Mischief Managed

by rainfromheaven

They say that when someone is on the brink of death, his life flashes through his eyes one last time. Who but the Marauders had experienced so much of life... and death? *Contains HPDH spoilers.*

Redemption and Reunion

Chapter 1 of 1

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Story Summary: They say that when someone is on the brink of death, his life flashes through his eyes one last time. Who but the Marauders had experienced so much of life... and death? *[Contains HPDH spoilers.]*

Redemption

Noise. Just more noise.

Peter sighed and hunched lower in his seat, wishing he could disappear altogether. *Not again,* he thought wearily. *Not another prisoner being take in.*

He couldn't figure out what was being said or what was happening above the din...not until Bellatrix' voice, cutting and cruel, sliced through the air, pierced afterwards by a scream of a young woman being helplessly tortured...

"HERMIONE!"

Peter flinched in recognition both of the name and its speaker. *The boy. The one who cared for me, let me sleep in his bed, gave me a rat tonic.*..Ron, best friends with James and Lily's son, both of whom he had betrayed...

They're here. They've finally been caught. And now it will end.

Another scream of agony.

"HERMIONE!"

He closed his eyes shut, half-hoping he could do the same with his ears. *The Dark Lord will be here soon. It will all be over not far from now.* But this was not the way he had imagined things would be, not when he had first stood before He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. Not after the Dark Lord offered him much-coveted safety for him and his friends, if he would only serve him by keeping him informed about their movements. It was necessary, he said, for him to be able to put them all under his protection. He had agreed, wishing it would end all their cares and bring things back the way they used to be at Hogwarts...carefree, happy, without any hint of worry...

But he had been branded with the Dark Mark. Peter shuddered at the memory of his burning flesh. He should have known his master's treachery at once. He should have known! Or maybe he did know, but he was too weak. Too helpless to find the harder way out.

I was never brave like you or James or Remus.

A ghost of a smile flitted across his lips. He had heard Remus had a son already, named after his wife's late father. He would make the perfect father. He knew he would. Just as James would have, he was sure.

James.

He buried his face in his hands and uttered a sorrowful groan, unmindful of the cold silver on his face. "I'm so sorry, James! I'm so sorry, so sorry..." His shoulders shook as he wept hard, as though his tears would rid him of all his pain and guilt. "Why did it have to be you? It could have been...should have been...somebody else, not you! Why did I have to betray you? You, of all people..." His voice broke. *You, who had been the kindest to me, the most patient, the most understanding... the most forgiving...*

"Can you ever forgive me, James?"

The door to the drawing room burst open, and Draco burst in, panting heavily.

"Wormtail, quick! Father wants you to have a look at the cellar...there's something going on..."

He gaped uncomprehendingly at the blond boy. "Something going on?"

"Potter and his friends have been caught," Draco answered bitingly. "Stupid, careless brats... I haven't got time to explain! Go down there immediately. NOW!" He bolted out of the room without another word.

Peter stood up in a daze and exited the room, making his way down the stairs to the cellar. He stood some feet away from the wooden door, staring fearfully at it.

"Stand back. Stand away from the door. I am coming in." He pointed his wand at the door, and it opened; he blinked, momentarily blinded by the blaze of light coming from within. He stepped inside and was, in an instant, bound strongly by two boys. Ron had already seized his wand arm and had painfully jerked it upwards while Harry had smacked the palm of his hand to his mouth. He struggled against the uncomfortable position to which he had compromised, his wand emitting sparks in the process. He lifted his silver hand and tightly wrapped it around Harry's neck.

"What is it, Wormtail?" he heard Lucius call from above. He attempted to shout for help, but Ron had already wheezily answered back, "Nothing! All fine!"

Harry gasped, hardly able to breathe. He clutched at the metal fingers around his neck, vainly trying to pry them off. "After I saved your life? You owe me, Wormtail!"

Something flashed in Peter's eyes, and for the first time in a long while, his heart took over his mind *James.* He was choking him, hurting him. *No!* He would not cause him pain again. His fingers slackened around Harry's neck; Harry, surprised at this, wrenched himself free of the older man's grasp and stepped back, his hand still on his mouth.

He let me go, Harry thought, shocked. Judging from the look of surprise in the man's watery eyes, he was too.

"And we'll have that," Ron whispered, taking Peter's wand from his other hand.

Suddenly, his silver glove rose of its own accord and moved towards his throat. His eyes widened in fear as it inched closer, despite Harry's attempt to halt its progress.

"No..."

It clamped down around his throat, tightly squeezing it. He rasped as he fought for precious air, trying to help it into his lungs. Oxygen was cheating him, and its lack was finding its way into his brain. Everything was becoming foggy, blurred. Moments of his youth, the happiest he'd ever been in his life, passed his vision in a jiffy. His parents. Dumbledore. Sirius. Remus. Lily. James.

"Peter, have you done it?" James's face loomed in front of him, alight with youth and curiosity, his eyes twinkling with naughtiness.

He gasped for breath once more. It was no use; the hallucinations...or were they memories? ...remained. He tried to return his friend's smile and faintly succeeded.

His response was barely a whisper. "Mischief managed." He had a sense that everything around him was fading...

James embraced him like the brother he had always been, like the one he himself was supposed to be. "So proud of you; there's nothing like a real Marauder."

...And then a sense of nothingness at all.

Reunion

A white, silvery animal distracted Remus from his musings by the window. He rushed outside the door to meet it before Nymphadora could stop him and recognised Bill's Patronus.

"They are safe."

Remus nearly collapsed with relief as he waited for the Patronus to swiftly run away. It didn't. He frowned in confusion as it paused and scrutinised him with its translucent eyes.

"Wormtail's dead." It trotted away without another glance.

His mouth dropped open, pain punching through his gut. *Peter.* His shoulders drooped, and he reentered the house and made his way to the kitchen, where his wife was cooking.

"Who was that?" she asked cheerfully, her hair its customary shade of bubblegum pink.

Remus locked his hollow gaze with her. "From Bill." A slight heartbeat, and then, "Peter's dead."

Nymphadora tightened her grip around the pan's handle as she stared at her husband, who suddenly looked so much older than his years *The last man standing had seen everyone fall.*

"I wanted him dead, was willing to kill that rat myself after what he did to James... To Sirius..." His voice cracked with grief. "But now..." How could everything end this way? Who could have foreseen all the horrors their future held hidden behind the childish pranks and obnoxious humour? Why had they spent all their laughter so young in their lives and had left none for later?

And now, standing in front of Bellatrix and her fellow Death Eaters, the question remained unanswered.

"Well, well! If it isn't my dear niece and her dirty-veined husband," Bellatrix sneered, her mouth curled contemptuously as she regarded Nymphadora and Remus. "Married

quietly, didn't we? What's the matter, ashamed of your vows?"

Tonks lifted her wand higher and aimed for Bellatrix' chest, who just laughed. "Seems like your ties are going to be tested tonight. *Till death do us part,* is that how you said it?"

Hatred coursed through every fibre of Remus' being; she was the one who had murdered Sirius, had taken down another one of the Marauders...

Without another warning, a jet of green light streaked towards his wife, who had crouched and narrowly avoided being hit. Curses were soon being fired indiscriminately from everywhere, and in the midst of such a chaos, the two of them had to split up and take on separate zones. Instinctively, he turned his back on Tonks and faced the half of the hallway nearer the stairs, where four people robed in black had their wands pointed at him.

Was this how James felt when he was being attacked by Voldemort that night? he wondered as he ducked and sent a streak of curses back. *No, he was with his son. I'm not with Teddy.* Feeling an upsurge of energy at the thought of his son, of the life he owed him, he attacked with renewed vigour.

It had only been five minutes into full combat when he heard a triumphant cackle behind him. He whirled, distracted, just in time to see the love of his life slowly fall to the floor, watched as the light drained out of her eyes. *No! Not her! I was supposed to protect her!*

Unmindful of the fact that his own survival was at stake, he rushed to her lifeless form, grabbed her hand and held it to his heart. She could not be dead, not with her vibrant hair and the peaceful smile on her lips, not when they were just about to start a new life, had the beginnings of a happy family...

He could feel a rush of air going for him from behind, but before he could react, he felt it hit him. A thousand invisible knives stabbed him mercilessly...but no, he would not cry out, he would not give them that satisfaction of knowing they've gotten to him. He gripped his wife's hand tighter as though it would give him strength, but the pain was just too much. He struggled to keep his mind together and his eyes open, but deep in his heart, he knew the blackness would soon overwhelm him.

And then he remembered that they were at the third floor of the castle, where they...Sirius and James and Peter and him...had first discovered another secret passageway into Hogsmeade aside from the Whomping Willow, which they had used many a time to sneak out from and back into Hogwarts on ordinary nights, when he didn't have to worry about his furry little problem... It seemed fitting that his life should end here tonight...where it first began anyway and where it would always come back to...

Out of the fog, he heard Sirius' voice, as clear as day. "I'm tired. I think it's about time we get some rest now, isn't it?"

Remus almost smiled in reminiscence as James agreed, "Definitely. We've been up all night keeping Moony company; think we've caused enough chaos to last a lifetime."

"Come on, Remus. What's taking you so long?" Peter whined.

He closed his eyes and remembered climbing out of the tunnel, tapping the map blank and muttering, "Mischief managed."

"I'm ready now."

The Marauders had once again come in full circle...and this time, nothing could break them.

Author's Notes: I just had to write something, no matter how stupid, or I'd end up crying my eyes out again! Sigh. Did you know I practically keeled over the picture in Chapter 10? I'm going to miss them so much! *tears well up again*