

Harry took a deep breath before he extended his right hand and cut the ribbon tied across the doorway. Claps filled the air as witches and wizards from all walks of life huddled around the joke shop's opening ceremony. Harry held himself back from flinching as the bright flashes of lights of magical cameras shined on him. Bright gold and red letters appeared on the shop that spelt; Marauders' Den.

Bright golden lights lit up inside the newly inaugurated joke shop showing off the products the Weasley twins, Fleur, Remus and Sirius, had painstakingly built up over the last few months. He didn't even know how the twins managed to pull this off, with just owls being their sole line of communication to Remus and Sirius. But they certainly outdid themselves, and Harry was all too happy to lend a hand by being a visible mascot for the joke shop to expand their reach among customers. Already, there was a substantial crowd formed outside. He had to endure a slew of embarrassing conversations with a Witch Weekly reporter and an invasive one with Rita Skeeter, whom he felt was getting a tad bolder as days went by. At least, Skeeter was highly competent in unearthing buried stories with gusto, and that ability kept her a valuable weapon in his arsenal.

Besides, Skeeter remains a journalist though of questionable work ethic. Harry's general rule of thumb was to leave journalists, lawyers and doctors out of his zone. The only reason he had gone out of his way to blackmail Skeeter was because he had no intention of being a victim last year. He disliked the doormat experience where everyone walked over him without any consideration. To compensate for his admittedly 'uncool' actions, he had paid her quite well for her work and even gave her exclusive interviews and juicy stories about Dumbledore and Voldemort.

Then there were the common wizards and witches with their children gathered at the joke shop. They all came attracted by the promise of signed Harry Potter dolls that can spew out random jokes.

"Come along, Harry, my best of friends..." said George, guiding Harry away from the crowd converging on him towards a small stall where hundreds of dolls were placed inside glass shelves.

"A good signature is all we need..." Fred said along, coming to his other side, pulling a chair out of nowhere and placing him on it.

"Now sign away." the Weasley twins chorused together, placing a quill and a doll in his hand.

Harry blinked, and the next thing he knew, there was a long queue of children and adults formed before him on the stall.

"If we were on a sinking ship, and there was but one life vest...I cannot express how much I would miss you." Harry said, looking at the twins.

"Oh, Harry. Why would you wound us so...?" Fred placed his hand on his heart, pretending to be in pain.

"Now, Harry. Before you give the doll, press your thumb over the scar on its forehead and give it to the kid. Oh, don't forget to put your signature on the doll's heart." said George.

"All right, you merry pranksters." Harry rolled his eyes.

He put his signature on the doll, pressed his thumb over the lightning bolt-shaped scar and handed over the doll to a little kid looking at him with bulging eyes and a wide smile. The lightning bolt on the doll lit up with many lights before the doll opened its mouth and spoke;

*"It's okay if you don't like me. Not everyone has good taste."*

Harry raised an eyebrow as he heard the doll's squeaky voice that suspiciously sounded like a watered-down version of Sirius' sound.

"Huh. That's not so bad." said Harry.

"Here, see this..." said Fred, picking a pink-haired doll from a shelf wearing a pink dress.

"This is our masterpiece." said George, tapping the head of the doll with his palm.

The doll raised its hand, holding a pink wand in its hand.

*"Hem...hem. Will you be my friend?"*

The doll sounded and looked suspiciously like Dolores Umbridge.

Harry stared at the doll with wide eyes and then at the twins in amazement for pulling off a prank that'd no doubt piss off Umbridge. He now knew what he should give the pink toad as a present.

"Oh, you two are pure gold." said Harry, looking at the twins, who were sporting massive grins on their faces.

After a lengthy affair of signing up dolls and interacting with a lot of people, most of whom he had never even seen in passing, Harry was sitting at a table inside the store with a cup of coffee in his hand. When they originally envisioned a joke shop, a café was not in their mind, but once Sirius brought up the matter of a joke shop he was helping build, Brigitte suggested adding a café. Sirius, who had become addicted to certain delicacies of the French, was all too glad to follow through with Brigitte's suggestion.

"How 'eez the coffee?" Fleur asked, taking a seat across from him.

"Quite good. Good charm work with those dolls, by the way. The twins told me you had a hand in speeding up some of their products." said Harry, raising his cup to compliment the work Fleur had done in the shop.

"Zank you. Did you know Fred and George were planning to quit 'ogwarts?" Fleur asked suddenly, eyeing the twins who happily strolled around the joke shop greeting customers.

"Hmm. Not really. But I wouldn't be surprised if they dropped out. The twins are hyperactive inventors. They don't need structured education to succeed. Their sheer talent is enough, and a little bit of capital." said Harry, shrugging his shoulders.

"So, how was your trip to France?" Harry asked, taking a sip of the coffee.

"eet was fine. Gabby was disappointed not to 'zee you." said Fleur.

“Mmhm.” Harry grunted, his eyes finding the Weasley family and Hermione in the crowd.

Hermione found him, and Harry waved at her while she was standing close to Ginny near the entrance of the shop. He noticed Molly Weasley was having a heated exchange with Remus while Arthur Weasley was quietly speaking with Sirius in a corner. Harry gestured to Hermione to come over to the table.

After a few minutes, Hermione managed to rope in Ginny and join him and Fleur at the table.

“You! You never told me all those secret meetings with the twins were all about this joke shop. You had me convinced you were reprimanding them for their pranks and illegal experimentation.” Hermione hissed.

“Guilty as charged.” Harry raised his hands in surrender.

“Did you know that the twins are planning to leave Hogwarts?” Hermione asked, her hands on her hips, staring accusingly at him.

“Calm down. Sirius and Remus will set them straight.” said Harry, sounding confident.

“Are you sure? Because our mother is furious with Sirius for going around her back and setting up this shop for Fred and George.” said Ginny.

“Don’t worry. Everything is taken care of.” Harry waved away the redhead’s concerns.

A few hours later, Harry was pointedly looking away from the stares of Ginny and Hermione in Grimmauld Place. He had to stop himself from flinching as Molly Weasley’s screams reached a new pitch.

“If this goes on, mum is going to make us all deaf.” Ron muttered, looking rather pale while staring at the shouting match between the twins, his mother and Sirius, unfolding before his eyes.

Harry raised an eyebrow when the shouting toned down a little. Instead, there were now hushed whispers with several Order members joining in, like Alastor Moody and Dumbledore. Harry got the distinct feeling that the discussion had veered off topic of the joke shop and arrived at something else. It was times like these that he regretted not placing some listening charms around the place. Before Harry could make up his mind to see what was going on, a knock on the entrance door attracted his attention.

“You expecting someone?” Ron asked, staring at the door curiously.

“I don’t think so.” Harry said, frowning at the door.

The door opened, and to Harry’s surprise, it was Dobby that came forward. But someone else stepped into the house following Dobby’s footsteps. His eyes widened when he looked at Daphne following behind Dobby. That was when it clicked in his mind. He had all but forgotten that he was supposed to take Daphne out on a date to see the old Potter manor and the new plans for restoring the Potter manor.

“From the look on your face, I suppose you forgot about our date.” said Daphne, staring unimpressed at Harry.

“What’re you talking about? I was just stunned by your beauty.” Harry replied, grinning weakly as he faced the scrutiny of Daphne.

Daphne merely rolled her eyes at his weak attempt to save face.

“Get ready, or I’m leaving.” Daphne eventually said, after letting him stew for a minute.

“Thanks.” Harry was on his feet and pressed a kiss on her cheek. “I’ll be right back.”

Harry disappeared into his room and quickly returned after slipping on better clothes.

“All right. I’m ready. Let’s go.”

“Wait, Harry! Aren’t you supposed to stay out of public spaces with you-know-who out to get you?” Hermione asked worriedly.

“If I started to live in fear of that noseless idiot, I won’t be having much of a life to live anyway. Tell Sirius I am out with Daphne. He knows where I’m going.” said Harry before taking Daphne’s hand and nodding at Dobby.

Dobby teleported them away from Grimmauld Place. When the swooshing sound and feeling stopped, Harry and Daphne found themselves in a clearing near a small stream rolling down from some huge rocks. Harry looked around, noticing the rocky hills and giant trees surrounding the place.

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“So...this was Potter Manor.” Daphne breathed, staring at the rotten and burnt remains of the manor that was now overgrown with weed and other plant life.

“Yes. I plan to have the remains unearthed before rebuilding the whole manor.”

“Why? Are you hoping to find something?” Daphne asked curiously.

Harry frowned thoughtfully at the remains of the old home of the Potters.

“When Voldemort burnt down the manor, he also erased the history of House Potter. The loss of all the portraits and records is a far greater blow than the loss of a manor built on wood and stone.” he eventually said.

“Is it wise to build Potter Manor here again?” Daphne asked, looking a tad concerned. “The Dark Lord already knows its location. Once you start rebuilding the manor, word will get out. He’ll target this place again.”

“Exactly!” Harry grinned. “Let him come. Being the psychotic maniac he is, Voldemort shall rush towards this place to show off his power. But when he arrives here, he’ll face a far more humiliating defeat he suffered than the last time we met.”

“You’re rebuilding Potter Manor as bait for the Dark Lord?” Daphne asked incredulously.

“Hard to believe, isn’t it? That’s what I’m counting on from Voldemort as well. He’ll never expect I’ll build Potter Manor as bait for him. He’ll think that I’m emotionally attached to a house with my family name on it.” said Harry, smirking at Daphne, who frowned at him.

“Why aren’t you? I mean, why aren’t you attached to your family name?” Daphne asked, her blue eyes trained on him with an inquisitive stare.

“The legacy of House Potter will not be built on wood and stone. It’ll be built on the blood of my enemies.” said Harry, his green eyes flashing with a firmness that took Daphne by surprise.

Daphne observed Harry for a long time as they walked around the site while Harry explained the current plan under consideration for the new Potter Manor. She had already picked up some information from her parents regarding Harry’s involvement with the death of several prominent Death Eaters. Harry’s subtle digs at her fellow housemates who lost their parents last year were also a clear indication that Harry was somehow involved with those deaths. She was not as stupid as everyone else to believe the Ministry version of the events, nor did she think the Dark Lord killed off his most prominent followers in a fit of rage, as most of her housemates believed.

Admittedly, she only knew Harry properly for just under two years, but she was his girlfriend. She had interacted with him far more intimately than anyone else. So, she knew Harry better than most people. With all that she knew of Harry, she got the feeling that Harry had somehow set a trap for the Dark Lord and the Death Eaters. Some of the most prominent Death Eaters that had escaped Azkaban by claiming to be under the Imperius curse were dead on the eve of the Dark Lord’s return. Then, two nights back, a mountain full of corpses was discovered with the Dark Mark on their forearms. The Daily Prophet was quite thorough in covering that story, and her father had been over the moon with that little story.

Daphne had also recently learned that a tribe of Giants were also burned down on the hill, according to the Auror’s office. The Daily Prophet was supposedly holding that finding close to their chest. She had accidentally learned that tidbit of news from her father while a reporter from the prophet was gloating to have found it over the floo. Now that her father had gained all the major controlling shares of the Prophet, he had a more hands-on approach while managing the Prophet. There was no news in wizarding Britain that went without her father’s attention. And therefore, she usually had far more exposure to more information than usual.

Also, she had seen Harry go through intense magical training with that mysterious woman before the newly recruited Death eaters were found dead on a mountain. The recent death of Giants made it clear that Harry had some hand in it as well because Harry had stopped visiting her home for training after the incident.

Daphne quietly slipped behind Harry and hugged him from behind. She placed her head against his shoulder and kept a close watch on his face.

“Harry.”

“Umhm.”

“Did you have anything to do with those dead Death eaters last summer and the bodies of Death eaters found on the mountain last day?” Daphne asked, without any inhibition, as she knew Harry disliked dancing around any issue.

“What brought this on? Did you forget to put the dream catcher on your bed and got a bad dream last night?” Harry asked playfully.

“Stop fooling around and be serious.” Daphne pinched Harry on his side.

“If I say yes, would you like me more, or would you like me less?” Harry asked.

That question from Harry took her back for a moment. She looked thoughtful for a moment before her mind almost immediately came up with an answer.

“I’d like you a hundred times more if you say yes.” Daphne eventually said.

“Then, my answer is...” said Harry, who quickly caught her by her left arm and pulled forward. “...yes!”

Daphne suddenly found herself staring into Harry’s deep green eyes. Her eyes fluttered shut when a pair of warm lips pressed down against hers. When they parted, she found herself holding on to Harry’s shirt while she felt Harry’s hands wrapped around her waist.

“So, you never said anything about that ice skating rink we talked about.” Harry whispered against her skin while he pressed several small kisses along her cheek.

“I would have until I learned an idiot intends to bait a dangerous Dark Lord to attack the place.” Daphne whispered back, enjoying the way they slowly moved as if they were in a waltz.

“I could hold off on that plan for a while. Besides, it’s not as if I intend for my house to be burnt down. I intend to trap Voldemort and teach him a lesson, not standing by as the idiot burns down my house.” said Harry, grinning at Daphne.

Daphne let out a sharp breath as she felt Harry’s hand getting a little adventurous behind her. She frowned at him for his promiscuous behaviour, but Harry merely smirked at her, not at all bothered by her admonishing look.

“You’re lucky you have such cute eyes.” Daphne eventually said, letting Harry get his way.

“Out of all my body parts, my eyes are in the best shape. I do at least eleven eye rolls a day.” Harry joked.

“Eleven? How can you be so specific?” Daphne raised an eyebrow.

“Three for Hermione, two for Sirius and seven for Dumbledore.” Harry said, making Daphne chuckle.

“For now, I’m all for going to that ice rink in muggle London.” said Daphne.

“Are you sure? We could go to my room in Grimmauld Place and explore the bed in my room.” Harry winked suavely.

Daphne glared at Harry and promptly punched him with her elbow on his side.

“Ow! We are going to muggle London.” Harry conceded.

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The remaining days of the vacation passed quickly for Harry. Most of his days were spent in the company of Daphne, primarily for academic work, as they had to show their final report on the progress they made with their rune project to Professor Babbling. Usually, most of their project-related work was done in Daphne’s home, as Sirius’ house was getting increasingly crowded with Order members, especially the Weasleys, after the Azkaban breakout.

In fact, The Ministry had gone bonkers with the Prophet releasing more and more juicy details about the disappearance of a tribe of Giants, a burnt mountain and the suspicious presence of dead Death Eaters so close to muggle settlements. The rumour was that Minister Fudge had holed himself in his office, not talking to anybody, blaming it all on Dumbledore. Harry had to give it to the man. Despite finding a mountain of evidence to show that the Death Eaters were active, Fudge was quite unrelenting in conceding even a fraction to Dumbledore’s claims. Harry had thought Fudge might grow a pair of working brain cells after witnessing the mounting evidence, but the Minister continued to surprise him with sheer stupidity.

The one thing he was curious about was Voldemort’s reaction. Unfortunately, Harry could not take a peek into Voldemort’s mind without compromising his own mind. He had been employing Occlumency against the Dark Lord to keep out any dangerous mind arts from adversely affecting his mind.

However, there was one advantage to all the confusion and chaos in the Ministry. The Aurors were spread thin throughout the countryside in the hunt for the absconding Dementors and Death Eaters. They were not particularly effective in tracking down anyone, but the optics mattered for the Ministry. They wanted to appear doing something before the public. Therefore, the Aurors have been scouring all visible magical settlements like Diagon Alley, Knockturn Alley, Godric’s Hollow, Hogsmeade etc. This left the Ministry wide open, and that was when Harry rolled out his next phase of the plan.

"You know, James would be laughing with glee if he was here. He'd have been so proud of you, Harry." Sirius said with a boyish glee as he watched the last of the charms set up in the Hall of Prophecies.

Harry smirked at Sirius.

"A noseless nuisance like Voldemort deserves to be pranked." Said Harry, reaching his hand out to the Weasley twins.

"Harry, we can't thank you enough for this opportunity." said Fred, who was positively thrumming with happiness.

"Yes, indeed. You've made this dream possible for us." said George, a tear falling from his eyes.

"Did you use the Faux Tear Gel again?" Harry asked, looking at George, who was crying anime tears.

"It's been very effective against our mum for some reason. If we had known earlier, we would've made the tear gel years ago." said George.

Harry saw the twins exchange a grin and shook his head. Going back to setting up the charms on the shelf containing the Prophecy orbs, Harry discretely hid certain small metal balls inside among the orbs under notice-me-not charms.

"All right. That's done. Now, give me the orb." said Harry, holding out his hand for the fake orb the twins and Sirius had made for the occasion.

Harry plucked the original Prophecy orb from the shelf before replacing it with the fake one.

"So, this is the little bugger that caused all of your problems." said George, staring at the glass orb with an uncharacteristic intensity.

"It doesn't look like much." Fred said, looking at the orb unimpressed.

"That thing ended up being the cause of the beginning of bad luck for Voldemort and me." Harry deadpanned, securing the orb into a mokeskin pouch.

"I'm sure this little guy would be bringing only bad luck for Voldemort alone." said Fred.

Harry glanced at the fake orb he had placed in place of the original orb.

"Let's hope that's the case." Harry muttered.