# Chapter 9: Harry Potter and the Cup of Nodens

“-. November 2, 1994 .-“

All Hallow’s Eve felt doomed.

And not because of Harry’s friends or their news. It had actually been pretty great walking Ron and Hermione back to Hogwarts. Unlike their terrible time on the way over, going back was super easy thanks to a dinosaur aversion bracelet that Hermione couldn’t stop slapping her own forehead over not thinking about herself.

It lost charge as quickly as all other magics did in that place – except some ancient artefacts like Godric, which seemed to work by different rules for some reason – but for just passing through it was perfect.

Hermione was not mollified when told it needed blood from all the affected species to work, but such was life. Ron was aghast at illegal blood magic, but not so much as when informed it was Neville who acquired all of said blood. It was his own fault for not being a true Gryffindor.

Speaking of, after he saw them through their exit, Harry went and spent a while with Neville on safari too, which was always brilliant. Nev was so much cooler in Raptor Mountain, it was kind of weird actually.

Kind of sad too.

The guns were outrageously illegal of course, but Harry totally agreed that he felt one hundred percent manlier holding one, and nine hundred percent even more manly while shooting at extinct megafauna.

Once back at the Pottery, though, Harry was finally alone to start worrying about the Tournament news, because bad news with friends wasn’t the same as bad news without them.

Still, while the younger him might have been resigned to yet another bad hand, the new him was different. The determination to not let this rule him, or anyone or anything else rule him anymore, was what he focused inward with absolute self-control and took with him into sleep

The end result was a breakthrough he’d avoided hoping too much for, lest he jinx himself: for the first time in his life, he managed to not just induce a lucid dream at will, but also control it from inside to force a past life regression deliberately.

Unfortunately, it completely deprived him of his newly-attained conscious control because it suddenly *wasn’t* a conscious dream anymore. Just memories, like… Like he was recovering from amnesia.

Badly.

It was only on waking up the next day that he remembered – too late, again – what Nicolas always told him: he was never going to remember anything worth a damn if he just woke up normally. Short-term memory was just about ten minutes, that was the bottleneck unless he figured something out. How to extend the trance, maybe. Have the past life regression while staying half-conscious for a few hours more? Days?

But the human mind could dream up entire lifetimes in moments, you shouldn’t need to be *asleep* to remember them any more than you needed it to think up the plot of a book. Magic should work to bypass that, Harry was sure of it. Legilimency could make you relive entire chains of events in an instant even awake, why not this?

Most annoying of all, in the excitement of his breakthrough Harry had completely forgotten to aim the dream – it was so easy to single-mindedly forget stuff in dreams – meaning that he only kept the stuff that hit him the hardest during that timeline.

*Cedric Diggory is going to die?* Harry thought drowsily. *He’s Hufflepuff, I think? We were friends? Didn’t feel like it though, but – he died that go around?*

Harry remembered Cedric Diggory lying dead on the ground, darkness all around, and a large, looming angel with a raised scythe in its right hand, with a skull face and skeletal hands.

He remembered crying too, very vividly. Crying over the body. In public, there was a public, so during one of the Triwizard tasks? Then he was being hauled around by a pod person before he was ready to calm down and… Some other stuff happened that he’d felt really strongly about in the dream, but which he didn’t remember anymore.

There was even something about the pod people cooking Voldemort into a stew while silver-masked marionettes stood around the cauldron, because past life memories mixed up with dream nonsense at the end there, ugh. Now he didn’t know what anything meant! Who the heck would eat Voldemort, honestly, wouldn’t he taste foul?

And did Harry mention that he felt doomed? On Halloween?

Real Halloween too, not that fake.

“Be glad you got anything useful at all,” Nicolas chided him later that day, when they were checking on Harry’s latest nerve regrowth potion together. “Other aspiring seers are too busy cleansing themselves and staying up all night with jitters, in anticipation and dread of tomorrow. As someone who also feels ‘doomed’ around this time, you should be glad you managed to have a full night’s sleep at all, never mind one so productive.”

“I know, it’s just frustrating. It’s different this time, I’m sure of it.” And weird. The Yearly Walk always felt significant but this was more than that. Harry couldn’t explain it well.

The feeling did come with a certainty that he’d be able to, though. Explain. Or at least understand. Soon. Like something would happen… not on the walk but after it. Something that would fundamentally change how he looked at life.

Hopefully something he did himself.

“Par for the course with divination,” Nicolas told him after Harry did his best to put it all in words. “Your spirit is changing, the more attuned you become to the associative and atemporal elements of reality, the more clearly you seem to discern future ties of causation and correlation. Even if a seer cannot divine his own future, you are becoming able to foresee how much impact everything else will have on it, which gives you some second-hand hints as to what your own decision-making will amount to. Quite the workaround.”

Someday, Harry would be able to take compliments with dignity, but today was not that day. “I’m not exactly thrilled to know I’m apparently changing without understanding how. Or controlling how, that’s worse.”

“We don’t much control physical growth either, or the mental, not directly, but I see your point. Fortunately for you, adaptability is built into us, more so in the spirit than the flesh. The third eye is only the beginning. Once you can keep it open *and* understand what you see, you’ll be able to make more deliberate changes to yourself if you wish.”

“Like what?”

“I could answer that, but then you might neglect to come up with original ideas. I probably already said too much, changes to yourself are not the end-all, and they might not even be necessary at all depending on what else you figure out. Potentially. For your sake, I’ll keep my peace.”

“That’s not a lot of help.”

“Visions, like dreams, are constrained by our frame of reference. You shouldn’t be too hasty to broaden it, premature experiences will open you to dangers you’re not ready to handle.”

“Like?”

“Well, your harrowing experience with Peter Pettigrew means that the memories about violence, injuries and other forms of trauma will come through much more easily and clearly than the rest. It’s not the sort of feedback loop anyone wants, and adolescent trauma is among the most crippling long-term. It doubtlessly influenced what you kept of last night’s dream, at that.”

Harry… *vaguely* recalled being put through crucio and a bunch of other things, now that Nicolas mentioned it. “Great.” Harry huffed. “Is it like with seeing and not seeing thestrals?”

“An apt example. If you’ve never witnessed or understood death, a dream visitor or legilimens won’t have an easy time tormenting you with visions of murder because they just wouldn’t have much to translate into.”

“Huh.” Harry hesitated. “Is this why chastity was considered a defense against dark magic and hags back in the day? Evil fae?”

“It still is.”

Best not mention those magazines Harry found in his dad’s old room then.

Nicolas gave him a look that clearly conveyed he knew what manner of though Harry just had, even without legilimency, but he let it go. “In any case, I am more concerned about what your dream revealed of the potential actors behind the goblet manipulations.”

“Can you believe that’s not even my main worry?”

“Yes, but you need still keep an open mind. I know you say your heavy feeling is about something else, but it is never so clear-cut with these things.”

“… Will you be there?”

“At Hogwarts, you mean? Of course, I will go on ahead, and Sirius has intimated he will do as also.” Sirius had been contacted by Dumbledore about the same time that Hermione and Ron finished talking about it with Harry himself. Godfather had promptly gone to Hogwarts to rake everyone involved over the coals. “He’s just about ready to have a second go at the tournament organisers.”

“Does Dumbledore know?”

“Of course not, that’s up to you. Do you want him to know to expect you?”

“Do I worry he’ll do something to mess up my ritual if we don’t forewarn him, you mean.” Harry didn’t worry about Dumbledore *deliberately* meddling anymore, he could tell him and probably nothing would change. Man probably expected the third walk to lead Harry to Hogwarts anyway, like the first two times. Even so, though… “I do worry… but I still don’t want to tell him. Or anyone. There’s still odds the walk won’t take me to Hogwarts this time. I’m worried it might skew the outcome if I prepare for any possibility over the others.”

Nicolas smiled approvingly. “You’ve learned well.”

Harry’s heart fluttered, but he managed to keep a stoic face. Like a man. “I just wish I could tell the real stuff apart from the dream nonsense,” he huffed while sniffing at the potion fumes. It *seemed* to smell right. “A *Voldemort stew*, who the heck comes up with that?”

“Well, cauldrons are used for many magics,” Nicolas demurred. “But then again, one would presume that those other timelines wouldn’t have been rewound, if something didn’t go grossly wrong with them.”

“Wrong by whose standards?” Harry muttered.

“I’m content with never worrying about it, but I’ve had six hundred years to come around to that stance. I can only hope your growing sense of consequences will prevent you from delving too far too fast.”

Harry both did and didn’t hope he’d find out how and why time worked like it did. He probably wouldn’t discover the answer until at least his twenties, either on the seventh of ninth walk. If it happened at all. He wasn’t sure if he should anticipate or dread the possibility.

Hopefully he wouldn’t go irreversibly crazy from the revelation. Harry didn’t really buy into the whole ‘things that man was not meant to know’ bollocks, the human mind could fathom things just fine, thank you. Yes, even the most complicated and bizarre stuff. Lovecraft had a cool way with words, but in the end all his stories were about his phobia of deep water and sea creatures.

Still, it was always a risk with things like this, all the old wizards said so, and since his feeling of doom got bigger every year, Harry was going to believe them.

Later that day, Sirius dropped by to spend some last quality time with him ‘before the big midnight walkabout through cross-country wilderness that was surely not going to drive him spare with worry that his godson might be eaten by some strange creature and end up wallowing in some ditch, hopefully not in that exact order.’

Harry suspected Nicolas also went on the Walks when Harry did, even though he didn’t need to, but stayed invisible or otherwise hidden. Maybe just far enough behind to fade out of Harry’s perception with the rest of the normal world. But this was one of those ‘best left unmentioned lest it impair Harry’s self-attainment’ things, so everyone was stuck not being sure how much they really had to worry about.

Being a seer was some real complicated work.

Unlike the previous night, Harry couldn’t fall asleep at all that evening.

That was when the space at the foot of his bed inflated like a warped balloon and spat out a tiny spelljammer crewed by hamsters.

Harry tried and failed to will the world to change around him into something that wasn’t the absurdity that was his waking life.

Having confirmed he was not, in fact, dreaming, Harry Potter went through the motions of accepting the delivery and directing the sailor hamsters to unload the package on the bedside table. He even had a couple of silver pounds to give as tips. Captain Boo was very appreciative and tipped his hat on the way off. Out. Whatever it was he did to teleport.

The package was the size of a stamp. Taking out his wand, Harry cast all the spells Nicolas, Dumbledore and Sirius had taught him for things like this. When all of them returned a big fat nothing, Harry picked it up and turned it over in his palm. On the third turn, the item grew into a small box about the size of a wallet, wrapped in paper with the picture of a zombie-faced planet opening its maw to eat a partly shattered moon.

Back after second year, Nicolas had made several overtures to ‘Ed Greenwood’, so cautiously you’d think he was yanking a lion by the tail or something. Mister Ed made a point of ignoring all of them. When Nicolas threw up his arms and took Harry with him to a Dungeons & Dragons convention across the pond to see him in person, the man played dumb so well they actually believed they had the wrong person all the way back home.

Then Captain Boo and the Nutcracker paid a visit to Nicolas with a glibly worded letter asking them to ‘kindly sod off because reasons.’ While Nicolas, Dumbledore, Sirius and Charlie were hard at work making a super-pensive to empty the Osiris memories into, so they didn’t clog up the Room of Requirement anymore. While within said Room of Requirement. In the heart of Hogwarts.

Somehow, this convinced Nicolas it was safe to poke Ed on and off after that, instead of the complete opposite, so Harry had needed to get used to the occasional gag gift. If nobody ever mentioned the awakened squash and its wailful tears during Valentine, it would be too soon. Don’t even get him started on the Luggage incident, Hedwig still hadn’t forgiven him for that.

Harry read the note.

*Little homebody! Not a gag gift this time, Merry Nick hasn’t poked the bear in over three months, more’s the pity. Since you’re aiming for a milestone this year, here’s something to put you in the mood! Some of the least middling music I’ll ever inspire this generation, if I do say so myself. Not sure why I’m supposed to send it to you, half these rhymes I’ve been saving for when I may or may not need to stomp certain wannabe moral busybodies on the face with my boots on fire, but oh well, surely I must know exactly what I’m doing!*

Harry pinched his nose. What did that even mean?

He unwrapped the paper.

It was a Walkman.

A Walkman with a cassette tape already inside it. And a small pair of earphones.

Shrugging, Harry laid back down on his pillow, put the headphones in and pressed play. The music wasn’t Harry’s usual cup of tea, but he thought he might get used to it. The first song started more like murmured poetry but got really good really fast. So much so he completely forgot to decide-decide-decide to have a controlled dream.

When he woke up in the morning, with vague impressions of brightly-glowing robed people and a man with a metal hand, he felt like he might have dreamed something important anyway. Arguing over something. Except not yet? And angels, there were angels in there too, somewhere. Or out there. At least the modern version where they were winged people like the valkyries, instead of weird UFO’s with not a single independent thought in their head and way too many eyes. It was like the night sky, but ripped open? Something like that.

All of which he’d watched through a diner’s window. Or out of it. For some reason.

Weird.

Harry Potter spent the whole day fasting. It was the seventh in a row, except this time he didn’t drink water either. He sat the whole time alone, out on top of the family burial mound in the middle of the maze, where his house guests knew not to disturb him, and where there was no risk of seeing fire. Every once in a while, the phantoms of dead family would flicker at the edge of his vision, and he had to force himself not to react lest they vanish.

When evening fell, he stood up and descended from the mound to bathe in the cleansing pool. When he was clean, he dressed himself in the hermetic white robes, the immaculate white vestment once worn by the Pythagoreans and the Egyptian priests before them. On his feet he drew boots made of the most common possible leather, and his wand was in its holster along his forearm as always. Finally, he picked up a knife, a wood axe, and Godric whom he bid to turn to proper size.

He usually carried it as a pen in his pocket, or by a chain along his wrist when he didn’t have any, but tonight the Sword of Gryffindor would be sheathed at his waist as swords were meant to be.

Harry spent the time to midnight slowly walking the hedge maze while light gradually disappeared until the stars alone were left in the sky. They were a sea of glimmering points that did nothing to let him see his surroundings. But despite the pitch-black darkness of the New Moon night, Harry knew exactly where to step.

He stepped off his property just as midnight struck and walked counter-clockwise around it twelve times. He then walked twelve times again, this time in a tightening spiral until he did the last circumambulation around the manor proper.

Each time he could feel the world drift behind him, or perhaps he was just seeing and sensing the timelines with events slightly off from his own. Each time he saw slightly different visions of his loved ones, one, more or all sat at a table having dinner. Nicolas, Perenelle, Sirius, Ron, Hermione, Neville, Dobby, Charlie, Doctor Strauss, and even Dumbledore in a couple of them.

No one was missing their head, which reassured Harry that nobody he cared about was going to die that year.

That still left Cedric Diggory though. And Harry himself.

Harry James Potter turned away from his home and set off through the forest.

Unlike the Forbidden Forest, this was an entirely natural wood. He still got the vague signs about distant wars and the like, battlefield sounds and passing sights of blood and worm-filled corpses, but nothing particularly specific or meaningful. Britain always had people fighting in foreign wars somewhere, officially or not.

More significant, and the reason why the Pottery had been built in this location, was the structure just outside the woodland to the west. Eight miles weren’t a quick walk of course, even on the beaten path, but it made sure Harry was over the worst of the jitters by the time he stepped out of the trees.

He almost didn’t suppress the sudden impulse to point and gape like an idiot. He didn’t know how he managed to walk around the Rollright Stones as if he’d always meant to do that, instead of cutting through.

There was a colossal portal within the King’s Men circle, like a scrying pool’s crystal-clear surface. It was as wide as the circle itself, but vertical and completely flat. Harry could barely make it out at first, like a dream that he kept waking up from only to realize he was still asleep and dreaming over and over again. The portal seemed to turn so that it always faced him even as he walked, but Harry knew that was just a trick of the eye, somehow.

Sailing ships could be seen on the other side, some small and close, others so far away and gigantic that you only saw their side passing in and out of view through the misty ripples. There was no water. They… they flew?

They didn’t approach, except for the smallest of them. Only the outright miniature ships like the Nutcracker floated in and out of the gate, back and forth from the gigantic vessels that had no business flying, and what looked like tentacle sea creatures the size of galleons, the sailing kind, not the coins…

Flying ships! Unless it was a portal to the bottom of the ocean or something. Was it?

*The Rollright Stones are a portal?* Harry thought in utter bafflement. *A portal to where? Durmstrang? But even they don’t have nautiloids, those are from a game! Aren’t they?*

Some of the ships looked normal, but others were fantastic-looking, like their sails were turned horizontally to paraglide instead, and all of them flew. They – they were skyships? And – and spaceships! Those were spaceships, right? There were stars beyond that rainbow mist, rainbow mist like – like the one he saw in the sky the first time! Was that outer space all along? But that wasn’t what outer space was like.

The Rollright Stones were being used as a port. A magic harbour!

By a *dwarf!*

Not an imp like the first time Harry went out like this, an actual dwarf was sat half-way to the middle of the stone circle. On a white plastic lawn chair.

He was a squat man with a barrel chest, broad shoulders, thick arm muscles and short stumpy legs. He was bald and had a short black beard, bushy but barely enough hide his thick neck, which almost made Harry stumble all on its own. Dwarves always wore their beards huge and long, unless they were disgraced someway. Everyone knew that!

This one didn’t look disgraced at all, though. He seemed more exasperated at most of the packages he was getting, except the occasional one that made him scowl or smile, all this – all those ships sailing the stars and dimensions – they were all here to bring him mail?!

The dwarf saw him. Turned his head to watch Harry even as the little and not so little ships continued to sail in and back out and away.

Harry didn’t know how he didn’t give himself away. Maybe he didn’t, and the dwarf just decided to pretend otherwise and let him on his way.

It was a miracle that the dimensional gate didn’t make Harry trip or stumble too. Though it didn’t arrest his feet, it captured everything else. It was a powerful, looming presence that both pressed and pulled at Harry’s spirit as he passed. With every step he made, it seemed as if its scale got bigger, the images clearer, the wisping mists encircling looked more and more like threads weaving together the patches of two different worlds. With every step it seemed as if it got closer and closer, until Harry suddenly realized it wasn’t. It hadn’t changed at all.

*He* was the one changing. He could feel it better. See more of it. Se *more*.

As the portcullis to the Whispering Knights swung open ahead of him, Harry Potter could see clearly in every direction. Like he only had in the Chamber of Secrets, when he was turned into a statue by the basilisk. Even through solid objects and down into the earth ten meters out.

The dwarf never stopped watching. His eyes felt like burning coals on Harry’s skin as he followed his seemingly unaware passage, all the way to the Whispering Knights dolmen. Being able to see in every direction meant Harry could watch the dwarf watching him right back.

By the time he stepped into the rock, Harry was so tightly-wound and hyperaware that he nearly didn’t remember to aim his destination.

Dolmen gates predated both the King’s Cross magic wall and the floo. They could only be used by those who could see them *and* cast their gaze through the ley lines themselves to perceive both ends of the path once. The average wizard could do neither, but Harry didn’t have it in him to feel smug about anything right now.

When he stepped out of the other side on the northmost islet of the lake – not Hogwarts lake, the other one further south – Harry Potter finally allowed himself to slowly breathe out in relief. For the first time in three years, he faltered along the Walk and had to lie down and collect himself.

What the hell was that?

*“Before you ask, I have no idea whatsoever,”* Godric spoke with chagrin in his mind. *“I neither expected nor understand what you just witnessed. Some manner of gateway, clearly, but I never witnessed the like, dead or alive. Surely it couldn’t be as trivial as receiving mail?”*

Interdimensional mail through a stone circle that legend said were the petrified remains of a king and his soldiers, what even was Harry’s life?

Time provided no answer, so Harry got back up on shaky legs, walked to the islet’s edge, and used the time on the self-sailing ferry to recover the strength in his knees.

Then he Walked onwards.

He always thought better on his feet anyway.

*An* ***interdimensional*** *portal, but how?* *Does it only work tonight, or year-round? And those ships, what kind of place spawns such things? How did it make it into a board game? Is it just coincidence, or are there really worlds like that?*

Fast travel was surely the best-known side benefit of stone circles, the Whispering Knights dolmen gate was the whole reason he had come this way at all, now and the year before. But that was all it was, a *side* benefit.

The surviving megalithic structures were almost all made in the last dwindling days of the old world. Who or how differed, the oldest Potter records were lost to time before the creation of stasis spells, and there were no speaking skulls in the family crypt, unlike the possible Bran the Blessed under the Tower of London (which Harry hadn’t managed to find even with the secret).

There were more ways to learn of other times, though, than a single yearly walking meditation. Harry had spent many nights meditating on top of his ancestors’ burial mounds. Sometimes he’d caught glimpses of them. Sometimes he’d talked to the lingering remnants of their ghosts. And sometimes he’d outright seen visions of their lives, disjointed as they’d been in the leftover animus inside the graves.

They conflicted on some things of course, the Potter lineage was mainly Welsh but also included some Scottish, old Norse, and very much older Irish branches. Some of the unions had been understandably fraught. Most writings and visions agreed it was a time of war, which dovetailed with what Nicolas knew of the void pretenders.

What none of the ancestral memories disagreed on, though, was the *why* behind the megalithic structures of the past: they’d been meant to power a world-spanning ritual that would ‘make man’s inborn godly might more readily plentiful.’

Unfortunately, most sites were seized, sabotaged or outright destroyed before that could happen, by the ‘enemy’. His various ancestors called them ‘jotnar,’ ‘fomhóraigh’, ‘eotenas’ and, most meaningfully in the case of his main Cambrian bloodline, a word that actually translated into Harry’s mind – via Godric’s added frame of reference in terms of languages – as ‘serpent folk.’

Somehow, though, no one knew why or how, Magic still went and evolved into what it was today, even without all that groundwork. Practically overnight, it felt like in those visions. It was why the war against the enemy was won at all.

*The Rollright Stones are older than most others,* Harry recalled now. *Does that mean anything?*

Probably not. The time frame for building a world-spanning network of stonehenges would have been in the hundreds of years, it was before Magic could casually be used for carrying and moving things. Even the Potter founder only kept the Pottery’s location for sentimental more than practical reasons. None of his ancestors recalled any of the details, only that there had been a whole town here, and the Pottery had literally been a potter’s workshop starting out.

Now, though, a new thought came to him.

*The Rollright Stones location was surely important, all the places for the stone rings were, they were chosen based on astronomy as much as ley line connections*. The thought carried heavy sense of significance. *Perhaps so important that the same place was used in the past for something else.*

Something else like, say, the gods’ departure from Earth to wherever they left.

Or, in this case, the dwarves.

*The dvergal,* Harry recalled Nicolas’ old letter. *Mighty, noble beings that left this world before the last deluge, before the war against the void pretenders sunk Atlantis beneath the sea, before even the gods left our plane and planet.*

There was always the possibility that was just some random man whose lineage happened to include a dwarf or two at some point, if not merely a particularly short grandfather. He could just be a throwback to that. One point four meters wasn’t *that* short by the standards of past ages.

But what were the odds of that? Tonight of all nights? Like *this?*

Harry’s inner wonderings were interrupted by a change in his surroundings. It felt somewhat like the surreality of the Forbidden Forest, but that was on the opposite side of Hogwarts from where he was approaching. He wouldn’t have noticed a thing the year before, or even just the day before, but right here, now, with sight beyond eyes, he understood immediately what was happening.

A Way coalesced right in front of him. Someone – some*thing* was warping space to affect his path. Alter it. Something familiar.

Harry side-stepped it, as well as the next eleven attempts to tempt him away from the long way. The night was still very young, he’d reach the end of the path in his own time or not at all.

When the same will marshalled itself the thirteenth time, it instead dispersed at the last second with a feeling of sullen grumbling.

*“It seems Hogwarts can’t wait for you to get there,”* Godric drolly said in his mind.

Harry hadn’t needed Godric to tell him that. Actually, it felt like Godric only realized what was happening because Harry did.

Something had changed in Harry. Something that stayed with him throughout the entire rest of the Walk. It was there when he went up and down the hills, when he stepped in and out of the glades scattered around the region. It knew when people or mischief tried to settle across his path, it flew ahead and behind him as he passed through the tiny villages along the Hogsmeade road. When he knocked on the walls of houses in passing, it saw within and heard the future wail or snore in response. Sight. Hearing. All the portents of the near and distant future.

Whatever else the portal had been, the experience had banished all other worries about the Year’s Walk from Harry’s mind, and it had ripped his third eye wide open. So much so that Harry wondered if he’d be able to force it back shut after this. Wondered if he even should. An eye was an eye was an eye, why shouldn’t it open and close and sleep and blink like the others? That’s what eyes were for, weren’t they?

*“Unless casual use leaves it too tired to use while asleep*,*”* Godric mused. *“Or astrally projecting, or what else.”*

*So like my normal eyes?* Harry wondered*. I go to sleep when they’re too tired to open, and that’s when I dream.* If the Third Eye got tired the same way, would he no longer be able to dream?Could the Third Eye even get tired?

*“And worse,”* Godric told him. *“I didn’t see it happen myself, but Helga had some nasty stories. Also, Herpo the Foul built his power by stealing the inborn powers of others to graft to himself – exploring the reverse is how he invented horcruxes – and Rowena had to rework her diadem several times before it stopped being overtly dangerous.”*

Overtly?

*“One can only affect deliberate change when aware, and suffer unwanted changes when unaware. When Helena Ravenclaw stole her mother’s diadem, Rowena fell fatally ill. We never found a physical cause for it, even Helga with her cup could do naught to save her.”*

Well. That dampened Harry’s excitement and then some.

*“We’re here.”*

Harry looked up from where he’d stopped to find the Hogwarts South Gates right in front of him. Not opened yet.

Harry knocked.

The gate swung open with a staggered jitter. It was an emotional display, as manifested by a place instead of a person. Somehow, Harry understood it. Hogwarts was excited to finally see him, and remembered just a little too late that it was trying to be upset with his refusal to come over the fast way. Beyond that –

Whoa.

Those were a *lot* of negative emotions.

Harry stepped onto the Hogwarts grounds and walked. Across the courtyard, up the steps and through the front doors that were already opened wide in greeting.

Once inside, Hogwarts all but deluged with bottled up feelings. The armors gave the most warlike salutes as Harry passed, the portrait frames all showed scenes of students and professors – only *most* of them foreigners – being rude and judgmental about almost everything that Hogwarts had to give. Swarms of flying keys flew around Harry to form rude gestures at the scenes. Most of all, the air was thick with disdain and contempt, and outrage on Harry’s behalf for what had almost been done against him two days prior.

Hogwarts had been woken up too early for comfort because of the rude and loud interlopers, too many new spirits that exerted uncharitable mood towards it, and some who were here with outright malicious intent. It was looking forward to Harry solving all its problems so it could go back to sleep. It was ridiculous, why couldn’t it go to Dumbledore with this? He was the headmaster, he should-

Oh. Dumbledore couldn’t? He couldn’t… reach the right mental state to communicate? Anymore? No, he never could, he’d never been able to go ‘inthat place between thought and wonder.’

Harry did falter in his step then. That was word for word the opening to the very first song from Mister Ed.

*What even is that guy, seriously?*

With an effort of will, Harry continued Walking.

Hogwarts, though… it still didn’t make sense. What about the ghosts? One of them could at least go to the headmaster with a message.

At that easy solution, Hogwarts turned positively sullen.

Was – was it sulking? In embarrassment?

It was!

Harry would have laughed, if everything else wasn’t so serious. And dangerous. Hogwarts had woken up early, but not early enough to catch the Triwizard meddler in the act. The castle would still have done its best to contain whatever the Goblet had been about to do, if something else didn’t render it all moot. But something did. Right as it happened, but also a few hours from now. One single act happening in both moments in time at once.

Harry… he could see it. When he asked, Hogwarts shared all it knew of it with him.

Harry didn’t understand a thing, the frames of reference were too different, the way a human and a place perceived the world, events – it was like diving into the most abstract painting, made of fractals constantly being painted and repainted from the inside by actors who only looked like actors in the moment of painting. Harry could only be sure of one thing: the magic, the will, the one that filled – *would* fill in the gaps of the painting tonight, it would be – it *had been* Harry himself.

What was he supposed to do with this? Harry’s claims to Hermione about messing with time were now validated, but knowing you’d do something – *had done* something in the *future* -wasn’t the same as knowing *how*.

It was after a whole hour of fruitless wanderings that Harry’s Yearly Walk took a sudden turn. Or, rather, *suffered* a sudden turn.

“Helly Harry Potter,” Luna Lovegood airily greeted as she walked out from the defense classroom corridor by complete coincidence. “Nice Arsgang we’re having this year, isn’t it?”

‘Arsgang’ was the Swedish word for Yearly Walk, or Yearly Round, Harry only knew that because it was in that first book Nicolas sent, the author was a Swede – the Lovegood were Scandinavians?

“Hello Luna Lovegood.” It was technically a break from the rite, he was supposed to be deathly silent and seemingly oblivious to all else the whole time… but the Asrgang *did* allow for two people to walk it together. Without saying a word or even acknowledging each other, but the Third Year was also when things went off-script. “Is it really?”

“Oh yes, only half my shoes disappeared this week compared to usual, and my homework also started coming back. I’d been wondering why and now it’s all clear – you chased off the nargles.”

“I did?”

“Well, some half of them at least, and they might not be responsible for mommy’s brooch at all, it’s just so precious you see, it’s not strange to imagine that it wandered off to be appreciated by other people too. It not just wit beyond measure that’s man’s greatest treasure you know. Or was that wit beyond measure is not just man’s greatest treasure?”

… Did she just say her housemates were stealing her things? She – Luna was being bullied? By the rest of Ravenclaw? But that brooch, that wasn’t the same thing, it sounded like a family heirloom which was just-

“I've interrupted a deep thought, haven't I? I can see it growing smaller in your eyes.”

“… Do you know where your – where the nargles took your shoes? And brooch?”

“Not at all, it’s like they somehow magically disappeared... But I'm not concerned, they'll all show up sometime, even when you least expect it.”

Peeves floated in through the wall, choked on his own cackling when he saw Harry, and promptly fled in terror.

“Luna,” Harry said, trying to be as idle as Luna herself. “How do I find the treasures?”

“By following the nargles of course.”

“And how do I follow the nargles?”

“Well, I’m sure I have no idea with my spectrespecs off a wandering, but you’re still friends with Hermione aren’t you? She knows all about getting somewhere before you get there."

The next portrait just happened to show Hermione Granger using a time turner right as they passed by.

*Oh,* Harry thought as Time’s shades suddenly became distinguishable among the rest of the shifting fractals in Hogwarts’ tapestry of self-awareness. *So that’s how it is.*

It seemed he’d fallen victim to his own hubris. Harry wasn’t going to learn how to mess with time after all. At least not tonight. Not on his own.

But…

Having Hogwarts do it instead wasn’t such a bad thing, was it?

As he walked, Harry drew his wand and conjured a note. When passing by the next painting, which happened to show a girl about to hide a pair of Luna’s shoes in the broom closet around the corner, Harry focused as clearly as he could on Hogwarts’ atemporal sense of reality, and tossed the note through the painting.

*Stop bullying or you’ll be sorry. Signed – Hogwarts.*

The feel of travel backwards in time was – he had no words for it but... Even second-hand with Hogwarts as a go-between, it was like nothing else he’d ever experienced, save maybe those faintest brushes with other worlds on that first night through the Forbidden Forest.

In the next frame, the girl frowned at the note that hit her in the back of the head, unrolled it, laughed disdainfully and said... something Harry wasn’t paying attention to because his awareness was still wound around the world from two different Ways. More than that, every single thing that happened reflected in one of the other fractals and shades, he could almost mix and match the girl’s actions with her equivalent in the castle’s – the *world’s* own perception of events, causal and acausal alike.

If the Rollright Stones had opened his third eye, this was like a baby beginning to understand shapes and colors. That – it – Harry didn’t know he could blend with Hogwarts so fully, what an amazing experience.

He needed to do it again.

Twice more he sent notes or airplane memos through portraits. Both girls dismissed it as a weak attempt to scare them, believing it was the limit of Luna’s ability to stop them. What spiteful creatures, Harry didn’t know girls could be so mean, why even do this? Did people just enjoy inflicting misery on people smaller than them? Unprovoked? Why?

He’d never understand bullies.

But he didn’t need to understand bullies to make *them* understand when something was unacceptable.

At the fourth frame, when he saw the first bully girl preening over Luna’s brooch in front of a vanity, Harry dispensed with written warnings and sent a bowel-loosening curse through the portrait instead.

The third-year girl soiled herself, shrieked, and ran into the bathroom screaming for her housemates to get Madam Pomphrey.

“Oh!” Luna exclaimed. “So that’s where it went off to.”

Scowling, Harry threw caution to the wind, reached through the next frame as he passed by and pulled the brooch back out. Forward through time.

His hand had just time travelled. Because Hogwarts remembered how to do that thanks to Hermione. And she wasn’t even the only one, it was just – give a kid a time machine so he can attend more classes, what was *wrong* with the magical world?

“Oh, thank you!” Luna exclaimed, pinning the brooch to the hair above her ear, opposite from her wand. “This is the nicest thing anyone’s ever done for me, it’s almost like having a friend!”

Hogwarts was more incredible than anyone knew. If not for all its otherworldly thoughts and sensation keeping Harry distracted from his worldly temptations, his Walk might have already turned into a rampage. “Who was that girl?”

“Oh, you don’t need to worry about her. She was excused from classes the rest of Monday but was fine again the next day. She even found my missing transfiguration homework!”

“I bet she did.”

It didn’t go so well for the next three thieves, the perpetrators just doubled down, either Harry was too harsh or not harsh enough. By the fifth, Harry began to feel Hogwarts tiring. Too much more of this and it wouldn’t be able to do it again for a while. Harry wouldn’t be able to deal with what he’d really come here for, and he already knew he would, Hogwarts knew he did. It was unsatisfying…

But Harry’s awareness had never been wider, his senses had never been sharper, there was more than one way to skin a nargle, and Hogwarts didn’t need time shenanigans to identify the rest of the bullies and thieves. Since he was here, he may as well leave the place better than he found it.

The right kind of response would surely rouse the entire castle to uproar… But Harry felt, with all of Hogwarts’ certainty, that having everyone present when he dealt with the goblet was needed for his success anyway. The knowledge induced a sour feeling, it seemed it was Harry’s fate to always be at the centre of outrageous events no matter if he wanted it or not, but…

Harry Potter was no longer bothered by fame, and even less by infamy.

Especially when he didn’t need to stick around to deal with the aftermath.

“It was good Walking with you, Luna Lovegood.” Good but at an end. “I believe you’ll enjoy the Hogwarts entrance hall more than your dorm for the rest of the night.”

Luna skipped away at the next split in the hallways, with all the semblance of someone who wasn’t choosing her direction at all.

Harry could relate. He himself walked where Hogwarts led him, where he felt he would derive the greatest benefit from the next step of the Walk. The Bell Tower.

There were no portraits there, just dust and rickety wood. But Hogwarts didn’t need a portrait frame to get things across anymore, or any other intermediary. It never did when it was all about space. It was easy, then, for Harry to unleash his own, many years’ worth of bullying and abuse trauma all at once.

The Yearly Round was more about the *metaphorical* steps taken on the path, in the end.

If you’re going to practice a skill, it only made sense to draw as much side-benefit.

All over the castle, chaos struck. Stolen homeworks turned into howlers, bags and desks went on strike or ran away uncaring of what they ran over or trampled on the way, the Monster Books of Monsters all escaped their restraints and went on a rampage, jewelry and shoes came alive and began beating and chasing their owners as if possessed, every manner of ironic punishment Harry could come up with, it happened.

The chaos spread like wildfire, and got even worse when those who incited Harry’s revenge were branded with boils spelling ‘thief’ and ‘bully’ all over their faces.

Hufflepuff’s den stayed almost entirely quiet.

Half the Slytherin dungeons snapped awake like from a waking nightmare, only to wonder if they were still asleep on seeing the worst of the snakes experiencing a sudden karmic turn.

A fourth of Gryffindor tower woke up, though their bullies weren’t that many in the end, the splash effect was just maximised because of their communal bedding.

Even the Beubaxtons carriage and Durmstrang ghost ship weren’t spared, though Harry knew it was mostly Hogwarts’ ire at the put-upon disdain of its dwellers, rather than any harm they’d done against each other.

But Ravenclaw…

A veritable cacophony of screams erupted from Ravenclaw Tower as seemingly everything in the girls’ dormitories came alive and chose violence. It only got worse and worse as the panicking students stampeded in a bid to get away from mad and angry inanimate objects turned animate. Then one of the panicking fifth years, stressed from the upcoming OWL cramming, cast an overpowered incendio amidst the chaos of it all, and the upper dorms outright caught on fire.

As was always Harry’s fate, the student body of Hogwarts Witchcraft and Wizardry managed to escalate things to disaster well before the professors got around to a response.

In no time at all, professors and elves were doing their best to coral the runaway objects and put out the flames. Everyone else was being bustled into the Great Hall, student and faculty alike, native and foreign. The fire had been mistaken for a deliberate malicious attack in the confusion, either from within the castle grounds, or from outside. Both were technically true.

Dumbledore even managed to get Igor Karkaroff to cooperate, instead of letting him and his students bunker down in their ship.

It wasn’t long before everyone on the Hogwarts grounds was in the Great Hall, and the mysterious ‘cup meddler’ was being blamed for everything without any evidence whatsoever. Just like Wormtail had been in second year.

Harry took his time Walking to the Great Hall. About the same time that it took Hogwarts to play out the most egregious domestic bullying and foreign bigotry on the ceiling, for everyone to see.

Dumbledore, Karkaroff and Madam Maxime had only just regained control over the students, when Harry pushed the doors to the Great Hall wide open.

Everyone stared at him.

He didn’t look at them. Luna had been part of his Walk, but they were not. Not just yet.

He walked in, a single speck of white in the darkness, heedless of the mass of bodies parting before him like before a funeral coffin. His eyes were affixed on a very specific spot in the chamber’s middle.

“No,” Dumbledore commandedsomewhere, though the words were loud and clear everywhere without him raising his voice thanks to a spell. “He is in the middle of a diviner’s rite. You do *not* want to get mixed up in it. This is ancient magic, clear away.”

It didn’t end at that, not with two other headmasters demanding answers. But the shapes and shadows of people faltered in trying to get over each other. Harry reached the middle of the hall unimpeded.

There, he turned his feet and walked counterclockwise in a circle.

The Goblet of Fire appeared like through a shivering fog at its centre, blue flames dancing just as it had been on the night of names.

Voices gasped, balked, murmured and muttered, but Harry ignored them. Distantly, he noticed the Great Hall had dimmed in the Now to the same dark of Then, but he ignored that too. It was much darker outside, but that hadn’t bothered him either. Not after the Rollright Stones.

The next circle he walked was wider, prompting everyone to draw further away from him, as they did on the next. And the rest.

On the third round, the view of the Goblet was joined by bits and pieces of students and benches as they’d been Then. The tables and food spread began to weave in on the fourth. On the seventh, the circle was wide enough to paint in Dumbledore as he’d been in the past, working the crowd. Another connection in the tapestry of time became highlighted to Harry as Dumbledore, in the Now, expanded the hall to make more room.

Harry walked and walked, until finally, on the twelfth pass, none of the four tables lacked representation in the vision of time past, and all three schools had members present in both times and two different places.

The flames inside the goblet suddenly turned red and began shooting sparks, then it spat a big tongue of fire straight up. The entire hall gasped as a charred piece of parchment fluttered out of it. Different gasps came from the same people on both ends of time at the same time.

Harry’s walk had slowed as close to standstill as anyone’s could be without completely stopping his circumambulation. His eyes were wholly on the events as they’d transpired Then, but his Mind’s Eye saw them as Hogwarts saw them Now too, different and the same. One single point, one single event unfolding, but experienced from both directions in Time. The *only* single event unfolding in a crowd of dual events enacted by people in two different places at once.

Harry could see them. The parts everyone had in the painting of Hogwarts’ atemporal view of time. All shapes of every piece. How they changed. How they didn’t.

“The champion for Durmstrang will be Viktor Krum,” said Dumbledore of Then, even as Dumbledore of Now mouthed the same words in astonishment.

“No surprises there!” Yelled Ron in the past, but not in the present.

“Bravo, Viktor!” boomed Karkaroff, so loudly that everyone could hear him on both ends of time, even over all the applause in the past. “Knew you had it in you!”

Harry witnessed it all on both sides of the moment, like reflections in a mirror that copied everything *except* actions. The contrast was as much of a revelation as the identical gasps had been upon the goblet’s first reappearance.

“The champion for Beauxbatons is Fleur Delacour!”

The Veela allure did not transcend time’s boundaries, adding another piece to the puzzle in the form of the difference in actions. Ron and most other boys Now behaved much differently on Miss Delacour’s departure from the hall Then. She, too, only departed Then, not Now. Another piece.

“The Hogwarts champion is Cedric Diggory!”

Another piece.

“No!”

Another

“Excellent!”

Harry slid his wand into his hand.

“Well, we now have our three champions. I am sure I can count upon all of you, including the remaining students from Beauxbatons and Durmstrang, to give your champions every ounce of support you can muster. By cheering your champion on, you will contribute in a very real-”

SHINK

Harry slashed with his wand. The Great Hall of Hogwarts Witchcraft and Wizardry blared like shearing glass just as the fire in the goblet turned red a fourth time.

SHINK

The air rang again as *something* deflected off the tip of Harry Potter’s wand a second time.

RING-SHHKKK

The third clash trailed off into sparking shrieks as a sharp, stabbing *thing* sparked off Harry’s hastily cast shield spell and didn’t slide off. The strength – the pressure – he barely held it off. If he hadn’t had all of Hogwarts’ forewarning, if he couldn’t see so far beyond the regular wizard – *Godric!*

*“Allow me.”*

Harry’s back straightened, his stance firmed, and his body moved on its own with grace and skill he still lacked, even with all his practice. His magic was still his to handle, but it was a greater exertion than any in the past save the Chamber, to blast the thing away for just a moment. His shield became a grip. A twist and swing of his arm brought his wand sharply down.

Magic screeched, the invisible chain slammed into the floor with a rustling rattle, the hooked spike trying to stab him got stuck in Hogwarts’ magic for just one moment. It yanked loose, drew back in the same breath it took the attack to recharge its strength, and stabbed forth just as Harry’s hand grasped Godric’s hilt.

The Sword of Gryffindor sliced the chain clean through.

With a ringing song, the hook and spike cleaved down the middle along with the chain behind it and the links behind that, all the way to the goblet’s flames.

For one, looming moment, the manifestation of the geas cast in the past became visible to all eyes in the present, the many links of chain sliced into twice as many pieces. Glinting dully. Floating like scrapes of tarnish in the air.

Then a second chain, bright and visible to all with the density of its magic, stabbed at Harry’s chest before the first had time to finish fading.

He barely interposed the flat of Godric’s blade in time.

CLANG

The hall all but rattled this time, from the clang and gasps and screams around him mixing with the whistling magic. Harry didn’t know how he didn’t fall on his back, no more than he knew where his wand had flown as Godric switched him to a two-handed grip from no other choice. The force of the attack pushed him back several feet, and he had no time to think as the chain lengthened and spread far and wide, twisting and bending in loops forth to envelop him-

“No,” Godric’s voice came from Harry’s mouth.

Harry’s grip twisted harshly. The Sword dislodged the offending spike with a screech like nails on a chalkboard, even as the gems along the blade came alight.

The hooked chain trying to impale Harry *disintegrated* as the entire hall was bathed in the green of death.

Harry felt tired, twice as dazed, and many times as frightened. How – why – why this? Why him? None of the other champions went through anything like this, Ron and Hermione would have told him, was it just because he could see more?

“I’ve seen enough.” Godric’s voice came from Harry’s mouth as much as from behind him, now. Godric… he was more than he usually was. More than he’d ever been, save the last time they’d both been on Hogwarts grounds. Godric wasn’t actually Godric Gryffindor, he was like the magical portraits at best, a vessel preserving the last traces of the real person’s animus. But… in Hogwarts, who best remembered the anima of the original, the ghost of Godric was closest to his old self. Close enough to act like the true him would act, it now seemed. “I neither know nor care what kind of artefact you are. This. Is. Unacceptable.”

Harry’s body had never stopped moving. Breathing deep, it reclaimed his balance, stood as tall as he ever had, then even firmer as he slowly raised the sword up for a vertical cut. The death that shone from the sword was so strong now that it felt like the air was poisoned. Harry knew, with complete certainty, that when he brought down the sword, this thing in front of him would be destroyed.

Godric made to strike.

Harry’s arms stopped half-way.

“Young one?”

Belatedly, Harry realized the hesitation had all come from himself. He hadn’t tried to stop, exactly, but a sudden turn of feeling was sharp enough to end their synchronicity.

Destroying the Goblet of Fire… he should probably do it. No one was stopping him, thanks to Dumbledore, Nicolas and Sirius in the crowd.

But… Somehow…

It felt like losing.

Godric faded from view, even as the poise and magic in the sword persisted, menacingly. *“Harry,”* Godric asked lowly, not speaking aloud anymore. *“What do you see?”*

Harry didn’t know how to reply.

In response, Godric also didn’t relent on the death magic. The sword’s will to end the threat did not abate in the least.

But in the end, Godric was just a magic sword. A haunted one, but not something that would or could control its wielder. Slowly, driven by intuition that was his as much as Hogwarts’ own, Harry lowered the sword. Brought it in front of his face even as it continued to glow poison green, and turned it ninety degrees.

In that glow of promised destruction, the death-feeding natures of the goblet and the sword were reflected. Resonated.

Harry could see, now, how reality reflected in all its smaller parts, through all the influences that affected an object or person, the acts and choices that got it to where it ended up. History, time… it lingered in the thing like the whole universe was reflected in single drop of falling rain, all the way from heaven to earth.

This was why he’d needed everyone here, he realized. Mixing and matching everyone’s actions, with each other’s and themselves on both ends of the loop of time. Everyone was one of the fractal fragments of reality as Hogwarts conveyed it. Every shift was a bit and piece added to Harry’s comprehension of Time and Magic, more so than all his life up to this point.

Harry was too small to fathom most of what he saw through Hogwarts, but he fancied he was beginning to understand the nature of time, and he could see much more than he used to. He didn’t think he’d be able to keep much of what he learned here today. But he’d had his Third Eye open this while time, and Hogwarts’ own understanding and memory of everything within its walls, at all points in time when it was awake and aware. Including how to trace back along *itself*.

Since the first time Harry set foot in Hogwarts tonight, and especially from Walking with Luna onwards, Harry himself had done little else besides experience exactly that.

It wasn’t the same as spending the whole night wrestling an entire tribe of dwarves in a graveyard, to win a nigh-omniscient hat…

But psychometry wasn’t a bad consolation prize.

Scenes of battle and war played out on the flat of the blade. What Harry saw was important, he knew it like he was certain the Earth would continue to spin around the sun no matter what happened tonight. Harry felt the limits of his frame of reference keenly, but that only made what he *could* perceive stand out all the more. Murder, war, death, magic, old magic, heroes matching wits and might against slaves with animal heads, and their lords who ruled from flying chariots and dispensed commands and judgment with cruel, gold flashing eyes.

*That thing is not medieval*, Harry concluded, more confidently the longer his retrocognition carried on. *It’s – it’s not even a goblet. It shouldn’t* ***be*** *a goblet, never mind made of wood. It’s… It’s older than Magic. The maker of the enchantment, he crafted it from his own self. His own spirit.*

This goblet – or whatever it was before, the *cauldron* the enchantment was in before… Its true function was more sinister than the Tournament organisers suspected, but its cause had been worthy. It had been used against the enemy.

*“We cannot hesitate forever, nor can the others,”* Godric warned when Harry took too long noticing the sickening effect of the avada kedavra field. Some students were looking deathly ill just from the light’s refraction. *“If you do not destroy that thing, it will bind you. Painfully, it seems, you are too sensitive to the ethereal now. I have no other options for you.”*

Harry didn’t have other ideas either.

At the back of his mind, Hogwarts thrummed with tense expectation too. Tiring. Almost frazzled. Inquiring. What did he need to end this night happy and well? Hogwarts never wanted anything but for its denizens to be happy and well. Hogwarts just wanted Harry to be happy.

*I…*

It really shouldn’t have taken him so long. When he finally found the answer, Harry couldn’t help but smile ironically at himself.

*I need help.*

Seemed it wasn’t just hubris he was flirting with, in the end. He had a problem with wanting to do everything by himself too.

“I require a ghost!”

Harry Potter called his wand back to his hand and sheathed his sword. The green haze disappeared.

Sir Nicholas de Mimsy-Porpington galloped into the hall through the eastern wall and drove his spear through the chain just as it reformed. The tip went through three different links right as it tried to fold outward, and drove deep into the floor to pin the writhing chain in place just horse and rider came to a stop.

Harry nodded thankfully, raised his wand in front of his face, and closed his eyes. Strangely, the opening poem to Ed’s first song came to him first.

“In the space between thought and wonder, Memory cannot pull you under, In the moment between breath and dying, You’re free, fearless, you’re flying.”

Zeroing in on the part of Hogwarts’ view of Time that was Harry himself, he dove into it. Sunk into it and travelled its whole breadth all at once. In so doing, Harry Potter saw his own place in the flow of time, and understood how to travel back and forth along *him*self. It wasn’t *travel* at all, it was evocation, and then divination by looking outward to the reflection of reality in himself at that moment, to see what reality he lived in Then.

Harry did that now. Looked back along his own Time to the one moment when he’d had all the help he could ever ask for.

When he finally reached back enough for the memory of the first Walk he undertook, he knew he was not just reliving the memory. He understood exactly when and how he integrated the spell his mother had inflicted on Peeves. He knew, with utter certainty, he could use Parseltongue again if he maintained this, his own personal loop of time. And his Dad’s ghost…

When Dad picked up the wand Harry dropped back Then, after sealing the Diadem, he was looking higher to the Harry of Now. When Dad smirked that last time, it was at both of them. And when James Potter cast that last prank spell, Harry Potter felt like he might explode with both happiness *and* tears when his hair turned red both in the past and in the present.

Dad hadn’t vanished just because. He’d vanished because Harry didn’t need him anymore Then, he needed him *Now*.

“Expecto Patronum!”

Prongs erupted up from the tip of his wand with a bright flash of moonlight. His antlers appeared first, like a tree of light right above him. Then the rest of him coalesced outward to cast its bright white glow over the hall, and further. The shining brightness pulsed and rushed out, like dome-like sheets of see-through silk, again and again and again. Its light seemed to travel past the walls and the ceiling, *into* them – no, to where they showed.

Harry didn’t look away from the Goblet, but he didn’t need to when he could see in every direction. Not even when Hogwarts turned its attention away from Harry for the first time that night. Another will had pulled at it, it was – it was Dad.

Dad’s will. Dad was in his spell. He was *again* in Harry’s spell and he’d come over with *ideas*.

The ceiling of the great hall changed to show an old skull sitting on a plinth in the darkness. From above. Which was the same as below because the view was upside down.

The skull promptly fell up from its stand, fell *down* through the ceiling, and dropped further down right between Prongs’ shining antlers to land on Harry’s head like an old helmet.

Bwuh?

The skull – the neck hole alone was so wide is almost exceeded the width of Harry’s shoulders, it was so big, like a giant!

*“I wondered how I’d get dragged into things,”* the skull thought in Harry’s head where Godric usually was. *“Quite the nasty metaphor you manifested here, a barbed hook on a chain. A grim kenning no matter what you’re singing.”*

Harry almost couldn’t muster a reply to the dull, sepulchral tone of the skull. “… Bran?”

*“To the bone. That’s as deep as my disappointment goes too, all that build-up wasted on just another meddling parent,”* the skull said with not an ounce of feeling, despite the words. *“What am I here for?”*

Well-

*“An unwilling contract? That’s what you lot get for not using blood like the rest of us sane people, no wonder any miscreant can mess with your oaths. Well, then, let’s see just how easy you lot have it. Nigh all of our spirits were fed to Magic’s crucible, it better be worth it.”*

Before Harry could wonder what he meant by that, Bran blew Sir. Nick away with a flick of Harry’s wand, wound back, and jabbed forward just as the chain reformed for one more stab.

The Great Hall of Hogwarts rang loud and long like swordsong as the wand stabbed *it* right in the tip.

The chain buckled, folded on itself like a train ramming into an unbreakable wall, and lost half its luster in an instant as the glowing parts all broke away from the main.

Runes. They were runes. All broke loose in a single blow, to hover around like a strange cloud, doing nothing as the chain froze shivering in the air.

*“Not a work of Magic indeed,”* said the spirit, and Harry felt the capital letter as clearly as he felt the lack of contempt where much of it should be. *“This is the craft of Nodens. To think I’d come across something even more old and decrepit than myself. Though its vessel is much newer. And weak. Well, that just makes this simpler.”*

One, two, three slashes along the angles of the sun and moon at high summer. The chain rearranged into the form of a stave, a symbol of meaning and power Harry didn’t know, though he did know the runes.

With a last sweeping flow of Harry’s wand arm in a grand upways circle, the runes rearranged in the air and rejoined the chain with one single modification to the script.

*“Phew,”* Bran thought as Harry’s very spirit burned with tiredness, his soul seemed as if it would slip loose, so weak it was. “*Tired from just this much, Men are so weak nowadays, I suppose Magic makes for a heavy geas to bear. It’s a miracle my lot haven’t died out completely, we giants definitely weren’t dumb as rocks in the old days. That’s just what happens when everyone’s constantly drained to power this worldwide spell you lot use. Those of us whose minds work off the spirit more than our flesh just don’t grow them past the child stage anymore.”*

Bran dropped Harry’s arm.

The hooked chain stabbed forward, shot past Harry’s cheek with a rush of air, cut through the suddenly screaming crowd behind him, and went on through the wall, on which the illusion from the ceiling had descended to show the corridor just outside the Defense Professor’s office.

The hooked barb stabbed the maimed man in the back just as he yanked open the door.

Everyone saw.

Everything froze.

Except Harry. He turned around, wand slowly rising under his own power and will once again. Through Hogwarts, he was the only one who recognized the one more thing that was wrong with this picture.

“Phantasma Claudo.”

The ectoplasmic chain followed the other chain through the illusion, sunk through the fake flesh and Harry *yanked*.

It was hard, it didn’t work immediately, if not for the Goblet’s own attack he probably wouldn’t have had the leverage or time before the adult wizard did something to undo Harry’s attack, someone would have come up with a counter to this spell in the past two years, surely?

Finally, the Triwizard meddler fell down with a pained curse, half-way through the door. His body began to writhe. Change as everyone watched. His skin bubbled, the peg leg popped loose as the real one started to grow back in place.

“Good heavens,” Dumbledore breathed in the horrified silence. “Fawkes, to me!”

The phoenix appeared in a burst of flames, disappeared just as fast with a second burst of flames, and Dumbledore flashed into view on the other side of the viewing spell just in time to block a spell that had been aimed at the imposter’s screaming, shaking trunk.

Harry, for once, was in the same boat as everyone else. He stood and watched, every bit as riveted as the rest, as Dumbledore outduelled a defense professor and subdued him with insufficiently extreme prejudice.

*“You’ve set yourself up for a mighty confusing life, boy,”* the skull sounded in his head. “*Try not to go mad.”*

It was in those few seconds when everyone was distracted, that the Headless Black Knight from Sir Nick’s deathday party galloped in through the opposite wall, stopped next to Harry, picked the skull off Harry’s head, and rode back out and away through the front doors before anyone could so much as point. Harry didn’t need to turn around to see it all, he still saw just fine in every direction.

Ron, Hermione and Neville stared at Harry, open-mouthed. They were arrayed at the front of the circle of people that he’d had his back too all that time. They’d had his back all that time. Since the Walk was over, Harry didn't mind that the sight brought a smile to his face.

Harry Potter had an entirely new view of things, but most people wouldn’t be able to relate. Not without burning even hotted with jealousy. He knew things about the Goblet of Fire that he needed to tell Dumbledore, but the headmaster was busy right now. Harry didn’t need to look back to see the goblet was gone. Well, its past was back in the past, and the current goblet was wherever it had been stashed. Either way, it wasn’t Harry problem anymore.

Man, he was tired.

“Headmistress McGonagall,” Harry called when the hall got a tad too eerily silent, he couldn’t afford to fall asleep right now. Oh, Nicolas and Sirius were here too, he’d completely forgotten about them. “When he’s finished with whoever that is – Barty Crouch Junior?” Hogwarts was sure? What was he saying, of course it was sure. “Right, him, please tell the Headmaster I need to have a word.”

“… Very well, Mister Potter. I will let him know.”

Harry nodded in thanks and made for the closest way out of the Great Hall, which happened to be the one leading to the same antechamber where the champions had been ushered after the drawing ceremony.

His friends followed quietly behind him. No one blocked his path ahead of him.

Harry still stopped, though, when he happened to pass in front of a certain seventh-year Hufflepuff that everyone nearby seemed to be hiding behind. That’s right, he’d been really worried about this, hadn’t he? “Cedric Diggory, right?”

“…That’s me.”

“I had a vision of the Tournament. I get kidnapped at the end and you get caught up in it and get murdered with the killing curse. Obviously, that’s not going to happen anymore, but if you ever wind up in a graveyard and start hearing words, at least *try* to duck and roll? Also, the vision ended with me crying over your corpse in the middle of a crowded stadium or something, so whatever trapped portkey was involved was probably two-way. Maybe not lose track of that either.”

“… Right. Okay. Sure, Potter, I’ll do that. Thanks?”

Harry nodded and walked off. He pretended not to be aware of the weird faces and mutterings and disbelieving stares he left behind.

This would take some thought, but hopefully not too much. With everything else piling up, having an eye at the back of his head was one of the least remarkable things to happen to him at this point.