

Ending Maker: Fate Wizardry

Chapter Intro:

*This fic's premise is inspired by the webtoon titled **Ending Maker**/엔딩메이커 by **Chwiryong** and their illustrator **chyan**. Please check them out.*

Story Starts

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Ch 7.1 - Interlude?

More like inter lewd!

(1 out of 2)

Two figures stood motionless, each upon a flying carpet—one of the few that remained technically legal within Wizarding Britain, purchased just before the initial banning of the product several centuries ago. Grandfather clauses in magical law were remarkably persistent, and certain departments had always been meticulous about maintaining access to tools the general public had long since forgotten existed.

These two carpets had been heavily modified and modernised with the latest enchantments, their original threadbare weaves replaced with shimmering protective layers. Warming charms woven into the fabric kept the biting North Sea wind from cutting through to the bone. Stability enchantments ensured the carpets held steady despite the turbulent air currents that would have sent lesser conveyances tumbling into the waves below. And, most importantly, Notice-Me-Not charms had been layered so densely that even a passing seagull would forget it had seen them the moment it looked away.

Both figures wore grey hoods and cloaks—their faces obscured despite the pale daylight struggling through the overcast sky. The wind whipped at the fabric, tugging with the petulant insistence of the open sea, but the enchantments held firm, keeping their features shrouded in shadow.

One figure held out a gloved hand, a long chain dangling from their clenched fist as they drew their carpet closer to their companion. The metal links caught what little light there was, glinting gold despite the gloom—goblin-wrought, if one knew what to look for. Only goblin metalwork held that particular lustre, that stubborn defiance of ambient lighting conditions.

With their other hand, the grey-hooded figure cast the chain around both their shoulders, drawing them into a shared circle. At the chain's centre hung a small hourglass enclosed within two concentric rings—unassuming, almost decorative, belying the impossible power contained within its delicate frame.

The figure's fingers found the hourglass.

Then they tipped it backwards, flipping it once—twice—thrice—and more. Each rotation sent a pulse of magic through them, something subtle, barely worth noticing unless you knew exactly what to look for. Against the buffeting winds of the open sea, the magical signature was virtually undetectable.

Which was, of course, entirely the point.

Time is a complex element of reality.

That statement alone was perhaps the greatest understatement in the history of magical academia—and magical academia was built on understatements, hedged conclusions, and the quiet terror of admitting how little anyone truly understood about the forces they wielded daily.

Time was not merely complex. Time was foundational. It was integral to reality's very construct, woven into the fabric of existence so thoroughly that attempting to describe reality without time factored in would be akin to describing colour to someone who had been blind from birth. The words existed. The concepts could be articulated. But true comprehension required something beyond mere intellect—it required the capacity to perceive what could not, by definition, be perceived.

Most wizards never bothered trying. They cast their spells, brewed their potions, and lived their lives in comfortable ignorance of the deeper mechanisms that made their magic possible.

Magic is a lot of things.

Some say magic is an authority left over from when chaos was just that—chaos. Before the universe settled into patterns, before natural laws crystallised into their current configurations, there was only potential. Raw, undifferentiated, infinite potential. And magic was the echo of that primordial state, the last remnant of a time when anything was possible because nothing had yet been defined.

Or perhaps it was a remnant of a previous stable universe that had inevitably collapsed, seeding the birth of the current one with fragments of its own fundamental forces. The Muggles theorised that the universe was expanding, after all—racing outward from some incomprehensible origin point at speeds that defied intuition.

Who could say with certainty? Perhaps the universe was like rising dough: expanding and expanding until it reached some unknowable maximum, whereupon it would collapse back upon itself, condensing into another singularity, another beginning, another cycle in an infinite series of cosmic breaths.

The Department had theories. The Department always had theories.

But theories were not certainties, and they had learned long ago that certainty was a luxury their work rarely afforded.

Reality surrounding the two figures began to shift—slowly, imperceptibly, like the movement of the sun across the sky. You wouldn't notice the change unless you were looking for it. Unless you knew what signs to watch for.

The grey-hooded figures knew.

And to think that this artefact was merely creating a small nick in time. A paper cut in the fabric of temporal reality. Something so minor, so inconsequential, that when reality reasserted itself—as it always did, as it always must—the correction would be seamless.

Reality has its rules, and magic exists in tandem with them. It can bend them, reshape them, collude with them in ways that seemed impossible to the uninitiated. A wizard could make a feather float, could transform a beetle into a button, could create fire from nothing and banish it just as easily. But even magic had limits. Even magic operated within constraints that could be tested but never truly broken.

And time—time was one of those key fundamental aspects where magic's influence was simply an ant's stolen grain of sugar compared to a household's entire pantry. You could nibble at the edges. You could borrow moments here and there, small sips from an infinite ocean. But you could never truly take. You could never break the flow, never dam the river, never make time bow to mortal will.

At least, not without consequences that made the attempt laughably self-defeating.

The Department had files on those who had tried. Extensive files. None of them made for pleasant reading—wounds in time are few and far between, and devastating to look at.

Waves crested in reverse around them, foam collapsing inward as the sea retreated from motions it had not yet made. The sky shifted through shades of grey and blue as clouds unmade themselves and reformed in configurations that had existed hours ago.

What they were doing now was not breaking time.

They weren't even bending time to their will, not in any meaningful sense. The Time-Turner was a far more elegant—and far more limited—instrument than most people realised. It didn't grant mastery over the fourth dimension. It didn't allow its user to reshape history according to their whims.

While time was often described as linear, it could also be relative—a truth the Muggles had stumbled upon barely a century ago, something that revolutionised how the Department dabbled with its fabric.

Consider a vessel travelling at tremendous speed, with light bouncing between two surfaces within. To those aboard, the light moved in a simple vertical path—up, down, up, down—measuring time in steady, predictable intervals. But to an observer watching from outside, that same light appeared to travel a longer, diagonal path, chasing after surfaces that were themselves in motion.

And yet, light's speed was absolute. Inviolable. The cosmic speed limit that nothing—not even magic—could circumvent.

So if the light couldn't speed up to cover the extra distance, something else had to give. Something else had to bend to preserve that universal constant.

From the outside observer's perspective, time itself dilated. Stretched. The vessel's internal clock ran slower relative to their own—not through any mechanical failing, but because reality demanded it. The universe would sooner warp the fabric of time than permit its fundamental speed limit to be broken.

Magic operated under similar constraints—different rules, perhaps, but rules nonetheless. And the Time-Turner exploited one of those rules with elegant precision.

But what they were doing was far simpler than manipulation or mastery.

They were creating a closed loop.

Playing with causality in the only way that reality permitted. They were about to witness something that had already accounted for their witnessing. Their future selves had always been present at this moment; their past selves simply hadn't caught up yet. The loop was closed before they'd entered it—had been closed, would be closed, the tense collapsing into irrelevance

when effect preceded cause and cause justified effect in an eternal ouroboros of temporal self-reference.

Reality, for its part, saw no contradiction. Reality saw only a single timeline in which two grey-hooded figures had always observed the events of this night from their flying carpets. That the figures themselves experienced the observation after the events had concluded was merely a matter of perspective—and perspective, unlike causality, was allowed to be subjective.

To translate: They would witness events that had already accounted for their presence. Future-tense experience of a past-tense fact—a closed loop that had always been going to resolve itself, because it already had, because it would.

Time-travel grammar was a headache. Best not to think about it too hard.

The hourglass continued flipping as day rolled back to night, the world rewinding around them like a film played in reverse. Stars emerged from the brightening sky, then vanished again as darkness asserted itself. The moon traced a backwards arc across the heavens.

And then—

The two figures went still as the scene unfolded before them.

They didn't really know what they would witness, but when twenty-six soul-sucking immortal creatures of gloom were presumably missing and probably wreaking havoc on unsuspecting Muggles—

The hourglass stopped rotating as time began to flow properly.

A small fishing vessel appeared on the dark waters below, pitching and rolling with the waves. Three figures aboard—one at the helm, one gripping the railing with obvious distress, and one moving with preternatural grace despite the turbulent conditions.

The grey-hooded observers watched in silence as events unfolded.

But it wasn't the bow that made them exchange a meaningful glance beneath their concealing hoods. It wasn't the impossible precision of arrows fired across kilometres of open sea. It wasn't even the artefact dropped into the water that somehow lifted Azkaban's wards—wards that had stood for centuries, wards that the Department itself had helped design.

No.

It was what came after.

When the dementors emerged from the prison—the immortal guardians, the unkillable sentinels that had served as Azkaban's ultimate security since the fortress's founding—they expected to see a Patronus.. That was how one dealt with dementors. Everyone knew this.

Instead, they watched the young man conjure weapons from nothing.

Not summon. Not transfigure. Conjure—pulling fully-formed blades out of thin air with the casual ease of a man reaching into his pocket for loose change. And then he handed a pair to the grizzled Auror beside him.

According to their superiors, this boy wasn't supposed to know about magic yet. According to their records, he had received no formal magical education whatsoever.

The problem wasn't conjuring, the problem was the conjuring of enchanted weapons—enchanted weapons that bit into the lead dementor with devastating effect.

The creature screamed.

Dementors could not be harmed by physical means. Dementors were, for all practical purposes, immortal; not even the cursed flames of Fiendfyre could eliminate one.

And yet.

The two grey-hooded figures watched as the young wizard and the veteran Auror fought back the swarm with nothing but conjured blades and apparent determination. Watched as the fishing vessel sped away from the prison, its passengers continuing their impossible assault. Twenty-six dementors—twenty-six immortal dementors—met the coils of mortality that night. Those that attempted to flee were systematically sniped from the retreating vessel, their essence washing away in the turbulent sea below.

The two observers hovered in silence over the empty sea, processing what they had witnessed.

"Thoughts?"

A long pause.

"...Continued surveillance."

For now.

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"Soooo..."

A tennis ball arced lazily across the living room, bright yellow against the beige walls. Harry's hand shot up automatically, catching it with practised ease. He threw it back with perhaps more force than necessary, raising an eyebrow at the pregnant pause that hung in the air—the unasked question practically vibrating between them.

Nymphadora Tonks, otherwise known as 'Just Tonks'—and gods help you if you used her given name—caught the ball. Or rather, she tried to catch it. Instead, in a display that perfectly encapsulated everything that made her simultaneously endearing and utterly exasperating, she inadvertently toppled backwards over the backrest of the couch she'd been perched on like some sort of colourful, chaotic bird.

There was a muffled thump and what might have been a creative swear word.

"Well, it's your eighteenth birthday today," Tonks announced, her head popping up from behind the Dursleys' pristine sofa like a particularly cheeky jack-in-the-box. The grin spreading across her face could only be described as lascivious, all-knowing mischief and waggling eyebrows. "I heard someone's getting lucky today."

Heat crept up Harry's neck, and he resolutely focused on the tennis ball in his palm, turning it over as though examining it for defects. "Do you not have patrols with Moody today?" he diverted, perhaps a touch too quickly. He caught the returning ball again, sending it back immediately to the bubbly metamorphmagus, who was currently sporting spiky, bright yellow-blond hair—something that looked like a cross between a fan of the punk scene and some famous anime character whose name he couldn't quite recall. Dragonball, maybe? The effect was simultaneously ridiculous and somehow suited her perfectly.

Tonks just grinned wider at his obvious redirection, clearly filing away his embarrassment for later teasing. "Oooh, is wittle Harry a pwude?" she cooed in an exaggerated baby voice that made him want to throw something heavier than a tennis ball. "Do you need advice from your... uh—first cousin once removed... wait, no, that's you and Mum. First cousin twice removed, right? Hey, ow! I was distracted!"

The ball connected squarely with Tonks's forehead with a satisfying thwack as she'd been too busy working through their admittedly convoluted family tree. Harry couldn't help the small smile of satisfaction that tugged at his lips. Served her right, really.

Not that they were particularly closely related anyway, he thought, his mind going straight to that particular lesson during biology class. First cousins shared about twelve and a half per cent of their genes, and you halved that with every generation. By the time you got to their degree of separation, it was practically negligible.

Shaking his head, Harry firmly pushed those thoughts aside. It was just a distraction anyway, a tangent his mind had wandered down to avoid thinking about what Tonks had actually been implying with her earlier comments.

Tonks rubbed her forehead with the offending tennis ball, though the grin never left her face. "Today's a day off, plus Moody had some meetings to attend to... don't you appreciate that a bodacious bombshell of an auror trainee visited you on the morning of your birthday?" She emphasised the 'bodacious bombshell' by making certain parts of her anatomy distinctly larger whilst other parts grew proportionally wider, her body shifting with the casual ease of someone adjusting their hair.

Harry's eyes tracked the changes before his brain caught up with what he was doing. He stared for perhaps a second too long before catching himself and jerking his gaze away, heat flooding his face as he studied the ceiling with sudden intense interest. God, if anyone walked in right now, he'd be in so much trouble. What was he supposed to do? She was doing it deliberately!

Of course Tonks noticed. Her triumphant grin told him he'd been well and truly caught, and he'd never hear the end of it.

The two of them were currently camped out in the Dursleys' overly sanitised living room, surrounded by Aunt Petunia's obsessively arranged doilies and Vernon's golf trophies. In keeping with their carefully constructed plan—the one designed to ensure that Dumbledore didn't learn about Harry's newfound freedom of movement—they'd all agreed that for the week surrounding his birthday, he'd stay at Privet Drive. Just for appearances. Just to make sure that if ever, for some reason, Dumbledore checked the address written on his letter, he'd still be clear.

Of course, his loving relatives wouldn't have willingly allowed his return after the months he'd been conspicuously absent, probably celebrating their nephew-free existence with extra pudding and self-congratulatory dinner parties. So Tonks, alongside her father Ted, had paid the Dursleys a special visit and persuaded them—with varying degrees of magical suggestion and

creative truthfulness—that they'd won an all-expenses-paid vacation to the Canary Islands.

The vacation was real enough, at least. Harry had purchased the tickets and made the bookings himself with money from his vault, so his conscience was more or less clear on that particular deception. It was practically a birthday present to himself.

Bzzzt. Bzzzt. Bzzzt.

"Oh, is that the ball and chain?" Tonks grinned as she leaned over and casually swiped at the phone.

"I dare you to say that to her face," Harry challenged as he tried reaching for the phone at the same time as Tonks swiped.

"Oh—what's this?" Tonks was able to grab the phone quickly as she stood up and instantly distanced herself from Harry. "Is this what you particularly want?"

The grinning loon was swiping left frantically as if she struck gold as Harry stood quickly to grab the phone.

Harry lunged for the phone, but Tonks danced backwards with the ease of someone who'd spent years dodging hexes and her own clumsiness in equal measure. Her eyes widened as she swiped through the screen, her metamorphmagus abilities apparently extending to her expressions, which cycled rapidly from curiosity to shock to absolutely gleeful mischief.

"Oh my," Tonks breathed, her grin threatening to split her face in half. "Oh *my*. Harry James Potter, you absolute dark horse!"

"Give it back!" Harry's voice cracked embarrassingly as he made another grab, his face already heating in anticipation of whatever mortifying thing Hermione had sent. His girlfriend had been increasingly... experimental with her phone usage lately.

Especially since they were separated since the start of summer vacation, as their parents took their semi-traditional vacation every other year—skiing in Zermatt, Switzerland.

Plus, Harry wanted Hermione to spend some quality time with her parents, especially since this year she'd be living in Hogwarts in Scotland for the better part of the year. At least they'd have floo privileges, which they could use to get to the Grimmauld Place and the townhouse they recently bought beside it.

"Is this what the studious Miss Granger gets up to in her spare time?" Tonks held the phone just out of reach, her pink hair shifting to a suggestive shade of red as she waggled her eyebrows. "Because bloody hell, Potter, I didn't think you had it in—wait, there's more!"

Harry's reinforcement kicked in automatically as he vaulted over the sofa, desperation lending him speed. Tonks yelped and stumbled backwards into the armchair, nearly dropping the phone as she continued swiping with gleeful abandon.

"Thigh-highs! Very nice choice. Classic, yet alluring. And is that—oh, that skirt is *definitely* not regulation length for any school I know of." Tonks cackled, holding the phone above her head now as Harry practically climbed over her to reach it. "Does this count as educational material? Because I think—oi! Watch the goods!"

Harry grabbed her wrist, applying just enough pressure to make her hand spasm open. The phone tumbled into his waiting palm, and he immediately clutched it to his chest, backing away from the still-grinning menace sprawled in the armchair.

"Spoilsport," Tonks pouted, though her eyes sparkled with unholy amusement. "I was just getting to the good bits. Tell me, do you request this of Hermione, or did she—"

"Please stop talking," Harry managed, his voice strangled as he finally looked down at his phone screen. His brain short-circuited immediately.

The photo showed Hermione perched on the edge of what looked like a desk in a hotel room, one leg crossed over the other in a way that made the already short pleated skirt ride up dangerously high. The black thigh-high stockings she wore had a small bow at the top, and the angle of the camera—*gods*, had she used a timer?—showed just enough to make his mouth go completely dry. Her expression was coy, knowing, absolutely deliberate in its promise.

'She's going to be the death of me,' Harry thought, and found he didn't mind the prospect one bit.

He swiped. The next photo was worse. Better. Both.

Aside from their usual evening talks until they passed out sleeping, Hermione had been sending more and more risqué stuff.

"You've gone the colour of a tomato," Tonks observed cheerfully from her position still sprawled in the chair. "Actually, no, you've surpassed tomato. You're approaching beetroot territory. Should I get a cold flannel?"

Harry locked the screen with fumbling fingers, shoving the phone into his pocket before Tonks could make another grab for it. His face felt like it was on fire, heat radiating from his cheeks down his neck. "I hate you."

"No, you don't. You love me. I'm your favourite deviant cousin twice removed or whatever we decided on."

A sharp *tap-tap-tap* cut through Harry's mortification like a knife through butter, drawing both their attention away from his phone-related embarrassment to the window. A tawny owl perched on the sill, its amber eyes fixed on them with that particular intensity that suggested it had been waiting quite some time and was growing increasingly unimpressed with their delay. There was something almost reproachful in the way it tilted its head, as if silently judging them for forcing it to wait whilst they mucked about with mobile phones.

"Oh, brilliant timing," Tonks said, immediately pushing herself up from the armchair with only minimal grace, her limbs still sprawled in that careless way she had. "That'll be your letter, then."

Harry crossed to the window, grateful beyond measure for the distraction from his still-burning face. His cheeks felt like they'd been held too close to a fire, and he could feel the heat radiating down his neck, probably visible even beneath his collar. He pulled the window open with perhaps more force than strictly necessary. The owl hopped inside immediately, landing on the back of the sofa with a soft *thump* and extending its leg with an air of dignified patience that spoke volumes about its training. This was clearly a bird that took its duties.

He untied the envelope—thick, cream parchment sealed with red wax and the Hogwarts crest pressed into it with obvious care. His acceptance letter, official and final. The weight of it in his hands felt more significant than mere paper and ink should. This was it, then. Truly happening. The owl ruffled its feathers expectantly, fixing him with a look that clearly communicated it expected compensation for its services.

"Hold on," Harry said, already heading towards the kitchen, letter still clutched in one hand. "Tonks, where'd you put the bacon?"

"In the microwave, you muppet," Tonks called after him, her voice full of that particular brand of affectionate exasperation she'd perfected over the summer. "Didn't want flies to gather around it. Though I wouldn't mind another slice of that treacle tart whilst you're in there."

Harry found the rashers exactly where she'd indicated, still relatively warm from breakfast. He returned to the living room, and the owl accepted three rashers with what might have been approval—or at least the cessation of judgment—tucking into them with quite remarkable efficiency. Its claws clamped down on the bacon with decisive force, its beak tearing into the meat with the kind of single-minded focus that Harry had to admire. At least someone was having a straightforward morning.

Harry broke the wax seal on his letter with careful fingers and scanned the contents, his eyes moving over the familiar formal language of wizarding correspondence. Standard acceptance, exactly as expected. A list of required books and equipment, none of which surprised him particularly. Instructions for

term start on 1 September, with the usual reminders about the Hogwarts Express from Platform Nine and Three-Quarters. Nothing unexpected, though seeing it all laid out in official script made it feel suddenly, startlingly real in a way that all his preparation hadn't quite managed. He'd already read Hermione's letter when they'd first met months ago. He'd already purchased most of his books and equipment during various shopping trips with Hermione and Andromeda; all he had left were his potion ingredients and his wand, which he'd been deliberately saving for last.

"Well?" Tonks had followed him into the kitchen, already cutting herself a generous slice of treacle tart without bothering with the pretence of waiting for permission or even using proper table manners. "Does it say anything interesting? Special instructions for the Boy-Who-Lived? Secret passwords to the Headmaster's private bathroom?"

"Just the usual," Harry said, though his eyes caught on one detail that made him pause. "Term starts on a Saturday, though."

"Nice, we start on the weekend," Tonks said cheerfully, returning to the living room with not one but two slices of treacle tart balanced precariously on a single plate, the same dessert she'd brought this morning as the 'cake' for his birthday celebration. It had been sweet of her, even if the tart itself was almost aggressively sugary. "Makes the transition easier, I suppose. Get settled in before classes actually start on Monday."

As Shirou Emiya, he hadn't really cared for intensely sweet things—had actually found them somewhat off-putting, if he was honest with himself. But for some reason, as Harry, treacle tart was the only overly sweet thing he apparently genuinely liked. It was strange, these little disconnects between who he'd been and who he was now. He thanked Tonks as he accepted the plate she offered, using a dessert fork to eat a piece with more restraint than his cousin was demonstrating.

"I can give you and Hermione a tour when you arrive," Tonks offered, speaking around a mouthful of tart in a way that would've made her mother despair.

"Show you some shortcuts and some Hogwarts secrets I've discovered. The

castle's absolutely massive, easy to get lost if you don't know the tricks. Some of the staircases move, did I mention that? Absolute nightmare in your first week."

"Oh, yeah," she added, as if suddenly remembering something more serious. "Any news on the mutt?"

Harry felt his stomach clench slightly at the question, though he kept his expression neutral. It had already been months since that particular night. Thankfully, right after breaking Sirius out, Wizarding Britain had reacted exactly as they'd expected and planned for—the initial conclusion being that it was someone who utterly hated the supposed right-hand man of Voldemort, someone who'd risked everything to deliver their own personal brand of justice. The Prophet had been full of speculation for weeks.

Theories had wildly ranged from suggestions that Sirius was now probably at the bottom of the ocean, weighted down and lost forever, to bizarre notions that Sirius was somehow still alive in that person's basement, being slowly tortured for crimes real or imagined. There had even been one particularly creative theory that Sirius wasn't truly dead at all—that he'd been permanently transfigured into a rock and left there forever to be part of Azkaban itself, somehow still conscious and experiencing the dementors' effects for eternity.

With how much blood had been splattered quite deliberately across the prison cell and even on the rocks of the island below—they'd been very thorough about that particular detail—the only conclusion the authorities could reasonably reach was that no one could possibly survive that amount of blood loss without immediate, expert medical attention. Which, obviously, a vigilante bent on revenge wouldn't have provided.

"Nothing much aside from the fact that his name has been quietly cleared by the ICW," Harry explained carefully, taking another bite of the overly sweet dessert to give himself a moment. "And that his rehabilitation is going well, from what I understand. He's responding positively to treatment."

He'd actually felt some genuine form of guilt when he'd shot Sirius in the thigh with the clear, calculated intention to maim him so severely that there wouldn't be any doubt whatsoever about his survivability—or rather, the apparent lack thereof. The blood had been real, the wound had been real, and Sirius's screams had been entirely too real for Harry's comfort, even knowing it was necessary, even knowing Hermione was right there with potions and healing draughts at the ready.

"Oh, are you still feeling guilty?" Tonks asked perceptively, her hair turning a distinctly darker shade of yellow, bordering on brown—a slip in her control, something Moody had been working tirelessly with her to eliminate as it was an obvious tell for any metamorphmagus. Her emotions were literally written across her appearance if you knew what to look for.

Harry smiled awkwardly, reaching up to scratch at his jaw in an unconscious gesture of discomfort. "Maybe a bit," he admitted quietly. "I know it was necessary, but still..."

"That howler sent by Mum was absolutely bonkers!" Tonks said quickly, clearly trying to lighten the suddenly heavy mood, her hair already shifting back towards its usual vibrant pink. "I've never seen her that angry, and I've done some properly stupid things over the years."

That had been the one thing about their operation that they'd very deliberately not disclosed to Andromeda beforehand, because they'd known with absolute certainty that the Tonks matriarch would have emphatically, vehemently rejected the entire plan.

Hermione had, of course, been there the entire time during Sirius's rescue, armed quite literally to the teeth with blood replenishers and healing draughts. She'd explained afterwards that they'd left the blade stuck carefully in Sirius's thigh, and he'd already consumed the Draught of Living Death beforehand, which helped slow down his heart rate and therefore the bleeding to something survivable. It had all been meticulously planned and executed with precision, but that didn't make the memory any easier to bear.

"Yeah," Harry said with a slight grimace, remembering the howler's screeching quite vividly. "I'll be given the chance to apologise to him properly this week, at least. Face to face."

"Oh, yeah, what time does your portkey activate?" Tonks asked, standing up smoothly as she gathered both their now-empty dishes with practised efficiency.

Harry checked his phone, glancing at the time displayed across Hermione's last message. "Actually, in about half an hour. Should probably start getting ready, I suppose."

"Not fair that everyone's in France right now whilst I'm stuck here," Tonks complained, though her tone was more theatrical than genuinely upset. "You lot off having adventures and fancy French food, and I'm here doing boring Auror training exercises."

"You could always quit and come with us," Harry suggested with a slight grin, knowing full well what her answer would be.

"And face Mum's wrath? I'll take my chances with the training, thanks." Tonks paused at the kitchen doorway, turning back to look at him with an expression that had gone unexpectedly serious. "But actually, Harry—enjoy it, yeah? Seeing Sirius properly, spending time in France with Hermione and everyone. You've earned it. Stop feeling guilty about doing what needed to be done and just... be happy for a bit."

Harry felt something warm settle in his chest at her words, at the genuine care behind them. "Thanks, Tonks. Really."

"Yeah, well, don't get used to it. Can't have you thinking I've gone all soft and emotional." Her hair flashed through several rapid colours before settling back on pink. "Now go pack whatever you need to pack. And Harry?" She grinned wickedly. "Maybe leave your phone behind, yeah? Wouldn't want your portkey activating mid wank."

Harry felt his face flush red all over again, and Tonks's delighted laughter followed him all the way up the stairs.

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End

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