

Realisation

by Saracen77

Hermione puts together the pieces and comes to a conclusion.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: None of these are mine, much as I would wish it.

Thank you to my betas, Charmed3 and Ubiquirk, for rescuing those commas from the special level of hell. Special thanks to Ubiquirk for fixing my exposition issues!

"It's you. My God!" Hermione paused. Taking a deep breath, she looked squarely at Harry. "It's been you all along. We have all just been too blind to see it."

Harry looked at her, not comprehending. He looked at the torn shirt and mud-streaked face, softly touched by the light of the full moon. Behind her, Ron looked worn, thin and battered by the night's, no, the year's work.

Harry looked back at the past year, silently tracking their progress around the country, as he watched his friend's familiar faces. He remembered fighting the Death Eaters and trolls, giants and werewolves at every turn, searching every corner for the four remaining pieces of Voldemort's soul.

Ron turned to Hermione. "What? I think I'm too blind to see most things at this point. We're all shattered, and I stink of Snape's house. Speak plain or don't expect me to keep up with you."

"Think about it, Ron. We came here tonight because we were out of ideas. We knew the penultimate Horcrux was inside that overgrown snake, and we knew that Wormtail would be here. It's a shame the intelligence didn't manage to warn us about the other ten Death Eaters that happened to be setting up camp in Snape's lounge, but that can't be helped now." She paced through the clearing, trying to shake loose the fog from her own mind.

Harry turned to follow her movements. "There is that to it. I was more worried by the trouble that twelve-foot snake was causing. Give me a Basilisk any day." He flashed a half-hearted smile at Ron, who chuckled quietly.

"We got out though dirty great snake dead, Death Eaters dead or trussed up like turkeys, and the rest of the Order home safe in their beds. Where we should be, 'Mione. Let's Disapparate and get some sleep. I've got bruises on my bruises, and my back is killing me."

"Yes, Ronald, I know. Thankfully your bruises are probably the worst any of us got tonight, but then, we didn't try rodeo riding a giant snake through a house full of flying curses. This is important. Please, try to follow me?" Hermione looked at him, pleadingly.

"Explain it to us." Harry sounded weary, but he knew Hermione would not keep them hanging around in hostile woods for no reason.

"Right. We found out about the Horcruxes. We deduced that there would be seven from Slughorn's memory." The pacing continued. She held up seven fingers. "The diary that got Ginny, you destroyed in the Chamber." One finger down. "Professor Dumbledore dealt with Slytherin's ring for us." Another finger was ticked off. "Hufflepuff's cup, from the office building that used to be Riddle's orphanage, destroyed." Three down. "We pulled apart the Defence Against the Dark Arts classroom to find Ravenclaw's

dagger. I knew there had to be a reason that Voldemort didn't want the teachers to get too familiar with that room." Four. She paused to look at the boys. They were both staring at her.

Harry caught her eye. "We know this, Hermione. Piece five in that rotten snake, six still inside Voldemort. We only decided to come after the snake because, like you said, we are out of ideas. We can't find seven. Ron and I have taken Snape's Potions book apart, and I think you have probably read every word in Hogwarts' and the Ministry's libraries. The Death Eaters we caught know nothing, and no one from Riddle's childhood who lived to tell the tale knows anything. Dead end. Nowhere to go now. Even if I killed him tomorrow, without piece seven, he could come back."

"Yes, Harry, he could. But not now that we have the key. Harry, you are the key."

Harry, Ron and Hermione looked at each other in the moonlight. Ron sank to his knees, weary and aching. He rested his head in his hands as he spoke in a gruff voice.

"What are you going on about, Hermione? We've known that all along. Chosen One, Boy Who Lived. It's always been Harry."

"Yes, but no. We never really looked at what was under our noses. Or what we had already been told by people that we trusted." She paused, gathering her thoughts. "Neither can live, while the other one survives.... It's true, isn't it? You can't live while he survives, neither of you can really live, because you are so connected."

Hermione turned away, looking to the stars for guidance. The Dog Star winked at her, sending a chill down her back. *Not now, Sirius*, she thought, *please, the idea is bad enough without you glaring at me.*

"Of course I can't. You know this. I wouldn't have spent seven years of my life fighting him if I could have just brushed it under the carpet, would I?" There was no anger, no fight, in Harry's voice, just confusion. *Where are you going with this, Hermione?* It was plain from the look on Ron's face that he was just as much in the dark.

"OK then. What did Dumbledore tell you about Riddle and his Horcrux? What did he say was Riddle's criteria for creating a vessel for a piece of his soul? He told you, Harry, in his study, and then you told us. Not him. Your words explained this to us." Hermione was breathless, eyes flashing. Harry could not tell if anger or distress was the emotion behind them, but she was becoming close to tears.

"He said he saved the making of a Horcrux until he had a really important death." All the energy was being sucked out of him; the very words had drained the last of his reserves.

"Do you think your death would have been the most important death that he could possibly have orchestrated? Do you think that he would have saved making his sixth and final Horcrux, breaking his soul into the seven magical parts, for the death of the boy that was prophesied to destroy him?"

"I suppose."

"So that's it then," sighed Ron. "All this is about looking in the Potters' old house or village. Couldn't this have waited until we have had a good night's sleep? Remember that we have just been whipped by a bloody great snake."

"No, Ron, it can't wait." Hermione rounded on Harry. "OK then. What would he have used? What could have been good enough to use as a receptacle for the sixth piece of Lord Voldemort's soul? Something lying around in the bedroom of a small boy? I don't really see him as the stuffed bear type, do you?"

They shook their heads. They had no idea where Hermione was going with any of this, nor enough energy to catch her up. The best idea was probably to nod in the right places and hope she got round to the point before they fainted.

"And do you believe that if it had been lying round in Little Whinging that Dumbledore would have found it by now? He must have gone over that house with a fine-toothed comb. No. If it was in that house, he would have got it by now."

"Hermione, I don't understand where you're trying to lead us with this. I'm tired, it's late, and I really need a hot bath. Plus, I think about a hundred Death Eaters are going to swoop in to find out what happened to their pals any minute now, so please, can you get to the point?" Ron was beginning to sound annoyed, and Harry was beginning to think he had a point.

"Harry, think hard. What do you remember about the night he came to your house. The night that your parents died?"

"Not much, you know that. I kind of remember the green flash, then nothing."

"Was he alone? Did he come to your house with back up? Were there more Death Eaters around or just him by himself?"

"Alone, I think. Merlin, this was all so long ago I really don't know. I think he was alone."

"So there was no one else to carry the Horcrux, and no one to remove it from the site then?"

"I-I don't know. I don't think so."

"Oh, I get it!" Ron walked to stand beside Hermione. "You think Harry took it with him without realising! So what did you have that day Harry?"

"Nothing. The clothes I sat there in. The nappy that was on my bum. Nothing. I had...." Harry stopped suddenly. His eyes widened as he turned to look at his best friends. He sank to his knees and buried his face in his hands.

"What's up, mate? Then you can't have it, can you? If you had nothing, then Hermione must be wrong."

In a small, quiet voice, Harry looked up at him. "No. She's right. It's me. It's been me all along."

Hermione joined Harry on the floor, and put her arm around his shoulders. "If there was nothing there to make the Horcrux, then it must have been Harry. That snake was proof that he could use living things. He used Harry because the plan backfired. The protection that his mother placed on him was unexpected and fast. He was disembodied and had no way to take his planned Horcrux away from the scene. The intent to murder Harry had already split his soul that last time, so there were two pieces floating. He shoved one into the nearest thing that he knew would be protected. Harry." Hermione finished speaking and stifled a quiet sob.

Harry looked at Ron, whose face was ashen. "It's not so bad, Ron. It's you and Hermione that will have the tough job." He looked from Ron to Hermione quickly. "You will do it, won't you? I don't want it to be a stranger."

Hermione's sobs became louder, her whole body shaking. Ron looked uncomprehendingly at Harry. "Do what, mate? I don't get it."

"When I take him down, he will die. But he will only die like he did last time. Disembodied until another idiot like Quirrell or Wormtail comes along; then they will go through the whole business of putting him back together again. There will always be someone ready to believe that Riddle's way is the best, that he can make their sorry little lives better. He has to be dead. Properly dead." Harry paused, looking squarely at Ron. "After I kill him, you will have to destroy the final Horcrux."

Harry's words finally penetrated the fog of fatigue that had surrounded Ron. He saw the expression change on Ron's face, realisation dawning. Hermione had managed to stop her chest-wrenching sobs and was also looking at Ron.

Ron sank down to join them on their knees, penitent in the moonlight. Tears shone in his eyes as he put one arm around Harry and the other around Hermione.

"So this is it. Three become two. It shouldn't have to end like this, mate," whispered Ron.

"I know. But that's the way it was written. Neither can live while the other survives. Trelawny just missed out the bit where we would both have to die to make sure that one stayed dead. You will, Ron, won't you?"

Ron paused. Under his hands he could feel the tremors of Hermione's grief-wracked body, and the radiating calm of Harry.

"I will."

In the sky above, the clouds parted to reveal the heavens, and a lone dog cried out a plaintive note into the darkness.