

## **A Strange New World**

### **Chapter 1**

Harry Potter tiredly trudged through the thick snow, and every labored exhale of hot breath produced a huge cloud of mist. Beyond him was a field of the whitest snow imaginable. The wind was burning his cheeks and causing his heavy winter robe to snap loudly with every gust. The weather was turning bad, as it often did near the North Pole. Why was he in the North Pole, one might ask. Unfortunately, some smooth brains in the Department of Mysteries had the bright idea of studying the natural ambient magic produced by the magnetic poles. Since the Unspeakables weren't trained fighters, Harry had been tasked with guarding them as they conducted their tests. He had been in this icy hellhole for the better part of three weeks, and he was very eager to return home.

A noise behind him made him stop. Turning around, Harry pulled out his Omnioculars and scanned the horizon. The wind was picking up, and it was getting difficult to see through the snow flurries. 'Damn polar bears,' Harry thought as he spotted the source of the noise. The Unspeakables had warded off the area, but every so often, bears still found their way through. "That's why you're here, Potter," the Unspeakables happily chirped when he complained. It was true. That was why he was here. With no other choice, he would chase them off and wait for them to try again. Sighing, Harry pulled out his wand and went after the bear.

## **A Strange New World**

"Another bear," Harry said as he got back to base camp. The two hooded Unspeakables he was protecting looked up at him. "I chased it off," he added. They both nodded.

Harry didn't know the identities of the Unspeakables, but he was certain they were both females. Though their bodies were hidden under the bulky winter wear, they were both fairly short and petite, and judging by how they moved, Harry would wager that they were both north of fifty in age. Their voices were, of course, altered to sound like any other generic Unspeakable.

"We received a message from the Ministry," one of them said. "There's some trouble back home." They sounded a bit nervous.

"What kind of trouble?" Harry asked. He immediately thought of another Dark Lord coming to take Voldemort's place. However, that wasn't the kind of trouble they were talking about.

"A virus," the other Unspeakable said. "A magical one."

"A magical virus?" Harry asked, sounding unconvinced. "I've never heard of one."

"They're rare, but they do exist," one of them explained.

“Is it dangerous?” Harry asked them. He had people back home that he cared about, after all.

“Right now, we don’t know very much about it. All they said is that it came to attention less than a week ago. Apparently, it started somewhere in South America and is spreading rapidly. Right now, not much is known about the virus itself.”

“So, they’re going to quarantine?” Harry asked them.

“They are,” one of them nodded. “We’ve been ordered to remain here as a precaution. We’ll continue with our work until we hear something back. Hopefully, we’ll receive regular updates.”

“Do we have the supplies for this?” Harry asked them. They had only planned for a month-long expedition.

“We packed a three-month supply of rations to be on the safe side, so we should be fine on that front. Water obviously isn’t an issue,” one of them said. Harry slowly nodded. He didn’t want to stay here any longer than necessary, but sadly, orders were orders.

“Alright ... Keep me up to date,” he said and went back to his tent.

Little did Harry know how bad things would turn out to be.

### **Six months later ...**

Harry stood at the edge of the ice and flicked his wand. A large fish shot out of the water and hovered in front of him, thrashing violently. He expertly gutted it and banished the innards back into the water so it wouldn’t attract more bears. Their food ran out ages ago, so it became his job to not only protect the Unspeakables but also feed them. Thankfully, the ocean was teeming with life, so procuring food wasn’t much of an issue.

If Harry thought the weather was bad during the summer months, it was nothing compared to winter. It was constantly dark and miserable, and terrifyingly powerful storms were practically a daily occurrence. To make things worse, the news back home vastly exacerbated his misery of being stuck in such a desolate and dark place.

By the time they had realized there was a problem, it was too late. The magical virus had taken hold of every magical community in the world. No amount of quarantines had helped them. It burned through the magical population like Fiendfyre. They still didn’t fully understand the virus, but it became widely known that it was much more aggressive to males than their counterparts. Once infected, magical males quickly developed a fever that couldn’t be stopped by any amount of medication. It attacked their bodies, and within a few days, their vital organs began shutting down. Within a month of Harry’s team first being notified, over ninety percent of magical males were dead, including all of his friends.

Harry, of course, despaired over the news that he would never see his friends again, and the only thing that kept him going was knowing that his female friends were still okay. The sickness also affected the magical females, but not nearly as badly as the men. He had received word that his female friends had also gotten sick, but all of them survived and were relatively healthy. That was the only thing that gave Harry hope.

The news hadn't gotten any better from there. The few men remaining were quickly quarantined, but sadly, they had already been infected. Harry wasn't sure how many of the world's magical males remained, but from what his Unspeakables told him, survival of the greater magical community hung on a very precarious ledge. As such, Harry wasn't allowed to return until they were one hundred percent sure he wouldn't get sick. Now, his survival was simply too important.

Harry carried the heavy fish back to camp, keeping an eye out for any bears. Since news of the virus, there hadn't been a single bear who crossed the ward boundary. Harry suspected that the Unspeakables had been ordered to keep Harry alive at all costs, including adding heavier protections to their camp. Once back in camp, Harry dropped the fish onto the table.

"I'll do that," one of the Unspeakable said from behind. "Your fillets always come out ragged."

Harry chuckled. He had had months to grieve and was only now getting back to his old self. "True, but they cook up just the same," he told her while she flicked her wand at the fish. The fish was descaled and sliced into thin fillets. "What I wouldn't do for a cup of tea," Harry said.

"Me too," the Unspeakable sighed as she began cooking them on an open fire. The wind was still whipping, but the weather was as good as it would get. Supplies couldn't be sent to them out of fear of accidentally infecting Harry through contamination. They were on their own.

"Any news?" Harry asked hopefully.

"Actually, there is," she said happily. "There was a breakthrough, and the virus is now being safely studied. The hope is that a way to fully eradicate it can soon be found."

"So we'll be able to go home soon?" Harry eagerly asked. He wanted to get back home as soon as possible. She shook her head.

"I expect we'll be here for at least another few months. They don't want to take any chances with you," she told him. Harry sat down and sighed.

"I don't want to be here any more than you do," she said, flipping the sizzling fillets. "But you have to understand how important you are to the magical world as a whole. They're not sure how many wizards are left in the world. Only the ones who live in complete isolation will have survived, and trust me, that's not many. You were incredibly lucky to be on this mission. It

undoubtedly saved your life. Your life will probably be very different when we get back," she added. Harry looked at her, confused.

"What do you mean?" he asked. She turned to look at him.

"The magical population has been cut in half, and men are now in very, very short supply," she said as though the answer was obvious. It took a moment for him to realize what she meant.

"You mean ..." he began, and she nodded.

"Repopulation of the male sex will be a top priority," she told him, flipping the fillets again.

"What about Muggleborns?" he asked. She shrugged.

"All the male muggleborns died," she sadly told him. "I'm sure more will be born, but that doesn't help our problem right now. It takes a long time to grow up, and a lot can happen before then. I imagine you'll be expected to do your duty to the magical world."

Harry quietly thought about what she was saying. "I've already done my duty," he said defiantly.

"That's true, and we're all grateful that you rid us of the Dark Lord. I truly mean that," she told him, and he knew she was being genuine. "But this is different. We're all in the same crappy boat, and we're all going to have to make sacrifices if we want to save our kind," she said. Again, Harry sighed.

Of course, he would do what was needed of him. He wanted his remaining friends to live in the best world possible. However, his friends were his first and foremost concern. They would always come first.

"Anyway ... Forget about the world's problems for now. Enjoy nature's bounty," she said, shoving a plate into his hands. On it was a piece of unseasoned fried fish. He looked at the hooded Unspeakable.

"Yum," he said in a deadpan voice. She laughed at his expression.

## **A Strange New World**

It was over five months later that they finally got off that frozen stretch of land. Harry had never been so glad in his entire life. When the portkey dropped them off in the Department of Mysteries, healers quickly swarmed all three.

"Forgive us, Mr. Potter, but you need to be evaluated before you can leave," one of them said as they rushed him to a special room they had prepared. Harry already knew this was going to happen. His mission mates had informed him of this.

"I understand," Harry said as they quarantined him. While he was eager to return home, he was still very nervous about returning. If they hadn't fully exterminated the virus, he was dead meat.

For two weeks, Harry was kept isolated in a room while his vital signs were constantly monitored. Harry was just happy to have real food and tea again. When it eventually became clear that he wasn't going to immediately drop dead, he was cleared to leave. Going up to the Atrium was an adventure of its own. Harry instantly noticed that there wasn't a single man in the Ministry other than him. Every woman he passed looked at him. Some of them looked hopeful, while others looked very saddened. It seemed everyone had lost someone, and the reminders of that horrible time couldn't be ignored. Harry floo'ed straight home and was hit with the smell of an old, musty house the moment he stepped out of the fireplace. His home had sat abandoned for a long time. He quickly opened all the windows, dropped off his stuff, and apparated straight to Hermione's house.

Harry knocked on the door, and when it opened, Hermione stood there looking shocked. Harry didn't wait for her to snap out of it. He simply wrapped her up in a hug. "You're home?" she asked in a shuddering voice. Harry nodded. Her arms wrapped around his waist, and she squeezed him harder than she ever had. He heard her sniffing.

"Are you okay?" he asked. She shook her head.

"The past year has been so horrible," she said, her voice full of distress.

"I'm sorry I wasn't there," he apologized sadly. Hermione let out a watery laugh and broke the hug. She wiped her eyes.

"I'm not. Otherwise, you would be gone too," she smiled. Harry nodded, understanding what she was saying. Harry led her inside, and they sat on the couch. Hermione and Ron had been sharing this house, but he was obviously gone now.

"How are the others doing?" Harry asked her. Hermione sighed.

"Ginny and Molly got it the worst," she told him. "Most of the Weasleys were men, after all. Nearly the entire family was wiped out. Molly was in a bad state for a long time but is slowly improving. Ginny's tough, though. She pulled through after a few months," Hermione told him. Her eyes were red and puffy, and her pale cheeks were flushed.

"And what about the sickness? Did you girls get it bad as well?" he asked her.

"All of us got sick," Hermione explained. "I got a bad fever for a few days, as did Molly and Ginny. Fleur was the sickest. She was bedridden for two weeks. Luckily, she pulled through."

"Where is Fleur?" Harry asked. With Bill gone, he was unsure if she would return to France.

“She’s still living at Shell Cottage. After her father died, her mum and sister moved in with her to help take care of her while she was recovering. I guess they saw no reason to go back to France afterward,” Hermione told him while softly picking at the frayed stitches on her pajama pants. While Hermione had never been a fashion diva, she did always dress smartly. Seeing her wear pajamas in the middle of the day really made him realize quickly things had changed. It was like she had no reason to even try anymore.

“And what about you, Hermione?” Harry asked. “Why are you living here by yourself?” Hermione shrugged.

“They want me to move into the Burrow with them, but I prefer it here,” she said. “I’ve been spending the last six months doing ministry-sponsored research to see if I can help out with the problem. I need a lot of room for my books and equipment,” she explained.

“I don’t like the idea of you being here all alone,” Harry told her. Hermione shot him a sweet smile.

“You don’t need to worry about me. I’m pretty tough, you know,” she stated. Harry chuckled and patted her thigh.

“I don’t deny that, but still ...” he began, but she waved it away.

“I’ll be fine, Harry. I’ve grieved as much as humanly possible. Most of us have. I think we’re all ready to move forward,” she assured him. Harry nodded.

“What about the job situation? Is everyone unemployed?” he asked her.

“That obviously took a major hit. With all the men gone, there’s a shortage of workers. We’re doing our best and keeping the essentials going, but there are still shortages. We have to go into the muggle world for stuff like clothing and whatnot. It’s slowly been getting better, though.”

“And Hogwarts?” Harry asked.

“The school was closed all of last year, but everyone will be going back in September,” Hermione said. She then stood up. “Come on. I’ll make you some tea. We’ve been getting that from the muggle world as well.”

Harry stood up and followed her into the kitchen. He watched as she made the tea. “You know, Hermione ... I’ve been thinking.”

“What about?” she turned to look at him.

“Why don’t I move in here with you? After being alone for so long, I could really use the company,” he brought up the subject.

“You want to live with me?” she asked, setting the kettle down.

“Unless you’d rather I didn’t,” Harry quickly added. He didn’t want to intrude. Hermione smacked into his chest and hugged him tightly. He pressed his lips to the top of her head and breathed in her familiar scent.

“I think I’d like that,” she spoke into his chest.

## **A Strange New World**

Hermione, Fleur, and Ginny sat outside the Burrow talking while Harry helped Gabrielle pick apples from the orchard. Fleur snorted when Gabrielle “accidentally” rubbed against him for the fifth time.

“Could she make it any more obvious?” Fleur commented and took a drink of her cocktail.

“There’s hardly been a girl who Harry’s come across who hasn’t made it plainly obvious,” Hermione added as she watched the pair as well.

It had only been a few days since Harry’s return, and he was barely getting back into the swing of things.

“We visited Diagon Alley yesterday, and he was instantly surrounded by women. I couldn’t count the number of dirty looks I got just for being with him,” Hermione explained.

“Trust me ... There’s going to be a lot more of that in the coming days,” Ginny added.

“What do you mean?” Fleur asked her.

“Hermione and I had an interesting meeting with Amelia Bones,” Ginny said, looking less than pleased.

Amelia Bones had taken over the role of Minister of Magic after Shackbolt’s passing. She was doing her best to get the community back on track.

“She knows we’re Harry’s friends and wanted our advice,” Hermione chimed in.

“What about?” Fleur asked, wondering why Ginny was pulling a face.

“Harry’s only one of two known men left in the country. The other one is a hermit who’s over one hundred and twenty years old,” Ginny told her.

“So few?” Fleur asked, slightly shocked. She knew the number was bound to be extremely low, but this was worse than she expected. Hermione nodded in response.

“The magical population might not recover if they just sit back and wait. So few muggleborns are born every year, and roughly only half of those will be male. It’s a risky gamble to wait and hope,” Hermione explained. “Amelia is hoping that Harry will do his part to ... speed up the process,” she cleared her throat uncomfortably. Fleur’s eyes widened.

“She wants to turn ‘Arry into some kind of breeding stud?” she asked quietly while keeping her eyes on him. He tousled Gabrielle’s hair, making her squeal and jump out of reach.

“Yes,” Hermione said, not liking the idea either. “And as distasteful as it is, I can see her point. The magical world is in a really bad spot. The next ten to twenty years will be crucial for us.”

“And what does ‘Arry ‘ave to say about this?” Fleur asked.

“I haven’t brought it up, though he’s mentioned that the Unspeakables he was with talked to him about something similar. He doesn’t sound too comfortable with the idea,” Hermione said, watching Harry as well.

“I should say not,” Ginny pipped in. “Harry shouldn’t be treated that way. He’s not a prize pig to be passed around,” she sniffed.

“As much as I dislike the idea, it’s not going to change the fact that a lot of women are going to try, with or without ministry backing,” Hermione told them. “Let’s not forget that there’s now a lot of single women and only one eligible bachelor.” This statement made the other two girls go quiet. “Even Pansy Parkinson was making doe eyes at him.”

Ginny made a disgusted face while Fleur looked at Hermione. “Pansy Parkinson?” she asked in confusion.

“She’s this wretched cow we went to school with,” Ginny answered. “Horrible girl,” she added, shaking her head. “Do you think some girl will try and steal him from us?” Ginny worriedly asked. Hermione rolled her eyes.

“Ginny ... Harry’s not mine, yours, or ours,” she reminded her redheaded friend. She then added, “And yes ... I think someone will try. I imagine a few will try simply because whoever holds Harry’s loyalty instantly gains a ton of power,” she told them. None of them looked happy with the thought. They remained quiet for a few minutes while watching him.

“Why so quiet?” another voice made them jump. They turned to see the stunning Apolline Delacour joining them at the table.

"We were just thinking, Maman," Fleur told her.

"About what?" the older Veela asked as she sat down. Fleur filled her in on their conversation. Apolline patiently listened.

"Yes, I think many will go after 'im," she nodded wisely. "You are lucky that you already 'ave a deep friendship with 'im, and it is unlikely that 'e would abandon you."

"Harry would never," Ginny said with certainty.

"But if you girls are worried about the future ... per'aps you should do something to better secure it," Apolline added as she sipped her own drink.

"What are you talking about, Maman?" Fleur asked. It seemed that Hermione knew exactly what she was hinting at.

"Are you suggesting we should ... with Harry?" she asked with a bit of squeak in her voice. Apolline calmly nodded. "All three of us?" she asked, squeaking even louder. Ginny tried to shush her when she got too loud.

"Yes," Apolline simply said.

"But ... but ... that's ... That's absurd!" Hermione exclaimed, trying to keep her voice low.

"Why?" Apolline asked her.

"For so many reasons!" Hermione began. "First off, can you imagine what people would say?"

Ginny snorted. "Especially my mother."

"Actually, Molly and I were just discussing this very topic, and she 'appens to agree with me," Apolline smiled. Ginny was gobsmacked.

"And as for what people might think," she said, turning back to Hermione. "You must remember that things are different now. Chances are that 'Arry will 'ave to give in to the Ministry at some point. 'E is too important to our society now and will be shared by many. No one will think twice about you three being with 'im. You would 'ave to deal with many jealous girls, but other than that ..." Apolline shrugged. "At least 'Arry would know where he truly belongs," she added before standing up. She smoothed Fleur's hair and then grabbed her drink.

"It is something to think about," she told them before walking back into the house.

The three girls became quiet again. Each was lost in their thoughts. They weren't sure how long they remained quiet. Eventually, Harry and Gabrielle walked by with their arms laden with apples before disappearing into the house. Ginny was the first to break the silence.

"What do you think?" she asked quietly.

"My mother 'as a point," Fleur stated. "Sooner or later, some cute girl will catch 'is eye."

"And maybe he won't have as much time for us," Ginny finished her thought.

"Surely, you can't be thinking ..." Hermione started but was cut off.

"'Arry loves us, and we love 'im," Fleur said. "No one can take Bill's place, but I don't want to be alone for the next thirty years."

This made the other two go quiet again. Neither of them wanted to be alone for decades or more. Both of them cared deeply for Harry, and he obviously cared about them as well. What Apolline said was true. Things were different now, and they couldn't be expected to play by the same rules. The ministry was already trying to butt in on Harry's life, and it would be nice if they had a say in how things would go. If things ended up going that way, then Hermione could make damn sure that Harry got plenty of concessions out of the ministry. He was just about all she had left, and Harry would need her to protect his interests.

"I suppose we can discuss it," Hermione relented after some careful thought. The girls snuck off to Ginny's room to have a serious discussion about their futures.