to hear him. I spiked his tea for him one afternoon, and that was the last time he came by when we were home from school."

"Severus," Minerva said in a scolding tone.

"What did you do to him?" Harry asked.

"Let's just say, you are not the only investor in the Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes."

Harry laughed.

"Well, at least I can be sure he won't be able to intimidate you."

Snape raised his eyebrow and smirked. He was going to enjoy making that man squirm.

The ladies that lived in Little Whinging were passing gossip from one another at a high rate of speed. Not since the strange events that had happened almost a year and a half ago had there been such juicy tidbits spread from house to house. Strangely enough, both events centered on the same family.

Yesterday morning Marge Dursley, Vernon's sister, had a heart attack. Many people in the neighborhood felt she had it coming. She was always so unpleasant to everyone when she came to visit. The only people she seemed to like were her brother and her nephew. The neighbors had cringed when they'd heard that she was moving in full time at number four.

For years the Dursleys lived in the house on Privet Drive and raised two children: their son, who they adored and spoiled, and their nephew who was shunned and bullied by the entire family. Many of the neighbors were just as guilty for the verbal abuse the second boy had suffered while living there, but they blamed the Dursley's lies about him for their behavior.

After the Dursleys had left for an extended vacation two summers ago, some of the neighbors got together to discuss the two youngest residents of number four. It turned out that the smaller of the two was known among the elderly for helping with yard work. He had never accepted any money, but had gladly taken a sandwich and a cold drink for his efforts. The ones with children told the others that when the Dursley boy had bullied the neighborhood children, the Potter boy had deflected his anger onto himself, thereby saving the rest of the children from his wrath.

The residents of Little Whinging slowly realized that they were all wrong about the Potter boy. They realized that the Dursleys were telling them lies all these years and abusing that boy in front of their faces.

When the Dursleys came back in early June, after being gone for almost a year, they were still spewing lies about the 'trash that was left on their doorstep sixteen years ago'. The other residents just nodded their heads and ignored them. The Dursleys were happy to be rid of him, and the neighbors were glad he escaped. Marge moved in with them a week after they returned home.

By the beginning of July, Petunia noticed that she was no longer invited to the weekly teas that the wives held at their homes. She tried to host a few herself, but none of the ladies of Privet Drive came. In August, Vernon overheard some of the men on the golf course talking about the despicable family that had fooled them all for years. He was shocked when he heard his name mentioned as the head of the family.

The Dursleys were being shut out of neighborhood events and parties. The arguments from number four could be heard all the way to number twelve. Many times the word divorce had been heard floating from the windows.

Arabella Figg smiled. Her promise to Sirius Black was complete. She swore the Dursleys would get what they deserved once Harry was out of that house for good.

On Thursday morning the Professors and Harry were having breakfast when the owls came in to deliver the mail and the news. Harry had long ago stopped taking the paper, and all of his correspondences was being sent directly to the kitchen fireplace unless the person who sent them was personally known to Harry. Professor Flitwick had worked up that little charm. It helped to keep the fan mail and Howlers from piling up too high at the breakfast table each morning.

He glanced at Minerva's copy of the *Daily Prophet* and saw his face smiling back at him. Not an unusual occurrence. It was the Muggle picture below him that caused him to gasp. The picture was of his family: his Aunt Petunia, Uncle Vernon, Aunt Marge and Dudley. It looked to be a tourist photo taken in front of Stonehenge.

The headline read 'The Boy Who Vanquishes Loses Another Family Member'. *The Boy Who Vanquishes* was a new name. He wondered when they got tired of printing *The Boy Who Lived To Defeat He Who Must Not Be Named*. Before he could stop himself, he started to laugh. The Wizarding world would turn his aunt's funeral into a media circus. His uncle was going to be livid. His first trip away from the castle since the war ended would be interesting.

Harry and Professor Snape arrived at the church a full thirty minutes early. Minerva was adamant that the family should be there early to receive the guests' condolences as they came in. Harry glanced nervously around. He was looking for any sign of reporters or stray fans. Snape saw the look and tried to calm him down.

"Don't worry, Harry, the Ministry has had the church under surveillance since the arrangements were made. Only those witches and wizards with special permission from the Minister will be able to approach the church."

"Why would anyone even want to come? She did not know any other witches and wizards. She never even knew I was a wizard."

"There will be some high ranking officials from the Ministry and a few foreign dignitaries that will be here. They will come because of you. It would be considered rude for them not to come. You have become a symbol to these people. It is to you they wish to pay respect to. Besides you have not been seen in public since May. I think many of them may just want to thank you."

Harry nodded. He knew so little of Wizarding culture. It was actually one of the things he and Professor Snape spent hours discussing.

They had reached the door to the church. There was a young man standing in front. As Harry got closer, he realized it was Dudley standing there. He stopped dead in his tracks. Dudley had grown a few more inches and lost a lot of weight. So much that Harry barely recognized him, though the man would never be thin.

"Dudley, is that really you?"

"Hello, Harry. Yes, it's me."

A look from the professor had Harry regain his composure.

"Uh, sorry. I didn't recognize you at first."

Dudley smiled, something Harry had rarely seen him do.

"I am in much better shape than the last time we saw each other. I spent a lot of time training while we were at the safe house your friends secured for us. I am also on the university boxing team. I managed to get a scholarship with the help of a few friends."

"That's great," Harry said as Dudley looked at the stern man next to him.

"Dudley, this is Professor Severus Snape. Professor Snape, Dudley Dursley."

Snape reluctantly held out his hand and Dudley grasped it.

"It's a pleasure, sir. I have heard a lot about you in the last year. I am honored to meet you."

Harry was stunned. Dudley was being polite - to a man he knew to be a wizard.

"Dud, how did you know about the professor?"

"Dedalus. We became friends after he and Hestia took us to the safe house. He would come by every few days to check on us. He kept us up to date with information on what was going on in your war, brought me my school work so I wouldn't fall behind. He even helped me with my studies.

"Dedalus is a very big fan of yours." Snape snorted. "He told me about all of the times he met you when you were younger. It was amazing hearing all about you and then seeing your life in books. Mum and Dad only ever told me bad stuff about your parents, and I was immature enough to believe them.

"After a few weeks of listening to him go on about you, Dad blew up. He threatened to strangle the man if he mentioned your name again, but I was fascinated. I asked him to tell about you and magic. I never knew all that you went through at school and in your world. I guess coming home to us during the summers was just about torture for you."

Dudley grinned. Harry smiled at him. It wasn't much of an apology, but he would take it. It was something he never thought he would hear from one of the Dursleys. Snape gave Harry a soft nudge. It took Harry a moment before he realized why the man was hitting him.

"Dud, I was really sorry to hear about your aunt."

Dudley shrugged his shoulders.

"What are you doing standing out here and not in the church with your family?" Harry asked.

"Waiting on you. I wanted to warn you about my parents before you went in."

"Warn me? Why?"

"Things haven't been that good since we came back. The neighbors all but shun us. I am really surprised they haven't tried to burn the house down to get us out of town," Dudley said with a smile.

"Oh, this is my fault. I never even thought about what everyone around here would make of the events when we left."

"No, Harry. That's where you are wrong. The neighbors' dislike of us is entirely our fault. Mum and Dad just don't see that. The neighbors finally figured out just how we treated you."

"Oh."

"Mum thought that if she invited you to come, then we could all pretend to be one big happy family. I heard them planning it the night Aunt Marge died. They figured they could be nice and even dote on you a bit in front of the neighborhood. Then Dad would take you aside and threaten to repeat his summer time treatment of you if you ever returned here."

"Summer time treatment?" Snape asked.

"Uh, well, he was very..." Dudley started to say, but Harry stopped him.

"Can we discuss this some other time, Professor?"

"Of course. Will that other time be this evening or would you prefer after breakfast tomorrow?"

"I would prefer never."

"Good. After breakfast it is."

"You know you're getting to be almost as bad as Professor Dumbledore."

"Possibly," replied Snape.

"Shall we go in?" Harry asked in hopes of changing the subject.

"Sure. After you, Professor, Harry."

Yes, Harry decided, *Dudley has certainly grown up.*

A/N: Thanks go to my beta, *sempra*. I hope she knows that I couldn't do this without her.

The prompt I used was #8.

Harry goes to see his aunt and uncle after Voldemort is defeated. How does it go? What does he say? What do they say?

The Funeral

Chapter 2 of 3

The funeral is about to begin and a few friends show up.

Chapter 2 The Funeral

The church was empty aside from Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia. A coffin lay at the base of the altar. A large spread of coral roses lay on top. Aunt Marge's favorite color. Petunia and Vernon were sitting in the first pew, talking quietly to each other.

Harry was glad the coffin was closed. He didn't think he wanted to see the body. He followed Dudley to where the Dursleys sat. Uncle Vernon was first to see him approach. His expression instantly went from sorrowful to anger and then to one of neutrality, just as quickly. He never noticed the tall man enter behind the two boys and remain in the shadows at the back of the church. Vernon patted his wife on the arm before standing to greet his son and nephew.

"Dudders, sit with your mother a bit while your cousin and I have a little chat," Vernon said with a false smile on his face.

He grabbed Harry by the upper arm and led him back down the aisle. When he was sure they were out of Petunia's hearing range, he pushed him into a pew and stood over him. Harry couldn't help but to smirk to himself; Vernon was trying to intimidate him. Vernon was about to get a lesson in intimidation from the master, and Harry knew it. He also knew it was best to let his uncle get it out of his system before he spoke, so he decided to sit back and listen to the rant.

"Now you listen, boy. Because of your freakishness, the last year or so has been incredibly hard on me and my family. I nearly lost my job." Harry knew that wasn't true. Kingsley and Mr. Weasley had made sure that Grunnings had taken him back.

"We had to move and live in hiding. Then since we've come back here to our home, everyone thinks that we mistreated you. I don't know what you did to turn our friends against us like that, but you will be fixing it, or I will show you what abuse really looks like.

"I agreed with Tunia that having you here would be for the best. You will play Happy Family and you will act normal. If anything strange happens or I see your stick, I will make you regret the day your parents met. Do you understand me?" He grabbed Harry by the shirt collar and hauled him to his feet.

"Ye..." Harry felt a hand grab his shoulder. He turned and saw Snape standing there. The look on his face would have sent even the toughest seventh year to the hospital wing in fits.

"Dursley, if you value your pitiful excuse of a life, you will remove your hands from Mr. Potter," Snape said, his voice barely above a whisper, but the threat was clear.

Vernon did not remove his hands. Instead, he began to shake Harry.

"How dare you invite more freaks to my sister's funeral? I will..." Vernon never got the chance to finish his sentence. He was silenced as the Potion masters' hand began to crush his throat. Severus' anger was so great; he forgot for a moment that he could curse the man into oblivion.

"I believe I asked you to remove your hands from him."

Vernon dropped his hands, and Harry took a step back, straightening his shirt as he did.

"Now then, Dursley, we are going to discuss how I expect you to behave today. Mr. Potter will not act like a Happy Family with you. Nor will he lie to anyone about your past treatment of him in order to please you. You will not speak to Mr. Potter unless he speaks to you first. You will refrain from speaking ill of him to anyone. If I so much as suspect you of even thinking of harming him, you will be joining your sister on her final trip. Are we clear?"

A small sob escaped Vernon's mouth.

"I will take that as a yes." Snape released his hold on the man. "Go back and sit with your wife."

By this time, Petunia had realized that something was going on between her husband and the strangely familiar man who was glaring at him.

"Vernon, dear, is there a problem. Oh, I see he has arrived. Did you tell him how we expect him to behave?" She seemed unconcerned by the tall man standing next to her husband and nephew.

"Petunia. I would say it is nice to see you again, but I would be lying."

She looked at the man for the first time and realized just who he was.

"Severus. I would have expected you to be dead. I had hopes that someone would have killed you by now. I am happy to see the years have not been kind to you."

"Unlike you, I did not have the luxury of sitting home all day with a personal slave. I have survived two wars and a Dark Lord. What is your excuse?"

Harry was amused by the banter between his aunt and the Potions master. It could almost be mistaken for friendly bickering if one didn't know them better. Dudley didn't know what was going on. Vernon, though, was turning purple trying to hold his tongue. How dare this man insult his wife? And just who was the slave he was referring to? He had to calm down before he spoke. The man that Petunia called Severus did not seem like someone who would not follow through on his threats.

"Tunia, dear, do you know this... this man?" Vernon asked, trying to keep the contempt from his voice.

"I am surprised you don't remember me, Dursley. After all, I believe you said you would castrate me if I ever came near your tea with my chemistry set again." Harry could not stop the laugh coming from his mouth. He tried and almost ended up in tears. He was dying to know what the professor had done to the man.

"You! You're that little urchin that was friends with Tunia's freakish sister."

The laughter stopped. Harry drew his wand and, before he could stop himself, buried it in Uncle Vernon's throat.

"Potter. Put that away," Snape hissed, his teeth clenched tightly together. He turned to Vernon and growled, "It would be wise to refrain from speaking ill of his parents. It seems that since the war his temper has been on a short leash. I am not sure if I could stop him from killing you if he wanted to."

A minute nod from Snape let Harry know he was joking and just trying to diffuse the situation before Harry really did hex his relatives. Snape glanced at a clock in the entry.

"It is almost time for this to start. I suggest you take your family back to your seats. Mr. Potter and I will remain back here."

Vernon took Petunia's arm and began to lead her back to the front. Dudley looked as if he was trying to decide whether to follow or stay. Petunia made the decision for him. "Come along, Dudders."

"Dursley," Snape called out before the man got too far away. "In answer to your question, I always follow through on my threats."

Vernon's face paled. *How did that man know he had been thinking that?*

Snape was correct; within a few minutes, the first of the mourners appeared. A man in an old naval uniform was first. He was fairly old for a Muggle. He went up to the Dursleys and spoke to them at length. He looked very unpleasant and all business like. Harry heard his aunt greet the man. Colonel Fubster. Harry remembered him now. He was Marge's neighbor at her old house. He was the one who had drowned the runt puppies in the litters for Marge. The thought sent shivers down his spine.

Mrs. Figg arrived next. Harry was surprised to see her dressed in a somber black skirt suit, though she still paired it with slippers. She went and greeted the Dursleys before returning to the back to speak with Harry and Snape. After a few minutes, she went and found a seat nearby.

The mourners continued trickling in for the better part of an hour. A few he recognized as people who lived in Little Whinging. He wondered if they had actually made friends with the unpleasant woman or if they just felt it was their civic duty to appear at the funeral. A few stopped by him to pay their condolences.

As he watched the mourners talk quietly to the Dursleys and each other, a low murmur of excited noise caught his attention. He watched as the people in the back were turning towards the door. The man and woman who appeared in the doorway looked vaguely familiar to Harry. They made their way towards Harry. It was only when they got closer that he realized who they were. The man spoke first as he held out his hand to Harry. Harry's jaw dropped open slightly.

"It is an honor to meet you, Mr. Potter. My mother and my cousin talk about you all the time. I probably should not have come here, but my family wanted to give you their

appreciation for saving well, everybody," the man said. He was very handsome, and the woman by his side was equally as beautiful.

Nearly every eye in the church was watching them and trying to hear what the famous footballer had to say to the teen. Snape decided it would be best if they moved the conversation somewhere private and ushered the four of them into a small room he found in the front of the church.

Once inside, Harry decided it must be a sort of office. It held a desk and several chairs. They all took a seat. Harry was about to say something when the woman spoke.

"Please excuse him. He gets like this occasionally. You would think that someone who is used to people gawking at him wouldn't do it to others," she finished with a smile. Snape snorted.

"Miss ..." Harry started.

"You can call me Victoria. May I call you Harry?"

He quickly nodded.

"So you are a witch then?"

"No." She laughed. "I am a Muggle. Becks' family is magical."

"My mum's family. In fact, I think you know my cousin Katie. She was in your house at school."

"Katie Bell is your cousin? How? I thought she was a pureblood. But you're not a wizard, are you?" Harry could hardly believe he was sitting here talk with these two stars.

"I am, at least I think I am. I don't have a wand or practice magic, but I have some magic. Mum was cursed by Grindewald when she was a child and lost her magic. She has been little more than a Squib ever since. She never went to Hogwarts. She married a Muggle and went to live in the Muggle world. She didn't have much contact with her magical relatives, so neither did I. I did very little accidental magic when I was younger, so my mum never told me about magic."

"I seem to recall seeing you make a goal a few years ago that had to have been aided by magic," Snape drawled.

"True, but I really didn't mean for that to happen. I just wanted to score."

"You follow football," Harry asked, looking at Snape.

"Potter, I am a half blood. I do know what the sport is. I have been a fan of Manchester United since before you were both born," he said as he rolled his eyes.

They all laughed and waited for Becks to finish his story.

"When I received my Hogwarts letter, she told me everything. She even told me how she had lost her magic and all about the wars. She left the decision up to me. I thought about it for a few days and decided against it. I was happy with my life. My friends and family meant a lot to me. I did not want to give that up, so I declined the invitation. There are times when I wonder what my life would have been like had I chosen the other way, but I am happy.

"Since then I've met my mum's sister, Joann, and her husband , Sebastian. They are Katie's parents. We visit each other often. I learned all about magic from them. I have to admit to being a huge Quidditch fan."

"Really. Who is your favorite team?"

"Puddlemere United."

"They are mine as well. You know I played with Oliver Wood in school."

"Katie told me. She said you are amazing on a broom. I would like to see you fly sometime. Did you know the two of them are dating now? She is the one who got me hooked on the team."

"I had heard that," Harry said.

"Dear, we really should be going. We have monopolized Harry enough for one day," Victoria said.

He nodded and they all stood.

"Harry, it was a real pleasure. My mother wanted to come but was unable to get a pass from the Ministry to attend. They are being very strict with the wards."

"Thanks for uh... I mean thank you for coming. It was nice to meet both of you."

"Harry, I know we just met, but Victoria and I would like to have you as a guest at our wedding. My family would love to meet you. I can promise they will be on their best behavior and not fawn all over you."

Harry agreed to go. He told them how to get in touch with him, and they said their goodbyes. Harry and Snape then made their way back to the chapel. It was just about time for the services to begin.

A/N: Thanks to my beta, sempra. I hope she knows that I couldn't do this without her.

The Friends

Chapter 3 of 3

Harry receives a letter from his Aunt informing him of a death in the family. It is his first time out in public since the Final Battle. Who comes to see him? How do his relatives react?

As they entered the chapel, Harry excused himself to use the restroom. He was just finishing up washing when his uncle entered. Not wanting to be alone with the man for

too long, he quickly dried his hands. As he was heading for the door, a hand grabbed his arm.

"Who do you think you are having your freaky friends impersonate celebrities? How dare you make a mockery of Marge's funeral," he growled out.

"I don't... I didn't even know them. I swear Uncle Vernon. I'm s..." Harry stuttered.

"You're what? You're sorry. No, you are not. But you will be when I get through with you."

He slammed Harry against the wall and held him there with his hand at Harry's throat. Before his head connected with the wall causing his vision to blur, Harry thought he saw a mass of black cloth to his right. He heard, rather than saw, the curse that hit his uncle and sent him flying into the opposite wall, cracking the tile on impact. Harry sank to his knees, gasping for breath.

When his head cleared, he looked up and saw Snape standing in front of him, glaring at the lump that was his uncle.

"Yo..." he croaked. He cleared his throat and tried again. "Did you kill him?"

"No. Just Stupefied. I did not want to explain to the Ministry why I killed him."

"That's good because I wouldn't want to explain to Aunt Petunia why you killed him."

Harry laughed as Snape tried to suppress a grin.

"I suppose we should wake him now," Harry said when he regained his composure.

"Hmm, yes, I imagine we should."

"Shall I or do you want to?"

"I think it would be best if I handled your uncle. You need to get back to your seat before anyone starts looking for you."

"Oh, um alright. You're not going to ki..." Harry asked, thinking back to the professor's early threat.

"No. I will return him to his family in one piece. Mostly." Harry looked up at him and saw the smirk that meant he probably was not joking.

"Right. I'll just go get our seats," Harry said as he backed away towards the door. As he was leaving, he heard Snape talking to his uncle.

"I believe we discussed what would happen should you lay a hand on Mr. Potter..."

The door closed and all he heard was a soft, muffled voice. He quickly made his way back to his seat. He had just sat down across the aisle from his aunt and cousin when he saw Professor Snape strolling towards him. His uncle was nowhere in sight.

When the professor sat down next to him, he decided to find out what happened in the bathroom.

"You promised not to kill him."

"And I didn't."

"Then where is he?"

"He should be making his way here shortly."

"What's wrong with him?"

Snape pretended not to hear the question. A woman began to play hymns on the piano, and Harry saw his uncle gingerly making his way to the side of his family. He sat down painfully and squirmed a bit as if uncomfortable. Harry looked at Snape. The professor calmly brushed his hand down the front of his robes and ignored Harry's stare. Finally, Harry cleared his throat in an effort to gain his professors' attention. With a sigh, Snape decided it was best to explain.

"It looks to me as though the man may have a small case of boils."

"Boils? How would that have happened?"

"Possibly because I cursed him."

"You cursed a Muggle, during a family funeral when there are probably a dozen Aurors present."

"No, I cursed a whale who deserved to be uncomfortable during the funeral of someone who made your life miserable. And there are only four Aurors here at present."

"How did you know?" Harry asked, looking around to see if anyone was listening to the two of them.

"I saw what that woman did to you during our Occlumency lessons, in case you have forgotten."

"No, not that. About the Aurors?" he asked.

"Because if you look closely, you can see that they all have a Notice-Me-Not spell on them."

"You can see through the spell?"

"When one spies for more than twenty years, one picks up a few things here and there. I can tell you that there are six wizards here using the spell, and two of them are not Aurors."

"Then who are they?" Harry asked.

Snape was about to answer when the minister began the services. Harry nudged him. Snape turned and glared before quietly answering him.

"Judging by the hideous perfume, I would say Miss Brown and her wizard of the week."

"Lavender. What is ...?"

Snape glared at him again and nodded his head to the front of the church where the minister was still speaking. He turned and tried to pay attention. After hearing the minister remark on Marge's caring and compassion for helping orphan children, he decided he had heard enough and tuned the rest out. His thoughts drifted to why all these people were here to see him.

He knew that the Wizarding world wanted to thank him for what he had done. He knew he should allow them to, but he just wanted to finish school and start his life. He had

lived for everyone else for so long that he just wanted to slip off into obscurity.

Instead he was here, so his relatives could use him to get back into the good graces of the neighborhood. The Wizarding world was no better. The witches and wizards that mailed him treated him as a celebrity. Someone they could tell their grandkids they had met once or use his name to impress their friends.

And then there were people like Lavender. They weren't exactly friends. True, she had dated his best friend for a time, but she only spoke to Harry when it could improve her image. So was this just another way for her to impress people, and how did she even get permission from the Ministry to be here?

Harry felt Snape nudge him. He looked up and noticed everyone standing to sing. He followed suit. After the song and another prayer, the minister informed everyone that the family would be receiving visitors at their house starting in an hour. The rows of people began to file forward to pay their last respects.

A few high ranking officials with the Ministry of Magic came over and spoke with Harry and Snape as most of the rest of the congregation went over to the Dursleys. After a few minutes, the church cleared, and he was left with just Snape, the Dursleys, Mrs. Polkiss and her son, Piers.

He was just about to leave when Lavender and her friend appeared at the back of the room and started walking towards them. He looked over at the Dursleys. Neither they nor the Polkiss' seemed to notice two people appearing out of nowhere.

When they got closer, Harry heard Snape muttering something under his breath.

"What?" Harry asked.

"I am just surprised I didn't recognize the magical signature of Miss Brown's friend."

Harry looked at the man walking with his old classmate. He looked familiar, but Harry was sure he did not attend Hogwarts.

"Do you know him?"

"Yes. I was his summer tutor for the last several years."

"Summer tutor?"

"It was not feasible for him to attend Hogwarts, and his parents wanted to be assured he had the best tutors possible so he could pass his N.E.W.T.s."

"Why wasn't it feasible for him to go to Hogwarts?" Harry asked.

Before Snape could answer, the man in question was in front of them and answered for him.

"Because a member of the Royal Family cannot disappear for most of his teenage years. Professor Snape, it is good to see you," he said.

"Pleasure to see you, as well," Snape said as they shook hands with each other. Harry felt like a fish. His jaw dropped open when he realized who Lavender's date was.

Harry was too shocked to say anything.

"Hello, Harry. Professor Snape," Lavender said.

Harry vaguely heard Snape and the couple speaking. He was still trying to get his head around the fact that Lavender's date happened to be royalty.

"You're Lord Fredrick," Harry managed to say after a few moments.

"Please call me Freddie," he said, reaching out to shake Harry's hand. "I hate being called by my title when I am trying to blend into the Wizarding world. It's bad enough I am a member of the Royal family. In the Muggle world, I am barely able to have a life without people thinking they know me. In the Wizarding world, I just like to be me."

Harry knew how he felt.

"So you are a Muggle-born, then?" Harry asked.

"Not exactly. There are quite a few witches and wizards in the family, and just as many Squibs. We try to keep it quiet. That is why the professors come to us. It is something that both of the ministries worked out several generations ago.

"Professor Snape was always my favorite. I made it a game to see if I could crack his mask."

Harry laughed, and Snape just glared at the lot of them.

"I see your manners have not improved any since the last time we met. Let's hope your behavior has. I would hate to have to speak on your behalf again in front of the Ministry," Snape said.

"Whatever would I do without you and your glowing recommendations, Professor," Freddie said, the sarcasm evident in his voice. Freddie then turned to Harry.

"Enough about me. I am here to pass on the thanks from the Royal family blah, blah, blah. I am sure you hear enough of this and don't really want me to continue."

Harry nodded. If anyone could understand how it felt to be fawned over, he was sure Freddie knew. Harry was just about to say so when he heard a screeching noise coming from his aunt. He had forgotten that they were still present. He knew that they had just realized who Harry was talking too. He turned to his relatives, reminding himself he was not allowed to hex them no matter what they said or did to embarrass him.

Vernon was coming towards him with a gleam in his eyes that could only mean one thing. Vernon was about to exploit this for his benefit in some way. Luckily for Harry, the doors opened up at that moment, and two men walked into the church. They were closely followed by two other men in suits that could only be some sort of security force. As the men made their way up the rows of pews, two Aurors materialized from under their charms and followed behind them.

It was Kingsley Shacklebolt. Harry was not really surprised to see him; he had expected that he would come. He was accompanied by a man that Harry thought looked familiar. He was a Muggle and dressed in a suit. He looked to be in his late forties, early fifties, with graying hair. As they got closer, he realized it was the Muggle Prime Minister. Harry was beginning to wonder if his day could get any more bizarre.

At the sight of the approaching entourage, Vernon stopped moving. It was as if he was frozen in disbelief. When the two Aurors appeared, Mrs. Polkiss let out a scream that could be heard three towns away and promptly fainted away. Her son was too stunned to even attempt to catch her and let her fall to the floor. Petunia's face was a mixture of horror and triumph. Harry knew that she was thinking how the appearance of these people at the funeral of a family member would boost their standing with the people in the neighborhood.

Snape saw the look and knew it too. He quietly moved closer to the Dursleys. By the time the Minister and the Prime Minister had reached Harry, he had silently cast a few Obliviates (on Petunia, Mrs. Polkiss and Piers), and placed Vernon, Petunia, Mrs. Polkiss and Piers under sleeping charms. He gestured for Dudley to follow him and he rejoined the group standing by Harry.

After the greetings, Kingsley turned to Snape. "Please, tell me you did not cast Obliviates on four Muggles in my presence. I would hate to have an inquiry about it."

Harry was trying hard not to laugh. The gleeful look in Snape's eye wasn't one many could see. He hid it too well. Harry had seen it a time or two in the past few months they had become friends. It usually meant the professor was up to something.

"I did not cast four Obliviates. It was only three, and they would not have been necessary if your security forces were a bit more careful about how they remove their charms. Why does the Ministry insist on teaching them the spells, if they refuse to show them how to use them properly?" Snape was referring to the two Aurors that allowed the Polkiss' to see them appear from nowhere.

"Then why cast the charm on Mrs. Dursley? She knows about us," Kingsley asked.

"Revenge."

Harry could not help himself. The laughter he had been holding in escaped. When all eyes turned to him, he looked to Dudley for help. Dudley was too busy laughing himself.

"Is someone going to explain?" Kingsley asked.

"Fine. The Dursleys invited Mr. Potter here today in order to use him to get on their neighbors' good side. It seems the inhabitants of Little Whinging were displeased with Mr. and Mrs. Dursley once they learned how Mr. Potter was treated in their home. When Dursley saw Lord Frederick, he was already calculating how to use his presence to help him and his wife get back in the good graces of their neighbors. When the two of you strolled in, he was so full of thoughts of parading both Lord Frederick and the PM through town to his house that I could hear him jumping up and down in his head."

"That still doesn't explain why you Obliviates everyone but him."

"I think that the professor is hoping that once he wakes them all up, Vernon will swear that he saw them both, and since no one else saw them, they won't believe him. Not even his wife," Harry said. Snape just stood there with his arms crossed in front of him. His face was void of expression, but the gleeful look was still present in his eye. Harry knew that Vernon was likely to get more than just a little humiliation from this. Snape was likely planning other inventive ways to torture his uncle.

"And what about young Mr. Dursley?" Kingsley questioned.

"Harry and I have made our peace. I hope that we will be able to be friends in the future, once I have made up for all the things I did to him when I was a child. I will not be a part of my parents' plans to use him," Dudley said.

Harry turned and put a hand on Dudley's shoulder. "We are friends, and we will learn to be family."

Snape mumbled something that sounded like 'blubbing idiots.' Harry and the others laughed. Harry was beginning to enjoy himself, something he hadn't have expected to do when he'd agreed to come to the funeral. It was nice to be around people again. It felt good to laugh and joke.

There would always be people out there that would try to use him because of who they thought he was. The savior of the Wizarding world. The Chosen One. But there were also people who wanted to know him because of who he was, the scrawny kid with glasses who grew into a confident man surrounded by people who he loved and who loved him back.

Harry and Snape remained friends throughout the years. Every so often when they would get together, Snape would complain about the latest trouble that Lord Freddie had found himself in. Harry would always say, "I thought I was the only student that could drive you to complain for hours at a time."

Vernon spent the next twenty years swearing to anyone who would listen that on the day of his sister's funeral, the Prime Minister and Lord Freddie had come to see him. After five years, his wife, tired of listening to him, began to drink heavily in order to block out his voice. The children on Privet Drive referred to him as 'the crazy old coot', who told fantastic stories about witches and wizards. Their parents tried to keep the children away from him. They all thought the loss of his sister had made him lose his mind. He was never quite the same after her death.

Dudley eventually placed both of them in a home. During one of his visits to them, he noticed the unusual amount of canned chipped beef in the pantry and nothing else. He decided they needed someone to care for them.

When Vernon passed away, it was reported that his last words were, "I swear I saw them."

Harry, Dudley, Snape, Freddie, Kingsley and the Prime Minister all attended his funeral. They were the only six people present. Afterwards, they went to Diagon Alley and drank to his memory. When Harry asked, Snape finally told Harry what had done to Vernon's tea all those years ago.

"It was a simple little potion that caused his bits to shrivel up and breasts to form. I suspect he became heavy to cover up the fact that the breasts never fully went away."