

## Wishful Thinking

2012

It is a lazy summer day. I'm laying in bed reading Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix again.

Harry and company have just burst into the Department of Mysteries, wands blazing, ready to save Sirius, but there's no one there. As I read about them wandering through the Hall of Prophecies, the book begins to shake in my hands. The binding starts to glow. It looks eerily similar to when Harry got sucked into Tom Riddle's diary in the movie adaptation of the Chamber of Secrets.

It's not quite my Hogwarts letter, but I'll take it, I think, just before I literally fall headfirst into the book.

When I land in the Hall of Prophecies, no one pays me any attention. Just as well, since I don't have a wand or anything to defend myself with. I look around with interest. This is just like being in a Pensieve, right? Like a 6D movie. I can't interact with anything. So I follow Harry and company down where they find the fateful prophecy when I notice one that has my name on it.

I look around again, trying to see if there are cameras or something. Maybe this is some sort of elaborate prank? But there's nothing shelves and shelves of dusty orbs and teenagers arguing amongst each other. I reach out, waiting for my hand to pass through the prophecy, but to my surprise, I can grasp it. I lift it. There's a tiny figure shouting and banging against the glass prison. I bring it closer to try and listen but then Death Eaters materialize. Startled, I drop it.

The fight starts around me but I crouch down to listen to the ghostly figure. It's blurred and hard to make out the features, but it looks a little like me, maybe older and more exhausted. I can only make out snippets. I make out the words JK Rowling, Nagini, Asian woman, and "any canon after Deathly Hallows is dead to me" before it fades. What does it mean? For once, I wish any sort of prophecy could be straight-forward.

Something whizzes past my ear and I scramble backwards, just in time to avoid being crushed by a falling shelf. If I could pick a prophecy up, maybe I'm not as invulnerable as I thought I was. I wish I had a wand here. But then I wonder even if one would work for me. Am I still a muggle in this universe? But pondering the mechanics of self-insert fic will have to wait, because I spot Harry and the others are sprinting for the exit.

I am in no mood to be left in a room with trigger-happy (hex-happy? killing curse-happy? murder-happy definitely) Death Eaters. I run after them, tripping through the doorway into the room with the bell jar before Hermione seals it shut. She spares me a look (and instead of being cool my first time meeting a fictional character, I shrink back). But she

doesn't seem surprised to see me. She doesn't really acknowledge me at all before she turns to Harry. What is going on? Am I not in a memory?

But at least I know what will happen. And my heart sinks when I follow Harry and Neville and the Death Eaters into the amphitheater and the Order of the Phoenix charges in.

"No! Go back! It's not what you think!" I shout, but they sprint past me like I'm not even there. I give a wordless cry as beams of light shoot around me like I'm in the middle of a disco club. Or at least I think so. I wouldn't know. I've never been to one. Sirius is going to die if I don't do something. But if I save him, will it be like a butterfly type of effect? Will someone have to die in his place to keep the tragedy of Harry's coming of age arc in check?

I decide I don't care as Sirius yells at Harry to round up the others and run. Sirius was a bully at Hogwarts, but he has never done anything to deserve the amount of suffering he was saddled with in his adult life. And like hell I'm going to let him die here after he's been stuck in Azkaban for thirteen years and then lived off rats during the Goblet of Fire to be close to Harry and then shuttled straight to being trapped in his childhood home for the past year? Muggle or not, I've got one chance to fix this.

I crouch behind one of the stone benches until Bellatrix has her wand raised, the guttural beginnings of the killing curse starting to form in her throat before I sprint out and tackle Sirius. He's lighter than I expected. I guess a decade or so in wizard prison doesn't give you a chance to bulk up, but still. We go flying, rolling and tumbling perilously close to the veil anyway. I drag him away from it. The shock has worn off now and now he's kicking and punching.

"Who do you think you are? Harry's going to get killed!"

"Yeah," I pant, "but originally you die."

"So what? I have to protect him!"

"So, you idiot, do you want Harry to not have you in his life? You're the closest thing to a father figure he's had. If you really loved him, you'd stick around."

"What are you talking about?" he snarls, finally getting enough leverage to pull away.

But then news of Dumbledore's arrival spreads through the crowd and everyone panics. Harry sees Sirius and hugs him. "You're okay."

Sirius laughs. "Of course I am."

I bring my hands to my mouth and sob.

"I thought you were being tortured. I thought you were going to die."

"That would've been tragic, wouldn't it?"

Harry closes his eyes. "Hermione was right. I was so stupid."

"Smarter men than you have fallen for Voldemort's tricks."

Harry finally notices me. "Who are you?"

"Me? I'm an innocent bystander."

"In the Department of Mysteries?"

"Yeah, just wandering through."

They exchange an incredulous look.

"So, you know, since the fight is over or whatever, I guess I'll just be running along now. See you guys later." And then I mosey on out of there, out of the Department of Mysteries, past the Atrium where Voldemort and Dumbledore are fighting. I'm not worried about either of them. Dumbledore can handle himself. I glance at the fireplaces, considering the Floo Network for a second before I remember I'm most likely still a muggle here and I'd rather not burn up in a fireplace. Even if it works, where would I end up?

Just as I'm about to leave by telephone booth though (where will I go? Who knows? Even not within the Ministry of Magic, I'm in London! I won't get far with nothing but the clothes on my back, but when else will I get a chance to walk around and soak in the atmosphere? The furthest from home I've been is Canada), something like a ghost materializes into JK Rowling. "What do you think you're doing with my story?" she says. It's soft but so cold I can't help but take a few steps back.

But then I remember that Sirius deserved better. "Making it better through self-insert fanfic!"

"You're derailing the entire plot. This is my story. Get out."

"Sorry to tell you this," I say, the prophecy's meaning becoming clear like a punch to the gut. "But you do that yourself in a few years when you retcon a bunch of stuff just for the drama." I click my tongue and fingergun at her before I backflip (which I can't do in real life) and spring back into the real world.

Apparently, traveling into one of your favorite series is fine and dandy but going back to your own dimension gives you terrible nausea. I lay there, trying to force away the urge to vomit for half an hour. When it recedes, I sit up and eagerly flip to the end of the book. Sirius still dies.

I sigh and flop back on the bed.