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24th of July, 1991

He had no idea how long he was staring at the dark ink.

Privet Driver number six? Was his memory faulty? Or was this just another change? He remembered the Dursleys lived in Number Four Privet Drive, not Number Six.

He sighed and rummaged through a small drawer in the corner to find a pen and a piece of paper. What would he even write? He knew Vernon would not spare even a penny for him to visit London. Without a wand, Harry Potter was utterly helpless. During the last year on the run, he had grown used to using magic for everything - big and small.

Without a wand, Harry could not call the Knight Bus. And even if he did, he had nothing to pay for the ride. He could maybe try apparition without a wand, but he had never tried it before— not consciously, at least. It would be disastrous if he splinched himself, and even if he succeeded, he did not have his Gringotts key either.

Dear Ms McGonagall,

I'd love to attend Hogwarts! However, I have no money to pay for tuition or supplies, and I don't know where to purchase any of the books or items listed in the letter.

Yours Sincerely,

Harry Potter

He carefully folded the letter, placed it in his pocket, and went to the garden. Thankfully, his uncle's car was gone, meaning he had already left for work, and his aunt was busy cleaning the house for probably the fifth time this week. After looking around, Harry saw a brown barn owl perched on a nearby tree, looking at him expectantly. After waving the owl over, it flew up and landed on the fence before him.

“Bring it to Professor McGonagall for me, please,” he murmured as he handed the letter. The owl carefully grabbed it with her talons and gave him an expectant look.

“Sorry, but I don't have any treats for you,” Harry shrugged apologetically. The owl gave him the sharpest glare possible and flew away.

He sighed and started weeding the garden under the rays of the summer sun. It was not as if he had anything better to do while waiting for a professor to come, and he did not want to have any confrontation with his relatives.

In truth, almost nobody cared for Harry Potter, but The Boy Who Lived was another story. Hopefully, the letter should raise enough alarm bells for someone to quickly show up because he had no desire to stay on Privet Drive longer than necessary.

After about two hours of toiling, he was finally finished.

After a quick shower to wash off, Harry was in his bed, staring at the grey ceiling of his room.

He wanted to begin planning, but would there be any point if things were different? And it was not like his plans so far had been very successful. The one for planning had always been Hermione. Was she the same? Did she even exist anymore? A sinking realisation slowly appeared in his gut.

His Ron and Hermione were gone.

Even if Ron and Hermione were here, they were not his friends but eleven-year-old children, young and without the experience of all the adventures and difficulties they had faced together.

How many times did the three of them have a close brush with death because of him? Was Harry selfish enough to put them through all of that again? They often survived or got out of trouble only because of pure luck. What if they were not lucky this time? Could he even be friends with children and their childish dreams and worries after all the death and horror he went through?

Was it fair to impose the expectations of the friends he remembered on two eleven-year-old children who had never met him?

The bitter feeling returned as Harry realised they would probably be better off without him. He was strong and more experienced now and would deal with whatever may come on his own without dragging others into mortal peril.

Feeling the drag on his consciousness, he closed his eyes and drifted into the darkness.

Crack!

The familiar sound of apparition woke him up. A loud knock on the front door was heard. Harry quickly got dressed in his cousin's oversized cast-offs and rushed downstairs.

“No, no! I won't have it. I won't have you and your… *kind* impose yourself on MY home again! You've done enough!” Petunia's shriek could be heard from the second floor. Thankfully, Vernon was at work, and Dudley was out with his friends.

At the front door, he saw his aunt facing the stern visage of Professor McGonagall. His Transfiguration Professor was dressed in the usual emerald robes and a pointy hat.

“You've done enough… you've done enough…” Petunia was visibly upset now and fled towards the kitchen, weeping.

Harry was left at the front door alone with an exasperated Deputy Headmistress. He opened his mouth to greet her but quickly stopped himself. At this point in time, Harry was not supposed to know what Minerva McGonagall even looked like. He was also supposed to behave like an eleven-year-old. How the bloody hell did an eleven-year-old act like, anyway?

“How can I help you, Ms…” he trailed slowly, settling on acting polite. Yes, eleven-year-olds were polite!

“Minerva McGonagall. I'm here for one Harry James Potter,” she said.

“Err…that's me.” His former… no, his future Transfiguration teacher's gaze slid towards his face where the barely visible lightning bolt scar was. “I'm Harry Potter. Are you really from… Hogwarts?”

“Yes. I am the current Deputy Headmistress of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.” McGonagall’s piercing eyes did not move from his brow. “I'm here to help you acquire your supplies.”

“I don't have any money to pay the tuition, let alone the supplies, though,” he replied mechanically.

“Students don't need to pay tuition to attend Hogwarts, Mr Potter,” her lips thinned. “Your parents left you more than enough to pay for simple school supplies.”

“You knew my parents?” Were James and Lily Potter the same here?

A small yet genuine smile bloomed on Professor McGonagall's face. “Why yes! I taught them myself during their youth. Both were some of the most brilliant students ever to walk the halls of Hogwarts.” Just as he was about to ask for more details or just stories about his parents, she took out a small ornate bronze watch from her robes. “Time's ticking, and I'm afraid we have to get going, Mr Potter. Grab my hand.”

He gripped her outstretched arm and quickly braced himself. The world suddenly twisted. The feeling of being squeezed through a small tube was unpleasant, but less so than his first time, as he was not unprepared.

He still landed, slamming his legs on the ground unevenly, barely avoiding falling face-first on the pavement. As usual, the methods of wizarding transportation other than brooms did not agree with him. As Harry steadied himself, he saw they had landed in an empty alleyway.

“Quite good for the first-time apparition, most children tend to… lose their lunch,” McGonagall finished with a brisk nod. It was not his first time, yet he still felt quite nauseous. “How much do you know about your… situation?”

“Err, the dark lord?” He muttered with trepidation.

“The very same that killed your parents,” the older witch shuddered. “Good, I won’t need to waste time explaining. Our trip would go faster should you remain incognito. As you can probably imagine, you’re somewhat of a celebrity in the wizarding world.”

“Alright,” Harry agreed quickly. There went his dreams of being a nobody.

“Well then, follow me.”

Professor McGonagall was already moving onwards. They quickly walked down the crowded Charing Cross Street and stopped at the tiny, grubby-looking pub that none of the people around could see. Harry remained silent, feeling he might throw up if he opened his mouth again. Maybe it was better to stay quiet. He wasn't sure he could act like a proper eleven-year-old.

“This is the Leaky Cauldron, entrance to Diagon Alley, the wizarding shopping district,” she explained shortly before entering.

The inside was just as Harry remembered-dark and shabby and filled with a clamour of wizards and witches.

“Professor McGonagall, leading the muggle-born around again?” The barkeeper greeted them jovially.

“You can say so, Tom. We'll be going quickly,” the Transfiguration mistress nodded and dragged Harry to the courtyard in the back.

For a short moment, his heart leapt in trepidation. But the expected attention never came. It took him a few moments, but he finally realised what was happening. Nobody seemed to recognise Harry without his scar and glasses easily. To people, he was just another young boy. He revelled that people's eyes passed over him; the feeling of being unnoticed felt thrilling. There were a few curious glances, but none lasted more than a second or two.

The Professor stopped straight in front of the trashcan and turned to him.

“Mr Potter, you will come here without me in the future, so you should memorise the combination necessary to open the entrance. Three bricks up from the bin and two across to your left. Observe,” her wand appeared in her hand, slowly tracing along the wall with the tip and tapping on the final brick.

The brick in question shifted, and the whole wall soon turned into a wide archway. He looked in wonder as the rustic cobbled street was bustling and full of people again. The last time he visited in the summer before his sixth year, only a few hurried souls could be seen across the Alley then, and half the shops had been closed.

“And this is your vault key. Don't lose it. If you do, Gringotts will charge you a small fortune to make another one.” McGonagall carefully handed him the familiar small golden key before leading him to Gringotts's silver doors.

As he remembered, the bank was a cold place lined with gold and marble. Both sides of the walkway were lined with tellers counting coins with almost fierce diligence. None of the goblins spared them a glance; all were busy with their sparse customers or shoved their pointed noses into a stack of parchments.

Harry's nausea finally receded just as they stopped before an empty counter.

McGonagall had to cough loudly to force the teller to tear away his gaze from his desk.

“How may Gringotts be of help?”

“I'd like to withdraw some gold,” Harry said quietly, handing the key to the goblin, who carefully inspected it with a magnifying glass.

The teller seemed to find the golden key to his satisfaction, nodding curtly and leaning over to look at Harry. “I will get someone to take you to the vault. Rognot!”

“Mr Potter, I'll wait for you outside at the entrance. Make sure you get at least fifteen Galleons to cover for your supplies.” Before Harry could reply, McGonagall turned around and headed for the entrance, leaving the stunned boy behind.

Another goblin, probably Rognot, ushered the flabbergasted Harry towards one of the many doors leading off the hall. They entered a familiar narrow stone passageway. Rognot whistled, and a cart quickly zoomed up the rails before suddenly stopping in front of them.

When they got on the cart and flew wildly through the dimly lit tunnels, Harry realised Professor McGonagall was probably not a fan of the speedy cart ride. Even his mind refused to conjure the stern Transfiguration mistress riding on the crazy cart

Looking at the dark depths, he idly wondered how many dragons the goblins had imprisoned down there, never to see the light of the sun ever again. But he quickly banished that thought from his head. What was Harry going to do? The world was not fair, and if he tried to make it so, he'd never get a moment of rest.

The cart stopped, breaking him out of his dark thoughts. The goblin quickly unlocked the vault with his key; it was just as full as he remembered it. Harry looked around in fascination before grabbing a handful of galleons. He stopped, realising he had nowhere else to put the gold coins but in his pockets. Something that he would not want to do, as the galleons would weigh his pants down big time, and he could not go around like that.

“Mr Rognot, do you provide any bags?”

“Five galleons for a normal bag and seventy-five for a mokeskin pouch,” Rognot, eyes alight with greed, replied with a toothy smile.

“I'll take the pouch,” Harry begrudgingly decided, missing the useful pouch that Hagrid had gifted him for his 17th birthday. Judging by the goblin’s greedy smile, he was probably being ripped off one way or another, but Harry had no desire to carry a lot of coins in his pocket nor return to the bank multiple times.

After handing two handfuls of galleons, he got his mokeskin bag and filled it with gold and silver. A few minutes later, he had made a visible dent in one of the mounds of gold coins. Harry had poured what felt like a thousand galleons and a few hundred sickles before being satisfied. The memory of Griphook's betrayal was still fresh in his mind, and he would avoid dealing with the treacherous little buggers as much as possible.

One wild cart ride later, Harry was back outside the bank, where McGonagall was waiting in the sun. She quickly led him to a familiar narrow and shabby shopfront. Harry looked nostalgically at the peeling gold letters on top of the door that read *'Ollivanders: Maker of Fine Wands since 382 B. C.'*

“Mr Potter, you go get your wand, and I'll get your books and other supplies.”

“Are you not going to come in with me, professor?”

“No, Mr Potter, picking a wand is very personal to every wizard. Besides, it can take a lot of time. If you're done early, wait for me outside,” the Professor hurriedly strode towards Flourish and Blotts.

Harry shrugged and entered the wand shop. Just as he passed through the doorway, his skin tingled, and the hairs on his neck stood up.

The store was seemingly empty, but Harry knew better. After a few seconds, he quickly spun around and stood face-to-face with Mr Ollivander. His unusually pale, unblinking eyes stared at him with surprise.

“Good afternoon,” Harry greeted evenly.

“Good afternoon indeed, Mr… Potter?” The boy confirmed with a nod as wandmaker quickly regained his bearings. “Ah, you have your mother's eyes. It seemed only yesterday when she was here for her first wand. Ten and a quarter inches long, swishy, made of willow. A great wand for charm work.”

Mr Ollivander moved closer to him, and Harry finally took a good look at him. His last memory of the wandmaker was when he was just rescued from Malfoy Manor and looked gaunt and tired. Yet now he was full of energy, and his eyes were no longer as dull.

“Your father, on the other hand, favoured a mahogany wand. Eleven inches. Pliable. A little more power and excellent for Transfiguration. Well, I say your father favoured it – it's really the wand that chooses the wizard, of course.”

Harry wondered what had happened to his parents' wands. Were they destroyed during that night? Did the ministry have them? Or did they stay on display in Godric's Hollow? He realised he had zoned out and shook his head, focusing on Ollivander's quiet voice.

“...Yew. Powerful wand, very powerful wand and in the wrong hands...well, if I'd known what that wand was going out in the world to do…”

The wandmaker pulled a familiar long-measure tape with silver markings out of his pocket.

“Which is your wand arm, Mr Potter?”

“My right hand.”

Ollivander quickly started measuring him with the tape. “Every wand I make has a core of a powerful magical substance, Mr Potter. I use unicorn hairs, phoenix tail feathers, and the heartstrings of dragons. No two Ollivander wands are the same, just as no two dragons, unicorns, or phoenixes are quite the same. And, of course, you will never get such a good result with another wizard's wand.”

The familiar words brought him an odd sense of relief. Soon, the wandmaker went around the shelves while the tape was still measuring on its own.

“That will do,” Ollivander said, and the tape crumpled into a heap on the floor. “Right then, Mr. Potter. Try this one. Maple and dragon heartstring, nine inches. Supple.”

Harry picked up the wand and waved, making a vase on the side burst into pieces.

“No, not this one,” the wandmaker quickly snatched the wand from his hand. “Beechwood and unicorn hair. Seven inches and three quarters, swishy.”

Just as he picked up the wand and was about to wave it, it was snatched out of his hand. “Not this one either.”

“Aspen and phoenix feather. Ten inches, fairly bendy…”

“Blackthorn and dragon heartstring. Eleven inches, whippy…”

“Cedar and unicorn hair. Nine inches and a quarter, slightly yielding…”

“Elm and unicorn hair. Ten inches and a half, brittle…”

Harry's annoyance grew alongside the stack of wands and boxes on the counter, yet Ollivander seemed thrilled at the challenge. With that said, he still had not brought out his trusty holly wand for testing.

At least two dozen wands later, it was finally here.

“Holly and phoenix feather. Eleven inches. Nice and supple,” as soon as the wandmaker placed the elongated box on the counter, Harry grabbed the wand and gave it a wave expectantly. To his dread, his trusty companion felt dead and cold in his hand, and nothing happened. Harry gaped at his holly wand, but Ollivander quickly snatched it from his grasp.

“Not this one either, eh?” The wandmaker looked excited, yet Harry could not muster anything but a feeling of devastation and defeat. “Try this. Cherry and dragon heartstring. Thirteen inches, unyielding…”

“...No? How about ash and unicorn hair...?”

Harry numbly tried every wand placed in his hand, but all felt cold and unresponsive. The pile of tried wands on the counter grew until it became a small hill. Ollivander's excitement slowly disappeared, and his face turned pensive.

“Curious, how very curious. This is a first.” The wandmaker paused at the sight of all the discarded wands on the counter. He quickly disappeared in the back of the shop before bringing a big, heavy-looking blue case.

“Ever since I started using unicorn hair, dragon heartstring, and phoenix tail feathers, I have been able to match a wand to every wizard that walked into my shop. But it seems that those cores are fit for you, Mr Potter. Hmm, this will require a different core and a more personal touch.” He opened the case, revealing an array of feathers, small bones, scales, and hairs of different colours and sizes. “Personalised wands have been proven fickle or ineffective before, but it might just be what you need.”

“I thought the wand chose the wizard?” Harry found himself asking with trepidation.

“That is most certainly true, Mr Potter. During my father's time, however, almost every wand was custom-made. Wizards and witches often brought their magical core, or their parents would, for the young Hogwarts students. Usually, a token they had a close connection to, like whiskers from their favourite kneazle or a mane of a kelpie that a witch had met on holiday. Needless to say, such wands did work, but not as well. They were not as balanced or easy to use as my current wands. Or so I thought until now,” Ollivander muttered thoughtfully and scratched his stubby chin before motioning towards the open case. “Here is my collection of interesting cores from when I travelled in my youth. Hold your hand above each one, and tell me where you feel the strongest connection.”

As soon as his arm was over the case, he felt a strong pull almost immediately. His hand was drawn to a pitch-black silky hair.

“This one.”

“Goodness gracious! I'm surprised that you can even see it. Though, considering your...experience, you should indeed be capable of seeing and maybe even wielding it.” Ollivander rubbed his chin again and glanced at his faded scar.

“What exactly is it...?” Harry tried his best to suppress his trepidation; he just wanted this day to end.

“This, Mr Potter, is thestral hair.” A tired groan escaped Harry’s throat; he wasn’t even surprised. Yet, Ollivander looked like a child with a shiny new toy. “I see you’re not unfamiliar. The core of the legendary Elder Wand is said to be thestral hair plucked by Death itself! Every wandmaker, even I, have attempted to make a wand with it but with no success. Thestral hair is fickle and volatile, making any wands made with it unwieldy. The story goes that only those who have truly accepted death can master it!”

“Mr Ollivander, if thestral hair is so… troublesome, will I even get a working wand?” The image of Ron trying to wrangle with his brother’s wand back in the second year appeared in his mind.

“Fret not, Mr. Potter. It is a worthy challenge, one that I would be glad to undertake. The strong connection to the core would undoubtedly help you.” The wandmaker closed the heavy case and carried it to one of the back rooms. Soon, he returned and arrayed a couple of dozen elongated and slender wooden blocks on the remaining space on the counter. “These are different types of woods. Tell me if one of them draws you in.”

Harry ran his hand through the blocks. There was no pull this time, but a particularly pale piece felt warm compared to the others.

“This one,” he carefully tapped it.

Ollivander was silent for a moment. “...Yew. Wands made of such trees are said to have the power of life and death. I harvested this particular piece from the ancient Fortingall Yew.”

Harry gulped. Voldemort's wand was made of the same stuff.

“But this could be said for all wands,” the wandmaker continued, talking more to himself than anyone else. “Yew wands do retain a fearsome reputation in the spheres of duelling and curses, and for a good reason. However, that does not mean that you're destined to walk a dark road in the future. I have found that users of yew wands could also prove to be fierce protectors of others.”

Ollivander quickly collected all the wooden blocks and rushed into the back room.

“Oh, yes. This will take me quite some time. Come back in an hour to collect your wand,” the wandmaker's muffled voice was barely heard from the opened door. Tired, Harry turned around and left the store.

“What took you so long, Mr Potter? You've been inside for more than an hour! And where is your wand?” An exasperated Professor McGonagall asked as soon as he stepped outside.

“Err, none of Mr Ollivander's wands chose me, Professor. He is making me one right now. It will be ready in over an hour,” Harry mumbled, feeling a touch of guilt for making her wait outside for so long.

“Come, let's get you your robes.” The older witch sighed, leading him towards Madam Malkin's Robes for All Occasions. The insides of the store were just as he remembered.

“Minerva, another first year?” a familiar squat witch asked merrily.

“Yes. However, this one seems to be quite picky. He was stuck in Ollivander's for over an hour.”

“No doubt making him ecstatic. The old wandmaker loves a challenge,” Madam Malkin snorted and turned towards Harry. “Come, dear. A young lady is getting fitted for Hogwarts in the back.”

She quickly led him to the back of the shop, where a girl his age was standing on a stool, getting her robes measured by a second witch. There was something oddly familiar about the girl, and Harry tried to jog his memory but did not recognise the face. She was tall–or well, taller than him, with frosty blue eyes, long and curly raven locks, and aristocratic cheekbones.

Was she one of the upper years? But Harry simply couldn’t recall seeing her face before, despite the fleeting sense of familiarity.

He obediently stepped on a second footstool, and Madam Malkin slipped a long robe over his head and began to pin it to the correct length. Harry only grew more curious about the girl and wanted to say something. However, the cold and haughty look she threw at him before facing away quickly made him reconsider, and he kept silent. She was probably another one of those pureblood snobs.

After a few moments, he realised he was still wearing Dudley's old and oversized cast-offs and looked ridiculous. This time, he would get clothes of his own, everything else be damned.

“You're done, dear,” After a few minutes of silence, Madam Malkin finally finished her work and sent him back to the shopfront, where McGonagall was waiting.

"Come, Mr Potter," she urged. Thankfully, the proprietress had not returned to the counter, and nobody heard his name. He had no desire to be crowded and followed by an overenthusiastic mob for something he did not do. Why almost everyone believed a fifteen-month-old toddler could vanquish a notorious Dark Lord was baffling. Even Voldemort himself had said it was something his mother had done.

“Where next, professor?”

“We have some time before your wand gets ready, and I know just the place to go. There's an ice cream shop right across the street.” There was a hungry glint in McGonagall’s eye as she looked at the ice cream parlour. Harry scarcely believed his eyes, as he never took his stern Transfiguration professor as a fan of iced desserts. Yet the prospect of indulging in Fortescue filled him with energy and chased the drowsiness away.

Things would not be the same this time around, but Harry had no idea how different everything would end up being.

Author's endnote: Things start diverging even more. Harry gets a chilling surprise at Ollivander's and meets a new face in Madam Malkin's.

JKR mentioned in an interview that custom-crafted wands had been commonplace before. Olivander supposedly standardised wand-making in Britain with the power trio of phoenix feathers, unicorn tail hair, and dragon heartstrings. Fleur's wand is technically one of the custom wands, using Veela's hair from her grandmother as a core.

This FF will update *once a month* on a Thursday (once every 4 Thursdays, to be precise) until I get ccomfortable with writing more and in a different universe. A chapter will be up two weeks early on discord(dgj93pNeAD) as usual.