

Second Chance For A Blind Man

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Harry gets a message to visit a dying Hermione, only to find he has been the author of her ills.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 of 2

Harry gets a message to visit a dying Hermione, only to find he has been the author of her ills.

Harry Potter knocked quietly on the door of the medical clinic and waited for it to be opened. He looked around the quiet, tired street and wondered who had called him to such a dreary building. Many of the secret codes from the old Order of the Phoenix days were scattered throughout the message he had received. It was the only reason he'd answered the missive that begged him to come to this spot. His Auror training had him watching his back, and he kept his wand close.

The door swung open to reveal a mediwitch standing in a neat, though austere, corridor. She appeared to be studying him, searching for something.

"I'm Harry Potter," he said gruffly.

"I recognise you from the newspaper, Minister Potter. Please come in." The mediwitch led the way to a small sitting room and indicated for him to sit in one of the seats. Harry scanned the room for malevolent magic before he sat and turned his full attention to the witch in front of him. After too many years filled with powerful enemies, his old habits of defence and observation were hard to break. "Why am I here?" he asked; the room smelled of death, and the strangeness of the situation increased his discomfort, besides he hadn't the time to waste running around talking to strange witches.

"Thank you for coming, Minister Potter, my name is Melinda Postlethwaite, and I am the chief mediwitch in charge of Miss Granger's case."

The witch reminded him a little of Professor McGonagall, and he found himself wondering what her animagus form was. Then the words sunk into his brain.

"Hermione Granger? I haven't seen her in over forty years!" he exclaimed.

"We know," the mediwitch sighed. "No one has. She had a complete breakdown, both of mind and powers, 47 years ago, and we've been caring for her ever since. The Ministry of Magic have taken care of all fees in lieu of her pension, but now she is dying. She asked to see you one last time."

"Dying? What on earth from? She's young in our world! Hades, she's only 67." Harry was shocked. He ranted on. "She's not too old for a Muggle either. Is there a cure? Who cursed her??" The questions flew thick and fast while the witch let him talk.

Melinda waited patiently until the man in front of her had wound himself down. "Yes, she's young for a witch. Despite her age of sixty-seven, it isn't a curse or illness that's killing her. I have patients having babies at that age. Simply put, she is dying of old age, and I wanted to warn you before we went into her room." She looked kindly at the saviour of their world. He was a wizard in the prime of his life, strong healthy and vibrant. She thought the contrast between him and the woman she'd helped care for since she was first qualified as a mediwitch.

They both stood, and Melinda led the shocked man down the corridor to a room set out like a hospital. The first thing Harry noticed was how dim it was. Out of instinct he went to cast *Lumos* to lighten it, but the witch stopped him.

"The light hurts her eyes," she told him, and she pointed to the bed. In the dim light Harry was barely able to make out the shape of a frail human, and he walked closer. The sight shocked him to his core.

In the bed was a wizened figure, hardly human, that looked nothing like the Muggle-born heroine who was once an active part of the golden trio. Her hair was thin and sparse, her features shrunken, and her skin had become almost white. The mediwitch guided him to a chair that had been placed conveniently near the head of the bed.

"Hiya, 'Mione," Harry said as he reached for her gnarled hand. The skin felt tissue-thin under his fingers and had that old woman texture to it. Harry was frightened to hurt her. She looked ancient. "You wanted to see me?" Even though he'd been told about her condition, the sight of her made him feel sick.

"Harry? You finished your homework?" Hermione asked as she opened her eyes, too weak to form the whole sentence. Harry tried not to seem shocked as he realised that her previously beautiful eyes were clouded with cataracts.

"Her mind wanders," Madam Postlethwaite told him, but Harry smiled up at her. "That was her usual question to me when I was at school. She always asked me that, it's kind of an old joke between us" he explained, his voice catching a little before answering her. "Yes, all done, including the Potions essay for the bat."

"Professor Snape," Hermione corrected before she smiled at him. "Thanks for coming, Harry."

"I should have come before," he told her guiltily.

"You wouldn't have got in; I haven't seen anyone since that night."

"What happened? Is there anything I can do for you, 'Mione?"

Hermione's eyes filled with tears. "There is something I want, Harry."

"Anything for you, Hermione, just name it and I'll do it. It's the least I can do for you."

"There are pictures of Sirius at Grimmauld Place. I don't have one here, and I haven't seen his face in nearly fifty years. Could you get it for me, please? That's all I want. I just want to see his beautiful face one more time before I die."

"Sirius?" Harry grew more confused by the moment. Why was she asking for a picture of Sirius Black? She had to be confused. So, he tried to correct her. "I could get Ron for you; he's between wives at the moment, and I know he'd come."

"Not Ron, Harry. Not Ron. It was never about Ron. I'd just like that picture of Sirius, please; I just want to see him one last time."

"I'll be back in a second," he told her and kissed her on the forehead.

Hermione squeezed Harry's hand weakly. "Harry, there's a Pensieve in my drawer. When I'm gone you are to have it. It will explain everything. Melinda?" Her voice was getting weaker and softer even as she attempted to make it loud enough to be heard by her mediwitch.

"Yes, Hermione?" The witch had to step closer to hear her fading voice.

"Tell him everything and answer any questions he has."

The mediwitch nodded and led the way back to the sitting room. She didn't even ask before she poured him a large Ogden's and told him to drink up. Harry took it without thinking. He walked around the room in a daze. The fierce liquor hitting the back of his throat cleared his brain from the shock it had been under.

"Can you Floo from that fireplace?" Harry nodded towards the mantle. Melinda nodded and watched him move to the Floo to call home.

It was Misty that answered, and the house-elf ran to get the photograph album from the study. The heavy album was almost as big as she was, but Harry caught it easily and pulled it into the room he was in.

Harry skimmed the pages until he found a picture of Sirius that had been taken after his return from the veil. He was sitting on his new bike trying to get Hermione to take a ride with him, and she was laughing as she kept shaking her head. The memories it brought back haunted him. Tears appeared in his eyes and he wiped them away roughly with the back of his hand.

"She was beautiful, and I can quite see why she was so smitten with him. He was a handsome man," Melinda said as she looked at the picture. The witch pulled out her wand and pointed it at the print.

"*Augeo permitto videor!*" She incanted the spell clearly and watched the size of the picture increase threefold.

Harry felt like his face was wearing a permanently befuddled expression.

"She wouldn't have been able to see it clearly at the size it was," the witch explained. "Do you want to take it in or should I?" She flicked her wand again and whispered, "reveal." A part of the wall turned into a screen, and it showed Hermione's room beyond it. A young trainee was sitting by the old witch's side as she slept.

Hermione was still asleep when Harry went back into her room, but she stirred when he approached the bed.

"Here you are, 'Mione. The picture of Sirius you wanted," he said as he placed it by her side.

Hermione reached out a clawed hand and started to stroke it. "He was so handsome. I never understood what he saw in me for those happy months, but it didn't last. He finally saw me for real and died rather than stay by my side. What did I do wrong, Harry? Why wouldn't he stay with me? Was it the baby? Did he hate the idea so much that he preferred to be dead rather than live with me?" Lightning started to circle around the room, and a wild wind tugged at Harry's hair. "What did I do wrong?" She was crying so hard, and it broke the heart of The Boy Who Lived Twice to see her like this.

"What did I do wrong? What did I do wrong; I loved you so much, Sirius." Hermione practically scrunched the enlarged photo, crinkling it as she tried to get answers from the images on it. "I still love you. I was so happy; if you'd wanted your freedom I would have given it to you." She started screaming in the middle of the gale that spun out of control around them. "You didn't have to die!"

The witch at the door waved her wand silently, and Hermione fell asleep. Tears still fell from her eyes as her hand lay over the picture that fell onto her breast. The storm settled as she relaxed, and the mediwitch indicated that Harry should leave.

Harry seemed almost broken when he accepted a second glass of fire whiskey from the witch in front of him. He looked a pitiful replica of the wizard seen in the newspapers every week.

"I didn't know," Harry muttered, "I just didn't know. When she was first ill we were told to leave her alone, to let her recover slowly. Then a week turned into a month, then six months, and finally a year. We just assumed she'd rebuilt her life without us. We never knew how sick she really was." He knew it was no excuse for their behaviour, but he still wanted to explain himself.

"We weren't permitted to tell you. On her good days she used to be able to read or research what had happened. A lot of the newer potions and cures at St Mungo's are due to her excellent mind and her research," Melinda told him. She conjured up a tea tray and started pouring a cup which she offered to Harry before pouring her own.

"She said you'd tell me what happened?" Harry prompted as he gratefully sipped at the hot drink.

"I can tell you what I know from my conversations with Ms Granger when she was lucid and from our records." Melinda pulled a file across her desk and opened it. 'It's really rather sad,' she started to explain. "Miss Granger, Hermione, had entered into the first part of a binding with a rather powerful older wizard. The process was disrupted."

"I never knew that. Are you sure?" Harry looked quizzical. This was the first he'd heard of any of this. Ron had never said anything about him and Hermione trying to bond with each other, and with the best of wills Ron could hardly be described as either older nor powerful.

"I'm quite sure The ceremony used was the older form that takes a month to complete. Each participant would end up with a part of the other's soul at the end of it. That way they could survive the death of their partner if necessary. Only the most powerful and devoted lovers have even a chance of making it work. It's called the 'Forver Reus' spell, the eternal soul binding, and I have never actually seen it used before." Melinda allowed a moment for her words to sink in before she continued.

"Usually it was performed during a wedding ceremony. The month time frame for the entire ritual was the original reason for a honeymoon. Hermione and her lover had only performed the first part of the ritual, opening them both up for the partial soul swap. When he was killed in a motorbike accident -- well, it was assumed to be an accident -- it left her with a 'hole in her soul' as it were. When she found out that he had committed suicide something snapped inside her. Between that and the loss of her baby, it broke her already fractured soul into an unmendable mess. The result is the shell of the woman you see before you now."

"Baby? What baby?" That piece of the news stunned Harry. He had not heard about it or imagined that Hermione had been pregnant. He felt like he was seeing his friend for the first time and seeing the flaws in the way he'd handled himself. A cold feeling engulfed his heart. Something about the events Melinda told him gave him the horrid feeling that he was responsible for this mess.

"Are you sure you are Harry Potter, friend to Hermione Granger? I hate to have to ask but you seem to have no knowledge of these momentous events in her life." Melinda couldn't fathom how someone who was supposed to be a close friend of her patient had no idea about her pregnancy.

"Well, I am Harry Potter. I thought I was her friend, but I am beginning to wonder. There is so much I simply didn't know." He ran his fingers through his hair, over the scar dominating his forehead. It had been easier to face Voldemort than find out how ill Hermione really was.

"Can you prove it, sir? I have to consider my patient's confidentiality." Melinda seemed embarrassed. She was sitting across the desk from probably one of the five most famous wizards ever, asking him to prove himself.

Harry didn't take it amiss. He would have asked the same thing if the position had been reversed. He swished and flicked his wand, producing his Patronus wordlessly, and the silvery stag galloped around the room once before vanishing. "She had a baby," he whispered. Hermione had always wanted children, and she'd mothered him and Ron through school and the battles.

"She lost a baby," the witch corrected quietly, "and before she could reverse the binding spell she was hit by one shock after another and collapsed. The binding is so rare that no one thought to check for it when she was taken to St. Mungo's. When it was finally discovered it was too late to reverse the effects or even to help her.

"Is there nothing that could have been done? Nothing you can do to help her?" Harry pleaded with the witch for the answer he wanted to hear, no needed, to hear.

"There is nothing at all to cure her. All we can do now is ease her passing," the witch told him gently. She always hated giving bad news to families. It was the worst part of her job.

"She looks so ancient." Harry could feel his throat closing with the tears and the injustice of it all.

"Physically, she's 148 years old. The loss of her soul mate has put that much stress on her body and mind."

Harry thanked her wordlessly when she handed him a self-cleaning tissue and she politely ignored the tears that fell.

"We were never told, could never find out, who the man was; even in death we might have been able to link his spirit with hers but she couldn't tell us. For some reason she had placed a privacy charm on the knowledge, and we couldn't break it without making her worse. She said if he would rather die than remain with her, she wouldn't curse him with her soul for eternity"

"It was Sirius Black," Harry said quietly. The knowledge seemingly coming from nowhere, like a torch was being lit up in his mind.

"I wonder what could have made him run from her after pledging his life and soul to her? It was a strange thing to do. If he didn't want that type of connection why start the ritual at all?" The witch mulled the unanswerable question over.

"He thought she had chosen another and died to free her from the bond." The knowledge hit him hard. He was the one that had destroyed his two best friends lives. He remembered the day clearly. He'd been having a drink with Sirius at the Leaky Cauldron, and he couldn't wait to tell his Godfather that he'd seen Ron and Hermione choosing a ring. He'd wondered at the time why Sirius had gone so quiet and thoughtful at the news. Now, to his shame, he knew.

"Why on earth would he think that? She was pregnant at the time, and he knew it!" Melinda shook her head at the stupidity of it all.

"I think someone must have told him. I think I told him something that I now realise I was wrong about," Harry's voice started to fade as the memories came back.

"Told him what?" the mediwitch prodded. She really had wanted to help Hermione when she first started working with her. Now she just wanted her friend to have a peaceful death.

"That I'd seen her in Diagon Alley with a friend and ..." Harry's voice trailed off. "May I go back in and see her? Maybe I can explain it to her and give her some peace"

"Of course. You know the way." Melinda stood as Harry left the room. Then, she sat back down and pulled another file out of her desk and to started work on it. She looked at the screen as he entered but left it on mute.

"Hi, 'Mione," Harry said as he sat down in the recently vacated chair.

"Just call me when you're through, Mr Potter, and I'll come back and sit with her. She doesn't want to be left alone when she dies," the young witch watching Hermione told him as she quietly left the room.

Harry nodded his agreement and turned his attention back to his friend. Her long hair had been cut at some point, making it easier to manage in bed.

"Harry..." Hermione's voice had no strength in it at all when she spoke. Her eyes remained fixed on the picture of Sirius. "What did I do, Harry? I loved him so much." Her rheumy eyes tried to focus on the man in front of her.

"I don't think it was you, 'Mione," Harry told her gently, desperately trying to hold back the tears that threatened to overwhelm him.

"It has to be me. First Ron turned his back on me. He wanted to be able to play the field as well as play Quidditch. After Ron left me, HE picked up the pieces, taught me to laugh again. The Sex God of Gryffindor, at least that's what they called him, wanted me. He didn't push me. Instead he was gentle and loving and kind. We just woke up one day and realised neither of us wanted anyone else, ever, and we were in love. I'd told him that morning about the baby. I was so happy and so was he or so I

thought." She gazed at the picture again.

"Then what happened?" Harry prodded gently.

"He went out, and so did I. I wasn't sure where he went, but I went to Diagon Alley and bought him a ring. I saw Ron that day in the jewellers. He was buying a gift for some floosy or other. He made a great joke about me buying a ring. The prat said it was the only way I was ever going to get one. He must have been right. I was too serious for him and not pretty enough."

"It was Sirius. Wasn't it, Hermione?" Harry asked

Hermione gasped but she didn't answer him. Instead she continued speaking her thoughts out loud. "You know how beautiful the witches were that he went out with normally, and they were all purebloods. I was a Mudblood. Do you think that was what the problem was? I wasn't pretty enough, or was it my dirty blood?"

Hermione was getting agitated and clawing at his hand. The young mediwitch hurried in and started to fuss. She administered a calming potion and give Harry a look that warned him not to upset Hermione again.

Harry let his memories drift, recalling that dreadful time right before he'd lost his Godfather to death for a second time. He'd met Sirius coming out of Gringott's, gone for a drink, and he'd been stupid enough to tell him that he'd seen Hermione and Ron choosing something in the jewellery store, laughing together. At the time he'd thought that they were together. Since he was delighted for his friends, he had told Sirius what he'd seen. How stupid could he have been? He'd destroyed his best friends' lives.

"It wasn't you. I'm sure it wasn't. Why didn't you tell me about the two of you?" Harry asked.

"We didn't want you to be torn between your loyalties to him and I. We wanted to tell you quietly but time just slipped away from us. There was one time you told me there was too much of an age difference between us so you knew I was safe from him. He didn't want to disappoint you." Hermione fell heavily back against the pillows and seemed to be having difficulty breathing. She reached for Harry's hand. "When I'm gone, Harry, bury me somewhere quiet please, away from everyone."

"With Sirius?" Harry asked, thinking about the graveyard that held his parents and his godfather.

"No," Hermione almost yelled because the word came so forcefully. "No. He didn't want me in life. So I won't make him suffer me in death. Promise me that, Harry. Promise me, not there. Promise me that you won't bury me near him. Please, Harry!"

Hermione seemed so frightened and desperate to Harry. If this was the only thing he could do, fulfill her last request, he would do it for her. "I promise, Hermione," he told her quietly.

"And no memorial for me either, Harry. Just let me fade from history. I have no family and you are the only friend I have left. So, just bury me and leave me please. Let me be forgotten. Most people already have anyway."

Harry just nodded and held her hand as she slept; it was all he could do for her now. He looked at the picture lying on the bed. Now he knew what had happened. He couldn't believe how one small action could hurt so many people. Ron had spent his life chasing every female that came within his notice. Hermione was the only one who could ever talk sense to him. When she was gone there was nothing to hold Ron back. Hermione grew so old before her time, broken by his betrayal. Sirius died; Harry had even managed to kill a baby indirectly. It hadn't been a killing curse, but he'd caused the death just the same. Some hero he was.

Harry thought he heard the roar of a motorbike getting closer and closer. He looked around, only to see the spirit of his Godfather ride straight into the room through the wall.

"Come on, 'Mione, I've been waiting for you, my witch. We've been apart for far too long," Sirius said, holding out a ghostly hand. Harry watched as the soul of his best friend left her body, getting younger with every step. Sirius grabbed her up and swung her around, deepening a kiss until Harry had to look away for a few moments before he heard Hermione laugh, and he turned back.

Sirius winked at him as he lifted Hermione onto the back of the bike, and they sped away into the dusk. It didn't even soothe his heart to think that they were together.

It was raining when they buried Hermione at Hogwarts. Her grave overlooked the lake and was tucked behind a tree where it wouldn't be seen. Harry broke down in tears as her coffin was lowered into the waiting soil, and Ginny had to support her husband to prevent him from collapsing. There were only a few people in attendance: Harry, Ginny and their two children, Ron, Professor McGonagall and Hagrid - but that was it. The other Weasleys had offered to attend, but Harry asked them not to. He wanted it to be private, as Hermione wished it to be. The idea of false mourning for a forgotten friend seemed obscene at that moment.

Ginny placed a single white rose in the grave and turned to join her husband. 'Let's go up to the castle and have a drink. Then, we must go home,' she said as she linked her arm through his. Ron followed them, lost in thought. His red hair was dripping wet from the rain. Hagrid was sniffing loudly and blew his nose on the large spotted handkerchief he was carrying.

Headmaster Margrave was nervous to see all of the famous faces sitting at his table. He had felt it was the least the school could do, to offer Hermione a place to rest. It had been her home for seven years, and now it would be her home forever. He only hoped her spirit was peaceful enough not to add to the ghosts that abounded in the castle. He made a mental note to ask the Grey Lady to keep an eye out for her and make her welcome if she did show up.

Albus Dumbledore looked down from his portrait at the people below. Ronald Weasley hadn't changed in the years, neither had Harry. Well, at least not too much. Ginny was as beautiful as always. She was a grandmother now of course. It seemed a great shame that the third member of the Golden Trio was no longer amongst them.

Harry was the last to leave. His heart broke; every step he took left him feeling worse. 'I wish I had the chance to put it right,' he muttered, leaving Fawkes alone in the room.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 of 2

Harry gets a message to visit a dying Hermione, only to find he has been the author of her ills.

Harry woke with a scream. When he couldn't see anything or anybody, he just continued screaming. The noise woke Ginny up and sent her scurrying down the stairs from the bedroom; she rushed into the study ready to face whatever she found there.

"Lumos!" Ginny shouted, looking around to see where the attack was coming from. Strangely there wasn't anything, or anybody, attacking. Her boyfriend was lying on the sofa covered in a blanket, but he was still fully dressed and he was screaming.

Harry was staring wide eyed and unseeing around the room, terrified of what he'd seen in his sleep. Everything seemed so real. Seeing Hermione die, even if it might have only been in his dreams, frightened him. It took Ginny the rest of the night to settle him down, and he refused to even consider sleeping without a light on. He had never been so afraid.

Harry was late getting in to work the next morning. He was still very unsettled by his horrendous dream, but Ginny had told him to write every little detail he could remember down. She wasn't positive it was only a dream and not a foretelling, and she wanted to be prepared. Harry, however, didn't want to believe any of it. After all, wasn't Hermione busy with her Potions training at St Mungo's? If she was seeing someone, surely she would have told him wouldn't she? He didn't want to face the possibility that he could be the cause of all that he'd seen.

Harry Floo'd into the office he worked in. Since he really didn't need to see anyone this morning, he was grateful that it had its own entrance. There was a stack of paperwork waiting for him, and there seemed to be no let up all day. Harry enjoyed his work. At work he was just one of the boys. He was someone who had worked his way up over the last three years. Now, unless he needed to use his celebrity status for something, he was just Harry.

Ron Weasley, Beater for the Chudley Cannons and star player of the English team, was the famous one. Ron had finally escaped from Harry's shadow. It was a wonderful day for both of them when Harry had been pushed out the way so some girl could get his mate's autograph.

Harry ploughed his way through the reports all morning, and he was glad of the break when Gladys, his secretary, came in and asked if there was an Auror spare. The minister needed some paperwork hand delivered to Gringotts.

Harry volunteered. He could do with the walk and the fresh air. The security wizard helped him attach the bag to his wrist, and he made his way to the Minister's Office. Percy Weasley waved him in, and Minister of Magic Shacklebolt was waiting for him.

"Would you please deliver these to the Head Goblin, Harry? Make sure he signs a receipt and signs to say that the bag seal is intact. You know what Goblins are like," he said with a smile.

Harry signed the paperwork with a wave of his wand and headed out towards the public entrance, looking forward to the time away from his desk. It was cold but bright as he made his way up Diagon Alley towards the Wizarding bank. The shops were not as busy as he expected. Mostly he saw mothers with younger children and ladies having lunch. He noticed Lady Malfoy, who acknowledged him with a wave of her hand before going into Madam Merkin's, and a few other people he knew from school and work. As he passed Faberge's, the jewellers shop, he noticed a shock of bright red hair that would only belong to a member of the Weasley clan.

Even though he was supposed to go straight to the bank, he couldn't resist taking a close look at what his friend was up to. Inside the jeweller's shop he saw Hermione and Ron, and Ron was down on one knee in front of her. Spread out on the counter there were several rings. Harry's mind jumped to the obvious conclusion or at least would have if it hadn't been for his nightmare. The parallel situation to his dream showed him that he needed more proof that today was the day he'd destroyed so many lives. He wanted to vomit, knowing what he was about to do to the people who loved him.

Harry nearly tripped over his own feet when he saw his godfather at the doorway into Gringotts. Sirius Black was getting the normal amount of stares from every female, and more than a few men, as he lounged against a pillar smoking a cigarette. The maleness of Padfoot the Marauder oozed out of his every pore: at least that's what Ginny told him. Harry wasn't sure how he felt about his girlfriend being besotted by his godfather, even if it was only in fun.

"Hermione will do you some serious injury if she sees you with those things, Sirius," Harry said with a grin, delighted to catch the Marauder breaking a Hermione-induced rule. Blackmail material was always useful.

Sirius just smiled. "Don't tell her, mate, please? I'm going to give up anyway." He almost seemed to shift nervously from one foot to another. "Look, we have to meet up soon for a drink. I need to talk to you about something." Sirius studied his godson. He looked so much like James, it was scary sometimes.

"How about now? I've just got to drop some stuff off at the bank, and I can walk you back to the Leaky Cauldron and grab a cold one. It'll be time for lunch by then," Harry said. It would be good to spend some time with Sirius again.

Sirius nodded as Harry went into the bank. By the time Harry had managed to persuade the Chief Goblin to sign all the paperwork, and handed over the case with the seals still intact, Sirius was surrounded by a gaggle of females. It was always the same when Sirius was out in public. *Mind you, if he stopped wearing his snugly fitted clothes, maybe he wouldn't be mobbed quite so much*, Harry thought with a humph. Then, he remembered the broken woman of his dreams and vowed to do all he could to make sure it never happened.

The Leaky Cauldron was near enough empty when they arrived. The lunch time crowd had vanished, and the evening crowd had yet to arrive. Sirius and Harry found a quiet table in the corner. They both sat quietly and watched their Butterbeer for a few minutes, neither one sure how to start the conversation.

"Sirius, I saw..." Harry started to say.

"Harry, I need to tell you..." Sirius started talking at exactly the same moment.

"You go first," Harry said. As he spoke he felt a wave of magic pass over him. It felt as though someone had walked on his grave.

Sirius took a deep breath. "Harry, I've met someone. I was at Gringotts to retrieve the Black family jewels. I..." he stopped, unsure of how to continue.

"What's she like?" Harry asked. "It is a she?" He had to tease the womaniser a bit, didn't he?

"Yes, she's a she, you cheeky young beggar!" Sirius laughed at James' son. Moments like this reminded him of how much like James that Harry was, and he took another swig of his pint. "She's beautiful and intelligent, and..." Harry laughed to himself as his godfather's eyes went dreamy and unfocused.

"Then why's she going out with you?" *Ooh, it was fun to torment Sirius.*

"I don't know," Sirius said earnestly. "She could have the choice of any wizard she wanted, but she seems to want an old man. She's so much younger than I am." Sirius looked straight at Harry. It made the younger wizard feel a little guilty about all the times he'd teased Sirius about his age, but he wasn't going to let him off that lightly.

"Mentally or physically?" Harry asked, grinning like mad. It was fun to listen to Sirius wax lyrical over a female. Old love 'em and leave 'em Sirius Black had fallen totally and completely in love. If his dream was anything to go by, he'd fallen for a book-loving witch instead of a complete airhead.

"If it was mentally younger than me she'd be about four, Harry. She's so smart and usually more mature than most. Physically she's the same age as you."

"So when are you and Hermione getting married?" Harry looked at the man in front of him and smirked. This was so much fun.

"As soon as possible," Sirius said without realising that Harry knew exactly who he had been talking about. "Hey, how did you know it was Hermione? Merlin, she's going to kill me! She wanted to tell you that bit herself!"

"She'll only kill you for smoking, Sirius, only for smoking." Harry took another drink. "Congratulations." Harry noticed the skeptical look on his godfather's face. "No, really, I mean it. You deserve one another," he told Sirius. They laughed together and they finished their beers before heading out of the pub.

"You know if you hurt her, I will have to kill you, right?" Harry said as they headed for the Floo.

"Right, I know. I would cut out my own heart or even go back into the veil forever before I ever hurt her intentionally, Harry. I promise." Harry saw the magic surrounding them. His godfather had just made an unbreakable oath.

Harry made his way back to the office happier than he'd been for ages. Sirius had shown him the ring he'd bought as well as the one he'd fetched from his vault. He wanted Hermione to have the choice of a family one with all the traditions attached or one for a fresh start. Knowing Hermione, she'd find a way to combine the two.

Waiting at the office for Harry was a house-elf that he didn't recognise. The elf bowed low when Harry approached him and asked, "You is Harry Potter?"

"I is... I mean I am Harry Potter; how can I help you?" he asked. It was unusual to see visiting house-elves in his office; they normally just went to the front desk, but he made it welcome.

"I is told to bring you this." The creature handed over a letter sealed with the Hogwarts' coat of arms before Apparating out of the office.

Dear Harry,

Aren't you glad you let him speak first? Congratulations on changing the time line.

Albus Dumbledore

Harry was still laughing when he arrived home to Ginny. She told him the wonderful news that Hermione Granger and Sirius Black had eloped and would be back in a month. He kept the news of the baby to himself: it was the least he could do. Harry thanked Merlin for a better ending than his nightmare had promised.