

Hogwarts Overexposed – Salazar's Return

by

Neil

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Chapter One The Streets of Fort Lauderdale

Friday, August 5, 2005

"They look like they're having a great time," Jamie said, watching enviously from the window in the staff tower as the Giant Squid tossed the girls ten to fifteen feet in the air and then permitted them to splash back down into the lake before scooping them up and repeating the process.

"Why don't you go join them, Jamie?" Hermione suggested. "It's not like we have that much packing to do."

"I'd love to except I haven't written to Alex today, and we pledged to owl each other every day," Jamie answered.

Jamie and Alex would be starting their seventh and final year at Hogwarts in the autumn and had been best friends since their first year. Last year they had finally acknowledged that the feelings they shared for each other went far beyond friendship. Both Alex and Jamie planned to train as Aurors after they completed Hogwarts and then, in due course marry.

When Jamie's parents died during her fifth year, she had thought that life, as she knew it, would come to a crashing halt. Jamie envisioned saying good-bye to Hogwarts and having to seek some sort of menial employment in order to support herself and her then ten-year-old sister, Emily.

Professor Granger, who had been a mentor to Jamie, refused to think about this alternative. Since the girls had no living relatives, she and her fiancé, Harry Potter, insisted on caring for Jamie as a sister and becoming guardians to Emily. Harry and Hermione did this without hesitation despite Hermione having previously adopted Caitlin, a then eleven-year-old girl who had been orphaned and abused.

And so Harry Potter, now at the ripe old age of twenty-five and married for only slightly over a year, finds himself the father of three children: Caitlin, who would soon turn thirteen and start her third year at Hogwarts; Emily, now twelve and entering her second year; and Benjamin, Hermione and Harry's newborn son, just over two months old.

"Harry, will we be able to Portkey all the way to Fort Lauderdale or will we have to do it in phases because of the distance involved?" Jamie inquired as Harry entered the room.

"That is the one advantage a Portkey has over Apparating," he answered. "There is no limit to the distance you can travel. Our group is rather large, however, and so I've arranged for three Portkeys."

"Three? Why so many? And what about Timmy and Ben?" Jamie inquired. "Timmy is rather young to understand he must hold onto the Portkey and Ben, well he just can't."

Timmy is the four-year-old son of Samantha Bowman, an American witch. Sam had originally come to England searching for Timmy's birth father but, after a year of no leads, had given up and settled in Hogsmeade where she met and fell in love with Ron Weasley, who suffers from lycanthropy. He had just been released from Azkaban and, at the time, was working in a joke shop owned by his twin brothers, Fred and George.

It was at Harry and Hermione's wedding that Samantha and her son were initially observed by Timmy's birth father, none other than Draco Malfoy. Draco made a legal attempt to gain custody of

his son, but upon failing, begrudgingly accepted the state of affairs and his current role in his son's life.

"I secured three Portkeys mainly because of Ben and Timmy," Harry explained. "Traveling by Portkey can be rather rough treatment, especially with a large number of people thrashing their limbs about. I propose that you girls use one Portkey. That will allow Hermione and me to secure Ben between us and the Weasley's to do the same with Timmy."

"But will all three Porkeys have the same coordinates?"

"Yes," Harry said assuredly. "The only drawbacks are that we have to allow ten minutes between departures, and that we will be arriving in an area that none of us are familiar with. But I'm sure everything will go well."

* * * * *

"I'm tired," Kim whimpered, "Can we get out of the water for a bit and take a break?"

"I'm rather exhausted myself," Caitlin agreed.

"You two are worse than two old ladies," Emily complained, but she conceded and headed for the shore. "I wish we could shrink Elmo and take him on holiday with us," she said glancing back at the Giant Squid.

"I'm sure that would go over spectacularly with the other ship passengers," Caitlin said sarcastically. "Somehow I don't think they would take kindly to a giant squid in one of the ship's swimming pools."

"Nah! I guess not," Emily said sadly. "I'm going to miss him though while we're away."

"I've never been on a cruise ship before," Kim said excitedly. "I'm so glad your parents invited me to go along."

"We are going to have a great time," Emily commented enthusiastically. "I understand that they have food available twenty-four hours a day and you can eat as much as you like."

"You're starting to sound like Professor Weasley," Caitlin observed. "I think that's the only reason he's agreed to go."

"Speaking of food; could any one else go for an ice cream cone?" Emily suggested.

"That sounds good," Kim said. "Do you know how to get down to the kitchens? Will the elves give us a little?"

"I don't think Emily is interested in asking the elves," Caitlin said. "Actually, I don't think its even ice cream she truly wants, but rather the clerk that serves it."

Kim looked at both Emily and Caitlin questioningly, not understanding what Caitlin was talking about. Kim, who was Emily's best friend and dorm mate, had gone home at the end of school to visit her mother, only returning yesterday in order to go on the ten day holiday cruise with the Potters and Weasleys.

"When you shopped for your school items last fall in Diagon Alley, did you happen to notice Florean Fortescue's Ice Cream Parlor?" Caitlin asked.

"Oh yes!" Kim answered. " My mum and I stopped there for a sundae after we first met you at Madam Malkin's."

Meeting Kim at Madam Malkin's had been the first of a succession of events that changed Emily's life. The final event was Emily asking the Sorting Hat to place her in Slytherin House, instead of Gryffindor with Caitlin and her sister, so that she could watch out for Kim.

"Mister Fortescue has opened a parlor in Hogsmeade and his son Roger is running it," Caitlin stated. "Emily seems to find him more attention grabbing than any sundae on the menu."

"He may not be a sundae," Emily proclaimed, "but he is quite tempting."

"May I remind you that he is also twenty and you are only twelve," Caitlin said shaking her head.

"No reason I can't look," Emily insisted. "Besides, I think he likes me."

Kim gave Caitlin a questioning look, as if to ask if this was true. Caitlin nodded her head in response. "He can't take his eyes off her. It's revolting."

"So, who wants to walk into Hogsmeade for ice cream?" Emily asked hopefully.

"We'll have to go back to the castle first and change and get money," Kim said.

"I have enough money with me," Emily said, "and the shop is right on the edge of town; we can go as we are."

"In just our bathing costumes?" Kim questioned, looking nervous. "Emily, yours is practically nonexistent."

Kim was wearing what would be considered a very reserved one-piece costume. Caitlin had on a small bikini and Emily.... Emily's swim costume was very minimal. At a distance, she appeared to be nude.

"Actually, both Caitlin's and my bathing costumes are non existent," Emily responded. "We are only wearing the concealment charm."

Kim looked at her best friend in disbelief and then reached out and touched her. Physical contact negated the charm and allowed her to see Emily in what she was actually wearing, which was absolutely nothing.

"I should have known you guys wouldn't actually wear swim costumes," Kim said. Then she stared at Emily. "Even micro-mini ones."

Both Emily and Caitlin are naturalists and preferred to be unclothed whenever possible. Jamie and Emily's parents were nudists and they raised their daughters in the naturists' ways. Both girls feel extremely uncomfortable when clothed and would much prefer to always be naked even if others about them are clothed. They don't see being unclothed as wicked or sexy, but rather as natural and comfortable.

Jamie befriended Caitlin when she first started Hogwarts, and was the first real friend and positive role model Caitlin had ever had. It was by accident that the young girl discovered Jamie was a naturist. Caitlin was so impressed by Jamie and her explanation of her lifestyle that she was tempted to try it. She became an immediate convert.

"Okay!" Kim agreed. "I'll walk into Hogsmeade with you, but only if we all cover ourselves with our towels."

Emily and Caitlin both raised their eyebrows in annoyance, but agreed to the condition.

"Should we tell your parents?" Kim asked Emily. "They might become concerned when they see we are gone."

"We won't be gone that long," Emily said reassuringly. "Besides, if they miss us, I'm sure they'll guess where we are."

"She's been dragging me into Hogsmeade almost daily," Caitlin complained quietly to Kim as Emily walked away to get her towel. "Mum and Dad would have a stroke if they knew the true reason why."

"I can understand her having a crush on an older boy, but," she looked fretfully at Caitlin, "why would a twenty year old boy be interested in her? Don't get me wrong. I'm not putting her down. Emily is very attractive, but after all she is only twelve."

Caitlin nodded her head in agreement. "I feel the same as you; it's weird. Guys that age shouldn't be attracted to a little girl," she declared. "But don't try telling Emily that. She'll bite your head off."

Once Emily had retrieved her money, the girls wrapped themselves in their towels for the long walk.

Although the girls are best friends, they have uniquely different personalities and attitudes. Caitlin and Emily both abhor clothing and prefer being nude, even when in the company of clothed people. Caitlin accepts the fact that they live in a textile world and nudity under certain circumstances is just not acceptable. Emily, however, is and always has been an extremist when it comes to nudity, sometimes pushing the limits of socially acceptable behavior. She resents being forced to wear clothing and considers the term 'private parts' ridiculous. To her mindset, a body part is just a body part, and she shouldn't be forced to cover any of hers just because other people have dirty thoughts.

Kim is a most unenthusiastic nudist. In order to avoid lingering embarrassment from a cruel prank on the Hogwarts Express in her first year, she had all her cartoon-imprinted underclothes destroyed. This caused her dorm mates to mistakenly assume that she, like Emily, was a nudist. She now uncomfortably lives that lie. She has actually become at ease being naked with Caitlin, Emily and their family. The cruise, on the other hand, will be her first experience at public nudity, and she is exceedingly apprehensive.

Even the way the girls draped their towels about them was indicative of their different feelings. Kim used the towel to its fullest extent, wrapping it around her body just under the arms with it reaching mid thigh. Caitlin wrapped hers around her waist as a long skirt reaching near her ankles, but leaving her tummy and bikini top exposed. Emily folded her towel several times and then wore it as a short skirt. Her torso was bare except for two triangles of material that barely covered anything. .

Kim looked briefly at Caitlin, but then stared blatantly at Emily. "I'm going to be nude on this cruise for the next ten days," she said entreating. "Can't you guys at least humor me by fully covering yourselves whilst we walk to Hogsmeade?"

Caitlin and Emily exchanged aggravated glances, but then begrudgingly repositioned their towels in a manner similar to Kim's before they began walking toward the path that led to the main gate and eventually to the all wizard village of Hogsmeade.

"It's just not fair," Emily complained as they approached the pair of magnificent wrought iron gates that were flanked with stone columns, topped with winged boars and guarded the entrance to Hogwarts. "What harm would befall the world if we were allowed to stroll into Hogsmeade nude? I want the feel of air and sunlight on my body, not a damp, clammy towel." Emily looked like she was about to shed the object of her frustration, but instead looked at Kim and relented.

They had only gone a few hundred feet past the gate, when Caitlin came to a sudden stop. "Did you feel that," she cried nervously.

Kim looked at her questioningly. "Feel what?" she asked, a bewildered look on her face. "I didn't feel anything."

"I did," Emily piped up. "It felt as though something hot was trickling down my back. Kim, remember when Professor Flitwick demonstrated the Disillusionment Charm on us last Christmas, the charm that made us blend in with the decorations. It felt exactly the same as when he lifted it."

Kim nodded her head. "I remember the charm and the feeling it created when it was applied and lifted, but I didn't sense anything like that just now."

"That's exactly the sensation I had," Caitlin agreed. "But what caused it and why didn't Kim feel it. I'd think it had something to do with the wards that hide the castle from Muggle view, but I've never had that feeling before when entering or leaving the grounds. Besides we're all witches. Why would you and me experience it and not Kim?"

The rest of the journey was occupied with questions and hypothesizing, but as they approached the edge of the village, they agreed to table the discussion until they returned to the castle. If anyone could give them an answer, it would be Hermione.

"I can't get over how fast they built that store," Kim said, admiring the colorful ice cream shop. "They hadn't even started construction at the end of the school year, and now in just over a month, it's open."

"It's been open for three weeks," Caitlin commented.

"Wizard contractors take some short cuts not available to Muggle builders," Emily added.

"Yeah!" Kim said. "One might call it magic!" They all chuckled.

It was nearing two o'clock as they entered the nearly empty shop, the lunch hour rush having ended.

"Well, what have we here?" the clerk behind the counter asked. It was undoubtedly a rare sight to have three towel-clad girls enter his establishment. Although he had addressed all three girls, his eyes only inspected Emily. "Did you girls just get out of the shower?"

"No silly," said Emily dreamily. "We were swimming and had the urge for some ice cream. This is my good friend Kim. She is going on holiday with Caitlin and I."

Roger gave Kim a smile of recognition, but quickly turned his attention back to Emily. "I'd say Kim was extremely fortunate. I would really enjoy being on vacation with you for a week."

At this comment, Emily blushed, but Kim and Caitlin exchanged uneasy glances. This smooth talking git might entrance Emily, but, although she didn't know why, Kim had taken an immediate dislike to Roger.

"I was hoping perhaps you had come to visit me," Roger said suggestively. "But since you prefer ice cream, what can I get you?"

Emily seemed content to stare at Roger; therefore, Kim decided to place her order. "Could I have a small cone of chocolate, please?"

"I'll have a small cone also," said Caitlin, "but make mine vanilla, please."

"And what about you, beautiful," Roger said.

"Could I have one of those swirl mixes of both kinds?" Emily asked sweetly.

Roger purposely served Caitlin and Kim first. The girls sat down at one of the many empty tables as Emily waited to be served and pay.

As Roger handed Emily her cone he got a mischievous grin on his face. "Do you know what they say about people who get mixed ice cream?" Emily shook her head, no. "They say they go both ways."

Emily blushed a deep shade of red, but made no comment. Instead she asked, "How much is the total bill?"

"That depends," Roger said devilishly. "Perhaps we could work out an agreement that would be both easy on your pocket and easy on my eyes."

"What do you mean?" Emily asked innocently, not understanding.

"I envisage you looking quite nice in your swim costume," he said, licking his lips. "If you drop the towel and model it for me; all three cones are on the house."

Emily licked her ice cream, both to prevent it running down the cone and to give her time to think. Her bathing costume was rather skimpy and dropping her towel and modeling seemed like a rather sexual thing to do. On the other hand, she was a naturist. If the world were fair, she'd be happily standing here completely nude at the present time. Besides, she'd sort of like Roger to see her in her bathing costume and free ice cream in the bargain sounded like a great deal.

Emily looked around the room. There were only six other patrons in the shop; four pre-teen boys at a table near the rear and a young couple near the window. This felt so weird. She had absolutely no qualms with the entire world seeing her naked. She had even walked naked to the grocery when she was ten, yet modeling a bathing costume in an ice cream store somehow seemed wrong.

"I'd really love to see how nice you look," Roger said entreatingly.

Her decision was made. "Would you hold my ice cream?" she asked passing the cone back to Roger. "Now don't snicker. I'm only twelve and with a bit of luck my figure will develop considerably more."

"I'd never laugh at you, besides I think you have an excellent figure," Roger said.

"Okay, here goes," Emily said, stepping back from the counter. She couldn't believe how nervous she was as she undid the towel and in order to avoid seeing Roger's expression stared anxiously up at the ceiling.

As she felt the towel brush her body on its way to the floor, she began turning slowing, allowing Roger plenty of time to scrutinize her before finally looking him in the eyes and saying, "Well, what do you think?"

Roger had dropped Emily's ice cream on the floor. The young girl that was sitting near the window had grabbed her spellbound boyfriend and dragged him from the shop as the four young boys at the rear went wild. Caitlin and Kim, who had been absorbed in conversation and paying little attention to Emily, jumped to their feet.

"What happen to your swim costume!?" Kim asked in a panic as Caitlin ran to pick up Emily's towel and toss it to her.

It was only when Kim asked what had become of her costume that Emily realized that she was indeed standing there starkers.

"Roger, I'm sorry," Emily said. "I don't know what happened. I'm sorry if I made you ill at ease you. Somehow the concealment charm that covered me was canceled." She started to wrap the towel around herself.

"I'm not embarrassed," Roger said, not taking his eyes off Emily, "and you shouldn't be either. You're splendid."

"I'm not embarrassed," Emily said, letting the towel slip off and into her hand. "Do you really think I look nice?"

Roger corrected her. "I'd say fabulous. Nothing would please me more than to have you spend the balance of the day in my shop just as you are."

"Maybe that could be arranged," Emily said boldly.

"I don't think so!" Caitlin said, giving Emily an appalled look. "We have to go! Emily, please cover up!"

When Emily made no effort to do so, Caitlin grabbed her arm. "Suit yourself," she said with frustration. "Kim, please help me."

Before Emily realized what was happening, Caitlin and Kim had dragged her out the door and on to the thankfully deserted street. "Now will you put that towel on?" Caitlin asked.

"Why?" Emily answered defiantly. "There is no one about, and I'm quite comfortable like this."

Emily tossed the towel to Kim and started boldly walking away from the shop and in the direction of the path that would return them to Hogwarts.

Kim and Caitlin exchanged exasperated looks before following after her.

"What happened in there?" Kim asked Caitlin as they followed a few steps behind Emily. "What happened to her swim costume?"

"I'm not sure what canceled out the charm," Caitlin answered, turning to Kim and flipping open her towel. "Did it affect me, too?"

"Yes," said Kim after glancing at Caitlin. "You're totally starkers, too. You don't think I was affected, do you?"

"I doubt it," Caitlin answered. "You're wearing an actual costume. Let me have a look just to be positive." Kim lifted her towel confirming that her swim costume was indeed intact.

Suddenly, Emily stopped walking and turned back in their direction. "That was so humiliating," she said crossly. "I can't believe the two of you actually dragged me out of Roger's shop. I'll never be able to face him again."

"You don't consider your actions embarrassing or what he was doing with you over the line!?" Caitlin shouted. "There is a *huge* difference between being a naturist and being put on display. What you did in there today was not naturalism, and I'm ashamed of you and furious at Roger!"

Emily was about to retort, but then glanced at Kim who was hanging her head sadly. "What's the matter, Kim?" Emily asked concernedly.

"I don't think I've ever seen you two fight before, and I don't like it," she answered.

Emily's anger came to an abrupt halt as she turned to Caitlin. "I was a real tart, wasn't I?"

"No!" Caitlin answered with a smile. "Had you had an actual bathing costume on, you would have been a tart. I'm not sure they've even invented a word for what you were today. How does tart-ar-se sound?"

Kim giggled. "Emily, I love you. Caitlin loves you. We're just concerned for your welfare."

"I know," she said pulling them into a group hug. "Sometimes I don't use my head when it comes to boys. I try too hard. Maybe I am a tart-ar-se."

"In some cases, maybe you shouldn't be trying at all," Kim said tentatively, then quickly changed the subject. "Do you want your towel back?"

"No, she doesn't," Caitlin answered for Emily.

Emily stared at her in surprise.

"Now you are being a naturist, and I'm envious," Caitlin said as she unclasped her towel. "I've always wanted to walk this route with the sun and air caressing my body."

"I can't believe you two," Kim said, as she watched her two friends walk naked, arm in arm toward

the main gate. "What if someone comes along and sees you?"

"Then they'll see us," Emily responded. "Why don't you take that confining damp swim costume of yours off and join us?"

Before Kim could respond, a horseless carriage, apparently coming from the castle, came into sight around the corner. Even if Emily and Caitlin had wanted to cover up, there was no time because the carriage was rapidly upon them before it came to a halt.

"Good afternoon ladies," Professor Malfoy drawled. "You've certainly adopted the proper attire for our humid, hot summer weather."

"I wish I had such courage when I was your age," Ginerva Weasley added, seeming quite sincere.

"You're never too old to practice nudism," Emily suggested enthusiastically. "Your brother is going on a cruise with us. Why don't you and Professor Malfoy join us for a swim?"

"I'm afraid we'll have to pass," Draco said. "Miss Thatcher, it was my understanding that you were also going on this clothes free- cruise. Shouldn't you be adapting your skin to the sun?"

"The Professor has a point," Ginny added. "Skin that has never experienced sunlight has the tendency to easily burn. The last thing you want to do is spend your holiday stuck in your cabin with sunburn."

"I'll take that into consideration," Kim said timidly as the carriage continued on its way.

As they watched the carriage disappear, Kim turned to Emily and Caitlin with a look of beaten acceptance on her face. "They're right about one thing," she said admittedly. "If I'm going to play the part of a nudist for ten days, I best get accustomed to it." Without another word, she unclasped her towel and subsequently wriggled out of her bathing costume.

"Now what?" Kim asked.

"It's still early," Caitlin said. "Let's see if Elmo is still in the mood to toss us around."

"Like we are?" Kim questioned.

"I don't think Elmo cares if or how we dress," Emily answered casually, and then added. "Mum likes us to use the concealment charm, but it's really not necessary anymore on the school grounds. Most of the staff has seen at least one of us nude. It's really no big deal any longer."

'Maybe not to you', Kim thought and then turned toward the castle and said, "let's go."

* * * * *

Sunday, August 7, 2005

"Ron, will you please cheer up," Sam said with annoyance, as she and Ron finished packing. "We're starting our vacation tomorrow, not going to a funeral."

"That's easy for you to say," Ron groaned. "If I had your body, I wouldn't be concerned with being

seen nude either."

"If you had my body, I doubt we'd be married," Sam said with a laugh.

"It's not funny," Ron moaned. "You know what I mean. I feel like I'm the king of the string bean geeks going on vacation with the Perfect Body Club."

"We don't all have perfect bodies," Samantha insisted. "Well, maybe Jamie and Hermione do. Hermione is going to have men losing concentration and falling overboard."

"Perhaps you haven't looked at yourself in a mirror lately," Ron commented, "but you should put yourself in the same category."

"You're sweet," Sam said brushing against him as she gave him a kiss on the cheek.

"And that's another problem," he said, looking down at a specific part of himself. "It's totally out of control. It's ready for action and you barely touched me. If it were the day before a full moon, that's to be expected, but the next full moon is a ways off. I think I'm turning into some sort of sex manic. Emily and Caitlin caused a reaction the other night and they're little girls."

"They aren't that little anymore," Sam declared. "Their bodies are becoming more womanly every day. Besides, I don't think that even calm, cool Harry could have handled what happened to you."

"I wasn't doing too badly watching them play Twister , although I had to turn away a few times," Ron said. "Don't they realize the view they afford when they get into some of those positions?"

"I'm sure they do, but they don't care. I have to admit that it bothers me a little knowing that my now smooth front will afford people a better view of me. I'm not nearly as comfortable with my body as the girls."

"Well I certainly wasn't comfortable when the two of them fell into my lap while they were horsing around after their game," Ron sighed.

Sam laughed. "I'm sorry Ron. I know I shouldn't laugh, but I wish I had a picture of you with Emily on top of you."

"It wasn't funny," Ron protested. "It seemed like they took forever to get up."

"It wasn't forever, and they thought it was comical. You do realize that they both trust you completely. They know you'd never do anything wrong."

"And they're right," Ron affirmed. "But that didn't prevent me from getting a stiffie anyway. Sam, I love you. You mean everything to me. I would never even think about cheating on you. But... I'm afraid I'm going to spend the next ten days with a semi permanent erection."

Sam smiled. "In that case, I hope we can get the girls to watch Timmy often because I know just the remedy for that problem. Would you like me to demonstrate?"

"That would be nice..."

* * * * *

Monday, August 8, 2005 8:00 AM

"The Weasleys will be here any minute now," Harry said anxiously. "Are one and all sure they have everything they need packed?"

"Why are you insisting we take so much clothing?" Emily questioned. "We are permitted to be unclothed at all times aren't we?"

"When on the ship and at nude beaches, yes," Hermione answered as she did a cleansing charm on Ben's bottom and readied him for the trip. "But when we travel about the islands or go souvenir shopping, you will need to be dressed and not just by the concealment charm. I have qualms about any of us even using that anymore now that you girls have discovered yet another imperfection with it."

Crookshanks and Alfred both paced the room as if sensing that the family was shortly going to be deserting them.

"Can't we take them with us?" Caitlin begged. "They're going to be lonely."

"No we can't," Harry said emphatically. "Beside, they will be much more content here, where they have free rein to roam about our quarters and the castle grounds, than they would shut up in a ship's cabin all day."

"You are sure that Professor Bell won't forget to look in on them and see that they are properly fed?" Emily asked concernedly.

"Katie loves animals," Harry responded. "She'll see to it that our pets are well taken care of."

As the others finalized their packing, Kim had been reading the cruise brochure and checking their itinerary with animated anticipation.

DAY PORT ARRIVAL DEPARTURE

1 Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, United States 5:00 PM
2 Princess Cays 9:00 AM 4:00 PM
3 At Sea
4 St. Thomas 7:00 AM 6:00 PM
5 St. Kitts 7:00 AM 3:00 PM
6 Barbados 8:00 AM 5:00 PM
7 Antigua 9:00 AM 6:00 PM
8 St. Maarten 7:00 AM 6:00 PM
9 At Sea
10 At Sea
11 Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, United States 7:00 AM

"We'll actually be anchoring at six different islands," Kim stated with enthusiasm. "I've never been further away from home than Hogwarts."

"I'm looking forward to having a wonderful time," Hermione said as she began breast-feeding Ben.

"Professor Potter, there's one thing I don't understand. Why are we leaving so early?" Kim inquired. "Isn't the United States' east coast five hours behind us in time? If we leave at nine, it will only be four in the morning there, not even light yet."

"You're correct," Harry said rather perturbed. "The American Magical Authority, which is the counter part of our Ministry, insisted that we arrive before sun rise; less chance of us being seen."

"What the hell are we going to do from four o'clock in the morning until five in the afternoon," Emily blurted out.

"Maybe we should spend the time teaching you to talk like a proper young lady," Hermione suggested.

"I'm sorry Mum, but that's thirteen hours," Emily said apologetically.

Hermione looked concernedly at Harry. "Exactly what are your plans for all that time? she asked.

"It's not as bad as it sounds," Harry responded. "I rented a hotel room nearby, where we can all crash or watch the tele until checkout at eleven. Then we can head to the dock and board the ship. Even though we don't sail until five o'clock, there will be food and drink available for us from noon, and we can take a tour of the ship."

"That sounds like a good plan," Jamie said, tearing herself away from her latest epistle from Alex.

"Most certainly," Kim agreed. "I don't fancy getting lost."

"How can you get lost on a boat?" Emily chortled.

"You haven't read the brochure, have you?" Caitlin inquired. "The ship rises fourteen stories and measures nearly three hundred meters in length. I would imagine that it is extremely easy to become disoriented."

"Not only that, but the cruise is sold out. That means that there will be nearly 2,000 passengers on board," Hermione added.

"I just hope a good portion of those are our age," Emily whined. "I'm tired of seeing nothing but naked potbellied old bald-headed men. I want some young buff guys to ogle."

Hermione just shook her head in consternation at Emily's remark, but Kim literally trembled. If she had to be naked the next ten days, she'd much prefer it to be in front of old potbellied men rather than hunks of her own age.

A rapping at the door interrupted the conversation, as the young voice of Timmy called out, "We're here!"

Caitlin rushed to the door and ushered the Weasleys in.

"Why are you dressed?" Timmy asked disappointedly. "I thought we were going on a nudie coose?"

"We are Timmy, it's just that we can't get comfortable until we're actually on the ship," Caitlin responded.

Without warning, Timmy grabbed the hem of Caitlin's tiny skirt in his hand and pulled it up to her waist.

"Caitlin has no knickers. I can see her gina!" he shouted.

Caitlin leaned over and lifted Timmy into her arms. "You, young man, are getting to be more and more like your Aunt Emily," she said giving him a big hug. "Your mother better break you of that habit before you enter primary school in the village or all the little witches will be practicing hexes on you."

Ron looked at Caitlin and then around the room. He could not understand her and the others' lack of reaction to what Timmy just did. Then he finally comprehended that this girl was normally naked, and that it didn't bother anyone. Why was he so different? Why did it bother him?

"You're here!" Harry shouted in greeting as he entered the room. He checked his watch and then rubbed his chin. "I imagine that the first thing we should do is collect and miniaturize our luggage."

After everyone assembled their luggage, Harry performed the charm that shrunk it to doll size and then Ron and Harry placed all the tiny parcels into their pockets.

"We're scheduled for three portkey departure times: 9:00, 9:10 and 9:20," Harry stated. "Ron, suppose you Sam and Timmy go first, the girls will follow, and Hermione, Ben and I will bring up the rear."

Ron nodded in agreement and then they all waited nervously for the rest of their free time to pass.

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When the clock displayed 8:59, Harry picked the first of three Portkeys off the kitchen table; it was an old battered umbrella. "Now Sam, if you and Ron will hold Timmy tightly between you and all grasp the umbrella in your hands. Sam perhaps you should hold Timmy's hand tightly beneath your own."

They stood waiting nervously, the others watching, waiting there turn.

"Forty-five seconds." Harry counted down. "Thirty seconds."

"Mummy, I have to go potty. I have to go really bad." Timmy wailed.

Sam looked anxiously to Harry. "When he says he has to go, he has to go. He always waits to the last minute," Sam announced.

"Damn," Harry murmured looking nervously around the room. *Hermione could never get Benjamin into his harness quickly enough.* Harry didn't like sending the girls first, but he had no choice. Fortunately, Jamie was a powerful witch, so he figured that they'd be okay.

"Girls! Hurry! Over Here!" He shouted. "Each of you, hold onto the umbrella. Don't worry! You'll be fine. The Weasleys will be along in ten minutes and your mother and me shortly thereafter. Move at least twenty-five feet from your landing point, but don't leave the area."

Jamie, Kim, Caitlin and Emily had barely clutched the old umbrella when Emily felt as though a hook just behind her navel had suddenly yanked her irresistibly frontward. Her feet left the floor; she could feel Caitlin, Jamie and Kim as their bodies bashed into hers; their legs becoming entwined as they sped forward in a howl of wind and whirling color; their hands stuck to the

umbrella as though it was pulling them magnetically onward.

Emily had only expected the trip to last a few seconds, but instead it was minutes before they finally slammed to the ground in a bruised entangled mess.

"Emily, will you please get your privates out of my face," Kim asked as if gasping for air.

"Caitlin never complains," Emily retorted without thought and then looked nervously from Jamie to Kim and then Caitlin, hoping that in the confusion no one had heard her comment. Neither Jamie nor Caitlin seemed to be paying her any attention as they disentangled themselves, but Kim had definitely heard her and was staring at her piercingly.

"Will they be all right?" Hermione questioned nervously.

"I'm sure they'll be fine," Harry said in his most convincing voice. "I would have preferred that they not gone first, but under the circumstances, there wasn't much choice. They'll only be alone for ten minutes, I'm sure they'll be fine. I just wish I knew more about the area in which they are landing."

Hermione glanced nervously around the room.

"Hermione, they'll be okay," Ron said in his most reassuring voice. "What could possibly happen in ten minutes?"

"I wonder where exactly we are?" Caitlin said as she staggered to her feet. "That trip threw my equilibrium out of whack."

"Me too," Jamie said leaning against a nearby wall.

"Well, one thing is certain," Emily commented. "Whoever programmed that Portkey has never actually been here."

"You've got that right," Kim added nervously. "I understand transporting to a discrete location, but this is a dirty, filthy back alley."

"Yeah, I'm glad we won't be alone here long," Jamie said. "Lets move closer to the main street and more light. It's eerie in here."

"Now you've gone and hurt my feelings," a voice echoed from the shadows ahead of them. "This alley is our headquarters. Perhaps we should clean up, but most ain't stupid enough to come here uninvited."

"And there are four of them," a voice from behind commented. "One for each of us."

"I get the older one with the big titties," shouted a third voice from the dark.

"Hey, they're just kids," said a fourth disembodied voice. "From the sound of them, from England and probably lost."

"Lance, are you a faggot? 'Cause if you are, how 'bout suckin' my dick," the first of the boys to speak responded. "Pete, what is the name of our club?"

"The 'Chasers', Art. And you're our president," answered the boy who had commented about Jamie.

"And what do the "Chasers" do, Phil?" Art asked his voice sounding as if he were extremely intoxicated.

"We're tit-and-pussy chasers." Phil answered, laughing raucously as he stepped from the shadows and was soon joined by his compatriots.

As the gang closed their circle on the girls, the one referred to as Art, snapped open a long switch knife and waved it menacingly.

Jamie whispered softly to the girls, "Wands on three. One... Two... Three..."

CHAPTER TWO AN OLD FRIEND

But, as if knowing what to expect, each boy leapt toward a different girl on the count of three, knocking his respective target to the hard asphalt covered ground. Art had targeted Jamie and held her menacingly against the ground, his knife at her throat. "If you try anything like that again, I'll slit you in two from your skinny neck right down to your cunt. Get the message?"

"Art, something is weird about these girls," Phil said, holding out Caitlin's wand to Art. "These three were all carrying sticks like this in holsters attached to their leg."

"Where is your little stick Miss Big Tits?" Art asked as, without warning, he lifted Jamie's skirt above her waist. Momentarily he froze; then as he rubbed his fingers over her mound said, "You and I are going to have lots of fun."

"Guys, check out this bitch!" Art yelled as he forced Jamie to her feet, her skirt still gathered to her waist. "No panties and not even a trace of stubble anywhere on her pussy or ass."

"These two don't either," yelled Phil and Pete.

"This one is a smooth as a baby," voiced Lance.

Kim stared at the severely pockmarked Lance. Other than knocking her to the ground, he hadn't touched her and had no way of knowing what he had just declared.

"Gentlemen, we are about to have a party," Art declared, "but not here. Let's take these ladies across the street to the parking garage where we can see them better."

"What about the sticks they were carrying?" Phil inquired.

"Just toss them," Art instructed. "They're probably some new type of stunner or spray. I don't intend to fuck up my night with them. You guys lead the way with your lady friends."

"And ladies... don't try anything. I'll have my knife at 'Miss Big Tits' back the entire time. One mistake on your part and she'll be making a visit to the morgue."

"Tell the girls we'll be there in ten minutes," Hermione said as Sam, Timmy and Ron held on to their Portkey tightly.

"Three..." muttered Harry, with one eye on his watch, "two...one..."

They were gone.

"We better get ready," Harry said tentatively. "You're positive that Poppy said it was safe for Ben to use a Portkey."

"Harry, you had me check and double check with her five times," Hermione answered. "He'll be fine in the chest harness as long as we keep our arms and legs entwined. Obviously he'll cry, but that's to be expected with all the twisting and jerking."

"Again, again! Let's do it again." Timmy squealed as Ron and Sam both staggered, but managed to maintain their balance and keep from falling over.

Sam looked about as her dizziness subsided. "Who the hell picked this filthy alley as an arrival point?" she questioned.

"Don't know," Ron said, shaking his head in repulsion. "Probably some overpaid pencil pusher that never leaves his office. I'm not surprised the girls didn't wait for us at this point. They're probably just around the corner on the main street."

"Good thinking on their part," Sam said, thinking twice about whether to hold Timmy or let him walk. "No telling what sort of vermin might be lurking in here."

Timmy was squirming to get out of Sam's arms, but as she went to deposit him on the ground, she saw something that made her change her mind and instead clutch him closely to her chest.

"Ron! There on the ground! Just in front of the trash bin," she shouted breathlessly.

Ron turned in the direction Sam was pointing and suddenly his face turned white. "Wands!" he said unbelievably. "They have to belong to.... But what would their wands be doing.... Oh my God! How much longer before Harry and Hermione will arrive?"

"Just a couple of minutes," Sam answered, trying to stifle her imminent tears.

"Hurry!" Ron yelled in panic, as he picked up the girls' wands. "Let's run out to the main street and see if we can get gather any clues as to what happened to them before Harry and Hermione get here."

* * * * *

Emily had never felt so scared and vulnerable in her entire life. As they crossed the street, a number of automobiles sped by, but the drivers evidently were in too much of a rush to notice the terror on her face. A taxi slowed down, but Art waved the driver on.

When they reached the garage, Phil yanked open a metal door leading upstairs. Caitlin screamed, as his hand reached out and prodded her. He shoved her face first into the cement steps. "Scream again bitch and you've had it," he threatened.

"For Christ's sake, leave her alone," Lance said. "Let's just grab their dough and get the hell out of here before someone tips off the cops."

"You *are* a fucking fag!" Pete declared. "Do you see any pocketbooks, shit-for-brains?"

"Don't worry," Lance whispered in Kim's ear, "I won't hurt you."

"But what about them?" Kim begged softly, her eyes glistening. "They're my friends. Please don't let them be hurt."

Lance looked helplessly at Kim, as she stared at Caitlin, who lay motionless on the stairs, blood trickling from a gash on her forehead where her head had made contact with the rigid cement.

Pete brandished a fifth of whiskey and after taking a swallow shoved it in Emily's face, slopping it all over her. "Stop wasting that stuff," Art yelled.

"What's the matter, think you're too good to party with me?" Pete grabbed Emily by the back of the neck. "Open your mouth," he hissed. Digging his fingers into her neck, he pulled her head back. Finally she gave in and opened her mouth. He poured the whiskey slopping it in her face and forcing her to swallow. Emily gagged, but resisted heaving.

Then, Pete let out a terrifying scream and grabbed his head with both hands. Blood was covering both sides of his face and his body was writhing in agony.

"What the fuck!?" Art yelled, no longer paying attention to his captive, Jamie. "What just fuckin' happened?"

Jamie now had the opportunity she had been waiting for. She hastily removed her wand from the invisible sheath she had been given by Mr. Ollivander for saving his shop. "*STUPEFY! STUPEFY! STUPEFY!*" she yelled in quick succession as she pointed her wand and shot red beams of light at Art, Phil and Pete in turn. But when she turned to Lance, Kim stepped in her path.

* * * * *

"Harry, it's the girls!" Ron shouted, before Harry and Hermione had even regained their equilibrium. "They're gone; no sign of them; just their wands."

Harry glanced frantically around the filthy alley searching for any mark, any clue.

Hermione, however, didn't seem panicked in the least. Indeed, she appeared quite calm, almost in a trance. She just stood nodding her head, a look of relief on her face, as she tried to calm baby Benjamin who, unlike Timmy, had not enjoyed his Portkey experience.

"Their okay," she finally said. "It was touch and go for a bit, but everything is under control now."

Harry, Ron and Sam stared at her. "Caitlin?" Sam finally asked. "Did she just contact you telepathically?"

Hermione, nodded. "Her powers are unbelievable when she concentrates on using them. There is a parking garage across the street. They're on the top floor. We should try to get there before the magical reversal people arrive."

They hurried to the mouth of the alley and then practically ran across the street and up the stairs of the garage. When they reached the roof, they momentarily all froze as they absorbed the sight before them.

Kim was standing talking animatedly to a youth who was wearing what appeared to be a gang jacket. Three other youths, dressed similarly, were lying unconscious and tied securely. Jamie, Caitlin and Emily seemed to be reassuring each other, their clothes either partially on and torn or not on at all.

"*MUM! DAD!*" Emily shouted as she ran toward them. "*IT WAS AWFUL!*"

They kissed and hugged her, trying to set her mind at rest, but Emily couldn't seem to stop crying. "Dad! Please hold me!" she gasped. Harry scooped her into his arms and despite her size, cradled her, as he would have a new born.

Harry caught the scent of cheap liquor in the air. Jamie seemed to read his mind, as both she and Caitlin hugged Harry and Hermione. "They forced her to swallow it, and spilt it all over her in the process."

"I've never been so scared or felt so helpless," Jamie cried. "I still had my wand, but I couldn't get to it. He was going to have her and I was powerless to do anything, but watch. That is until Caitlin came through for us." Jamie put her arm around her 'sister' and drew her into a hug.

"What did you do, sweetheart?" Hermione asked, displaying a look of concern mixed with pride.

"Mum, I know it was wrong," Caitlin cried. "You warned me about using my Hyperempathic powers to injure, but I had no choice. He was about to rape her! I couldn't let that happen... she's my sister... I love her.

"They all thought I was unconscious, but I wasn't. I was concentrating, trying to reach you, but you hadn't arrived yet. He had getting ready to... oh god, you know... then I remembered the knife they were using. I visualized it slashing his face on both sides, and immediately he was screaming and blood was gushing from the slashes I had given him through my thoughts."

Hermione looked toward the boys to see which had been slashed. "He healed as soon as I stopped visualizing hurting him," Caitlin explained.

Hermione put her arm around Caitlin. "I know what you think you did was horrible, but listen. You have been given a gift, a powerful gift that is capable of both saving lives and taking them. Your choice to only hurt him when you could have just as easily killed him shows get strength of character. Your Dad and I are both very proud of you."

"I imagine that is your handiwork?" Harry asked Jamie as he studied the unconscious and bound gang members.

Jamie nodded her head. "Once Caitlin had them distracted, it was easy to get to my wand. Muggles don't stand a chance against magic."

"That is why under normal circumstances it should never be used against them. I think, however, that in this case the use was certainly justified. What about him?" Harry asked, indicating the boy talking to Kim.

"He seems different from the others," Jamie answered. "He didn't touch Kim and even tried to talk the others into letting us go."

Lance was speaking in a soft voice to Kim. "I've never been with a girl, even on a date or anything. Girls won't have anything to do with me. I can't help my face; it's so ugly. But I wouldn't ever want a girl that didn't want me. Do you think a girl like you would ever want to go out with me?"

"Yes," Kim said. "If you were nice to her, and protected her, a girl would want to go out with you."

Lance stared at Kim for a minute, trying to decide if she meant it, or was just lying to make him feel better. What possessed her to do it, she'd never know, but Kim kissed him, and then ran to talk to Caitlin leaving the boy standing dumbfounded.

After a few minutes of conversation with Harry and Hermione, Kim returned to Lance with Caitlin by her side.

"Lance, my friend Caitlin has powers that are uncommon even among our people," Kim said. "I've asked her to try something, something that could change your life. Will you trust us?"

"Yeah," the youth said without hesitation. "I trust you."

"I've never tried to do anything like this," Caitlin said. "I have to touch you; actually run my hands across your face. It won't hurt. Whether I'm successful or not, it won't hurt."

Lance nodded his head. He wasn't sure what these girls had in mind. He was still trying to deal with the information that witches actually existed and that Kim and her friends actually were.

Caitlin began to run her fingers and palms against Lance's skin, akin to a sculptor working with clay. She missed not a spot as her fingers caressed his nose, ears, cheeks and neck, every part of his head. Then for the briefest time, hideous scares and pockmarks invaded her face. Subsequently, as fast as they came, they were gone.

"I think you'll find the girls quite eager to kiss you now," Kim said, gazing at Lance with appreciation. "Be careful though in your choices. You, better than anyone, should know that outer appearances don't necessarily portray the person within."

"What did you do?" Lance questioned.

"She gave you a second chance," Harry said. "One of the prime excuses you had for falling into the company of these scoundrels no longer exists. Leave now while you still can, with the memory of what has transpired intact. Remember what has happened, but tell no one, else you will be considered by them a liar and a fool. Now get out of here."

Lance looked in turn at Harry, then Caitlin and finally Kim. "I wish I were a part of your world," he said smiling. "I'll never forget you," he added as he turned and ran down the stairs.

The boy had barely disappeared from sight when two loud pops, announcing the arrival of members of the American Improper Use of Magic office disturbed the early morning quiet.

"What the hell happened here!?"

* * * * *

"Ron, Sam, would you mind leaving Harry and me alone with the girls for a few minutes," Hermione asked after they finally got to the hotel.

"Not at all. We'll take a stroll," Sam suggested. "Perhaps have a cup of tea or coffee."

The American Accidental Magic Reversal Squad, once they arrived, had been quick to put everything back into its proper order. The three gang members had their memories adjusted, and

were portkeyed to the scene of a staged robbery, where they were taken into custody and charged by Muggle police. Obviously, under the circumstances, it was impossible to charge them with the crimes they had actually committed against the girls, but this way they would at least serve deserved jail time.

Harry and Hermione were assured that the person responsible for programming their Portkeys to deposit them in such an undesirable location would be disciplined. All in all, the Americans seemed extremely embarrassed by what had transpired and were very apologetic. They also had dispatched a mediwitch who specialized in crisis counselling to the scene to console the girls.

Unfortunately the trauma that the girls had suffered would take a long time to heal. It had been a terrifying experience for them all, but especially for Emily, who had been inches away from being raped.

After such an experience, how could the girls possibly be up to going on a vacation, especially a naturist vacation?

"Girls, please have a seat," Harry said. "Hermione and I want to talk to you about what took place and get your feelings on how we should progress from here."

The room had two beds. Harry and Hermione sat on one; Jamie, Caitlin and Kim climbed on the other.

"Dad, will you hold me? May I sit on your lap? " Emily entreated.

Harry had no more than nodded his head than Emily threw herself on his lap, wrapped her arms around him and began to cry. "I've never been so... frightened... in my entire life," she sobbed. "I thought we were all going to die.... That I'd never see you or Mum again... and that I'd never be held like this again."

Hermione was holding Benjamin, so she couldn't embrace Emily. She could only lay a reassuring hand on her leg. "That's why Harry and I want to talk to you, all of you," she said. "The events of this morning had to be extremely traumatizing for all of you. Under the circumstances we thought that it might be best if we canceled the cruise."

"Do bloody what?" Emily said, jerking to a rigid position. "Why would you consider doing that? What does the cruise have to do with what occurred this morning?"

"It's just that your Mum and I thought that under the circumstances you might rather not be among a lot of strangers, especially nude," Harry suggested. "We thought it might make you feel even more vulnerable."

Emily glanced from Caitlin to Jamie and then Kim. "The mediwitch really only talked to us individually. As a group we haven't discussed what happened today, so I don't know exactly what feelings went through the heads of the other girls. I only know how I felt, and I was scared to death. I don't know if I can get the vision... of that boy... out of my head. Maybe I never will.

"But I'm not about to allow those bastards to bugger up my life or turn me into a milksop. Hiding and crying in my room is certainly not going to cause the memories to die any sooner."

"I actually prayed to die rather than have them touch me," Jamie sobbed. "I didn't want to leave the shower after I finally got in. I felt like I could never wash the stench of him off my body. But now I realize I have to put it behind me. It's over. Concentrating on it will only soil the future and continue giving our attackers power over us."

"Never pray to die," Caitlin said, hugging Jamie. "That summer when Hooch attacked me and I was abandoned in the woods, I prayed for a fast death. God knew better and didn't answer my prayer. Now I have you, all of you." She looked from one to the other. "I have horrible memories in my past, but my present with all of you makes them bearable. You can never forget atrocious things like what happened today, but you have to go on and savour the positive things life offers."

Kim had sat quietly as everyone commented. Then as tears burst from her eyes, she spoke. "Maybe what happened today was for a greater purpose. I'd like to think it was to give a person a second chance at life. I'm hopeful that because of us, Lance's life will change.

"People can affect other people's lives, you know. You've all affected mine." She looked from person to person, her eyes finally stopping on Emily. "Before, I met you, I tried to kill myself three times. I was getting better at it. I think if I had tried one more time, I might have succeeded. But you stuck your nose into my life and turned it upside down, or maybe in my case, right side up."

Caitlin, Emily and Jamie stared thunderstruck at Kim, as did Harry and Hermione. She had never before revealed this information about herself to them. "Ruffians like we met today are no different than terrorists," Kim stated. "They are cowards that strike the innocent and defenseless. We can't let our lives be directed by such lowlifes."

"Am I to gather that you all still want to carry on on with the holiday," Harry asked amazed at the girls' determination to not allow what happened derail their holiday.

All four girls instantly nodded their heads.

"I guess that's settled then; I believe we can continue as planned," Harry said. "Is that okay with you 'Mione?"

"Yes," Hermione answered. "Even though you all have expressed a great deal of resolve to move on, I think we all need to seek counselling after our holiday, some of us for a longer term than others I imagine," she added gently. "The mediwitch told me that she could only do so much in a crisis situation and that longer-term counselling is needed to truly move on. Kim, I strongly recommend you see a therapist too, for your scars run deeper than just today's incident; we can help make arrangements for you if it is okay with you and your Mum first."

Kim nodded her approval.

"Honestly, I think therapy has been a long time coming for all of us. Nonetheless, I'm amazed, by your comments and determination," Hermione said, pride evident in both her voice and facial expression. "It would seem that Harry and I both underestimated you girls; you are all stronger and braver than we gave you credit for."

"We're also hungry," Emily announced. "Do you think this place has room service?"

* * * * *

Although certainly not able to remove the morning's experience from their minds, the girls all left the hotel with a determination that they would not allow it to ruin the holiday they had looked so forward.

As they squeezed into two cabs for the short trip to the dock, Hermione shushed Emily when she suggested that perhaps her Mum should put an enlargement charm on the interior.

When they passed the parking garage, Caitlin and Jamie exchanged nervous looks and reached for each other's hand, sure that Emily and Kim in the other cab were sharing similar feelings.

* * * * *

"Why did those two blokes look at us so strangely?" Ron asked as the two cabs pulled away.

"Think about it," Sam said. "The drivers were Muggles and they just transported ten people to a dock to go on a cruise."

"Yeah! So what's the problem?" Ron asked.

"I think they were rather confused by the fact that we had no luggage for a ten day cruise." Sam answered.

"Oh my!" exclaimed Hermione. "I should have thought about that." She looked carefully around.

"Harry, you and Ron best enlarge our luggage before we board the ship. It might be a nudist cruise, but I'm sure it will seem very strange if we appear to have no luggage."

"Is that our ship?" Kim asked wide-eyed. "It's beautiful."

"That's it," Harry said. "The Sun Princess. It is ten years old, but as beautiful as the day it was launched."

"It is pretty," Emily agreed, "and extremely big. I can envision getting lost very easily."

"Are we all going to be in one room, like at the hotel?" Kim questioned.

"Not quite," Harry laughed. "That hotel room was only for us to sit and relax until we were able to board the ship. Not only wouldn't they allow ten people in one cabin, but also we would be on top of each other. I'm sure you girls will be pleased with your accommodations."

"Harry, instead of talking about the rooms. can we go on board and see them?" Hermione asked, the little girl in her showing.

As they approached the gangway, they all stared at the impressive ship in much the same way as tourists look up at the tall skyscrapers in New York City.

"I guess I've reached the point of no return," Ron said, squeezing Sam's hand as they walked up the gangway.

"Good afternoon and welcome aboard the Sun Princess," the greeter said. "Under what names is passage booked?"

"Potter and Weasley," Harry answered.

The girl checked the registration log and in a few moments produced computerized card keys. "The Weasleys are in cabin B309," she said handing two cards to Ron as he reached out his hand.

"Mr. and Mrs. Potter, you and your son are in B307." She was about to say 'your daughters are in B301 and B303', but hesitated after balancing the ages of the girls to Harry and Hermione's appearance. "The girls are in B301 and B303. All the rooms are on Baja deck. Bill will help you with your luggage and show you the way. A light welcoming buffet is now being served in the Horizon Court, located on the Lido deck. Please wait until the ship is well out of port before appearing on deck unclothed. During the cruise you should at all times carry a towel to sit on as a courtesy to the other passengers. Enjoy the cruise and thank you for sailing Princess Cruises."

As Bill guided them to the lift, Jamie pulled Hermione aside. "Just two of us to a room? Does that mean that Alex and I would have had our own room together for ten days if he had decided to come?"

Hermione gave Jamie an 'I'm sorry' smile and nodded her head.

Jamie shook her head. "I'm going to kill him. When I see Alex Ward in September, I'm going to literally kill him." She didn't mean it, but was just frustrated that they had missed this wonderful opportunity to be together.

On the way to their rooms, Bill explained what was on each level of the ship and how to easily get about. When they got to there accommodations, the girls practically fainted.

"I think I'll spend the entire cruise in my room," Kim said. "It's... oh wow!. Whom do I sleep with?"

They hadn't really discussed this, but Emily quickly suggested that they divide by houses, Slytherin and Gryffindor. Caitlin and Jamie went happily along with this proposal.

The rooms the girls had were identical. Each contained two beds, a sitting area with a desk, television, refrigerator, bath, a spacious closet and an ocean view balcony.

Ron and Sam had the same accommodation as Harry and Hermione. They were what the ship referred to as a mini-suite. There was a private bedroom with a queen-size bed, and a sitting room

area with a sofa bed and a balcony for entertaining. The suite also had two TV's, a walk-in closet, plus a bath with tub and shower.

"Are we rich Dad?" Emily asked. "This must be costing a fortune."

"Didn't I tell you?" Harry joked. "You and Caitlin are paying for the trip. Don't expect any spending money for the next seventy-five years."

"Only one problem," Caitlin said, as she burst into the room. "I wish the rooms were all adjoining. It's going to be a pain running from room to room when we want to do something."

"Does something, include eating?" Emily asked. "I'm famished."

"Did I hear someone mention food?" Ron asked as he put his arm around Emily. "I could eat a hippogriff."

"You're lucky Buckbeak isn't here to hear you say that, or you'd be the lunch instead of eating it," Hermione said, warningly. "But I think that is a good idea. We are among the first to board. Let's have lunch and tour the ship. Then we can relax until it's time to set sail."

"I should have waited to tell Timmy this was a naturist cruise," Sam said as she and Hermione talked on the way up to the Lido deck. "We were barely in the suite, and he was out of his clothes. I had a devil of a time getting him to put them back on."

"What about Ron?" Hermione asked softly. "Do you think he'll participate?"

"If by participate, you mean parading around in his birthday suit? I'd say there is about as much chance of that happening as there is of it snowing in hell," Sam answered. "He is so self-conscious and then there is his erection problem."

"Problem? Oh! I'm sorry! Ron is so young to have that sort of problem. I've read about charms that can help induce erections," Hermione advised.

"No," Sam laughed. "You have it backwards. Ronnie gets a stiffy at the drop of a hat. Except immediately after we've had sex, it's rare that he is fully placid."

"Oh!" was Hermione only response.

"Will you get a load of that spread," Ron remarked, salivating as they entered the Horizon Court. "If that is what they refer to as a light buffet, I can't wait to see a full course meal."

Hermione and Sam exchanged worried glances, as they started selecting food from the buffet.

"Everything looks so good," Hermione said. "Meals of this type will necessitate us spending half the cruise in the gym."

"Not me," Ron said trying to squeeze a few more items on his already chock-full plate. "I could stand a few more pounds. You'll still love me if I develop love handles, won't you, Sam?"

"We're on vacation, Ronnie, and I know you love food, so enjoy yourself," Sam said. "But I prefer your body just as it is. So, should you grow any additional appendages, you will be working them off."

"Sounds like the boss has spoken," Harry said, smiling and giving Ron a poke in the ribs.

"No problem, mate," Ron replied. "I have a good idea how she'd have me work off any extra pounds, and it's my favorite kind of exercise."

Sam blushed, but Hermione laughed and then muttered to Sam. "That's my favorite type of workout, too."

"Have you guys been looking around the room?" Caitlin asked the other girls.

"Yeah!" Emily replied. "It looks like there are lots of families on this cruise and more teenagers

than I expected."

Between bites, Kim was checking out a very handsome boy who had just joined the serving line. "We're here to have fun, right?" she said. "Let's make a pact that anything that happens the next ten days stays on the ship."

"Sounds to me like someone intends to cheat on Randy," Caitlin said kiddingly.

"Not so much cheat as have fun," Kim explained. "Randy would most likely get upset if he even knew I talked to another boy."

"Yeah!" Caitlin agreed. "Matt's the same way. He's really special to me, but he can be rather possessive at times."

"Does that mean that we're four single girls on the prow for a good time this week?" Emily asked.

"Make that three girls," Jamie corrected. "And be careful how good a time you have. Remember you guys are all underage."

"Gee Sis! Get a grip," Emily said. "I didn't mean anything like that. I just meant swimming, dancing, fooling around. After what happened this morning, I'm sure none of us are thinking about sex."

"You got that right," Caitlin said, and Kim agreed.

"Sam!" Ron said, briefly taking a break from stuffing his face. "Did you notice that guy sitting near the railing has been staring a hole through you?"

"Yes!" she replied. "But I'm not the only one being checked out. His wife, or girl friend, whichever she is, can't seem to take her eyes off you."

"Must be the gorgeous red hair," Ron said with a laugh, and then he went back to gorging himself.

"Harry, Benjamin's hungry. Do you think anyone will mind if I feed him here?" Hermione asked.

"Mione, tomorrow, at this time, all these people will be sitting someplace on this ship having lunch, completely nude," Harry said. "I don't think any of them are going to be offended by you exposing a breast and feeding our son."

"I guess your right," Hermione said, unbuttoning her blouse and revealing her breast. "It's just that this is the first time that I've ever been even partially nude in a public place when everyone else was fully dressed. It feels kind of weird. I'll be much more relaxed when everyone else is nude."

"Would you feel more comfortable if the girls and I removed our clothes?" Jamie asked genuinely. "The woman that checked us in only said no nudity topside. Since we're inside and this is, after all, a nudist cruise; I don't think anyone would mind."

"Would you?" Hermione asked, feeling ridiculous. "I know I'm probably just being silly, but I feel that everyone is staring at me. Since you don't have towels with you, maybe you should only take your tops off."

"We can sit on our skirts," Jamie said, jumping to her feet. "Caitlin, Emily, your Mum needs some diversionary tactics; strip."

Without question, they stood up and within seconds the three girls had shed their clothes. Both Kim and Sam sat watching dumfounded. Predictably, Ron stared at his plate, fearful to let his eyes wonder in any direction.

What happened next was remarkable. A number of other people rose to their feet and shed all or part of their clothing.

"It sort of looks like everyone was waiting for someone else to be first," Harry said with a laugh, giving Hermione a kiss on the cheek.

* * * * *

"Will you guys hurry up?" Jamie urged. "It's traditional for all passengers to be topside when the ship casts off."

"Sounds like another stupid tradition to me," Emily complained. "Especially, since we have to get dressed to do it."

Jamie didn't make any further comment, but rather just stood tapping her foot as Emily took her time dressing.

After they had finished lunch and toured the ship, everyone had returned to their staterooms to relax until it was time to set sail. Kim was already dressed, having chosen to stay that way. Actually, Kim would be quite content to remain clothed the entire cruise. She was dreading dinner. It would be her first time nude in front of a bunch of strangers, and she was extremely nervous.

"Come on girls," Harry urged. "You don't want to miss the ship casting off and leaving port."

Emily shrugged her shoulders as she glanced at Kim. Although she loved Harry and Hermione with all her heart, she sometimes just didn't understand how they could get such a thrill out of things that were so mundane.

When the group reached the Promenade Deck, it was already crowded with passengers, and ship personnel were handing out something they referred to as party poppers.

"When you pull the string on the end," Kim explained, "they make a popping sound and little streamers and confetti come out."

"How thrilling," Emily said sarcastically. "Mum, can we get out our wands and show them how to do this send off thing properly?"

"Keep your voice down," Hermione admonished. "With the exception of our group, I would imagine everyone else on this cruise is a Muggle. I don't want any more talk about anything related to 'the M word' from any of you outside of our staterooms."

"What are you laughing about?" Hermione asked turning severely toward Harry.

"Nothing darling," Harry said apologetically. "It just that you saying 'the M word' reminded me of the Dursley's. I was never allowed to mention the word magic in their presence."

Hermione blushed. "It's just that we have to be careful not to raise any unnecessary attention. We have to appear to be Muggles."

As Harry and Hermione were talking, Ron seemed to be intently checking out the other passengers. Finally he had to ask. "Are you sure everyone on this cruise is a naturist?" he inquired, looking both at Hermione and Harry. "I expected all faultless specimens like you two, but most of these people are far from perfect. Take that bloke over there." He indicated a man standing a distance from them. "That guy must weigh over three hundred pounds. He's most certainly not a nudist."

"I'm sure there are others such as yourself, that are here because of a spouse, but other than those few, I'm certain everyone else is a naturist," Hermione explained.

"That guy you were indicating is Simon Block," Harry added. "We meet him on holiday last year; very nice person. He's been a nudist his entire life."

"How can he do it?" Ron asked no one in particular.

* * * * *

"May I have your attention please," the voice echoed over the public address system. "We have now cleared port. Although not required, except in the ship's four swimming pools, clothing is now optional in all areas of the ship. As long as you remain on board, clothing will not be required until

our return to Fort Lauderdale. Anyone going ashore at our various ports of call will be required to dress appropriately."

Emily looked at her watch and then at Caitlin and Kim. "We have an hour until dinner; let's go for a stroll about the ship."

"Sounds like a plan," said Caitlin, who, like her sister had undressed upon returning to their quarters.

"Okay," agreed Kim, as she headed for the door.

"Didn't you forget something," Emily asked as Kim reached for the knob. "You're still dressed."

"Oh! Yeah! How dumb of me," Kim said nervously, as she hesitantly started to remove her clothes. The moment she had been dreading had actually come sooner than dinner. In a matter of less than a minute, Kim was ready. At least, she was physically ready. She doubted she would ever be truly ready for what she was about to do.

Without pause Caitlin opened the door and walked out into the corridor. Emily, bringing up the rear, practically pushed Kim through the door. As she heard the door click shut, Kim heart leapt to her throat. They were out in a public area and about to walk about the ship. Instinctively, one hand reached to cover her vagina and the other arm tried to cover her breasts.

"What are you doing?" Caitlin laughed. "This is a nudist cruise."

"She's right, Kim," Emily added. "All you're going to do by trying to cover yourself is draw more attention. Relax; we all have the same equipment."

Kim left her arms fall to her sides and tried to relax, but that was much easier to say than do.

Much to Kim's relief, they made it to the lift without running into any other passengers. *'Maybe everyone is in their staterooms getting ready for dinner,'* she thought to herself, not sure exactly what it would be necessary for a nudist to do in order to prepare for dinner.

As the lift stopped at the Caribe deck and the doors open, Kim held her breath, but there was no one waiting to enter. Once again, she held her breath as they stopped at the Dolphin deck, only this time there was someone waiting to board the lift. It was the handsome boy that Kim had eyed in the serving line.

He was alone, but fully dressed and Kim automatically went to cover herself. Emily and Caitlin, as if reading her mind, were too fast for her, each grabbing a hand and holding it to her side.

"Hi," said the boy pleasantly. "You all certainly didn't waste anytime getting with the program. My name is Brian."

"I'm Emily, that's my sister Caitlin and this is our best friend Kim," Emily said.

"Nice meeting you," Brian said as the lift came to a halt at the Promenade deck and they all exited.

"I have to meet my parents now for dinner, but there is a teen social tonight. Hope to see, you and your friends there," he said, giving Kim a smile.

"Talk about working fast," Emily said, after Brian was out of earshot. "Not even an hour out of port and you've already landed the best looking guy on the ship."

Kim would have blushed, but she had turned scarlet the moment Brian had entered the lift and she still maintained her pinkish glow. "He was talking to all of us," Kim said defensively.

"He might have been talking to us all," Caitlin agreed, "but he was definitely chatting you up."

"I can't believe he saw me naked," Kim said, physically shaking.

"He's a nudist. I'm sure it was no big deal to him; he's probably seen hundreds of girls naked," Caitlin said reassuringly. "Besides it's a plus for you. Now that he's already seen you nude, you

shouldn't be as nervous later tonight."

"You forget," Kim said, fretfully, "I'm not like you two. I'm the girl that actually likes to wear clothes."

* * * * *

"I don't know if I can do this," Sam said tensely, as she and Ron waited for a knock on their door.

Any moment now, the Potters would be rapping on the door, prepared to go to dinner. Sam was ready, so was Ron, but ready had two entire different meanings. Ron was casually dressed; Sam was anxiously nude.

"It was so different, back at their quarters at Hogwarts," Sam declared. "I was relaxed and comfortable. Now I feel like I'm streaking or something."

"There's no need to put yourself through this anguish," Ron reminded her. "No one will blame you if you want to take this slow and decide to dress for dinner tonight."

A knocking at the door interrupted Sam's answer. Once open, Ron found himself facing his first challenge of the evening. Six naked people stood there smiling, one was his best friend, Harry Potter.

The girls were all either carrying their towels haphazardly or had them slung over their shoulders. Jamie actually had Benjamin, who she was carrying, bundled in her arms.

Never in his life had Ron maintained such resolute eye-to-eye contact with his friends as he did at that moment. Being in a room when the girls were naked was always difficult; when Hermione was nude it was torture, but this was pure hell.

Sam hugged Hermione. "I don't know if I'm up to this," Sam said, literally shaking.

"I'm a little nervous myself," Hermione confessed. "I'm afraid these," she indicated her breasts, "are going to draw unnecessary attention to me. I'm getting better, but I'll never be as confident as those three."

Hermione had only indicated Jamie, Caitlin and Emily because Kim was still not at ease.

"Sam, you can slip something on if you want," Harry said encouragingly. "It's only the first evening. I doubt very much that Ron will be the only one wearing clothes tonight."

"What do you want to do?" Hermione asked compassionately.

"I want to take the plunge," Sam answered, her voice trembling, "but I'm going to need help."

"That's what we're here for," Jamie said. Hermione took Sam's hand and guided her toward the door.

Caitlin and Emily did the same with Kim's hands as they began to walk off, both giving her a heartening squeeze.

Ron gave Harry a grave look as they brought up the rear. "Don't even think about holding my hand," he said in jest. Harry snickered.

"What about me?" Timmy asked, sounding hurt.

"You can hold my hand anytime, buddy," Ron said, but instead he scooped the boy into his arms as they headed for the lift.

* * * * *

Kim kept her eyes glued straight ahead as they entered the large Regency Dining Room and located their table. Although they weren't, she felt like every eye in the room was on her. Only when she was finally seated, did she dare to glance about the area. Harry had been correct, some passengers had opted to dress for the first evening's dinner, but they were a definite minority.

Somehow looking around at the other tables put her slightly at ease.

Due to the size of their group, they filled an entire table. Depending on a personal viewpoint this was either an advantage or a disadvantage. On one hand, they weren't forced to sit with strangers and make conversation. On the other hand, they didn't get the opportunity to meet people and make new friends.

Jamie and Hermione took turns holding Benjamin through the course of dinner. Fortunately, he had decided to be on good behavior tonight and spent most of the meal sleeping or cooing contentedly.

With the exception of Ron, everyone else, including Emily, complained that the servings were too large and that they couldn't possibly eat everything they were being served. Ron seemed to keep his eyes fixed on his dinner plate. It was impossible to tell whether this was because he was so engrossed in the meal or just that he was scared stiff to look around the room. .

The only time he looked up was when Sam mentioned that the same young couple was looking their way. Ron glanced at them quickly and then, for no explicable reason, waved at them. Much to both his and Sam's shock, the couple smiled broadly and waved back.

After dinner the adults returned to their rooms and decided to call it an early evening. Taking the time change into account, and all the emotional turmoil, it had been a long exhausting day. The girls, however, weren't sleepy and decided to check out the teen mixer that Brian had mentioned. Kim wanted to see Brian again, but was thwarted in her efforts to get the other girls to agree to slip on some clothing.

"The brochure says nudist cruise," Emily reminded Kim. "No one is stopping you from putting clothes on, but this girl isn't going to except when absolutely necessary."

"I'm sorry Kim. I'm with Emily," Caitlin said. "This is our holiday; our chance to be ourselves."

"Being Emily and Caitlin's best friend doesn't come with a requirement that you be a naturist," Jamie said, putting her arm around Kim. "If you'd be more comfortable wearing a little then by all means, do it. None of us is going to coerce you into practicing naturism."

Once more, Kim was faced with the decision to either dress or not. And once more, she halfheartedly chose to emulate her best friends.

"Remember, if at any time you change your mind, it's fine with us," Emily said. Caitlin agreed.

With that out of the way, the girls quickly headed for the teen center.

Although Kim still felt anxious, she at the same time felt somewhat relieved. This had been her decision and if worse came to worst; she knew she could wear clothes anytime during the cruise. She kept trying to convince herself that this was something she wanted to do.

When they reached the correct deck, it was easy to find the teen center. All they had to do was walk toward the blaring music. While there was a dance floor, no one was dancing; instead they were competing against the sound system and trying to hold conversations.

They had no more than entered the crowded room when Jamie waved excitedly. "Look! It's Chantal and Felicite," she shouted.

Jamie had met these two girls last summer at Cap d'Adge, and had become fine friends with them. After everyone said hello and introductions were made, Emily, Kim and Caitlin stood listening in awe as Jamie conversed with the two girls in fluent French.

For the most part, they didn't understand any of the conversation, only picking up on an occasional word here and there until Emily and Caitlin heard Felicite unmistakably say 'Roz' and point toward the far side of the room.

Chapter Three New Friends

Emily's stomach lurched at the very sound of Roz's name. Jamie and Emily had known Rosalind for a number of years because both families vacationed yearly at Cap d'Adge. In this case, knowing and liking had absolutely no correlation.

Roz had detested Jamie from day one and did everything in her power to aggravate and humiliate the girl whenever possible. In the last few years, she had even tried getting at Jamie through Emily. Last year, she had tricked Emily into a bet that was both sickening and demeaning. Every time Emily thought of what she had nearly had to do to Roz, she had the urge to heave.

Although totally impossible in the din, Roz's head turned toward the group, as if hearing Felicite bring up her name. "Oh shit!" Emily cursed. "She's coming our direction."

"Who?" Caitlin and Kim voiced in harmony.

"Rosalind," Emily said, virtually gagging on the name.

Although Kim had never met Roz, the stories she had heard from Emily and Caitlin made her extremely anxious.

"What's going on here?" Roz said as she swaggered over to the group. "Is this a meeting of the hopeless losers club?" She gave Kim a turned-up-nose glance. "Still picking up new members I see."

Roz shook her head in a self-aggrandizing way. "Daddy said that this year's holiday would be better because we'd be away from all the riffraff, but I imagine the cruise line must allow all types on board or they'd be accused of bias."

"I'm likewise happy to see you," Jamie said, trying her best to pay no attention to Roz's snide holier-than-thou attitude. "I believe you know everyone except Kim. She's a friend of the family."

Roz gave Kim the sort of look usually reserved for rancid garbage and then turned to a young girl, about Emily and Kim's age, that was shadowing her. "This is my niece Angel," Roz said, acting as if she were introducing royalty.

"Angel, you don't even need to know their names," Roz said arrogantly. "Just take a good look at their faces and stay away from them; they're not worth your time."

Roz turned and walked away as Angel's face flushed. "I'm sorry," she said, sounding sincere. "I... I... I got to go." Angel turned and hurried after Roz.

"Well, that was pleasant," Caitlin said acerbically, to Emily and Kim.

Jamie had returned to her conversation in French with Chantal and Felicite, although now by their frequent glances in the direction of Roz, it was easy to speculate what they were talking about.

"I actually felt sort of sorry for Angel," Kim said. "She didn't appear to be at all like Roz. It looked like she was humiliated by that whole encounter."

"I agree," said Caitlin. "It's difficult to believe they are related. Not only do their personalities seem totally different, but also they don't look at all physically alike. Angel is extremely pretty and Roz

is..." Caitlin seemed lost for the proper word.

"Roz is an unkempt hag," Emily suggested. "No, that's not being fair to hags in general."

"I always thought you were both exaggerating when you described her, but you weren't," Kim said. "She's as miserable and gross as you portrayed her. I can understand a girl or woman not wanting to go to the extreme of being smooth, but you'd think she'd at least trim. And her underarms... ugh!"

The discussion of Roz came to an abrupt halt when Emily noticed Brian walking in their direction accompanied by two other boys; the girls, especially Kim, watched nervously as the boys approached.

"Hi," Brian said shyly, upon reaching them. He was addressing them all, but his eyes seemed trained on Kim, who was clearly tense.

The girls all responded with a muffled greeting. Emily was the first to break the ice. "I see you finally discarded your clothes and got with the program," Emily said, addressing Brian.

"Yeah!" he said. "This is my preferred condition of dress. I've been a naturist my entire life. Unfortunately, coming from Pennsylvania, I don't get to practice it outdoors nearly as much as I'd like. This is Jeff and Mark's first time." He indicated his two friends. "They're only doing it so they can get to see a lot of naked women."

"You are so full of it," Jeff retorted, and then turned to the girls. "Mark and I have been nudists since we were youngsters; we're fraternal twins. We met this liar on vacation about five years ago; been putting up with him every summer since."

"How long have you guys been at it?" Mark inquired.

"I've been a naturist my entire life," Emily replied. "If I had my way, clothing would never touch my body."

"You sound like a nudism activist," Mark answered back.

"I just might be," Emily said, "once I reach the age where my actions won't affect those I care for. Caitlin's only been a nudist two years."

"It looks like you and Caitlin get to spend a lot of time bare outdoors," Jeff commented. "You both have great all over tans without a trace of a tan line."

Obviously Jeff had been observing Emily and Caitlin closely, but neither girl seemed the least embarrassed by his comment. It was Kim who blushed because she had very noticeable tan lines. You could see the precise outline of her bathing costume.

"How long have you been a naturist?" Brian asked, giving Kim a pleasing smile.

Kim gulped. She thought about lying, but lies always had a way of coming back to haunt her. "I'm not a naturist," she said. "I'm nude lots of times with Kim and Caitlin where they live, but this is the first time I've ever been naked in public."

Brian looked at Kim with astonishment. "Then you must be the gutsiest girl on earth," he exclaimed. "I'd expect you to be scared to death, but you don't look the least ill at ease."

"Looks can be deceiving," Kim said with an uneasy laugh.

"Well, one thing is for certain," Brian said truthfully. "You most certainly have nothing to be ashamed of; you're quite lovely."

"Thank you," Kim replied, a bright glow covering her entire body.

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Day Two, Tuesday, August 9, 2005, 11:00 AM, Princess Cays

"Ron, please join us," Sam entreated. "I'm sure Jamie won't mind watching Timmy. She already has Benjamin."

"I'm not really feeling up to it," Ron lied. "Besides Timmy and I have to finish building this sand castle."

Truthfully, Ron wanted to join the fun; he just couldn't handle playing volleyball with a group of naked people, especially when two of those people were his best friends, Harry and Hermione Potter

He still couldn't believe that his wife and best friends were so relaxed and confident while being totally nude. There was no way he could run about with his privates flopping about, yet Harry seemed totally at ease.

Despite trying to do just the opposite, Ron found himself stealing glances at the various people about him.

His lycanthropy had always caused heightened sexual desires when a full moon neared; the inability to satisfy these desires while imprisoned in Azkaban had nearly driven him insane.

It was over a week until the next full moon. He had been religiously taking the potions Severus prepared for him to dull these desires, but yet Ron found himself with a perpetual stiffy. Samantha had most certainly done everything possible to help relieve him, but they had a child and could, after all, only spend so much time in bed.

Ron tried to hide his protuberance and concentrate on helping Timmy build the castle, but it was difficult. Then suddenly it became impossible.

"Hi! Would you mind if we helped with your castle?" The pleasant female voice inquired. "My husband Jim is playing volleyball with your wife and friends and Lynn and I are bored stiff."

Ron looked up and saw a smiling, sweet-faced toddler, about Timmy's age standing next to a pair of gorgeous legs. His eyes slowly climbed the legs, pausing where they joined and then, realizing that he was gawking, they hurriedly finished the journey to the lovely face that owned the legs.

"My name is Bonnie," the young woman said, not seeming to be at all upset that Ron had caressed her body with his eyes.

"Hi," said Ron uneasily, knowing he should get to his feet, but daring not. "Which one is your husband?"

As soon as the question passed his lips, Ron regretted asking. Now he would have to look at the group of naked volleyball players.

"Jim is the tall dark haired one between your wife and her friend with the awesome chest. Do you know who did them?" she asked.

"Who did what?" Ron asked.

"Her breasts. I was thinking of getting augmentation surgery, although nothing quite that dramatic." Bonnie stared enviously at Hermione. "Notwithstanding their size, they look very natural."

"That's because they are," Ron said. "That's one hundred percent Hermione. "I've known her since we were eleven. She's an exercise aficionado and watches what she eats, but she'd never consider Muggle surgery to enhance her appearance. Her breasts are naturally quite large and the fact that she is breast-feeding makes them even more dominant."

"What type of surgery did you say?" Bonnie asked, questioninglly

"What did I say?" Ron asked, laughing as he tried to cover his slip. "I meant mug. Hermione doesn't have a vain bone in her body. She'd never have surgery done on her face or body."

"She's breast feeding?" Bonnie asked, staring a Hermione in disbelief. "I need to learn what she eats and what type of exercises she does. She defies all customary rules; it's almost magical. But enough about her. Do you mind if my daughter and I join you and your son? I have the feeling that they'll be playing volleyball for hours."

Timmy and Lynn had already started playing nicely together; therefore, Ron found it extremely difficult to say no. How in the world would he hide his stiffy from Bonnie and what would Sam think of him fraternizing with this attractive woman? He glanced toward the volleyball court, but Sam was busy receiving high fives from Jim and her other teammates.

"My name is Ron, Ron Weasley. This is Timmy and my wife's name is Samantha, but we all call her Sam."

* * * * *

"Have either of you ever been on a surfboard before?" Kim asked, looking at Emily and Caitlin.

"I haven't," Caitlin said. "Truthfully, I prefer my swimming water in a nice clear pool."

"I'm not that grand a swimmer," Emily admitted. "I'd drown if I went out that far."

Kim leaned the board back into its rack, dejectedly.

"Are you girls going surfing?" Brian called out as he, Jeff and Mark came bounding toward them.

"Just looking," Emily replied. "Kim is the only one with the guts and ability to try it."

"Then this is her opportunity," Jeff said. "Brian is the main man when it comes to surfing. You'll take her out, won't you dude?"

"This is a good place to give it a try if you're interested," Brian suggested. "The water is warm and the surf mild. You won't get any thrill rides, but you won't get knocked off the board either."

"Why don't you try," Caitlin said encouragingly. "I'm sure the four of us can find something safe to do while Brian and you drown yourselves."

"You won't drown," Brian said, reaching out and squeezing Kim's hand. "I'll see to that."

"Okay," Kim said giving Brian a smile. "But if I do die, I'm coming back to haunt you."

"No chance," Brian said. "Only witches and wizards can become ghosts." He turned to the others. "We'll meet you guys in front of the Banana Beach Bar in about an hour."

Kim looked over her shoulder apprehensively as Emily and Caitlin walked off with Jeff and Mark, leaving her alone with Brian.

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"You have quite a way with cats," Severus said as he watched Katie relate with Crookshanks and Alfred.

"They're not cats," Katie corrected Severus. "Crookshanks is part Kneazle and Alfred is a purebred. These guys are both very intelligent and can almost tell at an instant whether you are trustworthy or not."

"It's a shame we humans don't possess that ability," Severus commented.

"Some do, although most don't realize it or use it to its full potential," Katie said. "Jamie Zacherley is a case in point. Hermione says the ability is strongly manifested in her, but she tends to block it, instead looking for the good redeeming values in people."

"That sounds like Jamie," Severus said. "How do you think she'd do as a member of staff?"

"Next year, just right out of school?" Katie questioned. "But I thought she had plans to go into training as an Auror."

"She does," Severus answered. "Unless she and Alex Ward do appalling on their N.E.W.T.s, I would expect them both to be accepted into the program."

"I don't understand," Katie said. "If she isn't interested in teaching, why would you be considering her?"

"Because Flitwick says she's the best qualified person to replace him when he retires next June." Severus answered. "He claims that her abilities stand far above any other candidate we've considered for the position. Not only that, but she's already gained some valuable experience by subbing and has shown a strong aptitude for teaching."

"Aren't Ward and she dating?" Katie asked.

"Yes! That is what is causing me consternation," Severus answered, shaking his head. "They have been extremely close friends since first year. Very much like Hermione and Harry were. Now, like the Professors, they have been chosen Head Boy and Head Girl. Every indication is that they are

destined to be together. I feel that by offering her a position, I'm building a roadblock in the path of their happiness. It would dictate them being apart for three years."

"Are you asking my advice?" Katie asked.

"I value your opinion greatly."

"Then when the time comes, you must offer her the position. By not doing so, even though your intentions might be honorable, you are trying to control her life. The choice has to be theirs. It will be a difficult choice, but it must be theirs to make."

* * * * *

After a time, with Bonnie's help, the piles of sand actually began to take shape and look like a castle. The varying enticing positions that Bonnie had gotten into during the construction, however, had done little to help Ron's growth problem.

Ron had tried not to look intently, but after all he was human and what guy could resist looking at a beautiful naked girl bending and stretching uninhibitedly in front of him.

"You guys ready to get some drinks?" Sam asked as she ran over to Bonnie and Ron, her body glistening with sweat.

"Hi! I'm Sam," she said with a smile as she held out her hand to Bonnie. "Your husband is an awesome volleyball player. I'm glad I was playing with him rather than opposite him."

By this time, Jim, Harry and Hermione had reached the construction site. "You guys should enter a contest," Jim said observing the sand castle critically. "That's an incredible job. I'm Jim, Bonnie's husband."

As Jim reached out his hand, Ron realized that he had no alternative. Out of good manners, he had to get to his feet, and when he did all would be observable. But just as he began to get up, Bonnie stepped in front of him and without being seen dropped a towel. Ron held the towel loosely in front of him as he rose to his feet and firmly shook Jim's out reached hand.

"Bonnie this is Hermione and Harry Potter, they teach at the same school as Ronald," Sam said politely.

The couples all exchange pleasantries and then after some coaxing finally managed to convince Timmy and Lynn to abandon the castle in order to get some refreshments.

As the others started off, Ron held back a moment and whispered *thanks* to Bonnie.

"Thank you," Bonnie whispered back. "I had fun, and such a reaction to me from someone as handsome as you is quite a nice compliment." With that said she went over and grabbed Jim's hand as Ron ran to catch up with Sam and Timmy.

"Sam! I know we've never met Jim and Bonnie before, but their faces seem so familiar. Where do I know them from?" Ron asked as soon as he caught up to Sam.

"It's a good thing you decided against a career as an Auror," Sam said with a laugh. "They're the couple that was staring at us yesterday. Jim apologized for that. He said they were hoping to make

some new friends on the cruise and were attracted to us."

"She's quite nice," Ron offered. "What's Jim like?"

"He reminds me a lot of you," Sam said, a dreamy sort of expression on her face. "Accept, of course, for the nudity concerns."

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"Draco, would you ever go nude?" Ginny asked completely out of the blue, as they were finishing up dinner.

"I assume you mean with others about than just yourself," he said.

"Yes, like Harry and Hermione, on their cruise," Ginny confirmed.

Draco thought twice before answering. "Ginny, I'd rather we not fight tonight, and I think my answer might be such that it will start one."

"How would a simple yes or no answer start a fight?" she demanded.

"Because nothing is ever that simple with you," Draco retorted. "You'll insist that I explain my answer."

"We're more likely to get into a fight if you refuse to answer the damn question," she said, her voice slightly louder than before.

"Fine," Draco said. "I'll answer the question. No, I'd never go on a nudist cruise or for that matter go about naked anywhere but in my bed or shower."

Ginny looked at him in a befuddled manner. "Why not? I think it would be fun."

"I knew you wouldn't simply settle for a yes or no," Draco said. "It would be fun for you because you're a female and females think differently than males. You women spend your entire life in skimpy clothes trying to catch the attention of males. It's not that great a step, going from a scant bathing costume to being nude. Besides, girls look good naked."

"Are you saying that you don't look good starkers?" Ginny asked fiercely.

"Of course, I'm not. I look excellent," Draco admitted. "That's not the point; it's just something that guys don't do. A group of naked women running about is hot and sexy. A group of nude guys is just plain gay."

"Are you saying that Harry and my brother are poofs because they went on this cruise?" she asked angrily.

"I'm saying that MEN don't hang about in groups nude," he reiterated.

"But you have no problem with a group of women being nude? What if some of them are older or out of shape?" Ginny questioned.

"Ugh! Certainly they have some standards, some limitations," Draco cried.

Ginny just shook her head in disgust. "You know if they ever need a poster child to represent male chauvinistic pigs, you'd be a perfect choice."

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"Are you nervous?" Brian asked after he and Kim had paddled out to sea a good distance.

"Nervous doesn't come even close to describing how I feel," Kim said fearfully.

"You'll be fine," Brian said reassuringly. "You just have to trust me. Now getting to our feet can be a little tricky. I'll get up first and then assist you. Once we're both up, relax and lean back against me. Let me move your body in tandem with mine in order to maintain balance. One more thing, forget that we're naked."

Forget that we're naked. How the devil am I supposed to do that when you're going to be touching me, when you want me to lean back against you? Why am I here? Why did I agree to do this? Why is he so nice to me? Why is he so gorgeous?

Brian had made what they had to do sound much easier than, in fact, it actually was. Ten times they had tried standing and ten times they had fallen into the brine. Kim was exceedingly glad that she was a proficient swimmer; else she would have already given up and begged to return to shore. As it was, she could only picture trying this a few more times.

They fell for the eleventh time.

"Okay," Brian said with assurance. "The twelfth time is charmed."

"It better be," Kim gasped. "I've swallowed about as much ocean as I care to for one day."

Brian was on his feet and so was Kim. They were finally actually both standing. "Now relax," Brian said. "Lean against me and let our bodies become one."

They were actually riding a wave, albeit a small one, and headed for shore.

"This is great," Kim said happily, forgetting for the instant that Brian's naked body was pressed tightly against hers. Then he shifted to change their direction and she felt it. She knew at once what it was and it had nestled itself gently between her butt cheeks. Kim panicked and they were both in the water.

"What happened," Brian asked after they had both surfaced and caught their breath.

"I lost my footing," Kim lied.

"Want to go out and give it another try?" Brian offered.

"No thanks," Kim begged off. "I've had enough for the first time, but it was fun. Thanks."

"It was my pleasure," Brian replied genuinely.

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"Are you sure it was his Willie?" Emily asked as she and Kim lay in bed discussing the events of the day.

"Well, since I didn't in point of fact see it, I can't be positive," Kim replied. "But I can't imagine what else it could have been. He had a hand on each of my arms and I was leaning back against him."

"Was it soft or hard?" Emily persisted.

"I don't know!" Kim said, aggravated at Emily's doggedness. "I just knew it felt weird having a part of him touch me there." Kim thought for a minute. "He must have had a stiffy, otherwise I don't think it would have prodded me to the extent it did. I just know it didn't belong there."

"I think you're being overdramatic," Emily said assuringly. "Brian seems like a real nice guy. I'm sure he wasn't trying to do anything improper. It was probably just a natural reaction to his penis having rubbed against your bare skin. Jamie says they sort of have minds of their own sometimes; that guys can't fully control them."

"Speaking of which, have you noticed Professor Weasley's?" Kim asked, her face turning ruby red.

"It's somewhat difficult not to," Emily answered. "I wonder whether his large size has anything to do with him being a werewolf."

"Probably," Kim answered. "Can you imagine something that large inside you?" She shuddered at the very thought. "I wonder how Sam does it."

"Well, as we saw when Amanda and Mum gave birth, women can adjust." Emily said, actually fingering herself. "It must be an awfully tight fit."

"Emily, can I ask you a question without you getting irritated and flying off the handle?" Kim questioned warily.

"I can only promise to try," Emily said with a laugh. "Lately I seem to have a very short handle."

Kim took a deep breath. "Are you and Caitlin gay? Have you had sex? I mean if you are and have, it's okay with me. I just..." She didn't finish.

Emily just stared at the ceiling, completely caught off guard by Kim's questions.

"I don't think either of us is gay," she answered. "I'm not sure a person at twelve or thirteen can even be fully confident of their sexual preferences, but we are unquestionably both extremely interested in boys so I don't think that either of us is gay."

Emily took a deep breath, not sure how her best friend was going to handle the balance of her answer. "We have experimented with oral sex," Emily honestly admitted. "And we both found that it felt nice."

"Oh!" Was all Kim could say in response.

"Does knowing that change things between us?" Emily asked apprehensively.

"I'm not sure," Kim said nervously. "I love you. You're my best friend, but I could never do that to another girl; not even you."

"Kim! I love you too and I'd never ask or expect you to do it," Emily replied. "I'm not even sure if I could do it with you. You are my best friend, but Caitlin is my sister and although I can't quite explain it; the two of us have a special something that actually made it feel good and proper."

"Then I can slumber assured that you won't molest me during the night," Kim said with a laugh.

"Promise," Emily said. "Will you still hold me if I have another nightmare about that git, like I did last night?"

"Promise," Kim said, as she kissed Emily on the cheek before turning on her side and shortly going to sleep.

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Day Three, Wednesday, August 10, 2005, 10:00 AM, At Sea

"Daddy, why don't you come swim with Mummy and me?" Timmy beseeched, as he and Sam headed off into the pool.

"Maybe later," Ron fibbed as he and Hermione made for two unoccupied deck chairs. Harry and the girls were already in the pool, roughhousing as usual.

"How does he do it?" Ron asked as he helped Hermione situate and shade a sleeping Benjamin, all the time trying not to look straight at his friend. Ron was already using a towel to hide his semi-erectness; if he allowed his eyes to fully appreciate Hermione's body, he'd have a full-fledged stiffy that would never give up.

"I don't know for sure," Hermione said, stopping momentarily to watch her husband as he frolicked with the girls. "He has always been incredibly good at controlling his mind. Remember in our forth year how he was able to resist the Imperius Curse, whereas that Moody pretender had the balance of us making fools of ourselves."

"Yeah," Ron said, his mind drifting momentarily back to their school years.

"I imagine he must be able to do something akin to that to ward off any sexual thoughts. Because when they go at it, they really go at it, and there are no holds barred," Hermione said, shaking her head as she watched her family horse around.

"Even with Jamie?" Ron asked, amazed.

"Those two are now actually the worst," Hermione laughed. "If they're wrestling and one has the advantage, neither will bother to think twice before grabbing the other's private."

Ron looked at Hermione shocked. "And you think that's acceptable; you're actually okay with that?" he asked.

She smiled and nodded her head. "They're like brother and sister, but with none of the usual

inhibitions." She looked Ron in the eye. "They have the type of relationship that I wish you and I had; that after what we've been through together we should have."

Ron looked at Hermione, completely caught off guard by her remark. Did she mean what he thought she meant? It didn't matter. His lycanthropy would surely make such a bond between them impossible. Under normal circumstances his sexual desires were controllable most of the month, but during the three days of the full moon without the proper potions his sexual desires could not be satisfied and no man, woman, child or beast was safe.

"Oh! Sam just made a huge mistake," Hermione said, drawing Ron's attention back to the present and the pool. "She just handed Timmy off to Jamie. That makes her a marked woman."

Sure enough, within seconds, Harry had pulled Sam under the water. In retaliation, Sam joined the girls in their efforts to submerge Harry. With Sam's help, Harry was far out numbered, and soon also became a victim

"Look at those two," Ron said enviously. "They're behaving like two little kids. You'd never think they were adults, naked adults at that."

Ron and Hermione were interrupted by the shrill sound of a woman's voice loudly calling out Hermione's name.

Hermione turned and, upon seeing Michelle Wolfskill, hurried to greet her, giving the relatively fleshy woman a proper hug. Michelle had befriended Hermione last year at Cap d'Adge; she was also responsible for telling the Potters about this cruise. She and her husband, Lloyd, had been good friends of Jennifer and Carl Zacherley, Jamie and Emily's late parents. Upon first meeting, Michelle in fact mistook Hermione for Jennifer's sister because Jamie and Hermione looked so similar.

"It's wonderful to see you again," Michelle said, sincerity evident in her voice. At that time she looked at Ron. "Have you brought us a new convert, Hermione?"

"That remains to be seen," Hermione said candidly. "This is Ronald Weasley. Ron, Harry and I have been best friends since our first year of school. Ron, this is Michelle Wolfskill. We only just met last summer, but hit it off immediately."

Ron and Michelle exchanged smiles and then shook hands, with Ron, naturally maintaining full eye contact.

"Where is Lloyd?" Hermione inquired.

"Still sleeping," Michelle said disgustingly. "He was gambling till the wee hours of the morning. I didn't realize the ship had a casino when we booked passage or I might have reconsidered. Lloyd has an unhealthy obsession for playing poker."

Ron listened with great interest. Wizards had nothing that compared to casinos in their world. He was extremely eager to find out more about this form of adult Muggle entertainment. Unfortunately, Harry and Hermione seemed to both eye gambling negatively and Sam had shown little curiosity.

"That's Samantha, Ron's wife, perched on Harry's shoulders," Hermione said, pointing in the direction of the pool. "We all call her Sam. Jamie is holding their son, Timmy."

"You have a very attractive wife," Michelle said, but as she spoke her mind seemed to wander as

she glanced at Kim, Caitlin and Emily. "Did you adopt another daughter?"

"No, although she almost seems like part of the family," Hermione said with a laugh. "That is Kim, she's a good friend of both Emily and Caitlin."

"But our family has increased in size," Hermione noted proudly as she bent over and picked up Ben. "I'd like you to meet Benjamin James Potter."

"You've had a baby?" Michele said disbelievingly. She gazed at Hermione in skepticism and then at little Ben. Temporarily all other thoughts were erased from her mind as she looked at the adorable baby. "May I hold him?"

"Certainly," Hermione said trustingly as she handed Ben to Michelle. "Don't take it personal if he wakes up and starts crying; he's normally been fed by now."

"I'll feed him if I may?" Michelle said. "It seems like forever since I've held a baby and giving me grandchildren doesn't seem to be a priority with my children. Where do you have his bottle?"

"I'm breastfeeding," Hermione said almost penitently because she knew it would draw Michelle attention to her breasts.

Michelle just stared unbelievably at Hermione. There were so many things she was tempted to say, so many questions on the tip of her tongue, but she somehow managed to remain mute and instead just nodded her head.

"I looked all over Princess Cays for you yesterday," Hermione said. "I'd about come to the conclusion that you had decided not to book passage."

"Lloyd and I opted to stay on board yesterday," Michelle advised. "Most of the stops are pretty much the same and Princess Cays, being owned by the line, is the most bland and uninteresting of the islands."

"Ladies," Ron said, getting Hermione and Michelle's attention, "I'm not really in the mood to lie in the sun. If you don't mind, I believe I'll just move over to that table where I'll have a better view of the pool."

"Are you sure?" Hermione asked, feeling shoddily for perhaps ignoring him.

Ron, however, was already on his feet and didn't answer. Perhaps he hadn't heard her or possibly he was intentionally ignoring her as he headed for the empty table.

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"A penny for you thoughts," Bonnie said cheerily as she approached the table a brief time later.

"A what?" A startled Ron said, immediately opening his eyes. He had closed them to seal out the copious nudity surrounding him, but had evidently done such a good job of relaxing that he had almost dozed off, while sitting up.

"I'm sorry. I forgot for the moment that you were British," she apologized. "I imagine that sounded very nonsensical to you."

"Not really, I've heard it used before," Ron said. "I just wasn't quite with it. I was rather bored and had started to doze off."

"Bored? Why don't you join your family in the pool?" Bonnie asked.

"Two reasons," Ron replied. "You need to be naked to enter the pool, and I'm not a nudist. And I think you noticed the other reason yesterday."

Bonnie blushed, "Considering its size, it was rather difficult not to notice."

Ron endeavored to change the subject. "Might I ask you the same question? Why aren't you swimming with your husband and daughter? You obvious don't have either of my problems."

"No, not quite," Bonnie laughed. "I'm very much accustomed to being nude. Frankly I've earned a living the last ten years dancing like this. Well, except for when I was pregnant with Lynn."

Ron was taken a back by Bonnie's forthrightness. "You dance totally starkers?"

"It depends on where I'm dancing and if they sell alcohol," Bonnie explained as she took a seat across from Ron. "Sometimes I wear pasties and a G-string, but I prefer being totally bare; that way there is no possibility of getting into trouble for something inadvertently peeking out. I started doing it to pay my way through college, but when I graduated; I couldn't afford to take the cut in pay, so I kept dancing."

Ron looked toward the shallow end of the pool where Jim now stood engrossed in conversation with Sam as Lynn and Timmy splashed each other contentedly. "How does Jim feel about you dancing, and what about Lynn?"

"Lynn only knows I'm a professional dancer," Bonnie answered. "As for Jim, I was dancing when we met, and he knew I intended to continue doing it when we got married. Besides he can't say much when I earn three times as much as he."

"Would I be getting personal if I asked how much?" Ron asked tentatively.

"Very," Bonnie replied, but with a smile. "But I like you. Each of the last five years, I've cleared over \$100,000 and that's mostly tax free." Bonnie looked at Ron severely. "And before you get the wrong idea, that is for dancing and posing for pictures only. No one touches me and I don't touch them in any way."

"I couldn't handle my wife earning a living like that," Ron said straightforwardly.

"Most men couldn't, but Jim isn't most men and we have a unique relationship." Bonnie elucidated. "Don't get me wrong, we love each other very much. There are some activities we like to pursue together, but for the most part we have totally dissimilar interests. Take yesterday as an example. He would never have the patience to build a sand castle, and I couldn't hit a volleyball to save my life."

"Today, he'll probably never leave the pool and me... Please don't laugh, but if I could find a challenging opponent, I'd spend the entire day playing chess."

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"Oh No!" Jim cried, looking, as if irritated, toward the table where Ron and Bonnie were seated. "I don't believe it."

"What's the matter?" Sam asked concernedly.

"Chess!" Jim muttered under his breath. "Is your husband any good at that stupid game?"

"Actually, he's quite good," Sam answered, not at all understanding what had ignited the discussion of Ron's chess ability.

"Then I'm afraid we've both lost our spouses for the balance of the cruise," Jim said wincingly as he pointed toward Bonnie and Ron, who were absorbed in a game.

"Is Bonnie any good?" Samantha asked.

Jim nodded his head. "She's played in a number of regional tournaments. Never won, but she's always done well. If possible, my wife would play chess twenty-four hours a day."

Sam watched Ron for a while. For the first time since they had boarded the ship, he looked relaxed and as if he were truly enjoying himself. Samantha smiled. "It looks like you and I might be spending a good deal of time together," she said with a laugh.

Jim smiled broadly. "What's that saying? Every cloud comes with a silvery lining. In this case that is most definitely true."

Sam returned Jim's smile, graciously accepting his complement. She wanted to be with Ron, after all this was to be a family vacation. Until now, however, Ron had been totally miserable. He had only agreed to the trip because of his love for her and Timmy. If playing chess made the trip manageable for him, then it was only fair that she allowed him this obsession. Besides, Jim seemed like a nice enough guy and certainly a fun person to spend time with.

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"Michele, what's on your mind?" Hermione inquired. "I know you well enough to be able to tell when something is bothering you. It's not like you not to say what you're thinking."

Michelle looked at Hermione hesitantly. "I'd rather not say," she said. "I value your friendship too highly, and we get to see each other so seldom that I don't want to chance saying something that will rub you the wrong way."

"Part of the reason I like you so much is because you are frank and tell it like it is. I'd much prefer you come out with whatever it is you want to say rather than let it fester the entire holiday."

Michelle shook her head as she bit down on her lip. "You're different," she finally said. "I like you. I like you very much, but there is something different about you; and by you I mean you and your entire family."

Hermione looked at Michelle concernedly. She was expecting a question in regards to her breasts or her body springing back to shape so fast after having Ben, but she wasn't expecting this. Michelle most certainly didn't know that she was magical, but somehow she had realized that she was unusual.

"Last year when we first met, I took an instant liking to you," Michelle said. "I imagine most people do; you have that sort of charisma about you. Of course, I was cheering for Jamie in the competition." She hesitated a moment. "I was watching the day of the contest when Jamie reached the hotel clutching her breasts in pain. Having done some nude running myself in my younger days, I could be empathetic with the tenderness she was feeling. It was evident that the girl could run no more."

"But then I watched as you and Caitlin held hands and went into what seemed to be a deep trance. Jamie who had been sitting very quietly, almost as if in a trance herself, began to move about as if... Well, from my viewpoint she seemed to be reacting to her chest being rubbed, yet neither you nor Caitlin had touched her. This went on for a time until Emily came running up to you. She almost went into a panic yelling and shaking the three of you before finally there was a response."

"As you know Jamie went back and finished that race not showing any sign of even a token amount of tenderness. I kept my judgment to myself, not even telling my husband my suspicions. He probably would have considered me mad anyway. Besides, after what you and Harry had done... how you had taken those girls into your home and heart. I didn't want to think negatively of you."

"But now look at you. Hermione, I've been a nurse for over twenty years," Michelle declared. "Your body is flawless. The most obvious unfeasibility is your breasts. Natural breasts the size of yours do not, cannot defy gravity, especially when breast feeding."

"But that's not all," Michelle went on. "Your skin is perfect. Not a stretch mark or even a pimple anywhere. Even the scar you had on your arm last year; probably from a childhood injury, is gone."

Hermione glanced at her arm, almost in panic. Michelle was correct. The scar that she had gotten on her arm from a bicycle accident was gone. The massages that Caitlin had given her during her pregnancy had done far more than intended.

"Michelle, I don't know what to..."

"Look Out! They're attacking!" shrieked a woman.

"My god what are they!"

"They're going for those girls!"

"Someone help them, please! Oh my god, those poor kids."

Chapter Four Listening, But Not Hearing

The screaming had caused an alarm. People were yelling and running in every direction. Some courageous souls ran toward the girls to assist them, but most were frantically leaving the area, possessions forgotten, in order to seek shelter within the ship.

The owls had initially gone unobserved as they drew near the ship and circled it predatorily, looking for the recipients of the mail they carried. When they dived as one toward the pool, however, with their wings extended to their full width, they were unquestionably noticed.

Owls have a rather creepy appearance to them, but when you're not accustomed to seeing them and then are suddenly faced with four at once, presumably attacking, they can be down right scary.

"It's all right," Jamie cried, trying to calm some Good Samaritans that had come to her rescue. "The owls are trained to deliver messages. They won't harm us; please don't hurt them."

Panicked people, however, have a propensity to not be rational or listen to reason; they continued to splash the birds with water and swing wildly at them with towels. Jamie and the other girls were barely able to secure their letters before the now frightened birds took flight.

"Are you all okay?" Harry asked, having halted his conversation with Jim and Sam to hurry to the girls' assistance.

"We're fine," shouted Caitlin, "but I doubt those owls will be in a rush to delivery anymore letters."

"The poor things. They were just doing their jobs," Kim said.

"The owls will be all right," Emily said. "At this minute, I'm more concerned about us."

Emily had good reason to be fretful, for at that moment, three ship employees with ominous expressions on their faces were headed in the group's direction.

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"How did it go?" Hermione asked when Harry returned from speaking with the ship's captain.

"Not good at all," Harry replied, shaking his head in embarrassed frustration. "It would seem that cruise ship captains have an extremely low tolerance for passengers that cause a panic on their ships. I was given a reprimand and advised that if one more owl descends on this ship, we will be set ashore at the next port."

"He's blaming you?" Hermione asked.

"Damn, I felt like I was back at Hogwarts and McGonagall was scolding me," Harry said. "I had no idea what to tell the man. He was already incensed. Had I told him the owls were delivering letters from a school, he would have thought I was playing him for a fool."

"So what did you tell him?" Hermione asked, looking at Harry incredulously.

"I told him that I was an ornithologist and that I had a government grant to study the feasibility of

owls delivering mail."

"Did he actually believe that?" Hermione asked skeptically. "Didn't he ask questions?"

"In point of fact, it caused him to launch into a tirade on how government wastes money," Harry said. "I think he was more upset about the funding than the owls landing on his ship. Bottom line is that he thinks I'm some weird nerdy professor."

Hermione gave Harry a hug. "At least you were able to avoid the truth," she said nervously. "I just violated the International Confederation of Wizards' Statute of Secrecy."

"You did what?" Harry asked, not believing his ears.

Hermione explained all about the conversation she had with Michelle. "She knew we were different," Hermione clarified. "I was trying to think of a reasonable way to explain my way out of it when the owls arrived."

Harry nodded his head. "I guess that was what they sometimes refer to as the 'icing on the cake'."

"It was either the truth or say that we are from another solar system," Hermione noted. "I hoped she would be more inclined to accept us if at least we were from her planet."

"We're certainly doing a first rate job of blending in with the Muggles, aren't we?" Harry asked sarcastically. "How did she react to the news?"

"At first she just looked at me disbelievingly," Hermione explained. "Michelle had figured out that we were different, but I don't suppose she was ready to accept for fact that witches and wizards actually existed."

"I can understand her skepticism," Harry said. "Did she ask you to prove it?"

"She was about to, I believe, but relented when I showed her my wand. Actually I don't think it was seeing the wand as much as my producing it out of its invisible sheath that convinced her that I was being truthful," Hermione said. "The Zacherleys evidently were much more competent at pretending to be Muggles than us. Michelle never once thought there was anything peculiar about them. I'm sure she'll have far more questions when I see her after lunch. Harry, should I have lied to her?"

"That was probably one of those situations where a lie would have been more damaging than the truth. She is certainly not the first Muggle to know of the existence of our world, nor will she be the last. Do you trust her to keep it a secret?" Harry asked.

"Yes! Yes I do," Hermione said emphatically.

"Then I don't see that any harm has been done. Did you ever find out what those bloody owls were delivering?" Harry inquired.

"Just the girls' school book lists," Hermione answered. "Oh and Jamie received notification that she will be Head Girl."

"Not much of a surprise there," Harry said proudly. "I don't see that there was much of a competition. I assume Alex got picked as Head Boy?"

"Yes!" Hermione answered, beaming. "Jamie is thrilled."

"Looks like a certain professor is rather pleased too," Harry pointed out.

"I am," Hermione responded. "Oh Harry! They remind me so much of us. I'm happy the two of them realized they were meant for each other now and didn't waste precious years as we did."

"I agree," Harry said nodding his head. "I don't know how I managed to endure five years without you." "Me either, without you," Hermione said, a devilish look in her eye. "Sam's watching Ben so we could have a quiet lunch and the girls could go off with their friends. We can get a slice of pizza later. What would you say to skipping lunch and having a little dessert?"

"Have you ever known me to turn down my favorite dessert?" Harry asked.

"I pray I'm always your favorite."

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Day Four, Thursday, August 11, 2005, St. Thomas

"Let's ask her to join us," Kim said. "She's been sitting there alone for over an hour and looks truly bored and depressed."

"Have you forgotten whose niece she is?" Emily asked.

"If I recall correctly, you were dating Dick Bancroft's brother last year," Caitlin said. "I thought you believed in judging the individual, not their family tree."

"I do, but that was hardly a good example," Emily retorted. "We all know that came to a disastrous end."

"Are you sure it's over?" Kim inquired.

"It's over!" Emily replied, louder than necessary. "I don't have time for little untrusting boys when there are committing men available."

"Please tell me that you're not referring to that git, Roger," Caitlin appealed.

"You're just jealous," Emily replied.

"Yeah! Right!" Caitlin answered. "Look, I don't want to argue about it. Let's just drop the subject. Do we want to be decent and ask Angel to join us or just walk by and kick sand in her face?"

"If it were Roz, I'd definitely opt for the sand," Emily replied, "but I guess, in all fairness, we should give Angel the benefit of the doubt."

As the three girls approached Angel, she timorously jumped to her feet. "What do you want?" she cried, nervousness evident in her voice.

"We just wondered if you wanted to join us," Kim said, sincerely. "You look rather lonesome sitting here all by yourself."

"Are you serious?" Angel asked skeptically.

* * * * *

"And just exactly what is so funny about me being buried in the sand?" Jim asked.

"Its more what"s not buried that"s funny," Sam said, trying to suppress her giggles.

Jim had allowed himself to be buried by the all too eager Timmy and Lynn. He and Sam had initially helped the youngsters dig a trench and then Jim had grudgingly agreed to lie in it and be covered with sand. Lynn and Timmy were now busily building ramps so that they could drive their toy cars up and over the completely helpless man.

"Is my face that funny?" he asked, not understanding what exactly Sam found so hysterical.

"It"s not your face," Sam said, slightly embarrassed. "For some reason the kids decided to leave your privates uncovered. And before you get offended, that"s not what I"m laughing at either. It"s just... I was thinking what I would do to my husband if I ever found him in such a compromising position."

Jim made a mistake, a colossal mistake that male nudists must never make. He began to imagine himself being tortured in the way he imagined Sam meant she would torment Ron. His thoughts caused an immediate and extremely noticeable reaction.

Timmy and Lynn were occupied building their highway and didn"t notice Jim"s dilemma, but fortunately Sam had because Jamie and her friends had picked that very moment to approach them. Without a word, Sam picked up one of the empty pails that the children had tossed aside and inverted it over Jim"s quite noticeable erection.

"Thanks," said a scarlet-faced Jim seconds before the girls arrived.

Besides Chantal and Felicite, Felicite"s younger sister Monica also accompanied Jamie.

"Sam, have you seen Kim and my sisters?" Jamie asked.

"Not for about an hour," Sam responded. "They were standing just over there talking to a girl about their age; then the four of them ran off toward the water."

"Thanks," Jamie said politely as the group started to leave. Then she turned back and gave Sam a smile. "That"s a unique use for a sand pail."

Jim turned an even brighter red, but said nothing until the girls were out of earshot. "I"m sorry, Sam," he said apologetically. "Thanks for coming to my rescue. I"ve been a naturist since I was ten, but never had that problem before."

"It"s really no big deal," Sam said, and then thought about her choice of words. "I didn"t mean that literally; it was quite nice, I mean... oh shit." Sam"s face was now even brighter than Jim"s.

"Can we have our bucket back?" Lynn asked.

Sam looked at Jim who nodded his head as best as feasible, indicating that everything had returned

to normal.

"Kids, we're meeting Ron and Bonnie for lunch in less than an hour," Sam stated. "That means its time to release our prisoner."

This announcement was met with a great deal of resistance from Lynn and Timmy. After a few minutes of whining and moaning, they began to help Sam unearth Jim.

"I wish the four of us were able to do more things together," Jim said truthfully.

"So do I," Sam said sadly as Jim was finally able to sit up, "but I'm happy that Ron at least has Bonnie to keep him company and occupied. It must be strange being the only clothed person among all these naked bodies."

Jim gazed about the beach. With the exception of the vendors, everyone else was indeed nude. He stared at Sam, trying to build up his courage. Finally he said, "Perhaps the four of us could get together one evening for some adult type entertainment before the cruise comes to an end."

Sam hesitated for a moment. Ron had expressed a desire to visit the ship's casino, but she hadn't really been interested and neither had Harry or Hermione. She felt extremely guilty that Ron and she had been spending so little time together. This would be a perfect opportunity to be with both Ron and their new friends.

"We'll be at sea for two days on our return to Fort Lauderdale," Sam responded. "Perhaps we could plan to do it one of those evenings. Let's make it the first night. That way, if we enjoy ourselves, we can do it again."

Jim was dumbfounded. He had hoped Sam would agree, but was exhilarated that she was going as far as considering two evenings.

Jim's faced beamed. "I was afraid you'd turn me down," he said, obviously greatly relieved.

"Normally I would have," Sam replied. "I'm not into that sort of thing, but Ron really wants to give it a try. He's gone through a lot so that Timmy and I could come on this cruise; he deserves to have some fun."

"You're a very special woman," Jim said, shaking his head in awe. "You must love him a lot."

"I do," Sam said in earnest.

"I'll do my best to make the evening enjoyable and memorable for you," Jim said sweetly.

"I'm sure you will."

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"I can't believe Harry actually talked Lloyd into trying that," Michelle said. "We've been to numerous places where they offered parasailing before, and he's never shown the least interest."

"Harry has a way of getting people to do things with him that they'd never consider doing on their own," Hermione said, as she watched Harry and Lloyd being strapped into their harnesses.

"I'm surprised you're not down there," Michele said. "You seem very gutsy, like you'd try just about anything."

"I prefer to keep my feet on the ground," Hermione answered. "I only fly when absolutely necessary and then at a very conservative speed. Harry is the flyer in the family. Actually Jamie and Emily are extremely good on a broom, also. Caitlin tends to take after me."

"Then you... witches really do fly broomsticks," Michelle asked in wonderment. "Is everything that I thought to be fantasy actually reality?"

"Not everything," Hermione said with a laugh, "but you'd be surprised how much folklore is based on truth. Take broomsticks for example; we can't fly just any old household broom; for a broom to fly, it must be specially built and charmed."

"And judging from you and the girls, witches most certainly aren't ugly and old with warts on their noses," Michelle joked.

"Actually some are," Hermione replied, "but usually they've been on the receiving end of a nasty hex."

Hermione smiled at her friend who was looking at her with admiration. "I'm glad you found us out," Hermione said in earnest. "I hated lying to you, and it's good to be able to talk to you openly now."

"Plus you know your secret is safe with me," Michelle added. "Hell, who'd believe me even if I told them? My own husband would think I'm crazy."

"Then you haven't told Lloyd?" Hermione asked.

"I didn't think I was allowed," Michelle answered with surprise.

"I'll let you make that determination," Hermione said. "You certainly know your husband better than me, but sometimes you'll find you need someone to confide in. I'll confirm it with a little demonstration if you decide to tell him."

"What I don't understand is why you keep yourselves secret?" Michelle questioned. "You'd be revered and treated like celebrities."

"More likely we'd be feared and mistrusted," Hermione retorted. "Some would try to force us to use our powers for their benefit, while others would probe and examine us, trying to learn how we became different."

Michelle thought for a few moments, as the smile slowly faded from her face. "You're right to remain hidden within your own world. Knowledge of your existence would cause a panic. Instead of seeing your kind as a blessing, most would consider you a threat and try to exterminate you."

"Most, but not you?" Hermione asked, raising her eyes.

"No! I've gotten to know you personally. You're good people," she said emphatically. "But I do want to hear more. If you don't normally use our type of transportation, how did you get to Fort Lauderdale?"

Hermione explained Apparating and Portkey"s and told Michelle about the girls" adventure in Fort Lauderdale. It seemed that each answer Hermione afforded Michelle initiated a new question.

Hermione watched nervously as Harry sailed out to sea; happy for the distraction the questioning yielded. She much preferred Harry flying on a broom that he controlled.

Hermione thought for a moment on her own Muggle heritage, particularly on both her parents being Muggle dentists and her introduction to the magical world occurring when she received her Hogwarts letter the summer before her eleventh birthday. Now as she talked with Michelle, she thought about how different the magical world was from the one into which she had been born.

"Then centaurs actually exist and unicorns, too," Michelle said in amazement, interrupting Hermione"s reflection. "Unicorns are so beautiful. I"d love to see and brush one."

"They are beautiful and pure; unfortunately they will only accept the touch of a virgin," Hermione informed Michelle. "Jamie"s Animagus form is a unicorn."

"Jamie"s what?" Michelle questioned.

"Some witches and wizards have the ability to transform into an animal. It is a rare ability among magical folk, mainly because it takes lengthy painful training."

"I assume you and Harry have the ability," Michelle said with a laugh.

Hermione nodded her head yes. "Harry can transform into a Golden Griffin, and I can become a wolf."

"A Golden Griffin?" Michelle questioned. "Isn"t that a winged lion? But they don"t exist?"

Hermione only smiled.

"You mean Harry can actually fly?" Michelle inquired.

"Yes. One of my worst memories is flying on his back. I"m not sure which was worse; that or flying on a hippogriff," Hermione answered.

"A hippogriff?" Michelle questioned. "Never mind! I don"t even want to know."

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"That was refreshing," Bonnie said, as she got out of the pool. "I wish you had been able to join me."

"Yeah," Ron said forlornly. "I feel like I"ve been... what"s the phrase you Americans use? "A wet blanket"?"

"Ron, you"re not a wet blanket. You"re a lot of fun," Bonnie proclaimed. "Not everyone is comfortable enough with their body to go au naturel. Your shyness is one of the things I find appealing. Do we have time for another game of chess before lunch?"

"I wish we did, but we should be departing soon to avoid being late. As it is, I feel guilty spending so much time away from Sam and Timmy," Ron said, shamefaced.

"It was her idea we stay on board this morning and play chess. I think Sam feels guilty for dragging you on this cruise. She loves you a lot and wants you to have a good time. Besides, she and Jim seem to get along well."

Ron nodded his head. "I would have just been uncomfortable ashore with everyone else nude."

Bonnie scanned her own body. "I don't know whether you've noticed or not, but I'm totally naked; I've been that way whenever we're together."

"It's different with you," Ron explained. "I've gotten accustomed to you being naked. I'm comfortable around you now; it doesn't turn me on anymore or cause a reaction."

"Considering as how I make my living turning guys on, I don't know if I should consider that a complement or an insult," Bonnie said, a feigned hurt expression on her face.

"You know what I mean," Ron said contritely. "Now that I have a familiarity with you, I see beyond the body and see you as a person, not just an object."

"Good try Weasley," Bonnie said good-naturedly. "Since my body no longer turns you on, would you consider rubbing sun tan lotion on my back before we catch the launch for shore?"

Ron looked at Bonnie hesitantly. "Yeah. Okay. I can handle that," he said assuredly.

Bonnie positioned her towel on the lounge chair and laid face down. Ron squirted some lotion on her back and she twitched. As Ron rubbed the lotion in, he concentrate on thoughts of their last chess match, one in which Bonnie had crushed him. It worked- no stiffy. He did the same as he applied lotion to both her legs. As he finished, a look of triumph spread over his face.

"Thanks Ron," Bonnie said dulcetly, "but didn't you forget something? The area between my waist and legs will burn just as fast as the rest of me."

Ron gulped.

* * * * *

"We've been looking for you guys everywhere," Jamie shouted as she ran up to Emily.

"Evidently in all the wrong places," Emily responded in jest. "What did you want us for?"

"The recreation director just posted a notice; there is going to be a talent contest the last evening of the cruise. I thought you might be interested," Jamie suggested.

Emily eyed the other girls. "She just wants us to compete so she'll have an easy time of it."

"Not true," Jamie said with a defensive attitude. "I'm not even eligible to participate. Contestants must be at least ten and no older than fifteen. Felicite's younger sister Monica is going to enter; we just thought you guys might be interested."

"When you say talent, I assume you mean singing, dancing or playing some sort of instrument," Caitlin said. "That most certainly leaves me out."

"I only have a talent for getting into trouble," Emily said with a laugh. "What about you Angel?"

"I might give it a try," she answered. "It might be fun."

"Kim, you have a great voice," Emily stated. "Why don't you enter?"

"Me?" Kim said. "I only sing in the shower. Besides I could never get up on a stage like this." She indicated her lack of clothing. "I'd die of embarrassment."

"Here comes your aunt," Caitlin said to Angel, interrupting the conversation about the talent show.

"She looks to be in a particularly cheery mood," Emily noted critically.

"What are you doing hanging about with this rabble," Roz shouted nastily. "I thought I told you to stay away from their type."

"Good morning Roz," Jamie said pleasantly. "I'm glad to see that the cruise is having a pleasant calming effect on your temperament."

"Never you mind me!" Roz bellowed. "I want you and your low life family and friends to stay away from my niece. My brother has spent too much money sending her to the best English finishing schools to have all their efforts negated by associating with the likes of you."

"Gather your belongings," Roz ordered. "Your mother wants to see you immediately." Roz grabbed Angel by the arm and dragged her off without another word. Angel looked back, giving what appeared to be a helpless "I'm sorry" expression.

"You know, if I didn't know better, I'd get the impression that Roz doesn't like us," Emily said straight faced. Everyone laughed.

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"Ron, you really don't know what you're missing," Bonnie said as she stood near the bow of the boat, the sea breeze striking her nude body and causing her hair to fly about.

"That's what Sam keeps telling me," Ron answered despondently. "She thinks I'd be fine once I got over the initial effects. How do you do it? I can't envision taking my pants off and you purposely open yourself to inspection when you dance."

"We're different people, from different backgrounds," Bonnie explained. "You're shy and I'm a bit of an exhibitionist. Plus you must remember that I rarely ever wear clothes. What is an earth shattering experience to you is my everyday lifestyle."

"Want to hear something silly?" Bonnie asked, actually blushing. "A part of me hopes you never take your clothes off; I'd miss the mystique. Of course, another part, the bad part, wants to see you nude. Preferably with a hard-on."

"Are you purposely trying to give me one?" Ron questioned. "Let's talk about something else."

Bonnie seemed to ignore Ron's comment as she started into what almost seemed like a rehearsed speech. "Jim and I were talking about you and Sam last night before we went to bed. We were both hoping to meet a special couple on this cruise, a couple we could swap good times with, and we

think you and Sam are perfect. Its fun playing chess with you," she continued, "I hope we can do it for the remainder of the cruise. Jim and I have also both enjoyed the times we've spent with the children."

Bonnie took a deep breath, which had an amazing affect on her breasts. "Ron, Jim and I were wondering if you and Sam would consider getting together with us for a little adult type recreation before the cruise ends."

Finally, Ron thought to himself, someone who wants to spend some time in the casino.

"You can't possibly imagine how much I'd like to do that," Ron said enthusiastically. "I've been trying to talk Harry and Hermione into it ever since we left port, but for some reason they think its wrong. I told them we didn't have to do it the entire night, just a quick in and out to see whether we liked it or not, but they outright refused."

Bonnie looked at Ron with a combination of surprise, happiness and confusion. She had hoped he'd agree, but his exuberance had caught her entirely off guard. "Jim and I had at first considered approaching Harry and Hermione with the idea, but after you've done this a few times you can pretty much tell who might or might not be interested."

"Then you've done this before?" Ron asked. "It will be the first time for both Sam and me, but I'll admit that I'm extremely eager."

"Jim and I do it all the time. Admittedly, he usually gets a lot more enjoyment out of it than I do, but I think this time will be different. I'm looking forward to being with you."

"I'm certainly not as experienced as you and Jim," Ron admitted, "but I promise what I lack in experience, I'll make up for with enthusiasm. I guarantee that I'll give you my hardest effort."

"I was hoping you would," Bonnie said, turning flush at the thought. "What about Sam? Was she willing to do it with Harry and Hermione; how will she feel about Jim and me."

"Sam"s never done it before, so naturally she'll be nervous."# """)Ê'ØRA""B" d"-ÑA""rz\$"@""M"âĐ"1\$ " " Âc)"É""H"hé"À\$HJ9"t""2J| "Ñ">N8 "">8B'>N ""! ?>""!>"">8"> ""> "">2""?>""!>""> "" hesitate doing anything either of them asked. But she likes you and gets along famously with Jim. Sam could be reluctant at first, but I think she'll open up to the idea. And if she enjoys herself, look out."

Bonnie face was aglow as the boat reached the pier, and she saw Jim and Sam awaiting their arrival with Lynn and Timmy by their sides. She and Jim had done this frequently before, but this time seemed different, very special. She found herself wishing for the days to pass quickly.

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"What was all the racket? Draco asked as he entered the room, still toweling himself off from his shower.

"We received an owl," Ginny exclaimed. "Well, not really an owl; it was some sort of large, colorful tropical bird. It could only just get through the window and then it was very impatient and not the least cooperative."

"Is it from Harry and Hermione or your brother," Draco asked indifferently.

"Actually it's from Sam," Ginny answered as she read the parchment. "Oh My! The trip got off to a frightening start. A street gang upon arrival accosted the girls, but everyone is okay. Sam says the accommodations are beautiful and the food is terrific. Ron hasn't taken his clothes off yet, but they've made friends with a nice couple. The wife plays chess. Sam says that the only time my brother doesn't have a stiffy is when he's playing chess with Bonnie."

"She must be quite the hag," Draco remarked. "I thought the idea was for the female of the species to arouse the male into having an erection, not to cause him to go placid."

"Do you mean like this?" Ginny said, as she walked over to Draco and placed her hand on his leg. Then she ever so softly ran her hand up his leg until she was holding his manhood. His member immediately sprang to attention.

"Now that you have my attention, what do you intend to do about it?" Draco asked.

"I'm sure I'll think of something," Ginny responded, wetting her lips with her tongue and then dropping to her knees in front of Draco.

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Day Five, Friday, August 12, 2005, St. Kitts

"Today we are anchored at the beautiful island St. Kitts," the voice echoing from the public address system announced. "Here you will have the opportunity to enjoy the type of lush tropical paradise usually only associated with islands in the South Pacific."

"The atmosphere here is palpably luxuriant, an intoxicating blend of sunlight, sea air and fantastically abundant vegetation. At the center of St. Kitts stands the spectacular, cloud-fringed peak of Mount Liamuiga, a dormant volcano covered by dense tropical forest filled with elusive green vervet monkeys and brilliant tropical flowers. For eco-tourists, or simply anyone who enjoys stunning natural beauty, St. Kitts cannot fail to exceed expectations."

"We remind you that St. Kitts does not allow public nudity. Therefore, please dress appropriately before disembarking the ship."

"Why did the ship even stop here if we must get dressed to go ashore?" Emily complained over breakfast. "I thought this was a naturist cruise."

"No one is forcing you to go ashore," Hermione explained. "You're allowed to remain in the buff if you stay on board. Personally, I want to travel around the island, and I'm willing to slip on a sun dress for a few hours in order to do it."

"The island does look beautiful," Emily admitted. "It might be fun hiking through the forest and I know just what I can wear." Emily suddenly had a devilish expression on her face.

"Emily," Caitlin whispered. "I don't like that look on your face."

"Neither do I," said Kim. "Please tell me that you disposed of that floral sun dress of yours."

Emily smiled broadly.

"You can't wear that," Caitlin admonished. "Have you forgotten what happened the last time?"

"Last time I was in the Great Hall. Today I'll be in a dense tropical forest," Emily explained. "Once we're in the forest, we could even strip and no one would be the wiser. So what if someone gets a view in the boat while we're headed to shore, they've already seen me nude."

"But what if Mum or Dad are in the same boat?" Caitlin asked. "They will be extremely upset with you for wearing that dress again."

"Then we just have to make sure we set off at a different time than them," Emily retorted. "They seem to be taking their time eating. Let's get dressed quickly and disembark before them."

Kim shook her head as she wolfed down her remaining food. Emily's stellar plans always seemed to end in trouble, and she was sure that this one would be no different from any other.

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Caitlin quickly slipped on a skirt and mini top, then rushed next door to Emily and Kim's room, where Kim was just finishing tucking her blouse into her skirt. Meanwhile, Emily, who also had already dressed, was adjusting her rucksack. Caitlin was delightfully surprised to see that Emily was wearing a skirt and top and not her infamous sundress.

"How did you talk her into not wearing the dress from Hell?" Caitlin asked Kim.

"I didn't," Kim answered. "One look in the mirror and she decided to face reality."

"I must have grown two inches this summer," Emily said, shaking her head in astonishment. "My whole twat showed. I'm a nudist, not an exhibitionist."

"Sometimes I'm not so sure about that," Caitlin said with a laugh. "Why are you taking the rucksack?"

"Because I believe in being prepared," Emily said. "This baby is filled with ice cold beverages. I'm not going to die of thirst while traipsing through a tropical forest. I called Jeff's room. He and Mark are going to meet us at the launch; they're contacting Brian."

"Then what are we waiting for?" Caitlin asked enthusiastically.

The girls arrived just as a boat was getting ready to depart. They waved for the boys to join them, and then they all hurried on board.

The trip to shore seemed to take no time at all as they were all busy talking.

"Are we going straight away to the rain forest," Kim asked once they had reached land.

"I think its best we do," Caitlin answered. "Its nine o'clock now and the ship is leaving at four. That gives us seven hours. To play it safe, we should probably plan on being here to catch a boat back to the ship no later than three."

"Sounds like a plan," Brian said. Jeff and Mark nodded their agreement.

From where they had come ashore, it was only a short walk over the sugary sand before they came

to vegetation and the edge of the forest. There were a multitude of paths, most with signs indicating the length of the trail and approximately how long it would take the average walker to return to their starting point.

"This trail leads to Mount Liamuiga," Mark suggested. "It's only about three miles away and less than a mile high. We should be able to get there and back with plenty of time to spare."

"That sound good," Kim said. "That would leave us time to do some shopping."

The boys as one moaned at Kim's suggestion, but everyone agreed to heading for the old volcano.

They had walked only about one hundred yards when they realized that the beach was already hidden from view. "When they say dense, they really mean it," Kim commented. "It must be hard to maintain these paths."

"Most people are lazy and ride four-by-fours on the old dirt plantation roads, " Jeff said. "I bet we'll be the only ones to use this path all day."

"If that's the case, why are we still wearing these horrible garments?" Brian questioned.

"Finally someone who thinks like me," Emily said, smiling as she struggled to get the rucksack off her shoulders.

"What are you doing?" Kim inquired, skittishly.

"The same thing as Brian," Emily replied. "We're going to take off our clothes and enjoy this hike."

"But the announcement this morning said that St. Kitts didn't allow public nudity," Kim reminded them.

"Most of the world doesn't allow public nudity, but people go nude every day," Mark explained. "No one is around to see us. What's the problem?"

"Yeah, why not," Caitlin said taking off her clothes. "Let's really enjoy this hike."

Within seconds, Kim was the only one still wearing clothing. "You're not getting shy on us are you?" Brian asked.

Kim lowered her head and shook it no. She had a bad feeling about doing this, but reluctantly slipped out of her clothes.

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The group, despite stopping numerous times to admire flowers and other tropical vegetation, made excellent time reaching the base of Mount Liamuiga, where they picnicked on the beverages and snacks that Emily had thoughtfully packed.

"That was fun," Kim acknowledged as she finished off a second beverage. "Although I doubt I'll ever be as zealous a nudist as the group of you, I have to agree this was certainly fun and harmed no one."

"That's my argument with current laws," Emily declared. "In a free world, people should be allowed to do as they please as long as it doesn't infringe on the rights of others. I don't understand how my being nude encroaches on someone else's rights."

"Neither do I," agreed Caitlin, "but it's not us you have to convince. Are we going to climb the volcano or head back?"

"I think we should head back," Brian remarked. "It will give you girls more time to shop before we have to catch the boat back to the ship. Emily, is that knapsack empty? If it is, we can all stick our clothes in it until we near the beach. I'll carry it for you."

"There is just one beverage left," Emily answered. "Does anyone want it? I personally couldn't drink another drop."

Everyone shook his or her head except Kim. "I hate to see it go to waste," she said reaching for the drink. "They're awfully good."

After depositing their trash in one of the inconspicuous containers provided, they turned and headed back in the direction of the beach on the same path they had used to enter the forest.

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"You still have no recollection of what happened during the time you were kidnapped?" Michelle asked

Hermione shook her head no in response to the question. She had just finished telling Michelle about how Jamie and Alex had saved her from a sure death after she had been abducted "I sometimes have horrible dreams having to do with that time, but have no way of distinguishing whether the scenes contained in the those dreams are factual memories or just my imagination at work," Hermione responded.

"When you initially told me that you and Harry were a witch and wizard, I was extremely envious," Michelle said. "But now after hearing all that you've both been through, I think I'll stick with being a plain old Muggle nurse."

"There is nothing plain or old about you," Hermione insisted. "You simply have a normal life. You can't imagine how many times Harry and I have wished our lives could be quiet."

Michelle stared uncomfortably at Hermione. "The prophecy that you told me about. Is there any chance that it will never take place?"

"I'd like to think so," Hermione said, hopefully "It seems incredible that anyone would be anserine enough to try an resurrect someone as vile and evil as Salazar Slytherin." She paused. "Harry and I have discussed it at length with the girls and with Timmy's parents. We're all concerned, but we refuse to live our lives in a state of constant fear."

Michelle let this statement settle as she thought about the prophecy Hermione had recited to her.

"THE STARS PROCLAIM THE RETURN OF THE GREATEST DARK LORD

FROM THE BLOOD OF INNOCENTS FOUR,
THE GREAT LORD SLYTHERIN'S SPIRIT SHALL POUR.

TWO OF HIS OWN, SEER AND HEIR,
TWO OF HIS ENEMIES, HEALER AND HEIR,
TWO DROPS OF EACH, NOT ANY MORE,

WITH THEIR DEATH BY HIS HAND,
TO HIS BODY HE WILL BE RETURNED,
TO WALK THE EARTH A MORTAL MAN,
BUT WHEN SLYTHERIN AND EVIL ARE JOINED,
NOT EVEN THE COVENANT WILL BRING THE RESULT DOWN.

THE DARKEST OF TIMES THEIR JOINING WILL BRING,
SORROW AND PAIN WILL OFT BE THE FAME.
MANY WILL DIE DREADING THE NAME,
SALAZAR SLYTHERIN.

THE WORLD WILL HAVE BUT ONE HOPE
AND THAT IS TWO CUBED TO EIGHT
WITH HEALTH AND SIGHT AND SPIRIT BRIGHT,
THE HEART AND SOUL AND MIND WILL ADD THEIR WEIGHT

BUT ONLY WHEN THE FLAMING DAUGHTER
AND MOONCHILD JOIN THE FRAY
CAN THE WORLD DEFEAT EVIL
AND RETURN SLYTHERIN TO HIS GRAVE"

Hermione then continued after a moment. "We could have called off this cruise and huddled together in the safety of the Hogwarts castle, but that seemed too much like being cowards and bowing to fear," Hermione said. "Harry and I would opt to live our lives quietly as Hogwarts professors, but if anyone is foolish enough to threaten our children, we'll fight them to the death, just as we had to do when Harry was the target."

Michelle looked Hermione directly in the eyes as the young woman spoke. As she did, Michele saw something she had never noticed before in Hermione. Beneath the obvious beauty and sincere kindness was a courageous, merciless fighter. She pitied the individual who harmed anyone cherished by this woman.

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"Hold up a minute will you," Emily said, as the group made their way back the path.

Without out any further explanation, she stepped just off the path and squatted.

Everyone seemed transfixed as they watched. Only Kim seemed able to verbalize. "Emily, what in the world are you doing?" she asked, taken aback.

"I would think that was fairly obvious," Emily answered, still crouched. "I have to pee." Then for the first time, she noticed the varied expressions on her companions' faces. "Haven't any of you ever seen someone pee before?" she asked in disbelief.

"No," answered Jeff, who was the first to recover his senses.

"Our family did a lot of hiking when I was younger," Emily explained. "When nature calls, you either answer the call or feel miserable until you do. My parents taught Jamie and me to not to be

embarrassed by what were totally natural acts."

Caitlin looked like she had a question on the tip of her tongue, but Brian asked it first. "What if you had to do the other thing?" he asked awkwardly.

"That would depend on the surroundings," Emily answered. "If the ground cover was such that you could see where you were walking, we'd normally go off behind a bush or tree. Under these heavy growth circumstances, I wouldn't consider leaving the path."

"Well I for one am glad you had to go, because I've been dying to take a piss," Mark said, as he began to relieve himself onto the nearby vegetation. Within seconds the other two boys were doing likewise.

"I can't believe I'm going to do this in public," Caitlin said, as she nervously squatted.

Only Kim, who had drank more than any of the others, refused to relieve herself and insisted that she didn't need to go when, in fact, she felt like her bladder was about to burst. She was determined that somehow she would hold it.

As they continued on their way, everyone's spirits, other than Kim's seemed higher.

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Suddenly, Brian came to an abrupt halt. "We're back at the beach already," he said in surprise.

"Wonderful," exclaimed Kim. She knew where her first stop would be.

"Not a soul saw us," Emily proclaimed happily. "I knew we'd get away with it."

"That's where you are wrong," said a livid voice. "You're all under arrest for indecent exposure."

Chapter Five Crime and Punishment

"Sir, we're sorry," Brian beseeched. "Our clothes are in this backpack. No one saw us. Can't you please just let us get dressed and forget that this ever happened?"

"Keep your hands out of that bag and carefully pass it to me," the officer ordered. "You Americans are all the same; you think we're savages and that you're above our laws. I'll be making an example of you six."

"But officer..." Caitlin began to implore.

"Silence!" he bellowed. "I'm not interested in hearing any excuses or pleading. Save your whining for the judge. My truck is just at the end of this path, on the beach; head for it now and don't even think about trying to make a break."

"But don't you want us to dress before leaving the forest?" Kim inquired.

"I want you all to keep your mouths shut and do as you're told!" he answered irately.

Heads turned in shock as the six naked teenagers exited the forest and walked in a line toward the flatbed truck.

"What type of cop drives a flatbed truck?" Jeff asked his companions a little too loudly.

"One that will have no problem shutting your smart ass mouth for you if you open it again," the officer threatened.

"Climb up onto the bed of the truck," he ordered, once they arrived at it.

The boys assisted the girls up and then jumped aboard themselves. The bed of the truck had a pipe railing around its edge with three-foot tall supports located about every five feet.

As the officer opened the passenger side of the truck and leaned in to retrieve something, Caitlin whispered to the others. "What's up with this guy? He arrested us for being nude, but now he's forbidding us to get dressed. No one saw us while we were in the forest, but now we've gathered a healthy size audience."

Before anyone could offer a possible explanation, the officer returned carrying an armful of handcuffs. He threw the cuffs on the bed of the truck and then climbed up himself.

"You!" he yelled, motioning to Jeff. "Come here!" He grabbed Jeff's left wrist and slapped a cuff on it, quickly attaching the other side to the pole nearest the truck cab. He then picked up another pair of cuffs, attached one cuff to Jeff's right hand and ran the short chain around the next support pole before attaching the other half to Caitlin's left wrist.

He continued this pattern until all six teenagers were standing cuffed to the railing facing the ever-increasing group of bystanders. Then he just walked off, leaving them helplessly secured to the rail. For the briefest of moments, Kim's attention was drawn away from her bloated bladder as she listened in embarrassment to two teenaged boys standing next to the truck.

"I've never seen a naked girl before, have you?" The one boy asked animatedly, staring up at Kim in awe.

"No," said his friend. "This is cool! Hey! How about giving us a better look?"

Kim couldn't ignore them, but neither did she answer. She closed her eyes trying to pretend this was simply a terrible dream, but even so, she was powerless to hold back her tears.

Brian, who was handcuffed to Kim's left side, shouted angrily, "Leave her alone!"

"Make me!" shouted the first boy. Then he glanced to his friend. "While he's gone, I'm going to finger her."

Kim recoiled, revolted at the thought, and at the same time realizing also that any incursion in that area would make it impossible for her to hold off peeing.

"No!" shouted Emily, who was shackled to Kim's other side. "Don't waste your time on her. I'll let you really have fun."

"What do you mean by that?" the boy asked, his interest piqued.

"If you give me your word not to lay a hand on her," Emily said, "I'll spread my legs and crouch as low as I possibly can, and I'll let you touch me."

"Emily, you can't," Kim protested.

"Yes I can," Emily persisted. "I got you into this. Besides, you know I can handle these circumstances better than you can. To me they're just body parts."

"Cool!" the boy said eagerly.

Fortunately, just as Emily started to squat down, the officer returned. The two boys and everyone else stepped back a few steps from the truck as he gave the horde an appalled look. "You people are just as bad as these brazen deviates! Go on about your business!"

Slowly, reluctantly the crowd began to disperse.

"Your parents must be extremely proud of you," he said sarcastically, returning his attention to his young captives. "High on drugs, running around completely exposed, and having sex in public."

"We don't do drugs, and we certainly weren't having sex," Caitlin protested.

He turned in the direction of Caitlin, looking as if he were about to slap her surly face, but rejected giving into the desire. "I thought I said no talking! Now I suppose you're going to tell me you're not naked either?" he yelled. "Since you all seem to enjoy exposing yourselves, I believe I'll take the long way back to the station, through town."

Obviously, he expected a strong negative reaction to this comment, but everyone seemed to take it in stride with the exception of Kim. "Please Sir!" she begged. "I have to pee something awful. May I please relieve myself before we start the trip?"

"You may not," he retorted maliciously. "I suggest that you hold it or you'll be facing additional charges." With that said, he returned to the cab of the truck and started the engine.

As the truck bounced insensitively overland toward the main road, Emily gave Kim an anxious look. "How bad is it," she asked concernedly.

"Bad," Kim answered. "I'm afraid I'm going to burst any minute and this incessant bouncing about isn't helping matters any."

"Why don't you just let it out?" Emily suggested. "Squat down and relieve yourself before we reach the main road."

"I can't," Kim responded in dismay. "Not here, not secured like this between you and Brian. I have no way on controlling where it goes; we could all wind up with pee on us."

Emily, felt sorry for her best friend who was clearly suffering, but recognized that she was in no position to offer any real assistance. Hopefully, Kim would be better able to hack it once they were on a smooth roadway.

* * * * *

"That was fun," Hermione remarked, as she and Harry returned to their stateroom. "The tropical forest was so beautiful."

"I liked that we finally all got to do something together," Harry added. "I've felt bad that Ron was always missing out on everything."

"Ron seemed to appreciate that St. Kitts didn't allow nudity," Hermione agreed. "He must feel awfully out of place all the time. I've given up on the prospect that he'll ever feel comfortable enough to take his clothes off around us."

"I agree," Harry said. "He'd only be comfortable enough to do that around Bonnie."

"Bonnie?" Hermione cried, shock evident in her voice. "What makes you think he would be able to undress in front of her when he can't around us?"

"You sound jealous," Harry responded, with a laugh.

"In a way, I am," Hermione answered. "The three of us have been friends since age eleven. She's a total stranger."

"In this case, I think that is an advantage she has over us. Ron likes her, he's seems extremely comfortable with her, and he'll likely never see her again."

"Harry, do you think Ron would cheat on Sam? I mean, he cheated on me when I dated him, and he was pretty lascivious before he got sent to Azkaban." Hermione asked tentatively.

"I was wondering the same thing about Sam today," Harry replied. "I like Jim and Bonnie a lot; they're nice and great fun, but...."

"But what?" Hermione entreated. "Harry, say what you're thinking."

"It's probably just my imagination, but they both act more like they're courting Sam and Ron rather than just being friends," Harry suggested.

"Oh! My God, Harry!" Hermione practically screamed. "I was thinking the same thing. They pay more consideration to Ron and Sam than they do to each other."

"Michelle and Lloyd seemed to give Jim and Bonnie a wide berth," Harry observed.

"I noticed that too, and it's completely out of character for Michelle. She usually likes everyone."

Their conversation came to an abrupt halt when there was a loud knock at the door.

"The captain needs to have a word with you right now," the messenger barked none too politely, when Harry unlocked the door.

* * * * *

"What is with that cop? Is he mental?" Kim moaned, as she and the others waited unattended in a receiving cell, watching the hands of the clock move closer and closer to the scheduled departure time of their ship.

They had broken the law; they all recognized that, but they couldn't fathom the manner in which they were now being treated. In the eyes of the law, they were guilty of indecent exposure for having hiked nude, but thus far their punishment seemed to be a prolongation of their crime, only to a much more serious degree.

Now, still naked, they had spent the last hour in a dank jail cell - a completely bare cell without even a simple bench to sit on and certainly not equipped with a comfort facility.

Finally their tormentor returned, a perturbed expression on his face, carrying Emily's rucksack. He gave them a disgusted look as he forcefully shoved the pack through the bars. "Put your clothes on and be swift about it!" he shouted maliciously. "Your parents are here to pick you up."

From the sound of his voice, it was lucid that he was not at all pleased with the judgment to let them go free. No one spoke, but instead they all rushed to dress before psycho-cop changed his mind. As soon as they were all clothed, he unlocked the cell and pointed reluctantly to a door. Without pause, they all rushed to it, Kim in agony with each step.

"Hurry!" shouted Brian's father to them all. "We have transportation waiting. They said they'd hold the ship for us, but I don't know how long."

Hermione grabbed Emily and Caitlin's hands and hurried them out the door behind Jeff and his brother. Kim stood paralyzed, as if afraid to move.

"We have to dash," Harry said, running to Kim and scooping her up into his arms as if she were a doll. "Don't be afraid," Harry said as he hurried out the door. "Everything is okay now. Hermione and I aren't angry with you. We know this wasn't your idea." Before she had a chance to try and squirm free or even speak, she lost control of her bladder.

At first Harry had absolutely no idea what had happened. It was as if someone had opened a spigot and he was being flooded with warm water. Then Kim burst into tears.

"Oh my god!" she cried. "I'm so sorry professor. I've had to go for hours and he wouldn't let me use... I can't believe... Oh, I could just die..."

"Calm down," Harry said, as usual maintaining his equanimity. "I'm just glad to know that it wasn't just me that caused such a reaction."

In spite of everything, Kim couldn't help but laugh through her tears.

"Ben did the same thing to me yesterday," Harry said with a laugh. "Just hold on to me tight until it's all out."

Harry turned his back to the balance of the group that were now getting into cabs, as the torrent of warm liquid continued to stream out of Kim.

"Harry, what are you and Kim doing?" Hermione shouted. "We have to hurry."

"Just give us a moment," Harry begged. "We have some unfinished business."

Finally, when the flow eventually subsided, Harry allowed Kim to slip to the ground. He waved his hands over Kim as he spoke an enchantment and then did the same to himself.

Kim watched her professor in awe. She knew he was a great wizard but did not realize he was proficient in wandless magic.

"That should do it," Harry said, grabbing Kim hand and running toward the cab. "We better hurry before they leave without us."

Harry jumped into the front seat next to the driver and Kim slid into the back with Brian and his father. As Kim settled herself next to Brian, he sniffed the air and then turned to her.

"How in the world can you spend the day hiking in a tropical forest, then going through what we just went through and still smell as fresh and clean as if you just stepped out of a shower?" Brian asked.

"I don't know," Kim said, as she shrugged her shoulders and smiled at Harry who had turned around in his seat and was now grinning at her.

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"Don't you guys have any common sense?!" Jamie asked Emily, Caitlin and Kim once they returned to their rooms. Harry and Hermione had been asked, along with the parents of the other youths involved, to join the captain. "This isn't Britain. These people could have chucked you in jail and thrown away the key. What would you have had Harry and Hermione do then - magic you out?"

"I never thought we'd be arrested," Emily said.

"That's the problem with you! YOU! NEVER! THINK! Sometimes I'm embarrassed to admit that you're my sister," Jamie said, frustration evident in her voice.

"Emily wasn't the only one," Caitlin said defensively. "We all did it."

"Then you should all be very proud of yourselves!" she roared. "Because of you, the departure of the ship was delayed for over an hour and, once again, Harry finds himself groveling at the feet of that effing captain."

"It wasn't our fault the owls chose now to deliver the letters from Hogwarts," Emily argued.

"No that wasn't," Jamie admitted, "but what happened today was most certainly within your power to prevent. Laws are laws and they must be obeyed whether we like them or not. I detest clothes as greatly as you, but there are times when we have no choice but to wear them."

"But that isn't fair," Emily protested.

"LIFE ISN'T ALWAYS FAIR, AND THE WORLD DOESN'T REVOLVE AROUND YOU!" Jamie retorted. "The sooner you find that out, the better off we'll all be."

Emily sulked as she tried to think of a way to change the subject. "So what did you and Felicite do today while we were getting ourselves arrested?" she asked.

"We spent most of the day at the hospital with her sister, Monica," Jamie answered still rather hotly, but she was beginning to cool down..

"Why? What happened to her?" Kim, who had been sitting quietly, asked.

"She has a broken ankle," Jamie answered in disappointment.

"But she was going to dance in the ship's talent competition," Caitlin shrieked. "How did she go about breaking her ankle?"

"She didn't," Jamie replied, anger evident in her voice. "She was laying on the beach and had actually just dozed off, when a girl playing Frisbee stepped on her ankle and then ran off."

"Hold on," Emily cried. "Haven't I heard this story before?"

"Yeah." Caitlin agreed. "That's how Roz's friends tried to knock Felicite out of the competition last year. That's just too much of a coincidence."

"Felicite and I agree," Jamie said, "especially considering that the girl doing the stepping seems to roughly fit Roz's description."

"What are Monica parents going to do about it? Roz can't be allowed to get away with this!" Emily declared.

"Unfortunately there were no witnesses, and Monica never got a good look at the girl's face," Jamie said disgustedly. "She was in dreadful pain."

"It had to have been Roz," Caitlin said shaking her head. "She's eliminating the strongest competition so that her niece has a better chance of winning. If only I had been there, perhaps I

could have healed it."

"Too late for that now," Jamie said shrugging her shoulders. "Perhaps it's best you weren't there. We've drawn too much attention to ourselves already on this cruise."

"I thought she was different," Kim said downheartedly. "It was my idea for us to befriend Angel. She is just like Roz - cheating so she can win a stupid contest and not caring who she hurts in the process."

"Sad part is that it will probably work," Jamie said disgustingly. "I've seen the tryouts, and the only real competition Angel had was Monica."

Kim had a look of anger on her face. She had reached out to Angel and this was her thanks. She felt betrayed. "Is it too late to enter that contest?" she asked.

"I'm not sure," Jamie answered. "They have pruned the group to what they feel are the top ten entries, but now they've lost Monica. Who did you have in mind?"

"Me!" Kim responded crossly. "Emily, did you mean it when you said you thought I had a good voice."

"Yeah, you sound great, but you can't just stand there and sing. You need some sort of routine and you only have five days to rehearse."

"Caitlin, didn't you say that your Mum and Dad's new friend, Bonnie, was a professional dancer?" Kim asked. "Do you think she might be willing to give me some pointers?"

"She seems very nice. It certainly won't hurt to ask," Caitlin responded.

"Kim, are you sure?" Emily asked. "You have the talent. I mean, you're really good, but you'll have to perform on stage in front of hundreds of people." Emily wavered. "Like you are.... I mean nude. Can you do it?"

"I have to," Kim said assuredly. "I'm not even sure I have any possibility of beating that cow, but I can't just stand out-of-the-way and do nothing."

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"I don't think I've ever met such a miserable man," Hermione said, as she and Harry discussed their meeting with the captain. "He makes Captain Blye seem like a pussy cat."

"I think I'd prefer to be keel hauled rather than meet with him again," Harry said wincingly.

"There for a while, I thought he was going to have us all walk the plank," Hermione laughed.

"He wanted to throw us off the ship. I could see it in his eyes," Harry said. "But he would have had to do it to all the families involved, and I doubt he could have justified that to his superiors."

"I understand him being upset, but even he admitted that the lost time could be made up," Hermione

said. "I'm just thankful that the St. Kitts' judge was understanding. If it had been up to that perverted cop, the kids would be doing time."

"What about the girls?" Harry asked. "We can't just ignore this."

"I have an idea," Hermione suggested. "It will cost us a little money, but I think it will be well worth it to make the punishment fit the crime."

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Day Six, Saturday, August 13, 2005, Barbados

...and passengers are reminded again that public nudity is against the law in Barbados."

"I don't know about you guys," Emily declared, "but I don't think I'm even going to bother leaving the ship today; it's not worth the aggravation."

"Sometimes you make me laugh," Kim said. "Why do you make such a big deal about wearing a swim costume, especially when yours is practically nonexistent?"

"It's just the principle," Emily stated. "I'm still being forced to wear it."

"I wonder if Bonnie is going ashore today?" Kim questioned. "I'd like to ask her about helping me with a routine."

"In that case, we should find the recreation director and see if you can still get in the contest. Then I suggest we head for the pool," Caitlin said. "Professor Weasley and Bonnie spend most of their time there playing chess."

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"I'll be happy to help you," Bonnie said, eagerly, "but we don't have much time. Ron." Bonnie reached over and grasped Ron's hand. "I could really use your help."

"Me?" Ron said horror-struck. "I don't know anything about singing or dancing."

"There's lots you can do to help that doesn't require that," Bonnie replied and then turned her attention to Kim. "Your show is only four days away. Whatever you do, will have to be simple, but at the same time attention grabbing. What in the world can you do to grab attention when you and the other contestants are already performing nude? Do you have any songs in mind?"

"Not really," Kim answered. "This is all fairly spur of the moment."

Suddenly Bonnie had an inspiration. "You're only twelve, but you already have a nice figure. This is a little risqué considering your age, but hopefully the majority of the people in the audience will see the humor intended and find it funny."

"What do you have in mind?" Ron asked, his interest having been incited.

"I thought that perhaps she could..."

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"What do you think Mum and Dad want to see us about?" Emily asked.

"I'm sure it has something to do with yesterday's fiasco," Caitlin answered. "They probably want to insure that there isn't a similar occurrence today."

"I'm amazed they didn't punish us; at least shout at us," Kim remarked.

"They seldom yell, but they do have a knack of making you feel really bad; like you let them down big time," Caitlin explained. "We should have never hiked nude."

"I still don't see that we did anything so dreadful," Emily grumbled. "Everything would have been fine if that cop hadn't 'gone off the deep end' with us. It was outlandish the way he paraded us around, not even letting you take a pee." She looked intently at Kim.

"How in the world did you manage to hold it so long? Emily asked. "Why you didn't even sprint to the bathroom when we got back to the ship. You must have the strongest bladder in the world."

"Not quite," Kim responded, a ruby glow covering her face, but she didn't comment any further. "Oh look! Here come your parents. It looks like they've been shopping."

Harry and Hermione both had a devilish look on their face as they approached the girls. Hermione was holding Benjamin, who appeared to be snacking on the run.

"We wanted to talk to you girls before you went ashore today," Hermione started, continuing to feed Ben.

"Don't worry Mum," Emily interrupted. "We learned our lesson yesterday. Kim has rehearsal with Bonnie this afternoon, so we're just going to go have a quick look-see, but we'll be wearing our swim costumes." Emily had been clutching hers in her hand and held it up.

"You most certainly will," Harry said, "but not that one. Your mother and I decided to buy all of you new swim costumes to be worn ashore for the balance of the trip."

"But Antigua and St. Maarten allow nudity," Caitlin said timidly.

"This is your punishment for what occurred yesterday," Hermione said. "If you wear these today and tomorrow without argument, Harry and I will reconsider allowing you to go nude on St. Maarten on Monday."

As Hermione handed the identical swimsuits to the girls, they were acknowledged by three completely different reactions. From Caitlin's expression, it was evident that she didn't like the costume, but was willing to accept it as her punishment. Kim seemed to like the attire and was

thrilled that they were all the same. Then there was Emily.

"You actually expect us to wear those!?" she asked aghast. "We might as well go to the beach fully dressed. It looks like a dress with attached knickers. Why not just restrict us to the ship?"

"You can remain on board if you prefer," Harry said. "That would, of course, cancel out any reconsideration of nudity on St. Maarten."

"So then what it comes down to is that our punishment for what we did yesterday is to humiliate ourselves for the next two days," Emily said angrily.

"They're not that bad," Caitlin said.

"I kind of like them," Kim said. "And I really fancy the fact that we'd all be dressed the same."

"Emily, we didn't buy them with the intention to shame you, but rather to fully cover you," Harry said. "Hermione and I would never intentionally do anything to humiliate you. I'm sure that wasn't your intention either yesterday, but never the less it was the result. Your actions resulted in both of us being deeply embarrassed."

Emily looked at Hermione, tears filling her eyes. Then she turned to Harry. "I'm sorry. I'll wear it and I won't protest."

Harry held out his hands and Emily leaped into his arms. "You're allowed to complain," Harry said, holding her tightly. "You wouldn't be the Emily we love if you didn't complain."

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"I'm glad Dad said it was okay for me to bitch about this costume," Emily said as they neared the transport back to the ship.

"He wasn't giving up any ground," Caitlin said with a smile. "Dad knew you wouldn't be able to resist griping."

"If you two would be truthful, you'd own up that you loathe wearing these as much as I do," Emily quarreled.

"I'll admit it," Kim said, much to both Emily and Caitlin astonishment. "Going to the beach is much more comfortable the other way. I've spent the entire day pulling at this costume; it insists on giving me a wedgie, and the elastic is grinding the sand into my skin."

"I feel like someone poured a bucket of sand on me," Caitlin moaned. "I can't wait to shower."

"You know what I've found to be most extraordinary?" Kim asked, but then went on without waiting for an answer. "It seems that people watch you more when you're wearing a costume than when you're not. It's like they are waiting, hoping to see something they're not supposed to see. When you're naked they certainly check you out more thoroughly, but then they seem to go about their business realizing that they've seen all there is to see."

"Do my ears deceive me," Emily asked with a laugh. "Is Kim Thatcher actually starting to enjoy naturism?"

Kim blushed. "In ways. I most certainly still don't enjoy that initial inspection. That's my biggest concern with the contest, but I'm starting to feel more relaxed. I thoroughly enjoyed hiking yesterday."

"It takes time, but I think you'll eventually get over that feeling of being inspected," Caitlin observed.

"Maybe it's because I've always been a nudist, but it doesn't bother me at all when people gawk," Emily added. "I'd have no problem being an artist's model or even letting an anatomy class examine me."

"I'm most certainly not ready for that," Kim said, shuddering at the thought.

"Poising nude wouldn't be a problem for me," Caitlin said, "but wouldn't an anatomy class be examining you extremely closely, actually touching and probing you?"

"I guess," Emily answered nonchalantly. "I don't think I'd have a problem with that."

"I can't wait to see what ideas Bonnie has come up with," Kim said as they boarded the launch.

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Day Seven, Sunday, August 14, 2005, Antigua

"Just two more days. Are you as eager as I am?" Jim asked keenly. He and Sam were playing Frisbee, Timmy and Lynn playing in the sand nearby.

"I'm sure it will be fun," Samantha answered lukewarmly. "Ron can't wait, but then you guys are usually more into that sort of thing than us women."

"Sometimes that's true," Jim agreed, "but Bonnie seems to be looking forward to this Tuesday as much as I am."

"I hope I don't ruin the evening for everyone else," Sam said, "but honestly I don't see what all the anticipation is about."

Jim's face dropped.

"I'm sorry Jim. My mind is somewhere else," Sam said, dejectedly. "Sometimes I feel this vacation was a huge mistake. Instead of spending time with Ron, I feel like we're growing apart."

"If it helps any, Bonnie tells me that most of their conversations revolve around you," Jim said. "I've actually become somewhat resentful of Ron. It seems Bonnie has run a comparison check, and in her eyes, I don't stack up nearly as well as your husband does."

"Perhaps a naturist cruise wasn't the best option for a vacation, taking into consideration his unwillingness to part with his clothes, but if I were you, I wouldn't for one second doubt his love. I'm sure everything will be fine once you two are back together on familiar ground."

Sam ran to Jim and threw her arms around him. "Thanks, you made me feel a lot better," she said, then kissed his cheek. "I'm sorry. I'm sure I'll have a great time on Tuesday."

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"Harry, am I a sex fanatic?" Hermione asked as they lay sunning near the pool, Ben sleeping contently next to her in his basinet.

"Not that I can tell," he said, "but I'd have no complaints if you turned into one. That's assuming, of course, that I'd be the object of your lust. What exactly brought about this topic of conversation?"

"I was just laying here looking at you, and I suddenly had the strongest urge to take you in my mouth and pleasure you here and now in full view of all these people."

"Damn you, Hermione Jane," Harry cursed as he quickly rolled over onto his stomach. "You know full well that you'd never do any such thing in public. The only reason you said that was to see if it would cause a reaction. Are you happy?"

"I'd be happier if you hadn't rolled over and hid," she confessed. "You know I love seeing you naked and hard."

"Will you kindly change the subject?"

"Okay, I think Kim has a school girl crush on you," Hermione said.

"Kim? I hardly think so," Harry said lightly. "She might think of me as a father figure, since her real step dad was horrible, but nothing more."

"She was certainly holding on to you tightly enough the other night," Hermione said.

"Now that you mention it, I guess one could say that she was showering me with her affection." Harry laughed. "Hermione, Kim hadn't peed all day. The poor girl was about to burst. When I lifted her into my arms to hasten for the cab, she lost all control. I stood there holding her, trying to hide the fact that she was inundating me with what seemed like a gallon of pee."

"Oh my! The poor thing must have been mortified, and you..." Hermione just stared at Harry lovingly. "You just continued to hold her and then did a cleansing charm on you both. You had no intentions of telling me, did you?"

Harry shook his head.

"I'm sorry for prying it out of you." Hermione thought a bit and then chuckled. "Since the two of you have been intimate enough to share a shower, has she told you what her talent will be in the contest?"

"No," Harry laughed. "That seems to be a well protected secret. Even Ron declined to tell me what's going on. All I know is that she is doing a combination song and dance."

"Kim is extremely fortunate that a professional dancer is willing to take time away from her vacation to lend her a hand."

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Day Eight, Monday, August 15, 2005, St. Maarten

"I thought for sure they'd tell us at breakfast that we could skip these costumes today," Emily said moodily, as she look disgustingly at her skirted swim costume.

"There were busy talking to Sam and Professor Weasley. Maybe they just forgot," Caitlin suggested.

"I know this is going to sound completely out of character, but I was really looking forward to going back to the way things were today," Kim said.

Emily looked quickly around the room. "Who said that? It sounded like Kim's voice, but she'd never look forward to being nude."

"Maybe this isn't really Kim. Maybe it's some Polyjuice substitute. I bet it's a boy," Caitlin said between giggles.

"Is that possible," Emily asked, suddenly turning very serious. "Can a boy become a girl and visa versa using Polyjuice?"

"I don't know," answered Kim. "That would certainly make for some interesting observations."

"Can you imagine, suddenly having a willie down there!?" Caitlin squealed.

"I think we should try it," Emily suggested, "when we get back to school. I know Mum still has all her notes and everything from when she and Dad did it in their second year; I've seen them."

"It would be neat to be a boy for an hour, but what if something went terribly wrong?" Kim asked concernedly.

"What could possibly go wrong?" Emily asked.

"Off the top of my head, I can think of a number of things," Caitlin said. "Don't forget, Mum turned into a half-cat/half-girl. I don't want to end up with a boy's chest." Caitlin cupped her breasts in her hands. "They aren't much, but they're all I have, and I've waited forever for them."

"I'm sure Mum would have it in her notes if there are any restrictions," Emily said assuredly.

"Besides, it's not like we'd be doing it tomorrow. We have plenty of time to think about it. Lets just be sure to get the necessary ingredients when we refill our potion supplies."

"Bonnie booked practice time for late this afternoon," Kim advised. "Lets put our swim costumes on and make the best of our last day on the beach."

The girls had just finished dressing when there was a knock on the door.

"Hermione and I were afraid you girls already left for shore," Harry said as he entered the room. "We wanted to inspect you before you left."

"Inspect us?" all three girls mumble.

"Yes, inspect you," Harry said sternly as Hermione stood back trying to keep a straight face.

"Line up shoulder to shoulder," Harry barked. "Stomachs in! Chests out!" Harry assessed the girls as if he were a commanding officer inspecting his troops. He leaned forward and whispered something in Caitlin's ear that made her blush, and then he turned to Hermione. "What do you think?"

Hermione smiled and nodded her head. "Give the order."

Harry also smiled, and then shouted. "Strip and hit the beach!"

The girls didn't even exchange glances. They were too busy screaming with glee as they swiftly removed their costumes and threw them on the bed. Then after expressing their thanks, they headed to the door. Caitlin, however, hesitated and then ran back to Harry. "Hold me, Dad," she said, reaching out to Harry.

As Harry supported Caitlin, she kissed him on the cheek before whispering something in his ear. Harry gave her a hug.

Caitlin clung to Harry's neck as she slid to the ground. "I love you Dad," she said before turning to Hermione. "I love you Mum." Caitlin then gave her Mum a huge hug before running to catch up with Kim and Emily.

"What was that all about," Hermione asked when they were alone. "What did you whisper to her to spark that outburst?"

"I just told her that she was getting much better at chest out."

"Harry, you didn't," Hermione said, shock evident in her voice. "She's your little girl. It's embarrassing for a young girl to have their father notice the physical changes that are taking place in their bodies, yet alone discuss them. Why did you mention that?"

"We both know that she has been very conscious of her chest for some time," Harry began to explain. "As I was waiting for you to catch up to me, I put my ear to the door to see if they were in."

"Right. I saw that," Hermione acknowledged.

"When I did," Harry continued, "I heard her say, 'They aren't much, but they're all I have, and I've waited forever for them.' I just knew that she was talking about her breasts. So, I moved away from the door to think of a humorous way I could make her feel better about that issue and came up with the military shtick."

"That was funny," Hermione said with a smirk, "Did you hear anything else they said?"

"No, that was it."

"Well, what did she say to you?"

"Thanks for noticing, Dad. But no matter how big they get, I'll always be your little girl and I'll always love you and want you to hold me like this."

"She said that?" Hermione asked.

"Yes," Harry said, nodding his head. "I think our little girl is dealing with some mixed emotions about growing up."

"I'm having the same feelings," Hermione said, sorrowfully. "Emily and Caitlin are both becoming young women. I'm proud of them both, but I wish I could have shared more of their little girl years."

"Me too!" Harry agreed desolately.

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"I'm sorry Sam, but I just can't do it," Ron said, a defeated tone to his voice, as they both sat near the pool. Sam, of course, was nude. Ron actually was too, except for a towel wrapped protectively around his waist, a towel he refused to abandon.

"Ron, there is no one about but us," Sam said encouragingly. "Most passengers will be spending the day in St. Maarten. Just give it a try. I promise that I won't desert you."

Ron looked about nervously. If necessary, he would die for this woman, but she wasn't asking him to die, just slip into the pool. He looked around again, tugged the towel off, and before Sam realized what was happening, he was in the pool.

"You did it," Sam said gleefully.

"Yeah! I did it!" Ron said as he apprehensively clung to the corner of the pool. "Now will you shield me so I can get out and return to our room?"

"Not until I give you a reward," Sam said, jumping into the pool and immediately hugging Ron and giving him a sound kiss.

"Thanks, Sam," Ron said sarcastically. "I'm sure that you being plastered all over me will really help to relax me."

"Sam, I tried. Please, let's get out of here before anyone sees me," he implored, but it was too late.

"Good morning Sam, Professor Weasley," Jamie said happily. "Finally got him in the water I see."

"Just a quick dip," Sam said, trying to shield Ron. "Aren't you going ashore today?"

"In just a bit," Jamie answered. "I like to start my day by swimming a few laps." That said Jamie started doing some warm up exercises, her back to the Weasleys.

"Where is Timmy," Jamie asked.

"She's with Bonnie and Jim," Sam answered. "He's going to miss their daughter. He and Lynn have become good friends."

"That is a depressing element of holidays," Jamie said with a sigh. "Often you meet wonderful people, only to never get to see them again." Jamie slipped into the pool and started swimming.

As they were talking to Jamie, a large number of people had started to claim lounges in the area of the pool.

"How am I going to get out of here?" Ron said in a panic.

"I'm sorry," Sam cried. "I feel like I forced you do to this."

"Look, I know this is none of my business," Jamie said swimming up to them, "but it's apparent you guys have a problem. May I help?"

"I'm not sure what you can do to help," Sam said. "I talked Ron into getting in here and now we seem to be trapped."

"How strong are you Professor?" Jamie asked. "Do you think you could carry both Sam and me at the same time?"

"That is probably the only benefit to being a werewolf," Ron whispered nervously. "We have incredible strength. But I don't see how my physical prowess will help in this situation."

"My dad had a bad habit of getting aroused at the most inopportune time," Jamie explained. "Mum and I, or if Mum wasn't around, Emily and I would often shield him until he could get out of view. When it was Emily, and I we pretended to be fooling around. Emily would hang on his back and he would carry me against his front. To anyone that was watching it looked like he was carrying me off and Emily was trying to stop him."

Sam looked at Jamie and then at Ron. "What do you think Ron? Could you do it? We'll pretend to fool around, and then you can grab me in your arms and carry me off right up the pool steps and down that empty passageway." She pointed to a passageway beyond the steps. "Jamie will hang on your back covering your rear. Once were out of eye sight, Jamie can run back for the towels."

"I don't know," said Ron reluctantly, as he watched some more people occupy chairs around the pool. "I don't have any better ideas and if we don't do something soon, I'll be stuck here all day."

"Just one thing," Jamie added. "I'm sure we'd all be more comfortable doing this the way Sam described, but since I've got some experience with this, it might be better if I cover the front."

Ron looked around. Even more people were arriving, and now some were starting to enter the pool. "I... I... Sam she's done this before. I just want to get out of here," he said, now definitely in a panic.

"Okay," Jamie said. "Don't waste time. I'm going to scream and splash you. Immediately pick me up, but don't hold me in your arms. That won't hide enough. Pick me up by my bottom and hold me tightly against you."

Jamie didn't give either Sam or Ron a chance to argue. She stood directly in front of Ron and gave a fake scream as she began to splash him with water. Almost forgetting either of them was nude, Ron reached his arms around Jamie, and lifted her off the bottom of the pool.

"Don't think about anything," Jamie encouraged Ron, as she pretended to still horseplay and Sam leaped onto his back. "Just head for those steps."

As they neared the steps, Jamie realized that Ron wasn't holding her tight enough, his erect penis would be clearly visible when they got above the water line. Without wavering, she grabbed it, forced it upward between their stomachs and then wrapped her arms tightly around Ron to hold it in place.

No one said a word until they reached the shelter of the passageway. By that point, Ron's concentration on keeping up the charade caused him to return to a flaccid state. "I'll run back for the towels," Sam said.

"I believe it's safe to put me down now," Jamie said with a smile. "Sorry about grabbing you, but it was somewhat on display."

"You weren't uncomfortable doing that at all, were you." Ron said more as a statement than a question. He was obviously embarrassed that she had to grab that part of his anatomy.

"No, not really," Jamie said coolly as Sam ran up to them and handed Ron his towel. "It's difficult to explain, but Emily and I were brought up in an atmosphere totally alien to most people. What do you think of first when I say naked or nude? Please be honest."

Ron turned pink and after some dithering said, "Sex."

"Don't be embarrassed; that's what most people would answer. Our society has come to equate nudity with sex. Emily and I would have both answered 'comfort'. It's the same if you mention penis or vagina. Most people immediately think of sex, despite the fact that people urinate a lot more from those areas than they have sex with them. Professor, until you can purge sex from your definition of nudity, I doubt you'll ever be able to enjoy the naturist lifestyle."

Jamie checked her watch. "I have to go meet my friends; enjoy St. Maarten."

Ron watched until Jamie turned the corner and then turned to Sam. "They should have her teaching sex education, not me."

"I'm sure the boys would like that; she'd most likely teach the class in the nude," Sam said. "On second thought they might not like it; she'd doubtlessly require the students be naked, as well."

"I think she nailed my problem though," Ron said, a look of self-disgust on his face. "I can't think of nudity without thinking of sex."

Chapter Six From Heaven to Hell

Day Nine, Tuesday, August 16, 2005, At Sea

8:00 AM Breakfast

"Our luxurious holiday is almost over," Harry observed despondently between mouthfuls of his breakfast. "I'm going to miss being treated as if I were a king."

"It's amazing how not being able to use magic doesn't matter that much when you have people hastening to wait on you hand and foot all the time," Jamie said, as she held a sleeping Ben in her arms.

"People who I'm sure are being paid well, receive time off and probably have an excellent benefits package to boot," Hermione added.

"Hermione, we still have two days of our vacation left. Please don't go spoiling them by starting up on the elf rights stuff again," Ron moaned.

"Well it's true," Hermione huffed, taking a drink of her orange juice.

"What does everyone have planned for our second to last day at sea?" Harry asked trying to change the subject.

"Caitlin and I are going to hang around the splash pool with the boys and work on our tans," Emily advised. "Later on today there is going to be a body painting contest."

"Are you going to enter?" Hermione inquired.

"We want to, but I'm not sure if the boys will agree or not," Caitlin answered. "You have to enter as partners. They didn't sound too keen about us painting them."

"Professor, have you noticed how I've finally evened out?" Kim asked out of the blue. "You can't see my swim costume lines at all anymore."

"Yes," Harry answered. "I've also noticed that your confidence level has improved dramatically. I think you just might be starting to like being a naturist."

"I believe I am," Kim said. "I never thought I'd say this, but I'm going to hate going back to wearing clothes."

"Don't believe her," Caitlin giggled. "That's not really Kim. Emily and I spotted whoever it is drinking Polyjuice."

"Urgh! Caitlin, that joke is getting old," Emily groaned.

Caitlin responded in kind by blowing Emily a raspberry.

"Mum, that reminds me, we have a question about Polyjuice," Emily said. "When you guys used it in your second year, Dad and Professor Weasley became those blokes Crabbe and Goyle and you thought you were going to be that fat girl, Millicent Bultstrode. Could you have become perhaps Goyle if you wanted or must the person you change into be the same sex that you are?"

Hermione stared at Emily, then went to get up, but stopped, realizing where she was.

"Now you gone and done it; ruined Mum's vacation," Caitlin chided Emily. "You've asked her a question she doesn't know the answer to and we're two days away from a library."

"I don't recall the potion having any restriction other than it had to be a human and not an animal," Hermione said. "That would be truly creepy. Having your appearance change to that of another person is strange enough without it being someone of the opposite gender."

"What made you ask about Polyjuice?" Harry asked.

"The same as just now," Emily explained. "We were kidding about it not really being Kim, but probably some boy using Polyjuice. Then we wondered if that were actually possible."

Harry nodded his head in understanding. "How about the Weasley's? Do you guys have any special plans for today?"

"Probably just hang around the pool," Sam said. "I can't remember the last time I had a tan this dark."

"I'm going to make sure I get my fair share of food these last couple of days," Ron said.

"Poor boy, like you've starved up to now," Sam remarked, shaking her head at Ron. "Tonight, of course, we plan on going to the casino with Jim and Bonnie. Are you guys sure you won't join us?"

"You have your fun," Hermione said. "I've been rather in opposition to gambling every since my grandfather became addicted. He died leaving my grandmother practically penniless. Thankfully, Mum and Dad had good jobs and could help her out."

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9:00 AM

"Where are you off to so early?" Draco asked, pulling Ginny toward him and into an embrace.

"I have to go into Hogsmeade," Ginny answered. "Ron asked me to remove the wards off their apartment so that the landlord could show it to some prospective tenants."

"Right. I forgot that your brother was moving into the castle this weekend," Draco muttered. "There goes the neighborhood."

"Actually, I guess it not all terrible news," Malfoy said, after some thought. "It will be nice having Timmy closer at hand. I'll get to see more of my son and have the opportunity to take a greater part in his upbringing. It will be nice to see Samantha too, especially when she runs about unclothed."

"You've seen Sam nude?" Ginny asked, visibly upset at the likelihood. "I mean other than when you two conceived Timmy."

"Yeah," Draco said understatedly. "I guess the first time was about four months ago. I was running early to pick up Timmy, and your brother had just departed a few minutes before I got to their apartment. Sam thought he had forgotten something and had returned - she flung the door open wide. I'm not sure which of us was the most surprised."

"So what happened?" Ginny asked.

"She looked around the room and, after realizing there was nothing available to put on, just shrugged her shoulders. She commented that if she was going on a nudist cruise, she had better become accustomed to people seeing her naked. Anyway, Timmy was there. We had tea and then Timmy and I left."

"My nude sister-in-law sat and had tea with you," Ginny said flabbergasted. "You don't think that perhaps you should have shared this news with me before now?"

"No, actually I don't see why you're acting so upset at the moment," Draco said. "I've seen her starkers on a number of occasions since then. Hell, a week doesn't go by that I don't see one of the Potter girls naked."

"That's not the point," Ginny said. "You were once involved with Sam."

"But I'm with you now," Draco reminded her."

He then pulled Ginny close to him, lifted her skirt and plunged his hand into her knickers. "I think you're going to be late meeting that landlord," he said, grabbing the delicate material in his hand and with a single jerk ripping the tiny knickers off. "Why do you insist on wearing these?" He asked, tossing the now worthless item of clothing to the floor.

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11:00 AM

"Ron, are you one hundred percent positive about tonight?" Bonnie asked, concernedly.

"Sure," Ron answered. "I've been looking forward to it ever since our first conversation."

"It's just that," Bonnie hesitated, "I don't want things to change between us. Jim and I have done this before, and in most cases, it's been the last we've seen of the other couple. I like you and don't want to lose your friendship."

Ron stared at Bonnie, for the moment totally forgetting their chess game. *"Why should an evening of gambling change how you feel about people?"* he wondered.

"Bonnie, I'm hoping that we both have an enjoyable evening, but no matter what happens we've had a pleasurable week," Ron declared, giving up on trying to figure out Bonnie's concern. "I value the friendship that we've acquired and have no intentions of just tossing it aside."

"I don't want to lose you and Sam as friends either," Bonnie proclaimed. "By the way, Jim suggests that we eat at the early sitting tonight. That will give us more time,"

"I'm totally in favor of that," Ron agreed. "I want to really enjoy our time together."

Bonnie's face flushed.

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1:00 PM

"I haven't seen you guys for the last few days," Angel said as she walked up to Emily, Kim and Caitlin.

"Did you hear someone talking?" Emily asked the other girls, ignoring Angel.

"Not anyone I want anything to do with," Caitlin answered.

"I'm sorry about Roz the other day," Angel implored. "You know how she is. I'm pretty much forced to do what she says."

"No matter who it hurts!" Kim cried out. "I thought you were different, but you're just like her."

"Your aunt doesn't want you hanging around us or having anything to do with us," Emily said. "Well, tell her not to worry. We don't want anything to do with you either."

"But what did I...?" Angel stared at the girls, not seeming to understand why they were treating her as they were.

"Why don't you just move along and go practice for the contest," Emily said. "Obviously, winning it means an awful lot to you."

Angel turned and ran, tears streaming down her face.

"She acted upset," Kim remarked. "It was as if she didn't know what we were talking about."

"I think the key word there is acted," Caitlin replied.

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9:00 PM

"I'm happy that you were able to join us for dinner tonight," Hermione commented as everyone finished up his or her dessert.

"It was unquestionably our pleasure," Michelle said. "After all you and Harry are certainly the two most fascinating passengers on the cruise."

"You have an interesting way with words," Harry said, a smile on his face.

"Don't mind Michelle," Lloyd said. "She adores you guys - has since she met you last year. The magic thing is just sort of a bonus. What are your plans for next year? Will you be returning to Cap

d'Adge?"

Harry glanced at Hermione, who smiled and nodded her head. "I'm sure we will. Hermione and I have come to love the naturist lifestyle and the girls - well, you know that naturism is a very important aspect of who they are."

"We'll have to keep in touch then," Lloyd suggested. "Perhaps we can schedule our holidays for the same time?"

"Sounds good to me," Harry said.

"Do you think your friends will be giving Cap d'Adge a try?" Lloyd asked.

"Not unless a miracle occurs in the interim," Harry responded. "Sam and Timmy love everything connected with being a naturist, but Ron, I'm afraid, will always be a textile."

"I noticed that he didn't seem to be having a very good time accept when he was playing chess," Lloyd commented. "Speaking of Ron and Sam, where are they tonight?"

"They dined at the early sitting along with the girls," Harry said. "Jamie and the others are babysitting Lynn and Timmy tonight so that Sam and Ron can spend some time with Jim and Bonnie. They are going to the casino."

"I doubt that if the kids are being babysat," said Michele rather maliciously. "Jim and Bonnie are swingers."

"I don't understand," said Hermione.

Michele stared at Hermione in disbelief. "I think you've been away from our world too long. Haven't you noticed how they act toward Sam and Ron? To Jim and Bonnie, swapping spouses or partners is their idea of fun. I doubt very much that they will get anywhere near the casino tonight."

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"My god, I can't believe they'd do this!" Hermione bawled as she and Harry practically ran through the passageways until they reached Ron's stateroom.

"What do you intend to do?" Harry asked. "They are adults."

"Harry, they're our best friends," Hermione cried. "This will destroy their marriage; we just can't stand by and let them..."

"We can't just barge in either," Harry warned. "What if Bonnie and Ron are, you know, doing it?"

"If they are, I hope they both enjoy spending the balance of their lives as slugs," she vented maliciously.

Hermione pointed her wand at the door to Ron's suite. "*REDUCTO*," she shouted, blasting the door to shreds, and then charging heatedly into the room.

Before Harry could follow, Hermione's face turned pallid and then crimson.

"Oh my god Harry, I can't believe what I just did," Hermione said, looking as if she were about to heave her dinner. She turned back toward the opening, shouted "*REPARO*" and then rushed to their accommodations.

Caitlin stuck her head out to check on the noise, but Harry motioned with his hand for her to return to her room.

Hermione flung herself on the bed, tears pouring from her eyes, as there was a knock at the door.

"Don't open it, Harry. I can't face them," Hermione pleaded.

"What is it?" Harry asked, trying to console her. "What did you see? Were Ron and Bonnie having sex?"

"No," said Hermione. "I can't believe I just burst in on them like that. I'll never be able to face them."

"Hermione, I don't understand. What happened?" Harry implored.

Hermione looked up at him as she fought to hold back the tears. "I shattered the door and barged in on Ron and Sam having sex."

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Earlier that evening 7:30 PM after the Early Seating

"Ron, why don't you and Bonnie take Timmy and Lynn to the girls' stateroom and get them settled in for the night." Jim suggested. "There is something I want to show Sam, then we'll meet you at your room, and we'll all head to the casino together."

Ron agreed, but watched questioningly as Sam and Jim departed. He wondered what Jim wanted to show Sam that necessitated them going to his stateroom.

"What did you want to show me?" Sam asked.

"That was just an excuse so we could get away," he said. "By the way; that was a good cover story you and Ron came up with - telling the girls we were going to the casino."

"But we are, aren't we?" Sam said, a bewildered expression on her face, as they reached Jim's stateroom.

"I guess we could later," he said opening the door, "then you wouldn't be lying."

The door had no more than closed behind them when Jim turned and said. "You can't imagine how eagerly I've awaited this moment." Without further word, he seized Sam and slid his fingers into the fold of her vulva.

"WHAT THE HELL DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING!?" Sam yelled as she pulled away from

Jim and gave him a firm slap across the face.

Jim looked at her, both surprised and confused. "Why did you do that? I thought you were looking forward to swapping partners for the night as much as I was?"

"Swapping? SWAPPING PARTNERS!? Is that what you meant by adult entertainment!?" Sam asked incredulously. "I actually thought you were referring to going the casino. I'm happily married, and I define married as being faithful to your partner!"

"Did you truly think I would have sex with you?" Sam asked, dismayed. "Jim, I thought you were a nice guy, but I'd never consider cheating on my..." Then Sam came to a horrible comprehension. "Is Bonnie under the same misconception? Does she think Ron wants to swap?"

"I would imagine that they might be doing so at this very moment," Jim said. "Under those circumstances are you sure you don't want to reconsider?"

"No I don't," Sam said mournfully. "I'm not sure that I'll ever be able to forgive Ron, but I know I'd never excuse myself." Sam headed for the door.

"Where are you going?" Jim asked. "What if they're still at it?"

"If that possibility is reality, don't be at all surprised if your wife returns to you in a somewhat bruised and battered condition."

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Sam stood outside the door, not knowing what to do. A part of her wanted to burst into the room and hex the occupants fiercely. Another part of her wanted to collapse of the floor and drown in her tears.

Slowly she grasped the knob and opened the door. There they were: together in the middle of the room - playing chess. "Chess! You're playing chess!" she said, choking on her tears.

"I'm not a family wrecker," Bonnie said. "I've been struggling over tonight for the last few days. I like both you and Ron a lot and didn't want to lose our friendship. I was relieved to discover that it was all just a misunderstanding."

"Then nothing happened between you?" Sam asked.

"Not exactly nothing," Ron answered. "She's beating me pretty quickly here. Guess my mind was on you."

"But when you realized what was going on, why didn't you come after me? Weren't you concerned?" Sam asked.

"It was a combination of trust and guilt," Ron said timidly. "Bonnie assured me that you were safe and that Jim would never force you to do something you didn't want to do. I knew that if you decided to sleep with him, it would be of your own volition."

"You would have been all right with that?" Sam asked stunned.

"No, not really, but I felt I owed you," Ron said. "I haven't been there for you and Timmy this week - not one bit. I've been hiding behind a chessboard. I trusted you not to, but at the same time if you had, I could hardly blame you.

"I'm not going to hide anymore," Ron said. Before either Bonnie or Sam realized what was happening, he slipped out of his shirt and dropped his shorts and drawers to the floor.

"I'm going to be one of you at least for the rest of this cruise and I hope beyond."

Sam rushed to Ron, smothering him with kisses and embracing him tightly.

"Sam, I swear I'm going to do this, but it won't be easy if the first thing you do is cause me to have a stiffy in front of Bonnie."

"I think that's my signal to go," Bonnie said. "Are the three of us alright?"

"We're more than alright," Sam said. "And the damage between me and Jim is repairable."

"Then I'll be going," Bonnie said. "I suggested to Ron earlier that we actually go to the casino, but I have a feeling you two might have other plans."

It seemed Ron and Sam hadn't heard her. They were already initiating their 'plans' as she slipped quietly out the door.

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"Harry, they're our best friends, but I'll never be able to face them again," Hermione cried burying her head in the pillow.

"Well you're going to have to, and, as you Brits say, 'straight away'!" Sam said with quite a bit of indignation. She and Ron had suspended their hormonal activity and followed Harry and Hermione back to their stateroom.

"I'm so sorry," Hermione blubbered, incapable of looking directly at either of her friends.

"Muggles have a time tested way of thwarting such mishaps," Ron said with sarcasm and crossness. "Being Muggle born, I would have thought that you might have heard of it. It's called knocking."

"I know," Hermione whimpered, "but I thought you were..."

"You thought I was with Bonnie and that I was cheating on Sam," Ron said, cutting Hermione short. "The pre-Azkaban Ron probably would have done just that and not worried the slightest about the consequences. This Ron knows better! I realize what a fantastic loving wife I have, and I'm not about to risk losing her for the sake of a one-night fling."

"I'm sorry Ron, I should have had more faith in you, but when I became aware of what Jim and Bonnie truly meant by 'adult entertainment', I panicked," Hermione said, her head still buried.

"I understand," Sam said. "As much as I love Ron and recognize that he loves me, I too was concerned, especially when I got to our stateroom and heard Bonnie's voice inside."

"Then you understand why I burst in?" Hermione said, hoping that somehow Ron and Sam could forgive her.

"We understand," Ron said seriously, "but we'll still have to perform a memory charm on you."

Hermione's head burst out of the pillow as together she and Harry looked at Ron in sheer disbelief.

"He's kidding," Sam said. "What's done is done. We'll all just have to learn to live with it."

"If we're going to just live with it, could you two possibly have another go at it since I missed it the first time?" Harry asked, a wide grin on his face. "You know, sort of a show and tell for adults. I'm always keen to be taught new techniques."

"Then you will have to get some porn," Ron retorted as he gave Harry an evil look and Hermione tossed a pillow at him. Sam reacted differently, however, as she threw her arms around Harry and kissed him. "You two are the best friends a couple could ever have," Sam said, giving Hermione a caring glance.

"How come he's always the one to get kissed?" Ron complained.

"Because you always back away whenever I get within touching distance of you," Hermione countered briskly. "Stay put and I'll give you the identical treatment."

Ron did not have time to respond before Hermione had closed the distance between them and kissed him, too. It wasn't until Hermione felt something squeezed against her that she broke the embrace.

"Ron, you're naked," she said, as much amazed at the fact that she hadn't noticed as she was at the fact itself.

"And your flaccid," she then added. "Considering as what I just did, should I be happy or depressed?"

"Be happy for me," Ron answered. "It seems my subconscious has finally acknowledged that there is a difference between nudity and sex."

"Does that mean you'll be joining us in the pool tomorrow," Harry asked hopefully.

"I'm not sure about that," Ron said hesitantly. "I should probably learn to walk before I run."

"Then what do you say we take a stroll on the Promenade deck before calling it a night," Hermione suggested. "It's late; there shouldn't be too many people about. Besides, it's dimly lit."

Sam looked warily at Ron, but he nodded his head yes. "Maybe we could grab a slice of pizza, I'm starved."

Harry smiled. "It's nice to know that no matter how much some things change in our lives, other things will always remain constant."

"Such as?" Sam questioned.

"Your husband," Hermione said. "He always has been and always will be hungry."

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Day Ten, Wednesday, August 17, 2005, At Sea

1:00 PM

"Checkmate!" Bonnie exclaimed. "Are you going to pay up or back out on your bet?"

Ron took a deep breath. "I'm going to pay up," he said resolutely. "Actually, I had decided to pay up whether I won or lost the game. Are you going to join me?"

"I wouldn't miss it for the world," Bonnie said, with a smile, as she got up from the table.

Ron looked around the pool until he spotted Sam and Timmy. "Wish me luck," he said to Bonnie, as he dropped his towel on the chair.

Ron leaped in and began swimming in the direction of Sam, Bonnie on his heels.

"Daddy!" Timmy yelled happily. "Look mummy! Daddy got nudie and in the pool."

Sam smiled as Timmy madly splashed his way toward Ron and then threw his arms around his Dad's neck.

"He really loves his daddy," Bonnie said, as she settled herself on the edge of the pool next to Sam.

"They're very close," Sam agreed, nodding her head. "Where is Jim today? He's not avoiding me because of last night is he? It was just a misunderstanding. I'm not angry." Sam blushed before continuing. "If the truth be known, I'm rather flattered by the whole incident."

"It's not you, he's avoiding," Bonnie answered, her face turning serious. "It's me. I told him I didn't want to have anymore to do with this swinging lifestyle. I imagine he is trying to decide if he wants to be monogamous. "

Sam looked at Bonnie compassionately. "Personally, I think he's a fool. He should have been able to make that decision without any thought."

"I would have hoped that too," Bonnie agreed, dejectedly. "I really love him and so does Lynn. The last thing I want is to get divorced, but..." She sighed. "I imagine the final decision on that is in his hands."

"You and Lynn can make it on your own?" Sam asked concernedly.

"As long as I can keep dancing, we'll be fine," Bonnie said. "Once I start to show my age and lose my figure, things might be different, but somehow, we'll survive." She looked at Sam. "I hope it doesn't come to that."

"Ron did it," Hermione squealed excitedly as she bounded over to joined Sam and Bonnie. "I never thought I'd get to see him naked." Hermione paused after realizing what she just said. "That didn't

sound very proper, did it?"

"Hermione, it's okay!" Sam said. "Bonnie and I know what you mean and feel the same way. It's taken a lot for him to do this."

"You have a very special guy there," Bonnie said enviously. "You are both very fortunate."

"I know," Sam responded. "Not a day goes by that I don't appreciate my good fortune."

"Are you going to give us a hint about the show tonight?" Hermione asked. "The girls won't even tell us what song Kim is singing."

"She's singing two songs, both show tunes," Bonnie confessed. "But I can't tell you anymore."

"Is she going to dance, too?" Sam asked, pressing the issue.

"We didn't have time to come up with anything too fancy," Bonnie answered. "She'll be more moving and strutting about than actually dancing."

"It must be thrilling to be on stage dancing professionally in front of an appreciative audience," Hermione commented enviously. "Do you dance ballet or is it more modern, Broadway show type dancing?"

"I took ballet lessons for ten years," Bonnie said, looking dejected, "but no, I'm not in the ballet."

"Don't tell Harry, but I used to attend dancing school when I was younger," Hermione divulged. "I dreamed of being on the stage, showing the world what I had, but times changed and one dream was replaced by another. Now I'm a teacher and a mother and that will never happen."

"Only if you choose to not let it happen," Bonnie said. "I'm a mother. Many of the girls I work with are mothers, and some have other jobs." Bonnie looked at Hermione admirably. "You could make a fortune dancing professionally."

"I could? But I don't have the experience; I've never done it before," Hermione said.

"It's not all about dancing," Bonnie said. "You need self-confidence and a good frame. You be amazed how many doors that body of yours would open."

"Thank you, but without any experience?" Hermione questioned.

"They have tryouts for amateurs monthly," Bonnie said. "If you come and show them what you got, I'd be willing to guarantee that you'd be offered work."

"It sounds so tempting, but we'll be heading home immediately at the conclusion of the cruise," Hermione sighed. "Maybe in another life."

* * * * *

"She was terrific," Kim declared after Angel finished her piano number. "I'd be willing to give up

my magical aptitude in order to play an instrument that well."

"Be careful," Caitlin warned. "Don't use the 'M' word; someone will hear you."

"You can't be serious," Emily whispered. "You'd give up you-know-what just to be able to play some stupid instrument."

"But to play like that is a marvelous gift," Kim insisted.

"By the time you leave school, you'll be able to make the piano play as well as that without even touching the keys," Emily reminded her.

"You just don't understand," Kim said. "It's just different."

"Do you know what I don't understand?" Caitlin asked. "Why did Angel have Roz eliminate Monica from the contest? She was no competition."

"I don't know about Monica, but I'm certainly no threat," Kim said downheartedly. "Maybe I should just withdraw."

"You can't do that," Caitlin implored. "Not after all the time and effort. How would Bonnie feel?"

"I guess you're right," Kim decided. "But I'm going to go get some fresh air. It just makes me more nervous to see everyone else perform."

"Well don't get lost," Emily ordered. "You're number ten. And don't let anyone see your costume."

"Costume?" Kim questioned. "How can you consider a pair of high heels and body glitter a costume? You guys didn't even apply the glitter consistently all over."

"We made it look like one," Emily assured her.

As Emily and Caitlin waited for the second performer to come on stage, Kim walked toward the rear exit door. She was just about to step outside when she heard two people talking behind a side curtain.

"That was wonderful," Roz said approvingly to Angel. "I knew you'd been taking lessons since you were five, but I had no idea you played so good."

"Thank you Aunt Roz," Angel said appreciatively. "I wish you hadn't always been too busy before to attend any of my recitals."

"So do I," said Roz matter-of-factly. "If I had known you were so good, I wouldn't have needed to go to the trouble of eliminating that no talent Frenchie. I can't believe I actually thought she might have a possibility of beating you."

"Eliminating?" Angel murmured to herself. "You're not saying... Aunt Roz did you step on that girl's ankle? On purpose!? How could you?"

"I did it for you. I knew you had practiced hard, and I wanted you to win," Roz said as if justifying her actions.

"Win no matter what! That's cheating!" Then Angel came to a realization. "You've done this before, haven't you!?" Angel asked seething. "Jamie's sisters and her friends know, don't they? That's why they were nice and now they're mean to me."

"Forget them! I told you before that you're better off without their kind," Roz declared.

"No!" Angel said noticeably shaking, a tear in her eye. "I'd be better off without you! GO AWAY!"

"You unappreciative little bitch," Roz yelled, slapping Angel sharply across the face. "I hope that fucking little tramp hammers you."

Roz turned and stomped away, leaving Angel in tears.

After the way she and the others had treated Angel, Kim wasn't sure how the girl would receive her, but she felt obliged to at least approach her.

"Angel, I'm sorry," Kim said sheepishly as she came within reach of the weeping girl. "I was going out for a breath of fresh air and overheard you yelling at your aunt. I'm sorry that we treated you badly. We were wrong to jump to the conclusion that you were involved in what happened to Monica."

"It's okay," Angel said with a sigh. "I don't blame you though. After all, I'm no baby. I should have known. Good luck in the contest. I have to go tell my parents what happened and drop out."

"Drop out!?" Kim said incredulously. "I'm the one that should be dropping out. I only entered the contest out of anger. I thought you were mixed up with Monica being hurt. You were great tonight; you deserve to win."

"That's up to the judges. I've seen you," Angel said. "I think you could win."

"Maybe if the best competition is eliminated," Kim countered. "By dropping out, you'll be doing the same thing for me that your Aunt tried to do for you; eliminate the strongest competition. No matter who wins this contest, they should win because the judges found them to be the best, not because they were the only one remaining."

"If I stay in, will you promise to try your best?" Angel asked.

"I'll try," Kim said. "My first priority will be not making a fool of myself because I'm so nervous."

"Kim, hurry up!" Caitlin yelled after finding her. "They're at contestant number eight; you'll be on soon."

"She's on next," Harry whispered excitedly to Hermione. "Do you know either of the songs she is singing?"

"No," Hermione said shaking her head. "They're both show tunes according to the program."

As the trombone player started playing, Kim took a deep breath, pushed the curtain aside and

strutted on to the stage.

Let me entertain you
Let me make you smile

"Oh my god Harry, she's playing a burlesque dancer," Hermione whispered nervously.

Kim was indeed playing the part, complete with a pink silk scarf that she was tossing about as she sashayed around the stage as she sang.

Let me do a few tricks
Some old and the some new tricks
I'm very versatile

"Are you sure that's Kim?" Harry asked quietly. "I would have never thought she would do this."

Hermione just stared at Harry, not making any comment.

And if you're real good
I'll make you feel good
I'd want your spirit to climb
So let me entertain you
We'll have a real good time,
Yes sir!
We'll have...
A real good time

As the band went into another chorus of the song, Kim moved about the stage, blowing kisses to the audience and accentuating the movement of her hips with each loud drumbeat.

And if you're real good
I'll make you feel good
I'd want your spirit to climb
So let me entertain you
We'll have a real good time,
Yes sir!
We'll have...
A real good time

On the drumbeats of the last two lines, Kim jerked her hips first right, then left, then to the back and then forward. At the end, to Hermione's horror, she pulled the scarf between her legs and tossed it to the audience.

"Please tell me that she didn't actually do that," Hermione said aghast. "I am going to kill Bonnie for teaching her that."

"But listen to the applause," Harry said. "They loved her."

"The young boys and depraved old men maybe," Hermione said disgustingly. "I'm sure it was intended to poke fun at the old burlesque since this is a naturist cruise, but I just find it poor judgment."

As Harry and Hermione had talked, two young girls pushed a mirrored dresser on stage. The one handed Kim a shirt that she hurriedly put on while the other girl sat a chair next to the dresser.

"Look! It's Caitlin and Emily," Jamie said elbowing Hermione. "I didn't know they were in the

show."

Hermione didn't answer. She just sat surprised and stared at her little girls.

KIM So hand me my cuff links

EMILY Yes Sir!

KIM And straighten my tie
Just drench me in rich cologne
And don't ask me why

As Kim sang the number, Emily and Caitlin helped her; first with cuff links and then with her tie and cologne and then continued to follow her instructions.

KIM Go on and pluck me a boutonnière

EMILY You're movin' up and walkin' on air

KIM Steppin' out with a star
And feelin' high

Come polish my shoes

And call for the car (Caitlin whistles)
I'll sweep her right off her feet
Wherever we are

CAITLIN A satin collar and velvet vest!

KIM I never settle for second best
Steppin' out with a star
Sad times bye-bye!

Have I got style?

Uh Huh!

KIM Have I got taste?

Uh Huh!

KIM On someone else I swear
This savoir-faire
Would be such a waste.

Come toss me my top hat

I'm ready to fly
Bustin' into the upper crust
As easy as pie!

Just watch my dreams come true
This was somethin' I was born to do

Steppin' out with a star
That star is you.

(holds up a picture, looks at it adoringly)

EMILY Have you got class?

KIM Have I got class!

EMILY Have you got chic?

KIM Have I got Chic!

EMILY To think that you and me were nobody
Why only last week!

KIM I'm ready to fly (pretends to fall)
At least I can try
Just watch my dreams come true
This is somethin' I was born to do

KIM, EMILY, & CAITLIN
Steppin' out with a star
Bye bad times
Steppin' out with a star
Hey good times
Steppin' out with a star
And feelin' high
Yeah!

"They were good, really good," Jamie said, sounding exceedingly impressed.

"Yes! They were," Hermione said positively, apparently forgetting about the first routine.

"While the judges are tallying their scores and deciding the top three winners, the captain would like to discuss a matter of great importance with you," the M.C. announced.

"Whatever it is, I'm innocent this time," Harry kidded.

"The old wharf rat, in all probability, wants to give us a sales pitch on future cruises," Ron commented unconcernedly.

"Hem, hem," the Captain said clearing his throat as he approached the microphone. "That was a very enjoyable show tonight. Each of the contestants is a winner in his or her own right. Hem, hem. I hope you all had a pleasant experience on this Princess Cruise and will sail with us again soon."

"Here we go," said Ron. "Sales pitch time."

"We were very fortunate this trip in that we were able to avoid Hurricane Emily, which was in the Caribbean area the same time as us," the captain noted. "I'm afraid, however, that our luck has come to an end. As we speak, Emily is approaching Fort Lauderdale and will be in that vicinity for most of the next twenty-four hours."

"Due to the storm, docking tomorrow is an impossibility. The bad news, I'm afraid, is that you are stuck with us for an extra day. We will endeavor to help you make whatever adjustments are necessary in your post cruise transportation.

"The good news is that Princess Lines will be picking up the tab for all expenses tomorrow. This includes up to four complementary cocktails per adult and a complementary twenty-five dollar credit in the ship's casino. We'll keep the ship out of hurricane range so that you can enjoy another wonderful day of sunning and swimming."

Ron just stared into space - his worst nightmare was about to take place.

"Hem, hem. Now the winners of our contest."

* * * * *

"Where are the girls?" Timmy asked, as everyone gathered in the Harry and Hermione's stateroom.

"Kim went to Bonnie's quarters to thank her for all the help, and Emily and Caitlin accompanied her," Jamie answered.

Timmy was just about to moan that it was taking too long, when Emily and Caitlin arrived, followed shortly by Kim.

When Kim entered the room, Harry gave her a big hug. "Those judges might have voted you second place," he said, "but in my book, you'll always be a number one."

"Angel deserved first," Kim said genuinely. "She's studied and worked hard for years. It wouldn't have been right if we had won after only a few days rehearsal."

"You guys were all great," Sam added. "Bonnie did a terrific job coaching you."

"Be that as it may, we have more pressing matters," Hermione said, pacing the room.

"Why? What's the matter?" Caitlin asked.

"The three day phase of the full moon starts tomorrow evening," Hermione replied, looking concernedly at Ron who was sitting quietly but very upset next to Sam. "We knew we were cutting it close when we booked the trip, but we never dreamed a hurricane would cause a twenty-four hour delay. We anticipated, even with the time differences between Fort Lauderdale and Hogsmeade, on being back at Hogwarts long before moon rise."

"Wouldn't you know that a hurricane named after me would screw everything up," Emily said dismally.

"It most certainly not your fault Emily," Harry said putting his arm around her shoulders, "but we do have a major dilemma on our hands."

"Couldn't Professor Weasley just Apparate back to Hogwarts?" Kim asked.

"If only it were that simple," Harry said with a sigh. "You will learn in your third year, when we study werewolves, that they are physically unable to Apparate. Even if he possessed that skill, Apparition becomes more difficult as distance increases. Only highly trained wizards would ever try intercontinental Apparating."

"You've made a Portkey before," Caitlin suggested. "Couldn't you do that again? Use the Portus spell now to make a Portkey and return him to Hogwarts."

"As with Apparition, the making of a Portkey becomes progressively more difficult the greater the distance involved," Harry explained. "You must know where you are and where you desire to end up. The destination is easy: Hogwarts. The problem is I don't know exactly where we are at the moment. Somewhere in the Atlantic Ocean between the Caribbean Islands and Fort Lauderdale, Florida is too indistinct. Taking into consideration my relationship with the captain, I doubt he'd be forthcoming with our precise longitude and latitude. "

"Then this meeting isn't about how we are going to get Professor Weasley off the ship and cover up for his absence," Jamie said, nervously looking about the room. "He can't get off. He's going to transform tomorrow night on a ship with nearly a thousand passengers."

"First, everybody should relax," Hermione said calmly. "The situation isn't nearly as calamitous as it seems. Wolfsbane Potion, although it can't cure Lycanthropy, does prevent the extremely dangerous dementia that accompanies the transformation from human into werewolf. We simply have to secure Ron in a room tomorrow night; Harry and I will stay with him until sunrise. Thanks to the potion, he normally just curls up and sleeps after the transformation."

Everyone seemed to glance towards Ron as if asking for conformation, but he just sat with his face buried in his hands shaking his head no.

"Ron, why are you saying no?" Harry questioned. "I know Headmaster Snape brewed an ample supply of potion for you. You have been taking it, haven't you?"

"That's the problem," Ron said tensely. "The trip, the stress, the constant nudity made it necessary for me to take extra potion in order to maintain control over my sexual desires."

"How much is remaining?" Harry asked concernedly.

"I took the last of it tonight before the show," Ron said, his voice trembling. "I'm going to be a hideous, uncontrollable monster tomorrow night. What if I bite someone, or worse, kill him or her? What if it's one of you?"

* * * * *

Day Eleven, Thursday, August 18, 2005, Still at Sea

"Why weren't the Weasley's at either breakfast or lunch," Kim inquired.

Jamie studied the younger girls momentarily before answering. "I think that the three of you are old enough that you should know the entire truth," she said.

Kim, Emily and Caitlin exchanged questioning glances.

"Most people are unaware of the full effects of Lycanthropy on a person," Jamie explained. "Nearly everyone knows that the bearer of the syndrome transforms into a wolf on the three nights of the full moon, but few appreciate or care that this is only one aspect of the sickness. During the day prior to the full moon, a werewolf goes through a period of heightened sexual desire."

Emily giggled. "Do you mean to say that they get extra horny?" she asked.

Jamie nodded her head yes, but the expression on her face was somber, not one of amusement. "We're not talking sexually stimulated as in the case of a hormonal teenage boy," she said severely. "Wolfsbane Potion will keep the desires in check, but without the potion, a werewolf is practically crazy with lust."

"Professor Weasley would attack one of us?" Kim asked incredulously.

"Mentally he would fight it with all his strength, but eventually his creature instincts could win out if you got too close," Jamie warned.

"Is that why Timmy is spending the day with Bonnie and Jim? But what about Sam?" Emily asked. "She's been alone with him all morning." Then she deduced the answer to her own question. "Sam is trying to satisfy his needs?"

"Over and over again," Jamie answered, "and it's not a loving, reciprocally satisfying sex. It is one-way and at times extremely rough. He nearly killed one of his fellow students during his seventh year when she was stupid enough to seduce him at that time and knew about this part of the lycanthropy. She was an ex-girlfriend desperately trying to win him back from Hermione when she and Professor Weasley were dating."

"So it is almost like being raped?" Caitlin said, horror stricken.

"Probably very similar," Jamie retorted, "but with one huge difference. Sam loves Ron. Actually, there is a second difference as well. Sam takes a potion that keeps her from getting badly damaged physically, but I understand that she is still pretty sore afterwards."

"Look! There's Angel!" Kim said elatedly, happy for the opportunity to change the subject. "She's alone. Let's ask her to join us."

"It would be best if you spent the afternoon with her and your other friends," Jamie advised the girls. "Perhaps you should say you good-byes, too. I think we'll all be needed tonight and, more than likely, we'll be disembarking as soon as the ship docks in the morning."

* * * * *

"Is she ready? Harry asked, as he and Hermione tried fruitlessly to relax in the sun.

"Oh Harry! She is and she isn't. I'm nervous about her sleeping," Hermione answered apprehensively. "It is one thing to transform and hold you Animagus form for hours when you're

awake, but you know how problematic it can be while asleep."

"Yes," he agreed. "The first night you spent with Ron and me, I was extremely concerned. I think I spent the whole night awake watching you. Did I ever tell you how beautiful you are to watch when you're asleep?"

"When I'm a wolf?" she asked skeptically. "Did I ever tell you how much I love you?"

"Not in the last hour," Harry answered. "I'm afraid though that we're going to need her help tonight. It is one thing for only the two of us to be with Ron when he is docile and asleep most the night. Tonight, however, I think we will need her additional strength to hold him at bay."

"What about Jamie?"

"No, it's best she stays with Timmy and the girls. By the way, don't forget to leave her plenty of breast milk for Ben. She'll have at least three feedings."

"It's good that you reminded me," Hermione said. "Jamie and I tried to get Ben to drink Muggle canned baby formula the other day and it was a debacle. He just spit it out. It seems your son prefers breast milk."

"That or he just prefers suckling on your breasts," Harry joked. "Already my son has developed excellent taste. He'll spend his entire existence searching for a girl with a figure as magnificent as his mother's."

"I thought you married me for my brains and personality?" Hermione said, pretending to show displeasure.

"I did," Harry answered innocently. "It's not my fault they came so artistically gift wrapped."

"What did Michelle and Lloyd say," Jamie asked as she came running up to them.

"They agreed, once I assured them that it would be no problem to restore the room to flawless condition," Hermione answered.

"I don't understand. Why do you need their room?" Jamie asked.

"Truthfully, I wish we had access to a food locker or some lower level storage area," Harry admitted. "Unfortunately the plans of the ship that are available to the public don't show any of those areas. Plus we need a place that no one is going to enter."

"But what makes their quarters any better than yours," Jamie inquired. "You have the Weasley's on one side and us on the other."

"And a lot of traffic using the corridor outside," Harry added. "All the soundproofing spells in the world are meaningless if someone walks by and sees a bulge suddenly appear on the bulkhead. Michelle and Lloyd are near the stern of the ship where there is little traffic and a number of unoccupied staterooms surround their cabin."

Jamie stared at Harry and Hermione, a horrified expression etched on her face. "What do you expect to happen in the room that would cause the bulkhead to move?"

"A vicious animal fight, with bodies more than likely being thrown against the walls and doors," Harry said, not even trying to soften the blow. "The sooner we are able to pin Ron, the less damage and chance of someone being hurt. That is why Sam is joining us. Theoretically, a werewolf should be no match for a Griffin, a panther and a gray wolf, but werewolves are extraordinarily strong."

"But what if one of you is hurt, or worse, bitten?" Jamie asked, horrified at the very thought.

"A bite, as long as we are in our animal forms, will be no more dangerous than a normal bite would be," Harry explained. "We'll just have to endure any injuries received until morning when Caitlin can treat them."

"It's going to be a long night," Jamie said with a sign.

* * * * *

"Kim, could I talk to you in private?" Brian questioned nervously.

"Sure! Hey guys! We'll be right back," Kim shouted, clutching Brian's hand and leading him out of the pool.

"Don't do anything I won't do?" Emily called after them.

"I guess that gives us an open field," Kim laughed as Brian turned bright red.

Brian led Kim to an empty table, still within view of the others, but out of earshot.

"It's times like this that I wish I had a pair of extendable ears," Emily said carelessly to Caitlin.

"A pair of what?" Jeff questioned.

"Extendable ears," Caitlin said, trying to cover for Emily. "You know, she wishes her ears could reach to that table so she could hear what they were saying."

"Who knows," interjected Mark. "Maybe some day someone will invent them."

Kim and Brian sat silently for a few moments as Brian endeavored to control his jumpiness.

"You were great last night," he finally said. "Not only did you sing and dance first-rate, but you looked awesome. I wish we didn't have to say good-bye. It stinks that we live an ocean apart."

Kim sighed inwardly. She liked Brian, but more than a mere ocean separated them. They lived into two different worlds. This was a summer romance and realistically could never be anything more.

"I've enjoyed spending time with you," Kim said honestly. "It would be great if you and your parents...." Kim was about to say vacationed in Cap d'Adge, but realized that even if the Potters returned there next year, there was no assurance that she would be invited to join them. "The odds are against us ever seeing each other again."

"I hope that isn't the case," Brian said sadly, "but if in fact it is, I was wondering if I could kiss you

good bye. Not a kiss on the cheek, but a real kiss."

"You mean on the lips," Kim said tensely, "with tongues involved. I've never kissed anyone like that."

"Neither have I," Brian replied, looking fondly into Kim eyes. "I'd like you to be my first. I've heard that people never forget their first kiss. I know I'll never forget you."

All of a sudden Kim became conscious that her eyes were watering. "Here with them watching?" Kim said, her palms suddenly sweaty.

"That's up to you," he said. "I'm not afraid to show the world that I like you."

"After last night, I doubt I'll ever be embarrassed about anything ever again," Kim said getting to her feet. "Are we going to do this like adults; I mean hold each other tight in each other's arms."

"That's the way it was in my dream last night," Brian said, heaving a sigh.

Kim moved closer as Brian cautiously wrapped his arm around her. At first, each movement was guarded, but then, as if they had done this before, they were tightly holding each other as their lips touch and they kissed. They continued kissing and soon their mouths opened just enough that their tongues could touch.

* * * * *

"I feel bad that you girls are going to be spending the night in this passageway," Hermione said.

"What makes you think we're staying here," Jamie said brandishing a smile. "The adjacent room is unoccupied. We'll take turns watching this door while the others keep Timmy and Ben happy. The sound proofing will seal out all noise, won't it?"

"No matter what transpires, you won't hear a thing," Hermione reassured her.

Although it was best for the sake of Ben and Timmy, Jamie did not necessarily find it heartening that she would be unable to hear anything that transpired.

"They're coming," Harry said, hurrying around the corner. "You best all get out of sight, he's over the top."

"You mean..." Jamie started to say.

"Just get yourself and the others out of sight and be quick about it," Harry advised.

Jamie had barely closed the door to the previously unoccupied room, when Sam and Ron turned the corner. Sam looked totally exhausted while Ron was sweating profusely. He had a strange perverted expression on his face as he looked up and down at Harry's body.

"My god, Sam. Are you all right?" Hermione asked upon seeing her bedraggled best friend.

"I'll be raw for awhile," Sam moaned. "I'm actually glad moon rise is near. I don't think I could have gone another time."

Hermione wanted to ask, but felt it was too personal and actually none of her business. Sam, however, caught the questioned look in Hermione eye. "I lost count," she said looking pained. "It was either thirty-three or thirty-four."

Just as Hermione was about to comment, she glanced at Ron, who was now staring at her very licentiously. "We better get inside," she said apprehensively. She was eager to transform. If they remained in their human states much longer, Ron would surely attempt to rape someone. In their present forms, she was doubtful that the combined efforts of Sam, Harry, and she would be sufficient to prevent such an occurrence. Even in his human form, Ron had the strength of many men on the days of the full moon.

As soon as Ron, Harry and Sam entered the room, Hermione signaled Jamie and then hurried inside herself. The door had scarcely closed when Jamie began applying every locking charm in her extensive repertoire.

"I'm going to transform," Hermione said nervously, as Ron's eyes seemed to try and devour her. "I strongly suggest you both do the same."

The change was quick, almost instantaneous, and the pain, as usual, excruciating, but it passed summarily.

She was now a wolf, but Ron still glared at her lustfully. She had never been in this situation when Ron had not had his potion. Then it happened. Ron howled in pain as if he had been mortally wounded. The griffin, the panther and the wolf all watched, the panther with tears in its eyes.

Ron jerked uncontrollable with pain as his body transformed from that of a man to a werewolf. Although it seemed much longer, the conversion actually took less than a minute.

More often than not, when Ron had the Wolfsbane Potion, he would circle the room a few times and then, tired by the exertion of transforming, curl up and fall asleep. Without the potion, his reactions were extremely different. He stood rigid as if defending his turf, his eyes moving from the panther to the griffin and back. He ignored the wolf, either because he expected her assistance or because he was protecting her.

Then without warning, he leapt at the griffin. The two rolled about the room, smashing furniture and lamps as they clawed and chomp at each other. Then the wolf joined the fray, but not in alliance with its own breed, but rather with the griffin. Blood splatter the room, as the three beasts seemed to bite the air haphazardly. The panther watched as if not sure whether to join the battle and, if so, on which side.

When she leapt, the panther did so without error, her jaws grasping the neck of the werewolf and bringing it to the ground with a thud. The griffin and wolf hurled themselves on top of the werewolf pinning it to the ground. At first he struggled, but each movement caused the sharp teeth of the panther to dig deeper into his neck. He was hopelessly pinned. After a time, he relaxed, and, after a much longer time, succumbed to sleep.

* * * * *

Jamie had just removed the last of the locking charms when she heard the voices approaching.

"I'm not sure what's going on Sir, but something is most certainly not right. The one room is supposed to be unoccupied and they been sort of standing guard outside the other all night."

"I'll handle it from here on," the Captain said as he approached Jamie. "You can get back to your duties."

"Are you sure Sir?"

"Do I look incompetent to you," roared the Captain. "I think I'm quite capable of dealing with any circumstances." That said, the steward turned and hurried off.

"Hem, hem. Now exactly what is going on here young lady?" the Captain asked.

"Nothing! Nothing at all Sir! I was just about to knock and wake them," Jamie said uneasily.

"Fine," said the Captain smugly. "If that's genuinely the case, then allow me to invite you all to join me for breakfast."

"Thank you, but I think we were going to skip breakfast this morning. We have to hurry to make our connections"

"Nonsense, I won't take no for an answer," he barked. "Besides, it will be another two hours before you're able to disembark." Without further discussion or knocking, he threw open the door and ambled inside.

The scene that he was confronted with made him come to an immediate halt. The room was literally destroyed, but that wasn't what made him stop. On the floor in the middle of the room, there was a naked man, either asleep or dead. The Captain assumed dead because a panther had its head resting on the man's blood encrusted neck. Another naked man was spread prone across the dead man's body, with a wolf cuddled next to him.

"What in the name of all that is holy," he cried, turning with the intention to scurry from the room.

Jamie pulled her wand from its invisible thigh sheath.

"Petrificus Totalus!" she cried, pointing it at the Captain.

His arm's snapped to his sides as his legs sprang together. His rigid body swayed momentarily before falling to the floor, stiff as a board and flat on his back.

Only his eyes could move, looking up at her in horror, as Jamie stepped over him and hurried to wake the others.

"We've had a glitch," Jamie said, as Harry opened his eyes. "One of the stewards became suspicious and brought the Captain to investigate, just as I was removing the locking charms."

"I hate performing a memory charm on a human being, but I'm afraid there is no choice," Hermione said reluctantly.

"Lets get this place back in order first," Harry suggested, just as the children entered the room followed by Michelle and Lloyd.

"Good lord!" Michelle cried as she first surveyed the damage to the room, then the condition of her friends and finally the petrified Captain. "It looks like you people had an extremely rough night."

"Why is everyone down here," Bonnie asked, and then froze. "What the hell is going on here?"

"Lynn's mommy said a bad word," Timmy whispered to Kim.

Kim just nodded her head as she assessed the situation.

"What is going on!?" Bonnie screamed. "Look at this room, you're all bloody, the Captain is... I'm going to go get..."

"Petrificus Totalus!" Jamie once again cried, this time pointing the wand at Bonnie.

"Jamie, I don't think that was at all necessary," Sam chastised. "I'm sure we could have reasoned with Bonnie."

"We still can," Jamie countered defensively. "I just felt that our main concern was to get the situation under control. We have to get this room restored and get back to our own quarters before anyone else walks in on us. Plus, the Captain will be missed if we don't get him back on duty soon."

"Sam, I have to get out of here," Ron moaned. "Too many people. I need..."

"Jamie is right," Harry commanded. "We have to restore some semblance of order. Sam, you and Ron go back to your quarters. Caitlin, please go with them and tend to their injuries."

"Sam, keep Ron locked in your quarters until we come for you both; don't leave him alone with Caitlin. Jamie, can you handle this mess with Kim and Emily's assistance?"

Jamie nodded.

"Hermione, you have Ben and Timmy," Harry stated. "I can carry Bonnie. Lloyd do you think that you and Michelle can manage to drag the Captain back to our quarters? Let me check that the corridor is empty first."

* * * * *

"...and that in a nut shell is the entire story, Bonnie. If I release you from this spell will you promise to remain composed so that we can answer any of your questions?" Harry asked. "Wink if you agree."

Just as Bonnie winked her concurrence, Michelle reentered the room accompanied by Jamie, Kim and Emily.

"Finite," Harry said, pointing his wand at Bonnie.

"Can I hire these girls to help clean myr house?" Michelle asked in jest. "It's amazing, the room looks perfect - better than when we arrived. That chipped lamp isn't even chipped any more."

"In that case, we should deal with the Captain next before anyone comes looking for him," Harry

recommended. "Bonnie please remain with Kim and Emily until we return. They can answer many of your questions." Harry handed Emily his wand. "I doubt you'll need this, but just in case."

"Hermione will you explain to the others what we intend to do?" Harry asked as they progressed to Michelle and Lloyd's room.

"I'm going to perform a charm on the Captain that will remove all his memory of the last thirty minutes," Hermione explained. "I can't go back any further because the steward, who led him to this corridor might question him about what he found. When I carry out the charm, he will become temporarily dizzy and disorientated. Michele and Lloyd you'll be in your quarters when he barges in. Jamie, as soon as I perform the charm, Harry and I will vacate the area. Do you think you can hold him for the time it takes him to regain his equilibrium?"

"I'll try," Jamie said, as Michelle and Lloyd hurried inside and closed the door

Hermione pointed her wand at the Captain and concentrated on the exact memories she wanted to eradicate.

"Obliviate," she said, and then quickly dashed away with Harry. The Captain fleetingly collapsed in Jamie's arms.

"I'm sorry miss," he said, both confused and flustered at having collapsed against her, however, he recovered his composure quickly. "Now then let's check out this room." Without further discussion or knocking, he threw open the door and ambled inside.

The room was in pristine condition, but much to the Captain's shock, Michelle and Lloyd were standing kissing in the middle of it with Lloyd fondling Michelle's breasts..

"What is the meaning of this outrage!" Lloyd yelled in a fake rage.

"I'm sorry," said the Captain, both embarrassed and aggravated. "One of my underlings led me to believe that something was amiss in this stateroom. Obviously, he was quite mistaken. Please accept my most humble apology. Can I possibly make it up to you? Perhaps you would join me for breakfast?"

The Captain looked at his watch, and then looked at it again. "We'll have to hurry. It's later than I thought," he said. "I must have lost track of time."

"That's extremely nice of you," Michelle said, "but we have plans to join the Potters."

"No, go ahead," Jamie interjected. "I was outside the door, just about to knock, when the Captain arrived. The family is skipping breakfast so that we can be ready to depart as soon as the ship docks."

"Well, in that case, we'd be honored to join you, Captain," Michelle said decorously. Then she turned to Jamie. "Please tell Hermione that I'll write. Have a safe trip home."

Jamie bid Michelle and Lloyd farewell and hurried back to Harry and Hermione's room. Upon entering, she noticed that Caitlin, Ron and Sam had joined the group. For the moment, Ron seemed satiated.

"How did it go?" Harry asked, as soon as Jamie entered.

"Fabulous," she answered. "Michelle and Lloyd did a great job; they made it look like he walked in on them feeling frisky. As far as the Captain is concerned, he just thinks he lost track of time."

"Then we're ready to disembark as soon as we dock," he said, "with the exception of..." Bonnie cut Harry off mid-sentence.

"Except for me," Bonnie finished for him. "Is that what you're going to do to me, the same thing that you did to the Captain? Are you going to modify my memory so that I forget you all?"

"A memory modification is doubtlessly the wisest option," Harry said. "You won't forget any of us or anything that has occurred on the cruise with the exception of the time span since you walked into that room this morning."

"Okay," Bonnie said, her eyes tearful. "Let's get it over with then if you feel you can't trust me."

"Harry! Must we?" Sam asked. "I trust her and so does Ronnie." Ron nodded his head in accord, even as he once again started to stare lustfully around the room at everyone. "You and Hermione didn't alter Michelle's memory, in fact you even allowed her to tell her husband about us."

"It was different with Michelle," Hermione argued. "She figured out on her own that we were different, partly based on things that happen last year. It would have been impossible, after all this time, to go back and modify those memories without causing irreparable damage. Besides Michele is a reputable person who..."

"Now the truth comes out!" Bonnie shouted, interrupting Hermione. "Michelle can be trusted and keep her memory because she is a nurse and therefore automatically considered reputable, but because Bonnie is an exotic dancer, she is not trustworthy. Are all witches bigoted or just you?"

Hermione was staggered; in her entire life, no one had ever accused her of being prejudice in anyway until this moment. What actually upset Hermione most was that Bonnie was correct on this issue.

"Mum. Kim, Emily and I have spent the last few days rehearsing with Bonnie," Caitlin said. "I don't think she would ever say or do anything that would place any on us in jeopardy."

"I like her" Jamie declared. "It certainly isn't scientific, but my instinct about people has never failed me yet."

Harry and Hermione exchanged meaningful looks. "We'll go along with the general consensus," Harry said. "There will be no modifying of Bonnie's memory."

Bonnie smiled in relief.

"Bonnie, for what it's worth, I'm sorry," Hermione said, bashfully walking over to the young woman. "I've spent my life fighting for equal rights for all magical creatures and now... I'm so sorry and feel very ashamed."

"Don't be," Bonnie said embracing Hermione. "In my profession, you get accustom to people thinking disapprovingly of you. What is rare is someone admitting they're wrong and not only admitting it, but having the guts to apologize. That takes a special person, someone I'd like to call friend."

"I'd like that," Hermione said genuinely.

"I hate to break up this bonding," Sam said, "but if we want to disembark as soon as the ship docks; we better get a move on.

"Especially," she added, "when one of us has to attempt to satisfy and calm their husband before taking him among the general populous."

"I think I can help you with that," Bonnie offered.

Sam stared unbelievably at Bonnie.

"I don't mean like that!" Bonnie said, flustered and turning red. "My stage act requires me to get in some fairly contorted positions at times, and because of that, I frequently suffer back pains. I have a prescription medicine that helps. It is very strong and causes me to become groggy, so I use it on a limited basis. Perhaps it will dull Ron's desires."

* * * * *

Kim turned back to take one final look at the ship. "Next to finding out I was a witch, that was the grandest week of my life. Thank you so much for having me," Kim said.

"It was our pleasure," Hermione answered with a smile.

"Harry can we hurry and get to the location where we are going to Portkey from," Jamie begged. "Professor Weasley is getting to be extremely heavy and everyone is staring at us."

Ron had one arm around Jamie's shoulder and the other around Sam's. He appeared to be in a semi-comatose state, knowing what was going on about him, but unable to function properly.

"God bless Bonnie for giving us those pills," Sam said. "They've really relaxed Ron."

"Maybe a little too much so," Jamie replied. "We're drawing a considerable amount of attention to ourselves."

"I guess we should have given him two pills like the directions said instead of six," Emily recommended.

"I think we've all already come to that conclusion," Caitlin laughed.

"Where is our Portkey departure point?" Hermione asked.

"Anywhere within twenty-five feet of that warehouse up ahead," Harry answered. "It would probably be best if we slipped around to the back and got out of sight before we shrank our luggage."

"Will the Portkey take us directly to Hogwarts?" Jamie inquired.

"No, it is programmed to take us all to Diagon Alley," Harry advised. "From there Sam and Ron

will floo to Hogsmeade where Professor Snape and Madam Pomfrey will be meeting them with additional Wolfsbane Potion. They will then return to Hogwarts. The rest of us will see Kim safely home and then return to Diagon Alley to finish your school shopping for the coming year," Harry continued. "Then we'll floo to Hogsmeade and finally take a coach to Hogwarts. Timmy will be remaining with us and spend the night at the castle with you girls. Hermione and I will be joining Sam with Ron in the dungeon."

"Timmy doesn't want to sleep with the girls," the toddler wailed. "I want to sleep in my own beddie."

"If it's okay, we could spend the night in the Weasley's apartment," Jamie suggested. "I could transfigure us some sleeping bags and order pizza. That way we'll be there if the magical movers arrive before you guys in the morning."

"Is that okay with you Sam?" Hermione asked, smiling her own approval.

Sam nodded her head as Ron mumbled something deliriously.

"If I have a choice, I think I'll opt for the pizza pajama party over the dank dungeon," Harry joked.

"You don't have a choice," Hermione warned. "I need you to keep me warm. Besides, I doubt anyone at the party will be wearing pajamas."

The girls all nodded their concurrence, as did Timmy. Even baby Ben seemed to smile.

Once the warehouse isolated them from public view, Harry preformed a reducing spell on their luggage, and then they all stuck a few pieces in their pockets. Despite the size of the group, Hermione insisted on using only one Portkey for the return trip, not wanting to chance a reoccurrence of their previous debacle.

Again, the Portkey sent them speeding forward in a howl of wind and swirling color, and again when they reached their destination, Timmy was yelling gleefully for more as Ben wailed uncontrollably.

* * * * *

It was near sunset when Harry, Hermione and their family arrived in Hogsmeade. After giving Jamie some final instructions and exchanging kisses all around, Harry and Hermione hurried to catch a coach for the castle as the others headed for Ron and Sam's apartment.

When Harry and Hermione reached the dungeon, the Headmaster was waiting for them along with Sam and Ron, the latter fast asleep in the corner of a cell.

"Sam tells me that your holiday was not without incident," Severus said with a smile.

"Let's just say it's good to be home," Harry said shaking the Headmaster's hand.

Hermione didn't speak at first, but instead threw her arms around the Headmaster and kissed him firmly on the cheek.

Snape blushed slightly before regaining his composure. "You should go on holiday more often, if I

can always expect such a greeting on your return," he said.

"I missed you," Hermione said, giving the Snape her most vibrant smile. "How is everything with you and..."

"Things couldn't be better," he said interrupting Hermione. "The rising of the moon is nearing, perhaps you should all get settled. Professor Weasley most likely will sleep right through his transformation tonight. It seems that the combination of Wolfsbane Potion and the Muggle medicine that he was given have the affect of an extremely strong sleeping draft. It would not surprise me if he didn't wake until morning."

"Does that imply that we can remain in our human form tonight?" Sam asked pleasantly.

"Never!" Snape yelled, unnecessarily coarsely. "Never for a moment even consider being in close proximity to your husband or any other werewolf on the nights of the moon in your human form. He might appear docile now, but when he transforms that hideous creature will take over his mind and body. Should he awake during the night, his natural inclination would be to attack you. He would be on you before you had the opportunity to convert to your Animagus form. The only question would be whether his bite would kill you or turn you into a creature such as he."

As Severus performed the locking charms on the cell door, Harry and Hermione stared sympathetically at Sam, and then all three looked at Ron. He was husband and best friend, and they loved him. The creature that possessed him three nights a month was not Ron Weasley. Ron Weasley was a wonderful loving man who they would always adore and support.

"I'm going to try to contact Caitlin before I transform," Hermione informed Sam. "Do you have any messages for Timmy?"

"Tell him to be a good boy and listen to Jamie," she said. "Also, that Mommy and Daddy love him. If it's not asking too much, maybe she could kiss him good night for me."

Hermione gave Sam a smile of acknowledgement and then seemed to go into a trance.

"It must be wonderful to be able to contact your daughter whenever you want, no owl, no fireplace, just your thoughts to hers," Sam said, with a sigh as she and Harry watched Hermione.

"Yes, the bond those two have seems to only get stronger with time," Harry said. "The way they can communicate is amazing, although not completely without problems."

Sam looked at Harry questioningly as if awaiting further clarification.

"Although the link continually gets stronger, distance is still a limitation," he explained. "Plus they can't make contact when Hermione is in her Animagus form, she really hates that; especially on a night like tonight. Then there is glass."

"Glass?" Sam questioned.

"It's weird," Harry expounded. "Hermione and Caitlin discovered it a few weeks ago when shopping, and Hermione can't figure out a rationalization for it. Their thoughts will travel through brick or stonewalls, but place a plate glass window between them and the thoughts are blocked."

* * * * *

"Mum and Dad send their love," Caitlin shared as she came out of her reverie. "The four of them will be here first thing in the morning to help with the moving."

Caitlin scanned Timmy who looked extremely grubby. "Your Mum sent her love and asked me to give you a good night kiss, but no way am I going to kiss that face unless you wash it first."

"No kisses," yelled Timmy. "I don't want any girl cooties."

"Isn't it amazing how boys and girls change their attitude about kissing," Emily observed. "Kim and Brian certainly didn't seem concerned about cooties yesterday."

"I think those two might have become an item under different circumstances," Jamie remarked, entering the room with a sleeping Ben in her arms.

"Summer romances stink!" Caitlin said. "You hit it off with someone and next thing you know, you're thousands of miles apart. Kim and Brian in all probability will never see each other again."

"Jamie, between you and Mum, Ben is going to be spoiled rotten," Emily declared. "One of you no more than lays him down and the other picks him up."

"I love holding him," Jamie admitted, "and he is growing so fast. Soon he won't want to be held. He'll want to be down on his own scampering about. I can't wait to have one of my own. Although balancing a career as an Auror and being a mother will be a challenge."

"Have you heard from Amanda recently," Caitlin asked as she settled next to Timmy and started to color in a coloring book with him. "How is Bradley doing?"

"She owled me just before we departed on vacation," Jamie answered. "She says Bradley is becoming a little butterball. She and her parents have been arguing about school. Amanda isn't sure she wants to return. She's afraid Brad will forget her by the time Christmas holiday rolls around." Jamie gave Ben a kiss on the forehead. "I know I couldn't stomach not seeing this little guy for four months."

"Has Tony visited to see the baby?" Emily asked, flopping down on the couch and watching Timmy and Caitlin.

"Amanda hasn't heard from him all summer," Jamie answered dismally. "Amanda doesn't know if it's his doing or if his parents are preventing him from contacting her. She is really downhearted."

"Hi big guy," Jamie said pleasantly as Ben opened his eyes and looked up at her.

Suddenly there was a loud pop, followed without delay by two additional pops. Three extremely unwelcome guests had just Apparated into the room.

Chapter Seven Innocents All

The girls all instinctively reached for their wands, but their reactions were too slow and they were hindered by their physical situations: Jamie holding Ben, and both Caitlin and Emily lying prone.

Hooch had Apparated with her wand at the ready. "*Accio wand! Accio wand!*" She repeated rapidly, pointing her wand at Emily and Caitlin in quick succession. Their wands flew toward her and she grabbed them deftly in her left hand as without the slightest hesitation she pointed her wand toward the apparently unarmed Jamie and cried, "*Expelliarmus!*"

Jamie was thrown violently backward against the wall, her head colliding with it harshly before she fell unconscious to the floor. Ben was ejected from her arms by the force of the impact and landed a few feet away, screaming. Timmy sat petrified, too terrified to even cry.

"You bitch," Emily yelled, running toward Hooch, her fists clenched. "I'll kill you with my bare hands, if you've hurt either one of them."

"Ridiculous little girl," Hooch snarled. "*Crucio!*"

Emily's legs buckled as she fell to the floor in pain, excruciating pain the likes of which she had never experienced; her blood boiled; her bones were on fire; she screamed with agony; she wanted to die so it would end.

And then suddenly the pain was gone. She lay in the fetal position on the floor, her body covered in sweat. But she wasn't alone. Caitlin had evidently tried to aid her by sharing the pain and now she too was reduced to a quivering pile of bones.

"So, my sweet petite Caitlin is the healer that the prophecy refers to," Madam Hooch said smugly, walking over to the blonde girl, "And not just an ordinary healer, but quite a bit more, a Hyperempath. How noble and righteous you have become, wanting to share your sister's agony. But you are no longer an orphan that must share with the other girls. You should experience the full pleasure on your own. "*Crucio!*"

Every part of Caitlin felt like it was being pierced again and again by red-hot daggers, but instead of sweat, blood seeped from her pores. Hooch ended the curse, but only after Caitlin had passed out.

"Interesting," Hooch said, running a finger across Caitlin's motionless body and studying the blood it amassed. "I've heard legends about Hyperempaths sweating blood if they were in agonizing pain, but until now I thought they were just fairy tales."

"Begging your pardon Madam, but shouldn't we be more protective of the innocents?" Goyle asked fearfully.

"I agree with Goyle," Crabbe muttered. "The Great One will be elated that we've happened upon all four innocents when our mission was only to kidnap Slytherin's heir, but she'll have our heads if any harm befalls any of them before they can serve their purpose."

"How dare you impudent, good-for-nothing, ne'er-do-wells have the cheek to tell me what I shall or shall not do?" Madam Hooch bellowed.

They both cowered as she turned toward them, her wand still in hand.

"We'd never be so bold," Goyle explained, shaking nervously. "It's just that... Well, the Great One was very clear that no harm should come to the Weasley brat. Would not the same hold true for the other innocents as well?"

Hooch studied Goyle intently and then surveyed the room. "Perhaps I was a tad over zealous," she reluctantly admitted, pocketing her wand. "You are right. The Great One will be extremely pleased. She was troubled as to just how we would go about seizing the other innocents while the Hogwarts' wards protected them. It was extremely accommodating of them to come to us."

"Will someone shut that damn baby up?" Hooch shouted. Emily had already edged over to Ben and was trying to quiet him, but to no avail.

"Jamie or Hermione generally takes care of him," Timmy whispered timidly, as he crawled over next to Emily, clutching his crayons and colouring book possessively.

"Caitlin, put your abilities to use; see to her," Hooch ordered the now stirring girl.

Caitlin detested following Hooch's orders, but in this case was grateful to be permitted to tend to Jamie. Although still weak from the effects of the Cruciatus curse, she managed to stagger over to Jamie.

Caitlin stroked Jamie's head for a few moments; after a bit, the older girl slowly opened her eyes. "You'll be all right," Caitlin said reassuringly. "Just a slight concussion."

Jamie ignored Caitlin's cautions as she struggled to get to her knees and then finally stand upright. As soon as she was on her feet, she hurried to Emily and they transferred the bawling Ben. The baby, once in Jamie's arms calmed and soon stopped crying.

"Well done Miss Zacherley," Hooch said. "I think you may have just won yourself a postponement of your execution."

Crabbe and Goyle looked questioningly at Madam Hooch. "But our orders were to kill any extras," Crabbe blurted out.

"Our orders were also to just bring back Slytherin's heir," Hooch retorted. "What do you suggest we do with the other innocents? You must learn to fine-tune your orders to the situation at hand. We will soon have all four innocents in safekeeping, but it is over two weeks until the new moon and the time of their sacrifice. I, for one, do not intend to spend that time as a nursemaid to these brats. Which of you two wasters wants to take care of that insufferable infant; feed him, change his nappy?"

Both buffoons aggressively wobbled their heads to say no.

"We'll take her back with us," Hooch decided. "She gets to play nanny for the next two weeks as an alternative to us. When all is said and done, it will just mean disposing of one additional corpse."

Crabbe and Goyle's heads bobbed in agreement.

Jamie, Emily and Caitlin had all paid attention as the followers of the Great One had opening discussed their ultimate fate. They now all remained silent. Emily actually seemed to be trying to

keep Timmy's attention by drawing in his colouring book.

"We've wasted enough time jabbering," Hooch finally said. "Let's get them back to head quarters, where Damien and the Great One can congratulate us on our good fortune."

"Should we go put clothes on?" Jamie asked, most cooperatively. Her foremost reason for asking was the hope that she could get out of view long enough to draw her wand from its invisible sheath and catch Hooch unaware. She knew that if she could just incapacitate Hooch, she would be able to handle Crabbe and Goyle easily.

On the other hand she was concerned about Crabbe and Goyle. Since things had quieted down, Goyle hadn't taken his eyes off her. She felt as if he had mentally violated her multiple times and it was only a matter of time before he got around to trying to do it physically. Goyle, however, didn't bother her nearly as much as Crabbe. Crabbe might be the dumber of the two, but he was also categorically the more lecherous. He seemed to be practically salivating as he ogled Emily and Caitlin.

"That would be a waste of time," Hooch said with a chortle. "You will be transported using a Portkey similar to the one used to get hold of your dear, look-alike, professor two years ago. It's good that you all enjoy being unclothed because that's how you'll be spending the remaining days of your lives."

"That lady just said that we could stay nudie for the rest of our lives," Timmy said elatedly to Caitlin and Emily.

"Isn't that great," Caitlin said giving Timmy a reassuring hug and purposely not explaining the true meaning of the ex-professor's remark.

"But what about the baby?" Jamie asked concernedly. "I need his diaper bag and the remaining packets of breast milk."

Hooch thought for a moment before answering. "Goyle, you Apparate ahead so that you are there to meet them on their arrival. Crabbe, you and I will see them off then I'll Apparate with the baby's immediate needs. You will make a side trip for diapers and infant formula."

Crabbe gave Hooch an insolent glare, but knew better than to question her orders.

"Benjamin doesn't take well to canned formula," Jamie advised. "He prefers breast milk."

"Well isn't that a pity," Hooch screeched uncaringly. "We don't always get what we want in life, do we? I'm afraid he'll just have to become accustomed to formula or go hungry."

Hooch observed the girl carefully as Jamie gathered Ben's belongings together. "What about Timmy?" Jamie inquired. "Should I collect some of his toys?"

Hooch looked disbelievingly at Jamie. "I'm sorry if I've given you the wrong impression," she bellowed. "You are not going on vacation and The Great One does not run a day care centre. Damien does, however, have a number of unique toys that I'm sure he'd be happy to demonstrate to all of you. That is enough of this pointless chatter. Goyle, go prepare for their arrival."

Without so much as a glance or any question, the corpulent wizard Apparated with a loud pop.

Hooch removed what appeared to be a deflated children's pool float from her pocket. "Each of you grab hold of a bit of this," she ordered.

"You had better hold the baby tightly to you chest." She advised Jamie commandingly.

They all put a hand nervously on the Portkey, having no idea to where they were about to be transported. Hooch counted down from three and then they felt the, by now, all too recognizable jerk as though a hook located just behind their navels had suddenly jerked them irresistibly forward. Jamie held Benjamin tightly against her breasts as her feet left the ground; she could feel the others on either side of her, their shoulders banging into hers, Timmy yelling gleefully as Ben cried incessantly. They were all speeding forward as though stuck to the Portkey as it pulled them magically onward and then__

Seconds later, they slammed to the solid ground. Jamie struggled to maintain her footing as first Emily and then Caitlin knocked into her.

Timmy was on the ground in front of her screaming ecstatically, "Again, again, me loves Portkeys." Ben was just screaming, obviously not sharing Timmy's bliss.

"Enjoy the trip?" Goyle uttered wickedly as they struggled to get their bearings.

Then with a soft 'pop' Madam Hooch joined them. She tossed Ben's diaper bag at Jamie, who let it fall to the floor; her arms already occupied, trying to calm the distressed baby.

"These are your quarters," she said with a snicker. "I advise you not to lay a hand on anything. Damien does not tolerate anyone touching his playthings. What's more, some are extremely sharp and dangerous. You'll be fed in the morning, if you're lucky." She turned to leave, Goyle at her side, his eyes still fixed on Jamie's glistening nude body.

"But where are the beds, blankets and pillows? Caitlin inquired. "And I need to use the bathroom."

Hooch and Goyle exchanged depraved smiles before breaking into uncontainable cruel laughter.

"You're standing on your bed," Hooch laughed. "As for blankets and pillows, I'm afraid you'll have to use each other for such luxuries."

"That sewer grate is your bathroom," Goyle chuckled. "The hose pipe just to the left is your drinking water supply and may also be used for bathing if desired. One temperature fits all purposes."

"Get to sleep," Hooch ordered. "Remember, don't touch anything!"

* * * * *

Saturday, August 20, 2005

"Sam, wake up," Ron said, cautiously shaking the sleeping panther.

The panther growled sleepily and then transformed into his charming wife. Sam gave Ron a kiss on the cheek and then looked about the cell. Evidently she had been the last to arise because Harry and Hermione were already engaged in an animated conversation as they both paced back and forth in

front of the dungeon cell waiting for Snape to arrive and unlock the chamber.

"Is something wrong?" Sam questioned apprehensively. "Why do Harry and Hermione appear so worried?"

"It's probably nothing," Ron said reassuringly. He seemed to be trying to persuade himself as much as Sam. "Hermione tried reaching Caitlin telepathically this morning when she awoke and was unable to."

Sam's face paled as she shook off Ron's embrace and hurried to Hermione's side. "Has this ever happened before, you not being able to contact her? Sam asked.

"No," Hermione answered, "but then we haven't been away from each other a great deal to methodically test it. Most of our contact by telepathy has been from one part of Hogwarts to another or sometimes Hogsmeade. During holiday we communicated from ship to shore and, of course, from our arrival point to that car park when those hooligans kidnapped the girls."

"But you never had any problem reaching each other before? Maybe she is asleep or the Hogwarts wards are interfering," Sam suggested, hoping for a logical and calming solution.

"We've both managed to invade the other's deepest sleep," Hermione replied nervously. "Thus far the only thing that has impeded our thoughts from reaching each other has been distance and plate glass. Our thoughts were not the least bit hampered last evening and circumstances this morning should be identical."

"Here he comes," Harry yelled, as he saw Snape turn the corner. "Ginny and Draco are with him."

* * * * *

Ginny had pressured Draco into offering his assistance with the moving task. It actually hadn't taken that much coercing once he was guaranteed that he wouldn't have to do any physical work.

As soon as Hermione had alerted Severus, Ginny and Draco to her uneasiness, they too decided to make the trip to Sam and Ron's apartment. The group wasted no time. As soon as Severus finished the unlocking charms on the dungeon cell, they rushed up to his office and then used the floo network to go directly to the apartment.

The ominous silence that greeted them instantly confirmed their most dire fears. The innocents, along with Jamie, were gone.

"This doesn't make any sense," Snape said, his voice filled with annoyance. "No one intending harm to the occupants should have been able to commit a breach of the wards that protected your home."

Ron's face flushed suddenly in horrified comprehension.

"Weasley?" Malfoy questioned, finding it unbelievable that anyone could have been so dim-witted. "You had Ginny remove all the charms and wards on the apartment so that your landlord could show it to a potential tenant, didn't you? Please tell me that you didn't neglect to restore them before allowing those children to spend the night here."

Sam looked at Ron, her face wearing with a terrible expression. "You never told me that the wards

were removed." She looked at Hermione and Harry apologetically, shaking her head despondently. "Please believe me, I never would have suggested they stay here if I had known they were completely unprotected."

"I had anticipated restoring the charms on our return," Ron declared disconsolately, trying to defend himself. "I didn't expect to be drugged out of my mind."

"It will not benefit us to bicker and try to place blame," Severus warned them. "All that will do is cause division between us at a time when we need to all work together."

Harry began to walk across the room, stopped abruptly, leaned over as if to pick something up and then continued toward the table. "Wherever they are, they're unarmed," he said, picking up Emily and Caitlin's wands off the tabletop

"Maybe Jamie still has hers," Hermione ventured hopefully. "It wouldn't be seen in its invisible sheath."

"No, but it evidently wouldn't transport along with her," he said, pulling Jamie's wand part way out of the sheath he had almost stepped on. "Evidently they used a Portkey programmed in a similar way to the one used to steal you away from me two years ago." He reached out and grasped Hermione's hand.

"Then they're all naked and totally defenceless," Hermione cried. "Little Benjamin doesn't even have any diapers or... Harry! Ben won't drink manufactured formula. It makes him gag and vomit. He has to have breast milk."

As Harry and Hermione talked, Sam and the others looked around the apartment in an attempt to discover any clues.

"Your diaper bag isn't here anywhere," Sam said observantly, "but how would it be possible for that to transport and not Jamie's wand?"

"Perhaps one of the kidnappers took it with them," Draco suggested. "I doubt they would use a Portkey that rendered them naked. They probably Apparated after sending the others off."

"That's not much conciliation," Hermione whimpered. "I only left Jamie with four units of breast milk. She's probably used at least two of them already. Ben will die with nothing to eat."

"No one is going to die," Severus said reassuringly. "We'll find them, all of them. I'll owl the ministry at once."

"You can inform those bureaucratic do nothings if you desire," Harry shouted, "but I'll be damned if I'm going to sit back idly and wait for them to find the kids. They were of absolutely no help when Hermione was kidnapped and I anticipate little more from them this time around."

Draco nodded his head in accord. "I'm glad that for once we are in agreement, Potter. Under Minister Wrong's administration the Aurors have become indolent and ineffective. They've made utterly no progress in the last two years toward eradicating that blot on the wizarding world known as the Great One."

"Harry, do you think it's him? Do you think the Great One has the children?" Hermione asked trying to maintain a semblance of control over her distraught emotions.

"Who else?" Harry answered. "The Great One wants to rule the world. He has shown himself to be ruthless, cunning and a tad psychotic. Anyone trying to resurrect the dead has to be crazy, especially when you're talking about a wizard that was as evil and monstrous as Salazar Slytherin."

"Then you believe the kids were taken in order to fulfil the prophecy?" Ron asked.

"Why else?" Harry said. "What possible other reason could there be for kidnapping a baby, a toddler and two young girls?"

"You forgot Jamie," Ginny said.

"I didn't forget her," Harry said, his voice cracking and practically choking on his own words. "Actually at this point in time I'm most concerned about her because she could be considered unnecessary and therefore expendable."

Everyone stared at Harry, but Severus was the first to offer a rationalization for his comment. "If someone is indeed going to attempt to restore to life Salazar Slytherin, they will be using some of the oldest and darkest magic known to the wizard world. Magic that is forbidden and the use of which is considered a more heinous crime than any of the forbidden curses.

"Such magic takes months of preparation and can only be attempted under prescribed conditions. One of those conditions is that the rebirth must coincide with the birth of the moon."

"By birth of the moon, are you referring to a new moon?" Ginny inquired.

Severus nodded. "Since we are now experiencing the full moon, we have two weeks until the new moon, September third to be exact. That is the earliest that the Great One can attempt the restoration."

"Then the children are safe until then at least," Ron said, sounding at least somewhat relieved.

"To an extent," Harry replied despondently. "They must remain alive and innocent until the new moon, but who knows what tortures the animals that cage them will inflict. And Jamie..."

"They don't require her at all," Hermione cried, horrified at the thought.

"No," Harry said. "At this juncture we can only be thankful that all signs point to her currently being alive."

Sam picked up Timmy's colouring book and after studying it a moment commented. "We can stop assuming some things," she said. "The Great One definitely has the children and we should stop referring to her as a he."

Everyone looked at Sam questioningly as she passed the colouring book first to Hermione and then it started making the rounds of everyone present. On the open page of the book, someone had hastily drawn a stick figure. Apparently the drawing was of a woman because a triangle representing a dress was drawn over the tops of the legs. 'G1' was scrawled under the drawing.

"It's not a lot of information," Draco declared, "but it's more than the Ministry has been able to ascertain in the last two years."

"We also have a means to locate them," Harry said.

"Harry, if you're referring to Caitlin and my telepathic connection," Hermione interjected. "I have to be within twenty-five miles of her for that to work."

"That means we have to get you within that distance," Harry declared emphatically.

"But Harry," Ginny said, "Great Britain covers nearly 89,000 square miles and we can't even be sure they are still on the island."

"No we can't," Harry admitted, "But two years ago I sat helpless waiting wondering if the woman I loved would ever be returned to me. I'm not sitting idle again."

He looked questioningly at Hermione. "It will be worse than looking for that damn proverbial needle in a haystack," he said, "and all we can do is fly escort, you're the only one with the power to contact Caitlin."

Not once did Hermione think about her loathing of flying. Instead a slide show of memories filled her mind. She remembered sitting across the table from an anxious looking eleven year old...

Hermione pulled a parchment out of her robes and laid it on the table in front of Caitlin. "Please read this and let me know what you think. The decision is completely yours."

Caitlin picked up the very official looking document. It already had a ministry seal on it and had been sign by the Inquisitor right next to the signature of Hermione Granger. Caitlin went back to the top of the parchment and began reading. She hadn't made it half way through the document before she realized what it was and burst into tears. "This is the real thing! This is a legal document. Does this mean...? Are you sure? Do you really...?"

Hermione smiled through the tears in her eyes. "It's a legal magical adoption paper. It has already been signed and approved by the court. I have never been surer of anything in my life. Because of your age, all that is needed is your signature and it will be official."

Caitlin was at a total loss for words. She just looked at her professor, soon to be mother, and broke into tears. Tears of joy that she neither could nor wanted to hold back. The food was forgotten as Caitlin sat on Hermione's lap and wrapped her arms around her. They sat like that crying and hugging until Caitlin once more asked, "Are you absolutely sure?"

"Yes, I'm absolutely sure," Hermione said, giving Caitlin a squeeze.

Caitlin slid off her lap and took the parchment over to Hermione's desk. She dipped the quill in ink and signed her name to the document. She no more than finished when the documents disappeared in a puff of smoke.

Hermione looked at her daughter. "It's official. We belong to each other."

Hermione remember lying in the hospital wing just prior to giving birth__

Emily looked from Hermione to Harry and then leaned into Harry. "Dad, when you have a child of you own, will you still love Caitlin and me?"

Harry lifted Emily to him, and held her with one arm while he moved toward Caitlin and put his

other arm around her. "If Hermione and I have a hundred children, we'll never stop loving you girls." He looked at Jamie. "You girls mean the world to us. We didn't physically give birth to you, but you are our daughters."

Emily looked concernedly toward Jamie and then at Harry. "Could you make it official? I mean... I know you're not my real parents. I'll never forget them or stop loving them, but I love you and Mum and Caitlin, too." She looked at Jamie, tears in her eyes. "I love you too Jamie, but I don't want them being my guardians anymore; the term sounds cold and unloving. I want to be a real part of the family. I want them to be my Mum and Dad and Caitlin my sister and I want the baby to be my little brother or sister."

Emily's eyes watered and then tears streamed down her face. "I know it's asking a lot, but would you adopt me?" She asked.

Harry squeezed her tightly. "Slytherin, I was hoping that someday you'd ask us that." He kissed her cheek. "What do you think, Hermione? Should we make this little trouble-maker an official part of our family?"

Hermione couldn't answer, she was crying too hard. She reached toward Emily, and Harry plopped the young girl on the bed next to Hermione. They embraced and kissed each other on the cheek.

Hermione remembered almost losing Jamie, a student who had come to mean so much more__

Hermione had been in her office, when a student came rushing in with the news of what had occurred. She silently thanked Madam Pomfrey for letting her know as she rushed as quickly as possible through the halls of Hogwarts. When she arrived at the Infirmary, the look on Madam Pomfrey's face was enough to frighten Hermione to the core.

"I think we may be too late, Professor Granger. I'm hesitant to take her out of stasis. She was in that freezing water so long and she had stopped breathing. I'm not sure for how long. If she lives I'm afraid she's going to lose one leg and there is a 70% chance of brain damage. I don't know what to do."

Hermione looked at her and said all we can do is pray. And so they did. After a few days Pomfrey reported that Jamie wouldn't lose the leg, but as far as brain damage, she couldn't be sure until or if she came out of the coma. For two weeks they took turns sitting with her and praying that she would return to them. Then Headmaster McGonagall housed Jamie's parents in empty faculty quarters. They spent the days sitting with her and Amanda, Alex and Hermione took the nights.

"We really thought we'd never see her alive again, Harry. But then one night, I fell asleep holding her hand, and our prayers were answered." Hermione smiled warmly as she remembered the feeling of seeing Jamie that night. "She looked like the most beautiful Angel in the world, and do you know what she said?"

When Harry shook his head, Hermione continued. "She said, 'Professor Granger, How is the little girl? Did I lose her baby doll?'"

Harry grabbed hold of Hermione's hand and gently squeezed it, telling her, "You're right; she is a very special girl."

And, of course she remembered the birth of her son__

"How do you feel?" Harry asked, as he watched Hermione nurse their son.

"Tired, very tired", Hermione said, "but extremely happy and fulfilled. Harry, I love the girls with all my heart, but this.... This was an experience I'll never forget."

"Nor I," Harry said, looking blissfully at the marvel Hermione held in her arms. "Even though I witnessed it with my own eyes, it still seems impossible that he actually came out of you and that he was formed by us simply making love."

"That's why it's called the miracle of birth," Hermione replied. "Harry, did I say anything cruel or spiteful during the birthing? If I did, I'm sorry. I love you with all my heart, and I've never been happier."

"And I love you Mione. And I love you."

The last picture to enter her mind was very recent, from just a few days ago.

Ron leaped in and began swimming in the direction of Sam, Bonnie on his heels.

"Daddy!" Timmy yelled happily. "Look Mummy! Daddy got nudie and in the pool."

Sam smiled as Timmy madly splashed his way toward Ron and then threw his arms around his Dad's neck.

"He really loves his daddy," Bonnie said, as she settled herself on the edge of the pool next to Sam.

"They're very close," Sam agreed, nodding her head.

"Hermione," Harry called, trying to bring her back to reality. "Are you all right?" Will you be up to that much flying?"

"Those bastards have ripped our hearts out. They've taken from us what is most precious, our children. It's not a question of whether I'm up to it; it's a question of how soon do we get started."

* * * * *

In twenty-four hours, Jamie had gone from sleeping in a quite comfortable bed on a first class cruise ship, to sleeping on the chilly stone floor of what gave the appearance of being a dungeon torture chamber right out of the thirteen hundreds. Sleeping was perhaps not the correct term because she had in reality slept very little during the night.

They had all cuddled together to share their body warmth the previous evening. Jamie had lain on her side with Ben nestled snugly in her arms, Emily facing her in order to help shelter the infant. Caitlin had snuggled against Jamie's back and little Timmy had burrowed between Jamie and Emily, alternately using each girl as a pillow.

With the possible exception of Ben, no one slept contentedly; there was a great deal of tossing and turning. Then just when Jamie had finally drifted off to sleep, Ben awoke, hungry and demanding that his diaper be changed.

It was now a little past six in the morning, as Jamie appraised their prison while the others slept

restlessly. She only knew the time because in the quietness of the early morning she had heard what sounded like a grandfather's clock in a nearby room solemnly chiming the hour.

The dungeon seemed to be modelled after those used during the time of the Spanish Inquisition. It was damp and if not for the torches, would have been extremely dark. Fortunately it did not seem to be vermin infested or extremely bad smelling as dungeons of that era often were; at least Jamie had not thus far observed any rats or cockroaches. She trusted that their meals would also be more than the mouldy bread and stale water normally served to prisoners of that time.

Although she had no way of being positive, Jamie suspected that they might be the only prisoners. She had been awake most of the night and had heard no cries or screams, or for that matter any sounds at all, echoing throughout the dungeon walls.

"Wake up!" Madam Hooch screamed as she entered the chamber, Crabbe and Goyle on her heels. Hooch tossed a bag in Jamie's direction. "Crabbe purchased formula and baby bottles."

"You get two meals a day," she shouted as the kids yawned and stretched. "This isn't Hogwarts, eat what you're served without complaint or starve. It's your choice." She waved her wand and four plates and tumblers appeared on the floor.

"Where do we sit to eat?" Timmy asked innocently.

"On your arse," Goyle replied crudely.

Caitlin and Emily both gave Goyle looks of loathing as they squatted Indian style on the floor, Emily demonstrating to Timmy how to sit the same way. Jamie looked about for somewhere she could lay down the still sleeping Ben. She stared beseechingly at Hooch.

"We were all extremely cold and uncomfortable last night," she said. "If you insist that my sisters and I catch pneumonia, so be it, but couldn't you at least give us blankets for Timmy and the baby. I can't lay Ben down on a chilly damp stone floor."

Hooch looked at Jamie as if she were asking for the moon and then gave a sigh of total antipathy. She drew her wand and pointed it at the floor where a tiny padded infant mattress appeared. "For the infant only," she declared. "Damien or the Great One will have to approve anything additional."

"Thank you," Jamie said, but her words of appreciation went ignored. After putting down the sleeping baby she seated herself next to Emily, adopting the same Indian style position the girls and Timmy had taken.

Goyle was carrying a large bowl from which he scooped what appeared to be gooey scrambled eggs, and flopped some on each of their plates. Crabbe, using his grimy bare hands, tossed a sausage patty and a piece of toast on each plate. Hooch placed a pitcher of some putrid looking juice on the floor and then the three turned to leave.

"You forgot to give us eating utensils," Emily said as if to remind them.

Crabbe, turned, held his hand in the air and wiggled his fingers. Then without a word he followed Hooch and Goyle out of the room and slammed the door.

"Somehow I don't think losing the weight I gained on the cruise is going to be a problem," Emily said, looking nauseated at her plate.

"That's an understatement," Caitlin said, taking a tiny bite from her cold rubbery sausage.

"I don't like this," Timmy said pushing his plate away. "I want to go home. I want my Mummy." The toddler started crying.

Jamie got to her feet and picked up the little boy, hugging him to her chest as she stroked his back. "Timmy, we all want to go home," she said, searching for words that he would understand to describe their situation.

"These are bad people. They've hidden us away from the ones we love. I'm sure that right now your Mummy and Daddy are looking for us along with Harry and Hermione. It's just a matter of time until they find us," she said, trying to sound as convincing as possible. "When they do, these terrible people will be punished. But until they get here we have to all be very good and do everything we are told to or they will hurt us. Do you remember what the evil woman did to Emily and Caitlin last night?"

Timmy nodded his head timidly.

"You don't want them to be hurt again, do you?"

Timmy shook his head.

"Then you have to be big brave boy. In order to do that you have to be strong, and in order to be strong you must eat. They want us all to become weak; that's why they gave us such horrible food. They think we won't eat it. We'll show them, won't we? We'll be big and strong and make your Mummy and Daddy proud of us."

Timmy nodded his head. "Timmy be big and brave like Daddy."

"Let's have a contest and see which of us can do the best job emptying their plate," Jamie suggested.

As Timmy and Jamie started nibbling at the bland food, Ben began to stir. Jamie looked worriedly in his direction. This feeding would finish the last of Hermione's breast milk. What would Jamie do if Ben refused to drink the Muggle formula?

* * * * *

"Timmy, please stay away from those devices," Jamie implored. "Some of them are sharp and look exceedingly dangerous."

"But I'm bored," Timmy complained. "There's nothing to do here."

"He's just being inquisitive," said the voice of a man who had one way or another, entered the chamber without Jamie's knowledge.

He stared admiringly at Jamie for a few moments and than said, shaking his head, "The resemblance is uncanny. They told me you looked like her, but ..."

Jamie shivered as the man stepped before her. Her heartbeat increased and her body became hot and

clammy as she felt him violate her with his eyes. He moved closer and she shivered as he stepped into the light before her. His face was sallow and covered in acne. His eyes were gray, but the parts that should be white were a very sickly looking yellow. Involuntarily, she shuddered as he stared at her silently. He took a few steps forward and was now so close that she could feel his breath on her neck. She cringed, but held her ground; determined to not show fear. Besides, where did she have to run?

"My name is Damien," he said, as if this should have some meaning to Jamie.

"Leave my sister alone," Caitlin yelled.

"Yeah, back off pimple puss," Emily shouted.

Damien seemed to ignore the outbursts of the younger girls as he moved even closer to Jamie, his large, oily nose now mere centimetres from her own. He leaned closer as if intending to kiss her, but instead whispered in her ear.

"Your sisters love you and appear prepared to leap to your defence," he said softly, yet in a cold manner, so that only Jamie could hear. "I like that. Since they are so brave, if you fight or resist me in even the slightest way, I'll allow them to pay the consequences."

He reached out his hand and caressed Jamie's cheek with his short rough fingers; slowly he moved them to touch her lips, before descending down her neck to her ample chest. Jamie closed her eyes and bit her lip as his fingers played briefly with her nipple.

Then without warning, he grabbed her between the legs and prodded her roughly with his fingers. Jamie jerked in response, tears coming to her eyes, but she made no effort to stop his invasion. Damien moved away from her, a look of disappointment on his face.

"You're no Hermione," he said, looking at Jamie with disenchantment. "You may have her looks, but you lack her tenacity. At the very least she would have spat in my face."

Damien turned his back on Jamie, as if their encounter had not even transpired, and addressed Timmy. "Would you like me to show you around?" he asked. "Your friends can join us."

Timmy nodded his head, eager for anything to do, and motioned for Emily and Caitlin to join him. Jamie just watched anxiously. Clearly this was where Hermione had been held captive when she was kidnapped two years ago. The memories of that time span still eluded Hermione. Could Damien have been her jailer? Was he the one that smashed the bones in her fingers? What else had he done? Had he possibly raped her?

Damien seemed to be enjoying giving the tour; it was as if he were sharing the results of a wonderful hobby. Emily and Caitlin walked apprehensively with Damien as he pointed out and explained the various implements to Timmy. Fortunately, Timmy was too young to appreciate most of Damien's enlightenment, but from the horrified looks on Caitlin and Emily's faces, they had understood his explanations, all too well.

After he had shown them such devices as The Rack, The Ducking Stool and the Wheel, Damien showed them The Cage. The Cage was rather simple. It consisted of an iron band that encircled the waist at the hips. From this band two additional iron bands were connected at either side in the front. These bands crossed at the chest and then bent over the shoulders again crossing in the back before connecting to the waistband. Wrist cuffs were attached to both sides and a hinged iron band

went between the legs and closed at the back. Attachments for chains at the shoulders secured the prisoner to the wall.

After finishing explaining the finer points of the cage, Damien called to Jamie. "This was Professor Granger's home while she was with us. Would you like to try it on?"

Jamie didn't answer, but instead walked over and picked up Ben, who was stirring restlessly. Soon she would know whether or not he would drink the formula. As Jamie held Ben in her arms, Damien picked up the first of many tools lying on a shelf.

"Step closer to me," he said to Caitlin. "I want to show you how this works. I won't hurt you, at least not at the moment."

He picked up an iron four-pronged implement. "This is called a Breast Ripper," he said, pressing the instrument firmly against Caitlin's chest. "It was often used on women convicted of heresy or adultery. Depending on the mood of the torturer, the device would either be frozen or heated to increase the pain."

Damien snickered as he removed the tool from Caitlin's breast. "It works better on something a bit larger. If you'd like a demonstration perhaps Jamie would be willingly to assist me." He laughed as if the idea of mutilating Jamie's breasts was amusing."

At that moment Ben began bawling and Jamie hurried to get him a bottle of formula. "Perhaps later," Damien said, sounding extremely let down. "She seems to be busy at the moment."

He returned the apparatus to the shelf and was about to pick up the thumbscrews when Timmy yelled, "What is that fancy looking thing?"

Damien patted the boy on the back. "That is one of my favourites," he said smiling wickedly at Timmy. "That is called a Pear."

"Like the fruit?" Timmy asked innocently.

"Yes," Damien said, again patting Timmy on the back.

Jamie listened nervously to Damien chatting to Timmy and the girls as she fed Ben. At least Ben was drinking his bottle.

"How does it work?" Timmy asked excitedly.

"It is forced into the mouth, rectum or vagina of the victim and there expanded by force of the screw to the maximum aperture of the segments," Damien answered. "The inside of the cavity in question is irremediably mutilated, nearly always fatally so. The pointed prongs at the end of the segments serve better to rip into the throat, the intestines or the cervix."

Timmy looked at him uncertainly, not quite understanding, but beginning to realise that these were not pleasant devices.

"How would you like that thrust into your little twat?" Damien asked Emily, maliciously.

"I'd much prefer to see it shoved up your scrawny arse," Emily retorted.

"You have spirit," Damien said, gazing with pleasure at Emily. "It's a shame that I've been ordered not to damage any of you. I think I could have fun with you."

"Go fuck yourself!" Emily shouted, as she attempted to drive her knee in between Damien's legs. She missed her target and Damien sent her sailing across the room where she landed near an eight-foot tall pyramid shaped object.

"Leave her alone," Jamie yelled, running to her sister's side.

"You keep out of this, bitch, and tend to that infant or you'll be the first person to test my Pyramid of Death."

Jamie didn't have the opportunity to comment, because Ben chose that moment to vomit and then proceeded to cry hysterically.

"Shut that spoiled brat up," Damien commanded. "You do understand that little horror is the only reason you're alive, don't you?"

"Enough of this tour," Damien said, growing bored and turning as if to leave the chamber.

"But sir! What is the Pyramid of Death?" Timmy questioned.

"I like you, little one," Damien said, sounding sincere. "It is a misfortune you must die so young." He pointed to the tall pyramid in the middle of the room. "That is the Pyramid of Death. It is my own creation, bringing together the virtues of the Judas Cradle and Impalement."

Timmy, Emily and Caitlin all stared at the pyramid uncertainly, waiting for a further explanation.

"With the Judas Cradle, the victim was hung in the air by various ropes and dropped onto a point, thus completely destroying the genital area," Damien explained. "Impalement was the process of inserting a stake or post through the entire body of the victim, starting at the seat of the body and exiting through the mouth or throat."

Damien beamed in delight as he gave details on his creation. "The point and edges of the Pyramid of Death are razor sharp. The victim is tied and hung in the air over the pyramid in such a way that the arms and legs are in the air and the anus is barely touching the point. When the rope is released, theoretically the weight of the body will cause it to be cut in four pieces with the point of the pyramid coming out through the center of the skull."

Caitlin threw up as she visualized such an atrocity. Timmy started to cry.

"You're mental," Emily shouted. "No one in their right mind could do something like that to another human being."

Damien backhanded Emily so hard that she fell to the floor. "I'll show you mental," he said. Damien looked coldly toward Jamie. "Hopefully they will all have the opportunity to see you meet that fate before they die." Without another word, he exited the dungeon.

"I'm scared," Timmy wailed. "I want my Mummy."

Emily lifted Timmy into her arms and tried to calm him.

"Jamie, what are we going to do?" Caitlin asked, their situation seeming hopeless.

"I don't know," Jamie sobbed as Ben sucked frantically on her nipple, trying to get nonexistent nourishment.

"Jamie, are we all going to die? Timmy asked between his sobs.

Jamie didn't answer. She just held Ben tightly as tears streamed down her face.

Chapter Eight The Milk of Life

Tuesday, August 23, 2005

"He hasn't kept anything down except water in the last seventy-two hours," Jamie pleaded. "If Ben doesn't get some real nourishment soon, he'll die."

"If the infant dies, so will you all!" Hooch screamed heartlessly.

"I can only guarantee that all your deaths will be extremely slow and painful, especially yours," she said, staring at Jamie, before taking her leave and slamming the dungeon door behind her.

"What does she expect me to do?" Jamie cried in frustration to the room in general. "Ben will only drink breast milk. How the hell does she expect me to get that for him when I'm locked in a dungeon?" Jamie dug her fingernails into her own breasts, purposely causing them to hurt. "What good are these damn things if they can't do their intended job?"

"Why is that?" Emily asked.

"Why is what?" Jamie asked impatiently.

"Why don't women's breasts give milk at all times? I mean once you have reached the age when you can have children, of course. Cows give milk every day of the year and they aren't always pregnant or feeding a calf, are they?"

Jamie stared at Emily, suddenly aware of how Hermione felt when asked a question to which she didn't know the answer.

"I can't answer that," she said. "Maybe that is one of the reasons why they are starting sex education classes this year at Hogwarts." Jamie shook her head in frustration. "I can't believe that I'm capable of transforming into another creature, yet I can't even explain properly how my own body functions."

Out of the blue, Jamie was struck with an inspiration. "Caitlin, whilst working with Madam Pomfrey at the Hogsmeade clinic, didn't you say that you were once able to help a woman go back to breast feeding? A woman's whose milk supply had dried up?"

Caitlin had been scratching Timmy's back in order to calm him down. The toddler had fallen asleep, his head nestled in Caitlin's lap. She looked up at Jamie as if reading her mind.

"Jamie, that woman had given birth and was already breast feeding. What I did for her was akin to repairing a broken bone." Caitlin gritted her teeth. "I'm not sure if I can do what I think you're suggesting. I wouldn't even know where to begin."

"Will you try?" Jamie implored.

"But what if I do something wrong, something that damages your ability to give birth or even worse kills you?" Caitlin asked.

"Then you'll deprive Damien and Hooch of the pleasure of butchering me," Jamie replied. "Caitlin,

if there is even the slightest chance of this working, we have to try. Don't you see? If we don't, Ben is going to die."

Emily gulped. "If it works on Jamie, you better do the same to me."

"Why?" Jamie asked staring at her sister in amazement. "I'd certainly be capable of supplying enough milk for Ben's needs."

"It's not just Ben," Emily replied. "You and I seem to be the only two in the group that can stomach what they pass off as food around here. Timmy isn't eating and neither is Caitlin"

"I'll be okay," Caitlin disputed. "If I get hungry enough, I'll learn to tolerate the slop. But Emily is correct about Timmy. I've seen him empty his plate into the sewer when he thought no one was watching."

"Are you suggesting that you breast feed Timmy? He's not a baby." Her words faded off. It seemed impossible that in such a short time they had been pushed to such extremes.

"I'm suggesting that we all have to do whatever is necessary to get us through this intolerable situation," Emily declared.

"Let's not argue about something I'm not even sure I'm capable of doing," Caitlin implored.

"No, let's not," Jamie agreed, "but we can't shilly-shally either. Ben is already behaving in a lethargic way. The longer he goes without sustenance the slighter his chance of full recovery."

Caitlin slipped out from under Timmy and, after placing his head gently on the floor, walked uncertainly over to Jamie. "I'm glad that I've been giving those massages to Mum," she said. "I'm in harmony with exactly how her body feels both on the surface and internally. I think what I'll have to try and do is to adjust your organs to mimic hers."

"Does that mean you're going to have to have to physically touch me? Can't you just do it mentally?" Jamie asked.

"I can only do healing mentally when I'm able to utilize my own body as a draft of how things are meant to be." Caitlin blushed. "That's why I wouldn't be able to heal certain parts of a male without actually touching them."

"I have to approach what we are going to attempt with the same attitude. I have to envision how Mum's breasts felt, both superficially and internally. Then using her as a guide as to what is accurate, I will attempt to amend yours."

Jamie had numerous questions she wanted to ask, but decided against posing them. This was uncharted territory for Caitlin, so she indubitably would not be able to answer without reservation. Besides, there was no other alternative; Jamie had to go through with this no matter what the upshot. Without a doubt, this would mean the difference between Benjamin living or dying.

"Emily, this may take quite awhile," Caitlin said, her voice sounding not in the least bit confident. "You'll have to tend to Ben and Timmy if they wake up. It would be risky for us to stop in the middle."

Emily nodded her head in understanding.

* * * * *

"How is she?" Sam asked.

"Exhausted, but she refuses to let up. I had to threaten her last night before she'd finally agree to take a break and get some sleep," Harry answered.

"What time did you get back last evening?" Ron asked as Harry ushered Sam and him into the bedroom.

"Close to midnight," Harry said. "I don't know how she's doing it. Hermione's been in the air fifty-six of the last seventy-two hours and we all know how much she hates flying. Hell, she won't even land for meals -- insists on eating while in flight."

"Where is she now?" Ron asked, looking around the empty room. But before Harry could speak, Hermione entered the room, her wet hair wrapped in a towel.

"I'm glad you're early," she said cordially, obviously trying to conceal her true feelings. "We need to discuss some changes in our strategy. Harry, do you have that grid map of Great Britain that Severus and Draco prepared?"

"Over there on the table," he indicated.

"Good," Hermione said, as she unwrapped her hair, tossed the towel over a nearby chair and then did a quick drying spell on her hair before hurrying over to the table.

"We can't continue to use Hogwarts as our base of operations, it's just too far north," she declared, pointing to a flag marking the location of the Wizarding School on the map. "We need to secure lodging as we travel south, otherwise we'll spend an inordinate amount of time retracing our steps as we fly back and forth to the castle."

"That makes sense," Ron agreed looking at the map. "We'll have to adjust the shifts for flying escort." He used his finger to draw an imaginary line on the map.

"Instead of alternating every eight hours, one group will have to remain with you until you reach the southern most point of the search area and then return again north. At that time, we will change escort teams."

"Hermione, are you up to this?" Harry asked. "Fortunately, the weather has been in our favor, but it's still an unreasonable amount of flying with little rest or sleep."

Hermione looked at Harry as tears filled her eyes. "Harry, if anything happens to Jamie or any of those innocent children, I'll never be able to have a restful night's sleep again."

Harry nodded his head in agreement.

"Let me slip some clothes on and we'll get started," Hermione said, rushing to her dresser.

* * * * *

"Caitlin, what on earth are you doing?" Jamie cried anxiously. "They're getting bigger. The last thing I need is bigger boobs."

"Relax," Caitlin whispered softly. "That's a good sign. Growth and enlargement are a sign of the breasts evolving and preparing for the baby."

"They're not going to get as large as Hermione's, are they?" Jamie asked in concern.

"Quite possibly," Caitlin answered softly, as if in a semi trance, her hands continuing to move over Jamie's changing body. "Your body structure was nearly identical to Hermione's before she became pregnant. It wouldn't be surprising for it to react in the same way as hers did."

Jamie's body stiffened. "You're not actually making me pregnant, are you?" she asked in panic.

Caitlin smiled, although her eyes remained closed and her mind focused. "I'm a healer. There are limits to my ability, as there should be. You are not pregnant, but I seem to have managed to convince your mammary glands that you are."

"Is that why my breast feel so tender and hypersensitive?" Jamie asked.

Caitlin nodded her head. Meanwhile, Emily couldn't take her eyes off Caitlin and Jamie. Emily continued to be in awe of her sister's great power. She had watched mesmerized as before her eyes, Jamie's breasts had increased dramatically in size, her nipples and areolas darkening and becoming larger.

Now, as Caitlin's hands gently touched Jamie's breasts, they began to leak a thick yellowish substance.

"We're almost there," Caitlin said, thrill evident in her voice. "You're starting to produce pre-milk. Madam Pomfrey taught me that normally happens in the second trimester. "Just a few minutes longer."

Jamie was both elated and... she couldn't quite describe her mixture of emotions. If this worked, as it seemed now that it might, she'd be able to hold Ben to her breast and actually feed him; he would live. This knowledge sent an emotional ripple of happiness through her body.

But as she looked around the dungeon, Jamie was brought back to the harsh reality of their dire situation. Was she actually saving Ben's life or guaranteeing the death of all four innocents? What hell would be released upon the world if, in fact, Salazar Slytherin actually were reincarnated?

She had to take one step at a time. The immediate concern was Ben. Her job was to do everything within her power to keep everyone alive until...

"I think I'm done," Caitlin sighed, sounding both physically and emotionally drained, but at the same time delighted with her accomplishment.

"Perfect timing," Emily said, as Ben began to stir and whimper. "Are you ready to road test those?"

Jamie nodded her head for Emily to get Ben while she silently prayed that Caitlin had been successful. By this time, Ben was crying non-stop. Emily picked the unhappy baby up and

practically ran to Jamie, who took Ben in her arms. Ben instinctively went for her nipple and immediately quieted.

"Is it working? Is he getting milk?" Caitlin asked.

"It's working," Jamie grimaced. "My nipple is tender and it hurts like hell, but he's getting milk. It's remarkable how something that hurts so much can feel so good."

"I think the hurting will go away in time," Caitlin commented. "It doesn't seem to hurt Mum."

"I'm hungry," Timmy wailed as he woke up.

Emily looked in Caitlin's direction and gave her a 'see what I mean' look. "When you're up to it, I think you should do me," she said looking extremely apprehensive. Then she went over to try and calm Timmy.

"Emily, I appreciate your intentions, but since Timmy can't stand to eat the garbage they serve us, what makes you think he'll be able to keep down breast milk? It's nothing like cow's milk, it's warm and, well I don't know whether he'll be eager to do what's necessary to get it."

"Do you think you can do the same thing you did to Jamie, to me?" Emily asked, ignoring Caitlin's comments and pushing the subject.

"Now that I've done it once, I don't think it would be at all difficult" Caitlin answered, "but we don't know whether Timmy will be able to drink it. Besides, he isn't a baby. You'd never be able to produce enough to feed him."

"Probably not, but Jamie will more than likely be able to generate more than Ben can drink. He may not end up with a chock-full stomach, but anything is better than zilch. We have to make an effort." Emily watched as Jamie lovingly nursed Ben.

"We could let him give it a try before making any physical changes to me," Emily suggested.

Jamie had been concentrating on feeding Ben, letting most of Caitlin and Emily's conversation go in one ear and out the other. For some reason though, Emily's last suggestion registered.

"I didn't think you were serious," Jamie said incredulously. "Are you seriously suggesting that you and I breast feed Timmy? He's four years old."

"Right, and he hasn't eaten anything of consequence in the last two days. It's damp and chilly in this hole. I realize it's not the most engaging idea, but we have to do something. I know you've been concerned about Ben, but haven't you seen the change in Timmy? He's suffering, too." Emily, went over to Caitlin and put her arm around her. "I don't know about you, but I'm willing to do anything that will increase the chances of us all making it through this hell on earth."

Jamie gulped, bit her lip and then looked up at the ceiling. "When I'm done feeding Ben, why don't we give it a small test?" She looked over at Timmy who was lying listlessly on the floor. "I'll try feeding Timmy. If he's able to keep it down; we should do as Emily suggests."

* * * * *

Madam Hooch stopped so suddenly as she entered the dungeon that she caused Crabbe to rear end her and Goyle to get caught in the chain reaction.

"What the hell happened to you!?" she yelled, staring unbelievably at Jamie's breasts.

Jamie was about to explain what Caitlin had done and why, but before she had a chance, Hooch's eyes fell upon Emily. Her eyes practically jumped out of her head.

"My God, girl, what have they done to you? Can you actually stand without tipping forward?"

When Jamie finished nursing Ben, the baby had straightaway fallen asleep, what would be the most contented sleep he had experienced in days. She then anxiously called Timmy to her side. Jamie realized that Emily was right, that this was something they had to try in order to keep Timmy alive, but that didn't stop it from feeling strange, and in some ways, wrong to her.

Ben was a little baby, not quite three months old. He was helpless and it felt totally natural and correct to have him snuggled next to her, sucking on her nipple for sustenance.

Timmy wasn't a baby. He was a little boy, a little boy with teeth. He was over four years old and at times could be a little monster. Yet, in many ways he was as just as helpless as Ben.

"Come and sit on my lap," Jamie said lovingly to Timmy. "Emily and Caitlin tell me you haven't been eating, that you've been throwing your food away when you thought no one was watching."

Timmy stared angrily at Emily and Caitlin. "I tried to eat it," Timmy said, his eyes filling with tears. "I wanted to be brave and make Mummy and Daddy proud of me, but I couldn't. It makes me sick."

"Are you hungry right now?" Jamie asked, already knowing the answer.

"Very," Timmy said, his facial expression so sad that it nearly broke Jamie's heart.

"Caitlin did some magic on my breasts so that I could feed Benjamin just like his mother does," Jamie explained.

"I was watching," Timmy said, between snuffles.

Jamie bit her lips before proceeding. "Would you like to try?"

"But I'm not a baby!" Timmy said, ostensibly upset at the thought of being treated like one.

"No one said you were," Jamie said, holding Timmy tightly. "We love you. You can't stomach the food they give us. This is the only alternative we can think of to keep you from starving. Will you please at least try?"

Timmy gazed into Jamie's loving face and then looked at Emily and Caitlin who both gave him encouraging smiles.

"What should I do?" he asked uncertainly.

Jamie gulped. "Just place your lips around one of my nipples and gently suck. Please be careful not to bite with your teeth."

Caitlin and Emily watched as Timmy slowly moved his head closer to Jamie's breast. Jamie seemed

to be holding her breath. Then finally he made contact and Jamie could feel suction on her breast.

"It... It tastes good," Timmy said, sounding as if he felt it was wrong for him to like it. "It's sort of sweet."

Jamie just smiled as she hugged Timmy tightly.

"Can I have more?" he asked.

Jamie nodded her head and then sighed as she looked towards Emily.

"I guess it's time for you to go back to work," Emily gulped as she reached for Caitlin's hand. "Jamie can't possibly feed the two of them by herself."

"It shouldn't hurt," Caitlin said reassuringly. "It didn't for Jamie and now I'm a little more skilled."

"I'm not worried about it hurting," Emily said with a sigh. "It's just that I'm only twelve years old. Breast feeding a four year old at this age is something I never envisioned myself doing."

"When Hooch tied me to that tree and left me to die, I never thought I'd live to see age eleven," Caitlin said sadly. "I even prayed to die." Caitlin threw her arms around Emily and hugged her tightly.

"Now I have a family and friends that I love," Caitlin said. "The last thing I want to do is die or witness anyone I love die. We have to do whatever necessary to ensure our survival. Somehow, we have to defeat these bastards."

Emily agreed and so they started the long procedure that would permit her to breast feed just like Jamie. Unfortunately, Caitlin forgot to take a number of things into consideration that made Emily's situation much different from Jamie's.

Jamie was seventeen and had reached her full adult height. She was also fully developed. Emily was only twelve. Although she had a figure, she had not reached what would be her full height and she was nowhere near fully developed.

When they were midway through the attempt, both girls realized there was a problem. They also both realized that they couldn't stop. To stop might cause irreparable harm to Emily, but it would also leave them with no way to nourish Timmy. They had to finish.

"Well Jamie, I always dreamed of having big tits like yours," Emily said, trying to force a smile.

Jamie hadn't worried before about her own physical change, but now she felt compelled to query Caitlin. "If we're fortunate enough to survive all of this, can you undo the changes you've made to Emily and I?"

"I'm not really sure," Caitlin said. "In both your cases, it ought to be possible to convince your bodies that you are no longer breast feeding." She looked at Jamie. "That means your breasts would return to approximately the same size and shape they were before I did anything. I can also alleviate any sagging that takes place."

"But what about Emily?" Jamie asked, nervously.

"I'm afraid the rest of her body will just have to catch up," Caitlin said sorrowfully.

"But that will take years," Jamie replied.

"Probably four or five," Caitlin agreed.

Picture, if you would, a very well endowed woman such as Hermione or Jamie. Now imagine their breasts increasing dramatically in size due to pregnancy. Place those breasts on the body of a slender twelve-year-old girl and you'll have an idea of how Emily currently looks. It's not a sexy or a pretty picture, but rather gross, almost deformed in appearance. The good news was that they were at least functional.

After Jamie finished explaining, Hooch uncharacteristically laughed. "What do you think of the girls' new looks?" she asked Crabbe and Goyle.

Goyle, as normal couldn't take his eyes off of Jamie. The increased size of her breasts only seemed to intensify his interest. Crabbe on the other hand was no longer torn between looking at Emily and Caitlin. His eyes now remained focused on Caitlin, totally ignoring the overly endowed Emily.

"You seem to have lost Crabbe's attention, my dear," Hooch said nastily. "If you'd like those tits reduced in size, I'm sure Damien would be happy to strip some flesh from them."

"Only if he wishes his own toys turned upon him," responded a mysterious female voice.

Everyone looked in the direction of the voice, but Crabbe, Goyle and Hooch dropped to their knees.

"Great One, when did you arrive, how long have you been listening?" Hooch asked, fear evident in her voice.

"Long enough," she declared as she stepped from the shadows, "to know that the loyalty these children share for each other is stronger than the allegiance my servants demonstrate for me."

"That is not true!" Hooch wept, flinging herself forward and trembling from head to foot as she collapsed at the Great One's feet.

"Crucio!"

Hooch writhed and shrieked until the Great One finally raised her wand.

"Do not ever take it upon yourself to correct me," she roared.

"Isn't that Emma Wrong, the Minister of Magic?" Caitlin whispered.

Jamie didn't answer, but merely nodded.

"I gave orders that the innocents should be protected; that no harm should befall them. Yet I now learn that two of them were on the verge of starvation." She looked long and angrily at her minions. "You three owe your lives to these girls. If my plans to awaken Salazar Slytherin had been thwarted because of your incompetence, you would have paid with your lives."

"Give them proper bedding and decent meals three times a day. I shall on occasion sample what you feed them and it best be to my liking," she howled. "If one of them ends up with so much as a scratch on them before the ceremony, there will be hell to pay."

"What about the older Zacherley girl?" Goyle asked.

"Thus far she has been more devoted to my wants than have any of you," Wrong declared disgustedly. "She will continue to watch over the children, unharmed, until the proper time. Once Salazar has arisen, I will decide her final fate."

Hooch, Goyle and Crabbe all seemed disheartened, but remained silent.

"Come," she ordered. "We must meet with Damien and make sure that everything is in place. The third of September will be here soon."

The girls stood silently until the door closed, and then all three tried to speak at once.

* * * * *

Friday, August 27, 2005

"Hermione, you need to rest," Harry insisted as his wife stumbled toward the shower. "I know you're worried, we all are, but you're going to kill yourself if you try to keep up this pace."

"I'll be all right," Hermione maintained. "Once they are all safely home, I'll have plenty of time to rest."

"You're not all right," Harry responded crossly. "Ginny told me that you dozed off last night and almost fell off your broom."

"Ginny has a big mouth," Hermione retorted.

"She's only concerned about you, we all are. You're just pushing yourself too hard."

"Harry, I'm the only one that can contact Caitlin," Hermione reminded him. "We only have a week before the new moon. If we don't find them before that..." She couldn't finish the sentence, but there was no real need. Harry knew that with the arrival of the new moon all hope of finding any of them alive would be lost.

"Don't you understand that is why you must take a break?" Harry pleaded. "You are the only hope we have of finding them." Harry put his arms around Hermione and drew her tightly to him.

"I've waited my entire life to have a family to love. I can't bear the thought of losing any of them, but if I were to lose you too..." The possibility was more than Harry could bear. He couldn't hold back the tears as he hugged Hermione desperately. "I need you so much," he cried. "I can't envision life without you."

Hermione returned Harry's embrace, her eyes swelling with tears. Then, unexpectedly, Harry found

he was supporting Hermione's entire weight. She had collapsed in his arms.

* * * * *

"What happened?" Hermione asked, a few hours later when she awoke in the hospital wing, steam escaping from her ears.

"You passed out," Harry said, leaning over to kiss Hermione gently on the cheek. "Poppy gave you some Pepperup Potion. It seems that you had a cold, but because of overexertion and lack of rest, it was on the verge of becoming pneumonia. She wants you to stay in bed for at least twenty-four hours."

"Harry, I can't," Hermione disagreed.

"Don't be stubborn," Harry said firmly. "Poppy is preparing you a sleeping potion now. We'll carry on the search tomorrow when you're feeling better. Meanwhile what do I tell Alex, Kim, and the others that are sending owls inquiring about the girls?"

"The truth," Hermione sighed, accepting the fact that she really did need rest. "They are too close to the girls; we can't lie to them. Besides, school starts in a week; the entire wizarding world will know the truth then."

"You know, of course, that they'll want to return to school straight away," Harry advised. "They'll probably insist on joining the search."

"Kim and the others are too young," Hermione said, "but I think Alex should be allowed. He's of age, after all, and Jamie and he plan to marry."

"I wouldn't even think of trying to stop him," Harry said. "You try to get some rest and I'll send owls off to Alex, Kim and the others."

Harry leaned over and kissed Hermione tenderly. "We'll find them in time, Mione. We have just got to."

Hermione drank the sleeping draught that Poppy gave her and then lay staring at the ceiling, waiting for it to take effect. There had been a time when she felt that with Harry her life was complete, but that was before Benjamin and the girls. At the end of the war, despite the deaths of her parents and losing her two best friends, she had somehow managed to go on. She shuddered at the thought of losing Jamie, Caitlin, Emily or Ben. But what if she lost all four? Tears filled her eyes as she drifted off into a dreamless sleep.

* * * * *

Wednesday, August 31, 2005

Jamie listened as the hour chimed faintly on a distant unknown clock. "The Sorting Ceremony will

be starting shortly, followed by the start-of-term banquet," she announced forlornly. "I've always loved the Sorting Ceremony, except when it was mine."

"Were you scared, too?" Caitlin asked. "You've always seemed so brave and courageous."

"I put on a plucky front," Jamie said with a laugh. "Besides, remember I was only eleven. I doubt any first year isn't petrified. I was shy, didn't know a soul. Just walking into the Great Hall is overwhelming; then add to that the ghosts, everyone staring at you and the creepy Sorting Hat."

"I found that the scariest," Emily declared. "I hated sitting on that stool with everyone gawking while that Hat made up its mind. There are times I still can't believe I talked it into putting me in Slytherin; I could have been with you guys in Gryffindor."

"That would have been nice," Jamie said, putting her arm around Emily's shoulder, "but you did the right thing. Kim needed you. Besides, look at the great friends you two have become. I have a feeling Kim and you are going to bring big changes to Slytherin house."

"Maybe Kim," Emily said sadly; she glanced to check that Timmy was still sleeping. "Jamie, it's time we stopped kidding ourselves. We are just three days away from the new moon. Mum and Dad aren't going to find us in time. We're all going to die and never see them, our friends or Hogwarts again."

"You can't give up hope," Jamie implored. "I know they are searching for us. They won't stop looking until they find us. You can't give up hoping."

"Besides," Caitlin added lightheartedly, "You have to get back so you can show Tyler your new boobs."

"Will you stop it?" Emily shouted angrily. "I've told you a million times that Tyler and I are history." She looked disgustedly down at her breasts. "Even if we weren't, one look at these monstrosities and we would be."

Emily shook her head in disgust. "The most depressing thing is that it was all for nothing. Once Emma Wrong got on Hooch's case, the food changed dramatically and Timmy started eating. I'm deformed for no reason at all."

"You're not deformed," Jamie insisted. "Once we get home, I'm sure that between Caitlin, Mum and Madame Pomfrey, they'll be able to restore you."

"If we get home," Emily said in frustration. "Meanwhile, I have two oversized basketballs as breasts and my back hurts all the time."

* * * * *

Amanda looked disconsolately around the Great Hall. The excitement normally associated with the start-of-term banquet was absent. Most certainly, the Sorting of new students had taken place as it did at the start of every school year, but the cheers erupting from the house tables had been more sedate than in years past.

Why Jamie, Caitlin and Emily were missing was supposed to be a complete secret, so, naturally the whole school knew about it. They similarly knew about the prophecy, therefore no one questioned the absence of Professors Potter or Granger from the head table. Amanda felt quite alone and lonely despite being in a crowd. Her two best friends for the last six years were missing; Alex was with the Potters searching, but it was doubtful that she would ever see Jamie again.

Tyler had initially sat next to his brother, but once he had learned the reason for Emily's absence, he moved and squeezed himself in at the table next to Kim. This move greatly displeased his brother, Dick Bancroft.

"Is there any news?" he asked Kim, placing his hand caringly over hers.

"I'm afraid not," Kim whispered softly. "You know about the link Caitlin and her Mum have. Well, they've been searching everywhere since the disappearance was discovered, hoping that Professor Granger could contact Caitlin. They covered the Shetland and Orkney Islands, all of Ireland and Scotland, including the Isle of Man. They've also covered England and Wales as far south as Cardiff. They're now covering the rest of England from the west heading toward London."

"What if they don't find them in the United Kingdom?" Tyler asked, his grip on Kim's hand tightening.

Kim bit her lip. "Then they'll keep searching, starting with France." Kim's voice became scratchy and she coughed. She threw her arms around a surprised Tyler as those sitting nearby looked on in shock. "The Potters feel that the innocents will be sacrificed with the new moon. Tyler, if they don't find them by moonrise on Saturday, they won't find them alive."

Tyler hugged Kim as everyone about them stared and whispered. "They have to find them; they just have to," Tyler cried, tears beginning to fill his eyes.

"You really do care about her, don't you?" Kim asked gently.

"I can't explain it," Tyler said, holding on to Kim as if his life depended on her touch. "I know we're only twelve and it's ridiculous to say I love her, but I don't know how else to describe my feelings. Our times together were the happiest moments of my life. Since we broke up, I've been miserable. I can't get her out of my head. I know she hates me, but I don't think I'll ever stop caring for her."

Kim gave Tyler a kiss on the cheek as she broke their embraces. "She doesn't hate you. I don't know if it will help, but I'll tell her how you feel when they bring her back to us."

"All that's important is that they bring her back unharmed. Bring back all of them alive," he added.

The buzz of chatter filling the Hall ceased as Severus Snape got to his feet.

"So!" said Snape, looking around at them all, a cheerless expression on his face. "Now that we have eaten, I must ask for your attention, while I give out a few notices. As ever, I would like to remind you that the Forbidden Forest on the grounds is out-of-bounds to students, as is the village of Hogsmeade to all below third year."

The Headmaster sighed deeply, picking at a stray hair on his sleeve as he measured his words. "The Inter-House Quidditch Cup will not take place this year," he said as if out of the blue.

Amanda looked around the Hall at the appalled students. They were staring soundlessly at Snape.

Many had been expecting Snape to say something about the kidnappings, but this announcement came totally unexpected.

"Life continues," he went on, but it was obvious he was having difficulty maintaining his own composure. "For a number of years we have been planning a special event that will be starting in October. Since this event will continue throughout the school year, and take up much of the teachers' time and energy, having a Quidditch Cup concurrently would be impractical. I am, however, sure you will all enjoy it immensely."

Severus coughed. "I would find much greater joy in announcing this special event if it were not for the grievous situation we are currently faced with. I'm sure that by this time you have all listened to the rumors concerning our missing students. It is my sad duty to confirm much of what you have in all probability already heard.

"Jamie Zacherley, Emily Zacherley-Potter and Caitlin Potter along with Benjamin Potter and Timothy Weasley were all kidnapped upon return from their summer holiday. They are believed to be presently in the hands of the person calling herself the Great One."

The Hall remained silent, the students hanging on Snape's every word.

"We believe that unless a rescue attempt currently underway is successful, they will be sacrificed in an attempt to fulfill a prophecy evolving the resurrection of Salazar Slytherin."

Amanda noticed that even the Slytherins, with a few exceptions, seemed appalled at this notion.

"I'm sure that we will all pray for their safe return," Severus added. "Initially I considered canceling the upcoming event, but decided to the contrary. With or without them, I'm sure Jamie, Caitlin and Emily would want to see ties established between young wizards of different nationalities.

"As I was saying, we are to have the honor of hosting a very exciting event over the coming months. The first of what I hope will be many such events that will strengthen our binds with our American cousins. It is my very great pleasure to inform you that the very first International Wizard Survival Tournament will be taking place at Hogwarts this year."

This announcement would, under normal circumstances, have been greeted with enthusiastic cheers, but due to the Headmaster's previous illumination concerning the kidnappings, it was only met with only polite applause.

"This will be our first competition with the United States since the colonies declared their independence. All the details as far as participating have not as of yet been ironed out, but will be forthcoming in the next few weeks. And now, it is late, and I know you all want to be alert and rested for your first day of classes. So, off to bed."

Amanda remained seated as with a great banging and scraping of chairs the students got to their feet and hurried toward the double doors and into the entrance hall.

"He's right," Amanda thought to herself. "Life goes on. We are all but players in the game of life. No matter who dies; no matter how much they mean to us, the game goes on."

She closed her eyes in an effort to suppress her tears.

Amanda jumped as a hand pressed against her back. "They'll make it," Tony said. "We can't give up

hope."

* * * * *

Saturday, September 3, 2004

"Thanks, Tom. Tell them that we'll join them shortly for breakfast," Harry said closing the door to the room Hermione and he had rented the previous night at the Leaky Cauldron.

"Severus, Ginny, Alex and Draco are downstairs waiting for us," Harry advised. "They just arrived on the midnight train from Hogsmeade."

"Why?" Hermione asked. "Ron and Sam are already here. How many people do they think I need as an escort?"

"I think they all wanted to be here for either eventuality," Harry said, a depressed look on his face.

"Either?" Hermione questioned.

"By this evening we will have completed our search of all the remaining territory in England. They want to be here to either help us with the rescue or comfort us if we come up empty handed."

"Harry, if we don't find them today, do you think we have any chance of finding them alive?" Hermione asked, apprehensively.

"We'll find them." Harry said with conviction. "We just have to."

* * * * *

For the first time since their incarceration, the captives had been immobilized. Crabbe and Goyle had entered the dungeon late in the afternoon and one by one chained them, spread eagle to the wall by both their wrists and ankles. Caitlin, Timmy and Emily actually hung by their wrists, their feet, especially Timmy's, not even nearly touching the floor.

Jamie, because she held baby Benjamin, had only been secured to the wall by leather cuffs around her ankles that were connected by chains to the wall. She found it extremely difficult to stand because of the distance apart that her ankles were secured. Two weeks had passed since their kidnapping and now the rising of the new moon was only a few hours away. They weren't going to be rescued; they were all going to die. Jamie watched helplessly as little Timmy bawled hysterically. Caitlin and Emily, who were chained on either side of the toddler, tried to calm him, but their words had little effect on the terrified child.

It was hours before anyone returned to the dungeon, and when they did, Crabbe and Goyle were pushing a huge stone cauldron. It was larger than any cauldron Jamie had ever seen; the belly was large enough to hold two adults, or four children. Jaime shivered at the thought.

Crabbe and Goyle had to struggle with the cauldron and even cock it to one side in order to finally get it through the door. Once finally inside, they ignored their captives as they first filled the

cauldron with water and then with their wands conjured a crackling fire beneath it.

The liquid in the cauldron heated extremely fast. The surface was not only bubbling, but also sending out sparks as though it, too, were on fire.

"There was definitely something already in that cauldron before they added the water," Caitlin suggested. Jamie agreed.

As they all watched, mesmerized by the surface of the water, alight with sparks, the door opened. The Great One entered accompanied by Damien and Hooch, they each carried an open container.

"The time has come," The Great One said, first looking at the bubbling liquid and then at the helpless innocents.

Emma Wrong walked over to the cauldron and dumped the contents of her urn into it, the water hissed and turned a vivid yellow.

Hooch followed and emptied her container causing the liquid to turn a dark poisonous-looking blue.

Damien hesitated as if unsure he wanted to empty the contents of his vial, but when he looked toward The Great One for direction, she returned an impatient glare. He quickly emptied the vial's contents into the cauldron. It no sooner touched the boiling liquid than the potion turned a burning red; the light it gave off filled the dungeon as if sunlight was suddenly streaming in through a hundred windows.

"It is ready for the blood of the innocents," Emma Wrong shouted madly.

"The blood of the heir first," she commanded.

Damien walked slowly toward Timmy, a shining silver dagger in his hand. Timmy struggled hopelessly at his binds, crying even harder than before. Jamie closed her eyes as the point of the knife penetrated Timmy's arm and blood seeped from the cut. Timmy wailed uncontrollably as Damien collected a vial of his blood and returned to the cauldron.

Damien had barely turned his back, when the cut on Timmy arm miraculously healed. Jamie's eyes went from Timmy to Caitlin who was deep in meditation, a trickle of blood on her own arm.

"Blood of the heir, given to return his greatest ancestor."

Damien walked over to the cauldron and carefully added only two drops of Timmy's blood.

"The enemy," Wrong bellowed, seeming to be on the verge of losing control.

Hooch handed Damien a new vial and his cleaned dagger. Jamie clutched Ben to her chest and tried to shield him by turning as best as possible toward the wall.

"His arm is small, the dagger extremely sharp," Damien said, almost sympathetically, as he neared Jamie. "I need but two drops. Struggling will only serve to enlarge the injury."

Reluctantly, Jamie turned toward Damien, thus exposing the helpless sleeping infant. Damien pressed the blade gently against the crook of Ben's arm until blood began to trickle. He collected

what he needed and went to turn.

"Thank you for being gentle," Jamie murmured, tears filling her eyes.

Damien didn't speak, but gave Jamie a weak nod of his head, then returned to the cauldron to add two drops of Ben's blood. Ben turned restlessly in his sleep as Caitlin healed his arm.

"Blood of the foe...forcibly taken."

"Sight and health," Wrong squealed. "Health first."

Caitlin gritted her teeth, knowing that no one was going to share her pain or heal her wound. But Caitlin was surprised. Damien was being uncharacteristically gentle. She had expected him to sadistically slash her arm, but instead he had only pricked it enough to cause bleeding.

"The blood of the Healer for Health and Strength."

Emily cringed. Her blood was the final ingredient. Would Emma Wrong actually succeed in resurrecting Salazar Slytherin?

"You have the makings of an admirable foe," Damien said as he approached Emily. "It's a pity that you must die so young." Without further word he slashed her arm. Because of the speed with which it was done, Emily thought the wound would be deep, but it was only superficial.

"The blood of the Seer to light the path."

As Damien added Emily's blood, the Great One mumbled an incantation and then stepped away from the cauldron. At first, it seemed like nothing was going to happen. The cauldron just seemed to be simmering, continuing to send off blinding sparks.

Then, without warning, the sparks were extinguished. The cauldron stopped bubbling; steam billowed thickly from it, filling the room and obscuring the view. No one was moving; even Timmy was quiet. It seemed like everyone was holding his or her breath waiting, just waiting. Then...

"WHO DARES TO AWAKEN ME FROM THE SLEEP OF DEATH!?"

Chapter Nine Death Times Two

The voice didn't seem to come from any particular direction, but instead had the sensation that it was emanating from everywhere in the dungeon at once. Then, as everyone watched tensely, the thick steam that filled the room slowly drew together and began to take form; a human form, but not really human, more ghost-like.

"I asked, who dared to wake me?" bellowed the ghostly representation of Salazar Slytherin.

"I did, Greatest of the Hogwarts Four," Emma Wrong answered anxiously.

"And who are you, woman, to wake me, the supreme wizard of all time, from death?" Slytherin roared.

"I am Emma Wrong, Minister of Magic," she answered, her voice quaking, "and future monarch of the magical world. My loyal followers refer to me as the Great One."

"THE GREAT ONE!" Slytherin screamed. "You have the audacity to refer to yourself as such?"

Slytherin glanced around the dungeon; first observing Wrong's cowering followers and then the variety of torture apparatus. His eyes finally came to rest on Jamie and the young innocents chained to the wall.

"What year is it?" he questioned. "Has the world become so depraved that it is now common practice to torture naked, defenseless children?"

"It is the year two thousand and five," Emma responded. "These are not just any children, but rather the innocents whose blood was needed to make your return happen as prophesied."

"Prophecy? Slytherin questioned. "What prophecy?"

Damien hurriedly produced a copy of the foretelling which he handed to The Great One. Emma in turn held the document out toward Slytherin, not even sure if this ghostly being had the ability to grasp objects.

A chill filtered through Wrong's body as Slytherin reached out and removed the rolled parchment from her hand. The room was silent as he scrutinized the document.

"THE STARS PROCLAIM THE RETURN OF THE GREATEST DARK LORD

**FROM THE BLOOD OF INNOCENTS FOUR,
THE GREAT LORD SLYTHERIN'S SPIRIT SHALL POUR.
TWO OF HIS OWN, SEER AND HEIR,
TWO OF HIS ENEMIES, HEALER AND HEIR,
TWO DROPS OF EACH, NOT ANY MORE,**

**WITH THEIR DEATH BY HIS HAND,
TO HIS BODY HE WILL BE RETURNED,
TO WALK THE EARTH A MORTAL MAN,
BUT WHEN SLYTHERIN AND EVIL ARE JOINED,
NOT EVEN THE COVENANT WILL BRING THE RESULT DOWN.**

THE DARKEST OF TIMES THEIR JOINING WILL BRING,
SORROW AND PAIN WILL OFT BE THE FAME.
MANY WILL DIE DREADING THE NAME,
SALAZAR SLYTHERIN.

THE WORLD WILL HAVE BUT ONE HOPE
AND THAT IS TWO CUBED TO EIGHT
WITH HEALTH AND SIGHT AND SPIRIT BRIGHT,
THE HEART AND SOUL AND MIND WILL ADD THEIR WEIGHT

BUT ONLY WHEN THE FLAMING DAUGHTER
AND MOONCHILD JOIN THE FRAY
CAN THE WORLD DEFEAT EVIL
AND RETURN SLYTHERIN TO HIS GRAVE"

Slytherin seemed to read and reread the Prophecy several times before he again studied his surroundings, his eyes once more coming to rest on the innocents. "Which of you is my heir?" he queried.

His question was answered by silence.

"Which is my heir!?" he shouted irritably, staring at Emma Wrong.

"The toddler," she responded, gesturing in Timmy's direction.

"How dare you treat my heir in such a debasing way!?" Slytherin hollered. "Release the child from those confinements at once."

"But he and the others must be killed by you in order for you to be returned to your body," Emma protested.

"I gave an order," Slytherin roared. "I expect my instructions to be carried out immediately. Release that child!"

"Perhaps you forgot who is in charge here," Emma Wrong suggested. "I am the Great One. It is I who has awakened you from the dead. You will be following my orders and helping me to achieve the greatness I so richly deserve."

"You are a whimpering, weak, foolish bitch!" Slytherin roared. "I follow no one's orders, but I will, with pleasure, give you what you richly deserve."

Slytherin raised his right arm and pointed his hand at The Great One. Without even saying the words, a blast of green light blazed from his finger tips and illuminated the entire room. When the light diminished, Emma Wrong was lying on the cold stone floor of the dungeon. She was dead.

As Jamie, Emily and Caitlin observed the scene horror-struck, Wrong's underlings fell to their knees.

Damien was the first to break the silence. "If it pleases you, Lord Slytherin, I will release your heir from his bindings."

"That would please me," Slytherin said, nodding his head.

Jamie watched as Damien approached Timmy, but then her eyes were drawn back to the body of Emma Wrong. Wrong was an evil woman; she was responsible for the deaths of hundreds of innocent people and yet somehow it just didn't seem right that anyone's life should end so abruptly, so coldly with no forewarning. A few minutes ago she was the Minister of Magic, respected by the Wizarding World. In her alter ego she was The Great One, feared and loathed. Now with just the wave of a hand, she was nothing but a dead, soulless shell.

As soon as he was released, Timmy ran to Jamie. She dropped to her knees and took him in her arm and held him tightly as she balanced Ben in her other arm.

Slytherin gave what almost appeared to be a smile. "Is the baby, the heir of Gryffindor?" he questioned.

Jamie nodded her head apprehensively.

"They shall be returned to their parents," Slytherin said. "Gryffindor was a noble man. Although we died as enemies, he was once my friend. His lineage deserves to live on."

"Begging your pardon, my Lord," Hooch interrupted. "She," Hooch indicated Wrong's body, "told us that the innocents must all die by your hand for you to return to human form."

"She was a fool," Slytherin responded. "She could not even properly interpret a Prophecy.

WITH THEIR DEATH BY HIS HAND,
TO HIS BODY HE WILL BE RETURNED,
TO WALK THE EARTH A MORTAL MAN

"Why would I, the great Lord Slytherin, after being returned from a sleep of over a thousand years, want to walk the earth as a mere mortal man when the Prophecy gives me the occasion to be so much more? I can be immortal and invincible if joined with evil."

"But you just killed her," Damien said in a meek voice.

"She was not the personification of evil," Slytherin said with the hint of a laugh. "She was but a warped and frustrated old hag." He looked knowingly at Damien. "You, my servant, are the embodiment of pure evil. When you and I are joined, no one will be able to conquer us."

Damien stared uneasily at the ghostlike figure of Salazar Slytherin. What exactly did he mean by joined? Were they to be some sort of partners in crime, or did he intend to live as a parasite off his body as Voldemort had done with Professor Quirrell?

"Excuse me, your ghostliness," Emily said. "You said my brother and Timmy would be set free. What about my sisters and I?"

Salazar did not answer, nor did he seem angry at being referred to as his ghostliness. Instead he walked, more floated, over to Emily and placed his hand on her forehead. Emily experienced a pain similar to the brain freeze one gets when eating ice cream too fast.

"You are the Seer," he said in what gave the impression of being a sad tone. "You're also in Slytherin house."

Emily nodded her head.

Then he approached Caitlin and likewise placed his ghostlike hand on her head. "The Healer," he said. "Not just a healer, but an extremely powerful one, and with telepathic powers no less." He placed his hand on his chin and shook his head sadly before moving on to Jamie.

When he reached her, he paused slightly to glance at Timmy and Ben, and then found himself staring thoughtfully at Jamie. "Forgive me," he said placing his hand on her forehead. "It has been an extremely long time since I have seen a nude female and you are an extraordinarily beautiful young woman."

"You're the Spirit Bright," he said disappointedly, removing his hand from Jamie's head and walking away from the girls.

"You are all strong, brilliant, talented witches," Slytherin declared. "I would prefer to allow you to continue to live and serve me, but unfortunately you are all mentioned as members of the conspiracy that could ultimately cause my defeat."

WITH HEALTH AND SIGHT AND SPIRIT BRIGHT

"Therefore, I regret that you must die, but your deaths will not come at my hands," he said looking at Madame Hooch. "Will you please clean up here?"

Hooch's eyes lit up as if Christmas had come early. "It will be my pleasure, Great Master."

"Now it is time we were joined," Slytherin's spirit said as he considered an extremely tense Damien. "I would much prefer my own body, but it is critical that the Prophecy be followed unerringly."

"Come and stand by me," he ordered the trembling Damien. "It will be quick and will not hurt. Your spirit and memories will not be destroyed, but rather will be overwhelmed by mine. Through you, I will learn of this new world I have been plunged into. Together your body and my mind will eventually rule this world."

Damien moved to within touching distance of Slytherin and then waited fearfully for further directions.

"Exhale completely," Slytherin instructed. "Make every effort to remove all the air from your lungs. Once your lungs are empty, breathe in deeply, through your mouth, trying to admit as much fresh air as possible."

Crabbe and Goyle watched with foreboding; neither of the bulky followers had the mettle to move or speak. Damien exhaled totally as he had been instructed. It was when he inhaled that it came to pass. The vapor like form of Salazar Slytherin first tapered and then was sucked into Damien's body as if it were a beverage being drunk through a straw. The final effect was, to a certain extent, the opposite of the Dementor's kiss. Instead of Damien's soul being sucked from his body, Slytherin's spirit was added. What was Damien continued to exist, but was overwhelmed by the spirit of Salazar Slytherin.

For a short time, there was complete silence, as if Slytherin's spirit was settling in and becoming adjusted to his new accommodations. Then he spoke, but in his own deep penetrating voice, which was nothing like that of the nerdy Damien. "This body is greatly inferior to my own," Slytherin muttered disgustedly, "but the mind is beautiful, full of such evil thoughts. The Prophecy was

correct. Our union will be unbreakable and our power unmatched."

Something, however, seemed to be confusing Slytherin as he absorbed all of Damien's thoughts and memories. "What is a Hermione?" he finally asked to anyone in general. "This mind seems obsessed with the subject."

"She was once a captive here," Hooch explained. "I believe Damien became rather infatuated with her."

"Apparently so," Slytherin said. "I must meet this woman some day, but for now there are more important things to do. Until I establish a loyal following, it is best my return remain a secret. You two," he indicated Crabbe and Goyle "shall accompany me to my secret chamber. I want you to tell me all you know about the individuals that supported this "He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named" person. These Death Eaters sound like people who would show me allegiance."

Salazar moved to the shelf containing many of Damien's torture devices. He removed the thumbscrews and held them in his hand as he muttered, "Portus." The device glowed blue and seemed to flutter momentarily in Salazar's hand, then became still. He flung the gadget to Hooch.

"That is a Portkey. It will bring you, but only you, to my side when you have finished here. Be quick about disposing of the young witches, I sense that a rescue effort is nearing."

"What about the boys?" Hooch asked.

"Do not hurt them. They can cause me no harm," he declared. "Leave them for their parents to find, they will be here soon." With a wave of his arm, Slytherin along with Crabbe and Goyle disappeared.

* * * * *

Without warning, Hermione came to an abrupt stop and just hung motionless in the air.

"What is it?" Harry asked, as he and the others turned back to join her.

At first Hermione just held her hand up, her eyes closed in concentration. Then finally she opened her eyes and spoke. "I've made contact with Caitlin, but our link is very weak. They must still be a good distance away."

"Are they all okay?" Harry asked. "Does she have any idea where they are?"

"She doesn't have any idea," Hermione answered urgently. "They think it must be some sort of castle or manor house because they're being held in a large dungeon. The boys are to be spared, but Hooch has just been given orders to kill the girls and she's been told to be quick about it."

"Then we haven't a minute to lose," Harry said scanning the horizon desperately. "Draco, how well do you know this area? Are there any castles or large manors nearby?"

"Not here, but as we near the coast there are quite a few," Draco offered.

"Everyone! Top speed toward the coast," Harry ordered. "Hermione, keep me advised as to whether your link gets stronger or weakens. We can't afford to lose contact with Caitlin."

* * * * *

Caitlin and Emily watched nervously as Hooch hustled about the dungeon making preparations. Neither of the girls had ever seen the witch look so happy, yet so frightening at the same time.

Jamie had just finished nursing Ben and was now giving nourishment to Timmy, their captors having not fed any of them since breakfast. Because of Timmy, Jamie didn't speak, but both Emily and Caitlin could read the expression on her face.

"Jamie doesn't think they'll get here in time," Emily said despondently. "Neither do I."

"We can't give up hope," Caitlin said encouragingly. But the words were barely out of her mouth when Hooch approached her.

"The Great Lord Slytherin told me to be swift, but it is difficult to hurriedly extricate revenge that I have waited so long to realize. My only regret is that I won't be present to actually witness the demise of two of you.

"My lovely Caitlin," Hooch said nastily. "I imagine you expect me to torture you unmercifully. Admittedly, it would give me great pleasure to turn you into a human shish kebab, but it will give me even more pleasure to know that you have died at the hands of your rescuers."

"Do you see that crossbow?" Hooch asked sadistically. "It is aimed directly for your heart and the arrow it holds has been soaked in a deadly poison. Can you imagine Hermione's grief when the opening of the dungeon door sets it off? I can only hope that she will be the one to actually open the door."

"But that is only the beginning," Hooch cackled. "In your hand you will be holding the rope that will suspend Jamie Zacherley above the Pyramid of Death. When the arrow pierces your heart, your hand will go limp and Miss Zacherley will become four nicely separated pieces."

"What about me?" Emily inquired, not actually knowing what possessed her to ask such a question.

"You, my dear, are what they refer to as a warm up act," Hooch laughed. "That is why I haven't secured your sister in her harness yet, nor suspended her above the pyramid. I want both her and Caitlin to have a good view as I first mutilate and then kill you. Their deaths will come so fast that they won't get to suffer. Through you they can experience how brutal and horrible death can be."

"I was hoping you didn't intend to leave me out of all the fun," Emily said bravely. Her words sounded plucky, but Emily was scared to death.

"You sound so spirited," Hooch bellowed as she reached for the breast ripper. "We'll see how brave you sound after I've reduced your tits to a proper size. And that's only for openers. After that we'll see how long you can survive the pear."

"Leave her alone," Jamie pleaded, lying Timmy on the cold floor next to Ben. "She hasn't done anything to harm you. If you must torture someone, torture me."

"You don't understand at all, do you?" Hooch cried. "You're just like Granger. Torturing you wouldn't have the desired affects. It hurts you more to have someone you love harmed than it does to be tortured yourself. Watch, you'll soon understand what I mean."

Emily closed her eyes as Hooch approached. She had never been so frightened or felt so helpless in her entire life.

Caitlin's brain felt like it was about to explode. Her head ached with agony. Normally when she used her healing or telepathic powers, she drifted into trance. Today she had struggled to maintain a contact with Hermione and at the same time remain focused on what was happening around her. She felt that if she tried to mentally stop Hooch from hurting Emily she would cause some sort of overload. What if she not only failed, but also passed out in the process? Then not only would Emily be killed, but she would lose contact with the rescuers. She looked desperately toward Jamie.

* * * * *

"Harry, stop! The connection was strongest as we flew over that manor; it seems to be fading slightly now," Hermione advised.

"Are you sure?" Harry asked in disbelief. "They can't be there. That manor belongs to Emma Wrong, the Minister of Magic."

"All I know is that I felt the strongest link as we flew over that manor," Hermione said emphatically. "The children are down there."

"Wands at the ready," Harry shouted, as he turned and headed for a landing.

"Potter, are you bloody crazy?" Draco called out. "Do you know who owns that manor?"

"I don't give a damn who owns it; that's where they're being held prisoner."

* * * * *

"Stop, don't you touch her!" Jamie screamed.

But when Hooch turned to sneer at Jamie, instead of a naked girl, she found herself facing a beautiful pure white unicorn. Caitlin had witnessed the almost instant transformation. Jamie was not only now in her Animagus form, but she was also free, the aged leather on her ankle bindings having burst due to pressure of the transformation.

Hooch dropped the breast ripper and reached for her wand as the unicorn, Jamie, lowered its head to charge.

"*Avada Keda*!" Hooch screamed. But before she could complete the curse, the unicorn's horn had entered her chest and was protruding out of her back.

* * * * *

"Please don't blast off the door," Severus begged. "Remember who lives here."

"It better ruddy well be unlocked then!" Ron hollered, "I've no intention of knocking and waiting for the bloody house elf to answer."

Fortunately the door was unlocked and Ron held it open, allowing Harry and Hermione to rush inside first, but as soon as Hermione crossed the threshold, she staggered.

"Are you all right?" Harry asked concernedly. "Nothing has gone amiss has it?"

"No, but this is definitely the place," Hermione panted, trying to catch her composure. "I've been here before. This is where I spent my missing week. It's all coming back. Follow me! I know the way to the dungeon."

Hermione ran down the hall. The last time she had done so, she was naked and running the opposite direction in order to save her life. "Down those steps and at the end of the corridor," she shouted to Ron and Draco, who had overtaken her and Harry.

Ron practically flew down the stairs with Draco right behind them. They were almost at the solid dungeon door before Harry and Hermione reached the bottom of the stairs.

Ron reached out to open the door. "No! Don't open it!" Hermione screamed, feeling as if a part of her were about to die, as Ron's hand touched the knob and started to turn it.

In his eagerness to get to the children, Ron hadn't heard her, but fortunately Draco had. He grasped Ron's outstretched hand firmly and prevented him from opening the door. "It's booby trapped," he said to Ron, only releasing his grip when Ron acknowledged that he understood.

"Thank God," Hermione sighed as she reached the door. "If we open that door, Caitlin is dead. I have to Apparate in."

"You mean we," Harry said firmly.

"You don't know the layout of the dungeon, I do," she said even more firmly. "I have to go alone. I'll be okay. Trust me."

Hermione didn't wait for an answer; instead, with a soft pop, she was gone.

Had Hooch or any other dark followers been alive in the dungeon, Harry would now be planning a funeral for his beloved wife. Hermione's only concern upon Apparating was finding the crossbow and transfiguring its deadly arrow to something harmless.

Once Hermione moved the crossbow so that it no longer pointed at anyone, she gave the all clear for the others to open the door. As they entered, the crossbow was triggered and it's arrow, now made out of feathers, floated harmlessly to the floor.

* * * * *

"Do you know what we haven't done since the children disappeared?" Harry asked as he snuggled close to Hermione later that evening.

"Yes, and I've missed you. I'm available tonight if you're interested," Hermione answered lovingly.

"Can you wait till I go check my engagement calendar?"

"So help me, Harry Potter if you even think of getting out of this bed, I'll hex you like you've never been hexed before," Hermione warned.

"Harry, do you love me?" Hermione asked concernedly.

"I've often been told that there is no such thing as a dumb question. That's a lot of rubbish because you just asked the dumbest question in the world," Harry answered. "I couldn't love you more if I tried. You're my world, my everything."

"No matter what I've done in the past?" Hermione asked, feeling extremely guilty.

"Hermione, why are you trembling?" Harry asked, holding her tightly in his arms.

"Harry, when I was being held in that dungeon." She hesitated. "I did something awful, but I had no choice." Tears started to moisten her eyes. "I'd been kept chained in that infernal contraption they call a cage. I had to get out if I wanted to have any chance of escaping, but the only way Damien would let me out was if I agreed to have sex with him."

"Mione, it doesn't matter." Harry said, and then hesitated. "Yes it does, it matters a great deal. You were forced to do something against your will. Even if you agreed, it was because you were forced to; that's no different than rape. When I said it didn't matter, I only meant that it doesn't affect the way I feel about you."

"Do you want to hear exactly what happened?" Hermione asked, her brown eyes glistening.

"Ah, I don't know if" Hermione, won't it upset you to relive the experience? It's not necessary. You don't have to put yourself through the agony again."

"I don't quite know why, but I think I'll feel better if you let me tell you what happened," she said timorously.

Harry nodded his head.

"During my confinement, I never got to see The Great One. Damien was my jailer and those two pigs, Crabbe and Goyle, assisted him.

Of all the humiliation she had borne throughout her capture, this was the worst. Damien had unlocked her from the Cage, but she had been shackled, both legs and arms, and Crabbe and Goyle had led her to another part of the dungeon. They had blindfolded her as well, dragging her body over the stone floor. As soon as the support of her metal prison was gone, her legs had fallen out from under her.

When the blindfold was removed, she saw that they had led her to another stone room, not all that different from the one she had occupied previously. The furnishings, however, were much different. Rather than various torture devices, there was a large bed, covered in soft-looking blankets. In one corner, there was a shower, partitioned off by a wall and curtain. They pulled her towards this and stood her up. She leaned against the wall as they scrubbed her down. The water was too hot and their hands were too rough. When they had finished, they pulled her out of the shower and she once more fell to the floor, her legs still unable to support her.

Crabbe pushed her down on the bed, securing more chains around her. They left quickly, closing the door behind them.

Her mind was racing, a plan formed completely. She felt the hot tears streaming down her face as her body throbbed. The blood was circulating more freely now that she was no longer in the Cage and the pins-and-needles feeling that she had felt countless times

before now covered her entire body, and was countless times worse than she had ever experienced. She heard the door open and close again as the voice of her captor washed over her.

"Hermione, did Crabbe and Goyle do a thorough job of washing you?"

"A little too complete. Was it necessary to allow them to fondle me? And are you going to unchain me to perform the first test?" Her voice was monotone and controlled.

"Until you complete both tasks you are still a prisoner and will be treated as such. Be thankful that you are not being required to service all the followers. Are you ready?"

"Yes!" Hermione said as if sincerely meaning it.

"Crabbe and Goyle will remain on the other side of this door. If you try to escape, I will give them the orders to begin removing your limbs."

"Damien, the only thing I'm going to do is make you feel like you have never felt before."

Damien smiled wickedly, "I like the sound of that."

Hermione smiled, "If you like the sound wait until you experience the actual feeling."

Damien caressed Hermione's naked body with his eyes. He was becoming aroused just by the anticipation of her touch. He took the keys to her shackles out of his pocket.

"Wait," said Hermione. "Before you unlock me, take off your clothes. I want nothing between us once I am released."

Damien couldn't believe his good fortune. The Great One was allowing him to have this beautiful individual and she actually seemed eager to be with him. Damien hurriedly stripped and then undid the metal straps that went around Hermione's ankles.

Hermione sighed.

Those straps were tight and had been cutting into her ankles. The moisture from the shower had doubled her pain. He hoisted her to her feet and undid the chains that held her wrists to her waist. He released her somewhat and her knees buckled again. She used this to her advantage and allowed herself to slide down, clinging to Damien's body.

She knelt in front of him, trailing her right hand over him before grasping him. "I'd prefer two hands for this." His only answer was a moan as she moved her mouth closer to him. Mentally, she was gagging, but a wave of strength washed over her.

Damien instantaneously found his feeling of ecstasy turned to one of unspeakable pain. He wanted to strangle the girl kneeling before him, but he needed his hands to pry her mouth and hand off of him. Hermione cringed as she felt warm blood touch her lips, but maintained her hold until Damien managed to send a knee into her chest knocking her on her back. Although still in agonizing pain, Damien somehow managed to pull

Hermione to her feet and then slam her so hard in the jaw that she went sliding across the floor hitting her head on the table leg. Hermione lay motionless.

Hermione pretended to be unconscious, as she struggled to hold back the tears. She could already feel her face beginning to swell. Damien had dislocated her jaw. "You damn bitch. Play me for a fool will you? You'll pray to be dead, but I'll keep you alive just so I can make you suffer." Hermione's body lay frozen as Damien made his way to the door leaving his clothes behind.

Crabbe and Doyle jumped from their chairs as the door slammed behind Damien. "Come here, you two morons. Go in there and saw off the bitch's right leg. Do a charm to stop the blood loss and put her back in the Cage. I'll be back later to personally rip her breasts to shreds."

They watched as his skinny backside turned the corner. Crabbe looked up at Goyle and said. "After what she did to him, I almost feel bad that we have to cut her apart."

"Yeah!" Goyle agreed. "But if we don't, we'll be joining her."

Goyle gradually pushed opened the door for them to enter. He had barely crossed the threshold of the room when he promptly halted causing Crabbe to nearly collide with him. He surveyed the bed and then the floor. There was no sign of Hermione's nude body. "Where the hell is she!?" he shouted.

The words had barely escaped his lips when the great gray timber wolf appeared from behind the door. The wolf's teeth were bared as its growl rumbled through the air. Goyle had no time to reach for his wand before the wolf leapt, knocking him to the floor and trapping Crabbe beneath him. The wolf limped a few steps before transfiguring back to a naked woman who sped down the corridor and up the steps to what appeared to be the main floor of an ornately appointed manor.

Hermione saw at the far end of the hall what seemed to be the main foyer. She heard Crabbe and Goyle lumbering up the steps. She had to make it to the door before they reached the top of the steps. If they hit her with any spell that prevented her getaway, she was as good as dead. She dashed toward the door and reached for the handle. It was mercifully unlocked. She threw the door open and ran outside.

Immediately she once again felt as though a hook just behind her navel had suddenly jerked her irresistibly forward. Her feet left the ground and she went speeding forward in a howl of wind and swirling color. Suddenly she was lying face down in a snowdrift at the side of the road.

"You actually bit his penis?" Harry asked.

"I didn't just bite it," Hermione said. "I nearly severed it."

Harry shivered at the thought. "It was your only chance to escape. You had no choice. Hermione, what you did" It wasn't cheating on me. There is no reason for you to be ashamed and it most certainly doesn't make me love you any less."

Harry embraced his wife tenderly and for a few minutes they just held each other, neither speaking. Finally Harry spoke. "Remind me never to make you angry before we have oral sex," he said

sincerely.

"Why?" Hermione asked as she broke their embrace and got to her hands and knees over him. "You trust me don't you? I'd never do anything like that to you."

Harry knew she wouldn't, but the devilish tone in her voice still made him nervous.

"Does that mean you'd rather I didn't do this?" she said, just before dotingly plying his rapidly enlarging penis with kisses.

"I guess this is out, too," she said before beginning to lick his testicles.

"And if I can't do either of those things, then this must definitely be out," she said, before opening her lips and taking him into her mouth as deep as she possibly could.

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"It's good to be home and sleeping in a real bed again," Caitlin said as she stretched and wiggled her toes in contentment.

"It's good just to be alive," Emily sighed. "I thought we were all as good as dead."

"Didn't I tell you never to give up?" Caitlin queried. "We have something that will always give us an advantage over the supporters of evil. We have love."

"Yeah we do," Emily said, feeling extremely fortunate to have been adopted by the Potters after tragically losing her own parents. She cuddled closer to her sister. "Speaking of love, where is Jamie? Is she off doing the dirty deed with Alex?"

"She's with Alex, but I doubt she's in a shagging mood," Caitlin said. "I think right now she just wants to be held. Did you get a good look at her after she transfigured back to herself?"

"Yeah! She looked awful. As evil as Hooch was and as much as the bitch deserved to die, I wish someone else could have done the actually killing. Jamie is just too much like her Animagus form, good and pure. I think she's having an extremely hard time dealing with the reality that she killed someone."

"That's why I can never picture Jamie as an Auror," Caitlin said. "She has all the other abilities to be great, but she lacks hatred. I know being an Auror doesn't always involve killing, but there are times when there are no other alternatives. Today she almost waited too long before acting."

"Emily, are you cold?" Caitlin asked out of the blue. "Would you like me to get us another blanket?"

"I'm fine. What makes you think I'm cold?" Emily asked.

"Because you have a sweatshirt on," Caitlin answered. "You hate clothes more than any other nudist in the world. Jamie told me you even love to lie in the snow naked and make snow angels. For you to wear a sweatshirt to bed you must be freezing."

"Or hiding something," Emily said guiltily.

"Hiding something? Hiding what? Mum, Madam Pomfrey and myself adjusted your breasts back to normal, so what do you have to hide?" Caitlin asked.

"Well not quite back to normal," Emily admitted. "You and Mum undid the growth associated with breast feeding, but then you both left and allowed Madame Pomfrey to shrink them back to normal."

"Did she have a problem?"

"No not really a problem." Emily hemmed and hawed. "Do you remember the story Mum told us about being hit by a curse that made her teeth really large?"

"What do Mum's teeth have to do with your breasts?" Caitlin asked, becoming annoyed with Emily's evasiveness.

"Well, Mum let Madam Pomfrey go a little further than necessary in order to make her teeth smaller and more attractive than they actually were to begin with. I did sort of the opposite. I stopped Madam Pomfrey a little before my breasts were quite back to normal."

"Now you're afraid you'll be in trouble if you let anyone see them?"

Emily nodded her head.

"You haven't worn a stitch of clothing around Mum and Dad since you and Jamie became a part of the family. Just how long do you think it will take them to become suspicious if suddenly you start wearing tops, especially if you still let everything else hang out?

"I just don't want them to think poorly of me or yell," Emily said.

"They never yell; you know that. Sometimes, it makes me feel guiltier because they don't," Caitlin said. "Instead of hiding under a sweatshirt, I think you should go to Mum and Dad and own up to what you've done."

"As usual, you're right," Emily admitted. "Will you come with me?"

"Of course," Caitlin said, "but before we go, can I have a look?"

Without hesitation, Emily sat up and quickly pulled the sweatshirt over her head.

"I can see why you had Madam Pomfrey stop when you did," Caitlin admitted. "They look great. I'm envious."

Caitlin studied Emily and then said, "Mum might not make you reduce their size. If you mature as fast as Jamie, they'd probably have grown to this size by spring anyway."

"Maybe," Emily agreed, slipping the sweatshirt back on. "Will you go with me to talk to Mum and Dad?"

"Right now?" Caitlin asked. "Couldn't it wait till morning?"

"I want to do it now before I lose my nerve," Emily said. "Please come with me."

"Okay," Caitlin said, as both girls hopped out of bed and scurried toward their parents' bedroom.

"Be sure to knock," Caitlin warned as they approached the closed door. "We don't want to walk in on anything."

"After the long, wearisome day they'd had, I doubt very much that they have the energy left to shag," Emily said, pressing her ear to the door. "They're still awake. I just heard Dad say Mum's name."

"Mum, Dad, can we come in?" Emily asked as she tapped on the door. "I really have to talk to you. It's very important." Without waiting for an answer, Emily flung open the door.

* * * * *

"I can't believe we did that," Caitlin said, as Emily and she hurried back into bed.

"Me either," Emily moaned. "They're going to kill us."

"I doubt it," Caitlin sighed. "They're probably both dying of embarrassment right now. That's the second time I've done that to Mum. The big difference is that the other time I didn't actually see anything."

"What did you see this time?" Hermione asked calmly as she entered the room.

"Where's Dad?" Emily asked, looking around for Harry.

"In our bedroom, dying of embarrassment," Hermione replied in an even voice. "Neither of you answered my question."

"I don't know about Caitlin," Emily said with a gulp, "but I saw everything."

"Me too," Caitlin said bashfully. "We're sorry, Mum. Emily had something very important to ask you. We had no idea you and Dad were". Well, you know, doing that."

"That is why you should not only knock, but wait until you are granted permission to enter before you barge into a room," Hermione said, surprisingly, with a smile on her face.

"Having sex with someone you love and are married to is certainly nothing to be ashamed of, but it is something private between two people," Hermione explained. "Harry and I just want you both to understand that we're not embarrassed because of what we were doing, but rather because you witnessed it."

"I suppose now wouldn't be a good time to ask questions about sex?" Emily tentatively inquired.

"It's a fine time," Hermione answered with a snort. "I was embarrassed, Harry was embarrassed, but we aren't angry. We're so pleased to have you girls back that I don't think you could possibly make either of us angry today. What is the question?"

"That stuff that came out of Dad's penis. Is that what makes a person pregnant?" Emily asked.

"Yes, it contains the sperm that can make you pregnant," Hermione confirmed.

"What if you got it in your mouth and swallowed it?" Caitlin asked. "Would that make you pregnant?"

"No," Hermione said with a chuckle. "It must enter the vagina in order for you to get pregnant."

"Why are you laughing?" Emily scolded.

"I'm not laughing at you guys," Hermione apologized. "I'm picturing Ron trying to answer similar question in class. His face will be redder than his hair."

"I like Professor Weasley," Caitlin said, "but he does get flustered easily."

"Now, I have a question for you," Hermione said. "What was so important that it couldn't wait until tomorrow; why did you feel it necessary to barge in on your Dad and I tonight?"

"Maybe it would be easier if I just showed you," Emily said as she slipped off her sweatshirt for the second time that night.

Hermione held her hand to her chin as she studied Emily's breasts. "You obviously, I'm sure by mistake, stopped Poppy a little prematurely during the reduction process. Do you want to go see her tomorrow or do you think you can live with them as they are?"

"Mum, you're the greatest," Emily said, giving Hermione a hug.

"How about you Caitlin? Can you live with them as they are?" Hermione asked.

"If you mean, am I jealous? No, I'm not," Caitlin replied. "Good things come to she who is patient and waits. Besides, Matt is quite content with what I have."

Hermione found it difficult, but decided it was better for the moment not to question Caitlin's comment concerning Matt.

* * * * *

Sunday, September 4, 2005

"Harry, it's so good to look out over the Great Hall and see the girls smiling back," Hermione said contentedly, as she ate breakfast while holding a napping Ben.

Harry smiled. "Have you put Ben down once since yesterday?"

"Only to pee and take a shower. I'm so glad it's Sunday and I don't have to leave him in order to teach class."

"You could always take him with you tomorrow while you teach. He's usually content and well behaved."

"Oh yes! And when he gets hungry, I'll just whip out my boob in front of the students and feed him," Hermione said. "That would go over great with the parents and Board of Directors."

"I know you can't do it, but that's really sad," Harry said dismally. "What is more pure and natural than a mother feeding her child?"

"You, Mister Potter, have been living with naturists too long; you're starting to sound like one."

"Not to change the subject, but did you get to talk to Jamie at all this morning?" Harry asked.

"No, she spent the entire night with Alex in the Room of Requirement," Hermione replied.

Harry gave a devilish grin. "Well, in that case, I imagine everything is all right."

"No, it's not," Hermione said, giving Harry an angry look. "Alex contacted me this morning while you were in Severus' office. Jamie cried all night. He just held her in his arms and tried to comfort her. She's having a difficult time dealing with what she did."

"She had no choice! Hooch would have mutilated and killed Emily!" Harry said.

"She knows that. She also knows that she had no option but to kill her. That doesn't make it any easier for her to accept. It's going to take time, love and patience for her to get over this."

"Perhaps she should reconsider training for a career as an Auror," Harry suggested.

"That's a decision Alex and her have to discuss and make together, but I tend to agree with you. She has the mind and physical ability for the job, but I don't think she has the penchant."

As Hermione and Harry talked, the owls arrived with the daily mail. As Hermione slipped a coin in the owl's bag, Harry grabbed the newspaper and began to read the headline.

**SELF-PROFESSED GREAT ONE KILLED.
HEROIC MINISTER OF MAGIC OF MAGIC DIES
DURING RESCUE OF INNOCENT CHILDREN**

The magical world may never know the full account of what transpired last evening, but we can once again rest at ease knowing that a dark force bent on world domination has been defeated. Sadly this defeat came at the needless loss of our beloved Minister of Magic, Emma Wrong.

What we do know is that on Friday, August 19, 2005 a kidnapping apparently took place at the residence of Ronald and Samantha Weasley, Hogsmeade. Reported as missing were: Timothy Weasley, age four; Benjamin Potter, age two months; Emily Zacherley-Potter, age 12; Caitlin Potter, age 13 and Jamie Zacherley, age 17.

All Ministry attempts to quickly locate these children were stalled by the lack of cooperation from their parents. Harry Potter, Hermione Granger and Ronald Weasley, having evidently allowed their previous success against He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named go to their heads; decided that professional assistance was not needed. The experienced staff of Aurors at the Ministry of Magic was informed that their help was not necessary or even desired.

Had the Aurors been fully involved from the onset, this matter would most likely have been solved in days and undoubtedly without the lamentable loss of Minister Wrong's life.

When the rag tag team of self-proclaimed detectives finally located the missing children last evening, they discovered that our brave Minister had arrived on the scene before them. Aurors conducting an investigation feel that Minister Wrong died while dueling the Great One in order to save the children from certain death. The Great One has been identified as

Madam Hooch, a former teacher at Hogwarts who served a brief sentence in Azkaban for a minor offense.

The Vice Minister, who has assumed the position of Minister of Magic until such time as a special election is held, asks that the magical community not take out its anger over the death of our beloved Minister on Weasley, Granger or Potter. "We all make tragic mistakes at times during our lives," Minister Percy Weasley said. "We must forgive their blunder, but at the same time resolve that we, as good citizens of the magical world, will not allow ourselves to be misdirected by imprudent people such as these."

Hermione had been reading the article along with Harry. When finished, they both stared at each other, for a short time speechless.

"What the hell is that all about!?" Harry shouted more loudly than necessary.

"I've heard of a newspaper screwing up details of an account, but that story was pure fabrication. Who told them that Hooch was the Great One? And there isn't a word about Salazar Slytherin," Hermione declared.

"Talk about losing your appetite," Harry said, shaking his head in frustration. "I have to contact our new Minister and find out if he's fallen off his trolley."

"Do you want me to go with you?" Hermione asked.

"No!" Harry said. "My yelling would probably wake Ben. Besides you don't like when I swear and I anticipate doing a lot of swearing."

* * * * *

"Who is it dear?" Harry heard Percy ask his wife after she informed him there was a head in the fireplace. "Oh! Him! Well I guess I may just as well get this over with now."

"Hello! Harry. I thought at first you might be another well wisher," Percy said snootily, as he pulled a chair up to his fireplace. "I've been receiving congratulatory owls all morning. It's a dream come true, becoming Minister of Magic. Of course, I just wish it could have happen under different circumstances."

"Percy, I didn't call to lick your boot straps!" Harry shouted. "Did you have anything to do with that article on the front-page of the *Daily Prophet*?"

"Yes. Any articles that could possibly incite a panic must be reviewed by the Minister's office before publication. I was unquestionably glad I had the opportunity to correct that article. The fool reporter that wrote it actually mixed up Madam Hooch and Emma Wrong. Can you believe, she in point of fact wrote that the Minister Wrong was The Great One?"

"I can believe it," Harry answered angrily, "because she was."

"Harry, Harry, Harry. Where could you possibly get such a preposterous idea?"

"From the people she was holding prisoner," Harry retorted.

"Children! You want to drag a deceased woman's good name through the mud based on the wild

hallucinations of little children?" Percy asked.

"My daughters were not hallucinating," Harry affirmed. "Jamie isn't a child. She gave the same account."

"I've been informed that Miss Zacherley was extremely delusional and distraught," Percy added. "The first Aurors on the scene state that she was wondering around totally nude, covered with blood and mumbling something about committing murder. How can you possibly consider her a steadfast witness?"

"How do you explain the blood on her?" Harry snapped back. "Jamie is a unicorn Animagus. She gorged Hooch on her horn to prevent the bitch from torturing and mutilating Emily."

"And after that, did the pink elephants do a dance?" Percy asked sarcastically.

Harry's face turned red with anger. "I don't care if you are the Minister of Magic, Percy. You're still an arse. You always have been and you always will be. Bring your fucking, good for nothing arse here to Hogwarts and Jamie will demonstrate her abilities for you."

"I don't care if Zacherley can turn into all seven dwarfs simultaneously," Percy said arrogantly. "You and your brood are not going to besmirch Emma Wrong's good name. She was the only one that stood by me after the Fudge debacle. It's because of her that I'm where I am today."

"Now the truth comes out," Harry bellowed. "You don't care two Knuts about Wrong's good name. Percy Weasley is all you're concerned about. If the truth comes out about her being The Great One, her assistant won't last a week as Minister of Magic."

"She was not the Great One," Percy screamed.

"Then explain the dungeon and why the children were being held prisoner in her manor."

Percy sighed. "It's possible that Hooch might have had her under the Imperius Curse the last few weeks. We have no way of being sure."

"Then Hooch must have been one hell of a witch," Harry declared. "When Hermione entered the manor, the memories of her missing week returned to her. She was held captive in that very dungeon. If my memory is correct, Hooch was in Azkaban at that time. Was she controlling Wrong by owl?"

"What about the Prophecy? What about Salazar Slytherin's return? The newspaper mentioned nothing about either. Our world has to know what it is facing!" Harry demanded.

"You're always trying to create a panic, aren't you Harry?" Percy said shaking his head. "At the end of your fourth year it was He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named that returned to life and now it's Salazar Slytherin."

"Percy, if you remember, I was proven right about Voldemort. My girls and little Timmy witnessed Slytherin's return."

"Harry, my patience is exhausted," Percy proclaimed. "Now you want me to start my reign as Minister of Magic by causing a panic based on the nightmares of a four year old. I'm sorry, but I don't believe in Prophecies and I don't believe that a man dead for over a thousand years is about

to wreak havoc on our world. You've always had a hero obsession. If it makes you feel better, you go fight this fantasy ghost while I administer our government. Now if you don't mind, please get out of my fire and don't bother me again with this poppycock."

Percy got up from his chair and left the room as Harry pulled his head from the fire and stood erect.

"I'm ashamed to admit he's my brother," Ron exclaimed from behind him.

Harry turned around startled. "How long have you been there?"

"Since the part where he did the Gilderoy Lockhart imitation: *Harry, Harry, Harry*. I was looking for you in the Great Hall and Hermione told me to let myself in. Percy wants that job so badly that he's willing to see our world destroyed by Slytherin in order to keep it."

"And he's turned most of that world against us just like Fudge did at the end of our fourth year." Harry added.

"Then he's left us only one option, Harry. You must call a meeting of the Order of the Phoenix."

* * * * *

When Emily entered the Great Hall for dinner, Kim at her side, she was surprised to find it decorated similar to how it had been at the Leaving Feast. The only difference was that instead of being decorated in just the winning House's colors, it was decorated with banners of both Gryffindor and Slytherin Houses.

Emily had barely taken her seat when Professor Snape stood up at the staff table.

"Although we just enjoyed the Welcoming Feast a few days ago," he said, looking around at them all, "I felt the occasion warranted another celebration." He paused briefly.

"The occasion I refer to is, of course, the safe return of three of our number," the Headmaster said. "I would like you all, please, to stand, and raise your glasses, to Jamie Zacherley, Emily Zacherley-Potter and Caitlin Potter."

The benches scraped as everyone in the Hall stood. Even Dick Bancroft reluctantly got to his feet; he did so more to avoid attracting attention to himself than to salute the girls.

Once everyone was again seated, Snape continued. "I'm sure many of you have read the account of what took place, printed in the *Daily Prophet*. Most of that article was a cock-and-bull story. It was laden with lies, misdirection and missing vital information. Sadly, the Ministry of Magic does not want you to know the truth. Possibly some of your parents will be angered by what I am about to tell you."

"I was there. I believe, as did my predecessor, that the truth is generally preferable to lies. The only truth in the Prophet piece of writing was that these three girls along with Benjamin Potter and Timothy Weasley were kidnapped. The help of Ministry Aurors was never refused; I myself contacted the Ministry and gave them every detail of the situation.

"What is truly disturbing is that the Ministry has chosen to alter facts and hide information from our world for political reasons. Minister Wrong did not die trying to save the kidnap victims. In reality it was at her instructions that the abductions took place. Minister Wrong was in fact, The Great

One; the authorities were told this by four witnesses, yet the Ministry is trying to save face and claim that Madam Hooch was the mastermind behind all this terrorism."

Snape looked from table to table before continuing. "But what is worse is that the Ministry has decided to stick its head in the sand like an ostrich and pretend that a most serious threat to our world does not exist. The innocents were kidnapped by Emma Wrong in order to fulfill a prophecy and restore Salazar Slytherin to life. She was successful; it was Salazar Slytherin, himself, who killed her."

Students looked at their friends. Every face in the Hall appeared stunned and frightened.

"I fear we are all facing dark and difficult times, perhaps even worse than when Lord Voldemort was at his height of power," Snape proclaimed. Without further word, he clapped his hands. In an instant, the hangings for Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw joined those of Gryffindor and Slytherin.

"It is at times like these that we must forget our petty House differences and unite against a mutual enemy. As Albus Dumbledore once said, we are only as strong as we are united, as weak as we are divided."

"It is because of our need to unite and work together, that I have decided to forge ahead with our plans to compete against our American cousins." Snape paused to take a drink of pumpkin juice. "Teams from America competed against each other this summer to determine which school would represent the States against us. The winning team from The Salem Witches" Institute will be arriving on Halloween. That evening, we will select our team"

Randy leaned over and whispered to Matt. "The tournament is as good as won. Hogwarts can easily beat a team composed of only girls."

"Is that so," Caitlin flared, defensively. "Are you saying girls aren't as good in competition as boys?"

"Nothing personal," Randy said apologetically.

"Besides," Caitlin added. "SWI has been co-ed since the nineteen fifties. They just keep the name for traditional reasons."

"This competition will be very different from the Tri-Wizard Tournament held here over ten years ago," Snape said. "Firstly, it is a team, rather than an individual event. Secondly, the contests will involve mental and physical challenges as well as the use of magical abilities. In some events, the use of magic will actually be strictly forbidden."

"The Goblet of Fire will be picking the Hogwarts contenders, but will be following prearranged rules. The team will be composed of six individuals, three boys and three girls. Each house will have at least one representative on the team and for obvious reasons, first years will not be allowed to participate."

This pronouncement was followed by moans from the first years.

"Now, let's be reasonable," Professor Snape said, shaking his head. "As first years, most of you haven't even learned to do a proper "swish and flick" yet. However, if any of you get the notion to submit your name anyway, you should be warned. Before presenting me with the names of our team members, the Goblet will spit out any names of first years submitted. Mr. Filch will be

standing by with a list of detention tasks to be assigned to those individuals. Now, I've rambled on way too long. Tuck in."

Chapter Ten Twists and Turns

Monday, September 5, 2005

What a difference a year makes, Emily thought to herself as she watched Kim sleeping contentedly. When they first met, Kim was the shyest, most worried first year you could ever imagine. Her anxiety was only amplified when her dorm-mates mistakenly jumped to the conclusion that she was a nudist and she ended up having to live the lie.

Back then, Kim couldn't wait to close her bed hangings in order to hide her embarrassment at being naked. Now her hangings were wide open and Kim was sleeping coverless, her loveliness completely exposed.

"Time to get up, you brazen hussy," Emily called.

"Talk about the pot calling the kettle black," Kim said, as she stretched unashamedly. "I don't see you rushing to hide your modesty."

"Probably because I don't have any," Emily said with a laugh. "You know how I feel about clothes. I'd have absolutely no problem spending the entire day like this."

Kim stared enviously at her best friend. "I've come to love being nude," she said. "The cruise was fabulous, but I doubt I'll ever be as at ease with bareness as you. I couldn't imagine walking into the Great Hall starkers and having everyone else clothed and gawking at me."

"They'd eventually get tired of staring," Emily said unconcernedly. "I'd gladly give every stitch of clothing I own to charity if I were told I could remain like this the rest of my life without any ramifications."

Kim got out of bed, went over to Emily and embraced her best friend closely. "I'm glad that your ordeal didn't change you any. I love you just the way you are." Kim gave Emily a light kiss on the cheek.

"Why don't you two lesbians get a private room?" Denise Graves, their least affable roommate suggested.

"Yeah! It's bad enough you both run around the dorm naked all the time," Janice complained. "Now are we going to be forced to watch you two fornicate as well?"

"We aren't gay," Emily said decisively. "Kim and I simply love each other. But you two wouldn't understand that. You're both too 'me oriented' to have feelings for anyone else."

"What if we were gay?" Kim said angrily. "There is nothing wrong with being gay. People shouldn't be judged on their sexual orientation."

"You're right," Denise declared. "It doesn't matter whether you two are gay or not; you're still both losers."

"Come on love," Kim said, giving Emily a wink and grabbing her inappropriately. "We don't have to listen to this crap. Let's go take a shower."

"Can I lather you first?" Emily asked naughtily as they exited the room.

"Not only are they nudists, but they're both queers, as well," Janice declared, as the bathroom door closed behind Kim and Emily.

"Does that really surprise you?" Denise crowed.

Marta and Becky had been listening to the exchange of barbs take place, but hadn't made any comment. Now they traded glances before Marta got out of her four-poster and traced Kim and Emily's steps to the bathroom.

"I can't believe you grabbed me down there," Emily said, as both girls burst into giggles as soon as the door closed behind them.

"You're always going on about how it's just another body part," Kim said. "Besides, did you see the look on their faces when I did it?"

"Yeah," Emily said laughing. "Denise actually turned green. You do realize that by lunchtime everyone in the school will think we have the hots for each other."

"In all probability, you're right," Kim agreed. "Maybe I shouldn't have gone so far."

"We're not done yet," Emily said, smirking. "Remember, I promised to soap you up."

"I don't think we should do that," Kim said, suddenly sounding quite serious. "I'm afraid I might like it."

Before Emily could respond, Marta entered the room. At first she just stared at them, without speaking. "You guys really do love each other, don't you?" she asked, seeming very impressed. "But not in the way you tried to make Denise and Janice believe."

"We're not gay if that's what you mean," Kim admitted, "but I'd do anything for Emily. Other than my Mum, I've never loved a person so much."

"I love her as much as I do Jamie and Caitlin. She's my sister," Emily avowed.

Marta studied them both cautiously as if she had something significant to share, but was extremely tentative. "Kim, did you mean what you said? Do you really not let sexual orientation affect how you feel about people? How about you, Emily? Do you think people who are gay are weird?"

Emily wavered, not certain just how much private information about herself she wanted to reveal to Marta with her answer. "I treat people the way they treat me," she said. "Their sexual preferences are their own business." She faltered before adding, "It's not right for me to judge other people, when I can't even completely figure myself out. I'm only twelve, but I'm pretty sure I'm heterosexual." She took a deep breath. "But there is a good chance I might be bisexual."

"Why are you asking all these questions?" Kim asked.

"Because it's hard to always be hiding your true feelings. It would be nice to have someone you could trust; someone you could let your guard down in front of." It was Marta's turn to take a deep breath. "Becky and I are a couple," she said quickly and then waited for a response.

"How long have you been together?" was the first question out of Kim's mouth.

"We've known each other since we were five," Marta answered, "but we've only been doing things to each other since we were ten."

"Ten?" Emily repeated in amazement. "You both knew you were gay at ten?"

"Not for sure. We just knew we liked to touch each other and be touched. It wasn't until we met you two that we were sure we were homosexuals," Marta explained.

"What did we have to do with it?" Kim asked.

Marta face turned a bright red. "Well, to be perfectly honest, the two of you running around in the buff all the time got both Becky and I rather keyed up." Emily and Kim exchanged nervous looks. "Don't worry, neither of us ever considered approaching either of you. We had each other to satisfy our wants. Besides, you both had us somewhat confused as to whether you liked boys or girls or both."

"Do we still get you excited?" Kim asked uncertainly.

"You both have attractive bodies, and Becky and I admittedly enjoy looking at you; similar to how someone looks at sexy pictures in a magazine." Marta paused. "I'm only confiding all this to you because we're tired of hiding our feelings. We want to be open about how we feel about each other, but we'd like to know that at least you two supported us."

"You both supported us last year," Emily said, without faltering. "I'll be there for you."

"That goes for me too," Kim said. "But...."

"You want to know how we can be sure about our feelings and choices," Marta said, as if reading Kim's mind. "We can't be absolutely positive. The two of us only know how we feel when we're together and neither of us wants that feeling to ever end."

"I envy you both," Emily sighed. "I hope you both still feel the same about each other a hundred years from now."

"I hope you and Kim both still share the marvelous friendship you have," Marta said sincerely. "I also hope that knowing about Becky and I won't make you self-conscious in front of us."

"Not in the least," Emily replied. "I can't think of any circumstances in which I'd prefer to be clothed rather than nude."

* * * * *

When Emily and Kim returned to the dorm after completing their showers, they found Becky and Marta both sitting on Becky's bed talking conspiratorially. The four girls exchanged knowing smiles as Kim and Emily dressed for breakfast.

"Did I miss a lot on Thursday and Friday?" Emily asked concernedly.

"Not really," Kim said. "It was mostly review of stuff we learned last year. Today should be interesting though. This morning we have our first 'Anatomy of the Sexes' class with Professor Weasley, and then this afternoon Professor Longbottom is going to have us transplant Mandrakes in Herbology."

"Which one of the Weasleys do we have, the male or the female?" Emily asked.

"The one with boobs," Kim answered. "She is teaching first and second years."

"Somehow I doubt we'll learn anything in that class," Emily said assuredly. "I just can't picture Professor Weasley discussing sex frankly with a room full of twelve year olds, and the textbook looks like it is out of the Dark Ages."

"I think she'll be much better than her brother," Kim answered. "He's teaching the third and fourth years."

"You guys about ready?" Becky asked, giving Kim and Emily a smile.

"As soon as I slip on my skirt," Emily said, adjusting her mini.

"I can't believe you two tarts," Denise said with revulsion. "It's bad enough neither of you ever wear bras, but how can you parade around in such short skirts without knickers?"

Neither girl verbally answered Denise. Emily did, however, bend over while lifting her skirt to moon Denise and Janice.

As they neared the door to their dorm room, Becky and Marta exchanged nervous glances before reaching out and clutching each other's hand tightly.

"What do you say?" Emily asked, giving Kim a devilish smile. "Should we give the school something to really talk about?"

"That depends on what you have in mind," Kim answered coyly. "I have no problem with you holding my hand, but I'll scream if you grab my butt in public."

"Would I do that?" Emily asked, starting to slip her hand under Kim's skirt.

Kim slapped her hand away. "You're worse than Randy."

"Speaking of Randy, how are the two of you getting along?" Emily asked. "Have you heard anything from Brian?"

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"Now what's going on?" Harry said, looking dumbfounded, as Becky and Marta entered the Great Hall followed closely by Kim and Emily, both couples holding hands.

"I'm not sure I want to know," Hermione said shaking her head in consternation.

"You don't think they're, what do they call it, coming out of the closet... do you?" Harry asked.

"I don't know," Hermione answered, looking rather bewildered. "It would seem to me that twelve would be rather young to be sure of one's sexual penchant. Although I did notice what seemed to be a definite magnetism between Marta and Becky last year."

"Neither of them is my daughter," Harry said, alarm evident in his voice. "What about Emily and Kim? I thought they both were fond of boys."

Hermione seemed to ignore Harry as she watched Kim and Emily closely. Unlike Marta and Becky, who appeared to be extremely nervous, Emily and Kim were smiling and appeared to be having a splendid time.

"They're pretending," Hermione finally said. "Marta and Becky are genuine, but I think Kim and Emily are just role-playing."

"That's wrong," Harry said disappointedly. "I would expect the girls to support their friends, not make fun of them."

"They aren't making fun," Hermione explained. "Don't you see? They're running diversionary tactics, but at the same time showing their support."

"Where are you going?" Harry asked as Hermione abruptly got up from the table.

"I'll be right back," Hermione said, hastening in the direction of the Slytherin House table.

By now, most eyes in the Hall were on Hermione. When she got to the table she stopped behind Kim and Emily and placed her hands on their shoulders. She didn't say a word, just smiled before squeezing their shoulders affectionately. Then she went over to Marta and Becky and squatted down between them. Both girls listened attentively as Hermione spoke briefly to them. Then she gave them both a kiss on the cheek before returning to the staff table.

As Hermione returned to her seat, Marta, tears filling her eyes, turned to Emily. "Do you realize how lucky you are to have her as a mother?"

Emily didn't answer, but instead just nodded her head.

"What was that all about?" Harry asked as Hermione rejoined him.

"I had to tell them how proud I was," Hermione said. "Do you understand just how much nerve it took for Marta and Becky to openly divulge their true feelings? I offered to facilitate when they're ready to tell their parents."

"At least not everyone is treating them as if they have the plague," Harry said, indicating Doris Burke who had just concluded talking to Marta and Becky.

"Doris is a wonderful girl. I'm so glad that Jamie and her have become such good friends," Hermione declared. "It's difficult to believe that her parents were once supporters of Voldemort."

"He's another one," Harry said, indicating Tyler Bancroft, who was now chatting with Becky and Marta. "His parents once ran a death camp for Voldemort and his brother should have been expelled from Hogwarts numerous times. Yet he seems like a great kid."

As Tyler walked past Emily, he touched her shoulder lightly. "I prayed that you'd be safely returned to us," he said quietly before continuing toward his seat.

"Why won't you give him another chance?" Kim beseeched her friend. "He worships the ground you walk on. Plus, he's gorgeous."

Emily gave Kim an angry look, but before she could reply, there was a rushing sound overhead and her attention was drawn to the arrival of a hundred or so owls. The owls circled the hall, dumping letters and packages into the chattering crowd.

Uncharacteristically, the hall suddenly became extremely quiet. Emily looked toward the head table expecting to see the Headmaster standing ready to speak, but instead she saw what had caused everyone in the room to become hushed. There was a large screech owl circling the head table. That was not unusual because the staff received mail regularly. What had gotten everyone's attention was the red envelope clutched in the owl's beak.

"One of the Professors is getting a Howler," Caitlin whispered to her sister.

"I've never seen that before in my seven years," Jamie said aghast. "Who would be so disrespectful as to send a professor a howler when they are surrounded by students?"

"I wonder who it's for?" Caitlin asked, but the words had barely escaped her lips, when the owl came to rest next to the Headmaster and politely offered the letter to him.

Katie and Severus exchanged edgy looks and then Katie did something she had never done before in public. She placed her hand reassuringly on top of Severus'.

"You better open it," she said in an apprehensive whisper. "They only get worse the longer you delay. Best you get it over with."

"Who would be so juvenile and discourteous as to send the Headmaster a Howler?" Hermione asked disgustedly. "And at breakfast, of all times."

"I would be willing to venture a guess," Harry said, a bad taste residing in his mouth, but it looks like we're all about to find out."

Severus stretched out his hand, relieved the envelop from the owl's beak, and slit it open. For a moment it seemed like the envelope had exploded; a roar of sound filled the Great Hall.

"--JUST WHO THE BLOODY HELL DO YOU THINK YOU ARE? --"

Percy Weasley's voice roared, a hundred times louder than normal. The students stared at the head table, as the bellowing voice echoed off the stonewalls of the hall,

"THE STORY THAT APPEARED IN THE *DAILY PROPHET* DID SO WITH MY APPROVAL. I PERSONALLY VERIFIED ALL THE DETAILS. HOW DARE YOU HAVE THE GALL TO SUGGEST THAT I, THE MINISTER OF MAGIC, WOULD APPROVE A STORY THAT WAS NOT FULLY FACTUAL?"

"WHEN I ATTENDED HOGWARTS SCHOOL OF WITCHCRAFT AND WIZARDRY, I CONSIDERED YOU TO BE A PROFESSIONAL, COMPETENT TEACHER. IT IS REGRETFUL THAT YOU HAVE FALLEN VICTIM TO THE LIES OF HARRY POTTER AND HIS MISGUIDED LEGION.

"I AM NOT A SPITEFUL OR VENGEFUL MAN AND UNDERSTAND THAT EVEN THE BEST OF US OCCASIONALLY FALTER. SHOULD YOU, HOWEVER, CONTINUE TO MISLEAD THE STUDENTS OF HOGWARTS, IT WILL BE MY SAD DUTY TO SEEK YOUR DISMISSAL AS HEADMASTER.

Sincerely,
Percy Weasley
Minister of Magic

Snape calmly rose to his feet as the letter burst into flames. "It is at times like these that people, even students as young as yourselves, are required to make choices, tough choices. I propose that you make your future decisions based on past history. When Lord Voldemort returned in the nineteen-nineties and sought to once again rule our world, Harry Potter and former Headmaster Albus Dumbledore attempted to warn the wizarding world. The Ministry and *The Daily Prophet* disparaged them both. Fortunately, we learned before it was too late who was giving us truthful information. We should learn from history where to place our trust."

Without further comment Snape took his seat. At first, the Great Hall remained quiet. Then as the students rose to their feet in order to head for their first class of the day, the talk became incessant.

* * * * *

"What if he has you removed as Headmaster?" Katie asked concernedly. "Where will you go? What will you do?" She grasped Severus' hand. "What will become of us?"

"The Ministry has absolutely no authority when it comes to running Hogwarts," Severus said confidently. "Albus Dumbledore took care of that after all the difficulty with Fudge and that vicious Umbridge woman. Only the school Board of Governors can remove the Headmaster and that takes a two-thirds majority."

"But what if he goes to the Board and they agree to remove you?" Katie asked, not convinced that Severus' job was secure.

"As long as I have the support of Harry, Hermione and Ron, I'm not concerned," Severus explained. "There are a lot of new, younger Board members now; they respect the Covenant and won't be easily bamboozled by someone like Percy Weasley. Besides, I doubt he'll even approach them. He won't want to take the chance of looking weak if they refused his request."

"No matter what happens, I'll be by your side," Katie declared.

"I knew I could count on that," Severus replied, with a smile.

* * * * *

"You never answered my question this morning," Emily said, as she and Kim took seats next to each other for their first 'Anatomy of the Sexes' class. "Has Brian written you at all?"

Kim didn't answer, but instead glowed pink as she held up six fingers.

"He's written you six letters," Emily said excitedly. "You must have really made an impression on him."

"I like him, too," Kim said shyly. "If only he wasn't a Muggle. It makes things so complicated. Even posting him a letter is a pain."

"When are you going to tell Randy?" Emily asked.

"I don't know what to do where he is concerned," Kim said concernedly. "He's really nice and I don't want to hurt him. He lost Caitlin to Matt and you to Tyler. If I break up with him, it will be a nasty blow to his ego. Besides, what are the odds of Brian and I ever even seeing each other again, let alone becoming a couple? He's in the United States and I'm here."

"I understand where you are coming from," Emily said supportively, "but somehow it just seems wrong to leave Randy under the impression that he is the foremost guy in your life when you are writing Brian. How about Brian, does he know about Randy?"

"No," Kim said hanging her head. "I was afraid he'd stop writing if he knew I had a boyfriend."

The girls' conversation was brought to a halt by Ginny bringing the class to order.

"You won't be needing your wands in this class," she said with a smile. "We'll be talking about a different kind of magic; the magic of love, intimacy, conception and birth. Although we will be following the printed guidelines in your textbooks, I want you to feel free to ask questions at any time and I'll do my best to answer them. Since this is our first session together, I think we should get to know each other. Suppose you each stand and introduce yourself. Then ask me a question that has been on your mind. Who wants to start?"

The students all exchanged glances, but no one raised their hand.

"I realize that you're all nervous," Professor Weasley said. "You probably aren't used to discussing sex in a mixed group. Thought was initially given to having separate classes for boys and girls, but the final decision was that you should be taught together. Would anyone like to venture a guess as to why it was decided it was best to instruct you as a mixed group?"

At first no one moved, but then a hand timidly rose. "Yes, Miss Thatcher. What do you think was the reason?"

"We'll all be having sex together, so we should learn about it together," Kim said softly.

"Hopefully not all at once," Ginny said, straight faced.

When the inference of what Ginny had said settled in, the class broke into laughter. Even Kim laughed at her slip.

"That would be called an orgy, and something we hopefully won't be discussing," Professor Weasley said with a laugh as she put her hand on Kim's shoulder. "We all know what you meant, but I appreciate you breaking the tension. We will also be discussing same-sex relationships, but for the moment, let's confine our discussion to heterosexual, or boy/girl relationships."

As the giggles subsided, Emily's hand went in the air.

"Our first question," Ginny said, her voice sounding both pleased and edgy.

"Emily Zacherley-Potter," she said in introduction. "I've been a nudist all my life. That doesn't necessarily give me a heads up when it comes to knowledge about sex, but I probably have seen more naked people than anyone else in the room. I've noticed that some men have extremely large things. What happens if you fall in love with someone and it doesn't fit in your twat when you want to make love?"

When Emily finished her question, every face in the room was red. Not only had Emily jumped directly to the subject of insertion, but she had also brought up the subject of size.

"You believe in getting right to the tough questions, don't you?" Professor Weasley asked. "First things first, men do not have a thing or a dick or a prick. Men and boys have a penis. You do not have a twat or a pussy or a cunt; you have a vagina. I'd prefer if we use the proper terminology in this class.

"I like that you referred to the sex act as making love. It's not necessary to love someone in order to engage in sex, but it makes the results much more gratifying.

"We will be studying the female and male sex organs in detail throughout this course. So, for now I'll only give you a rather quick and concise answer to your question. The vagina is a rather amazing muscular structure. Although it might seem small and tight to you, it can expand and contract rather substantially. Normally, the walls are relaxed and collapsed together. But, during sexual arousal, the inner two-thirds expand. This is why the vagina is sometimes called a 'virtual space.' By the time they reach legal age, most women, during intercourse, can accommodate almost any size penis, including a 12-inch one."

Kim and Emily exchanged horrified glances, neither girl wanting to even imagine anything that large ever being inserted into their body. The boys on the other hand seemed to have gotten extremely quiet. Emily imagined it was because most of them were worried about the size of their own manhood.

Now that Emily had broken the ice, everyone seemed eager to ask questions. She couldn't believe how fast the class had gone when Professor Weasley said, "Your assignment for next week is to read Chapters One and Two. We have time for one more brief question."

Denise's arm shot up into the air. "Professor, this is more a suggestion rather than a question. I've been looking through our textbook and it is rather behind the times. Some of the pictures and charts look about a hundred years old."

Professor Weasley nodded her head in agreement.

"Why don't we take advantage of the fact that we have two nudists in the class?" Denise questioned, seeming serious. "Instead of looking at some ancient charts, wouldn't we all learn more by actually examining Kim or Emily nude? I'm sure it would help me understand my body better and it would be especially educational for the boys. Maybe the two of them would even offer to visit your other classes."

Kim's face immediately turned cherry red. She knew that Denise hated Emily and her, but couldn't believe that even she would suggest something so humiliating?

Emily didn't flinch, but rather studied her professor's facial expression. It looked at first like Professor Weasley might actually be seriously considering Denise's suggestion.

"That's a ridiculous idea," Tyler said without taking time to raise his hand and be recognized. "Even if one of the girls were actually foolish enough to be willing to do it, I'm sure the Board of Governors would never approve. Then, there are their parents and our parents to consider; I seriously doubt many of them would consent. Plus, it would be sexist to only have a female model."

"You could volunteer," Janice suggested. "I know personally that I'd be willing to study late into the night if you were the model."

"Okay! Okay! That's enough!" Ginny shouted. "Denise, you'll be spending tomorrow evening with me in detention. I don't appreciate my class being disrupted. I'm not an idiot, young lady. I know that suggestion was only made to embarrass Emily and Kim. Class dismissed," Ginny proclaimed.

"Can you believe her?" Kim said as she and Emily departed the room. "Suggesting that the class have nude models to study and that you and I volunteer. Talk about crazy off-the-wall ideas."

"She only suggested it in hopes of upsetting us," Emily said. "I really hate to agree with her, but I do think everyone would benefit from being able to study live subjects. No one will learn anything about male and female anatomy from those stupid drawings in the textbook."

"Are you crazy!?" Kim shouted. "The school would never endorse such a thing! What's more, who would be insane enough to volunteer to be a model?"

"No, not as part of a regular class. But if it was part of a special presentation that required written permission from the students' parents to attend; they might perhaps go for it."

"Somehow I doubt my Mum would give me permission," Kim said, laughing as she shook her head. "Besides, like I said, who in their right mind would agree to model?"

"I'd do it," Emily answered matter-of-factly.

Kim stared at Emily, a horrified expression on her face. "You'd be willing to stand naked on a stage while people walked about pointing at you and discussing your various parts?"

"Why not?" Emily asked. "It's no big deal. Although to really do it correctly, the two volunteers should probably both be lying on tables like those Muggle doctors use."

"And I imagine a limited amount of touching should be allowed, too," Emily added. "Wouldn't you like to touch a boy's penis and testicles, just to see what they felt like? I'm sure the boys would want

to feel a breast and maybe even touch the inside of the vagina."

"And you could do that?" Kim asked, shaking her head in disbelief. "You could actually lie there as people you don't even know groped and fondled you?"

"Of course not," Emily retorted. "I'm sure the professor would watch carefully and see that no one got carried away. But a certain degree of educational touching should be allowed."

"To a small extent, I can agree with you," Kim finally admitted. "Before I went on holiday with you, I would have found such a display very enlightening. I'd still, admittedly, like to observe a penis at close range and get to feel it, but I'd prefer the models to be people I didn't know."

Kim looked at Emily and then laughed. "Why are we even talking about something so out of the question?"

"Yeah! It could never happen at Hogwarts," Emily agreed.

* * * * *

"Why doesn't the Minister believe you?" Matt asked, as he, Caitlin and Randy headed for the North Tower and their first Divination class.

"Mum says it's all political," Caitlin replied. "Percy Weasley desperately wants the position of Minister of Magic, but is fearful that he will be voted out if people feel our world is in jeopardy."

Randy shook his head. "Power-hungry, bigheaded git!"

"That about sums it up," Caitlin said. "How much further is it to the North Tower? Isn't there some sort of short cut we can take? We won't make a very good impression on Professor Trelawney if we're late."

"Calm down," Randy said. "I don't even understand why you're taking the subject. Aren't you the one that tried to talk Matt and me out of it because your Mum said it was a lot of malarkey? I thought you were going to take Muggle Studies instead."

"Yeah, but then you guys both decided to take it anyway and I wanted to be with you. Besides Mum can teach me anything I need to know about Muggle Studies," Caitlin added.

"I think we're lost," Matt finally admitted, as they stopped next to a painting of a short, squat knight in a suit of armor leaning against a tree as his fat, dapple-gray pony fed on the green grass.

"I've lost all sense of direction. Are we even still heading north?" Randy asked.

"Perchance, are you lost?" The knight inquired. "I am Sir Cadogan, of both noble heart and steely sinew. May I be of assistance?"

"You most certainly may, if you know the way to Professor Trelawney's Room in the North Tower," Caitlin replied.

"A quest! Most certainly I know the way," Sir Cadogan replied. "Follow me lovely princess and noble comrades. Let us be off to seek our goal."

Without warning the knight ran into the left side of the frame and out of sight. "Hurry!" Caitlin yelled. "Don't let him get out of sight!"

"There he goes," Randy yelled as Sir Cadogan ran through a picture ahead.

Finally after running what seemed like a long distance and climbing many spiraling steps, they emerged onto a small landing.

"Farewell!" cried the knight. "Call upon me whenever you are in need."

"Thank you!" Caitlin said as she looked around. There were no doors, but a number of hooks on the wall, many holding robes.

"I think we go up this ladder, Randy offered. "It sounds like most of our class is already up there."

"Hold up a second," Caitlin said as she read the sign above the robes.

Classroom can be extremely warm in September, May and June. Robes are not required.

"I'm keeping mine on," Randy said as he started climbing the ladder.

"Not me. I'm already roasting," Caitlin said, removing her robes and hanging them on an empty hook, then starting up the ladder.

"Likewise," Matt said as he also removed his robes and then began to follow Caitlin up the silvery ladder.

"This is the right place," Caitlin called down to Matt. "Lookup at the brass plaque on the trapdoor."

Matt looked up, but his eye never quite made it to the plaque.

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"Red, have you ever thought about having kids?" Draco asked, ostensibly out of nowhere, as they headed for lunch.

Ginny stopped abruptly and gawked open mouthed at him. Draco normally avoided any words in conversation that started with letters in the middle of the alphabet such as L for love and M for marriage. So, of course, Ginny never expected to ever hear him utter the K word.

"Draco, I come from a large family. Naturally I've thought of having children; not as many as my Mum, of course, but I'd like at least two." Ginny quickly recovered as she kept in mind Draco's usual aversion of any discussion involving marriage. "But it's not something I desperately want," she lied. "I'm content teaching and having you as a lover."

"You like Timmy, don't you?" Draco asked.

"Of course I do," Ginny answered. Suddenly there was concern in her voice. "Draco, please tell me that you're not thinking of trying to take him away from Sam and Ron again."

"No! I couldn't do that," Draco replied despondently. "Sam loves him too much. Besides, she's a great mother. Your git of a brother isn't half bad as a surrogate father either. Plus, they've both been first-rate by allowing me to play an ever-increasing part in Timmy's up bringing. I was more thinking of a kid I could be with from the moment he popped out of the oven."

"Have you given any thought as to how old you want to be when you conceive this progeny?" Ginny asked sheepishly.

"That's the tough part," Draco grumbled. "I don't want to wait until I'm an old fart that can't even straddle a broom anymore to teach his kid how to play Quidditch. Yet, I don't want to toss aside my wild youthful years and settle down with one woman too quickly. Maybe I'll be ready when I'm about twenty-five."

"But you are **twenty-five**," Ginny said, astonishment apparent in her voice. "Do you have someone in mind to carry your offspring or do you just intend to hire a stand-in mother through the want ads?"

"I have someone in mind," Draco verified, "but I have two major fears."

"What are those?" Ginny asked.

"First I'm concerned about the child's hair," Draco said, seriously. "The woman I have in mind to carry the baby has flaming red hair and my hair is white-blonde. What if the boy ends up with pink hair?"

"The child could be a girl," Ginny exclaimed.

"I still wouldn't want her to have pink hair," Draco declared.

"I doubt that will happen," Ginny said with a laugh. "What is your second concern?"

"I've treated the mother rather badly in the past," Draco replied. "I've taken her for granted, rarely told her how much she actually means to me. I'm not sure if she realizes how much I love her or if she'd even be willing to marry me."

Ginny just gawked at Draco in disbelief. "Are you asking me to marry you?"

"I'm not very good at this romantic stuff," Draco answered. "I've always lived for the day, never thought about the future. The last few weeks have made me rethink my life. Those kids could have been killed. None of us knows when our last day will arrive. I want to be with you and our children before my final day comes."

Draco took Ginny's hand and got down on his knees as curious students rushed past them. "Ginevra Molly Weasley, will you marry me?"

* * * * *

"Matt is something wrong?" Caitlin inquired as they headed for dinner that evening. "You haven't been acting like your normal self since Divination Class. Don't tell me that you're still upset about what Professor Trelawney said."

"Matt, I'm not going to die!" Caitlin avowed. "Mum says that Professor Trelawney has predicted the death of a student every year since she arrived at the school. None has died yet and I don't intend to be the first."

"That had me worried," Matt admitted. "But I know that Trelawney is a fraud and what she says can't be taken seriously."

Caitlin looked at Matt questioningly. "If it wasn't that, then what has you so upset?"

"We have to talk in private," Matt said as they reached the Charms classroom. He tried the door and found it to be unlocked. "In here, quick," he said, checking to see that no one was watching them.

"Caitlin, I'm sorry," Matt sobbed, turning away from her.

"Sorry? Sorry for what?" she asked, confused. "Matt, did you find another girl this summer? Are you about to break up with me?"

"Break up! No way!" Matt said fervently. "I love you. I want to be with you always."

"I love you, too," Caitlin said, taking Matt's hand and giving him a tender kiss on the cheek. "I don't understand. If it's not what Trelawney said and you don't want to break up, then what has you so troubled?"

Matt hung his head ashamedly. "Caitlin, I feel like some sort of pervert. When we were climbing up the ladder to the Divination classroom...." He hesitated. "Remember how you called out to me to look at the brass plaque."

She nodded her head.

"Well, when I looked up, I ended up seeing up your skirt."

Caitlin blushed slightly. "I'm sorry!" she said, giving him a hug. "I've never seen myself from that view point, but I imagine it's not very photogenic."

"You don't understand," Matt blubbered. "I couldn't take my eyes off you. You're beautiful! Every part of you is beautiful."

Matt lowered his voice as if afraid someone would hear what he was about to say next. He audibly gulped. "By the time we reached the top of that ladder, I wanted to jump on top of you and...you know... do it. I'm sorry, you must think I'm some kind of an animal."

"I think nothing of the sort," Caitlin said, as she held Matt tightly. "You can't imagine how many times I've thought of us being together." She sighed heavily. "But we're only thirteen. The consequences of us having sex are just too dreadful to imagine."

Caitlin bit her lip. "We can't have intercourse, but there are other things my parents do to make each

other feel good." A chill went through Caitlin's body. She couldn't believe what she was about to propose; she wasn't even sure she had the guts to actually do it.

"What are you suggesting?" Matt asked.

"Forget I said anything," Caitlin answered fearfully. "It was a bad idea. Besides, I'm not even sure that what I have in mind wouldn't trigger some sort of magical alarm. Maybe it would be best if you just didn't follow me up the ladder any more."

"That's something else I wanted to talk to you about," Matt said, suddenly sounding more angry rather than embarrassed. "I want you to start wearing trousers instead of skirts."

"I beg your pardon?" Caitlin said, not believing what she had just heard Matt say.

"I was originally going to tell you to just start wearing knickers," Matt said, "but I don't fancy boys looking up your skirt and seeing your bare legs either."

Caitlin pulled away from Matt. "I think it might be a good idea if we have a seat," she said motioning to two desks.

Once they were seated, Caitlin looked severely at Matt. "Would you like to rephrase what you just said?"

Matt stared incredulously at Caitlin. "I thought I made it rather clear," Matt said, not understanding what her problem was. "You're my girlfriend and I'm very much in love with you, but I don't want you exposing your privates to the rest of the school. From now on, wear trousers."

Caitlin couldn't believe her ears. She just sat gazing at Matt as her eyes filled with tears. "I'm your girlfriend, not your possession!" she said angrily. "You might give commands to your dog, but I'm not your dog, I'm your equal."

"You're taking what I said and twisting it all around," Matt said self-defensively. "It's just that sometimes you get in positions where you're rather exposed. I don't want other guys checking out my girl's twat and butt." He faltered momentarily. "Maybe you should consider wearing a bra, too. Your nipples were clearly visible through that blouse you had on the other night."

Caitlin sadly shook her head. "Matt, do you remember holding up a skinny, naked eleven-year-old on your shoulders two years ago as she tried to convince all of Gryffindor that Jamie Zacherley should be allowed to practice nudism in the common room?"

Matt nodded his head.

"Do you recall that I remained naked the remainder of that night? You, Randy and I had a grand time. I don't recollect you once telling me to cover myself then and I'm sure you got quite a view when I bobbed for apples."

"You weren't my girlfriend then," Matt insisted.

"No, but I was a nudist. You knew then how I felt about clothes and my stance has never changed. You know me better than most people. I'm not a flirt or an exhibitionist. I don't go without undergarments or clothes to draw attention to myself; I'm just more comfortable that way."

"Matt, since we've been a couple, how many things about yourself have I asked you to change? Caitlin inquired.

After thinking for a few moments, Matt responded, "Nothing."

"That's because I like you the way you are. I wouldn't have said yes to being your girlfriend if there were traits about you I didn't like." Caitlin looked Matt straight in the face. "I'm a nudist. I detest clothes. You knew what I was before we became involved. If you really care for me, you won't ask me to change."

"I'm not asking you to change," Matt insisted. "You can still go to those kinds of places with your parents if you must. I just want you to cover yourself decently here at school."

"Decently," Caitlin repeated. She closed her eyes, and then rubbed her face with her hand. "Matt, I'm going to skip dinner and have a short lie down; I think I'm getting a really bad headache. I'll see you in the common room tonight with my answer." She cupped Matt's face in her hands and kissed his lips hard before turning and leaving.

* * * * *

"Can you remember the names of anymore of these Death Eaters?" Salazar Slytherin asked. "They sound like the type of people that would readily support me."

Goyle shook his head. "We were just ending our seventh year when He-Who-Must-Not-Be Named was defeated. Many of his followers were killed in battles preceding his demise."

Slytherin paced the room for a few moments in silence, before speaking again. "You will first personally contact all the living former Death Eaters. I want you to offer them the opportunity to unreservedly join me. They should provide us with a strong nucleus."

"What if they refuse?" Crabbe asked anxiously.

"That would be extremely unwise of them," Slytherin sighed. "I would certainly prefer if everyone that joined my cause did so of their own free will, but I'm not beyond offering incentives. People often change their minds when faced with the loss of something or someone they feel great affection for.

"Then we will procure as much information as we can on deceased and imprisoned Death Eaters. Their progeny should be eager to avenge their parents. If not, I will offer them an enticement as well. Thanks to the new Minister of Magic, we should have a sizeable organization assembled before the wizard world is even aware of my reincarnation."

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Jamie grabbed the books off her bed and hurried out of the seventh year girls' dormitory to join Alex and Amanda, who were already in the common room. As she was about to pass the third year

dorm, the door opened and Caitlin slowly emerged.

"What are you doing!?" Jamie asked, coming to an abrupt halt.

"I'm about to give Matt an answer," Caitlin answered, trying to hold back her tears.

"No you're not," Jamie barked. "At least not until I know the question."

Chapter Eleven Driving the Point Home

"Would you mind explaining to me why it appears like you were about to go down to the common room totally starkers?" Jamie asked.

"Because that's exactly what I intend to do," Caitlin declared. "That is, unless you have it in mind to stop me."

"Suppose we step into your dorm for a minute and you explain to me exactly what's going on," Jamie suggested. "Then I'll decide whether I'm going to stop you or not."

Caitlin turned back into the room as Jamie followed her. She tossed the towel she was carrying onto her bed and then sat down. Jamie sat down next to her and placed her hand on Caitlin's leg. "What did Matt do?" Jamie asked as if reading Caitlin's mind.

"Do you remember the first day you and I spent together nude?" Caitlin asked.

"Like it was yesterday," Jamie answered with a smile.

"I asked you a question about not wearing knickers and you ended up telling me a story about Trelawney's class."

"Yeah, I remember," Jamie said, thinking back to the day.

Caitlin wasn't sure what to do so she looked at Jamie for guidance. Jamie nodded for her to go ahead with her question. The other girls all gathered around in anticipation. "You said you never wear any knickers, but yet you wear mini skirts. Aren't you concerned you will give a show?"

The other girls looked back and forth at each other. They wanted to hear the answer to this question, too. "I prefer skirts to jeans for the same reason that I don't wear knickers. I like the freedom. I like the feel of the air on my vagina. I try to bend and lean properly so that I'm not exposing myself, but if someone should see me, I don't think of it as that big a deal. After all if I had my choice, they'd be seeing all of me naked. Usually if a person sees that part of me, it's just a quick glance and they think they are mistaken."

"You mean like Alex before Trelawney's class two years ago?" Amanda laughed.

"That was an unusual circumstance. I'm glad it wasn't someone like Dick Bancroft or I never would have heard the end of it."

"What happened?" Caitlin asked.

"It was June of our 3rd year. The temperature was predicted to be in the high nineties, so I had worn as little as possible under my robes. I had on a thin mesh white half tee that barely covered my breasts and the shortest mini I owned. Still I was dying through most of the day, as was everyone else. You can't believe how hot those black robes can get. We had Divinations with Trelawney the last period and her class is held in the North Tower. You have to climb a silvery ladder to get to it and the room is normally hot because of all the candles she burns. We hadn't even reached the ladder and every one was complaining how hot they were. I could feel that my tee was completely soaked."

"When we reached the bottom of the ladder Professor Trelawney yelled down for us to take off our

robes and leave them at the bottom of the ladder because the temperature was well over 100 degrees in her room. I was concerned what type of reaction I would get as I dropped my robes. No one said a word, but Amanda told me later that I might as well have taken the tee off too because there was no mystery, it was totally transparent."

"Now Alex and Amanda are used to seeing me naked so they told me that I should go up the ladder first and they would cover my flank."

Caitlin stopped Jamie for verification. "Alex has seen you naked? Is he a naturist?"

"Alex a naturist! Not hardly. I think he takes a shower with his clothes on, but he's been cool about me being nude ever since he found out in first year. He's seen me naked dozens of times. Anyway I started up the ladder with Alex behind me, followed by Amanda. Now Alex, of course, was being the perfect gentleman by looking straight ahead and not up my skirt until I asked him a question and he automatically looked up as I was lifting my right leg to the next step of the ladder. He later told me that he could have easily given me a gynecological exam."

Caitlin turned red. "You mean he saw up inside you. That must have embarrassed you."

"Why should it? It's just another part of my body. Guys have their sex organ out on display. Girls have theirs inside. I don't feel it's a big deal."

Caitlin nodded her head, obviously now in agreement with what Jamie had said.

"How did Professor Trelawney handle you being virtually topless?" Caitlin asked.

"That was one of the biggest surprises of my life. I thought she would send me out of the tower or give me detention. I know Professor Granger would have. Trelawney just looked at me and smiled. Then she commented that thanks to me she wouldn't have to worry about any of the boys closing their eyes in class today."

"Jamie, was Alex upset because your blouse became transparent and everyone could see your breasts?" Caitlin asked.

"You have to remember, that was long before Alex and I became a couple." Jamie smiled. "I think he just sat back with everyone else and enjoyed the show I was giving."

"Now that you're going together, does he ever give you a hard time about being a nudist or not wearing a bra and knickers?"

"No. I actually brought up the subject once," Jamie replied. "Obviously Alex doesn't go around lifting my skirt or encouraging me to give shows, but he has a sweet way of reacting if someone does get an accidental look."

"What does he do?"

"He smiles at me and says 'There's someone else who knows how very beautiful you are and how extremely lucky I am.'"

"He's not the only one that's lucky," Caitlin said. "You're lucky to have someone who loves you so much and is so understanding and accepting."

"Yes, I am," Jamie agreed, "but we're supposed to be talking about you and Matt, not Alex and I."

"Matt caught a similar view of me going up Trelawney's ladder today," Caitlin confessed. "Although he said he was enthralled by the view, he practically ordered me to start wearing trousers. He even went as far as to tell me to put on a bra." Caitlin gave a depressed sigh. "I told him that I'd give him my answer tonight."

"And your answer is to cause a riot by walking into the common room completely naked? Couldn't you just tell him that you're his girlfriend and not his possession?" Jamie asked.

"I tried that," Caitlin answered dejectedly. "He claims he loves me, but at the same time he wants to change me."

"He's an arse," Jamie replied, shaking her head in sympathy. "You do remember though that Hermione forbid us both from going into the common room nude."

Caitlin nodded her head.

"You also know that the first and second years were not a part of the Gryffindor House that accepted us as nudists and gave their blessing for us to be naked."

Caitlin nodded her head again.

"You also realize how much trouble you could potentially get in."

Caitlin nodded her head once more. "I also appreciate that in all likelihood it will mean the end of Matt's and my relationship. Jamie, I'm a naturist. I love being a naturist. I'm proud of who I am and I don't want to change. It's the only way he'll understand."

Jamie got to her feet. "I love you, but you're crazy to do this," she said as she started to unbutton her blouse.

"What are you doing? Caitlin asked.

"You supported me on Halloween, two years ago. I'm supporting you tonight."

"No! No you can't," Caitlin begged. "You're in your seventh year and Head Girl. I won't let you risk everything you've worked so hard to achieve. Besides, I have to do this on my own. He won't understand otherwise."

"Okay! Have it your way," Jamie said, "but give me a head start so that I can clue in Alex and Amanda. Good luck! I love you!" Jamie put her arms around Caitlin and held her tightly. Then she kissed her on the cheek and headed for the door.

As Jamie entered the common room, Matt immediately ran up to her. "Have you seen Caitlin? I've been waiting for her all night."

"I was just talking to her," Jamie replied. "She'll be down in a few minutes. You might want to sit down."

"She's going to do what?" Amanda asked, a look of horror on her face as Jamie explained what Caitlin was about to do. "I can't believe you didn't talk her out of it."

"Amanda, when were we ever successful in talking Jamie out of anything once she set her mind to it?" Alex asked. "Caitlin is no different."

Jamie nodded her head. "If I were in her shoes, I'd likely be doing the same thing. Fortunately, I'm not," she said reaching for Alex's hand.

"Oh! My God! She didn't call it off," Amanda cried, staring at the vestibule to the girls' staircase.

It was only moments before everyone in the Common Room was staring in Caitlin's direction. Some were doing more than staring, as Caitlin tried unsuccessfully to speak about the din.

"What the hell are you doing?" Matt hollered as he ran over to Caitlin. "Are you crazy? Everyone is gawking at you. Go back to your dorm immediately."

"I don't think so," Caitlin said defiantly. "What you see is me! The real me! You can either accept me or reject me, but don't try to change me."

Caitlin ignored Matt's protests and turned to the room in general. "Can I please have your attention," Caitlin said, but her words were lost amid the clamor her nakedness had caused. She had their attention, every eye in the room was on her, but they wouldn't listen to what she had to say.

"Shut up and let the girl talk," Alex bellowed over the racket. He walked over to Caitlin and stood behind her, placing his hands reassuringly on her bare shoulders. "I realize none of you are accustomed to a beautiful young lady baring herself in front of you, but that's no reason to act like a bunch of moronic five year olds. Two years ago, most of you were present when Jamie and Caitlin revealed to us that they were nudists. At that time they explained to us their lifestyle and many of you graciously granted them permission to put into practice nudism in the common room. They never took us up on that offer. Maybe for some reason, Caitlin's changed her mind. Wouldn't you at least like to know why she's standing here naked?"

Although it was evident from their facial expressions that the students, especially the first and second years, had varying opinions on Caitlin being nude, it seemed they were all fairly interested in the reason why. They continued to gawk at the naked girl, but remained quiet, waiting for her to speak. Alex turned to return to Jamie, but Caitlin reached out and snatched his hand, clutching it tightly. He smiled and remained by her side.

Caitlin cleared her throat and then began to speak, her voice cracking because of her nervousness. "If I sound nervous, it's because I am," Caitlin began, "but not for the reason you probably expect. I'm not uneasy because I'm nude. I'm nervous because of what many of you are thinking, especially you first and second years."

She paused a moment. "You guys, in particular, must think me a tart," she said looking in the direction of the first years. "We haven't even had time to get to know each other yet, nevertheless I'm exposing myself to you."

"It is really difficult to explain naturism to someone who has never tried it. Do any of you have an old shirt or a pair of pants that you wear more than anything else you own simply because it feels especially comfortable on you and you're relaxed when wearing it? That's the way I am with being nude; it's the way I feel most contented. Hard as it may be for you to believe or understand, this is the most comfortable I've been in the common room in two years, despite the fact that many of you are staring a hole right through me."

"I wear clothes to classes only because the school rules necessitate it. I'd prefer to be nude all the time, but I'm not allowed. Every day I live a charade, pretending to be someone I'm not. Please tolerate me being myself. I'm not trying to hurt anyone. I'm not a tart and I'm not trying to attract attention. I just want to be me." Alex pulled Caitlin into his arms as she started to cry.

"It's up to you guys," Alex said, looking out over the common room. "No one can give Caitlin permission to do what she's asking. I'm sure it's against a multitude of school rules." Alex looked toward Jamie and she nodded her head. "If anyone has a problem with Caitlin being comfortable in the common room, just inform the Head Girl or myself anonymously and we'll require her to dress. If we receive no complaints, we'll remain blind to the situation."

"But what if the Headmaster or one of the professors finds out?" asked a fourth year girl. "What if someone owls their parents and they in turn contact the Board of Governors?"

"Well for starters, I think the positions of Head Boy and Head Girl will be open," Alex replied with a laugh. "But if anyone in this room does that, then the sorting hat made a horrible mistake. I have faith in my fellow Gryffindors. I'm not saying you all understand Caitlin's feeling about nudity; I'm just saying that Gryffindors don't purposely hurt other Gryffindors by stabbing them in the back."

Two first year girls that had been whispering to each other suddenly became silent and exchanged guilty, embarrassed glances.

Alex put his arm around Caitlin, leaned down and kissed her cheek. "I'm not sure how long this will last or what the ultimately consequences might be, but for tonight at least feel free to be comfortable."

Matt looked at Caitlin disbelievingly. "You did this all because I asked you to wear trousers?"

"I don't recall you ever asking me to do anything," Caitlin retorted. "If I remember correctly, you ordered me as if I were your slave or servant." Caitlin backed slightly away from Matt.

"Take a look! Take a good long, hard look! I'm a nudist. I intend to be one the rest of my life and I have it in mind to be naked whenever possible. Anyone wanting to be my friend is going to have to accept that and not try to change me."

"And what about someone who wants to be more than a friend?" Matt asked.

"Matt, I thought we had something special. I even fantasized about us someday getting married. But I'm not going to change, and I'm not about to take orders. When I get married it will be to someone that is willing to love and accept me, as I am, someone who thinks of his wife as a partner, not a subordinate. I wanted you to be that someone, but..." Caitlin trailed off.

"I'm sorry," Caitlin said, tears once more filling her eyes. "You mean the world to me, but I think we need to take a break from each other. I think you have to reconsider if I'm the right girl for you." Caitlin turned away from Matt and walked confidently across the room toward the other third years. Matt watched her briefly, then turned and sprinted up the stairs to his dorm.

"It looks like they broke up," Amanda surmised.

"Yeah," Jamie agreed sadly. "She liked him a lot. It won't be easy." Without warning Jamie threw her arms around Alex and kissed him soundly.

"Please tell me what I did to deserve that, so I can do it again," Alex said, when Jamie finally released him.

"That's just for being you and giving love and support to Caitlin," Jamie responded. "I love you."

Alex didn't have to repeat the words, they were etched in his eyes, "Since we're blind to Caitlin's nudity, can I assume you'll be joining her?" Alex asked.

"I wish I could," Jamie said contemplatively. "Two years ago, I wouldn't have thought twice about it. Now being Head Girl and all, I probably shouldn't. It's going to be hard enough explaining to Harry and Hermione that we allowed Caitlin to do this without me also participating."

"Then you think someone will spill the beans," Alex asked concernedly.

"I don't know," Jamie replied. "Maybe not right away, but Caitlin is only starting her third year. It seems rather unrealistic to think she could spend the next five years running around starkers in the common room without anyone ever becoming the wiser."

"In other words, I shouldn't become too attached to my Head Boy badge?" Alex asked.

"I wouldn't."

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"Harry, do you think there is something wrong with us? Are we sex maniacs?" Hermione asked, as she and Harry relaxed after a very fulfilling session.

"What would make you ask such a question?" Harry replied.

"I've read in different books that many couples, after they been together for a while, only have sex once a week; some do it even less," Hermione informed him. "You and I seldom miss a night and more often than not do it multiple times."

"The difference could be that we don't have sex," Harry asserted. "We make love."

He held Hermione in his arms, staring lovingly into her face. "I can't believe I was so blind for so many years. All that time we spent together; all those adventures we shared. How could I not see that I'd never be happy with anyone but you?"

"I was just as sightless," Hermione confessed. "Maybe it's true that sometimes you can't see the forest for the trees."

"And sometimes it just takes a good kick in the pants to wake you up," said Harry.

"I assume now that you're referring to Draco and Ginny," Hermione said. "I still can't believe that finally, after all this time, he just up and popped the question."

"Draco is unusually good at hiding his true emotions, but I think the kidnappings significantly affected him. I believe that he suddenly came to the realization as to just how fragile life is."

"Do you think he's afraid of dying before he's experienced having a family?" Hermione questioned.

"That among other things," Harry answered somberly. "I just hope his intentions toward Ginny are sincere."

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Thursday, September 29, 2005

"Good night buddy," Ron said after tucking Timmy in bed. "I'll see you in the morning."

"Good night Daddy, I love you."

Ron lumbered back toward his and Sam's bedroom.

"Okay, Ron! Out with it. What's bothering you?" Sam asked as Ron sat gloomily on the edge of the bed.

"Nothing," Ron lied.

"Ronald Weasley, don't lie to me," Sam scolded. "I'm your wife. We share good times and bad times. Something is bothering you. Out with it."

"The students hate me," said Ron. "They think I'm a terrible teacher."

"I doubt that," Sam said, encouragingly. "I'm sure you're exaggerating."

"No I'm not. You forget that werewolves have very acute hearing," Ron pointed out. "I hear them talking when they think I'm out of range. They all wish they had Ginny for 'Anatomy of the Sexes,' She's the sexy, cool Weasley; the one who's not afraid to tell it like it is. Today, one group actually said that I made Binns seem alive and exciting by comparison."

"Honestly Ron, it can't be that bad," Sam said supportively. "What do you have the classes do?"

"Read and outline the chapter," Ron answered.

"And once they've outlined the chapter, what then?" Sam pressed

"Then they read and outline the next chapter," Ron answered, sounding as if this was certainly the most logical progression.

"They just read and outline? Don't you ever discuss the material with them?" Sam asked. "I know those textbooks were the best available, but they're old and out of date. They're lacking a lot of important information."

"They're thirteen and fourteen year olds," Ron said in horror. "Half of them are girls. You don't actually expect me to discuss sex with them?"

"No, not your personal experiences," Sam said, shaking her head in disappointment. "But I would think you'd at least discuss the material they've read in the text and give them the opportunity to ask questions."

"But what if they ask a sexually explicit question? How do I answer that in mixed company?" Ron asked.

"Honestly," Sam responded. "Tell them the truth. Your job is to give them the facts so that they can make educated decisions with their lives. Isn't it better for you to end up red faced and embarrassed because you had to answer an uncomfortable question than for a young girl to end up pregnant because she never got the opportunity to ask the question?"

"As usual, you're right," said Ron. "Maybe you should be teaching this class."

"No, you're the teacher. You just needed a little help getting your head on straight. You'll do fine tomorrow," Sam said, positively.

Ron hugged his wife lovingly. If only he had as much faith in his abilities as she did.

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"Ginny, would it shame you, if you became pregnant before our wedding?" Draco asked, as he cuddled with his wife-to-be.

"Are you that eager to become a father?" Ginny asked, still mystified by the changes in Draco's behavior.

"Yes!" Draco declared candidly. "I understand your desire to wait until the end of the school year to get married, but if we wait that long to conceive, the baby won't be born until next winter."

"I could check with Poppy," Ginny suggested. "Perhaps she has a concoction to counteract the birth control potion I took. You do realize that I could possibly end up full term by the time our wedding day arrives, don't you?"

From the smile on Draco's face, it appeared that was exactly what he was hoping for.

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Friday, September 30, 2005

"This is quickly becoming my least favorite class," Matt said as he and Randy neared the classroom.

"I have the same opinion," Randy agreed. "I can only think of two things good about the class. It's only a single period and it only meets once a week."

"Did you ever think you'd be struggling to keep awake in a sex education class?" Matt asked.

"We wouldn't be if we had a decent teacher," replied Randy. "Kim says that the other professor Weasley is really cool. She discusses everything in the book and even allows them to ask any questions they want. It's just our luck to get the loser Weasley as our professor."

"Speaking of losers, here he comes," Matt said as they were seated. "Wish I had remembered to go back to the dorm for my pillow."

As Ron entered the room, all the third year Gryffindors, took out their textbooks, anticipating their professor's instructions.

"Textbooks away. You won't need them today," Ron said tensely, as he seated himself on the desk. "You've read the first four chapters. Hopefully, by now, you're bursting with questions."

Tentatively, Michael Hallowell raised his hand. "Professor, must the question be limited to the material in the first four chapters?"

Ron noticeably gulped, his face already warming. "I'd prefer we concentrate on the material we've all read, but if you have a pressing question, I'll endeavor to deal with it."

"Sir, is there actually a penalty for having sex under age fifteen or is that just a fairy-tale told by our parents to scare us into abstaining?" Michael continued.

Ron relaxed slightly. This wasn't too bad. He could handle this question; it didn't deal with the actual sex act or body parts.

"It's not a myth," Ron began, "and unfortunately many magical parents neglect to inform their children of the consequences. Sexual intercourse prior to age fifteen is considered rape. If the male is fifteen or older he will be sent to Azkaban, the sentence varies depending on the age of the girl involved: the younger the girl, the longer the sentence. If both parties are under age, neither is sent to Azkaban, but rather both taken from their, now declared unfit, parents and placed in a juvenile detention center until they are fifteen."

"Excuse me, sir!" Jennifer asked raising her hand. "What if the girl is fifteen, but not the boy?"

"Nothing would happen because the spell that causes the names to appear in the Offenders Log would not be triggered," Professor Weasley replied.

Caitlin's hand shot into the air.

"Yes, Miss Potter."

"Then are you in actuality saying that a boy could have sex under fifteen and get away with it, but a girl can't?" she asked.

"The age requirement law applies to both boys and girls, but only girls generate a posting in the log."

"That seems unfair and extremely sexist," Caitlin declared. "What exactly sets off this spell?"

The conversation was going in a direction that was making Ron nervous, but he took a deep breath

and said, "Semen. Semen within proximity of the walls of the vagina triggers the spell and causes the names of both offenders to be registered. I don't know exactly how it works, but every female witch born since the early fifteen hundreds has had this as a part of their DNA." Ron hesitated slightly. "Before anyone asks, those rubber things that Muggles use don't prevent detection."

Caitlin appeared to be extremely angry with reference to her newly obtained knowledge. "I don't have a problem so much with the law. Fifteen seems reasonable, but I do have a problem that my own body has somehow been implanted with something that snitches on me. It's an invasion of privacy. Why was this done to only girls?"

"I've never been a great student of history," said Professor Weasley. "In today's world, in most countries, perhaps it wouldn't be necessary. We are, however, talking about a time when girls entered into arranged marriages as early as age ten; an age at which they were not even yet truly a woman."

"Not to change the subject, but have any of you heard of King Henry V.," Ron asked. Every hand was raised. "How many of you can tell me the name of his mother?" Every hand quickly went down.

"His mother's name was Mary de Bohun. She was a witch, but she never got to attend Hogwarts and learn magical skills. Can anyone tell me why?" Everyone remained silent.

"The reason is that she married Henry IV in 1381 when she was only twelve and died at the age of twenty while giving birth to her sixth child. At that time in history people only seemed to be concerned with carrying on a family name. Hogwarts although never a single sex school, might just as well have been one. Girls that attended were for the most part withdrawn by their second or third year in order to marry."

"It was at that time that the international magical world met and decided to take action. Many wanted to set the age of consent at eighteen, but finally compromised on fifteen."

"But how did that stop prearranged marriages?" Caitlin asked.

"It didn't," Professor Weasley answered. "Muggles continued to marry at ridiculously young ages. Magical families for the most part saw the wisdom in keeping children, children until they finished their education."

"Did the Muggle world follow suit and also set an age of consent?" Jennifer asked.

"It took them a little while," Ron answered with a laugh. "There was no age of consent for Muggles until 1861 and then it was established as twelve. Knowledge of why something is as it is doesn't always bring acceptance, but hopefully it will at least bring understanding. I hope that answers the question to your satisfaction."

"Sir, what about the other two openings? Will they trigger an alarm?" Michael inquired.

Professor Weasley's face turned as bright red as his hair. Some of the class stared at Michael in awe that he would be so daring as to ask such a question. Others just stared questioningly not understanding at all what he was talking about. Only Jennifer raised her hand.

"Professor, what is he talking about?" Jennifer asked innocently. "In order to have sex, the male penis is inserted into the female vagina. Any eight year old knows that; there aren't any other

openings."

Jennifer's statement was followed by some looks of agreement, some blank stares and some hidden chuckles.

"I think he's talking about oral and anal sex," Caitlin offered openly.

For a moment Ron just stared at Caitlin in disbelief. Then he withdrew his handkerchief and wiped his now profusely sweating brow. For the first time in his life, he wanted to strangle Sam. Why had he listened to her? How could he wiggle his way out of this? He couldn't tell them they're too young to know about such things, even though he certainly felt that way. All he could hear was Sam saying, "Be Honest. Tell them the truth."

"Is that what you're referring to, Mr. Hallowell?" Ron asked, practically having to drag the words out of his mouth.

"Yes, Sir," Michael said apprehensively. He wasn't too sure now that it had been at all wise to ask such a question. Jennifer, Jane and Lynn looked like they were about to be sick. The balance of the class was just looking, rather more, staring in his direction.

"Neither will trigger the alarm," Ron stated truthfully, but reluctantly. "As much as I'd like to leave the subject there, I'm afraid that in good conscience, I just can't. You're still only thirteen. In my opinion you are much too young to consider any type of sexual activity." Ron looked at his watch; class was nearly over.

"Next week we'll talk more about these alternatives. At your age you should be abstaining from any type of sex, but just in case, I want you to be aware of health precautions that should be taken."

"Are any of you currently in a relationship?" Professor Weasley asked, concernedly.

Caitlin found herself automatically looking in Matt's direction. As their eyes met, they both quickly turned their heads. No one raised his or her hand.

"Good! Then we should be safe leaving it there till next time."

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October 20, 2005

"I can't believe it," Jamie said, as she and Amanda watched Caitlin playing exploding snap. "She's been spending every evening nude in the common room for over a month now and no one has even as much as grumbled about it, much less officially complained."

"It would have been unexpected if any of the boys had complained," Amanda stated. "Caitlin might not be up to *Playwizard* standards, but she is no longer a toddler either. I imagine some of the older boys even get a lot of pleasure out of gazing at her."

"Honestly, I expected problems from some of the younger girls, especially the first years who didn't know her. I thought they'd feel threatened by an attractive blonde parading about nude."

Jamie studied Caitlin for a while before responding to Amanda. "When did that all happen?" Jamie asked as if seeing Caitlin for the first time. "She's always had a pretty face and beautiful hair, but she's not a skinny string bean any more. Her little buds have even blossomed into breasts."

"Personally, I'd kill to have a firm little butt like hers," Amanda said, enviously. "Mine sort of shifted with pregnancy and it doesn't seem to have any intentions of shifting back."

"Most of the house seems to have adapted to her nudity," Jamie observed. "They might still initially check her out when she enters the room, but then they seem to go about their business."

"With two obvious exceptions," Amanda noted. "Matt can't take his eyes off of her. I don't know if it's love or obsession, but he has it bad."

"You can't help notice Matt," Jamie said. "I think Caitlin still has feelings for him, too. I've considered talking to her about him, but decided against it. They have a huge abyss between them; I'm not sure it can even be bridged. If it can, they have to do it on their own."

Jamie looked observantly around the room. "You said two. Who is the second?"

Amanda indicated the smallest of a group of first year boys. He kept turning and looking yearningly in Caitlin direction. "I don't know when I've seen such a bad case of puppy love. Do you know his name?"

"That's Evan Creevey. Isn't he the sweetest little thing?" Jamie asked. "Every time I see him, I want to hug him"

"I wouldn't suggest it," Amanda warned. "He'd probably suffocate between the twin peaks."

Jamie gave Amanda a frown. "You don't understand. I guess I just feel sorry for him. He's an orphan. Voldemort's Death Eaters killed his parents, Albert and Betty, along with his brother Dennis. He's been raised most of his life by his oldest brother."

"It gives me the shivers, just to think of those days," Amanda said. "And from what I've read on him, Salazar Slytherin makes Voldemort sound like a nice guy. I can't believe that the Ministry is living in denial of his return."

"Oh! No!" Jamie cried, nervously.

"What is it? Amanda asked concernedly.

"Caitlin just got finished with her game and flopped down on the couch by herself. I think Evan has worked up the nerve to go talk to her. Please be kind to him, Caitlin. Please be kind," Jamie murmured.

"Why is it, that you never have a pair of extendable ears with you when you need them?" Amanda questioned. Then both girls stopped talking as they concentrated on trying to read lips.

"Hi!" Evan said nervously as he approached the couch. "You're Caitlin Potter."

"Yes, I am," Caitlin said, holding back a giggle. "And you're Evan Creevey."

"You know who I am?" Evan asked in surprise.

"I try to get to know everyone," Caitlin answered. "Especially my fellow house members. I'm sorry we haven't gotten to talk before. Why don't you have a seat?"

"Me! Me, sit with you! But you're pretty and naked."

Caitlin laughed. "I don't know about the pretty part, but I'm definitely naked. Please, sit down. I promise you that it's not catching; your clothes won't suddenly disappear."

Evan uncertainly took a seat as far away from Caitlin as feasible. "I have your Mum and Dad as professors," Evan said, trying to make conversation.

"I know," said Caitlin, unable to hold back a chuckle.

"You know! How did you know?" Evan asked in amazement.

"My parents teach all the first years," Caitlin responded.

Evan blushed. "You must think I'm a real dimwit."

"I think nothing of the kind. You're just nervous," Caitlin said pleasantly.

"Yeah! I've never been this close to a naked girl before." Evan shook his head.

"Who am I trying to fool? I've never even seen a naked girl before."

"Most boys your age haven't," Caitlin said reassuringly, "unless they're a naturist or have a sister without a modesty hang-up."

"It's not just that you're nude. You're beautiful," Evan avowed. "Your hair is like silk and your eyes... I've never seen a prettier blue."

"Are you sure you're only eleven?" Caitlin asked.

"I wish I was older," Evan said, a look of desperation in his eyes. "Your skin looks so smooth and soft." Evan blushed. "I'm sorry. I know it's wrong but I can't stop looking at your breasts. They're beautiful. Every part of you is grand." He glanced between her legs. "Even your, you know what, is splendid."

"I'm glad you think so," Caitlin said, a genuine smile on her face. "Evan, I'm a nudist; I don't embarrass easily. If looking at me pleases you, then feel free to look intently all you want. It won't bother me; actually in your case I'll consider it a compliment."

"Do you really mean it?" Evan asked, a smile spreading from ear to ear.

"I really mean it," Caitlin said returning the smile.

"Did you know you have a string sticking to you?" Evan asked innocently. "Want me to get it for you?" Evan didn't wait for an answer, but instead reached for the string.

Caitlin didn't have time to respond verbally. She grabbed Evan's hand as quickly as possible and

held it securely against her inner thigh.

"What just happened?" Jamie asked anxiously.

"I don't know," Amanda answered, shock evident in her voice. "Evan looks scared to death, but Caitlin is smiling, actually laughing."

"The hell with the facial expressions, look where his hand is. Another three inches and she'd be pressing it against her vagina instead of her thigh," Jamie replied angrily.

"She moved it," Amanda said excitedly. "She's still holding it against her leg, but now its mid thigh."

"There better be a good explanation for what just occurred," Jamie growled. "Do you think anyone else saw what we did?"

"I don't think so," Amanda said, shaking her head. "No one is staring and everyone seems to be going about their business. Oh! Hell! Matt is on his feet and headed their direction. Evan's dead!"

"I'm sorry," Evan cried nervously, his face burning red. "I wasn't thinking. I saw the string and my first reaction was to pick it off of you. I forgot for the moment where it was. I didn't mean to be fresh. I really didn't. I'm sorry." Evan appeared on the verge of tears.

"Will you please calm down," Caitlin said, holding Evans hand even tighter. "I'm not angry with you. It wouldn't have been a huge deal to me if you had accidentally touched me there. I know you weren't making sexual advances. I think, however, that you would have been extremely embarrassed if you had pulled that string; it's attached to my tampon."

Although seemly impossible, Evan's face became an even brighter red.

"Evan, it's okay! Relax! I'm a girl. Girls have a period once a month. It's a fact of life and one of the reasons nudists always carry a towel to sit on."

Evan didn't have a chance to relax. The words telling him to do so had barely left Caitlin's lips, when Matt appeared next to the couch.

"What do you think you're doing with my girl, you insufferable little runt?" Matt yelled. "I hope Madam Pomfrey has a large supply of Skele-Gro on hand because I'm going to break every bone in your pitiful body."

"First of all I'm not your girlfriend and I haven't been for over a month," Caitlin screamed. "Secondly he wasn't doing anything wrong. And thirdly if you touch him, you'll destroy any slim chance that still exists for us to ever get back together."

"Are we having a problem over here?" Alex asked putting his hand firmly on Matt's shoulder.

"Not at all," Matt answered. "I was just on my way to bed and stopped to pass on good wishes to Caitlin and her new mini boyfriend." Matt shook free of Alex's grip and headed for his dorm.

"Did I screw up things between you and Matt?" Evan asked as everybody else went about his or her business.

"No," Caitlin said sadly as she stood up. "He did that himself and seems intent on increasing the chasm between us."

Evan leapt to his feet.

"I think I'm going to turn in," Caitlin said. "I like you, Evan. I hope we can become good friends." Without considering the consequences, Caitlin put her arms around Evan and pulled him into a hug.

Had they both been fully dressed, the height differences would have made hugging difficult; Caitlin being nude made it impossible. Evan tried to turn his head but still ended up with his cheek pressed tightly against Caitlin's chest.

Caitlin turned and headed for the stairs to the girls dorm. She either didn't realize or didn't feel what had just happened was important. Evan, on the other hand, seemed to be in seventh heaven as he floated back to the table where his fellow first years were sitting.

* * * * *

October 30, 2005

Once the golden plates were again clean, Snape stood up. There was a thrill of excitement in the air.

"The time has come," Snape said observing the anxious faces before him. "Before we bring the casket in, I would like to say a few words of explanation."

Kim looked wide-eyed at Emily. "Did he say casket?" she whispered.

Emily didn't answer, but rather uncertainly nodded.

"The team from Salem will be arriving at six o'clock tomorrow," Snape announced. "Lessons will end half an hour early so that all students will have time to spruce up and then assemble in front of the castle to greet our guests who will be joining us for the Halloween Feast."

"At the feast, our six member team and two alternates will be chosen by an impartial selector: the Goblet of Fire," he said. "Mr. Filch, the casket please."

Filch approached Snape carrying an extremely old looking wooden chest encrusted with jewels. Snape tapped three times on the top of the casket with his wand and with a creaking sound the lid slowly opened. From the chest, Snape removed a large, roughly hewn wooden cup that was full to the brim with dancing blue-white flames.

"The Goblet of Fire," Snape said, holding up the cup as if to introduce it. "The Goblet will be placed in the entrance hall tonight, where it will be freely accessible to all those wishing to compete. Anybody wishing to participate must write their name and house legibly upon a piece of parchment and drop it into the goblet. Tomorrow evening, the goblet will return the names of the six individuals it judges best to represent the school, along with the names of two alternates.

"Please remember that the placing of your name in the goblet constitutes a binding, magical contract. Do not enter into it lightly. Once your name is selected you are obliged to see the tournament through to the end."

"I remind you that first years are not eligible to compete," Snape added. "Do not waste your time submitting your name. It will only win you a night's detention with Mr. Filch. If there are no questions, I think it is time for bed. Good night."

"Jamie, are you going to submit your name?" Caitlin asked eagerly.

"I'm not sure," Jamie answered.

"You must," Amanda insisted. "You're the best athlete in our house."

"Okay, I will if you both do," Jamie agreed.

"But I'm not athletic," Amanda argued.

"Neither am I," Caitlin said adamantly.

"Who said you had to be athletic?" Jamie questioned. "The way they talk, the team must be well rounded. I think everyone in the school should submit their names so that the goblet can select the best team possible to compete for Hogwarts."

"That makes a lot of sense," Alex said, "especially if all the particulars of the contests have been given to the goblet. It alone would know the best combination of skills needed to succeed."

* * * * *

October 31, 2005

"This had to be the longest, most boring day ever," Emily moaned as she and Kim filed down the steps, along with the other Slytherins, and lined up in front of the castle with the other houses.

"Isn't that how it always goes?" Kim asked. "If you dread an approaching event, time appears to fly. If you're looking forward to something, it always crawls. Did your parents mention what time the train carrying the Americans is scheduled to arrive in Hogsmeade?"

"I doubt they'll be arriving by train," answered Emily.

"Do you think they'll Apparate then?" asked Kim. "Maybe Americans are allowed to do it at a younger age than us."

"I think I recall my Mum saying at least a hundred times that you can't Apparate inside Hogwarts grounds," Emily joked. "She told me that when The Triwizard Tournament was held here, the students all arrived in really impressive ways. The delegation from Beauxbatons arrived in a gigantic, powder blue, horse-drawn carriage. The carriage was the size of a large house and it was pulled through the air by a dozen winged horses, each the size of an elephant."

"The party from Durmstrang arrived on a sailing ship," Emily continued. "A whirlpool appeared in the very middle of the lake and this magnificent ship just rose up out of it."

"Well, in that case I'm sure the Americans will want to put on a fancy show," said Kim. "I wonder what they'll come up with?"

"I don't know," Emily answered, "but whatever it is, I wish they'd hurry. It's already after six. I'm hungry and I have to pee."

"That would be a nice greeting. As they walk by, you can pee on their feet. I'm sure they'd never forget you," Kim laughed.

"It isn't funny," Emily moaned. "I really need to go."

Just then a gigantic shape passed over the treetops of the Forbidden Forest. "What is it?" Marta cried.

"I'm not sure," Tyler answered, "but it's huge. I don't see where it is going to land. It looks bigger than the Quidditch pitch."

"It's a carpet," Kim screamed. "A gigantic red, white and blue striped flying carpet."

"Flying carpets are illegal," Denise protested.

"Maybe not in the United States," Tyler suggested. "They probably obtained special permission to fly it over Britain. Looks like it's going to land on the flat lawn where we had broom flying lesson last year."

When the carpet finally came to rest, a small building, sitting in the middle became perceptible.

"It's a log cabin," Tyler said in displeasure. "What a bloody disappointment. Based on the size of that carpet, I expected something a great deal more impressive."

The words had barely left his lips when over a hundred skyrockets zoomed into the air illuminating the grounds with bursts of red, white and blue. Everyone gasped in awe as the pyrotechnics display continued on, increasing in magnitude until the sky was blazing with color and the ground was shaking from the detonations. Finally, in conclusion, there was a huge explosion and the sky glittered with thousands of American flags.

"Got to give it to the Yanks," Tyler said, "that was pretty impressive." His attention, along with everyone else's, now returned to the smoke obscured log cabin.

They waited impatiently for the smoke to clear and the American delegation to exit the log cabin. But as the smoke dissipated, it was apparent that the log cabin was no longer present; a full size replica of the United States White House had replaced it.

"Impressive," Tyler said, biting his lips and nodding his head.

"Will you hurry up?" Emily cried, trying to cross her legs without losing her balance.

Finally, the doors opened and the American group proceeded down the steps and then across the lawn toward the waiting Hogwarts students.

"Oh! No!" Emily cried, as the group neared.

"Emily, please tell me you didn't have an accident. Not now, of all times," Kim entreated as she turned toward her best friend.

Chapter Twelve Follow the Money Trail

"I'm okay, at least thus far," Emily exclaimed, "but don't worry about me. Look at the American team."

"What about the American team?" Kim turned her attention to the advancing group. "Oh my god, they all look like they're parading about in their underwear," Kim exclaimed aghast. "Plus, their robes look more like capes. Are they all dressed to look like Superman and Wonder Woman for Halloween?"

"Their attire is outlandish," Emily agreed, "but that's not what I'm referring to. Look at the boy in the last pairing; the one walking beside the nice-looking blonde."

Kim looked in the direction Emily had indicated and then froze. The boy and girl appeared to be very embarrassed by their garb, but at the same time were talking and pointing animatedly at the castle, obviously extremely impressed with Hogwarts. Kim immediately recognized the boy; they had become good friends on the cruise.

"It's Brian," Kim said in a stunned voice, as the American group passed. "He's a wizard!"

Kim and Emily filed back up the steps with the other Hogwarts students and then, for Emily's sake, made a hurried pit stop in the nearest girls' bathroom before entering the Great Hall and sitting down for the Halloween Feast. The students from Salem had chosen seats at the Hufflepuff table. They all sat discomfitly looking around the Great Hall with overwhelmed expressions on their faces.

The Great Hall, as usual, was decorated festively for Halloween. Pumpkins hanging in mid air illuminated the hall as thousands of live bats fluttered about. Occasionally the bats swooped over the tables in low black clouds.

"Why is Filch adding three chairs to the staff table?" Kim wondered aloud.

"Not sure," answered Emily. "One might be for that paunchy person that accompanied the American team. I can't imagine whom the other two are for."

Once the students had all settled down at the House tables, the staff entered and filled the top table. Kim's question concerning the extra chairs was soon answered. Snape entered followed by Percy Weasley, the American chaperone and ...a third person that appeared to be neither a man nor a woman.

"Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, ghosts and guests," said Snape. "I hope your stay with us will be most enjoyable. The contest will officially open at the end of tonight's feast. Now, please, eat, drink, and make yourselves comfortable"

"I wonder how far we're allowed to go in regards to making ourselves comfortable?" Emily asked with a laugh.

"Not as far as you'd like," Kim said as the plates in front of them filled with food. The house elves in the kitchen had once again outdone themselves; there was a much larger than normal variety of dishes to select from.

"I can't get over the fact that Brian is a wizard," Kim exclaimed.

"I can't get over the getup that he and the others are wearing," Emily said. "That can't possibly be their school uniform. It must be a special costume for the events, but who would pick such awful outfits?"

"Maybe that person sitting to the left of Professor Snape," Kim suggested. "Is that a very feminine man or an extremely homely woman?"

Emily shrugged her shoulders. "I'm not sure which would be worse."

As they ate, most of the students seemed to be nervous and constantly watching the staff table with anticipation.

"Is it just me or is this feast taking a great deal longer than usual?" Caitlin asked as she played with her food.

"I think everyone is eager for the selection of the team to take place," Jamie answered. "Look! Filch is bringing in the goblet. It shouldn't be much longer."

"What qualities do you imagine the goblet will be looking for?" Caitlin asked. "I would imagine that seventh years would have a much better chance of being selected."

"Not necessarily," Jamie said. "A team needs members with varying talents and abilities."

Finally the golden plates returned to their original spotless state and Snape stood up. Tension seemed to fill the hall. "The time has come to select the Hogwarts team, but before we do, a few introductions and some explanations are in order," said the Headmaster.

"Let me introduce our guests seated at the staff table: Mr. Percy Weasley, interim Minister of Magic" - there was polite applause - "Mr. Bud Ryan, coach for the American team" - again a polite response - "and Mr. Rishard Simone, Facilitator of Games from the International Committee of Magical Games and Sports."

"Does that answer your question?" Emily whispered to Kim. "It's a guy. A very short guy with a dyed blonde, curly Afro, fake bronze tan, tight short shorts and shaved legs."

There was a louder applause for Mr. Simone than for the others, but there was also a spattering of inappropriate wolf whistles. Headmaster Snape gave the students a stern look, but it was not close to the severity with which Percy Weasley was looking at him. Obviously Percy had not appreciated being introduced as the temporary Minister of Magic.

"If that big guy is the American coach, who is the Hogwarts' coach?" Caitlin asked.

Jamie just shrugged her shoulders and put her finger to her mouth, indicating for Caitlin not to talk.

"The teams will be challenged by three tasks, spaced throughout the school year," Snape announced. "These tests will involve daring, deduction, magical prowess, danger, but most importantly they will test your ability to cooperate and function as a team."

"Now, then, before we select the team to represent Hogwarts, I would like to introduce the students from The Salem Witches' Institute representing the United States. When your name is announced, please come up to the top of the Hall and enter the chamber behind the staff table."

Headmaster Snape produced a sheet of paper from his pocket and started reading names. As he announced each person's name the student rose from his or her seat and proceeded toward the staff table and then the chamber. The Hogwarts students seemed to be paying little attention to the introductions; instead they were attentively staring at the American's in their revealing uniforms.

"How can they breathe in those outfits?" Amanda remarked. "They almost look sprayed on."

"It would be better if they were," Jamie remarked. "At least then they could move freely about. They all seem extremely self-conscious and embraced. That poor girl's uniform appears much too small for her," Jamie said, indicating a girl walking toward them.

"Oh my!" Amanda cried. "She has a severe camel toe."

"A what?" Caitlin whispered questioningly.

"When clothing is so tight in the crotch area that the shape of the vagina is unmistakable, it's sometimes referred to as a camel toe," Jamie enlightened her.

"What's it called for guys?" Caitlin asked, staring fixedly as a boy about her age neared them. "Oh my god! That's Brian from the cruise. I wonder if Kim and Emily have seen him?"

When Caitlin looked toward the Slytherin table, it was evident by their frantic waving and pointing that the girls had indeed noticed Brian.

After the two reserves for Salem were announced and had entered the chamber, Snape surveyed the hall. "Now it is time for the goblet to make its decision. The first six names selected will be the team starters. The last two names will be the alternates.

"As your names are announced, please go through into the next chamber and wait with our American friends."

Snape took out his wand and gave a sweeping wave, plunging the room into a state of semidarkness. All the candles except those inside the carved pumpkins were extinguished.

Everyone watched and waited breathlessly. The Goblet of Fire was now everyone's focal point, shining brightly with its sparkling bright, blue-white flames. Suddenly the flames inside the goblet turned red. Sparks began to fly and then a charred piece of parchment shot into the air. The entire room gasped as Snape caught the piece of parchment.

"The first team member for Hogwarts is from Gryffindor. Jamie Zacherley, please come forward," he announced.

"No shocker there!" Shouted Amanda happily, as she embraced her best friend. Jamie rose from the table to a thunder of applause; she walked hurriedly to the front of the hall, a pink glowing smile on her face. Jamie walked along the staff table and then entered the door into the next chamber.

"I knew she'd make the team," Emily said proudly. "I'd love to be on it with her."

"I'm sure you'll make it," Kim said encouragingly.

As the clapping subsided, everyone again focused on the goblet, which once more turned red and

shot out a second piece of parchment.

"The next member is from Hufflepuff," said Snape, "Jeffrey MacDowell."

At first Jeff remained seated as if not believing his ears. Then after prodding from his mates, he jumped to his feet and practically ran to the front of the hall.

"Do you know him? What year is he in?" Caitlin inquired of Amanda.

"He's a fifth year," Amanda answered. "I don't know him that well, but he seems like an okay sort."

"Our third competitor is from Gryffindor, Caitlin Potter," Snape announced.

"Me!" Caitlin exclaimed. "I don't have an athletic bone in my body."

"Evidently the goblet thinks you can help out the team," Amanda said, beaming and giving Caitlin a quick hug.

"Caitlin and Jamie are both on the team," Hermione said clutching Harry's hand tightly. "They're going to be thrilled when they find out that you're coaching the Hogwarts team."

"I'm worried about Emily," Harry said looking out over the hall. "With Jamie and Caitlin on the team, I'm afraid she'll be dreadfully disappointed if she doesn't make it."

Hermione nodded her head in agreement.

"Donald Thomas from Ravenclaw is next to join the team," Severus declared.

"I bet no one from Slytherin will even make the team," Kim declared. "Our house isn't exactly known for support and teamwork."

"Didn't the Headmaster say that each house would be represented? Emily asked.

Before Kim could respond, a tongue of flame shot into the air and another piece of parchment fluttered out.

"From Slytherin House, Kim Thatcher," Snape declared.

Emily hugged Kim as the Slytherin table burst into applause.

"That goblet has got to be crazy," Kim said as she dizzily got to her feet and staggered toward the head table.

The clapping hadn't yet died down when the sixth piece of parchment shot out of the goblet.

"The final member of the Hogwarts starting team is..." Headmaster Snape paused, as if not believing his eyes. "From Slytherin House, Dick Bancroft?"

At first the hall was quiet. Even the Slytherins seemed shocked by the selection of Bancroft. Finally as Dick got smugly to his feet, the Slytherins burst into cheers. The other houses gave a short polite spattering of applause.

"The next two names out of the goblet will be the team reserves," Snape announced. "Should, during any event, a starter be physically unable to compete one of the reserves will take their place."

"The first reserve," Snape said, grabbing the bit of parchment from the air, "is Nora Jordan from Ravenclaw." Immediately another fragment shot into the air. "The second alternate is Lee Wilson from Hufflepuff."

"How does Emily look to you?" Hermione asked worriedly.

"It's hard to say," Harry answered, trying to conceal his own concern. "It must be terribly disappointing for her not to have made the team when her best friend and sisters all did."

* * * * *

Jamie quietly opened the door and stepped into a smaller room, lined with paintings of witches and wizards, many of who smiled happily and gave her encouraging gestures.

On the opposite side of the room, the American team was grouped around a fireplace in which a handsome blaze was roaring. They were occupied in conversation and didn't seem to spot her enter the room. Jamie remained near the door transfixed. The firelight had the effect of making the costumes worn by the Americans seem almost translucent.

It seemed like only moments before Jeffrey MacDowell, bursting excitedly into the room, broke her trance.

"Everyone knew you'd be selected," he said breathlessly to Jamie, "but I never dreamed I'd make the team."

"Obviously, the goblet has more faith in you than you do in yourself," Jamie said, embracing Jeff in an sincere hug. "I'm sure you'll do fine."

"Maybe!" Jeff said. "Just so I don't have to wear a costume like theirs. Did you notice the bottom part is actually a thong?"

"It is!?" Jamie said shocked. She hadn't actually noticed due to the capes draping that area of the body. Jamie now tried to get a better look at the attire being worn by the American's without actually staring blatantly at any of the students.

The costumes were unisex and appeared to share the qualities of a muscle shirt and a thong in one extremely tight and body molding piece. It was a garment she would more expect to find on the French Riviera than in a wizard school competition.

"I wonder how the girls manage to keep their breasts from popping out the sides of those tops," she said matter-of-factly.

Jeff blushed. "I was wondering the same thing," he said eagerly, his eyes coming to rest optimistically on Jamie's full chest.

The door opened and Caitlin hesitantly walked into the chamber. Jamie rushed to the door and embraced her tightly. "This is great," she said enthusiastically. "We're going to be on the team

together!"

When Jeff burst into the room, it had attracted Brian's attention. Since then, he had been staring fixedly at Jamie. He couldn't get over how much this girl looked like Kim's older friend from the cruise. When Caitlin entered the room, he broke from his team and hurried over to the forming Hogwarts group.

"You're witches," he shouted excitedly. "Are Kim and Emily, too?"

"We all are!" Caitlin responded, embracing Brian. "Does this mean Jeff and Mark are?"

"No," Brian said, shaking his head. "I wish they were. They're good friends and I hate constantly lying to them."

As they talked, Donald Thomas entered the room. Jeff clasped his hand firmly and Jamie and Caitlin both gave him a hug.

"I better get back to my group," Brian said, feeling incongruous. "It's great seeing you guys. Tell Kim and Emily I said, hi! After they're done with us here tonight, maybe we can make arrangements to get together."

Brian had just turned to return to the American contingent when Kim wandered through the door. She still seemed to be in shock over being selected, but when she saw Brian, her face broke into a huge grin.

Brian ran to her and literally lifted her off her feet, swinging her in a circle. Kim's face turned bright red as he finally returned her to the ground.

"Why didn't you tell me that you were a witch?" Brian asked.

"For the same reason you didn't say you were a wizard," Kim replied. "That does, however, explain how you knew that someone had to be magical to become a ghost."

"I did let that slip, didn't I?" Brian said guiltily. "It's marvelous seeing you again."

"Bancroft! What are you doing back here?" Jeff barked, as Dick Bancroft barged through the door. "Only team members are allowed in here."

"That's me people," Dick crowed smugly. "I'm the sixth member of the team."

As Brian ran off to rejoin his squad, the Hogwarts group all exchanged bewildered looks. Certainly there had been some sort of horrible mistake. No one less personified the term "Team Spirit" than Dick Bancroft.

After Nora and Lee joined the group, they all waited nervously to receive further instructions. As Caitlin waited, her eyes kept returning to Bancroft. How could the Hogwarts team possibly win when it seemed an albatross had just been added to the group?

Finally, after what seemed like forever, the door behind them opened and a small group of people came in: Professor Snape, followed closely by Minister Weasley, Mr. Simone, Coach Ryan and Professor Potter.

"I'm sorry that I didn't get to address you in The Great Hall," Minister Weasley said, staring daggers at Professor Snape. "I had a great deal of inspirational advice I wanted to impart to you and the students of Hogwarts. But since I was deprived of that opportunity, I will only say that I hope both teams will find this experience both satisfying and rewarding. It is not important which team ultimately wins the competition. What is significant is that you all learn the importance of cooperating and working together." Once again he gave Snape a chilly, trenchant stare. "Good luck to you all."

Without a further word, he turned and departed the room.

"Well, that was certainly rude," Rishard huffed in a high voice. "He didn't even take my hand in parting."

"I apologize," Snape said. "I'm sure he thinks he has something more important to do. Now then before we get started, I'd like to introduce Professor Harry Potter to our guests. Professor Potter has agreed to coach the Hogwarts team."

With the exception of Dick Bancroft, the Hogwarts team all clapped appreciatively. Jamie, Caitlin and Kim jumped up and down and exchanged excited hugs.

Mr. Simone, smiled broadly as his eyes stroked Harry. "Wonderful," he said, a pleasant flutter in his voice. "I was hoping I'd get the opportunity to know you better."

"Mr. Simone will be running combined training sessions for the teams and also acting as impartial judge and facilitator for the events," Professor Snape explained. "Mr. Simone, would you care to elucidate further?"

"Thank you, Severus," Rishard said in a come hither voice. "I must say that both schools have assembled lovely teams. I look forward to working closely with all of you."

"If he tries to work closely with me, he'll end up with a mouth full of knuckles," Dick Bancroft grunted softly.

"This is the fifth event such as this that I have conducted for the International Committee of Magical Games and Sports. I'm proud to say that all thus far have been fabulous successes and I'm positive this one will be no different."

Simone placed his hands on his hips. "The players from Salem might be deemed to have an advantage because they have competed against the other U.S. teams, but I assure you that these games will be quite different. They will require cooperation, teamwork and trust unlike any you have ever experienced. Remember, there is no 'I' in team. Individual abilities will not win an event. A challenge is not complete until every member of the team is across the finish line.

"The next two weekends we will spend getting to know each other intimately and learning to fully trust our teammates. The actual tasks will be spread throughout the school year. You will not be given a date or time in advance. The task could be any day of the week between seven in the morning and seven at night. Unless there are questions, I believe that is all I have to say."

Snape was on the verge of dismissing the students when Simone suddenly stopped him.

"Oh! My goodness! Silly me!" Rishard squealed. "I forgot the most important thing. I've noticed that the students from Hogwarts have been eyeing enviously the stunning team uniforms that the

group from Salem is wearing. The International Committee of Magical Games and Sports had the magnificent House of Gayee in France create them just for these events."

"Fear not! I have uniforms for you, also," Simone said in an excited giggly voice as he waved his hands about gaily. "The only difference is that yours are in green, red, yellow and blue. Oh! Yes! A new rule stipulation is that you must wear nothing more than the team uniform during participation hours commencing tomorrow and continuing until the presentation of the trophies in June. Don't worry about size. One size fits all."

Caitlin looked down at herself and then glanced at Jamie. How could the same uniform possibly fit them both?

"If that fruitcake thinks I'm wearing one of those, he's bonkers," Bancroft bellowed. "I quit. One of the alternates can have my starting spot."

"Mr. Bancroft," said Headmaster Snape, putting his arm around Dick's shoulder. "For the first time in seven years, I believe you and I agree about something. Those uniforms are ludicrous and debasing. The designer should be tortured and the committee that approved their use by students cursed. Unfortunately, we must follow the rules, and they state clearly that those people whose names came out of the Goblet of Fire are bound to compete and follow all tournament requirements. You will be competing and you will be wearing that travesty of a uniform for the remainder of the year. I'm sure the rest of the school will be as distressed to see you in that get up as you will be to be seen in it. Learn to live with it."

* * * * *

"Will you girls please calm down," Hermione pleaded. "I saw the competition suits the Americans had on and I agree that they are awful, but I'm not sure what, if anything, we can do at this point. Why don't you go put them on so we can get an idea of just how dreadful they are?"

Jamie, Caitlin and Kim reluctantly grabbed their competition uniforms and headed for the bedroom.

"I don't see the problem," Emily said in an angry voice. "I'd give anything to be a part of that team. What's the big deal about their butt checks showing or the sides of their boobs? I thought we were all nudists? How can a camel toe embarrass you when you're willing to walk around with your twat fully exposed? I'd gladly partake nude if it meant being on the school team."

"Emily, please use correct terminology," Hermione said, a tone of frustration in her voice. "Jamie and I have both tried to explain this to you countless times before, but evidently to no avail."

"That's because my sister is an exhibitionist," Jamie said, as she returned to the room.

"Oh! My!" Hermione said as she gawked at Jamie. "That certainly leaves little to the imagination. Turn around and let me see it from all angles."

The uniform without a doubt reminded Hermione of a cut-off muscle shirt being attached by strings to a thong. The shirt part was colored stripes of green, blue and red, while the thong was yellow. The shirt only covered the chest ending just below the breasts. Actually in Jamie's case it barely covered the chest. Her nipples were only just covered by the edge of the fabric and the sides of her breasts were fairly visible. In the back, two strings attached to the top at either side forming a V, the

bottom point of which was just above her bum. At that point they became a single string that disappeared between her cheeks. From the back, Jamie looked like she was completely bottomless. Two strings also attached to the edge of the top at either side in the front. These strings met just above Jamie's vagina where they attached to a triangle of yellow cloth that scarcely covered that area before disappearing between her legs.

Hermione shook her head in disbelief. If Jamie had pubic hair, it would all be visible. She had seen the American uniforms, but not this close. She hadn't realized how revealing they really were.

"I can't believe that they expect you to practically live in these outfits for the next eight months. Going about normal activity would seem unfeasible, competing totally impossible. The boys' uniform is exactly the same?" she questioned. *No way in hell could Harry, even in a flaccid state, ever conceal his package behind that little triangle; and what if he got aroused? The very thought was enough to increase her heartbeat.*

"According to Brian, it's impossible to get through a contest without popping out several times." Kim added, as she and Caitlin entered the room. "He says that the girls' breasts are out more than they are covered. On one occasion, they were practicing making a human ladder and Debby's costume shifted to one side exposing her entire vagina. She was in the middle of the ladder and couldn't do anything about it for nearly ten minutes."

"I'm sorry, but I don't understand the problem," Emily said in frustration. "They are just body parts. We just got off a cruise where hundreds of people saw us nude. Jamie, Caitlin and I wouldn't have a problem with walking to the library right now totally naked. So, why is it a predicament to have a camel toe or a tit pop out while wearing some stupid costume?"

"Jamie's right," Caitlin said tentatively. "I love you, Emily. Please don't hate me for saying this, but you're different from us. We're all nudists, but I think you are an exhibitionist. We love being nude because we feel free and comfortable that way. I don't do it to excite or titillate anyone." Caitlin bit her lip. "I think sometimes that you like people seeing you naked; that it gives you some kind of thrill."

"Do you feel that way, too?" Emily asked, staring angrily at Kim.

"Sometimes you do go to extremes," Kim answered warily.

"So you all think I'm a tart," Emily cried. "In that case, why am I sitting here hiding my nudity? Why don't I just go display myself to the whole world?"

Emily jumped from the chair, angry tears running down her face, and ran toward the door before anyone could react. She threw open the door and ran naked out of the Potters' quarters.

"Oh! No! I bet she's headed for the library," Hermione screamed, running to the door.

"Would anyone like to explain to me what's going on?" Harry asked, as he walked through the door, a kicking and screaming Emily tossed over his shoulder. Once inside, Emily wiggled free and ran to her room, slamming the door behind her.

"She got upset when we told her she was an exhibitionist," Jamie admitted.

"Sometimes, the truth isn't the easiest thing to accept," Harry said, looking toward the closed door. "Let's give her some time alone to think."

"Fine Harry, but while she's thinking, what are we going to do about these scandalous outfits?" Hermione asked. "Some pervert must have designed them. The girls can't possibly compete in them. Just watch. Girls, do some toe touches."

At first the girls exchanged questioning looks, but then did as Hermione had requested. By the time they reached just five repetitions, all three girls had at least one breast exposed. Both of Jamie's had burst out in the open as soon as she moved.

"See what I mean?" Hermione said. "And that's not the only problem. Look how the material rides into the cleft of their vaginas. These outfits weren't designed with comfort or mobility in mind; they were designed to be sexually provocative."

"I agree," Harry said, shaking his head in disgust. "But try telling that to Rishard. He seems to feel that they are a perfect design. Can you believe that he even tried to persuade Bud Ryan and I to wear similar outfits to coach? The problem is that these games have been so successful thus far that no one seems willing to go up against him. Beauxbatons and Durmstrang competed last year and had only positive things to say about the way he ran the competition. There was not one negative comment, not even concerning the uniforms."

"Well I have a few negative comments," Hermione snarled. "In which guest room is this Rishard person staying?"

"He's in the Green room, but it won't do you any good," Harry warned.

"We'll see about that!" Hermione said, storming out of the door.

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Hermione's knuckles had barely touched the door when a voice called out sweetly. "Do come in Professor Granger, I've been expecting you."

Hermione opened the door, but as she walked inside, the sight of a man doing sit-ups naked, momentarily took her aback.

"I hope you don't mind, but I prefer to do my exercising in the nude," Rishard said in his high whiny voice.

"Not at all." Hermione answered indifferently as Rishard continued his sit-ups. "I favor exercising in the buff, myself. How did you know it was me on the other side of the door?" she asked.

"Reputation and your husband," Rishard answered demurely "He made it rather clear that you would most likely want to talk to me concerning the uniforms for the games. I'm surprised by your concern. I was under the impression that your entire family were nudists."

"As I was trying to explain to my younger daughter, there is an immense difference between being a nudist and using your body to be sexually titillating."

"And you find the uniforms to be sexy?" he asked.

"I find the uniforms to be disgusting," she declared. "This is a school, not a strip club. There is

absolute no way the participants can take part in any physical competition without exposing themselves.

"I certainly hope not," Rishard answered, a self-satisfied tone to his voice.

Hermione just stared at him in disbelief. She found this man totally despicable.

Rishard finished exercising, but didn't bother putting his robes back on. Instead he stood leaning against the doorframe, one hand on his hip, studying Hermione. "I've been told that you are the smartest witch of our time. It's disappointing that you haven't figured this all out on your own. Why do you think these games are being held?"

"To promote closer unity and understanding between witches and wizards of different countries," Hermione affirmed.

Rishard shook his head as he laughed. "Possibly that might have been one of the original intentions, but now if it occurs, it's just a pleasant by-product. The first games I had a part in were held in Australia against New Zealand. A great deal of money and effort went into preparing for them. It had been hoped that the sale of tickets, food and souvenirs would recoup those expenses. Sadly there was not a great deal of interest in the first two rounds and it looked like we would incur a financial disaster. Then halfway through the second event, there was a slight accident." Rishard smiled.

"A lovely young girl with extremely pleasant knobs fell out of a tree. Fortunately she was physically unharmed but seventy-five percent of her uniform remained attached to a tree branch. Instead of concealing herself behind the tree trunk and waiting for assistance, the young lady panicked and ran to get something with which to cover herself. She had to run approximately a quarter-mile, in full view of the spectators. In the process, she lost what was left of her uniform."

Mr. Simone smiled at Hermione. "For the final event, there was not a single empty seat in the stadium. We sold out of food, cameras, Omnioculars, practically everything. The overall competition didn't make any money, but we broke even. Unfortunately, however, there were no uniform malfunctions that day.

Hermione glared at Simone. "Are you telling me that these outfits were purposely designed so that the participants would be constantly exposing themselves? This is all about money?"

Rishard didn't answer; he simply gave her a toothy Gilderoy Lockhart smile.

"But these are children, certainly neither our Ministry nor the U.S. Magical Government can be supporting what almost amounts to child pornography," Hermione pleaded.

"Now, now, let's not exaggerate," Simone said calmly. "There are no sex acts. Why you, yourself have on numerous occasions voiced the opinion that there is nothing dirty or immoral about nudity. And contestants enter the game fully covered." He hesitated, and then laughed. "Perhaps minimally covered is more truthful. What is the harm in an occasional tit, penis or pussy popping out?" He laughed. "Why sometimes our competitors get so caught up in the competition of the games that they don't even trouble to tuck themselves back together properly.

"Wake up to the reality of the real world Professor," Simone advised. "Money speaks. These events now make a fortune and politicians from all the counties concerned want their share. Minister Wrong approached me. I didn't approach her."

"But what about the children?" she pleaded. "Certainly their parents can't approve."

"The voices of a few troubled parents are easily drowned out by the cheers of the boisterous supporting crowds. Besides, these aren't children, they are adolescents; in some cases, such as Miss Zacherley, almost adults. They're not being molested or physically harmed in any way," Rishard claimed. "Why, one might say they are simply being exposed to how much enjoyment their nubile bodies can bring to others."

"You are nothing but a filthy, sick pervert," Hermione screamed. "My girls will not be taking part in your sex show."

"Yes they will," Simone said, now sounding almost threateningly. "Have you forgotten that they've signed a magical contract?"

"Then, they'll wear robes over your hideous uniforms"

"I suggest you read the rules," he empathized. "They state quite clearly that commencing tomorrow and continuing until the presentation of trophies in June, the contenders will wear nothing more than the team uniform between the hours of 7:00 am and 7:00 pm. We're especially hopeful that Miss Zacherley spends an inordinate amount of time free of her cloth bindings."

Hermione stared at Simone. She didn't like to use the word hate, but it would be easy to learn to hate this man.

"Mister Simone, do you know what a hermaphrodite is?" she asked.

Rishard looked at her questioningly. "No, I'm afraid I don't"

"A hermaphrodite is a person born with both a vagina and a penis. Would you believe at this moment I wish I were one?"

He looked at her questioningly, trying to discern the abrupt change in the course of the conversation. "Why on earth would a woman as lovely as you want a penis?"

"So I could tell a deviate like you to suck my big hairy dick," she replied. Hermione turned and stormed out the door, slamming it behind her.

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Hermione hadn't spoken since returning to their quarters; she just sat shaking her head, a look of loathing on her face. Neither Harry nor the girls attempted to engage her in conversation. She rarely got in this type of mood, but they had all learned it was best to allow her to calm down before approaching her.

"I'd prefer to compete nude," Jamie said emphatically to the room in general as she stared at what she was going to be forced to wear "I'm not ashamed to be seen naked, but these costumes make me feel like a sex object and they're extremely uncomfortable."

"I agree," Caitlin said straight away. "It feels like someone is rubbing a rope between my legs. I vote for participating nude."

"I can't believe I'm agreeing," Kim said shyly. "Although I love being nude, I'm not quite ready to parade around in front of a crowd of clothed people, but on the other hand, I can't stand this stupid outfit. How can we possibly concentrate on the competition if we need to be constantly adjusting our uniform?" Kim took a deep breath. "If given a choice over this," she lifted the offending garment and looked at it, "or being nude. I'll go nude."

Harry just stared at the girls in disbelief. "I enjoy naturist recreation, but you girls are unbelievable. You'd all, in point of fact, be willing to participate totally nude with the entire school looking on?"

Jamie and Caitlin immediately nodded in the affirmative.

Kim hesitated. "It would be hard at first and I'd be extremely nervous and embarrassed," she said, "but if given the choice, I'd choose to be nude."

"You guys are incredible," Harry said, shaking his head in disbelief. "Just the thought of my being naked in front of the entire school is enough to make me cringe. But what you're suggesting is unfeasible. Even if Hermione and I were willing to go along with such an outrageous idea, the school would never, in a million years, approve. Plus, I doubt it would make Rishard the least bit unhappy. He'd probably be ecstatic."

Hermione had remained silent throughout Harry's discussion with the girls, but when she finally spoke, she instantaneously had everyone's undivided attention. "What if neither Rishard nor the school knows," she said.

"Hermione!" Harry cried, shock evident in his voice. "You're not suggesting the concealment charm are you?"

"It's a viable option," she said, a severe expression on her face. "It wouldn't solve the problems of the thong bottom exposing their butt cheeks or their breasts being partially visible from the side, but it would eliminate their breasts and vagina from being totally exposed by popping out of the costume."

"You're serious, aren't you?" Harry asked, completely flabbergasted by the suggestion. "You'd let the girls spend the remainder of the year attending classes totally nude."

"I didn't say I was fond of the idea, Harry, but our options are extremely limited. We can't let that bastard Rishard turn the girls into an erotic side show." Hermione pointed out. "You, yourself, said we have no possibility of getting the competition uniforms changed. And a magical contract can't be broken, so the girls must participate. If they actually wear these absurd costumes, they'll be flashing some part or other of their body every time they move. That at least won't happen with the charm."

"But what if someone touches them in a class, during a meal or in the common room?" asked Harry.

"They'll have to be extremely careful that doesn't happen or at least be sure the person doing the touching is someone that they don't mind seeing them nude."

"Hermione! What about the training and the actual competition?" Jamie asked, an uneasy feeling in her stomach. "Our teammates may need to touch us in some way and we may need to touch them."

Hermione nodded her head. "That's the one obvious imperfection with my idea. You'll all need to be

willing to have your teammates see you nude."

"Dick Bancroft?" Caitlin said, in a disgusted tone of voice.

Jamie looked as if she were about to be sick.

"Do we really have any choice?" Kim asked.

"No, you don't!" Emily said. She had been standing, unobserved, and listening to the conversation. "You guys aren't like me, especially not you Kim. If my boobs popped out during Charms class, I'd most likely pretend I didn't realize it. You'd die of embarrassment. You're going to have enough problems dealing with your bum being on display for the next eight months. You'd never be able to handle anything else being exposed. You have to use the charm and hope that the guys on the team are mature enough to deal with you being nude."

"She's right," Kim agreed, hanging her head. "I don't know about you guys, but I'm using the charm."

"Me, too!" Jamie and Caitlin said in unison.

Harry just sat with a glazed look on his face, looking from girl to girl and then finally to Hermione. "I can't believe we're giving our blessing to this," he said in amazement.

"Me either," Hermione agreed. "It's not the best option, it's our only option. I still feel like that perverted bastard, Simone, is winning, but I can't see anyway to get the girls out of wearing his distorted creations. It seems like all we can do is prevent matters from getting worse."

Harry kept looking from girl to girl and shaking his head. He felt like he was letting them down.

"I'll contact the Headmaster and get his okay for you to all spend the night here," Hermione said. "Harry and I will help you apply the charms in the morning. Between now and Saturday, you should have a team meeting, so everyone knows what to expect. Perhaps Nora or some of the boys will want to follow suit."

Caitlin and Jamie exchanged glances. Somehow they couldn't picture any of the boys being eager to join them.

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"So that means that you'll be spending most of the next eight months nude," Alex said, trying to comprehend the total ramifications of this.

"Yeah, well except for my socks and trainers, of course" Jamie said. "Truth is, that with the exception of the Yule Ball, I don't see a reason that I'd be putting clothes on at all. I'll shower in the morning and then activate the charm. I'm required to look like I'm in that hideous costume till after dinner. It hardly seems worthwhile getting dressed at seven. I guess I'll just keep the charm on in the common room until I'm ready to go up to my dorm. Then I'll deactivate it."

Jamie thought about this and then said. "Maybe, I will need to get dressed. I don't think I want to spend every night looking like a tart in that attire. It's bad enough I have to look that way twelve hours a day."

"Jamie, why not just ask our housemates if they'd mind if you removed the spell while in the common room at night?" You're going to actually be nude, why not just remove the pretence of having something on?" Alex asked.

Jamie couldn't believe her ears. "You'd actually be okay with that? You wouldn't mind my being starkers in front of all the other guys?"

"My name isn't Matt," Alex declared. "I know what I have and I've no intentions of losing you by acting like some stupid jealous prat. You were a nudist long before we met and I'm assuming you desire to be one for the remainder of your life."

Jamie nodded her head yes. "I'm sure the majority of people wouldn't understand, but naturism means an awful lot to me."

"Not nearly as much as you mean to me," he said, taking her in his arms and kissing her.

"When are you going to tell the other members of the team about the decision the three of you have made?" Alex asked. "It would be quite a surprise if one of them grabbed your hand Saturday at practice and suddenly saw that you were nude."

"Kim, Caitlin and I discussed that with Hermione," Jamie said. "She suggested we meet with the other team members on Friday night and explain what we were doing. We're going to suggest to the others that they use the charm also."

"Maybe Nora will consider it, but I doubt any of the guys will. Most of us males have a hang-up about being nude, especially around other nude guys. If one naked guy glances at another he's automatically labeled as gay. You girls handle same-sex nudity much better than us." Alex thought for a while. "You know, even if you tell them on Friday night, it's still going to be rather distracting when they initially see you, whether it be Saturday or whenever."

"Yeah," Jamie said. Then she held her breath waiting for Alex's reaction to her next words. "That's why we decided to let them see us naked Friday night."

"We figured that we'd let each guy touch our hand in turn and check us out visually for a minute or two," she said. "That way it wouldn't be nearly as stimulating when they see us the next time."

Alex just smiled and gave Jamie a kiss on the cheek.

"What was that for?" she asked.

Alex laughed. "I sincerely doubt that seeing you naked for two minutes Friday night will cause anyone to not be stimulated the next time they see you nude. You opening one button of your blouse has the same effect on me as an Engorgement Charm and I've seen you nude since I was eleven."

"That's only because you're a sex fiend that constantly wants to ravage my body."

"Guilty as charged," Alex said with a laugh, but his face showed concern.

"Alex, is something wrong? Would you prefer I didn't let them see me naked Friday?" Jamie asked with concern.

"No, it's not that," Alex said, concern in his voice. "I think it's necessary they get past that initial surprise."

"Then what's bothering you?" Jamie asked.

"It's the touching, I don't like those guys getting to touch you," Alex answered.

"It's only my hand."

"I know. Actually it's not the other guys so much as that slime Bancroft," Alex admitted. "He tried to kill you during our fifth year. I don't like him anywhere near you."

"I'll be fine," Jamie said reassuringly. "I'm a big girl. Besides I've been getting a lot of extra tutoring from Harry and Hermione. I can handle Bancroft. He'll only be touching my hand. You, on the other hand have an open invitation to touch me any place you want, any time you desire."

"Any place?"

"Any place"

Alex placed his hand on Jamie's knee. Then he began to slowly caress her leg as he inched his way closer and closer to his ultimate destination.

"I just thought of something," he said, his hand continuing its journey and exposing more and more of Jamie's beautiful legs the closer it got to its goal.

"If you're going to be using the concealment charm the next eight months, that means that every time I touch you, I'll see you starkers."

Notwithstanding the fact that she was a nudist and most certainly had absolutely no problem with Alex seeing her nude, Jamie still blushed.

"Well, I won't be completely naked," Jamie said, a smile covering her face. "I'll have my ear rings on, along with my socks and shoes. Oh! I'll also have on my invisible wand sheath."

"But other than that, you'll be nude. And when I hold your hand between classes I'll be walking with a beautiful naked girl."

"I hope you don't get tired of the view," she said with a little girl giggle.

"Jamie, do you realize that our desks are next to each other in every class we have?"

"Yes."

"If I lay my hand on your leg, I'll be sitting next to a naked girl."

"Just make sure that hand is on my leg and not between them," she said, trying to sound stern, but not succeeding. "If you cause me to have an orgasm in Flitwick's class and I start screaming, I'll never forgive you."

"Speaking of orgasms, I didn't have time for dessert at dinner," Alex informed her. "Would you

mind terribly if I had it now?"

"That is something I'll never refuse you," she said as she laid back and spread her legs welcomingly.

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"How did you get to be so good at that?" Jamie asked, as she hugged Alex tightly, kissing him with all her heart.

"Mum always allowed me to lick the bowl when she was done icing a cake," Alex replied. "I always stuck my face in as far as I possibly could until I'd licked out every last drop."

"I know, I can taste me on your lips. Tell me something, what did I ever do to deserve someone as special as you?"

"Jamie, it's nothing you've done. It's just you. No one that knows you could possibly resist falling in love with you. I'm just lucky that I found you first."

"We could argue all night as to which of us is the most fortunate," Jamie said, "but if you don't mind, I'd rather make love"

"I could probably be talked into that," Alex said, hugging her passionately.

"Alex! Have you told your parents about me yet?" Jamie asked. "How do you think they'll feel about you dating a girl that likes to walk around in the buff?"

"I'm not sure how they'll feel about the dating part," Alex admitted. "I never told them we were dating. I only told them that I'd found the girl that I intended to marry. And yes, I also told them about your attitude toward clothing."

"What did they say?" Jamie asked, a wide-eyed expression on her face.

"They want to meet you; if not before, then definitely this summer. Mum thought maybe you could come visit for a couple of weeks before we start Auror training and neither one of them has a problem with you being comfortable during your stay."

"That's great," Jamie squealed. "I can't wait to meet them." The thought of meeting Alex's parents put her on an emotional high. Unfortunately the thought of Auror training returned her to earth. She couldn't bring herself to do it tonight, not with everything else going on at the moment, but she had to talk to Alex. Somehow she had to tell him that she didn't think she was cut out to be an Auror.

She held him as tightly as she possibly could. Would he understand? They'd both talked of being Aurors since they were thirteen. They'd looked forward to training together. Now they'd be apart. Would he still love her when she broke the news? She felt like she would be letting him down, hurting him. She knew she didn't deserve someone as wonderful as Alex, but she also knew she couldn't live without him.

"Jamie!" Alex said shyly. "Before we make love, could I ask you a favor?"

"Of course, anything. What is it?" she asked, knowing she'd do anything he asked of her.

"I was wondering. Would you mind if I had another helping of dessert? I've read that it's not at all fattening."

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"Nott, I understand you ran into a bit of a problem with the couple you visited last evening."

"Yes, my Lord." Theodore Nott cried, prostrating himself at the feet of Salazar Slytherin. "I'm sorry my Lord, but they refused to enter your service. Please forgive me, my Lord. I tried my best to convince them that it was in their best interest, but they were vehement in their refusal."

"On your feet, Nott," Slytherin commanded. "I do not punish faithful servants who do my bidding. You can only give wise counsel. You've offered them a life in my service, regrettably they have refused."

Slytherin crossed the room, giving the matter thought and then returned to Nott.

"I'd like you to return to them again before the week is out and give them another chance to join my service. Do they have anything that might perhaps be used as a bargaining chip to influence them to reevaluate their original decision?"

"Yes, my Lord. They have two children, both girls. The older attends Hogwarts, the six year old goes to the day school in Hogsmeade."

"Hogwarts, dear Hogwarts," Slytherin said, as if reminiscing about bygone years. "I have many memories of the school, both good and bad. When you visit them, tell them how very disappointed I was at their decision. Also, inform them that if they do not join me immediately, their daughter will not live to ever ride the Hogwarts Express again."

"Oh, and Nott, in order that they realize how sincere I am and how distressed I was that they didn't answer my first calling, I want you to take them a gift on my behalf."

"Yes, my Lord," Nott said. "The gift my Lord, what is it to be?"

"The severed head of the youngest girl."

Chapter Thirteen Day of Reckoning

"Harry, I feel as if we've failed the girls," Hermione said, her melancholy mood apparent in her voice.

"I know, but we've done everything within our power," he said, caressing her absentmindedly.

"But it wasn't enough. The girls still have to spend the next eight months parading about appearing to be dressed in those appalling costumes. How could Severus agree to Hogwarts participating in this debacle? What was he thinking?" she asked.

"I wouldn't be too hard on Severus," Harry replied. "His intentions were honorable. All the reports he received concerning previous games were positive. When Minister Wrong approached him last year concerning Hogwarts competing against the Americans, he only visualized positive results from the meeting. Like us, he was not aware that greed had tarnished the games and turned them into an adolescent peek show."

"When did we catch up with and pass the Muggles?" Hermione asked. "I always thought the magical world was rather prudish and behind the times and now this happens. Even in the most liberal of Muggle schools, students would never be allowed to parade around in such outfits, let alone be forced to do so."

"It isn't our world or the schools that are to blame, it is government corruption and the greed of individuals like Simone," Harry insisted. "I'm not at all happy with the situation, but for now I'm afraid the best we can do is prevent it from escalating. The concealment charm is going to frustrate Rishard to no end. He's looking forward to the girls, especially Jamie, putting on a revealingly good show."

Hermione nodded her head in agreement to Harry's comments, but they had done little to abate her frustration. "Even without any accidents, I feel like he's still winning. The vision of the girls in those costumes alone is enough to cause most men to puff up; their various parts popping out was just an added bonus."

"At least the girls should be able to cope with the situation," said Harry, sighing deeply. "They might not be happy with the sexually explicit nature of the costumes, but being nudists, they aren't ashamed for their various body parts to be seen. I can't imagine how Nora and the boys will react. Nora, especially; she is so shy and modest."

"I suggested to Jamie that she should try to convince the others to also use the charm, but I doubt that she'll have much success. The boys will likely be thrilled about the girls being nude, but I doubt they'll be willing to follow suit. Then, like you said, there is poor Nora. I doubt she'll have the courage to even leave her dormitory tomorrow."

"Hermione, what would you do?" Harry asked. "I mean under the same circumstances, would you wear the costume or go naked with only the charm?"

Hermione thought for a while. "That depends on what period in my life we're talking about. Now, I wouldn't hesitate in the slightest to use the charm; I'd have absolutely no problem with my teammates seeing me nude. However, back when I was a young girl in school, it would be a completely different question because I was an entirely different person. As a first and second year, I would definitely have opted for the costume. I can't picture me letting anyone see me nude, even though there wasn't anything much really to see. Even as a third, fourth and fifth year my body still

wasn't exactly bursting forth. I would have probably still taken my chances with the costume rather than have anyone see me totally naked."

Hermione blushed. "In my sixth and seventh year, my breasts would have never been content to stay confined in that costume. I would have had to use the charm out of necessity although I would have died of embarrassment being naked unless you and Ron were my teammates. We were such good friends that I don't think I would have been nearly as embarrassed to be seen by either of you."

Hermione laughed. "Maybe I should have let you guys see me naked in second or third year," she said. "Then at least it would have been evident to you that your one mate was a girl."

"That was Ron," Harry said defensively. "I always knew you were a girl. I just never realized that you were the girl I was destined to love. Speaking of which. You're upset tonight. Would you rather we forgo our normal pleasure?"

"Harry, I don't think I could sleep a wink if we didn't make love. Being joined with you, as one, completes my day." Hermione paused. "There is something else we must discuss first, however. What are we going to do about Emily?"

"I don't feel anything needs to be done," Harry said, acting in Emily's defense. "Sure, she's more irrational than the other girls, but her heart is in the right place. Emily's a good girl."

"I wasn't talking about punishing her," Hermione clarified. "I'd prefer she let it out rather than hiding her true emotions and feelings. I was more concerned with the concealment charm. Emily, as you well know, is the radical nudist in this family. Since she was taught the charm, not a week has gone by that she hasn't asked about the possibility of her using it instead of wearing clothes to attend classes. Now Caitlin, Jamie and Kim are about to do it, not for a day, but for eight months. Emily didn't make the team with them and now they are about to do something she's been begging to do for what seems like forever."

"Are you suggesting that we also let her use the charm?"

Hermione nodded her head, a guilty expression on her face. "Harry, I must be the worst mother in the world. Tomorrow morning I intend to send my two young daughters, their best friend and Jamie off to classes, all totally starkers."

"Then I'm the world's worst father because I back your decision one hundred percent," Harry said. "But they won't actually be naked. They'll have on their socks and trainers."

Hermione stared at Harry momentarily, and then broke into laughter. "Men," she said, before nestling back in his arms.

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Tuesday, November 1, 2005

"Girls, hurry!" Hermione yelled. "You're not going to have time for breakfast if you don't get a move on."

"I think I've lost my appetite," Kim said, as she led the other girls into the room. "This is going to be

harder than going nude on the cruise was."

"You'll be fine," Hermione lied as she inspected the girls. The short walk from the bedroom to the sitting room had been enough to cause Jamie's breasts to burst out of her top. Kim's slit looked like it was trying to devour her tiny triangular bottom. Only Caitlin remained at least minimally covered.

Harry and Hermione exchanged perplexed looks.

"Is this going to work?" Harry asked, as he held a sleeping Ben. "Doesn't the charm simply replace the clothing? What is going to prevent their goodies from still popping out?"

"The difference is that unlike an article of clothing, the charm isn't actually worn. It is more like a three dimensional projection that appears solid. Clothing can shift position, the projection can't. It will always cover what it initially covered." Hermione paused. "You can even feel as if you are grabbing onto it, but when you pull, nothing happens because there is actually nothing there. You can't touch, rip or tear something that doesn't exist."

"Mum, does that mean that it can't get wet or dirty?" Caitlin asked.

"Exactly! If you fell in mud, your body would be covered from head to foot. The charmed article would appear completely clean, while in reality you would be covered in mud underneath it. Now, what we want to do is have each of you adjust your costume before I perform the charm on you. You want to cover your breasts on the side as best as you can and also make sure that the triangular patch at your crotch is smooth and covering as much as possible.

"So then once they are covered with the charm, they can't get a camel toe or expose a nipple?" Harry asked.

"No, no accidents," Hermione said, "but unfortunately that still leaves an awful lot exposed."

"An awful lot!" Harry repeated, wondering what his reaction would have been at 15 seeing Hermione, Cho or Parvati in a costume such as this. Suddenly he was having second thoughts about the girls leaving the sanctuary of their quarters.

"They're required to go about their normal activities," Hermione said, as if reading Harry's mind. "We have no choice."

Harry and Emily stood watching as Hermione did the charm on each girl individually and then as they in turn slipped out of their costume.

They all appeared to be still dressed, but Emily knew from personal experience that they were actually nude.

As the girls slipped on their socks and trainers, Hermione gave some additional advice. "I didn't charm the capes because I didn't know whether you wanted to wear them or not. They don't really cover anything; they just draw attention and make you look more ludicrous. Also, be careful how you bend, do a lady-like squat. The front and back of that outfit is only connected by a quarter inch string; it won't hide anything if you bend improperly."

Emily had watched, a gloomy expression on her face, as Hermione performed the charm on Jamie, Caitlin and Kim in succession.

"I'm afraid that's about all I can do to help you," Hermione said dolefully. "I hope the other students understand. After all, anyone of them could be in your shoes. Speaking of shoes; Emily, quickly slip out of your shoes and socks."

"Why?" Emily said staring at her mum questioningly. Then she suddenly realized why.

"Are you going to put me under the charm, too?" she asked elatedly.

Hermione nodded her head and gave her youngest daughter a weak smile. Emily was euphoric.

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"So far, so good," Caitlin said, as they neared the Great Hall.

"Caitlin, we used the private stairs from the staff quarters to the Great Hall; no one has even seen you yet," Emily reminded her.

"I know. I wish we could keep it that way," she said. "I realize this sounds crazy, but I'd prefer if everyone were about to see me nude rather than in this slutty outfit."

"It's not crazy," Jamie assured her. "Kim and I feel the same way."

Kim nodded her head. "I can't believe I'm saying this, but let's get this over with."

The others agreed as they hurried from the refuge of the tapestry-covered passageway to the Great Hall, bursting with students. As they entered, every eye turned in their direction, but they weren't greeted with the expected wolf whistles or obscene remarks. In fact the relative quiet was unsettling, considering the display they were affording the other students.

Quickly, they split. Caitlin and Jamie heading to the Gryffindor table, Emily and Kim to Slytherin.

"That went better than I expected," Jamie said as she took a seat next to Amanda. "I thought we'd be greeted with all sorts of obnoxious comments."

"That's because Snape chewed out the entire hall just before you got here," Amanda responded.

"What happened?" Jamie asked inquiringly.

"When the Americans walked in they were given the type of reception I imagine you were expecting. The pretty blonde -- didn't you say her name was Debby? -- became quite flustered and actually tripped over her own feet. Brian prevented her from actually falling to the floor, but in the process, both her boobs popped out. The Hall went wild and she's been crying ever since."

Jamie glanced toward the Hufflepuff table and saw Debby crying her heart out, her head buried in Brian's chest.

"Snape saw the whole thing and literally blew his top," Amanda explained. "He went into a tirade for about ten minutes about how wrong it was that the contenders were forced to wear such provocative costumes and that he was ashamed to be associated with the event. Bottom line is that if anyone treats any contestant with anything but the utmost respect, that person will be packing their

bags and leaving Hogwarts."

"That should put an end to obscene remarks," Caitlin said, "but I doubt it will have much effect on the lustful stares."

"Especially in your case, Jamie. How in the world are you managing to make your breasts behave?" Amanda inquired.

"The concealment charm," Jamie whispered in Amanda's ear. "Caitlin and I are actually sitting here nude."

Amanda stared at Jamie in total disbelief, before saying, "May I?" Once she touched Jamie, she just sat there speechless, a confounded expression on her face.

"Good morning, everybody," Alex said, giving Jamie a light kiss on the cheek and sliding in next to her.

"I wanted to be here before you guys," Alex said apologetically, "but I overslept. I hope you and the others weren't given any grief." Without thinking he laid his hand comfortingly on Jamie's. He had momentarily forgotten about the concealment charm, but in a few seconds he was reminded and quickly removed his hand.

"Alex, you're the only one that can see me," Jamie said, reaching for his hand. "I don't want this charm changing anything between us."

"It won't," he said, resisting a compelling urge to reach out and touch Jamie's tempting breasts.

* * * * *

"How does it feel to actually finally walk the corridors of Hogwarts nude?" Alex asked. "I know its something you've always wanted to do."

"Yes, but not like this," Jamie answered disconsolately. "Although I'm nude, it looks to everyone as if I'm wearing a scandalous outfit. I'd much prefer they see me as I actually am."

"Truthfully, I imagine what I really want is a Utopian dream," Jamie continued. "I'd like to live in a world where people just saw me simply as Jamie Zacherley, a world in which I wasn't judged by my clothes or lack of same or by my physical appearance, but rather only by the type of human being I am."

"Do you really think the world could ever evolve to the point that people would ignore nude individuals around them?" Alex asked.

"No," Jamie answered honestly. "Not unless everyone suddenly started running about starkers and I doubt that is about to happen. For now I'd be happy if people would just stop equating nudity with sex."

Alex nodded in agreement.

"Oh! Alex!" Jamie cried out. "We have to help her."

At first Alex had no idea what Jamie was going on about, and then he saw Nora. She was sitting on the floor in the doorway of an unused classroom. She had her knees pulled up to her chest, her cape pulled tightly around her. The girl was shaking uncontrollably as tears streamed down her face.

Without thought, Alex removed his robes and draped them over the emotionally distraught girl.

"I'm not allowed to cover myself," she cried, but made no movement to remove the comforting robes.

"This is a lot of bull," Alex shouted, "and it's not going on for a minute longer. Jamie, I'm taking Nora to the headmaster's office. I'm going to need the rest of the team. It would help if we had the Americans' support, too. Do you think Professor Granger or Potter could get them?"

"Alex, what are you going to do?" Jamie asked.

"That depends on your fellow competitors," Alex answered, as without explanation he picked up Nora in his arms.

* * * * *

"Professor Snape, what is so urgent that it necessitated my being dragged from my warm bed?" Rishard asked, as he entered the headmaster's office.

"I'm not quite sure myself," Snape responded, frostily. "I did not initiate this get-together; therefore I'm also extremely anxious to learn its purpose. Now that Mr. Simone has arrived, could you kindly explain why we are here Mr. Ward?"

"Yes sir," Alex responded, "but first may I please beg your indulgence as I ask a few questions of those gathered here."

"A few questions," Snape agreed, "but be quick about it. This is disrupting the school day."

"These are general questions I'd like to ask of all members of both the American and Hogwarts teams," Alex said. "Please respond by raising your hand when appropriate."

"How many of you like the costumes you have been issued to wear for the competition?"

Those assembled all watched apprehensively as not one hand was raised.

"It doesn't matter whether or not they like the uniforms," Simone shouted huffily. "They have a magical contract."

"Yes, we're all well aware of that," Snape replied. "Please allow Mr. Ward to continue his questioning. I would like to see where this is all heading."

"How many of you would have not even considered being a part of the competition if you had known before hand that you'd be required to wear such a revealing costume as practically your only clothing for the next eight months?" Alex asked. <BR? This time all hands went up.

"I'm sorry Severus, but this is a waste of my time," Rishard said haughtily.

"Mr. Simone, would you rather waste a few minutes now or a few days later in court?" Alex asked.

"What are you going on about boy? Rishard asked angrily. "No barrister would consider taking such a case. Magical contracts can not be broken."

"You're wrong," Alex declared. "Legal magical contracts can not be broken. Each of these students is obliged to compete in your tasks, but they are not required to wear your costumes, most certainly not everyday for the next eight months."

Rishard shook his head in frustration. "Okay, junior barrister, suppose you tell me just why they don't have to wear the costumes."

Alex smiled. "I wanted to be sure, so I stopped and got this book from the library on my way here." He turned to page 169 and read out loud. "Magical contracts are no different than paper contracts with the exception that there is no printed copy. All the same rules apply. Both parties must be made aware of all the particulars prior to completion of the contract. Noncompliance with items not disclosed will not negate the remainder of the contract."

"Very interesting, Mr. Ward," Snape said, "twenty-five points to Gryffindor. "You might want to consider a job in the legal profession. Mr. Simone, do you still feel that no barrister would consider taking this case?"

"This is preposterous, he's just a boy," Simone argued. "Certainly you people can't place any merit in the dribble he's spewing. It has been the authority of the games committee to select participation uniforms for over a thousand years."

"And how long has it been policy to insist that they be worn on a daily basis for eight straight months?" Severus questioned.

Rishard hemmed and hawed before saying, "That would be new policy, but it is still part of the magical contract."

"Only if disclosed to the participants before they became bond," Severus declared. "I know my students were not aware of your new policy, were you?" Severus directed his eyes to the group of Americans who quickly shook their heads no.

"Before returning to your classes, you might want to all slip into something more appropriate for a wizarding school," Snape announced.

"You're overstepping your authority, Snape," Rishard warned in his anxious high-pitched voice.

"I might well be," Severus said. "Sue me if you can find a barrister willing to take the case."

Rishard literally shook with anger. "This doesn't change the training or actual competition," Rishard warned. "They must dress as directed for those events."

"If that indeed proves to be correct, they will," Severus agreed. "Humiliation is always difficult to bear, but rather five days than over two hundred."

Severus turned to the assembled students. "Is there anything anyone wants to add?"

"Sir, would it be all right if Jamie and I talked with all the contestants for a moment before they went about their business?" Alex asked.

"Certainly," Snape said motioning to a corner of the room.

Rishard watched suspiciously as everyone gathered around Jamie and Alex. Before Alex could speak, Debby threw her arms around him and kissed him soundly.

"I'm sorry," she said looking first at Alex and then toward Jamie. "Brian told me that you were engaged, but I had to kiss him. You cannot imagine how good it will feel to get some clothes on and not be the center of attention for a change."

"Just don't make a habit of it," Jamie warned before giving Debby a friendly hug. "Look, we can't talk here, too much chance of being overheard. Can everyone meet me Friday night at eight o'clock outside the entrance to the Great Hall? It's about these costumes and it's important."

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Friday, November 4, 2005

"Emily, you do realize that Jamie, Caitlin and I have gone back to wearing clothes. Don't you think you should?" Kim asked as Emily and she were seated for dinner. "I doubt your Mum would approve of you continuing to use the Concealment Charm."

"She hasn't told me to stop," Emily said defensively. Then her tone of voice changed. "Please don't tell her. You know how much I hate clothing. It's not like I'm not hurting anyone."

"I'm not worried about you hurting anyone. I'm worried about you being hurt," Kim declared. "I won't snitch, but please be careful."

"I will."

"Before we enjoy our meal this evening, I have a few brief announcements," Headmaster Snape said, as the hall became quiet.

"First, it has been brought to my attention by a number of young ladies that I have neglected to announce whether or not there will be a Yule Ball this year. The answer to that question is a resounding, 'yes'. As it was last year, the ball will be held on New Year's Eve."

"It would be appreciated if all sixteen contenders in the contests and their dates led off the dancing that evening. Also, Miss Brown, the answer to your question is also yes. Graduates of Hogwarts may attend as your guest for the evening. Now, enough chatter, time to eat."

As food appeared on the table, Caitlin turned to Jamie. "Who am I going to ask?"

"There is always Matt," Jamie said encouragingly. "You do believe in second chances, don't you?"

"Only if earned," Caitlin replied. "I think Matt will always own a part of my heart, but I can't ask him. His attitude hasn't changed any and now he barely even talks to me."

"How about Evan?" Jamie asked.

"Evan! Jamie, he's only a first year. What would people say? Besides he's over a foot shorter than me, talk about being an odd couple."

"I'm sorry," Jamie replied. "I didn't think you were like that."

"Like what?" Caitlin asked.

"I didn't think you made your decisions and choices based on what others thought."

"I don't," Caitlin retorted defensively. "Besides, it wouldn't be fair to Evan. He has a crush on me. It would be like leading him on. I don't think I could ever think of him as boyfriend material."

"Then make that clear up front," Jamie advised. "Tell him the truth; that you need a favor from a friend and that he shouldn't jump to any wrong conclusions."

"Why do you want me to ask him?" Caitlin questioned.

"I don't really care who you ask," Jamie replied. "You said that you didn't want to ask Matt. Randy is dating Kim, and asking anyone else might lead them to jump to conclusions, too. At least you could talk to Evan. Hell, a night doesn't go by that you two don't spend at least an hour sitting together and talking."

"He's nice, I enjoy his company," Caitlin admitted.

"Then you wouldn't hate spending an evening with him?" Jamie asked.

"No, I wouldn't hate it," Caitlin said. "Sometimes I don't know which is worse, having a boyfriend or being available."

"I hope I never experience being available again," Jamie said, as she leaned to her side and kissed Alex's apple pie filled cheek.

"What are you going to do if both Randy and Brian ask you to the ball?" Emily asked.

"Have you ever heard the term 'a strong offense is the best defense'?" Kim asked in return.

"I know absolutely nothing about Muggle sports," Emily replied. "Would you like to explain that in English?"

"It means I'm going to ask Randy to the ball. Then I'm going to tell Brian that I'd really like to go with him, but that Snape said that all the competitors had to bring dates; so that we probably shouldn't go together, but we can sit together and dance some dances."

"Do you really think it's fair that you string along Randy when you're obviously interested in Brian?" Emily asked.

"I like them both," Kim said. "I'm not trying to toy with their feelings. I honestly don't know what to do. Even though Brian is a wizard, an ocean will still divide us when the competition is over. But

that's enough about me; what about you?" Will you say yes if Tyler asks you?"

"Tyler isn't going to ask me," Emily stated emphatically. "Besides I already have a date."

"How can you already have a date? We only just found out there was going to be a ball five minutes ago. No one has even had time to ask you."

Emily was saved from having to answer Kim's question by Tyler walking up to her and placing his hand on her shoulder.

Emily got up from her seat, grabbed Tyler's hand and pulled him over to the side of the hall, away from prying ears. Only then did she drop his hand. Tyler continued to stare at her as if in a trance.

"Sorry if I shocked you," Emily said nonchalantly. "I'm naked, but wearing a concealment charm. If someone touches me, they can see me as I actually am. To everyone else, I still appear to have clothes on. After a few more seconds I'll appear that way again to you also."

"Oh!" is all Tyler managed to say in response.

"Did you want to ask me something?" Emily asked, trying to pull Tyler out of his apparent shock.

"Yeah! Yeah I did. Well, you know how you said you didn't hate me and that we could be friends, but nothing more. Would you consider going to the Yule Ball with a friend?" he asked.

"That wouldn't be fair to you," she responded. "You want more than friendship from me and I'm not able to give that. Besides, I already have plans for the ball."

"You do? Already?" Tyler asked, a depressed, puppy dog expression on his face. "I guess in that case I might as well say yes to her."

"Yes to who?" Emily asked before she could stop herself.

"Denise just asked me," Tyler answered. "I was honest and told her it depended on you. She said she didn't mind being a second choice if I wanted to check with you first."

"Denise! Isn't there someone nicer you could go with?" Emily asked. "Denise is so, well you know, snooty."

"There's someone I'd much rather go with, but she already has plans." Tyler said dejectedly as he turned to leave, but then stopped and made a final comment. "You know I once thought that you were pretty, but now I realize I was wrong. You're beautiful." Without waiting for a response, he turned and left.

"What did Tyler want?" Kim asked when Emily sat back down. She had already guessed the answer.

"He asked me to the Yule Ball," replied Emily.

"And you turned him down," Kim retorted angrily. "Are you ever going to wake up and see how much he cares for you?"

"I don't think that you're currently in much of a position to be giving out relationship advice," Emily

replied caustically.

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"You can't imagine how good it feels to wear clothes again," Debby said as she and the other members of the American team approached Jamie and Alex. "I hate that ludicrous outfit. Words can never express my gratitude."

"Words will have to do," Jamie said with a warning laugh. "You've already exceeded your yearly limit of kissing Alex."

Jamie looked around and counted heads. "I think that's everybody then, please follow me," she said.

"Where are we going?" Dick bellowed. "And where are Thatcher and Potter?"

"I don't want to talk here," Jamie answered. "Kim and Caitlin are preparing a place where we won't be disturbed."

"I don't have all night to be traipsing around the castle," Dick complained. "Furthermore, what is Ward doing here? He isn't a member of either team."

"He's my boyfriend and he's here at my request," Jamie replied. "I might need his help to stick your head in a chamber pot if you don't shut up and stop bellyaching."

Debby smiled. She definitely liked Jamie and Alex. Something about them just sparked trust. On the other hand, Bancroft had easily won her disdain.

Jamie looked about nervously as the group followed her and Alex as they made their way toward the seventh floor.

"Harry offered me his map," Jamie whispered to Alex, "but I was fearful someone else might see it."

"I don't imagine it's necessary to name names," Alex said squeezing her hand. "I'm disappointed," he moaned. "Your robes are real."

"Yes, but what's under them isn't. That's another reason I wanted you with me."

"Why are you bringing us up to the seventh floor?" Bancroft complained. "There's nothing up here."

"Do you call that nothing?" Jamie asked, as they approached a highly polished door with a brass handle.

Alex seized the handle, pulled open the door, and led the way in. The room was spacious, and illuminated with flickering torches. The walls were lined with wooden bookcases containing every manner of law book imaginable. There were also seventeen extremely comfortable chairs.

"I've been on this floor numerous times before and I've never seen this room," Dick complained.

"Maybe you weren't looking for it," Caitlin said with a chuckle.

"If everyone will please take a seat, I'd like to get started," Jamie said.

Caitlin and Kim remained standing uneasily on either side of Jamie as the others all were seated.

"Prior to you getting started, may I ask why the three of you are wearing robes inside on a Friday evening?" Jeff questioned.

"What we want to talk about tonight involves a little show and tell," Jamie explained. "Bear with me and you'll understand in a few minutes.

"First I'd like to properly introduce Alex Ward, my wonderful boyfriend, who found the flaw in the contract that allowed us to get out of wearing those hideous costumes nearly every waking moment for the next eight months."

Everyone applauded and either kissed Alex or patted him on the back. Surprisingly even Dick Bancroft shook Alex's hand and murmured what sounded like, thanks mate.

"Unfortunately, thus far, Alex hasn't found any loophole that will get us out of wearing those atrocities for training or the actual contests," Jamie remarked.

"I don't understand," said Nora nervously. "What is the difference?"

"Tradition and over a thousand years of precedence," Jamie answered. "Having us wear his awful costumes on a daily basis was Simone's original idea. The concept was totally new to wizard competition and therefore needed to be explained in full before it could become part of the magical contract. It not only wasn't explained, but it wasn't even revealed, therefore it can't be part of the contract."

"I'm confused," Jeff admitted. "If the costumes are considered to be indecent for us to wear daily, why is it okay for us to wear them for training and in the actual events?"

"You've jumped to an erroneous conclusion," Alex interjected. "The fact that you don't have to wear the outfits on a daily basis has nothing to do with whether they are indecent or not. You don't have to wear them because being required to do so on a daily basis was a change from tradition that was not properly explained before the magical contract was initiated."

"You mean that we still have to wear them for training and the actual competition?" Nora asked, devastated. "They're still ghastly and indecent."

"That, they are," Jamie agreed, "but unfortunately it has been traditional for event holders to issue uniforms for the games. It was not necessary for this to be explained to us because it has been the accepted policy since the origin of the games."

"But certainly not such revealing outfits," Nora pleaded.

Alex nodded his head. "I was hoping that we could use that against Rishard, but it seems history is on his side. For a period of over two hundred years, wizards and witches actually competed in the same attire as the original Muggle Olympians."

"Didn't those dudes contend starkers?" Brian questioned.

"Exactly," Alex answered. "I'm sure Rishard has pointed this out on numerous occasions to those

opposing him."

"Let me get this straight," Bancroft fumed. "We don't have to wear mini Speedos on a daily basis, but we do have to wear them for the two training sessions and the three actual events when the entire wizarding world will be watching. I was expecting good news. Why are you wasting our time if you don't have any worthwhile to tell us?"

"We do have something meaningful to say," Jamie responded. "I'm sorry, I wish we had a way of getting us all out of wearing Rishard's debauched creations, but we don't. We do, however, have a way of preventing body parts from popping out while participating."

Jamie removed her robes; Caitlin and Kim followed suit. Kim's face glowed a bright pink as all the competitors from both teams stared at the trio.

"The way you're staring at us now, is exactly the way the spectators will be looking at all of us during the competition," Jamie said, disgust evident in her voice. "But as provocative and revealing as these costumes might be on their own, Rishard is expecting us to deliver much more to his audience. He is counting on us to have numerous 'accidents' throughout the course of the contests."

Jamie looked pointedly at Bancroft. "And it's not just boobs that he's hoping will pop out. He wants both male and female privates on display, too."

For the next few minutes, members of the American team related stories of the numerous embarrassing moments they had endured during the US competition wearing a less revealing costume than now required. After Debby finished telling the story of how she had spent ten agonizing minutes as part of a human ladder with her vagina completely exposed, everyone sat in silence for a few moments.

Debby looked intently at Jamie, tears filling her eyes. "These contests are going to be seen world wide on wizard cam. I don't want my pussy bared to the entire wizarding world."

"We have a way out," Jamie said hesitantly. "It has its draw backs, but it's better than the alternative." Jamie gave Caitlin and Kim a smile. "Are you ready?"

Both girls gave Jamie a nervous smile as she began counting. First the three girls did ten toe touches. They followed this with ten sit ups, ten pushups and ten jumping jacks. To finish everything off, Caitlin did a handstand with a full split.

Everyone watched with amazement, particularly the Americans.

"How did you do that?" Brian asked, looking totally flabbergasted. "Wearing those outfits, your breasts should be exposed." He stared at the spot where Caitlin's legs met. "You don't even have a hint of a camel toe. By rights you should be totally showing."

Debby and the remainder of the American team nodded their heads in agreement.

"It's impossible. How did you manage to stay in your uniforms?" Debby asked.

Jamie took a deep breath. "It was easy," she said. "You see, we aren't really wearing Rishard's costumes. We are covered with a concealment charm. In reality, except for our trainers and socks, we're nude."

"What do you take us for?" Bancroft yelled. "Do you actually expect us to believe that blarney?"

"In your case, I'm surprised that you've accepted the principle that the world is round," Jamie said, frustration evident in her voice. She reached out her arm. "Touch my hand."

Alex cringed as Dick Bancroft reached out and touched Jamie's hand. Bancroft barely made contact when his mouth open and his chin dropped. He didn't speak, but he did seem on the verge of drooling. Jamie withdrew her hand, but Dick's eyes remained fixed on her body.

"I don't understand how you can consider being nude better than wearing that depraved costume. Either way your private parts are seen," Nora pleaded.

"It's extremely different," Debby said. "One way, you're exposed to the entire world. I expect that my pictures will float about on the Muggle Internet for the rest of my life. The other way, you might be seen totally nude, but only by a few people that you intimately trust." Her eyes rested on Brian. "Jamie, would you please teach me that charm?"

"I'm in too," said Brian.

A couple of the other Americans also agreed, but one girl and the other three boys declined. None of the Hogwarts competitors seemed willing to take the plunge.

"Why can't we wear both the costume and the charm?" Nora asked.

"We thought about that but it causes numerous problems. The charm is meant to hide flesh, so parts of the real costume sometimes stick out from under the charm. Plus if the actual costume becomes out of place, which it will, there is no way to adjust it. We need to be careful that Rishard doesn't catch on to what we're doing.

"If there are no other questions, I'm willing to show anyone that's interested how to apply the charm."

After Jamie had showed the interested Americans how to use the charm, the students separated into teams so that members could become accustomed to seeing their teammates nude.

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Saturday, November 5, 2005

"What do you think practice will be like?" Caitlin asked Jamie as they both nervously nibbled at their breakfast.

"I've no idea," she said. "I'm just glad that Harry is going to coach and be present at the training sessions. That Rishard is creepy; he makes me uneasy."

"I don't like him either. He's most definitely a pervert," Caitlin declared. "Although he seems more interested in watching the boys than he does the girls."

"Yeah! His only interest in us is that we expose ourselves enough to satisfy his paying clientele," Jamie replied. "I heard that these training sessions are even open to the public. I wish Nora and the guys had decided to use the charm."

"Especially Nora," Caitlin said. "She's so shy. I'm afraid she'll be a basket case before the day is over."

Jamie nodded her head in agreement.

"You don't mind if I come watch the practice, do you?" Alex said placing a hand on both Jamie and Caitlin's shoulders. "I kind of want to keep an eye on Bancroft."

"We'd be disappointed if you didn't come," Jamie answered candidly.

"Okay, see you in a bit then," Alex said, leaning down and kissing both girls on the cheek before starting away.

"Wait up," Jamie shouted. "We're done eating. You can escort us both down to the Quidditch Pitch."

"Now that's an offer I can't refuse," Alex said gleefully. "It's not often I get to escort the two prettiest girls in Hogwarts." He put an arm around each girl's waist. "Do you realize how envious all the other guys are right now and they can't even see what I can?"

"Just make sure that hand stays on my waist," Jamie warned. "No grabbing a feel of my butt."

Caitlin giggled. "You can squeeze mine if you want, Alex. I think it would feel neat."

Jamie, Caitlin and Alex all exchanged impish looks and then burst into laughter.

* * * * *

"Do you mind if I sit next to you?" Tyler asked.

"Tyler, it's a free world, you can sit any place you desire," Emily replied.

"I just thought maybe you'd rather not have me sit near you."

Emily turned and looked Tyler straight in the eye. "Tyler, can we get some things straight once and for all?" she asked, more loudly than necessary.

"I do not hate you," Emily began. "I told you before that I forgive you for the picture incident. I think you're a nice guy. I even like hanging with you, but the chances of us ever getting together as a couple again are infinitesimal. A relationship requires trust. I trusted you, but you didn't trust me."

"But I've changed. I'd never do that again and I'd trust you with my life. What do I have to do to prove to you that I trust you?" He beseeched.

"I honestly don't know," Emily answered. "I don't even know if it's possible. Can't we just be friends?" She laid her hand on his knee.

Tyler couldn't take his eyes off her. "You're nude again," he whispered. "You must be freezing. It's only forty-five degrees."

"I'm sorry," Emily said, removing her hand. "That wasn't fair of me. I honestly forgot. I'm not trying to be a tease."

"I know you're not, but seriously, aren't you cold? You can borrow my robes if you like."

"I'll be okay as long as the sun stays out, but thanks for the offer," Emily said, giving him a smile.

"Look, they're ready to start. I hope they talk loud enough for us to hear what's going on."

"Good morning," Rishard said, surveying both groups of players. "You certainly all look divine today." He glanced at Harry and gave him a wink. "This is our first of two 'Get to Know You' sessions. To be successful in these games you must know your teammates and trust them intimately."

"What we're going to do first is a humorous little ice breaking drill using a simple little beanbag. Would both teams please form circles?"

Harry and Buddy had their teams comply, spacing the members about three meters apart in two separate circles. After the teams were positioned, Rishard handed Harry and Bud each two beanbags and instructed them to hold on to them until later. He then walked over to the team from Salem. He handed Debby a beanbag and then whispered something in her ear.

"I wonder what he told her?" Emily asked.

"I'm not sure," Tyler replied, "but I wouldn't want her looking at me like that."

Debby's face was flushed, but she was staring livid daggers at Mr. Simone.

Rishard next walked over to the Hogwarts contingent and handed a beanbag to Jamie. "My, but doesn't that costume display your attributes nicely," he whispered. "Your tits look like they're just begging to be unleashed."

Jamie just glared at Rishard. She couldn't believe that he was talking to her in such an improper way.

"I should warn you," Rishard continued, "that costume might not be able to restrain those beauties of yours, but don't worry. You have absolutely nothing to be ashamed of and I'm sure the sight will be greatly appreciated by all those watching."

"Now then, each team has a beanbag," Rishard announced loudly. "Introduce yourself to your teammates. Tell something unique about yourself and then toss the bag to the player on your right. Take your time; it is more important you get to know your teammates than it is to rush."

Debby and Jamie both began to speak, but since Tyler and Emily were sitting nearer to the Hogwarts team and could hear them better; they concentrated more on their introductions.

"I'm Jamie Zacherley, a seventh year Gryffindor," Jamie announced. "Most of you are probably by now aware of my uniqueness; I'm a naturist."

Jamie then passed the bag to Caitlin. Each player introduced him or herself and then passed the bag on until it reached Nora who was standing on Jamie's left. Nora had a difficult time reaching for the bag. Her left hand was busy covering her crotch, while she tried to cover her chest with her right

arm.

"I'm Nora Jordan, vice president of the Gobstones Club," she said timidly.

Mr. Simone had been watching both groups waiting for them to complete their introductions. "Now what I want you to do is call out any teammates name and toss the beanbag to that person. Try to do it as quickly as possible, but make sure your throws are accurate. Begin!"

Nora called Jeff's name and then without moving her arm, made a pathetic one hand toss to the boy on her immediate left.

"She's going to need to loosen up," Alex said to Amanda, who was now sitting with him.

"That's easier said than done," Amanda answered back. "The poor girl is embarrassed to be seen in public in that outrageous getup and I don't blame her. Worse yet, she's scared stiff to move for fear of becoming even more exposed."

Alex was sympathetic to how Nora felt, but at the same time realized that her inhibition might well eventually be the downfall of the Hogwarts team.

Both teams seemed to be having fun tossing the beanbag about; only a few players had dropped it. After getting their attention, Simone gave Harry and Bud the signal and they both called a name tossing a second beanbag into the circle. After a few more minutes the third bag was added. Nora stood apprehensively; she knew sooner or later one of the bags would come in her direction. She was amazed that no one had thus far thrown to her. Obviously all her teammates, Bancroft included, had decided it was best to avoid throwing to the timorous girl.

Then without warning, it happened. Three people called his name at the same time and Bancroft found three beanbags zinging his direction. He leaned to his left, stretched to the right and then jumped skyward. Unbelievably he had caught all three bags. He started to send them off in different directions when Jamie flung her arms around him and held him in a tight embrace.

"What the ...?" Dick started to say.

"Your penis decided it wanted some fresh air," Jamie quickly explained. "I'll keep you shielded while you adjust yourself."

Jamie held on just long enough for Bancroft to put things back where they belonged, and then she hurried back to her position in the circle. Dick just stared as she walked away. That had almost been worth being exposed.

"I hope she doesn't have to do anything like that too often during the competition," Amanda said.

"You hope!?" Alex said, his face turning a sickly green. "If she ever has to hug him again, I'm going to end up tossing my breakfast."

"That's enough," Simone said. He was still trying to act jaunty, but disappointment seemed to etch each word.

"I wonder what's wrong with him?" Tyler asked. "He seems disappointed about something."

"He is," Emily responded. "Rishard was expecting a tit show and he's not getting it. So far, at least

on the Hogwarts team, Bancroft was the only one to have an accident. I know for a fact that he was hoping for Jamie to be out of her costume more than in it."

"I get it," Tyler said. "Jamie, Caitlin and Kim are wearing the charm too. That's how they are able to jump around without exposing themselves."

"You always were clever," Emily said, patting Tyler on the knee. "Oh! I'm sorry. I don't mean to tease."

"Please don't be sorry," Tyler replied. "Maybe you'll never think of me the way I'd like, but that doesn't mean I don't love looking at you."

Emily blushed.

"Our next getting to know you exercise is called 'Reach Out and Hug Someone'," Simone announced.

Alex just looked at Amanda and shook his head. This wasn't his day.

"For this exercise the groups will once again stand in circles. When your coach yells, 'go' you run across and hug someone. On each 'go' you switch partners and hug someone different until each person has hugged everybody in the group. Yes, I mean everybody," Mr. Simone emphasized as a number of hands had ventured into the air.

When Harry hollered 'go' for the first time, neither Dick Bancroft nor Nora initially moved. Nora was simply afraid to move whereas Bancroft found the whole idea of hugging extremely uncomfortable. Once everyone else had paired, with Harry's encouragement, Dick finally moved toward Nora and only just placed his arms around her.

On the first switch, Bancroft ended up with Caitlin. Caitlin hadn't seemed to mind hugging Jeff, but seemed exceedingly hesitant to put her arms around Dick.

"I wouldn't want to hug that slime ball either," Emily said, commenting on Caitlin's lack of enthusiasm. Then she remembered that Dick was Tyler's brother. "Sorry! I'm sure he's okay once you get to know him."

"No, he's not," Tyler replied without pause for thought. "He's my brother in name only. We share no affection for each other. Dick is wicked, like my parents. Sometimes, I feel that St. Mungo's Hospital accidentally switched me at birth."

Emily placed her hand reassuringly on Tyler's leg, either not considering the consequences or simply not caring about the results. Tyler didn't stare or comment. For the moment he was satisfied just knowing that she didn't hate him. Maybe time would bring them together, again.

As the pairings continued to change on the field, so did the arousal level of the Hogwarts male participants. Most of the boys had never experienced seeing a naked girl before the previous night, now they were in turn hugging three of them. Their swelling quickly subsided, however, when the boys began hugging each other.

Finally after the members of both teams had exchanged hugs with all their counterparts, Rishard called an end to the exercise. Although his voice still maintained a buoyant air, his face gave away his disappointment. He glanced one by one at the Hogwarts players, maintaining eye contact with

the girls longer than the boys. Finally his eyes came to rest on Jamie Zacherley. The girls all looked extremely provocative, especially Jamie. The costumes left little to the imagination, but he had promised his colleagues that no imagination would be necessary. He had guaranteed accidental nudity. With the exception of Nora, the Hogwarts girls seemed to be running and jumping about without a care, yet there had been absolutely no exposure. Why weren't Zacherley's tits popping out?

"It looks like it is about to rain," Rishard said, glancing at the darkening skies. "This will be our last exercise of the day. Next Saturday we will concentrate on developing team trust."

"Emily, you must be freezing," Tyler said concernedly. "Take my robes."

"I'm fine," Emily lied.

"Sure you are," Tyler rejoined. "Is that why your nipples are as hard as rocks and your skin is covered with goose bumps? Don't be so stubborn. Move closer and at least let me share my robes."

She hoped Tyler wouldn't misconstrue her actions, but she was extremely cold. Emily moved closer as Tyler wrapped his robes around them both and held her tightly in order to share his body warmth.

Rishard had only just begun explaining the next exercise when the skies let loose with a torrent of rain. He quickly dismissed the students and ran for shelter. Had he remained, a curious happening might have interested him. Although the rain drenched all the participants, the costumes of some became immediately transparent while others remained completely dry.

When Emily and Tyler reached the protection of the castle, they stood momentarily just staring at each other. "Thank you for keeping me warm," Emily said, before parting company.

"Any time," Tyler answered back, keenly watching Emily's derriere undulate as she walked away. When her clothes reappeared he still kept watching until finally she disappeared around the corner. He had held her, they had talked but nothing had really changed between them. His momentary bliss was over.

* * * * *

"Harry! I'm so glad you're back!" Hermione cried, as he entered their quarters. "I was just about to send Hedwig to search you out."

"What's the matter?" Harry asked, seeing grave concern etched on Hermione's face.

"I'm not sure," Hermione answered tensely. "Severus just stuck his head in the fire and asked that you and I come to his office immediately. Tonks and Kingsley Shacklebolt are on their way." Hermione bit her lips. "I don't think it's a social visit. Severus looked distraught."

Chapter Fourteen The First Casualties of War

"Aren't you coming?" Jamie shouted as she made to run for the castle.

"I want to talk to Evan first," Caitlin said, indicating the diminutive first year Gryffindor boy that was standing nearby. Evan already appeared to be soaked to the skin by the heavy rain.

Caitlin and Evan exchanged quick looks and then both sprinted toward the shelter of the nearby building. They didn't speak until the door had closed behind them.

"My socks and trainers are soaked," Caitlin complained, as she led the way to the girls' locker room.

"I can't go in there," Evan said shyly, pointing to the sign on the door.

"Don't be ridiculous," Caitlin said, grabbing his hand and pulling him through the door. "No one is here but you and I."

"But what if someone catches me in the girls' changing room?" Evan pleaded.

"They won't," Caitlin said reassuringly. "You and I are the only two people crazy enough to be out of the castle in this weather."

Caitlin sat on a nearby bench and began to remove her trainers and socks.

"How come your costume didn't get wet?" Evan asked. "My clothes are sodden."

"That's because I don't actually have the costume on, it's in reality only a concealment charm. Watch!" Caitlin said, canceling the charm.

Evan suddenly found himself looking at a very wet, very naked Caitlin. He had become accustomed to seeing her nude, but this was the first time he had ever been alone with her when she was naked. The fact that her body glistened from the rain made him even tenser.

"I've got the chills," Caitlin said. "I'm going to take a quick hot shower," she said, nodding toward the adjoining open room.

"I'll go wait outside," Evan said uncertainly.

"If you want," Caitlin said, seemingly bemused. "It seems rather silly though. You see me nude in the common room every day of the week and I'm sitting here now completely starkers. It would be ridiculous for you to leave just because I'm going to take a shower."

For the first time since entering the changing rooms, Caitlin really looked at Evan. He was trembling uncontrollably because of his cold wet clothes. "You should get out of those clothes so that I can do a drying charm on them," Caitlin suggested. "It wouldn't be a bad idea for you to also take a good hot shower."

Evan shivered. "Maybe I should," he said, starting to head for the door with the intention of going to the boys' locker room.

"I don't have a problem with you staying here," Caitlin said. "There is plenty of room and honestly

I'd rather not be alone. Of course, I'll understand if you'd rather not have me see you naked."

Evan was knocked for six. A goddess had just asked him to shower with her. Well, not actually shower together in the usual sense. They wouldn't, of course, be washing each other, but they would be in the same room.

This was the type of fantasy teenage boys often dreamed of. Here he was, not even twelve and about to.... Could he actually do this? Could he really expose his little boy body to this beautiful girl?

As if able to read his mind, Caitlin took Evan's hand in hers. "Being a nudist has a lot of advantages," she said. "I've seen a multitude of men and boys naked. Nudity to me is really no big deal. I've also learned that physical appearance is only part of the package. Actually it's only the outer wrapping; what's inside is of much greater importance."

Evan blushed as he listened to Caitlin. He was ashamed of himself. Although he truly liked Caitlin, he had been placing a great deal of emphasis on her physical appearance. Caitlin, on the other hand, seemed to place a much greater weight on character. She'd already judged him on what she considered was important. Without actually saying it, she had just told Evan that she wasn't about to judge him on his muscularity or penis size.

"I'd like to stay here with you, if you're sure it's all right," he said nervously.

"I'm sure that some people would find it very disturbing and improper," Caitlin said, "but those same people would probably consider anything involving nudity as dirty." Caitlin gave Evan a smile. "I'm not getting any warmer standing here talking. If you're going to join me for a nice hot shower, hurry and get out of those wet clothes."

Evan would never know where he acquired the courage, but he immediately sat down and started removing his trainers and socks. Then he stood and removed all his outer clothing until nothing remained but his boxers. He didn't even look to see whether Caitlin was watching; instead, he took a deep breath, closed his eyes, and slid them quickly to the floor.

Caitlin reached out and grasped his hand tightly. "You better hold on to my hand if you intend on keeping your eyes shut," she giggled, as she led him into the shower room.

They took spaces next to each other and at first both just stood, enjoying the warm water flowing over their naked bodies. Then Evan watched spellbound as Caitlin lathered her entire body with soap.

"Since you're just standing there gawking, would you mind scrubbing my back?" Caitlin asked, a genuine smile on her face.

Evan stuttered incoherently in response.

"I'll take that as a yes." Caitlin said turning her back to Evan.

"Just my back and only from the shoulders to the waist," she instructed in a mock menacing way. "I don't want to have to hurt you."

As Evan gently applied soap to Caitlin's back, he envisioned what it would be like to reach around and touch her breasts. He suppressed these desires realizing that Caitlin's friendship was worth

much more to him than a quick feel.

After Caitlin rinsed her back, she offered to scrub Evan's. He declined, not sure whether he could withstand such intimacy.

After toweling off, they both returned to the locker room. "Evan, can I discuss something with you?" Caitlin asked, placing her towel on one on the benches and then sitting down on it.

Evan nodded his head apprehensively and then after placing his towel next to Caitlin's, took a seat. Although worried about what she was about to say, he couldn't get over how comfortable he was with this girl. No one had seen him naked since when he was an infant, yet he realized that he wasn't the least embarrassed for this girl to see him that way.

"Evan, I like you," Caitlin said sincerely. "In the short time we've known each other, you've become a very close friend. During my first and second year I spent most of my time with Matt and Randy; they were my best friends. Matt and I breaking up more or less forced Randy to choose between the two of us. Randy choosing Matt has made me sort of a loner, since Kim and Emily are in a different house and a different year. You and I becoming friends really meant a lot to me and it helped me through a bad time." Caitlin placed her hands on Evan's bare thigh. Goosebumps surged throughout his body.

"I don't want to lose you as a friend," Caitlin said, her eyes watering. She looked sadly at Evan. "I don't think I could sit here like this with any other boy and feel so comfortable. I love spending time with you and I have a special favor to ask of you, but I don't want to lead you on or hurt you."

"I know you'd never purposely hurt me," Evan replied. "You're not that kind of person."

"I'd like to think not, but sometimes we can hurt people without meaning to do so. Sometimes people are hurt because they misconstrue our actions." Caitlin took a deep breath. "I hope we'll always be friends, but at times I get the feeling you'd like our relationship to develop beyond mere friendship. I'm sorry Evan, but for a number of reasons, I don't think that will ever happen."

Evan turned his head away from Caitlin, not in anger, but rather to hide his tears. He knew he had been dreaming an impossible dream, but it hurt to have Caitlin confirm this as fact.

"I know you're too old for me," Evan said with a laugh, trying to conceal his disappointment. "Besides can you imagine us walking around together, people would laugh themselves silly. You have to be at least four inches taller than me."

"More like eight," Caitlin thought to herself.

"Don't worry about hurting my feelings, you didn't," Evan said, trying to put up a brave front. "I realize the extreme odds of us ever being more than just friends. I'm satisfied that you consider me a good friend. You said something about me doing a special favor for you?"

"I'll understand if you don't want to, especially after our discussion, but I didn't want you to jump to any wrong conclusions when I asked you. All the tournament participants need a partner for the Yule Ball and I was wondering if you'd consider escorting me?"

"You want me to go to the Yule Ball with you?" Evan shouted in a high gleeful voice.

"Only if you are comfortable with it and you understand that we're only going as friends," Caitlin

reiterated.

For Evan, Christmas had just come early. Even though the goddess for whom he was carrying a torch had just rejected him; he didn't feel hurt or glum. Somehow being asked to escort the most beautiful girl in the world to the Yule Ball had a way of softening the blow. Especially when she asked you totally naked after just having showered with you. If this was how rejection felt, Evan wanted to be cast off every day.

Evan jumped to his feet, faced Caitlin and bowed. "It would be my honor to escort the beautiful princess to the ball," he said.

Caitlin blushed as she got to her feet and pulled Evan into a firm hug. "You are a special friend," she said, holding him tightly.

Evan didn't respond. He felt as if he had just died and surely gone to heaven.

* * * * *

"No doubt about it, young lady," Madam Pomfrey said excitedly. "You are definitely with child. We will be able to calculate the due date more precisely after I ask you a few questions, but I'd estimate mid July."

Ginny beamed as she looked adoringly at Draco. "You sure didn't waste any time, Mister."

Draco smiled, but it seemed to be a smile that was hiding something. "Time is the most precious commodity we have. I've wasted too much of my life."

"Would you like to know whether it's a boy or girl?" Poppy asked.

"Can you tell already?" Draco asked in amazement. "It can't be any bigger than a Knut."

"If that," Poppy replied with a smile. "Some people want to know so they can make plans, others would rather be surprised."

Ginny squeezed Draco's hand. "Do you mind, Love?" she asked, her face aglow with happiness. "I'd like to know."

Draco didn't answer; he simply nodded his approval as he held Ginny's small delicate hand in his.

"This won't hurt at all," Poppy said as she prepared her wand by slipping a sanitary sleeve on the end. "I only have to insert it a few inches. Please drop your knickers, lift up your skirt, sit on the end of the table and spread your legs."

Ginny blushed slightly before lifting her skirt and sitting on the end of the table. Draco had finally gotten her to stop wearing knickers. In truth, he hadn't actually talked her into discarding them, but had instead destroyed all her exiting garments by ripping them off her when caught up in passion. Poppy didn't comment, but instead again just smiled.

"You'll need to spread your legs just a bit more," she said and then inserted the wand gently when Ginny obliged.

Ginny waited impatiently as Madam Pomfrey counted seconds off silently. Finally, she removed the wand, discarded the cover and gave her wrist a flick. Pink sparks emanated from the wand.

"I hope she's every bit as beautiful as her mother," Draco said. He ignored Poppy being there and took Ginny into his arms, kissing her passionately. There was a genuine smile on his face, but his eyes were moist with tears.

* * * * *

After depositing Ben with Sam and Ron, they hastened to the Headmaster's office. Harry promptly gave the password to the stone gargoyle. He and Hermione reached the top of the spiraling staircase just as Tonks and Shacklebolt finished removing their rain gear. One look at the solemn expressions on the Aurors' faces, and they knew that this most definitely wasn't a social call.

Snape gestured for everyone to be seated. "What is this visit concerning?" he asked, scrutinizing the Aurors.

"As you know, at the last meeting of the Order of the Phoenix, Harry asked Tonks and I to be on the lookout for anything suspicious; anything that might point to Salazar Slytherin recruiting followers," Kingsley stated. "This morning The Magical Law Enforcement Patrol was contacted by an elf, reporting that her masters had been killed. Tonks and I decided to tag along."

"Fortunate that we did," Tonks interjected. "The Ministry has ordered a cover up."

"Cover up?" Harry asked questioningly.

"It's being reported as a double murder, kidnapping," Tonks revealed, "but it's not. Even the Magical Law Enforcement Patrol knows that, but all the evidence has been sequestered."

"What makes you think Slytherin had anything to do with it?" Harry questioned.

"This!" Shacklebolt said, withdrawing a partially written letter from his pocket. "While I was listening in as the patrol leader questioned the house elf, our Nymphadora did a little confiscating of evidence herself."

Tonks gave a shudder; she hated when anyone used her first name. "If I hadn't, you know it would have been destroyed," Tonks said defensively.

"You're quite right! I was complimenting you, not criticizing you," Kingsley explained as he handed the letter to Snape.

Without looking over the letter, Snape began reading it aloud.

Darling,

I know my last owl upset you. If it were possible for your father and I to undo our past, don't you think we would? You can't imagine how many times we've regretted ever becoming involved with the Dark Lord. My only excuse is that we were young and foolish.

We can't change the past, but we need to do everything possible now to protect you and Hillary.

You girls are our world. I don't want us to fight, but I'm not leaving you behind. We've made arrangements to depart for the United States on Sunday. I know this is upsetting to you, but we have no choice.

It is imperative that you tell no one. We will

"Do you think she was writing this letter when the murderer arrived?" Hermione asked.

"That's our belief," Shacklebolt replied. "Tonks and I think the parents were being coerced to join with Slytherin. Their daughter, the one the letter was being written to, is a seventh year at Hogwarts. Once the ministry fabricates their story, I'm sure they will contact the school. Although difficult under the circumstances, it might be best if you could talk to the young lady before the ministry intervenes."

"I agree," said Hermione, "but isn't our first concern for Hillary, the girl that was kidnapped? What is the ministry doing to locate her?"

"Nothing!" Tonks said, unable to hold back her tears. "That's part of the ministry sham. She's not kidnapped; at least not anymore."

Hermione, Severus and Harry all stared at Tonks, expressions of confusion and unease on their faces.

"There was another piece of evidence that the ministry ordered destroyed," Kingsley said, his voice shaking uncontrollably. "Whoever committed the murders also delivered a package to the home." Kingsley hung his head sadly and closed his eyes as if ready to say a prayer. Tonks started crying uncontrollably. "The box contained Hillary's decapitated head."

Hermione's face became a ghastly white as she lunged for the waste bin. Harry and Severus sat motionless, neither wanting to fathom such an atrocity.

After a few minutes of uneasy quiet, Harry spoke. "They have the child's head. How can they possibly say she was kidnapped? They must see that this is the work of the vilest of wizards."

"The ministry refuses to believe that Slytherin has returned and walks amongst us," Shacklebolt replied.

"But what of the poor girl's head?" Hermione cried. "How can they deny its existence?"

"Because it was transfigured to a twig and tossed into the trash," Tonks sobbed. "The remainder of her body will undoubtedly never be found."

"The poor dear," Hermione wailed. "At the very least she deserved a proper burial."

"I felt that way, too," Kingsley said, tears filling his eyes as he gently removed a twig wrapped in a soft cloth from his pocket. "She should be restored to human form when the time comes, but I don't think I have the stomach for it."

"I'll do it," Hermione said, looking at the ceiling as if asking for strength. "Severus, could you please put the twig somewhere secure until the proper time? Who is Hillary's sister? We need to talk to her before the ministry gets a hold of her."

"Doris Burke," Shacklebolt answered.

"No! No!" Hermione cried, slumping to her knees and looking as if ready to pound the floor to dust. "No!" Harry got on his knees next to her and wrapped his arm around Hermione comfortingly.

* * * * *

Doris walked quietly into the Headmaster's office, and then studied the somber faces surrounding her. Without anyone uttering a word, tears filled her eyes. "My parents are dead, aren't they?" she asked, fighting to hold back the tears.

"What about Hillary? Is she okay?" Doris asked hopefully.

"No, I'm afraid not," Hermione said tearfully, getting up from her chair and going to comfort the distressed girl.

"I've lost my entire family," Doris sobbed, "and I'm next. It's just a matter of how soon."

"No one is going to hurt you," Hermione said reassuringly. "Hogwarts is safe and secure."

"I'm a seventh year. I graduate in June," she cried. "They'll come for me then and my only choice will be to join him or die."

"Join who?" Harry asked, his voice showing concern.

"Slytherin! The bastard is back!" she screamed. "The ministry and the Daily Prophet are lying. He's returned just like Jamie said and he's determined to take over our world."

"Doris, I give you my word that everything physically possible will be done to protect you," Harry said firmly. "I regret that it's too late to save your sister and parents."

Harry got to his feet and walked over to Doris. "In a very short time the ministry will be contacting you. They will be giving you a very different account of the events that occurred today from what you and I know to be true. As hard as it may be, on the surface, you must appear to accept their explanation of events. If you argue and claim that Slytherin was responsible, they will perform a memory altering charm on you."

Doris was bent over in her chair, her tear stained face hidden by her hands, but she nodded her understanding.

"Doris, do you know what a Pensive is?" Harry asked.

Again she nodded her head.

"It's extremely important that you retain the truthful memory of what has occurred. Likewise, it is imperative that we learn all the pertinent details so that we can protect you and help others. At this time I feel that questioning you would be extremely stressful for you and cruel on my part. Would you be willing to place your memories of all events leading up to today's dreadful occurrence in a Pensive so that the Headmaster and I can visit those recollections?"

Doris solemnly nodded her head as Severus stood and headed toward a locked cabinet.

"I regret having to say this, but I don't trust our governing body and I prefer that you not be alone with any ministry officials," Harry commented. "Would you mind if Hermione stayed with you?"

"I don't want to be alone," Doris sniveled.

"Is there anyone we should contact to help you make arrangements?" Hermione asked.

"I have no close relatives," Doris sighed. "Do you think Jamie would be willing to help?"

"I'm most sure she would," Hermione answered. "If you feel up to it, I believe the Headmaster is ready to show you how to use the Pensive."

* * * * *

"Then Hermione is going to tell Doris what actually happened to her sister?" Severus asked.

"Yes," Harry replied. "She and Jamie are with Doris now. They felt it better to wait until after she had dealt with the ministry officials before telling her everything."

"That was unquestionably the correct call," Severus said. "I greatly doubt that she could have maintain any degree of civility with the representatives had she known the extent of the cover-up." Severus hung his head. "How can anyone do that to an innocent child?"

"It would take a monster," Harry replied sadly. "Unfortunately it would seem that Slytherin and his followers fill that description. I'm afraid this is only the beginning of the killing."

"Are you ready to step into her memories?" Severus asked.

Harry nodded his head reluctantly. Although he prized being a wizard, some things about the magical world still made him queasy. Pensives were at the top of this list, only superceded by Floo powder and Portkeys.

The two men leaned over the shallow stone basin with its carvings of runes and other symbols; both seemed entranced by the basin's silvery contents.

"Together then," Snape said, and he and Harry both reached out to touch the material in the basin. Snape's office gave a massive lurch and Harry and the headmaster were both thrown forward and pitched headfirst into the substance inside the basin.

The professors found themselves standing in the Great Hall next to the Slytherin House table. It was breakfast and the owls were just arriving with the morning mail.

Harry watched as an owl landed in front of Doris, nearly knocking over her cereal bowl. The girl hastened to detach a letter attached to the owl's leg and then gave the owl a treat, before it flew off. Doris for a moment stared tentatively at the envelope, and then opened it hurriedly. Harry and Severus quickly took positions behind Doris so that they could read the letter along with her.

Darling Doris,

I wish it were possible for me to be with you today, instead of writing, because what I have to say is so difficult to put in a letter. Yet it is imperative that you be informed of the present situation as soon as possible.

The past has come back to haunt your father and I once again. We were so young and foolish when we joined the ranks of the Dark Lord. At the time, his beliefs were similar to ours, but we had no idea the horrible lengths to which he was willing to go to achieve his goals. We both learned from our mistakes, but it seems they insist on haunting us.

Theodore Nott just visited us. His father was a Death Eater, one of the worst. He took great pleasure in torturing and killing. His son seems to be following in his late father's footsteps.

Nott informed us that our greatest fear is true. Salazar Slytherin has indeed been restored. Furthermore his goal, once he assembles a following, is to take charge of the wizarding world.

Slytherin is offering a simple choice, accept him and live in eternal servitude or die. Being a pureblood will offer no protection against his wrath.

Nott and others are approaching former Death Eaters and their grown children offering them the opportunity to serve Lord Slytherin. To accept is to commit to a lifetime of misery. To refuse is the same as signing your death warrant. Your father and I refused.

They have already threatened your life and undoubtedly won't hesitate to hurt Hillary either. We must leave the country at once.

I know this is upsetting, but we have little choice. Please keep this letter confidential and be prepared to depart school with little notice.

I'm sorry!

Love,

Mother

Doris angrily crumbled up the letter and then without warning jumped to her feet. Harry and Severus needlessly scampered to get out of her way.

"Do you think we should follow her?" Snape asked.

"Yes," Harry replied. "The memory thread hasn't ended. I want to see her complete reaction."

Harry and Severus hurried after Doris as she scurried out of the Great Hall, trying to conceal her tears. She literally ran down the corridor before entering a room on her right.

"You're not proposing we follow her in there are you?" Snape asked, scandalized. He pointed nervously to a sign on the door that read 'GIRLS'."

"I don't think she's going in there to relieve herself," Harry answered, walking through the door in a ghostlike fashion, an ashen-faced Severus following apprehensively.

Doris performed a locking charm on the door and then checked all the stalls to be positive the room

was empty.

Once certain she was alone, she flung the letter with anger into a sink and then pointing her wand said, "Incendio!" The letter immediately burst into flames.

Doris watched through watery eyes until nothing remained but ashes, then she turned the faucet on and washed the vestiges down the drain. She sank to the floor and burst into tears.

As Harry looked to Severus, Doris' sobs died away. The lavatory was dissolving as though it were made of smoke; everything was fading; he could see his own body and Snape's - all else was swirling darkness....

Gradually another room appeared around them. Harry looked about him and saw five four-poster beds. Then he saw Doris sitting at a desk, apparently just finishing a letter.

"Harry! We're in the seventh year Slytherin girls' dorm," Severus shouted. "We shouldn't be in here."

The last word had just departed his lips when the door opened and a girl entered. She appeared to be wearing nothing but a towel.

"Harry, we should leave immediately," Severus said anxiously. "This just isn't appropriate."

"We will," Harry said, undecidedly. "It's important that we see what Doris wrote to her mother though. I'm fond of the girl; I want to trust her and help her. That letter is the key to just how far we can allow our faith in her to go."

"Are you writing a book?" Marilyn asked. "You started that letter long before I began my shower."

"It's not that the letter is that long," Doris answered. "I just have to be careful how I word things."

"Oh! A 'dear John' letter," Marilyn wrongly guessed. "If he's good looking, send my picture along. I'm in between boyfriends at the moment."

Severus turned toward Marilyn, shaking his head at her comment. She picked just that moment to discard her towel. He quickly turned his head away, but not before seeing more than a Headmaster should.

"Harry! Please! We shouldn't be here," Severus implored. "I'll never be able to look at Miss Monroe again without feeling guilty and immoral."

"I know," he agreed, "but you have to read this before we leave."

Dear Mum and Dad,

"Before I say anything else, it's imperative that you know one thing. I love you both. I always have and I always will. Nothing could ever change that.

As far as making mistakes and doing stupid things goes, I can most certainly relate to that. I wasted six years at Hogwarts avoiding and shunning anyone that was not a pureblood. Only within the last year were my eyes opened to the fact that it is the person that is important, not their lineage.

I love you; I don't want anything to happen to either of you or to Hillary. You guys are my world,

but I'm not running away with you. Leaving would be the easy choice, but staying and fighting for what I believe is the right choice.

I'm not going to be someone's slave and I'm not going to stand by and watch good people be killed. I'm staying and I'm fighting. If I die, which I probably will, I'll die fighting alongside my friends for a better world, a world free of hatred and bigotry. I want my sister to come to a different Hogwarts, a united Hogwarts, and a Hogwarts where petty house bitterness no longer exists.

I pray that by the time she is a first year, the threat of Slytherin will have been eliminated and that we can all be a family once again.

I love you!

Doris

As the image of Doris faded, Harry felt himself rising into the air, Severus at his side. Soon all was blackness, and then he felt as though he were doing a slow-motion somersault, finally landing flat on his feet back in Snape's sunlit office. Severus Snape was standing beside him, a perplexed look on his face.

"You don't think Slytherin will approach you in regards to supporting him, do you?" Harry asked. Concern was evident on his face.

"I seriously doubt that," Severus said, forcing a weak smile. "Slytherin seems to be mainly attracted to past supporters of Voldemort and their descendants. I seriously doubt that he'd want a retired old spy, who was instrumental in bringing about Voldemort's final defeat, as a member of his legion."

Harry studied the headmaster's expression momentarily. "Then your chief concern is that he might try to draft some seventh years that are about to graduate, especially those with ties to former death eaters."

"Yes! I'm most certainly concerned about the students," Severus replied. "And also the staff."

At first Harry just stared at Snape. *The staff?* Then his brain finally shifted into gear. "Draco!"

"I saw you and Tyler sitting together at the practice session," Kim taunted.

"We weren't sitting together." Emily corrected her. "We were simply sitting beside each other."

Kim looked skeptically at Emily. "Would you mind explaining the difference?"

"You have a propensity to use the word 'together' to indicate a relationship," Emily answered sharply. "We did not go to the practice session as a couple and we did not sit together. I arrived first and initially sat alone. When Tyler arrived, he politely asked if he could sit and talk with me. I graciously said yes. Don't try to make more of it than there was."

"You can gloss over it if you like," Kim persisted, "but when it started to rain; the two of you were sitting so close that I couldn't have wedged a Knut between you."

Emily blushed. "Tyler was just being nice and sharing his robes. I was only covered by the concealment charm and I got rather cold when it began to rain."

Kim shook her head and then looked skyward. "What are you trying to do, drive the poor boy crazy? You refuse to be his girlfriend, you refuse to go to the Yule Ball with him, but you let him hold you in his arms when you are totally starkers." Kim lowered her head and continued to shake it in frustration. "Tyler is probably suffering from a massive case of 'blue balls' as we speak."

"Suffering from what?" Emily asked innocently.

It was Kim's turn to blush. "I'm a few chapters ahead in our sex education book," she confessed.

"How many?" Emily asked.

"I finished it last night," Kim admitted. "Anyway, 'blue balls' is a term used to describe the condition that occurs when a guy gets extremely aroused but doesn't get to ejaculate. It goes away fairly quickly, but can be extremely uncomfortable for a time."

"Why are you looking at me that way?" Emily asked. "I didn't tell him to have a stiffy. What was I suppose to do about it, masturbate him to orgasm?"

"Of course not. But it's cruel to lead him on and continually build up his hopes," Kim said. "Why don't you reconsider and go to the Yule Ball with him?"

"Even if I wanted to, I couldn't," Emily said resolutely although Kim was sure she caught a hint of regret in Emily's eyes. "We both have dates. He's going with Denise and I'm.... Well, my invitation was accepted."

"Emily! I thought we were best friends?" Kim questioned. "When are you going to tell me who you asked to the Ball?"

Emily hesitated. She wanted to share her secret with someone, but she couldn't risk the information getting back to Harry and Hermione. She was worried about their reaction.

"If I say who I'm taking, will you swear not to tell a soul?" Emily asked.

"Do I really have to answer that?" Kim asked. "After all we've been through, I'd hope you'd know that you can trust me with any secret."

Emily took a deep breath. "I asked Roger."

"Roger, as in Roger Fortescue?" Kim asked. "The jerk... ahh -- clerk from the ice cream shop in Hogsmeade. But isn't he over twenty?"

"It doesn't matter," Emily said defensively. "Headmaster Snape said that we could invite Hogwarts graduates as our dates."

"I kind of think he meant that more for a seventh year to invite someone who only left school last year. I doubt he meant for a second year to invite a twenty year old," Kim exploded.

"Well, he didn't say we couldn't," Emily said haughtily. "Besides what's the big deal about eight years age difference? Wizards often marry witches much more than eight years their junior."

"Something like that is looked upon much differently once both parties are past legal age and considered adults," Kim declared. "It just isn't right for an adult to want to date a minor."

"Are you saying I look like a little girl?" Emily protested.

"No! Not at all! Actually, I think your figure is going to rival Jamie's in a few more years. It's just that..." Kim shilly-shallied; she was not quite sure how to proceed. "If Roger wants to take you out because of your physical attributes, that makes the situation even worse. He shouldn't be thinking about you like that."

"Don't you consider that double standards?" Emily asked. "You were just defending and feeling sorry for Tyler because I gave him a douse of 'blue balls', but if Roger gets a stiffy looking at me, he's a pervert."

"No, he's not a pervert if he gets slightly aroused looking at you," Kim clarified. "He's human and you're attractively appealing. He's only a pervert if he keeps looking and takes actions on his desires."

"In that case you are prejudging him," Emily affirmed. "Roger has never touched me or even said anything out of line. He's always been a perfect gentleman around me. You should read his response to me. He was absolutely thrilled that I asked him. Roger is so happy in fact, that he offered to buy me a dress for the occasion; not just any dress, but an original from the House of Gayee in Paris. I had to send them a whole bunch of measurement since I can't go for a fitting. He even wanted my shoe size."

"Maybe, I'm judging him wrong," Kim admitted. "Originals from a Paris fashion house can be very pricey; he must genuinely like you. It was wrong of me to prejudge and categorize him." Kim thought for a while. "I can't remember where, but I think I've heard of the House of Gayee."

"Then you promise not to tell anyone?" Emily asked nervously.

"As long as you promise to let me be the first to see the dress when it arrives," Kim said. "Speaking of which, how are you going to explain that you don't need a dress for the Ball?"

"I told Mum that in order to cut down on expenses, I was willing to wear Jamie's dress from two years ago. She said that it wasn't necessary, but I convinced her that I loved the dress and really wanted to wear it."

"The Slytherin in you is showing," Kim replied. "Exactly how do you intend to keep Roger a secret? Won't they ask who is taking you?"

"They already have and I told them I was going with Mr. Fortescue's son," Emily answered. "I think they assumed that I meant Darryl who is a fourth year in Ravenclaw."

"So what happens when they see you with Roger the night of the ball?" Kim inquired.

"I'm sure I'll be punished, but they won't make a scene at the Ball; they aren't like that. I'm not going to worry about the consequences beforehand; doing that would ruin the evening."

* * * * *

"Ron, stop sitting and sulking," Sam insisted. "You should be happy for your sister, not acting like it's the end of the world."

"How can I be happy?" Ron protested. "She's pregnant and planning to marry Draco Malfoy. I know he's changed somewhat since we were in school together, but I can't disregard how big a git he was."

Ron looked disbelievingly at Sam. "I can't believe you've become a Draco supporter. Have you forgotten that it was he that impregnated you and then just disappeared from your life?"

"I haven't forgotten, and perhaps under different circumstances, I wouldn't be so forgiving," Sam responded. "You have no one but yourself to blame for how I feel. I have a wonderful, loving husband and Timmy has a terrific adoring Dad. What would I gain by harboring hatred for Draco? Besides, that Draco no longer exists."

"I wish I had your conviction," Ron retorted. "I keep having dreams about Ginny waking up and finding Malfoy gone. I'm frightened he'll do the same to her that he did to you."

"No! It won't happen," Sam said, shaking her head with conviction. "Different times, different feelings and different girls. When Draco and I first crossed paths he was carefree and simply spreading his wild seed. Where I saw love and a lifetime relationship, he saw sex and an easy one-night shag. I'm not sure what caused the change, but Draco isn't the same person he was and Ginny isn't me. He loves Ginny. I think he'd rather die than hurt her or see her placed in harms way."

"I'd have no problem with him dying," Ron confessed. "However, the timing could have been better; you know, like before he knocked up my little sister."

"Ron, he's going to be your brother-in-law," Sam reminded. "For Ginny's sake try to forget the past and give him a second chance."

Ron just stared at Sam in disbelief. If ever the term 'easier said than done' applied, it was now.

* * * * *

It was never planned, but Harry and Hermione had drifted into a regular routine. They went to bed early each evening so that they could cuddle in each other's arms as they updated each other on the events of the day. Then before going to sleep they would always make love. It had become so much a part of their lives that now neither could envision being able to sleep without first giving pleasure to the other. Tonight might be an exception.

"How did it go this afternoon?" Harry asked. "Did you get all the interment arrangements made?"

"Yes," Hermione answered sadly. "It was tough on all of us. Obviously for Doris, but it also brought back depressing memories for both Jamie and I. I dread the actual burials."

"What about her sister's remains?" Harry inquired. "Has a decision been reached on how best to give her a proper burial?"

Hermione nodded her head, and then closed her eyes. She rubbed her forehead as if in pain. "Hillary

should be buried in the family plot next to her parents," Hermione said, sadly. "But since the ministry is feigning that she has been kidnapped, that's impossible. Severus has suggested that she be buried initially in the Hogwarts cemetery and later, when appropriate, be moved."

Hermione started to cry. "Doris wants to see the Oh! Harry! She wants to see the head before we bury it. She says that she has to know it's really Hillary and not just a twig."

"I wouldn't be willing to take anyone else's word either," Harry, said glumly. "Maybe she should see first hand the horrors that Slytherin and his henchmen are capable of committing."

"Harry, she's just a young girl," Hermione begged.

"Not anymore," Harry disagreed. "Slytherin has taken away what remained of her youth. I'm afraid that before this war ends many children will be robbed of their youth. I'm going to recommend that Doris be accepted into the Order of the Phoenix,"

"But she is so young and still in school," Hermione argued.

"Her sister was just a child. That didn't stop those bastards from killing her," Harry retorted. "Unlike the war with Voldemort, this war won't have a neutral ground; Slytherin has already made that clear. When asked, you either join him, thus entering a life of eternal servitude, or you die. The day Doris graduates, she's going to be given that choice."

"Isn't there something we can do to protect her?" Hermione asked.

"Very little!" Harry answered. "Once students leave the protection of Hogwarts, they are basically on their own. Doris won't be the only one facing this choice. At first, it may only be students whose parents once showed allegiance to Voldemort, but in time, as Slytherin's legions increase, I'm sure all graduating students will be approached."

"Sick, but ingenious," Hermione commented. "If the child joins, Slytherin has a foothold into getting the entire family. If the child refuses, he kills them, thereby giving the family a warning of what will happen if they don't submit to him."

"Harry! He could win without a war ever actually taking place," Hermione said, trepidation evident in her voice.

"Exactly!" Harry declared, a bitter taste lingering in his mouth. "Worse, the Ministry is actually helping him by hiding the truth from the public. The more atrocities they hide, the stronger he will become."

"Since all of Fudge's decrees were abolished, the Ministry has no say in what takes place at Hogwarts; perhaps the curriculum should be adjusted to better prepare the older students for the contingency," Hermione suggested.

"Severus and I discussed that earlier today," Harry enlightened Hermione. "We want to make changes in the program, but at the same time we don't want to train those that may one day be fighting against us. Remember how we anguished over who to allow in the D.A."

Hermione nodded her head. "Not all Slytherins are bad and not all Gryffindors are good. The same holds true for the other houses. How are you and Severus going to determine who is friend and who is foe?"

"Unfortunately, we can't be one hundred percent sure," Harry said. "Even Dumbledore made mistakes; he allowed Peter Pettigrew to become a member of the Order. The plans are to increase defensive training for all students. If we are confident of a student's allegiance, for example Jamie and Alex, they will be offered membership in the Order."

Hermione seemed slightly relieved. "I take it then that you are only considering select seventh years for induction into the Order?"

"For the most part," Harry agreed, "but exceptions will be made. Caitlin and Emily should be allowed to join. After all, they're part of the Prophecy."

"My god, Harry! Have you lost all priority?" Hermione cried. "They're just little girls."

"Little girls, I might remind you, who have already suffered once in the clutches of evil. I refuse to treat them the way Dumbledore treated me. I will not keep them in the dark for years like he did me. If we are to defeat Slytherin, it will only be with their help. They deserve to be familiar with what actions the Order of the Phoenix is taking."

"What about Draco and Ginny?" Hermione asked heatedly. "They're a part of the Prophecy and they're also adults. If you're so eager to add members to the order, why haven't they been asked to join?"

Harry's face turned somber. "Severus and I are concerned that Draco might have already joined the other side," he answered dejectedly.

"You can't be serious," Hermione huffed. "I know his father was highly ranked in Voldemort's legion, but Draco isn't like his father. Harry, he is going to marry Ginny Weasley, she's pregnant with his child."

"I know," he responded, sorrowfully. "All that makes what Severus and I learned today that more serious. Slytherin is contacting all former Death Eaters and their offspring and asking them to pledge their loyalty to his cause. The choices are unswerving devotion to the Darkest Lord or Death."

"Of course, you and Severus automatically assumed that Draco has joined with Slytherin," Hermione huffed furiously. "Neither one of you once considered that he might not have been approached yet; that he might not want to join Slytherin's followers; that he might need our help."

"We just thought..."

"I know what you thought," Hermione interrupted crossly. "Did either of you even consider approaching the man and asking if he needed help?" Hermione jumped out of bed without waiting for a response and headed for the door. "Because he's not dead, you automatically assume he's joined Slytherin."

"Where are you going?" Harry cried out.

"To talk to Draco. One of us should at least give him the benefit of the doubt. Or in Draco's case, do you and Severus consider him guilty until proven innocent?" Hermione asked.

"Wait, I'll go with you," Harry called. "Let me take a moment to check the Marauders' Map. We

don't want to barge in on Draco and Ginny doing anything kinky. Besides, don't you think you should slip some clothing on before going any place?"

Hermione blushed, but instead of immediately grabbing her robes she followed Harry to check the map.

"How close are the dots?" Hermione asked.

"Not close at all," he answered. "Ginny is in their quarters, but Draco appears to be at the top of the Astronomy Tower."

"The Astronomy tower?" Hermione repeated questioningly. "Draco's never had any interest in the stars, besides it's still raining."

Harry looked at the map, a horrified expression on his face. "Draco's dot just moved from the middle of the tower to the extreme edge. You don't think he could possibly be considering jumping, do you?"

Harry looked up, waiting for Hermione's answer, but all he saw was her bare arse streaking out the door of their quarters.

Chapter Fifteen Life Goes On

"I never knew this room was here," Doris said, softly as she looked up and down the long hallway. "Is it generally used to provide somewhere for guests to stay?"

"I only learned of its existence last year," Jamie admitted. "It's called the Room of Requirement. It only appears when it's needed. Harry found out about its existence during his fifth year when he used it to hold secret Defense Against the Dark Arts meetings. Hermione suggested that you and I might want to spend the night here."

"She's wise beyond her years, isn't she?" Doris asked. "Leave it to her to know that I'd want to get away from people tonight, but yet not want to be completely alone. Jamie, I'm so very glad you and I became friends." Doris reached out and briefly touched Jamie's hand before they entered the room.

Tonight the room had converted itself into sumptuous sleeping quarters. It was decorated in an especially cheery way and contained two oversize beds. On each bed there laid dressing gowns and nightclothes. There was an attached bath and even a small fully stocked kitchen.

"This is some room," Doris said, looking around in amazement. "Have you personally ever used it before?"

Jamie blushed profoundly. "Alex and I come here occasionally," she admitted.

Doris felt awkward. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to pry into your private life."

"You're not prying," Jamie said, reassuringly. "It's certainly no secret that Alex and I have slept together. My sisters know, and it was actually Hermione that recommended this room for my first time together with Alex."

"Professor Granger helped arrange a place for you to have sex?" Doris asked in disbelief. "My mother and I are close, but I don't think I'd ever be able to talk to her about my sex life; not that I have one."

Suddenly Doris realized what she had just said and started to sob. "I'll never be able to talk to her about anything, ever again."

"I still talk to my Mum and Dad," Jamie said unashamedly. "It's not the same; they can't answer back or give me a reassuring touch, but I know they're still watching over me. A person never completely dies as long as someone still loves them and thinks about them. I'm never going to let my parents fully die."

Doris nodded, but didn't respond. Then, after a brief silence she walked over to one of the beds and picked up the dressing gown and nightclothes. "I imagine these were provided for us?" she said. "It's been a long, difficult day. I think I'll get ready to go to bed."

Jamie watched sadly as her friend entered the bathroom and closed the door. She knew how Doris felt; the loss of her own parents was still quite fresh in her mind. She wished there was something she could say, something she could do, to lessen the grief, but she knew there wasn't. Only time would ease the pain, but not even time would ever fully eliminate the hurt and loss. Doris had not only lost her parents, but also her younger sister; she was totally alone.

Jamie looked dejectedly at the sleeping attire lying on her bed. She loathed all clothing, but she especially hated having to dress to sleep. It was so much more comfortable to sleep nude. She glanced at the bathroom door. Now was not the time to think of her personal comfort. She was here to console Doris, not to make her feel ill at ease.

After quickly shedding her garments, Jamie momentarily stood naked staring at the nightwear the room had provided. *"Nobody wears baby doll pajamas any longer,"* she said to herself picking up the frilly piece of clothing with matching pink panties.

Just as she was about to slip it over her head, Doris came back into the room. "I haven't worn one of these things since I was five," she said before stopping in her tracks and staring momentarily at Jamie before turning her head.

"Are you actually going to wear yours?" Doris asked in surprise, not looking at Jamie. "I thought you were a nudist. Don't you as a rule sleep in the all together."

"Normally," Jamie admitted, "but under the circumstances, I didn't want to add to your torment by making you feel ill at ease."

"I appreciate that," Doris replied sincerely, "but after all you've done for me, the very least I can do is allow you to have a comfortable night's sleep. Besides, we're both girls. It's not like you have any parts that I haven't seen or don't have."

Doris grabbed a quick peek at Jamie then added, "Although on you everything tends to look somewhat more enhanced."

Jamie blushed slightly as she hustled to get under the covers. She wasn't embarrassed to be seen naked, but discussions about her physical build tended to make her feel self-conscious.

There were a few minutes of awkward silence and then Jamie heard Doris' muffled sobs. "What am I going to do?" Doris cried. "I've lost my entire family and they'll be coming for me next. Jamie, I'm scared. I can't be one of them, but I don't want to die."

Without thinking, Jamie leapt from her bed and darted to Doris, enveloping the girl in a comforting hug. "You're not going to die. We'll protect you," Jamie said reassuringly.

"Harry and Hermione are already making plans for your security," Jamie confided. "You focus on laying your family to rest."

"Jamie?" Doris asked quietly. "Would it be asking too much for you to sleep with me tonight? I don't want to be alone and it's comforting being held by you."

"I'm not going anywhere," Jamie said, nestling Doris' trembling body into her arms and kissing her cheek supportively.

* * * * *

"I was hoping Jamie would be here tonight," Caitlin said, climbing into her bed. "I wanted to talk to her about what happened today."

"Is there a reason you can't talk to me?" Emily asked, sounding hurt.

"It's about Evan and you'll just make fun of me," Caitlin responded.

"Why would I make fun of you?" Emily asked. "I think the runt is kind of cute."

"He is not a runt; he's sweet," Caitlin retorted.

"He's a first year and nearly a foot shorter than you."

"Last year at this time you were a first year; or have you forgotten," Caitlin retorted. "At least he's not a perverted cradle robber. You invited that arse, Roger, to the Yule Ball, didn't you?"

"What makes you think that," Emily asked feigning innocence.

"Well, for one thing I happen to know who Darryl Fortescue is actually taking to the Ball and it isn't you," Caitlin said pompously.

Emily looked at Caitlin, panic evident in her eyes. "Please don't tell Mum and Dad," she begged.

"If I did, it would be in your own best interest." Caitlin affirmed. "Mum and Dad are going to kill you when they find out. Besides, all Roger wants is to shag you."

"That's not true," Emily insisted. "He has never even as much as tried to touch me and I seriously doubt he wants to end up in Azkaban for rape. He knows that I'm only twelve."

"Then why on earth is he going out with you?" Caitlin asked.

Emily's eyes became teary. "Am I that awful a person? Did you ever consider that maybe he just likes me for me?" Emily shook her head in dismay. "Did you ask Evan to the Ball so you could shag him?"

"Of course not," Caitlin proclaimed. "He's just a friend."

"And I'm not allowed to have friends?" Emily asked, a hurt look on her face.

Caitlin looked at the floor and gritted her teeth. "I won't say anything to Mum and Dad, but be careful. You know it's not the same."

"So what happened today between you and the Munchkin?" Emily asked, trying to get off the subject of Roger.

Caitlin blushed. "We took a shower together."

"You did what?" Emily said aghast.

"It's not like it sounds," Caitlin answered defensively. "Evan and I had made plans to meet after the tournament practice. I wanted to talk to him in private. We ran to the Quidditch changing rooms for some shelter from the rain. We were both soaked and freezing, so I suggested we take a shower."

"Together!" Emily cried in amazement. "You took a shower with mini man?" Matt is going to kill both of you when he finds out."

"It's none of Matt's business what I do. More to the point, it wasn't anything sexual," Caitlin tried to explain. "We weren't in a tiny stall where we constantly rubbed against each other. Each of us had our own shower head and the only time we touched was when I asked him to scrub my back."

"He scrubbed your back?" Emily asked, still dumbfounded. "I bet he would have much rather scrubbed your front."

"Probably," Caitlin admitted blushing, "but what's important is that he didn't try. He didn't venture anywhere even close. Afterwards, we just sat and talked for over an hour, both of us still unclothed. I was really comfortable around him and I think he felt likewise."

"What did you talk about?" Emily inquired.

"Well as you already know, I asked him to accompany me to the Yule Ball. But I explained that it would only be as friends," Caitlin clarified. "I didn't want him getting the wrong idea."

"I'm sure he won't," Emily said, a deadpan expression on her face. "Showering with someone usually lets them know beyond a doubt that you're not the least bit attracted to them. Tell me something, and don't lie. Did you check out his equipment?"

Caitlin reddened. "Emily, please don't make fun, but he's still a boy. He doesn't show any signs of having reached puberty yet."

"But you're still attracted to him, aren't you? Emily persisted.

Caitlin shyly nodded her head.

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"I hate that little bitch," Denise said as she and Janice readied for bed. "Did you see how she was cuddling up to Tyler today? The tramp didn't want anything to do with him until I asked him to the Yule Ball, now she is clearly trying to worm her way back into his life."

"She doesn't have a chance," Janice said. "Tyler would never opt for her over you."

"I wish I shared your confidence," Denise confided, "but he's been goggle-eyed over her ever since he saw her naked in our first year."

Janice stared at Denise, a confused expression on her face. "What makes you think he ever saw her nude?"

Denise gave Janice a frustrated look. "Do I have to do all of your thinking for you? For god's sake, put two and two together. Have you ever seen the tart wear a bra or knickers, even with the skimpiest of outfits?"

Janice shook her head no, but remained silent.

"Don't you remember the initiation at the beginning of last year when the two of them had to enter the broom closet, strip down to their underwear, and then come out wearing the other's clothes?"

Janice this time nodded her head, but still remained silent.

Denise just stared at Janice in disbelief. "You're my best friend, but at times you are so thick. If you recall, they did switch clothes, which means she was in that closet naked with Tyler."

Janice's eyes widened as she finally comprehended. "Do you think that is why Tyler has been captivated by her all this time; because he's seen her nude?"

"I think that's part of the reason," Denise said.

"Then fight fire with fire," Janice said as if it was the obvious thing to do. "Let him see you naked."

"You've got to be kidding. I'm not going to stoop to her level," Denise said with a gasp. "Besides ..."

Janice interrupted. "Yeah, that might not be so good an idea. She has an appealing body for her age. Plus, she is totally smooth down south. I understand most guys prefer that."

Denise stared daggers at her friend. "I have just as fine a body as her, but I refuse to use those tactics. What's more, even if I wanted to, the idea is impractical. I can't just walk up to Tyler and flash him."

"Then what are you going to do? Janice inquired. "Are you going to let him feel you up?"

"No," Denise shouted, thankful that she and Janice were alone in the dorm. "I'm not going to lower myself to her standards. Somehow I have to destroy that ivory tower on which Tyler has placed her. He sees her as something special. I have to wipe out the goddess-like impression he has of her."

"How are you going to manage to do that?" Janice asked.

"Unfortunately I haven't figured that out yet," Denise sighed. "But it will be good, I promise you that. I'm going to humiliate that girl so bad that she'll transfer to another school."

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"Damn Hogwarts and its anti-apparition charms," Hermione thought as she ran from the apartment.

The staff quarters and the Astronomy Tower were located at opposite ends of the castle. If she had on her trainers, Hermione doubted she could run the distance in less than ten minutes; in her bare feet, covering the expanse over the cold rough stone floors would take even longer. Could she possibly make it in time? The Marauders map had made it appear as if Draco were about to jump.

The staircase seemed endless as Hermione haphazardly sprinted down the steps, her breasts undulating with each footstep. Finally she reached the bottom, but just as she turned to head down the corridor, she collided with something unseen. She fell to the ground, her hands barely catching her in time to avoid her face smashing into the hard stone floor. Her legs were flailing in the air, whatever she had collided with implanted between them.

Only once she returned to a standing position did she realize what she had run into.

"Professor Flitwick, I'm so sorry," she said, flushing as she became cognizant of just where the

professor's face had been entrapped. "Please forgive me, it's an emergency," she shouted as she turned to run off. "It's Draco! Get Severus and hurry to the Astronomy Tower."

Before he could question why, she was gone. The tiny professor slowly got to his feet trying to work out what exactly had just occurred. Then he shook his head to clear it of thoughts and darted up the stairway.

When Hermione finally reached the top of the Astronomy Tower, it seemed like she had been running for hours. The rain had turned to a cold drizzle. At first glance she saw no one on roof of the tower. Slowly she walked toward the parapet, knowing she would have to look down, but fearing what she would see when she finally did.

Just as she was about to look over the edge, a voice called out from her left.

"Nice outfit Granger," Malfoy said. "I always did like the wet look."

"I wore it especially for you," she said. Hermione turned toward the sound of Draco voice and began to slowly walk toward him, not even attempting to hide her splendor from his gawking eyes.

"What are you doing up here?" Hermione asked. "It's rather difficult to star gaze on an overcast night."

"I could ask you the same question," Draco replied. "Do you normally roam so far from your lodgings starkers?"

"Only when I'm troubled that someone might be considering attempting something brainless," Hermione answered.

"What I do or don't do is my own business, Mudblood," Draco shouted. "Furthermore, even though you have extremely attractive features, it will take more than a Muggle tit and arse show to change a pureblood's mind once it is made up."

"I didn't come up here to give you a lap dance, Inbreed," Hermione snapped angrily. "I came to talk you out of making a huge mistake. Has all that interbreeding turned your mind to mush?"

"You don't know what the fuck you're talking about," Draco shouted. "You have no idea of the choices I'll be faced with. I don't want to die when I finally have something worth living for, but it is the only way out."

As they talked, Hermione had inched her way closer and closer to Draco. Now only a few feet separated them. Draco's back, however, was mere inches from the low tower wall. If startled in any way, he might back up and lose his footing.

"He'll be coming for me soon," Draco cried. "Don't you understand? If I don't serve him, he'll kill everyone I love. I can't let that happen."

Without warning Malfoy reached out and grabbed Hermione's bare breasts. "I always wanted to do that," he said, a devilish smirk on his face. "Look at the bright side Granger. I'll die with a smile on my face." He pushed away from Hermione and flipped backwards out of sight over the wall.

* * * * *

Wednesday, November 9, 2005

"I hate funerals," Emily said, wiping tears from her eyes. "I'm never going to another one as long as I live. They're too depressing."

Jamie placed her arm around her sister's shoulder. "They are depressing," Jamie agreed. "Even if the person being buried wasn't close to you, it's still disheartening. Funerals bring back memories of those you've lost and remind you just how fragile life is. Regrettably the healthier you are and the longer you live, the more loved ones you'll see put to rest."

"That's a pleasant thought," Emily said, sarcastically.

"I think the private ceremony after dusk tonight will be even more heartrending," Jamie said. "It's one thing for an adult to die, but it seems so unjust for a child to have her life ended before it has even truly begun, especially in such a gruesome way."

"How could anyone cut off somebody's head; it's inhumane?" Emily sobbed.

"Unfortunately in our world there are those that have no respect for life," Jamie said. "Some people can as easily kill another human being as you or I could trample on an insect. I doubt that the brute that killed little Hillary even lost a moments sleep over it."

Emily closed her eyes and shook her head. "I thought the atrocities of war were supposed to have ended with Voldemort's defeat. I guess I was wrong."

"I'm afraid evil will always exist in our world," Jamie replied sadly.

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"The lid of the casket is open," Caitlin cried, a horrified expression on her face. "Since they only recovered her head, I assumed it would be a closed casket viewing."

"That was the original plan," Harry said, "but Doris was adamant on seeing her sister one more time. With Sir Nicholas de Mimsy's aid, Professor Flitwick and your Mum were able to transfigure her a temporary body for the memorial service."

"They attached her head to another body?" Caitlin asked, horrified.

"Not exactly," Harry answered in a calming voice as he put his arm around Caitlin. "They didn't try to emulate Baron Von Frankenstein's work. The body is only a prosthetic facsimile to which the head was connected. That is why she is covered up to the neck. They simply wanted to give her as proper a burial as possible."

Caitlin nodded her understanding.

Since the Ministry was denying the death of little Hillary, her interment was being conducted in secrecy under the cover of darkness. In addition to Doris and the Potter family the only people attending were a few trusted Hogwarts faculty members and some members of The Order of the Phoenix.

"Death eventually comes to us all," Severus Snape stated as the mourners listened forlornly, "but its only cause should be old age. We live at a time when wizard kind has conquered disease; a time when all but the most serious injury can be cured by a mediwitch. Yet we find ourselves today mourning the death of a young child, a child whose life had barely begun.

"Hillary Burke was robbed of her existence because her parents loved her and wanted her to live a life of freedom in a world liberated of fear. Hillary was loved, but those who killed her find the mere concept of love alien. They live only to destroy and hate.

"I pray there is a God. I pray there is a heaven. And I pray that God has prepared a place for this little angel."

Hermione and Jamie accompanied Doris to the casket, where she kissed her sister's cheek one final time before the lid was closed.

* * * * *

"Are you sure you're up to this?" Jamie asked as she and Doris approached the Room of Requirement.

"No! Honestly I'm drained, but I have to attend," Doris admitted. "I need to be a part of the effort to defeat them. I have to do it for myself, for my parents, but mostly for Hillary. I have to help fight back."

The room they entered was much different than the one they had slept in the previous few nights. There were no beds, no bright cheerful colors. Instead there was a huge conference room with a magnificent round table. Harry ushered Jamie and Doris to chairs and then cleared his throat to get everyone's attention.

"It is getting late. Now that everyone is here, I suggest we get started immediately," Harry said, forcefully. He gave Doris a sympathetic smile and then continued. "I apologize for the timing of this meeting, but there are some matters we must address immediately. Since many Order members were attending the funeral, I felt it would save a trip. I realize that it might seem in bad taste to meet at this time, but Slytherin hasn't called a moratorium in his recruiting efforts."

"Harry, before you continue, may I ask a question?" Shacklebolt inquired.

Harry nodded his head.

"I understand that we all just left a funeral, but do you really feel that it is prudent to allow children, even your own, to attend a meeting of the Order? And what about him? His father was a Death Eater."

"They are the primary reason for this meeting," Harry answered. "We will forgo discussion on any other subjects until a decision is reached concerning them."

"What decision is that?" Shacklebolt asked.

"Whether or not they should be inducted as members."

"Harry, you can't be serious," Ron implored. "The Order has always required that members be of

age and out of school."

"I recall three exceptions to that rule," Harry said. "If I'm not mistaken you were one of those."

"You know very well that was under special circumstances," Ron emphasized. "Dumbledore only permitted you in because of the prophecy and Hermione and I because of our close liaison with you. But even so, that wasn't until the end of our sixth year. I can appreciate the value in considering exceptional seventh year students that we know can be trusted, but Emily and Caitlin are only twelve and thirteen. The order, after all, isn't a babysitting service."

"Too young to vote, but not too young to die," Harry said sorrowfully. "Hillary was only six. I'm not proposing that underage wizards and witches be accepted into the Order Carte Blanche, but like Dumbledore finally made an exception in our case, I feel we also have to make exceptions. It's obvious that Health and Sight in the prophecy refers to Caitlin and Emily. Slytherin can't be defeated without the aid of these girls. How can we ask them to risk their lives to save wizard kind and at the same time deny them access to information that might well save their lives?"

"THE STARS PROCLAIM THE RETURN OF THE GREATEST DARK LORD

FROM THE BLOOD OF INNOCENTS FOUR,
THE GREAT LORD SLYTHERIN'S SPIRIT SHALL POUR.
TWO OF HIS OWN, SEER AND HEIR,
TWO OF HIS ENEMIES, HEALER AND HEIR,
TWO DROPS OF EACH, NOT ANY MORE,

WITH THEIR DEATH BY HIS HAND,
TO HIS BODY HE WILL BE RETURNED,
TO WALK THE EARTH A MORTAL MAN,
BUT WHEN SLYTHERIN AND EVIL ARE JOINED,
NOT EVEN THE COVENANT WILL BRING THE RESULT DOWN.

THE DARKEST OF TIMES THEIR JOINING WILL BRING,
SORROW AND PAIN WILL OFT BE THE FAME.
MANY WILL DIE DREADING THE NAME,
SALAZAR SLYTHERIN.

THE WORLD WILL HAVE BUT ONE HOPE
AND THAT IS TWO CUBED TO EIGHT
WITH HEALTH AND SIGHT AND SPIRIT BRIGHT,
THE HEART AND SOUL AND MIND WILL ADD THEIR WEIGHT

BUT ONLY WHEN THE FLAMING DAUGHTER
AND MOONCHILD JOIN THE FRAY
CAN THE WORLD DEFEAT EVIL
AND RETURN SLYTHERIN TO HIS GRAVE"

"I'm with Harry," Tonks affirmed. "They may be young, but Caitlin and Emily have already faced greater peril than most full grown wizards have experienced. At their age, we most certainly can't expect them to stand beside us in battle, but because they are part of the prophecy, they should be privy to all Order knowledge and activity.

"Hermione, you've been uncharacteristically quiet thus far tonight," Severus said. "What say you on the subject?"

"Obviously, I have mixed emotions," Hermione answered, staring lovingly at her two girls. "They are my daughters, my little girls. My motherly instinct is to try and shield them from any possible danger, but we already know that is impossible.

"Just like Harry, when he was a baby, they have been named in a prophecy. Also, like Harry, they have been placed in a kill or be killed situation. Slytherin is going to want all eight persons named in the Prophecy either under his control or dead. On one hand, they are too young to be a part of The Order of the Phoenix: on the other hand they need the training and guidance the Order can provide if they are to have any chance of defeating the Darkest Lord."

"She's right," Sam declared. "We need them and they need us. Slytherin has already demonstrated that this war will have casualties of all ages; it's going to need soldiers of all ages, also."

Harry nodded his head in agreement. "Unless someone feels there is a need for further discussion, I'd like to call for a vote. All those willing to accept Caitlin Potter and Emily Zacherley-Potter as members of The Order of the Phoenix please indicate by raising your hand."

Harry counted the raised hands. "Those opposed!"

"Congratulations ladies!" Harry said. "You are now official members of The Order of the Phoenix." Both Emily and Caitlin responded in somewhat juvenile ways.

"Harry, can I assume that our other guests are also here to have their membership voted upon?" Snape inquired.

"That's correct," Harry replied.

Severus rubbed his chin, apparently deep in thought. "Since we have for all intents and purposes abolished the age restrictions for membership, I would like to sponsor Miss Zacherley and Miss Burke."

Harry gave Severus a grateful smile.

"These ladies have both been a credit to Hogwarts," Severus went on. "Both were house prefects and both made the short list for head girl. You all know Jamie; I don't think it's necessary to go into her history or to justify her qualifications.

"However, Doris is an unknown to many of you and she does come from the house that supplied a majority of Voldemort's supporters. But I guarantee you she is one of us. Harry and I visited her memories; I saw her reaction to the letter from her mum concerning the initial visit from Nott and I read her response. If my recommendation isn't enough, look at those two."

Severus indicated Jamie and Doris who were sitting with their hands unashamedly clutched tightly together on the table. "Females in the Zacherley family have an uncanny ability to judge people. Perhaps they have a touch of Kneazle blood in them," Severus said, giving Jamie a grin.

"Jamie, do you trust Doris?" Severus asked

"With my life," Jamie said, squeezing Doris's hand even tighter and giving her a heartening smile.

"That's certainly good enough for me," Severus said, giving the girls one of his no longer rare smiles.

Harry beamed when the voting was complete and both girls had received unanimous approval.

"That leaves us with one final candidate to vote for," Harry said.

"Of course, you saved the best for last," Draco said smugly.

"Harry, you can't be serious," Ron raged. "Not the 'ferret.' You can't possibly trust that git."

Ron received angry stares from both Ginny and Sam for his outburst.

"Surprisingly I do," Harry said. "Up until Saturday night I had some reservations, but not any longer."

"Skunks don't change their stripes," Ron fumed. "What could possibly happen in one night to erase over a decade of hate and deceit?"

"He tried to kill himself in order to protect Ginny and their baby," Harry said calmly.

Draco seemed to be closely studying the texture of the table's wood grain, avoiding the stares of everyone present. Ginny held his hand tightly between her two small pale palms.

"Good grief Harry! The bastard has been play-acting for years," Ron protested. "Think back to third year; how he tried to get Hagrid fired and Buckbeak executed. He'd never do the world the favor of doing away with himself."

"He certainly tried Saturday," Harry said resolutely and then with Hermione's help began to tell the story.

"... When I saw him disappear over the wall, I was certain he would die," Hermione said. "I had no idea that Harry had flown to the Astronomy Tower and positioned himself just below Draco and out of my sight."

"He fell directly into my arms," Harry said. "It all transpired so fast that I don't think Draco at first comprehended what was happening. I had him back on the tower and secured with a binding charm just before Professor Flitwick arrived with Ginny and Severus."

"Once again, the Great Harry Potter saves the day," Draco drawled sarcastically. "All you've done is delay the inevitable and place Ginny's life in jeopardy."

"Draco, suicide isn't the answer, it never is," Ginny pleaded, tears filling her eyes. "The order will help us."

"Like they helped her parents and sister?" Draco said furiously, looking toward Doris. "He's not going to be stopped, can't you understand that. You only have two choices; join Slytherin's ranks or die. If I have to die, I'd rather it be at a time and a place of my own choosing; not after I've been forced to witness the torture and death of the only person that has ever truly loved me."

"There is a third choice," Harry said serenely. "You could join us and help defeat him."

Draco shook his head as a smile covered his face. "I've never met anyone as arrogant as you Potter. Keep sending the evil villains," Draco shouted. "The Great Harry Potter is invincible, he'll defeat all comers. You won't win this time Potter; he's too strong. Even with her undying love as a weapon," he looked toward Hermione, "you have no chance."

"Maybe, not alone, but the prophecy says the new covenant of eight can defeat him."

"That is assuming that he can be located while all eight members are still alive. Don't you understand the clock is ticking? Nott visited me last week," Draco informed the group. "It wasn't my official visit. He came to see me because we were friends in school. He advised me that I might obtain some ranking if I volunteered to join before I was drafted. I was told to not think about it too long because my name was rapidly nearing the top of the list."

"Nott made one thing extremely clear. No one turns down Slytherin and lives. Burke's family isn't the first to die. It's only the first you're aware of."

"Then I think it's clear what you must do," Harry said, after a few moments of thought. "You must contact Nott tomorrow and inform him that you want to join Slytherin's cause, but first, tonight you must swear your allegiance to The Order of the Phoenix."

For a short time the room remained silent as everyone digested Harry's words.

"You want me to be a spy for the Order?" Draco muttered, shaking his head in disbelief. "If he finds out, he'll kill me and Ginny, too."

"Draco, don't you understand. Even if you had been successful at committing suicide, he would still have tried to kill Ginny," Harry explained. "Even though you'd be in your grave, he'd still want to exact his revenge on you."

* * * * *

"Thanks for playing the Devil's Advocate tonight," Harry said as he and Ron walked the grounds. "I know Kingsley and some of the others would have concerns about Caitlin and Emily being admitted to the Order, but they never would have voiced them. Hopefully now they understand and accept the reasoning behind my wanting them to be members."

"You will explain to Sam and Hermione that it was your idea for me to act as if I were against their being allowed to join?" Ron asked. "Sam was sort of giving me that 'you're sleeping on the couch tonight' look."

Harry laughed. "I'll talk to her," he said.

For a moment they walked in silence. "Do you actually trust him?" Ron asked.

"I believe he loves Ginny and will do whatever necessary to protect her and the child she is carrying," Harry answered.

"That doesn't answer my question," Ron persisted. "What if he decides that his stronger hand is to throw his support to Slytherin? He could destroy the Order single-handed."

"Then our deaths will come sooner than expected," Harry said sorrowfully. "You know as well as I that the Flaming Daughter and the Moonchild are Ginny and Draco. Without them standing by our sides we have no hope of defeating Slytherin."

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Saturday, November 12, 2005

Jamie was shocked as she entered the Great Hall. The four long houses tables that had occupied the Hall for all of her years at Hogwarts were gone. In their place were five huge round tables arranged in the same way as the dots on dice. The tables sort of looked like large letter Qs. The centers of the tables were cut out and the bottom notched so that students could sit on either side of the circle.

The center table, which was larger than the other four, remained empty. Each house had claimed one of the outside tables. Unusual too, was the absence of food or drink on the tables. Breakfast and lunch, especially on Saturday and Sunday, were much less formal than dinner, when the food magically appeared all at once. Normally the students came and went on their own schedule. Today it seemed that breakfast was not going to be served until the majority of the students were in attendance. Just as Jamie was about to ask Alex if he knew what was going on, Headmaster Snape got to his feet and the Hall became quiet.

"When you all first arrived at Hogwarts, as nervous first years, you were given a little talk about the various houses. You were informed that your house would be something like your family within Hogwarts. You would have classes with the rest of your house, sleep in your house dormitory, and spend free time in your house common room.

"Up until today you also enjoyed your meals with members of your house. Yes, on rare occasions some of you have been brave enough to sit at another house table with a friend, but those instances have been all too rare. Sadly, many of you have not gotten to properly know three quarters of your fellow students.

"I see that each house has laid claim to one of the corner tables. This is fine! We are often most comfortable around those we are most familiar with. However, I encourage you to use the community table in the middle of the Hall. Spend some time with friends from other houses; make new friends. I look to the prefects and the head boy and girl to help me in this effort to bolster unity."

"What a marvelous idea," Jamie declared. "Amanda, please come with me, I'm going to get Doris. Alex, why don't you ask some of your Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw friends to sit with us?"

"Must you be a prefect or can I go get Kim and Emily," Caitlin asked excitedly.

"The headmaster just wants us to get things started," Jamie advised. "Go get Kim and your sister."

"What the hell is happening to this place," Dick declared to anyone willing to listen. "Just when I think it can't get any worse, it does. Well, I'm staying right where I am. I'll be damned if I'm going to get chummy with any of the riff raff."

* * * * *

"Are you nervous about today's training session?" Kim asked as she and Caitlin walked toward the Quidditch Pitch.

"Not really," Caitlin answered, "the way Mr. Simone talked it's just going to be more of those stupid 'get to know you' games. I'm anxious to see what the real challenges will be like."

"Me too. Eager, but nervous at the same time," Kim said.

"I just hope the sun comes out. I'm freezing," Caitlin said. "My goose bumps have goose bumps."

"Me too," Kim whispered. "I guess that's a disadvantage of the concealment charm; at least we could have cast a warming charm on the costume."

"Not that it would have done much good. There is hardly any material to cast a warming charm on," Caitlin said with a laugh. "I'll check with Mum. There has to be some sort of warming charm that can be applied to the human body without burning it to a crisp."

"Caitlin, don't look now, but that group of fifth year boys is really checking us out," Kim whispered.

Caitlin laughed. "If they like the view in these costumes, imagine if they could see us as we really are, just socks and trainers."

Kim blushed. "Caitlin, if I tell you something, will you promise not to tell a soul."

"Yes, as long as it doesn't involve you performing any unforgivable curses on anybody," Caitlin said with a laugh.

"I can't believe this!" Kim said. "I'm embarrassed to tell you."

"Out with it!"

"Those guys! I'd rather that they had seen me nude then in this decadent outfit," Kim admitted. "I'm ashamed to be seen in this."

Caitlin smiled. "It's official," she said. "You're one of us, you're a naturist. You've learned that being nude is not dirty or sexual." Caitlin laughed. "But I'm afraid those guys would have had dirty and sexual thoughts no matter how we were dressed."

"Caitlin, do you have a minute?" Matt asked running up to the two girls. "We need to talk."

"We better hurry," Kim cried. "It looks like they're ready to start."

"Matt, I can't now, we're late, but if you meet me after the session we can talk," Caitlin said sincerely.

Matt nodded his head as Kim and Caitlin both began to sprint toward their teammates.

"Did you see that Eric?" Rishard said in disgust as Kim and Caitlin reached the other Hogwarts champions. "How are they doing it? It should be impossible to run like that without their little tits popping out."

"I agree," Eric said, frustration evident in his voice, "but they didn't and I suggest you find out why and find it out fast. We are paying you big bucks to deliver us nudity. We can get young girls in scanty costumes at any local beauty pageant. For your sake, there better be some tits and pussy on display today."

"There will be, I'm sure there will be," Rishard guaranteed nervously as Eric returned to his seat in the stands.

"Both teams are assembled and ready whenever you are Mr. Simone," Harry said as he approached Rishard.

"Thank you, Harry!" Rishard said. His eyes caressed Harry as they always did, but this time his mind seemed preoccupied. Suddenly he seemed to come out of his stupor. "Yes! Yes! Well on with the show."

Rishard drew out his wand, directed it at his throat, and said "Sonorus." Everyone in the stands could now hear his every word. He looked up at the sky.

"Hopefully we'll be able to complete our exercises today without any unwelcome rain," he said with a nervous laugh. "These exercises might seem easy and in some cases silly, but they serve an important purpose. They allow you to get acquainted with your teammates and to learn to fully trust them.

"It will be critical that you have full faith in your teammates when we start the actual competition. Our first exercise today is known as the Trust Fall. As you can see, we have erected two platforms, one for each team. These platforms are five and a half feet off the ground and large enough for two people to stand on. You will take turns climbing to the top of the platform and then jumping into the arms of your waiting teammates. Your coach will stand with you to give you encouragement and to ensure that your teammates are prepared. Do not jump headfirst or feet first. The members of your team will be in two lines ready to receive you. You want to arrive in their arms as prone as possible."

"Why do I have the feeling that Dick Bancroft is going to be concentrating more on getting a quick feel than on preventing us from hitting the ground?" Jamie asked.

Caitlin laughed. "Because you know the true deviate that's hidden behind that school boy facade. How do you think everyone will react to holding us in their arms naked?"

"I think it will take a little getting used to, but Lee, Don and Jeff seem pretty cool. I think they'll be okay. Dick, on the other hand is a big question mark," Jamie remarked. "I can't picture him being anything other than a jerk."

"Now if you'll all pay attention, I'll walk both teams through this the first time," Rishard advised. "Let's have the lightest member of each team on the platform first."

"That's you, Caitlin," most of the Hogwarts team said concurrently.

Rishard watched in disquiet as Caitlin, without a concern, climbed up the ladder to the platform. Although the costume provided a brilliant view of young arse, her adolescent breasts seemed quite content to remain covered. This was not going at all as planned and Simone knew his backers would not be happy.

Debby likewise reached the top of the American platform without a mishap. Rishard began to panic; what if they went through the entire exercise without any exposure. He didn't even want to consider how Eric and the other sponsors would react.

Once the coaches took their position next to the girls on the stand, Rishard showed the other seven players on each team how to line up to take delivery of their jumping teammate.

The three players on each side of the two lines joined hands with their counterpart in the parallel line. The idea was for the player on the tower to lunge forward so that they landed chest down on the outstretched arms of their teammates. A faultless catch would have the jumping player landing on arms positioned at their chest, waist and knees. The seventh player stood at the front of the two lines as a safety measure. Their job was to insure that the jumping player's head was protected in case there was an error. As silly and simple as this drill was, hitting the ground headfirst could have tragic results.

"When you are lined up properly and ready to take delivery of your jumper, start encouraging them to relax and leap," Rishard instructed the contestants. "Coaches, you should also encourage your player on the platform to relax and trust their teammates."

Harry had to do more restraining than encouraging; Caitlin was ready to leap before her catchers were even in position. Although Caitlin didn't appear the least bit nervous, most of her catchers did, with the notable exception of Dick Bancroft. Dick was positioned across from Kim in the chest support position. Jamie was at the front ready to prevent any head injury.

A feeling of revulsion swept through Kim as she clutched hands with Dick. He had this nasty look on his face. Kim got the impression that Dick was more interested in fondling Caitlin than he was in safely catching her.

Harry looked down on his team. "Everybody ready?" he asked. "How about you?" Caitlin gave the only father she had ever known an enthusiastic thumbs up. "Then jump!"

Caitlin was standing at the edge of the platform. She leaned back and then without hesitation thrust herself forward. Her body was perfectly prone when she reached the awaiting arms, but she had misjudged the strength of her lunge. She completely overshot Nora and Lee who were positioned to catch her legs; they instead fell on the arms of Don and Jeff, leaving Kim and Dick to catch her entire torso. Because of her light weight, they were able to hold her, although for a few frightening seconds it looked like Jamie might be the only thing preventing Caitlin from hitting the ground head first.

Caitlin quickly wriggled free. Once her feet hit the ground, she turned and gave Dick a penetrating, disgusted look. He returned a wily, evil smile that was quickly whipped off his face by a vicious slap.

Few noticed the slap as their attention was now on Debby, who was about to jump. Jamie, however, hadn't missed her sister's outrage and quickly approached her.

"What happened?" she asked urgently.

"That prick fondled me," she answered. "Worse than that, he tried to finger me, too."

"Are you positive?" Jamie asked in shock. She had always disliked Dick, but didn't think that even he would be so gross in such a public venue. "You over shot your landing. Perhaps he was only

trying to keep you from falling."

"I know the difference," Caitlin said adamantly. "Remember in my first year when I was getting off Matt's shoulders and slipped. He grabbed me at the crotch to keep me from falling. His fingers didn't move and he apologized a million times." At the time she had been mortified that Matt had touched her there, now it was a fond memory of the close relationship she had once shared with the boy.

"This was different. Bancroft kept moving his fingers around, trying to make entry."

"I'm going to kill him," Jamie said. And from the expression on her face, it looked like she had every intention of doing just that.

"You can't," Caitlin said, holding on to her. "He isn't worth you getting into trouble. Just, you be careful and warn Kim and Nora."

Jamie shook her head in agreement, but nevertheless slowly walked over to Bancroft. Then she started talking, but only loud enough for Dick to hear.

"Dick, have you ever hear of Viagra?" Jamie inquired.

Bancroft stared at her incredulously, wondering where this line of questioning was headed.

"Yeah, I heard of it," he replied. "Isn't that the Muggle medicine that gives a guy a temporary stiffy?"

"Did you know that there is a magical equivalent?" Jamie asked. "There is a spell that can add six inches to the length of a guy's penis, and it's not temporary. You have to perform another spell to return it back to normal."

"What makes you think I'd have any interest in this?" Dick asked angrily. "I don't need any artificial enhancements."

"I didn't say you did," Jamie answered coyly. "I was just wondering what would happen if the reversal spell was performed without the elongation spell being done first. Would you like to find out?"

"Are you threatening me, Zacherley?" Dick had a menacing look on his face, but his quaking voice gave away his fear.

"Not threatening," Jamie said. "It's more like a promise. If you touch any of the girls on this team again in an improper way, I'll be using you as a guinea pig."

"You wouldn't dare," Bancroft said.

"I believe I'm on the platform next," Jamie said. "Feel free to grope me if you think I'm bluffing. I think the title Nearly Dickless Dick sounds cute." She turned and walked toward the platform.

Jamie jumped with no consequences, as did Kim. For the moment at least, Bancroft appeared to be behaving. Much to Rishard's chagrin, so were the costumes.

The Hogwarts team had elected to have the girls all jump first before proceeding to the heavier

boys. That meant it was now Nora's turn. She stood petrified staring at the ladder.

Up until now, she had been able to shield her breasts even as she helped catch her teammates. How could she properly leap from the platform and at the same time screen her breasts? For that matter, how could she even climb the ladder?

Nora put her left foot on the ladder and reached up for the rung with her right arm. That was all it took for her right nipple to burst out of hiding. Nora turned crimson as she tucked the offending breast back into the minuscule costume and cowered in a ball at the foot of the ladder.

Rishard for the first time today, displayed his toothy smile. Nora didn't possess the largest or most perfect breasts on either team, but at this point Mr. Simone was happy for any display of nudity.

"We'll help you up the ladder," Jamie said, placing her arm around Nora.

"How can you do that?" Nora asked, a defeated tone to her voice.

"The ladder isn't that tall," Jamie answered. "Kim and I can hang on either side of the ladder holding the uniform cloth against your body so that your breasts don't pop out. Caitlin can wait at the top of the ladder to help you until you are standing upright."

"Then what?" Nora asked.

"Then you have to build up the nerve to jump," Jamie replied. "We'll do our best to conceal you once you're in our arms."

Nora looked at Jamie, desperation evident in her eyes. She couldn't do this, yet she knew she had to do this. She sadly nodded her head in agreement.

Mr. Simone watched crossly as the girls helped Nora successfully negotiate the ladder. He considered protesting, but remembered that this was just training and what they were doing violated no rules. Once Nora was standing upright on the platform, the girls all hurried back to their catching positions.

"You can do this Nora, I know you can," Harry said positively.

"I wish I had your confidence, Professor Potter," Nora answered, visibly shaking.

"Just slowly walk to the edge of the platform," Harry encouraged. "Don't look down. I'll tell you when everybody is setup. Then just close your eyes and jump; they'll do the rest. Have faith."

Nora nodded. She had to stop being a coward and become part of the team. Somehow she was able to block from her mind how scantily dressed she was, as she approached the edge of the platform. She stood there, her eyes pressed closed waiting for Harry's signal.

Harry lingered until everybody was ready and looked up at Nora before yelling, "Jump!"

In one quick movement Nora raised her arms and jumped forward and off the platform. As she raised her arms, both breasts burst out of her costume. Nora screamed and brought her arms down to clutch her chest. This had the affect of turning her prone lunge into a roll. She was headed toward the ground headfirst. Dick who was in the front position for this jump panicked to get out of the way and in so doing knocked Kim and Jeff both off balance.

Nora's head, neck and shoulders hit the ground simultaneously with a loud crack. She just lay there seemingly lifeless.

Chapter Sixteen The Spider's Web

At first no one stirred, then as one everybody seemed to rush toward Nora's motionless body.

"Don't touch her!" Harry shouted, his voice filled with trepidation. "She may have broken her neck." He jumped to the ground and hurried to Nora's side. "Caitlin, are you able to diagnose her with just simple contact, without moving her?"

"I'm sure I can," Caitlin said confidently.

"Jamie, will you and the team help me make a circle around them and keep everyone else back?" Harry asked. "And please try to block those photographers from getting any more pictures of her."

Caitlin got down on her knees next to Nora and gently placed a hand on each of the older girl's arms. Within seconds they were as one. Then as rapidly as she had gone into a trance, it ended and Caitlin smiled.

"Just a broken shoulder and minor concussion," she said with a grin.

"Can you put it right?" Harry asked.

"It's already mended," Caitlin said. "She won't even know that it was broken. I'll bring her around as soon as I make her more respectable." Caitlin hesitantly adjusted Nora's costume so that both her breasts were once again covered, and then prodded the girl lightly until she opened her eyes.

"What happened?" Nora asked, looking around anxiously.

"You gave us a fright," Caitlin answered, "but you're fine now."

"My breasts!" Nora cried, looking down at her chest. "I felt them burst out of the costume. Did people see them?"

Caitlin didn't lie. "I tucked you back together. Nora, it's not that big a deal. I spent most of the summer totally nude. What's important is that you're okay."

Nora looked questioningly at Caitlin who was still holding her hand. "You do realize that I can actually see you as you really are?" she asked.

"I'm sorry," Caitlin said, letting go of Nora's hand. "I didn't mean to embarrass you."

"It didn't make me uncomfortable to see you nude; I'd only be distressed if you saw me that way," Nora explained.

Caitlin shrugged her shoulders. "There was a time I felt like that," Caitlin said, but before she could elaborate, they were besieged by well-wishers.

* * * * *

"You were brilliant," Matt said, as he rushed up to Caitlin at the conclusion of the practice session.

"It's amazing how you can heal someone simply by touching them."

Caitlin reddened. "I'm still having difficulty comprehending it myself," she said. "The strangest part is that it happens almost mechanically now; I don't even have to think about it any longer. When I touched Nora, I was immediately aware of her injuries; then straight away they were healed."

"Do you think that if we held hands, the rift between us could be healed as easily?" Matt asked.

"We could try," Caitlin answered sweetly, reaching out for Matt's hands, "but mental wounds to the heart are usually much harder to heal than those of the flesh."

"I've missed you," Matt said truthfully. "Why is it that you don't realize how important... how precious someone is to you until you've lost them? Can you ever forgive me for being so possessive and intrusive? I swear that I won't be domineering ever again, if you'll just give me another chance."

"I've missed you, too," Caitlin responded, her eyes watering. "I thought we had something special, something that would last forever."

"Maybe it will. if we give it another try and this time work harder at not hurting each other," Matt said. "Can we please try again?"

Caitlin nodded her head. Then she leaned forward and kissed Matt on the cheek. Matt returned her kiss, but on the lips, then embraced her closely.

"I love the feel of your body in my arms," Matt said. "I was afraid that I'd never get to hold you again."

Caitlin likewise liked the feeling of being in Matt's arms once more. She didn't want the embrace to end, but it did when Kim called out to her. "Did you forget that we're supposed to be meeting Emily?"

"I'm sorry, Matt," Caitlin said. "I forgot that Emily, Kim and I had plans for this afternoon. Can we talk more this evening?"

"It's okay," Matt said, a wide smile on his face. "Nothing can mess up this day."

As Matt departed for the castle, Caitlin ran over to join Kim. "Obviously you and Matt have mended fences," Kim squealed as Caitlin reached her.

"Not completely," Caitlin said, with a smile "but I think we will. We're going to talk some more tonight."

"I'm glad," Kim said earnestly. "You two make such an adorable couple. I have to admit though that I feel sorry for little Evan. He worships you and was greatly looking forward to going to the Yule Ball with you."

Suddenly Caitlin's face turned pallid. "I forgot all about the Ball," she said, her voice trembling. "You're right though. Matt will expect me to go with him now, but I can't hurt Evan like that. What am I going to do?"

* * * * *

Rishard Simone walked down the main street past Zonko's Joke Shop, past the post office and turned up a side street. Finally at the top of the hill he reached his destination, a small inn called the Hog's Head. He had been here before and hated the filthy atmosphere of the dirty pub. Rishard would much rather imbibe in the warmth and cleanliness of The Three Broomsticks, but Eric had suggested the Hog's Head. Eric was Rishard's only contact with his backers. Eric spoke for them and Rishard knew better than to question their orders.

Rishard felt like he was entering a stable rather than a bar. The floor was filthy and the room smelled strongly of something quite like goats. He gave the bartender his order and then slowly approached the corner table where Eric was seated.

"Sit down," Eric ordered. "The situation isn't as dire as we originally thought. Actually the instant ratings were quite good considering that it was only a practice session."

"I don't understand," Richard said, looking cynically at the drink the bartender had just placed before him. He wasn't at all sure he wanted to rest his lips against the grubby glass. "There was minimal nudity today. I expected the viewers to turn us out."

"We underestimated the female viewers' love of angst," Eric replied. "There was just enough tit and arse to keep the males watching, but that near fatal fall grabbed the interest of the women. That Caitlin Potter girl is an instant superstar. The viewers want to see more of her in action."

Rishard gave Eric a very confused look. "I don't understand," he said. "Our concentration has always been on 'accidental' exposure, has that changed?"

"No! The public will never get tired of seeing a pair of attractive bare tits," Eric assured Rishard. "Plus, there are those that always get a thrill over a glimpse of an exposed snatch or dick. But we've been overlooking a large segment of our audience. Our viewers want to see these kids in real danger. They want to see them actually get hurt, maybe even occasionally one or two killed."

"You can't be serious," Rishard said. "It was one thing for you to ask me to put the competitors in erotic costumes, having their privates publicly exposed doesn't physically hurt them. But do you actually expect me to rig the contests so that there is a good chance of someone actually being hurt?"

"Only if you want to continue living in the luxurious life style to which you have become accustomed," Eric warned. "You're quirky, Rishard, but I like you. I'd hate to see you just disappear."

Rishard stared nervously at Eric. He was aware that he'd been given his one and only warning. "What do you want me to do?" he asked fearfully.

"Surprise me," Eric answered. "Just make sure it's good, or else."

* * * * *

"Evan, can I talk to you?" Caitlin asked shyly.

"Sure," Evan said, plopping himself down next to Caitlin on the Chesterfield.

"Not here," she said, looking around the busy common room. "Can we take a walk?"

Evan's eyes widened. "You're naked," he said, pointing out the obvious. "You can't leave the common room like that."

Caitlin laughed. "No, I can't wander about the castle, but my dorm is empty. We can go up there for some privacy."

"I didn't think the castle would permit boys to enter the girls' dorms?" Evan questioned.

"It won't until you've first been escorted," Caitlin explained. "After that it will allow you to enter on your own as long as your intentions remain honorable."

"The castle can read someone's mind?" Evan asked in awe.

"Not exactly the castle," Caitlin explained. "The protective wards on the stairway to the dorms act similar to those on a wizard home. The owners must grant first time visitors access. After that they are allowed automatic admission as long as they don't intend the owners any harm and their authorization to access hasn't been revoked." Caitlin gave Evan a shy smile. "You don't have any dishonorable intentions or plan me any harm, do you?"

"I could never hurt you," Evan said truthfully.

Caitlin bit her lip. Evan might not be able to hurt her, but what she was about to do would definitely hurt him. "We need to maintain physical contact the first time you go up the stairs," she said, taking his hand in hers.

From across the room Matt watched jealously. Caitlin had advised him that she wanted to talk to Evan privately and explain about the two of them getting back together. She hadn't, however, told Matt that she was going to have the conversation in her bedroom while totally naked.

"You're sure I won't get expelled for being in here?" Evan asked nervously as they entered the empty dorm.

"You won't get expelled," Caitlin answered reassuringly. "Alex is in the seventh year girls' dorm all the time. It only becomes a problem if the other girls complain or if we do something prohibited."

Evan nodded his head as Caitlin guided him to her bed and indicated for him to take a seat. He nervously did as instructed and then shivered as Caitlin sat down very close to him. She took his hand in hers, and then looked around the room as if searching for words.

"I think I know why you want to talk to me," Evan said quietly. "I waited for you after the practice session today, thinking maybe we could take a walk around the lake. You and Matt were talking, so I didn't bother you. You two are getting back together, aren't you?"

"I think so," Caitlin answered softly. She felt terrible, as if she were stabbing Evan in the heart. "I'm sorry, Evan. Please don't hate me."

"I could never hate you," he said. Although he tried desperately to hide them, there were tears in his eyes. "You and I... It was a little boy's dream. If you put your mind to it, you can have any guy in the school. Why would you ever want to settle for me?"

"It wouldn't be settling, Evan. Don't sell yourself short," Caitlin insisted. "The girl that eventually winds up with you will be very fortunate. It's just that Matt and I... Well, we had a special relationship. I can't just toss it aside without giving it another chance."

"I assume you'll be wanting to go to the Yule Ball with him? Evan asked.

She didn't answer, but instead bit her lip and nodded her head uncomfortably.

"Can we at least still be friends?" Evan asked. "I know you'll want to spend a lot of time with Matt, but can we still sit and talk occasionally?"

"Of course," Caitlin answered. "I enjoy your company. Hopefully we can remain great friends."

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"I'm so glad you're back," Ginny cried, flinging her arms around Draco. Her eyes were blood shot and her face stained with tears. "I was so worried. What did Nott have to say?"

"It's all a game to him. He's having a ball threatening people and ruining their lives." Draco shook his head disgustedly. "On the other hand, he thinks that Slytherin will be impressed with my credentials and me. I feel like I'm applying for a position in a blossoming firm."

"Then you didn't actually meet Lord Slytherin?" Ginny asked.

"No! Nott says it might be months before I actually meet him," Draco informed her. "In point of fact that's probably for the best. Potter claims that this Occlumency stuff that Severus is going to teach me is extremely difficult to learn."

Ginny looked at Draco, concern etched in her face. "Whatever it takes, you must learn to shut down your feelings and memories," she pleaded. "Otherwise, Slytherin will be able to delve into your mind and know that you are lying to him."

"I know," Draco said, sighing deeply. "Nott already warned me against lying to Slytherin, even about what I might consider inconsequential stuff. Nott says that he doesn't put up with anyone being even faintly untruthful to him. I think that is one of the reasons Potter and Snape advised me to own up to being a member of the Order. There was too much chance of him eventually finding out."

"But you still need to convince him that you will be loyal to his objectives and spy on the Order," Ginny said with concern.

"I don't think I'll have any difficulty convincing him of that," Draco answered, as he carefully avoided looking directly at Ginny.

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"Ron! Don't do that," Sam shrieked crossly. "What if Timmy sees you?"

"He's not paying any attention to us," Ron answered defensively. "Can I help it if you running around the house nude all the time makes me randy? I can't control myself."

"Well, you better learn how," Sam said, impatiently. "I'm not going to be the one to explain to Timmy why his father is sucking on my nipple."

"Because, my dear, you have extremely tasty nipples that top off sumptuous breasts on the very gorgeous body of the most wonderful woman in the world," Ron said appreciatively.

"Flattery will get you everywhere, Ronald, but not until Timmy is sound asleep in bed. He already knows quite enough about sex for a little boy his age," Sam admonished. "I prefer that he continue to think of breasts only as a mothers' way to supply nourishment to her child. He has plenty of time to become obsessed with them as playthings."

"Are you calling me obsessed?" Ron asked.

"If the shoe fits, wear it," Sam replied with a laugh. "Don't get me wrong, I'm not complaining, but I don't think you can go ten minutes without fondling me in some way or another."

"Guilty as charged," Ron said, pulling Sam into an embrace and at the same time squeezing her bum.

"What am I going to do with you?" Sam asked, pulling away from Ron.

"Keep me and love me, I hope," he replied.

"Guaranteed," Sam said. "Ron, I love you so much. I'm so glad we found each other."

"Me too!" Ron replied. "Me too!" He squeezed her tightly.

* * * * *

"Where is Caitlin?" Matt asked angrily as Evan reached the bottom of the stairs and entered the common room.

"She'll be down shortly," Evan answered glumly. "She had to make a quick stop at the loo." Evan reached out his hand. "Congratulations! I understand you two are getting back together. You're a very lucky guy."

Matt nodded his head, but avoided shaking Evan's hand. "We would have gotten back together a lot sooner if you hadn't stuck your nose into our affairs," Matt barked. "I want you to stay away from her. If I see you within ten feet of Caitlin, you'll need Madam Pomfrey to re-grow every bone in your body."

"You don't have any right to tell me I can't be friends with Caitlin," the small boy shouted boldly. "You may be her boyfriend again, but that doesn't give you the authority to determine who can or can't be her friend."

"I didn't say you couldn't be her friend," Matt said smartly. "That would be practically the same as trying to control her. I've learned my lesson concerning that. You can be her friend; just stay away from her."

"You haven't learned anything, have you?" Matt turned toward the voice to find Caitlin staring angrily at him, tears in her eyes.

"I thought you said you changed," she cried. "You're still trying to manipulate me and my life. Matt, I'm not even sure I want to be your friend any longer." She turned, tears streaming down her face, and ran back up to her dorm.

Evan looked intently at Matt. "You must be the biggest idiot on earth. You're supposed to learn from your mistakes."

"Shut up, Runt," Matt roared angrily, hitting Evan with a punch that sent the youngster flailing to the floor. Matt then exited through the portrait hole, leaving Evan on the floor holding his bleeding nose.

* * * * *

"Do you really think it will be that bad?" Hermione asked. "It's not nearly as headline generating as killing Voldemort."

"Mark my word," Harry declared. "The Daily Prophet and the wizarding world thrive on sensationalism and they've been through an extended period of drought. A Hyperempath with powers such as Caitlin is only born every few hundred years. The story will make headlines. Fortunately we live at Hogwarts or we'd have reporters camped out on our doorstep."

"If it isn't one thing, it's something else," Hermione said with a sigh. "What they should be reporting is the return of Salazar Slytherin."

"I'm wondering just how much longer Percy will be able to cover up all the signs. Even someone as arrogant as him has to wake up to reality sooner or later," Harry said.

"That would require him to admit that he was wrong," Hermione replied. "Percy, as you well know, has a serious problem doing that."

"But even Fudge eventually admitted that Voldemort was back," Harry pointed out.

"Only when he saw Voldemort with his own eyes. Somehow, I don't even think that would sway Percy," Hermione said. "He is even worse than Fudge when it comes to being power hungry and loving being Minister of Magic. If it weren't for the red hair, I'd think he was switched at birth. He is nothing like the other Weasley boys."

* * * * *

Caitlin had thrown herself on the bed in frustration trying to smother her rage by burying her head in the pillow. She thought Matt had changed. Or in truth had she just wanted to believe he had changed? What had made her so desperate to rekindle their relationship?

She anguished for what seemed like hours, desperate to escape reality and enter the world of dreams, but sleep evaded her. One by one, through her hangings, she heard the voices of her roommates enter the dorm. Finally the room was once again quiet, but still sleep eluded her.

"Are you okay?" asked a high-pitched nervous voice she recognized as Evan's.

"Evan! What are you doing here?" she asked, drawing open her hangings.

"I was worried about you," he said shyly. "You never came back down to the common room. I wanted to make sure you were all right."

Caitlin looked nervously about the dorm, fearful that one or more of her mates might still be awake. "Hurry and climb in here before anyone sees you," she whispered.

"In your bed?" Evan asked, taken aback by the very suggestion.

"Yes," Caitlin insisted. "If any of the others see you, they might mistakenly sound an alarm in panic."

She wiggled to one side of the bed to make room for Evan. "Evan, there is blood on your face," she said, alarm evident in her voice.

"I'm okay," Evan insisted. "I just got too close to Matt when he reacted to my remark."

"What remark was that?" Caitlin asked.

"I told him that he was a stupid git for losing you a second time," Evan said. "I can state for a fact that the truth hurts."

Caitlin leaned into Evan and kissed him gently on the nose. "Are you sure it's not broken? You should have gone to see Madam Pomfrey."

"I don't think it's serious," Evan said without conviction. "Besides, I didn't want to get in trouble for fighting." Evan looked apprehensively at the vision lying next to him. "I better go before I get us both in trouble. I just wanted to check on you."

Caitlin smiled. "You're a rarity. I hope you never change." She placed her hand gently on his nose.

"Does that feel better?" she asked.

He smiled, but didn't answer. Instead he just continued to stare at her adoringly.

Caitlin hesitated a moment and then asked, "Evan would you do me a favor before you go? Would you just put your arm around me and hold me for a short time."

"Sure!" Evan answered excitedly as Caitlin nuzzled close to him. He placed his arm around her and trembled as his hand touched her soft bare skin.

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Caitlin was awakened from a deep sleep by a voice calling out, "Are you going to sleep all day, Potter? We're going down to breakfast. You better get a move on if you don't want to starve."

Caitlin sighed as she contentedly, slowly opened her eyes. She froze. She wasn't alone. Evan was still lying next to her, his arm draped innocently across her chest, his palm gently touching her breast. For a few minutes she just watched him peacefully sleep. It felt reassuring to have him nestled next to her. She placed her hand on top of his and then, reluctantly moved it off her chest. She continued to hold Evan's hand as she gently kissed his lips. He didn't stir until she tried to part his lips with her tongue and then he woke with a start.

He looked around, terror filling his eyes. "We both fell asleep," he said, guilt and panic both rushing through his body. "I've got to somehow get out of here before anyone finds out I spent the entire night here."

"Relax," Caitlin said reassuringly. "Most of the house is down at breakfast. I know for sure my roommates are." She opened her drapes slightly and peered about the empty room. "Let me quickly check the staircase and common room." Caitlin scampered out the door and returned in a few moments.

"Hurry," she said. "The common room is empty. If you scurry down now, no one will be any the wiser." Evan quickly followed Caitlin down the stairs and safely to the common room. "Evan, I'm going to take a quick shower and slip on some clothes. Will you wait and go to breakfast with me? There is something important I want to talk to you about."

Evan nodded and then they both ran off in separate directions to shower and get dressed. He was the first to return to the common room and was surprised when Caitlin entered still nude except now wearing her socks and trainers.

"I wait until the last possible moment before putting these on," she said with a laugh, indicating the top and skirt she was carrying. "Sometimes I think I'm getting just about as shocking as Emily."

"What do you mean by that?" Evan asked.

"Emily literally loathes clothing. Sometimes she pushes the limit when it comes to being naked," Caitlin explained. "She'd never wear clothes anywhere if she had her way and I think I'm getting to be more and more like her."

"I think it should be an individual's choice," Evan said. "I mean, no one should ever be forced to go devoid of clothes, but on the other hand... what does it matter if you want to run around in the buff?"

"Evan, can I ask you a question; and please answer it honestly?" Caitlin said. "If I were your girlfriend, would it bother you for other boys to see me nude?"

"Probably a little," Evan answered truthfully. "Not the seeing you nude so much as the nasty feelings they might have. But I guess clothes don't even stop wicked thoughts." Evan blushed. "The neat thing about being your boyfriend would be that I might some day actually get to do some of those things that they'd only get to dream about."

"And just what might those things be, Mr. Creevey?" Caitlin asked, her face turning bright red.

"Just kissing and holding," Evan answered, also turning crimson. "I really liked waking up next to you this morning."

"I'm afraid we can't do much of that," Caitlin said, "but I liked sleeping with you, too. You have a way of making me feel secure and very special. "

"That's because you are special," Evan insisted.

Caitlin didn't answer verbally. Instead she leaned in and gave Evan a kiss on the cheek. After Caitlin slipped on her clothes, they headed off to breakfast. Somewhere between the Gryffindor common room and the Great Hall a decision was reached because when Caitlin and Evan walked into the Great Hall, it was hand in hand.

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Thursday, November 24, 2005

"What's going on?" Emily asked. "Why the decorations and the feast? Has someone declared a new holiday?"

"It's Thanksgiving," Kim said. "It's an American holiday. I imagine that we're celebrating it because of our guests."

"The more holidays, the better," Emily said, filling her plate. "I love roast turkey and cranberry sauce."

"You do appreciate that there is more significance to holidays than food, don't you?" Kim asked brusquely.

"I'm sure that you're about to acquaint me with the unabridged history of Thanksgiving," Emily said, a frown on her face. "I just hope you don't mind if I eat while you talk; this food is too delicious to let get cool."

"I don't know where you put it all," Kim said, seemingly impressed. "If I ate as much as you do, I'd be as big as a house. You, on the other hand, never seem to gain an ounce, except where it counts."

"Then it's not just my imagination," Emily said elatedly, her face displaying a rare blush.

"No, they've grown significantly since this summer," Kim confirmed. "It's quite evident, especially when you wear tighter fitting clothes. You'd unquestionably be accused of stuffing your bra, except everybody knows you never wear one."

"I hope my dress for the Yule Ball still fits," Emily said apprehensively. "Roger told me to measure

myself very precisely. I didn't allow at all for any growth."

Kim laughed. "Growth in the hips and waist can be a problem with most dresses, especially if they're tight fitting. The bust isn't normally as big a problem; there is usually room for a little spill over. By the way, when are you getting this one of a kind original?"

"Roger wrote that I should receive it before the first of December," Emily answered. "So I expect it will arrive any day now. I can't wait to see it."

"Neither can I," Kim said. But her voice contained a concern that wasn't evident in Emily's.

Snape got to his feet and a sudden silence fell over the hall.

"Excellent feast, isn't it?" he asked. The students responded with applause. "I think I'll need to check whether there are any other American holidays we can celebrate."

"There is an announcement I wanted to make before anyone left the hall, although you'll be making a great mistake if you do so before enjoying dessert. I saw some delicious looking pumpkin pies in the kitchen earlier today. Anyway, back to business." Snape cleared his throat. "Mr. Simone has asked me to announce that the first event of the competition will take place this Saturday at noon. Teams should assemble in the Quidditch lockers rooms at eleven."

Everyone stared at Snape waiting for more information, but he appeared finished with his announcement. "I'm sorry," he said, "I'm not allowed to divulge any further information except that the event is referred to as the Spider's Web. Enjoy your dessert."

As Snape sat down, the students looked questioningly at one another. Then it seemed everyone started talking at once.

* * * * *

Saturday, November 26, 2005

The morning was very sunny, although quite cold. The Great Hall was full of the delicious aroma of bacon and eggs and the excited babble of everyone looking forward to the first task.

"Aren't you going to eat some breakfast, Caitlin?"

"I'm not hungry."

"At least some toast," coaxed Jamie.

"I don't want anything," Caitlin insisted. "Besides, I don't see you eating."

"I had a huge dinner yesterday evening," Jamie fibbed.

"You should both try to eat something," Alex said encouragingly. "You're going to need your strength for whatever lies ahead of you."

"I don't want the smell of food on my breath," Caitlin said nervously. "It might attract the spiders."

"Just because the event is called 'the spiders web' doesn't mean that there are any actual spiders involved," Alex said, hopefully.

"I wish I shared your optimism," Jamie replied.

By eleven o'clock the whole school was packed in the stands around the Quidditch pitch along with thousands of other spectators. Camera crews from the WBS (Wizard Broadcasting System) were poised, ready to send live coverage throughout the wizarding world.

Meanwhile in the locker room, Kim and the rest of the Hogwarts team paced the room nervously.

"Everyone is here and healthy," Nora declared. "That means that the subs in all probability won't be needed."

"Not necessarily," Lee said. "Depending on the rules of this event, you or I might be required to enter the contest if one of the starters can't continue to compete."

Most of the others mumbled their agreement.

Nora fretfully chewed on her fingernails, and then burst into tears. "My Mum and Dad are in the stands and all our friends and family are watching. I can't have myself exposed to the world; it's humiliating enough to be forced to appear in this degrading costume."

Nora looked at Jamie, desperation unmistakable in her eyes. "Please, will you do the concealment charm on me?"

"Certainly," Jaime agreed. "I think you're making the correct decision. Now you understand that you'll actually be taking off the uniform after the charm is complete. To anyone that doesn't touch you, you'll appear to still have it on, but you'll actually be totally nude."

Nora nodded her head nervously. "The important thing is that I won't be exposed to the whole wizarding world."

"You'll be fine!" Jamie said reassuringly. "You'll see yourself as you really are, but to everyone else it will look like you still have the costume on. Just be sure you're alone or put something on before you cancel the charm."

"Now comes the hard part," Jamie said, giving Nora an encouraging smile. "You must undress and have faith that the charm is concealing you."

"Is there any way I can be sure it's working?" Nora asked.

"No," Jamie answered. "Your own eyes won't be fooled by the charm, neither will mirrors. You have to trust others to tell you truthfully that you appear dressed."

Nora's hands trembled as she started to remove the costume. "You'll stop me if something has gone awry?"

Nora closed her eyes as she fretfully removed the decadent piece of clothing.

"Trust me Nora, and don't panic," Jamie said calmly. "To everyone in this room you appear to still

have your competition uniform on, but when you look down at yourself, you're going to see a naked girl."

Nora gasped as she surveyed her body. She couldn't believe that she was standing in a group of mixed company completely nude. "This is so weird," she said anxiously.

"It takes some getting used to," Jamie agreed.

"That's the signal," Jeff called. "They're ready for us."

As they left the locker room, they were met by the American contingent and both teams marched out toward the Quidditch pitch.

"Here come our contenders," Rishard Simone announced in his magically magnified voice. The crowd burst into cheers as the two teams entered the pitch and then lined up on either side of Rishard.

In the middle of the pitch were two identical structures separated by about fifty feet. The buildings could best be described as looking like two very large garages, minus both their rollup doors and roofs.

"This game is called the spider's web," Rishard announced. "Since both teams are at their full strength, I think we'll allow the alternates to play as well."

Rishard made this sound like he was playing Santa Claus by giving out special treats, but Nora didn't look at all pleased.

"We have to participate too?" she moaned quietly, seemingly horrified at the prospect. "I thought we'd only take part in the events if one of the regulars were sick."

"Now, then," Rishard continued. "The rules are rather straightforward. Once the teams have entered the corrals, the entrances will each be covered with a web. The web itself is about ten feet across and six feet high. . There is no way around the web; the only way out of the enclosure is through it.

"The web will be a classic spider's web with large holes on the sides and spiraling smaller toward the center. Each person on the team must pass through a hole of the web. The challenge is the order of the people going though, as well as not touching the web while being passed though. If the web is touched, that section will close up and the player will be trapped. They will then need to be pulled free and try a different hole; pushing them forward is not an option. Trying to force a person through a sealed hole will only cause more holes to give way.

"A person also cannot be thrown through a hole. This will merely make the web shake and more holes collapse. Also, if a person puts a hand or any other body part through a hole and pulls it back the hole will close. As each hole collapses, there are less and less holes to go through. If you start running out of holes large enough for a person to pass through, two people can be passed through the same hole as long as they hold hands during the entire procedure. Both teams must get all their members through. Points will be awarded to the winning team based on the difference in time needed to complete the task."

"We're going to have to think this out carefully before we start," Jamie said to the group in general. "We'll have to figure out who should go first and last and in what order we should use the holes."

"Typical Zacherley philosophy," Dick Bancroft barked. "Make a simple task complicated so that she can take charge and play Miss Intelligent."

"I'm not trying to..." Jamie started, but she was drowned out by the amplified voice of Rishard.

"Now if the teams will please proceed to the enclosures, we will get started," he advised. "Coaches, you stay here with me. We wouldn't want you giving your lovely teams any extra aid."

"I'm certainly glad I'm not involved with this event," Ron said. He and Sam were sitting in the stands with Hermione. "I hate anything to do with spiders."

"As we all well know," Hermione said with a laugh. "Spider's Web is only the name of the task. I'm sure they are using a synthetic web and I doubt we'll see any real spiders."

"I wouldn't bet on that," Sam said. "They look awfully real to me."

As soon as the teams had entered the enclosures, two gigantic spiders had appeared out of the shadows and were now quickly spinning webs to close the entrances to each corral, thus trapping the teams within.

"What the hell is going on here?" Snape yelled as he rushed toward Rishard. "You said nothing about using real spiders in this event."

"I thought it would be an entertaining surprise," he answered. "Don't you think it makes for a fabulously more thrilling event having a bona fide web and the hideous maker lurking threateningly just off to the side?"

"Have you ever dealt with these monsters before?" Harry asked angrily.

"No," answered Rishard. "This is my first time, but these two seemed extremely eager to participate."

"Have you ever considered that they might be planning on lunching on the competitors?" Harry asked.

"Now Harry! You mustn't be so fast to misjudge our fellow magical creatures," Simone contended. "I understand that outwardly they may look gruesome, but they are actually quite docile and very misunderstood creatures."

"Like hell they are," Harry barked. "I've dealt with Aragog's children up close and personal. They are anything, but docile and I did not get the wrong end of the stick. They tried to kill and eat both Ron and I."

"How many years ago was that? People change, so do spiders," Rishard insisted. "These two are working for a side of beef each. The students are perfectly safe."

Harry and Severus exchanged meaningful looks. Neither man seemed to share Rishard's confidence.

"Did you know there would be gigantic spiders involved with this competition?" Kim asked.

"No!" Caitlin answered. "And if their facial expressions are any indication, it looks like one and all

were surprised by their being here. It sure makes a person hesitant about going anywhere near the web with that huge ugly thing sitting up there in the corner watching your every move with its eight eyes."

"You're a bunch of hopeless cowards," Dick shouted. I doubt that's even a genuine spider. Probably just some transfigured toy." He walked over toward the web and stuck his hand through one of the larger holes; then pulled it back out. "See, the great hairy beast didn't even budge."

"You brainless git," Lee yelled. "The spider may not have stirred, but look what you've done to the web." As if an opaque window had closed, the hole was now covered with dense stringy webbing. "Didn't you pay any attention when Rishard was explaining the rules about the webs."

"I have better things to do than listen to a talking fruit bowl," Dick spewed. "Incidentally, have you losers taken notice that the Americans already have one person through the web? I imagine they're more interested in winning this stupid game than they are in gawking at a revolting fake spider. At the rate they're going, the Americans will have all their players through the web before you people even get your grand strategy session started."

"You people can sit and plan a line of attack if you like, but I'm fully capable of going through a hole without first having a family meeting." Before anyone had time to respond, Dick ran toward the web and lunged.

It will never be known for certain whether or not he touched the web, but something caused the hole to close instantly around him, trapping and holding him midway through.

"I don't believe him," Jamie cried out in frustration. "Not only has he caused us to lose two of the best holes, but now we have to waste even more time pulling him free."

"I don't think so," Kim said, pointing nervously toward the web where the gigantic spider was moving swiftly toward Dick, its pincers clicking excitedly.

Chapter Seventeen Who Said Life Was Fair?

Jamie had her wand out first and yelled, "*Stupefy!*" The spell hit the spider's gigantic, hairy black body, but had no effect. The spider ignored Jamie as it deftly removed Dick from the web with its two front legs and then began quickly spinning the boy around and around, a cocoon swiftly covering his body.

"Stupefy! Impedimenta! Stupefy!" Jamie yelled.

The others also cast spells at the spider, but they too had no effect. The spells did nothing more than aggravate the ugly beast. It was either too large or was being shielded by some sort of magical protection. The monster began to place the bound boy's body in its mouth, but then hesitated. Harry, Severus and a number of others were running toward the corral, wands drawn.

The spider looked as if it were having second thoughts about consuming the student. It seemed to gaze derisively at the approaching wizards, before unceremoniously spitting Dick out, the boy landing on the ground directly in front of his teammates.

"I wonder why the spider didn't eat Dick?" Caitlin asked. Her voice sounded greatly relieved despite her dislike of the Slytherin boy.

"That's easy," Kim said. "The spider knew that if it ate Dick, your dad and the others would kill it. Not even that monster would want something as disgusting as Dick Bancroft for its last meal."

Despite the severity of the situation they had just experienced, Caitlin found herself unable to resist laughing at Kim's comment as they both hurried to help Dick from his bindings.

"See, I told you there was nothing to worry about," Rishard cried, sweat beading from his forehead. "It was all just part of the show. That spider was just giving us our full money's worth. He would never have actually hurt the boy."

Personally, Harry doubted this very much. From his first hand experiences with Aragog's offspring, he knew them to be bloodthirsty monsters. It was with grave trepidation that he returned to his seat, leaving the students in the corrals guarded by the hairy beasts. He wouldn't breathe easily until this task was complete and everyone was safely back in the castle.

As the others struggled to release Dick from his sticky encasement, Jamie bombarded him with her pent up sentiments. "Dick, I know you hate me and think that I'm an arrogant bitch, but I'd rather be a bitch than a stupid arse any day. This is a team, or have you forgotten that?" she screamed. "We need to work together. So far all your chauvinistic bravado has accomplished is losing us two holes and almost getting yourself killed. If you so much as move again without the team's agreement, I'll personally make you wish that spider had eaten you."

Dick didn't retort; he didn't even give Jamie the satisfaction of looking in her direction.

Jamie looked nervously toward the American's enclosure. "The Americans already have two members through and are working on their third. Does anyone have any suggestions how we proceed?" Jamie asked.

"I've been watching them," Lee Wilson offered. "They got their biggest, strongest player through first, and then a medium sized one. Now they seem to be passing one player through at a time."

"That makes sense," Jeffery said. "Leave the smallest for last."

"Problem is that the first and last players should go through the lowest and largest holes. We've lost both of those holes." Although he was tempted to add 'thanks to the stupidity of Dick', Lee resisted. "Actually we only have six large outer ring holes left. I doubt we can get anyone safely through any of the inner holes."

"Didn't they say we could double up going through a hole?" Kim inquired.

"That's what we'll have to do then," Jamie said impatiently. "Sounds like we have a plan. We'll put Dick through the lowest hole on the right first, so he can help the others get through. We better save the lowest hole on the left for Caitlin; she's the smallest and should probably come last. That means six of us must come through the other four holes. Four of us will need to pair up."

"Well, whatever we're going to do, we better get moving," Donald said. "The Americans just passed their third player through the web and they haven't lost a hole yet."

"Dick, we're putting you through first. Make yourself as stiff as possible so that we can handle you like a log," Jamie instructed. "Caitlin, hold his head so that it doesn't bob and hit the web."

Dick obligingly did as instructed. As arrogant as he might be, he didn't want to be single handedly responsible for Hogwarts losing the first event. Dick held his legs stiff, like a log, as he was pushed through the opening feet first. Once half way through, he was tilted and then as gently as possible dropped to the ground. The web opening then closed, but Hogwarts finally had their first player on the other side.

"Who goes next?" Caitlin asked.

"I'd prefer to do the doubles first," Jamie said, "but Dick's going to need some help on the other side to handle two people coming through at once. We better do a single first through a top opening. It should probably be another guy."

"I'll go," Jeffery offered. "I'm pretty big so I'll be able to help Dick, plus it's best I get through while there are still a number of you on this side to lift me."

Everyone concurred with this. Although Jeff wasn't fat, he was most certainly solid and by no classification a lightweight. In theory lifting and moving a person, like you would a log, sounded great. Unfortunately, people aren't solid and rigid they bend. This ability to bend has advantages and disadvantage. The cons seemed to be out weighing the pros as the team struggled to get proper grips on Jeff and pass him through. Once, they let him slip, but fortunately Donald prevented him from touching the web. Finally, Jeff was through and they could take a breath.

Jamie shook her head in consternation. "We have four good holes remaining and six people. Kim do you think you and Donald can double up?" she asked. "You're going to have to use the remaining top hole."

Kim nodded her head. "How exactly should we hold each other?" she questioned. "Should we embrace in a hug?"

"No!" Jamie answered. "I don't think we could hold you like that, besides you have to go through one at a time, but linked. Kim, try lying on your back. Donald, suppose you lay on your front between Kim's legs with your arms wrapped around them?"

Don looked at Kim questioningly, as if asking permission to touch her. Kim nodded and gave Don a weak smile. She knew Donald would soon be viewing her extremely close and personal.

"Are you sure you guys will be able to lift us?" Donald asked.

"If we can't, the contest is over," Jamie said, heaving a sigh. "Nora, you and Caitlin get on either side of Kim. Lee and I will lift Donald. The toughest part will be initially getting them off the ground. Once they're off the ground, we may have to reposition ourselves slightly to get them through the web."

"Wait," Donald called. "Wouldn't it work better if we started in a standing position? You could lift Kim into my arms and then I could hold her as all four of you try to lift me."

"I don't know," Jamie answered. "I've never tried to do anything like this before. Let's give your way a try."

Once they repositioned themselves, Jamie said, "Okay, Kim, lean back slightly toward the web. Don, try to guide her toward the opening. As soon as Dick and Jeff have her arms, we'll try to lift you."

Don looked up in order to position Kim and himself. He visibly gulped, then shook his head to regain his wits and concentrate on the task at hand. He moved as close to the web as he could. He could see Jeff and Dick ready to receive Kim. "Lean back as far as you can, Kim," he instructed. "I promise that I won't drop you."

Kim arms stretch above her head as she arched her back until it ached. Her hands were through the opening and her chest pointed skyward.

"Remember, you and Don must stay connected just as you are until you are both completely through," Jamie reminded them. "Don, we're going to start lifting you now."

But before they could attempt to lift Don off his feet, something distracting took place. Due to a combination of being aroused by holding a nude girl, wearing a brief costume and assuming an extremely awkward position, Don's penis had burst free. His attention was on the task at hand and he didn't seem to even realize his member was exposed. Lee quickly turned away; boys just don't look at other boy's cocks. Nora's hand was covering her mouth in shock, but she couldn't seem to look away. Caitlin and Jamie didn't stare at the organ, but rather exchanged questioning looks as to who would come to Don's aid.

"Don, you've had a little accident," Caitlin said nonchalantly. "Don't get flustered. I'll set things right."

At first Don didn't understand what Caitlin was talking about. But then he felt a small soft hand touch him followed by the feel of material rubbing against his penis. He literally shivered, but somehow managed to once again concentrate on the task at hand.

"On three, lift!" Jamie called out. "Bend your body forward, Don. Watch out that his feet don't touch the web."

Somehow they did it. Don and Kim were on the other side of the web. Four down, four to go.

"Jamie, how are we going to do this?" Lee asked concernedly. "You and Nora can't go together because that would leave only Caitlin to get me through." He looked at the two girls concernedly. "I don't think she can get either of you through by herself either."

Caitlin felt affronted, but she also was concerned that Lee was correct.

"Caitlin, who do you think you could better support on your shoulders, Nora or I?"

Caitlin glanced quickly at the two girls. Although they were both about the same height, Nora was frail compared to Jamie.

"I don't know if I'm capable of lifting either of you," Caitlin confessed, "but I'd undoubtedly have more of a chance with Nora."

Jamie agreed. "Okay, I guess you and I go next," she said grabbing Lee's hand.

Nora stood back looking relieved. She had been extremely edgy at the thought of Lee holding her in a fashion such as Don had just held Kim.

"Are we going to attempt it in the same style as Don and Kim?" Lee asked.

Jamie looked at Caitlin and Nora, and then shook her head. "They'll never be able to lift you, especially if you're holding me. Our strength is on the other side of the web now. This is going to have to be more pull than push." Jamie took a deep breath. "I'll hold you on my shoulder and clutch your ankles. Get your arms through the web. They'll have to lift from the other side as Nora and Caitlin push."

"That sounds impossible," Dick said.

"Can you think of another option?" Jamie questioned. "I'm not sure I can do this either, but we have to try."

No one answered.

All the running and exercising that Jamie had done during her life had resulted in her having a very firm, fit body, but she felt that she was about to push it to its limits. She crouched down. "Caitlin, Nora, get on either side and steady me as best as you can. Lee, get on my back and give a hand to each of the girls. As I stand up, walk up my back and stand on my shoulders."

Lee looked at Jamie disbelievingly. She had a way of making the impossible sound so easy. She also had a way of doing the impossible. Somehow Jamie had managed to get to her feet and was grasping the ankles of Lee who was now teetering on her shoulders.

"Lee, bend forward through the web," Jamie said. "Nora, you and Caitlin do your best to try and lift me as the other try to pull us up and through."

"It wasn't easy, but somehow they created another miracle. Dick, of course, had found it necessary to grab Jamie's boobs in order to get her through the web. This had hurt like hell, but Jamie didn't slap him or even scream at him. He hadn't had any other options and it had worked. Six were through, just two to go.

"Okay, Nora. Up on my shoulders," Caitlin ordered.

"You'll never be able to hold me," Nora exclaimed.

As Caitlin and Nora argued, Lee tapped Jamie on the shoulder and pointed. At first Jamie didn't realize what he wanted, but when she finally looked, her face turned white with fear. The spider, which since the fiasco with Dick had remained motionless in a dark corner, was creeping slowly toward the two girls. He was remaining close to the walls and in the shadows. Jamie doubted that any of the spectators had even noticed his movement.

"Stop arguing and get out of there," Jamie yelled in panic. "Nora, get on her shoulders. Caitlin, you have to hold her. You have to come through together and now!"

"Together?" Caitlin questioned. "Why?"

But then she heard the clicking of approaching pinchers and knew exactly why. As if they were professional acrobats, Nora found the capability to climb on Caitlin's shoulders. They staggered toward the web and Nora lean toward the opening and into the waiting arms of Jamie. As Jamie pulled her forward, Nora felt Caitlin's hands slide off her ankles and the young girl scream out in terror.

* * * * *

"Nott, you are doing excellent work," Slytherin remarked. "Continue to serve me faithfully and I shall see that you are amply rewarded when I assume my rightful position."

"Thank you, Great Lord! My greatest recompense will be your placement as monarch of the world," Nott proclaimed, prostrating himself in front of Slytherin.

Slytherin smiled. "On your feet, my loyal disciple. All will come in good time. We must learn patience. If the rest of the world reacts as the Ministry of Magic has, our task will be easy." Slytherin laughed. "If politicians had just one tenth the amount of brains as they have arrogance, we might have problems. As it is, our only fear of them is that they might try to talk us to death."

"Percy Weasley must be the biggest arse of them all," Slytherin continued. "If he were an Animagus he'd most definitely be an ostrich, the way he sticks his head in the sand and ignores the obvious. I'd have you kill the pompous git if he wasn't serving my purposes so well."

"What of the Order of the Phoenix?" Nott asked hesitantly. "Are you not concerned about them?"

"I take no adversary for granted," Slytherin said coldly. "But the greatest strength of an organization is found in its leadership. Godric Gryffindor was a great wizard, but his greatest strength was also his greatest weakness. The same can be said of Harry Potter."

"But sir," Nott said trembling. "Harry Potter defeated the Dark Lord."

"He defeated Tom Riddle because Potter possessed a weapon that Riddle knew not of. That weapon was love. Potter's mother used it to save him as a baby and Granger used it to save him as a young man. Voldemort did not understand the strength of love because he never loved, nor was he himself ever loved. I have experienced love. I know how it can help a person to achieve greatness beyond their ability. I also know how the loss of love can weaken one's desire to even live."

Nott's eyes shined with understanding. "If we destroy Potter, we'll destroy the Order of the Phoenix. We don't even have to fight Potter to destroy him. All we have to do is kill the one he loves so intensely."

"At least convince him she is dead. I am quite intrigued by this Hermione Granger," Slytherin admitted. "This body and mind that I possess were quite drawn to the young professor. I desire to know why."

"She is a filthy Mudblood," Nott replied in disgust.

"You are underestimating your enemy," Slytherin replied calmly. "You are judging her totally on her pedigree. Be honest with yourself. Remove hatred and prejudice from your mind. Close your eyes and tell me what you truly see when you think of Hermione Granger."

Nott obeyed his master and closed his eyes. He struggled to push all personal feelings and prejudices aside.

"Now tell me, what do you see?" Slytherin asked.

"An extremely beautiful, brilliant and powerful witch," Nott replied. "Easily the most intelligent witch of the century."

"I must meet this woman," Slytherin said.

"But she teaches and resides within Hogwarts. How can we possibly get to her?" Nott asked.

"Again patience," Slytherin said, his voice always calm. "Perhaps your new conscript, Draco Malfoy, will be of some assistance in reaching her."

"Then you trust him." Nott said excitedly. "You see a position for him in the organization."

"I'll reserve final judgment on that until I personally interview him," Slytherin answered. "At this point he appears to be a man that is willing to do whatever he feels necessary to serve his own best interests. His willingness and eagerness to spy is admirable. The question is where do his loyalties lie? Is he willing to spy for us or on us? I'm sure he will be very useful, but for now limit his knowledge to a need to know basis."

* * * * *

Nora had to look back. She had to know what had happened to Caitlin, but she was terrified to learn the truth.

If Nora was terrified, then words don't exist to describe how Caitlin felt. As she had struggled to maintain her balance with Nora on her shoulders, the clicking sound had gotten increasingly louder. Suddenly she felt something long and hairy seize her around the legs and lift her off the ground. She was no longer supporting Nora, but rather holding on to her for dear life. Caitlin was parallel to the ground: the spider pulling her legs as she held firmly to Nora's ankles.

Caitlin realized that she had to let go. The spider was too strong. Holding on to Nora would only jeopardize her teammate's safety. Caitlin felt like she was signing her own death warrant as she released her grip.

Head hanging facedown, Caitlin saw that the spider was clutching her with its two immensely long, hairy front legs. It appeared to be examining her as one would their lunch before taking the first juicy succulent bite. She could see its open mouth below her and a pair of deadly shining black pincers. The spider actually seemed to be salivating as it anticipated chomping on the fresh tender meat.

Caitlin could hear her teammates shouting as they hurled spell after spell at the huge spider, but to no avail. She was about to die a most horrible death with most of the wizard world looking on.

She had only one hope. Caitlin had never killed before. She abhorred hunting and those that referred to it as sport. She even avoided stepping on insects if she could. But now a spider was about to eat her alive. It was a 'kill or be killed' situation.

Caitlin closed her eyes and concentrated as the spider lowered her toward its open mouth. She fought her own fear, struggling to enter a trance state. She was seconds away from being bitten apart. Then her body relaxed as if she were asleep; a sleep she possibly would never wake from.

Suddenly one of the monster spider's eight eyes exploded as if a bomb had gone off inside it and then another and another as if part of a fireworks demonstration. In a grand ending, the beast's head blew apart covering the ground and everything within fifty meters in blood.

Jamie struggled to her feet and rushed through the ragged remnants of the web. Chunks of bloody flesh and bone lay everywhere; the ground was red with blood. Desperately she searched for Caitlin. Then she heard a faint moan. A wisp of blond hair was sticking out from under one of the monster spider's hairy legs.

"Caitlin! Are you all right?" Jamie screamed, just as Harry arrived on the scene, Hermione on his heels.

"I've been better," Caitlin gasped, as if having trouble breathing. "I didn't account for being dropped from that height or that hairy beast nearly falling on me. I hope Madam Pomfrey has a large supply of Skele-Gro on hand."

Harry levitated the spider's leg as Hermione placed Caitlin in stasis as a precaution prior to moving her. The team watched in silence, appreciating just how close Caitlin had come to dying.

Jamie tried to comfort a small first year boy who had pushed through the crowd of people and was now crying uncontrollably, struggling to get to Caitlin.

"You did well," Eric said placing his arm around Rishard as they watched Caitlin being carried off on a stretcher. "I couldn't have scripted it better myself. Everyone will be talking about the tournament tomorrow and Caitlin Potter is now a mega star. Do you realize how rare a Hyperempath is that can heal with their mind only, never having to even touch the victim? But she can kill, too. She can actually wish someone to death. That power hasn't existed in the wizarding world for centuries."

"You do realize how close she came to being lunch for that spider?" Rishard asked.

"It would have been a terrible loss," Eric agreed, "but can you imagine the ratings? You have a job ahead of you, Rishard. How are you going to make the second event even more exciting? You might actually need to kill or maim someone. I can't wait till February. Great job."

Eric walked away sprightly as Rishard stood staring solemnly at the ground, shaking his head in anguish. Eric was indeed a monster and now he had become one, too.

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Friday, December 2, 2005

Emily couldn't believe how fast the week had flown by, but then that was more often than not the case when one was busy, and Emily had been extremely busy. It seemed like all the professors were snowing them under with homework in order to cover as much material as possible before the holiday break.

Professor Flitwick had been the worst. It had become common knowledge that the little professor was planning on retiring at the end of the school year and he seemed intent on imparting all his knowledge to his students before his departure. This wasn't too awfully dreadful for sixth and seventh years, but the pressure on the others, especially on the first and second years, was tremendous.

"Jamie!" Emily called out as she sprinted across the grounds to catch up to her older sister.

"What's up?" Jamie asked, once Emily had caught up to Alex, Amanda and her.

"I was just wondering," Emily said, stopping momentarily to catch her breath. "Do you think you would have time to tutor me a bit on Summoning Charms this weekend?"

"Summoning Charms?" Alex asked questioningly. "Old Flitwick didn't teach us those until our fourth year."

"I know," Emily answered. "I think he's afraid that his replacement might not be up to the job and so he's determined to teach us six years of work in one year. I guess I shouldn't complain though; I could be a poor first year. They really have it bad."

"Does he know who his replacement will be?" Amanda asked. "Has he said?"

"No!" Emily answered. "All I've been able to gather is that he doesn't think his recommendation will take the job. Evidentially she has some other commitment."

"She?" Alex replied. "Probably some old hag."

"Yeah! Well, that's all out of our control," Emily said. "What I desperately need now is help on Summoning Charms. I'm probably the worst in the class. Denise is the best." From the anguished look on her face, it was evident that it pained Emily to admit this. "She's a natural at it; doesn't even appear to use any effort."

"It's not that hard," Jamie said. "It just takes concentration. You need to clear your mind of other thoughts. Suppose we get together tomorrow morning?"

"That would be terrific," Emily said excitedly. But before they could set a time for meeting, an owl, landing heavily on her shoulder and holding out its leg, startled Emily.

"Hedwig! What do you want?" Emily asked, rather taken aback. She seldom received owls, especially other than at breakfast.

"You might try reading that note she's clutching," Alex said with a laugh.

Emily removed the small piece of parchment from Hedwig and the snowy owl immediately took flight. Emily read the note and then looked anxiously toward the castle. "I'll see you in the morning," Emily said, crinkling the note up and tossing it to the ground before running toward the castle entrance.

"I wonder what that was all about," Jamie said, her eyes following Emily until she disappeared through the castle entrance.

Amanda leaned over and picked up the parchment from the ground, and then she smoothed it out before reading the brief message. "I've no idea what she did," Amanda said, "but I think she's in trouble, again."

Amanda handed the note to Jamie who read it, Alex reading over her shoulder.

EMILY! WHATEVER YOU ARE DOING, BRING IT TO AN END AND REPORT
IMMEDIATELY TO OUR QUARTERS. DAD

Emily stood briefly looking at the door. She knew she was in trouble, but she was damned if she knew why. Had Professor Flitwick told her parents how abysmal she was at doing Summoning Charms?

Quietly she opened the door and stepped inside. Normally the first thing she would have done once inside would have been to strip out of her clothes. She, however, decided today against that penchant. Her Mom and Dad were sitting on the couch talking to someone. The person was likewise sitting, their back to the door. Emily could only tell that it was a man.

"You made good time, young lady," Harry said, harshness to his voice. "We have company. Come in here and take a seat between your mother and me."

Emily walked timidly into the room, only turning toward the visitor when she was about to be seated. Emily's face turned white, her breathing became rapid as she collapsed silently on the sofa between her parents.

"I believe you know Roger Fortescue," Harry said matter-of-factly.

Emily simply nodded her head. She knew she was dead or at least before long would be.

"Roger tells us that we jumped to an erroneous conclusion," Hermione said. "He informs us that it is he rather than his younger brother who is accompanying you to the Yule Ball."

Emily nodded her head shyly. "I steered you to that wrong conclusion," Emily admitted.

"Why would you do that?" Harry asked, already reasonably aware of the rationale.

"Because I was afraid you wouldn't let me go with Roger because of his age," Emily owned up.

"Roger, what made you decide to visit us today?" Harry asked.

"It was a conversation I had with my dad," Roger said. He bit his lip. "I've been attracted to Emily since the first day I saw her." He stopped, seeing the troubled expressions on Harry and Hermione's faces. "I know! I realize I shouldn't even be looking at a twelve-year-old girl, but Emily was always so nice and sociable. She never looked down her nose at me or treated me like a lowly soda clerk."

"She became a ray of sunshine on an otherwise gloomy day. I looked forward to her daily stops at the Shoppe and found myself depressed when she skipped a day. I lost sight of the difference between our ages and just saw her as a person that made my day. When she asked me to the Ball, I didn't hesitate a moment before saying yes. I even offered to buy her dress." He indicated the box lying on his lap.

"The dress was to be delivered directly to Emily, but the House of Gayee goofed and delivered it to me instead. I live with my parents and obviously they questioned the box."

Hermione stared at Roger, an astounded expression on her face. "You bought my daughter a dress from one of the most exclusive fashion houses in Paris for a school dance? It must have cost you a fortune."

"She's worth every cent," Roger said, without hesitation. "She's a special person; I envy the man she eventually marries."

"Anyway, when I told my Dad the whole story, he became very concerned. He doubted that Emily had been totally candid with the two of you. Although he trusts me and knows I would never take improper advantage of your daughter, he wanted me to make sure that our going to the dance together met with your approval."

"I remember you from school," Hermione said, giving Roger the briefest glimmer of a smile. "You were just finishing your second year when Harry and I were completing."

"I'm surprised you remember me," Roger replied. "I was rather quiet and kept to myself, usually with my head buried in a book."

"That's probably what first drew my attention to you as a teacher," Hermione concluded. "You never did get over your shyness. I remember you being an excellent student, but I had to constantly prod you in order to get any participation out of you in class."

Roger just nodded, a look of regret in his eyes.

While Hermione seemed satisfied to reminisce about the past, Harry was more interested in the present and this twenty year old's intentions toward his young daughter.

"Have you ever thought about sleeping with my daughter?" Harry asked.

Hermione and Emily each reacted rather differently to these words. Hermione's eyes practically popped out of her head in shock while Emily's face turned scarlet. She'd never thought about her and Roger doing anything like that and trembled at the thought.

Roger was about to answer when he remembered reading that Harry was skilled at Occlumency.

The professor would easily be able to see through any lies. Roger had no choice, but to be honest and then deal with the repercussions. "Thinking about doing something and actually doing it are extremely different," Roger answered. "If men could be arrested for their thoughts, we'd undoubtedly all be residing in Azkaban guilty of rape."

"I'm sure when you look at Emily, you only see a little girl, your daughter. Stand back some time and truly look at her. Try to put it out of your mind that she is your daughter or that she is twelve. If you do, you'll see an extremely attractive young woman. A man would be a fool not to want to share a bed with her under the correct circumstances. Her being twelve does not represent the proper conditions. I couldn't live with myself if I were responsible for her being taken from your home."

"There is also Azkaban to consider," Harry added. "You'd be charged with rape."

"I'd never go to prison," Roger said assuredly, looking from Harry to Hermione and then back again. "One of you would end up there for killing me and then the other would die from heartbreak. I could never be the cause of that, no matter how great the temptation."

Emily wished she had a mirror. Definitely she had missed something the last time she combed her hair. She most certainly had never seen a beautiful temptress looking back at her.

"I believe you," Harry said. "At first I was concerned that you might be a pedophile, but you're not. I don't think you'd ever harm our little girl." He bit his lip and then looked to Hermione for guidance. Hermione shrugged her shoulders and gave him an 'I don't know what to say' look.

"You were truthful with me, so I'll be completely honest with you," Harry said. "If Emily were twenty-five and you were thirty-three, I wouldn't even question the age difference. Despite the fact that I believe and trust you, I still have extreme difficulty granting my twelve year old daughter permission to go out with someone eight years her senior." Harry sighed. "But then I know my daughter and how she thinks. Saying no would be the same as throwing a gauntlet in challenge. She would consider it a dare to somehow see you behind our backs. If this is to take place, I want it to be under our watchful eyes. Hermione and I will, as usual, be chaperones at the dance; don't even think about trying to sneak off alone."

Emily sat a few moments waiting for her father to continue. Finally, the realization of what he had said sank in. She ran and hugged her dad tightly, then threw her arms around her mum. "Thank you! Thank You!" she shouted gleefully. "I promise you that you won't regret your decision."

"I hope not," Hermione said. Although she agreed with Harry, like him, she had qualms about their decision.

Emily wanted to jump up and down in celebration and throw her arms around Roger, but decided restraint on her part might be a better choice. Instead she gave Roger a huge smile that proclaimed her happiness.

Roger returned the smile, then handed Emily the box that he had been holding. "Here, this is for you. I hope you like it."

"Is that your dress?" Hermione asked, sounding almost as excited as Emily. She looked at Roger. "I still can't believe you bought her a Gayee original."

Emily laid the box on her Mum's lap and then nervously removed the lid. When she lifted the top, it

revealed a beautiful, fine, silky, delicate pale yellow material. But as Emily reached to remove the garment, the color changed to green. Emily stepped back and just stared. After a brief time the dress again changed colors, this time blue.

"The material contains a rainbow charm," Roger informed them. "It changes to all seven colors of the rainbow, but the same shade is never repeated. The red, for example, could be pale, almost pink or maybe scarlet."

They all stood watching for a few minutes, mesmerized by the changing colors of the soft, almost fragile looking material. Finally Emily broke the silence. "Can I try it on?" she pleaded.

"I imagine after spending all that money, Roger would like to see what it looks like on you," Hermione said. She started to get up in order to accompany Emily to her bedroom to change, but Emily had already slipped her skirt down over her hips and was now unbuttoning her shirt. Within seconds Emily was standing in front of them nude with the exception of her socks and trainers. Roger couldn't help but stare.

"I imagine you've noticed that our daughter is extremely bashful when it comes to exposing her body," Harry said facetiously.

Roger tried to compose himself. It was not easy to talk with his tongue hanging out. "You may want to remove your socks and trainers," he suggested. "They won't go quite right with the dress. Besides, it comes with shoes and anklets."

As Roger reached in the box for the shoes, Emily quickly removed her socks and trainers.

Harry found himself staring at Emily as Roger's words played in his mind. *Stand back some time and truly look at her. Try to put it out of your mind that she is only twelve and your daughter.*

"Stop looking at her like that, you pervert," another voice yelled. "She is your daughter."

Harry blinked his eyes, trying to return to reality. As he once again looked at Emily, the two voices in his head agreed on one thing; Emily was becoming more and more attractive with every passing day.

"Oh! They're cute," Emily exclaimed, reaching for the socks. She first slipped her right foot in until she felt her toes touch the silky fabric. Then she slowly pulled the bunched cloth along her foot, over her heel and up to cover her ankle. She repeated the sequence with her left foot and then reached for the shoes.

"The House of Gayee recommended a four inch heel, but I thought a one inch would be more appropriate," Roger commented.

Hermione nodded her full agreement.

Once Emily had her shoes and socks on, she held out her right leg so everyone could view them. Emily adored the shoes, but was entranced by the tops of the extremely thin-laced white ankle socks. A fringe of ruffled lace about two inches wide crinkled from the very top of the short socks, with a second similar ruffle beginning an inch below. This second ruffle forced the top one to remain flared out, and it also hid the top strap of the shoe, the glint of the golden buckle through the pattern being the only sign of it.

"I love them," Emily cooed, jumping to her feet. "I can't wait to see them with the dress."

"I'm sorry," Hermione said, looking compassionately toward Emily. "It looks like there has been some sort of mistake. There is no actual dress in the box, just three pieces of material and a bunch of thin gold chains."

"That is the dress," Roger said apprehensively. "There are instructions in the box showing how it can be worn in several different ways, but I can explain to you the manner in which you'll probably want Emily to wear it."

"The first things to put on are the chains and there are a lot of them," Roger noted.

"I hope you were precise with the measurements you took or the dress won't fit correctly. The Gayee people almost refused to sell it to me without them being able to do a final fitting on the model," Roger confessed.

Emily blushed at being referred to as a model. Three years ago she was a total Tom Boy. Some of the boys in the area of her home actually thought she was a boy. She had a boys' haircut, wore boys' clothes and if they played a game of skins versus shirts, she never complained about being on the skins team. At that time, she certainly had nothing to hide. Hell, back then she was totally flat, chubby Eddie Heck had bigger boobs than her. Now she was being referred to as a model and Roger and her parents were looking at her as if she actually were one.

"The longest chain goes around your waist and fastens at the back," Roger instructed. Hermione's job was to apply the chains as Roger told her precisely where to put them. Harry just watched with misgivings. "If you keep the catch lined up with her spine, all the other connections should fall into place perfectly." Although the chain went around Emily's waist, it actually rested on her hips. "Next we use the three chains that look like necklaces. The largest actually goes around her neck, again keeping the closure to the back. The other two slide up her arms until they are actually at her armpits. They each have two eyelet type things. The one eyelet should point up and the other toward the floor."

"These two chains go on either side and connect from the under arm eyelet directly down to the waist chain." Roger pointed to the two longer of the four remaining chains. They add support for the waist chain and help keep the shoulder bands in place. Those last two chains attach from the necklace to the shoulder eyelet on either side. That completes the chains, now we attach the dress."

Roger paused to take a look at Emily. She looked gorgeous in just the gold chains. It almost seemed a sin to cover that beautiful body.

"The smallest rectangular piece is the optional breast cover," Roger said.

Emily, Hermione and Harry all looked up at the use of the word optional, but none of them questioned Roger.

"There are chains attached to all four corners of the breast cover," Roger continued. "The two shorter chains attach to the shoulder rings, the longer chains attach to the upward facing eyelets on the waist chain."

As she finished attaching the dress top, Hermione found herself again admiring the skill involved in making this dress. All three pieces were continually changing color, but it was with perfect synchronization.

"The remaining two pieces are the same size, so it doesn't matter which goes on the front or back," Roger pointed out. "The piece put on the back will magically adjust slightly in width and length to accommodate for the arse. Hang them like a shower curtain starting and finishing with the eyelets an inch forward and an inch behind the side support chains."

"That means there is two inches of totally exposed skin on each side," Hermione exclaimed. "There will be no doubt that she is totally nude under the dress."

"Mum, please wait until I have it entirely on before getting upset. And as far as people knowing I'm nude underneath, I think everyone in the school already knows I never wear a bra or knickers."

Hermione didn't respond to this, but instead finished making all the connections, then asked Emily to step back a bit and slowly turn around.

"Well, how do I look, Mum" Emily asked.

"From what viewpoint?" Hermione inquired.

"I guess from where you're standing," Emily answered, bewildered by the question.

"I meant do you want my opinion as a teacher, a mother or an independent observer." Hermione shook her head. "The dress is gorgeous and you look fabulous in it. It's just that I'm not sure it's suitable for a school dance," Hermione answered.

"What do you think Daddy?"

"Honey, I love you and I trust you. I think you should be allowed to attend the dance nude if that's what you want, but I don't make the rules," Harry replied. "You look beautiful and your Mum and I will thrash it out. We haven't said no. Don't push it. Please, just give us some time to talk."

"Okay," Emily said dejectedly. "But it's such a beautiful dress."

"You'll look beautiful no matter what you wear and I'm sure Roger will be proud to escort you whatever our decision is," Harry said.

"That's very true," Roger responded, as he looked nervously at his watch. "I'm sorry, but I really must leave. I'm due at work in an hour. Thank you for trusting me and allowing me to take your daughter to the Yule Ball."

Harry smiled. "It's a combination of trusting you, trusting her, but mostly knowing we will be there to keep an eye on you both. But yes, we could have said no. So, you're welcome."

After thanking Hermione again and shaking Harry's hand, Roger departed.

At first no one spoke, then Hermione, who had been reading the dress directions exclaimed, "Oh! My!"

"What is it Mione?" Harry asked, sliding over next to her.

"There are a number of ways suggested to wear that dress," Hermione stated. "Emily is currently wearing it in what the designer feels is its most conservative and unbecoming way. They

recommend wearing it this way only if you have deformities you wish to conceal."

"How do they suggest it be worn?" Emily asked. "Can I try it that way?"

"You can try it the way they suggest," Hermione answered, "but don't even think about asking if you can go to the Ball that way. Hogwarts isn't ready."

Harry's eye widened. "How exactly do they recommend the dress be worn?" he asked.

"Well, they included copies of legislation that was passed several years ago that made it legal for women to go topless, plus pictures of haute couture presenting it," Hermione said.

"Wait a minute," Emily yelled. "If going topless is legal, why do we have to wear tops? We're nudists after all."

"Being legal and being acceptable are two different matters," Hermione declared. "Something being legal simply means you wouldn't go to jail for doing it. Society has many other ways of punishing people who do things deemed unacceptable."

"Like what?" Emily asked.

"What do you think would happen if I started to teach classes topless?" Hermione asked.

"You'd make half the Hogwarts students extremely happy and the other half extremely envious," Emily said. "Oh! And the sales of skiving snack bars would drop tremendously because no one would ever want to skip your class."

"I'd also be fired," Hermione stated. "It might be one hundred percent legal, but the parents and Board of Directors would never approve."

"That's not fair," Emily protested.

"Emily, haven't you learned by now that life isn't always fair?" Harry asked.

"Okay, I understand," Emily said, "but can I still try it the way they suggest? Just to see how it looks."

Hermione nodded her head. "First remove the breast panel and the chains that were originally attached to it, but leave all the other chains on."

"I bet I'd turn heads if I walked into the Great Hall like this," Emily said, with a giggle after removing the panel of material that covered her breasts.

"No doubt about that," Harry agreed.

"Now move the first hook of the skirt to the fourth hook in on either side, both front and back," Hermione directed. "That will result in the exposed leg opening increasing from two inches to eleven inches on either side."

"But my hips only measure twenty-eight inches," Emily exclaimed. "Eleven inches exposed on either side." Emily quickly did the math. "That means the skirt will be gathered together in a space of only three inches, both front and back. Wow!"

Emily quickly made the adjustments and then ran to her parents' bedroom to see the results. "What do you think, mirror?"

"Your question confuses me young miss," the mirror responded. "I think about many things. May I assume that you are wishing me to comment on your own physical attributes or on the attire that you are almost wearing?"

"I guess both," Emily answered. "You can't lie, correct? You have to tell me exactly what you think?"

"I can not lie," the mirror confirmed. "My confusion stems from the fact that what you are wearing does not seem to serve any of the purposes for which humans cover themselves with clothing."

"What do you mean by that?" Hermione asked. She and Harry had followed Emily to their bedroom and were now absorbedly listening to her conversation with the mirror.

"I'll try to expound," the mirror said. "Humans initially took to wearing clothing for two central reasons, warmth and modesty. Miss Emily most certainly is not receiving any warmth from the garment she wears, nor is it providing more than a false hint of modesty. Many people now seek to cover their body flaws with clothing; Miss Emily has no such problem. Still others wear clothing to enhance their pleasant appearance. As lovely as that material may be, it only serves to hide her true beauty."

"Mirror, are you suggesting that my daughter attend the Yule Ball nude?" Hermione asked, surprise evident in her voice.

"Not at all," the mirror responded, almost defensively. "The young miss asked me to evaluate her and the garment. I have simply done as she asked."

"Did the mirror actually say what I think it just said," Emily asked.

"Yes," Hermione answered putting her arm around Emily. "The mirror thinks you're beautiful and so do I."

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Friday, December 16, 2005

Harry watched, devotedly as Hermione tucked Ben in bed for the night. "It's amazing how fast he's growing," Harry said.

"Yes," Hermione agreed with a sigh. "He's not a little baby anymore," There was a tinge of sadness noticeable in her voice. "Before we know it, he'll be running about the castle pulling at your trouser leg and begging you to buy him a broomstick."

"I wonder if Ben realizes how lucky he is?" Harry asked. "Not many little boys get to grow up surrounded by beautiful naked women."

"Personally I think the world would be a better place if everyone grew up in a naturist environment," Hermione said with conviction. "But that's coming from the crazy woman who founded S.P.E.W., so don't pay me any mind."

"S.P.E.W. wasn't a crazy idea," Harry insisted. "One of the countless things I love about you is your hatred of bias and bigotry. Besides, I totally agree with you. The world would be a healthier place if nudity weren't looked upon as being sexy or dirty, but rather just as natural. Maybe you should become a naturist advocate."

Hermione didn't speak, but rather just stared intently at Harry. You could almost see her mind processing his remark.

"Harry, when you look at the girls or me nude, do you see something sullied or decadent?" Hermione asked.

"Just the opposite," he said. "I see beauty, purity and innocence,"

As Harry slipped into bed, Hermione began pacing the room. "I love the view, but aren't you coming to bed?" Harry questioned, longingly.

Abruptly, Hermione stopped pacing. She had a resolute expression on her face. "Harry I think we should let Emily wear the dress, Roger bought for her, to the dance. How can a dress reveal too much or be considered risqué when a person considers total nudity innocent and pure?"

"Now you're talking about an individual's personal viewpoint," Harry said concernedly. "As much as you and I might consider nudity innocent, most people don't. If Emily wears that dress, even in its most conservative mode, she will raise eyebrows and we will be scorned."

"Then let people disparage us," Hermione bellowed. "I'm tired of our lifestyle being ridiculed and the girls being forced to live a lie."

Harry studied Hermione, an alarmed expression casing his face. "This isn't just about Emily any more, is it?"

"No! I'm tired of people looking at us as if we're bizarre simply because we're naturists. I'm weary of wearing clothes just to appease others. It may be too late for me, but I'm going to work to change the world for my children."

"You took me seriously," Harry said, a flabbergasted looks on his face. "You're going to actually become an activist for naturism."

"It's about time someone did," Hermione avowed. "Besides, unlike S.P.E.W., it won't go unappreciated."

"You do realize that depending on what actions you take, you could place your job as a professor in jeopardy?" Harry questioned.

Hermione nodded her head. "I love teaching, but you know that I won't let fear of reprisal impede me once I've set an agenda. If need be, I can always get another position."

Harry looked at his wife with both apprehension and renewed respect. "What's your first course of action?" Harry asked supportively.

"We're going to let Emily wear her House of Gayee original to the dance," Hermione answered, her voice emphatic. "In any manner she desires."

"You're actually going to let her decide how to wear it?" Harry questioned, concernedly. "Emily has always been rather an extremist. What if she decides to forgo the material completely and only wear the delicate golden chains?"

"Then I'll support her decision," Hermione answered, "knowing that she'll look quite stunning."

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Saturday, December 31, 2005, The Yule Ball

Roger stood nervously outside the Potter's quarters. He was beginning to think he had made a mistake when he accepted Emily's invitation. Everything about the girl appealed to him; she was the perfect woman for him except for one slight problem. He was twenty years old and she was only twelve.

He had finally worked up the nerve to knock, when the door flew open. "Did you intend to knock or spend the entire night on our doorstep?" Caitlin asked.

Roger was at a loss for words. "How did you know I was here?" he finally asked.

"Did you forget who our parents are?" Caitlin asked. "They've installed all the latest magical devices to insure our privacy. We were alerted to your arrival."

"Oh!" Roger said, understandingly. It was just then that he truly looked at Caitlin. "Wow! You look beautiful."

"Thanks," she said blushing slightly. "Then you don't think it's too short? Dad's concerned I might give a show."

Roger took a second look at the dress. It definitely showed a lot of leg. He couldn't recall ever seeing a dress quite so short. "Your dad is right," he said. "You're going to have to be extremely careful how you move or your knickers will show."

Caitlin looked at Roger as if insulted by his remark. "I never wear knickers. I think they're revolting."

Roger was saved commenting by a voice to his left. "Well, what do you think?" Kim asked. "Doesn't she look stunning?"

He turned in the direction of the voice and nearly fainted. It was as if Kim was invisible; he only saw Emily. "You're nude," Roger said, his voice shaking. "You can't be considering going to the Ball like that. Your parents will kill both of us."

"Don't be silly. I'm not nude," Emily said teasingly. "I have on the shoes and frilly socks you bought me, plus all the thin gold chains. Don't you like the way I look?"

Roger just stared at her, his mouth open and his head wobbling back and forth. "You look glorious, but they'll never let you in the Great Hall like that. And I repeat; your parents will kill us both."

"No they won't," Emily insisted. "Mum talked to Caitlin and me for a long time about our love of

naturism. She agrees that it is unfair for us to be forced to wear clothes simply because others have perverted thoughts about the naked body. School rules require a prescribed uniform be worn for classes, but she told us that we can wear as little as we want at other times and that she will defend our right to do so."

"You're truly going to go down to the Ball like that?" Roger asked. He was actually shaking at the thought of escorting a totally nude twelve-year-old girl into the Great Hall.

"No!" Emily answered as all three girls broke into laughter. "This is my preferred outfit and I wanted you to see me in it, but I've decided to be a little more conservative for the Ball."

"Mum, however, really did say I could go like this if I wanted and that she would defend my right to do so," Emily insisted. "They're the best parents in the world, but neither Caitlin nor I want to see their jobs put at risk, just so we can be more comfortable."

"Then you're going to wear the dress from Gayee?" Roger asked, seeming extremely relieved.

"Yeah! I just can't decide how to wear it. Did you know it was now legal for girls to go bare breasted?" she asked playfully.

Roger didn't speak; he just stared at her. It had gotten to the point that he didn't know when she was being serious and when she was kidding. Finally Emily came over and gave him a kiss on the cheek.

"I'm sorry," she said and she sounded sincere. "I'm wearing the full outfit. The only thing, I can't decide is how wide to make the opening on the sides. Two inches seems so old and conservative, but eleven inches.... What do you think?"

"I've only seen you wear it like this and in the conservative mode," Roger responded. "Why don't you try it on the other ways and let all of us vote?"

The girls all liked this idea and got a big kick out of adjusting the material to vary the amount of leg Emily exposed. They started with the most conservative setting that only exposed two inches of skin on either side at the hips, progressed to five inches, then eight inches and finally eleven inches.

At each setting, they had Emily walk around, pretend to dance, even sit and bend. Finally they all made their recommendations.

"I honestly like the eleven inch setting," Caitlin offered, "but that's probably because I think you look best totally nude. Three inches of material in front and back is kind of silly though because it barely hides your mound and butt crack and then only if you stand perfectly still. The five-inch setting doesn't show enough of your legs. I guess I vote for eight inches."

"Five or eight," Roger suggested. "Two inches doesn't seem worth the bother, but eleven might be pushing the limits."

"I agree with Roger," Kim said. "Either the five or eight inch setting." Kim giggled. "Probably the eight. It keeps you from being exposed in the front unless you bend forward, but it lets some of your pretty bum show from the sides when you walk."

"I guess that settles it then," Emily said, glancing at the clock. "We better get going; Evan and Randy will be getting anxious."

"I wonder what's keeping them?" Evan asked as he paced back and forth nervously in the entrance hall. Every few seconds, he looked toward the marble staircase waiting for the girls to make their appearance at the top; finally they came into view.

"Who's that old guy with them?" Randy asked.

"That's Emily's date," Evan answered. "He's not that awfully old; only twenty. His name is Roger."

"Too old for her," Randy huffed. He grabbed Evan by the shoulder and started pulling him in the direction of the staircase. "Come over here and stand directly at the bottom of the stairs so you can get the full effect."

Evan didn't understand what Randy was talking about until he looked toward the upstairs hallway as Kim and Caitlin started descending the stairs. Quickly he turned his head away.

"What's the matter with you Squirt; why are you blushing?" Randy asked. "You've seen pussy before. You see Caitlin nude every night. Hell, as chummy as you two are, I bet you've even gotten to lick it."

"What? I'd never...." Evan stared at Randy with revulsion. "It's different when she's nude. It's wrong to look up a girl's skirt when she's dressed."

"Whatever!" Randy said, returning his gaze to the girls. "Holy shit! Look at the outfit Emily is wearing. That sure doesn't leave much to the imagination. She might as well be starkers."

"I'm sure all three of them would prefer to be nude," Evan barked. "You don't understand them at all, do you? They're naturists. They don't wear short dresses or go without knickers to be sexy or excite people. They do it because they hate clothes and are more comfortable that way."

Randy was about to retort in a malicious way, but the group had finally reached the bottom of the stairs. "You girls look fabulous tonight," he said. "Especially you!" He gave Kim a peck on the cheek.

After making introductions, the six proceeded into the Great Hall. Caitlin grabbed Evan's hand and held him back. Then she leaned over and kissed his cheek.

"What was that for?" he asked naively.

"That was for being a gentleman and not looking up Kim's or my dress," Caitlin said. "I know it sounds silly, especially since you see me naked all the time, but it was sweet." She gave him another light kiss, and then they hurried to catch up to the others.

The Hall was quickly filling and so they found one of the few remaining empty tables and were seated. Shortly, Alex, who was accompanying both Jamie and Amanda, joined them.

Emily's outfit had gone relatively unnoticed as she entered the Great Hall; everyone seemingly caught up in their own conversations. That ended when at the conclusion of dinner, all the champions were announced and asked to assemble with their partners on the dance floor.

A collective gasp could be heard as Emily approached the center of the room. Ginny and Draco, who were subbing for Ron and Sam, looked at each other and then at Harry and Hermione.

"Did you know Emily was going to wear that?" Ginny asked anxiously.

"No," Hermione answered honestly. "I wasn't quite sure what either Caitlin or Emily would wear tonight. I had given them permission to attend in the nude if they were more comfortable that way."

Ginny just stared at Hermione in disbelief. Draco, on the other hand, couldn't look away from young Emily. His eyes seemed engrossed in the delicate thin chain that encircled her body and drooped precariously low both in the front and back. A mere six-inch wide swath of material hung from the chain in both areas covering only the essentials.

"Hermione, I don't think Emily should be allowed to remain at the Ball dressed like that," Ginny protested.

"Why?"

"Why! Because it's not decent!"

"There is nothing indecent about the human body. Emily is gorgeous nude," Hermione said, somewhat louder than necessary. "What is indecent are the thoughts that people, such as your husband, have when they see a nude or semi-nude body."

Draco jumped as if suddenly brought out of a daydream and stared at Hermione.

"Don't look at me like that, Draco. You know exactly what you were just dreaming about. I enjoy being nude, my girls would never wear clothes, if possible. That doesn't mean that any of us are asking for or willing to have sex with every pervert that comes along. Get it through your head; nudity does not equate sex."

Hermione turned and stomped away in a huff.

"By the way," Harry said slyly, "did I tell you that Hermione has decided to become an activist for naturism?"

Denise stared at Emily with abhorrence as the young girl danced blissfully to the opening number with Roger. The huge fires had made the Great Hall exceedingly warm and for this reason some of the balcony doors had been opened to make the room more comfortable. Occasionally a breeze teased at the back section of Emily's outfit causing it to blow almost like a curtain in the wind.

"Look at the little tart," Denise shrieked in Tyler's ear, nearly bursting his eardrum. "Her whole arse is practically on display and it doesn't seem to even trouble her."

"Yeah!" Was all Tyler said, but the inflection in his voice seemed to indicate more admiration than disdain.

"I can't believe her parents allowed her to wear that getup or bring someone that old to the Ball," Janice commented.

"She and her sister seem to like different extremes," Denise said. "Caitlin appears to be a cradle robber. What can she possibly see in that little boy? Maybe she should hold him in her arms as they dance, it would make them closer in height."

Janice laughed. "My dad used to dance with me like that when I was a little girl."

Denise and Janice continue to mock Emily and Caitlin, but Tyler tried his best to ignore them. He wished he were dancing with Emily instead of listening to these two wicked witches make rude comments about her.

As the tempo of the music changed, many of the couples returned to their tables.

"Do you mind if I have the next dance with your date?" Brian asked, as Randy and Kim were about to be seated.

"That's up to her," Randy answered unemotionally.

Kim nodded and she and Brian returned to the dance floor.

"Would you like to dance?" Tyler politely asked Denise. She nodded and they left Janice to talk with her date as they strolled to the dance floor.

Tyler was trying to treat Denise appropriately, but he longed to have Emily in his arms. He wanted to kick himself. Emily had been his girlfriend. How could he be so stupid as to lose her?

There was very little sitting out of dances as the evening progressed. Alex was busy dividing his time between Jamie and Amanda, while Roger seemed afraid to sit down for fear that someone would steal Emily from him.

Caitlin, too, was kept busy. When she wasn't dancing with Evan, she danced with Randy who seemed to be getting more and more annoyed by Brian asking Kim to dance. Caitlin even danced a couple of numbers with Matt who had asked politely and had been careful not to make any comments about Evan. Caitlin did manage, however, to keep a proper distance so that Matt did not get any wrong impressions. She wanted it to be clear that she was dancing with him as a friend and nothing more.

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Emily looked at her watch sadly. The Ball would be over in less than an hour and although Roger had treated her like a princess, something inside of her hurt. She had hoped that she'd get to dance at least once with Tyler. She had noticed him looking in her direction a number of times during the night; he even smiled when she caught him, but he hadn't cut in, not once and this disappointed her.

When the evening started, Caitlin had been slightly tense about people staring at her and Evan. This was partly because he was in first year and she was in third, but it was mainly because of their height differences. When a couple dances, the girl normally rests her head on the guy's chest, not the other way around. What now had Caitlin most concerned was the effect Evan was having on her.

His breath was entering the loose fitting cleavage of her dress and driving her crazy. Caitlin always thought that cold made a girl's nipples get hard. She never imagined that warm breath could do the same thing. Her Mum had explained to her that a Hyperempath feels pain and pleasure much stronger than normal witches, but this was ridiculous. She was only thirteen, Evan eleven, yet he was undeniably exciting her without even trying.

When Kim returned to the table after dancing with Brian for the fifth time that evening, Randy gave her a cold stare.

"Is something wrong?" she asked, already knowing the answer.

"Do you think I'm stupid?" he asked, trying to control his temper. "In first year, Caitlin chose Matt over me; then Emily dropped me for Tyler. At least they had the courtesy to be upfront about it. Don't you think I can see that something is going on between you and Brian? I'm not a troll, you know."

"No, you're not and I haven't been fair to you," Kim said, trying to hold back tears. "Will you take a walk with me? We have to talk, but not in here."

Randy begrudgingly nodded his head and they got up to leave the table just as Roger and Emily sat down for only the third time that night.

"They don't look happy," Emily said when Kim and Randy were finally out of hearing range.

"They're not! Well, especially not Randy," Amanda said. "I can't say that I blame him. He's Kim's date, but she's spent an inordinate amount of time tonight with that American boy, Brian."

Emily nodded her head. She had expected Kim's balancing act to fail.

"Tyler, darling! Will you watch Janice's and my drinks while we go to the lady's room?" Denise asked demurely.

Tyler nodded his head, knowing he should never have agreed to attend the Ball with Denise. Now she was calling him darling as if they were some sort of couple. He shook his head in frustration as he looked around the Hall, his eyes finally coming to rest on Emily.

He wanted to kick himself every time he looked at her. Damn it! He was going to ask her to dance. If she turned him down, she turned him down, but he had to ask her. Besides, the last time Denise and Janice went to the bathroom, he had nearly fallen asleep before they returned. He asked Janice's date to watch the girls' drinks and started the trek across the hall to Emily. He was a twelve-year-old kid and she was here with a twenty year old man. He knew she'd turn him down, but he had to ask any way.

"Hi Emily," Tyler said, his voice rattling with nervousness. "I had to come over and tell you how beautiful you look tonight."

"Thanks, Tyler. It's nice of you to say so," Emily said, giving Tyler a genuine smile. "This is Roger Fortescue, my escort for the evening."

"It's very nice to meet you," Tyler said politely. Then he turned his attention back to Emily. "If you would, and if Mr. Fortescue has no objections I would like very much to have this dance with you."

Tyler almost fainted when Emily said, "You don't mind, do you Roger? Tyler and I are good friends."

Suddenly Tyler felt like he was going to heave. His stomach was in his throat as he reached out his sweaty hand to the most extraordinary girl in the world.

Roger watched as Tyler and Emily walked onto the dance floor. Then he turned to Amanda. "Am I missing something? They look like more than friends."

"They dated when they were first years, but he really did a dirty thing to her," Amanda answered candidly. "I'm surprised she ever talked to him again. I felt for sure that she'd turn down his invitation to dance."

"Speaking of dancing, would you like to dance?" Roger asked.

Amanda stared at Roger. "Yes! I'd like that. Maybe it will help remove the curse."

"Curse?" Roger asked questioningly.

"Haven't you noticed that no one has danced with me all evening, but my best friend's boyfriend?" Amanda asked.

"I noticed, but didn't feel it was in my place to question why," Roger said. "What, if truth be told, truly amazed me was that someone as attractive as yourself came to the Ball unescorted."

Amanda gave Roger her hand as they headed toward the floor. "Hogwarts' boys tend to shy away from girls that have a loose reputation and a baby at home."

"Thank you for saying yes," Tyler said as they walked toward a less crowded area of the dance floor. "I was afraid you'd turn me down."

"Tyler, will you please get it through your head that I don't hate you," Emily said.

As Tyler went to put his arm around her, he hesitated. There was no place to put his hand except on bare skin.

Emily grinned. "You know, you're amazing. I've been completely nude in a closet with you, but you're afraid to touch me. If I recall correctly, you even got down on your knees so that you could check out my equipment closer. Look, just put your right hand on my waist and pull me toward you. I promise I won't hex you."

"Tyler, I know we've had some bad times, but I've gotten over it. I not only forgive you, but I consider you a friend, a good friend. Now, let's enjoy our dance together." Emily leaned forward and lightly kissed his cheek.

There was much less feeling behind the kiss than others read into it.

Tyler felt renewed hope that some day he might win Emily's love. He pulled her even tighter against him and returned the gentle kiss.

Roger saw the kiss and felt like his heart had broken; his mind did a quick reality check. You're twenty. He's twelve, she's twelve, and they're in love.

Denise, however, had the strongest reaction. She and Janice had entered the hall in time to see Emily kiss Tyler and then see him return the kiss.

"That f...ing bitch!" she screamed. "The little tart didn't want anything to do with Tyler until he became my boyfriend. Now the cunt thinks she can just move in and take him away from me. Well,

the bimbo's got another trick coming. I'll show her what happens to anyone that messes with me. Janice, follow me!"

Due to the loud music only Janice had heard Denise's vicious outburst. It was with trepidation that she followed her best friend out of the hall. She had seen Denise angry often before, but this was way beyond anger. She couldn't imagine what revenge Denise might at this moment be planning.

Janice followed Denise to a door just off the balcony. They entered the space and quickly moved toward a closed door at the other end of the room. Janice could tell, by the sound of music, that this room adjoined the Great Hall.

"What are you going to do?" Janice asked, not sure she really wanted to know the answer to her question.

"What are we going to do?" Denise said, revising the question. "I need your help because I need to cast two charms and I don't want to take the chance of negating the first when I cast the second."

"What type of charms?" Janice inquired.

"Just simple Summoning Charms," she said. "At this close proximity they should work like a charm." Denise laughed evilly at her play on words. "The first charm is to humiliate the bitch; the second to hurt her like she's never been hurt before. Don't worry, I'm not asking you to do the one that hurts. That will be my pleasure."

"What are we going to summon?" Janice asked, her interest growing.

"You my friend are going to summon the little tart's dress," Denise said with a chuckle. "She likes to run around nude in the dorm. Let's see how she likes being naked in front of the whole student body. But be sure you say Emily Zacherley-Potter's dress. We don't want to mistakenly strip Caitlin or Jamie. We'll save that fun for another day. As soon as the dress slides under the door, I'll cast my charm."

"But if she's already nude, what more can you do to humiliate her?"

"Not humiliate," Denise clarified. "Hurt! Hurt like hell!"

Janice listened as Denise explained her plan. She shivered thinking of the agony Emily would endure and clutched at her own chest.

"But you can't do a summoning charm on a person's body part, can you?" Janice asked. "It can't work. All parts of the body are connected. Where one part goes, the rest has to follow."

Denise didn't answer, she just laughed, but it sounded more like a cackle.

Janice thought awhile. "No, Denise you can't do that. My God if it works it would be like having two invisible cords dragging her across the Great Hall by her breasts. That would be excruciatingly painful."

"Exactly!"

"But what about when she gets to the door?" Janice asked. "The dress will slip under, she can't. Her chest will be ripped apart."

"Now, wouldn't that be a shame? I guess she won't be so proud of her body anymore and want to strut about naked."

"Denise, you can't be serious. You can't do this!" Janice begged. "Stripping her in front of the school is enough."

"No, it's not," Denise declared. "I want her body to be so badly mutilated that she'll never allow anyone to see it ever again. And you're going to help me if you don't want the same."

As the music ended, Emily smiled. "Thank you for asking me to dance. I enjoyed it. I hope Denise doesn't get too upset with you."

"Denise doesn't own me," Tyler said, "although she seems to think she does. Honestly I'm sorry I agreed to come to the Ball with her. The only part of tonight that I've actually enjoyed was this dance."

Tyler looked toward the table where he had been seated and was relieved to see that Denise and Janice hadn't returned yet from the bathroom. "Let me walk you back to your table," he said taking Emily's hand.

Once they reached the table, Tyler noticed that Amanda and Roger had remained on the dance floor. He decided to take the opportunity to stand and talk with Caitlin, Emily and Evan.

Suddenly without warning, Emily's dress, both material and chains looked as if they just disappeared. It all came to pass so rapidly that Tyler didn't even see it skim across the floor and disappear under a door at the other end of the room.

Then before even Emily had a chance to react to the disappearance of her dress and her sudden nakedness, she found herself on her back sliding madly across the floor of the Great Hall, screaming in unbearable pain. It was as if someone standing behind her had tied invisible strings to the ends of her breasts and suddenly wrenched violently on those strings causing her to fall on hard on her back. But she didn't even seem to touch the floor before her body began speeding across the room. The pain was excruciating; it felt like her breasts were being stretched like rubber bands and that her chest was about to be ripped apart.

Evan, Caitlin and Tyler were running frantically after her. Tyler and Caitlin had their wands out and were screaming *Finite Incantatem*; pointing first at Emily and then at the door she was speeding toward. Just as Emily's head was about to slam violently into the solid wood door, Tyler pointed his wand and yelled *Reducto*. The door was blasted to dust, filling the doorway with a cloud of thick black smoke.

Emily's body for reasons unknown had come to a sudden halt, but the girl remained motionless. Caitlin reached the body first. Emily's chest was covered with deep gashes, oozing blood and a pool of the dark red liquid was starting to form beneath her.

"No! No! You can't be dead! You can't!" Caitlin screamed. She literally ripped her dress off and flung her bare body on top of Emily's, wrapping her arms around her sister's bloody body and holding her tightly. "I love you! This isn't fair. You can't leave us."

Chapter Eighteen Second Chance

The music had stopped; everyone was staring in the direction of the destroyed door and the two young girls lying motionless on the floor. Students were looking at each other with expressions of dismay on their faces, shaking their heads in doubt. It had all happened so fast that many were questioning their friends as to exactly what had just occurred. All that anyone knew for sure was that Emily was laying in a pool of blood with her sister on top of her, both girls completely bare and motionless.

"What happened?" Denise asked frantically, causing Becky to jump with a start.. Becky hadn't realized that her roommate was standing right next to her. "Janice and I just returned from the bathroom when we heard a scream and saw poor unfortunate Emily sliding naked across the Hall."

"Marta and I saw the whole thing," Becky remarked, "but, truthfully, I'm still in the dark as to what exactly took place."

"Me, too," agreed Marta. "Becky and I were watching Emily and Tyler dance. We had been discussing how beautiful Emily looked and how we wished we were built like her and had the guts to dress like she does."

"She did look stunning tonight," Denise agreed through gritted teeth.

"We were still watching them as Tyler walked her back to her table. They stopped to talk with Caitlin Potter and that little first year she is dating," Becky said. "Then, just like that, her dress was gone and she was standing there nude except for her shoes and those adorable socks."

"The dress skimmed across the floor and went under the door that used to be there," Marta added, pointing to the blackened doorframe. "The next thing we knew, Emily was on her back heading the same direction, head first."

"It all occurred so fast that I can't be sure of all the details, but it almost looked like she was being pulled across the room by her breasts," Becky said. "She was screaming in agony as she clutched her chest. It was like she was trying to prevent them from being literally torn off."

Marta nodded in agreement. "I didn't think breasts could be stretched out so far like that," Marta said, actually shivering as she recalled the dreadful sight.

Denise scrunched up her face as if in deep thought. "The way you describe her dress being torn off sounds like a Summoning Charm, but can you summon a person?"

"I don't think that's possible," Janice answered, perhaps a little too quickly.

"I'm sure her parents will figure it all out. After all, they are the greatest witch and wizard of our time," Denise said assuredly, although her voice sounded slightly sarcastic. "I just hope poor Emily is all right. I can't believe anyone could do something so mean like that to another human being."

Harry and Hermione just stood in shock staring at their two little girls. Harry had almost tried to pull Caitlin off of Emily, but Hermione had fortunately stepped in and stopped him in time.

"Whatever we do, we can't break the bond," Hermione warned him.

That had been five minutes ago and neither girl had moved in the ensuing time.

"Draco, we have to do something about the students," Ginny said. "We can't just let them mill about staring at Caitlin and Emily. Harry and Hermione are too distraught to take charge."

"May I have your attention?" Ginny shouted above the chatter. "The Ball is officially over. There is nothing any of you can do here. Please return to your common rooms immediately."

Many of the students grumbled, but most just turned silently and started to slowly head toward the doors.

"No!" shouted Draco. "Stay where you are. No one is to leave this room." He took out his wand and pointed it in turn to every exit. The doors slammed closed and locked. "Everyone to the other side of the Hall; either be seated or stand against the wall."

"Ginny, quickly, go alert the Headmaster as to what has occurred."

"But the students, Draco," Ginny begged. "They shouldn't be here. They shouldn't be seeing this."

"Ginny, one of them did this," Draco declared. "If they are allowed to leave this room we may never know who. Their wands all need to be checked for the last spell cast."

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The first thing the Headmaster did upon arriving was to conjure up a barrier to screen off Emily and Caitlin from view. Then after briefly talking with Harry and Hermione, he and the other available members of the staff joined Draco and Ginny.

"That was commendable thinking on your part," he said, giving Draco an appreciative nod. "With any luck, the perpetrator of this dastardly deed has not since used their wand and we will be able to apprehend them using Prior Incantato."

"I've sent Jamie Zacherley to get Potter's magical map of the castle, so that we can round up any stragglers that might have departed the dance early." As if this were her cue, Jamie burst breathlessly into the room clutching the already activated Marauder's Map.

"Headmaster, there appear to be no missing students," Jamie declared, handing the map to Professor Snape. "The castle and grounds are totally empty. Everyone is here in the Great Hall."

Snape quickly perused the map in order to confirm Jamie's observations. "Excellent," he said returning the map to Jamie. He then turned to the students who immediately quieted.

"If you do not have your wand on your person, please step forward," he ordered. Slowly, nervously a number of students formed a small group before him.

"Is there anyone else?" he asked. When no one answered, he stepped toward the small group, flicked his wand and then pointed it in turn toward each student before raising it.

"Accio wands!" he shouted "Mr. Filch the door please."

Filch had only just obeyed the instructions when the first wand came speeding through the door and soared toward its owner. Within seconds all the absent wands were at hand.

"Now that you all have your wands, please form a line so that your professors and I can check them to see what spell was cast most recently," he commanded

Denise and Janice looked at each other apprehensively as they held off hurrying to join a queue. They seemed relatively satisfied to take a rear position.

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"Hermione, it's been over half an hour," Harry pleaded, not taking his eyes off his little girls.

"When I was shot, Caitlin and I were in a coma for days," Hermione said, trying to reassure herself as much as Harry.

"That was when Caitlin was a novice," Harry argued. "At that time she didn't even know she was a Hyperempath or how to properly control her powers. She was able to heal Nora in a matter of seconds."

"Nora wasn't hurt badly. I think Emily was...." Hermione couldn't bring herself to say the word. "Harry, you heard what Caitlin shouted."

Harry stared at her disbelievingly. "But Caitlin shouted 'you can't be dead'." His voiced quavered. "Hermione, what would happen if a Hyperempath tried to save someone that ... that it was too late to save?"

Hermione gave Harry a desperate look. "Before Caitlin heals, she shares the victim's injuries. If the damage has already caused death, she would then share death. She couldn't return to the living, much less bring someone back with her."

"Then have we possibly lost them both?" Harry asked, his body shaking uncontrollably at the thought.

"I honestly don't know," Hermione sobbed. "Harry, I have no idea what is happening. They both seem stationary, as if balanced on the threshold of death. I can't detect any heartbeat, yet there is no sign of rigor mortis setting in."

"Is there anything we can do?" he asked.

"No more than wait and pray," Hermione said, hanging her head somberly.

Harry and Hermione watched their motionless daughters anxiously, oblivious to the wand inspection taking place on the other side of the hall.

After each wand was checked acceptably for the last spell it had cast, its owner was allowed to depart the Great Hall. The line shortened rapidly until there were less than a dozen students left behind to have their wands tested. Jamie scrutinized those remaining. She was never one to jump to conclusions or prejudge, but it was a well known fact that Janice and Denise had never liked Emily and they looked extremely apprehensive as their turn to have their wands checked approached.

Finally Professor Snape raised his wand and place it tip to tip with Denise's at the same instant as Draco placed his to Janice's. Both men shouted "*Prior Incantato!*"

Disappointment was etched on Jamie's face as it became evident that the scouring charm, Scourgify, was the last spell performed by both wands. As Denise and Janice scurried from the Hall, Jamie stared at the headmaster in disbelief.

"Jamie, don't look at me like that," Snape sighed. "I know what you're thinking and while I agree with your conclusions, I can't suspend students based on such flimsy circumstantial evidence."

"But Sir, their story just doesn't make sense," Jamie insisted. "Why would they go to the bathroom and remove all their makeup, the dance wasn't even over yet?"

"I agree," Snape said in an understanding manner. "It would seem more likely that they were removing the dust and dirt from the explosion, but all the ghost images show are two sparkling clean students. Cleanliness in itself is no crime."

Jamie shook her head in frustration. The Headmaster was correct; there was no evidence to corroborate their suspicions, yet they both knew whom the perpetrators were.

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Sunday, January 1, 2006

"I must have dozed off," Harry said guiltily. "Has there been any change in their condition?"

"No," Hermione said. "They haven't moved. I just don't understand."

Harry had never seen his wife looking quite so distraught. Her eyes were puffy and red from a combination of lack of sleep and crying; her hands trembled. Harry checked his watch. "The students will be starting to meander in soon for breakfast," he said.

Hermione simply nodded, never taking her eyes off Emily and Caitlin. It was then that she noticed a slight movement in Caitlin. It was as though she had awoken, tightened her hold on Emily and then gone back into a trance.

"Did you see that?" Hermione asked excitedly. "I'm sure Caitlin just moved."

As Harry turned his attention to Caitlin, she once again stirred and then opened her eyes as if awakening from a long sleep. "What time is it? How long have I been out?" she asked, an embarrassed look on her face.

"It's nearly time for breakfast," Hermione answered. "Are you all right? What about Emily?"

Caitlin blushed profusely. "I'm fine," she said. "Emily is too, but she's going to be rather sore for the next few days. We should get her to the hospital wing. That spell or whatever it was nearly ripped all the internal organs out of her chest. Her heart had stopped beating."

Hermione wrapped her arms around Caitlin and hugged her tightly as Harry leaned over to pick up the still ostensibly lifeless body of Emily.

"She's still in stasis," Caitlin said. "I thought it would be best to leave her that way until Madam Pomfrey has checked her over."

"But she'll be okay?" Harry asked, seeking reassurance. "You're both okay?"

Caitlin started to weep. "I'm sorry I gave you guys such a fright," she cried. "It's all my fault. I was so stupid."

"Caitlin, none of this is your fault," Hermione argued. "You saved your sister's life."

"Mum! I worried you and Dad and everyone else needlessly," Caitlin bawled, as they departed the Great Hall, Harry carrying Emily in his arms. "I inadvertently put myself in stasis."

"But how?" Hermione started to ask. Then she laughed, realizing exactly how it had happened. She gave her daughter a reassuring kiss.

Harry stared at Hermione and Caitlin. "Anytime you're ready; I'd like to be let in on the joke."

"I'm sorry Dad. It all happened so fast that I didn't take the time to think," Caitlin said. "I allowed my emotions to take charge. As soon as I realized that Emily's heart wasn't beating, I straightaway put her in stasis. Then I stripped off my dress and pressed myself against her in order for us to bond. When I did that, I shared her injuries, but I also put myself in stasis."

"That explains why they neither seemed alive or dead," Hermione added.

"Fortunately, I was eventually able to pull myself out of stasis, but it took some time." Caitlin continued. She gritted her teeth trying to hold back the tears. "If Emily had come out of it before me, we'd both be dead."

Hermione clutched Caitlin's hand tightly as at the same time Harry tightened his hold on Emily's delicate limp body.

As they turned the corner, none of the family at first took notice of the three Ravenclaw girls that had abruptly stopped and were now staring wide-eyed at them.

"Caitlin are ... are you and Emily all right?" one of the girls stuttered. "Why are you both still naked?"

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Tuesday, January 3, 2006

"You have visitors. Would you like my help to put on a dressing gown?" Madam Pomfrey asked.

Emily simply smiled at her.

"I'll take that as a no." Poppy grinned and just shook her head. She would never get used to the Potter girls and their complete lack of modesty. "I'm going to run down to the greenhouse while your company is here. When I return, we'll apply some more healing balm to your chest."

Emily scowled slightly. She'd rather if her Mum or one of her sisters were on hand to apply the potion. She liked Poppy, but it felt weird having the older woman rub her chest.

"How are you doing beautiful?" a voice echoed, bringing Emily back to reality.

"Roger! What are you doing here?" Emily asked excitedly. "Would you please come help lift me into a chair so that we can sit and talk?"

"Help you?" Roger said apprehensively. "Sure, but I thought there would be no permanent injury."

"Supposedly there won't be, but at the moment my muscles seem to be on strike. I guess they still think I'm dead," Emily said with a laugh.

"That's not funny," Roger retorted worriedly. "You had us all extremely concerned."

"I'm sorry," Emily replied. "Roger, I thought you were going to help me into a chair."

Roger seemed to be uncertain how to proceed. "I can carry you to the chair, if you like. Perhaps I should wrap something around you first, it sort of looks like you might be topless?"

"I better be bottomless, too," Emily replied with a chuckle. "You must certainly realize by now that I don't have any qualms about you seeing me nude. Just throw back the covers and lift me up in those big strong arms of yours."

"But what if someone else comes to visit you?" Roger asked.

"If it bothers them to see me nude, then I guess they'll just have to close their eyes," Emily answered with a chuckle. "I spent my first life catering to other peoples' prejudices. This time around I'm living for myself."

Roger tried his best not to gawk as he threw the covers aside and then slid his arms gently under Emily. Once he positioned her in the chair, he placed cushions around her to both support her and make her more comfortable.

"You weren't really dead," Roger said nervously. He wasn't sure how Emily would react to his comment.

"No! But only because of Caitlin," Emily replied calmly. "If she hadn't been there, I'd most assuredly have died. My heart had stopped beating and the damage to my internal organs was extensive. My blood loss alone was enough to kill me. She almost died herself saving me. How can I ever repay such a debt?"

"By continuing to be the person you are," Roger replied. "You're very unique and that's why Caitlin was willing to risk her life to save you. Stay just like you are, extraordinary."

"Roger, there's something I have to tell you, but before I do, would you grant me a favor?" Emily asked. "Would you please kiss me? Not like a little girl, but like you would a grown woman."

"That's not a favor," Roger replied. "That would be my pleasure. As for the little girl part, I've only ever seen a beautiful young woman whenever I've looked at you."

Roger stooped down next to Emily's chair and placed his hand behind her head. He leaned toward her until their lips met and then he kissed her. It was a kiss that neither would ever forget, but when it ended they both had tears in their eyes because they knew it was both their first and last kiss.

"Roger, I'm sorry," Emily blubbered.

"Don't be sorry," Roger interrupted. "I'll never forget you. Maybe under different circumstances it might have worked for us, but whether you want to admit it or not, you're already taken."

Emily looked at Roger as if ready to protest.

"I saw how you looked at Tyler and I also saw how he reacted to you being hurt. Life and love come with no guarantees, but I think you two have something that could be very distinctive. You just both have to give it a chance." Roger wiped a tear from his eye. "Tyler's waiting outside. Would you like me to ask him to step in?"

Emily could no longer hold back the tears. "I'm sorry, Roger. I never meant it to end this way. The last thing I wanted to do was hurt you."

"Sometimes we hurt ourselves when we set our sights too high or dream the impossible dream," Roger said as he grasped Emily's hand. "Oh, I nearly forgot." He reached for a box he had laid on the nightstand.

"I was able to salvage your dress," Roger said. "I don't know how it managed to survive that blast, but all it needed was a cleaning. I hope you get to wear it again, you truly looked fabulous in it."

"Thank you," Emily whispered. "I'll look forward to seeing you at the ice cream shop. I hope you find someone soon who can return the love you deserve."

"Thanks! Time will tell," Roger said as he got to his feet and kissed Emily on the forehead. "Shall I tell Tyler it's all right to come in?"

Emily watched sadly as Roger departed the room, and then strained unsuccessfully to lift her hand high enough to wipe the tears from her eyes.

Roger and Tyler must have talked briefly in the hallway because it was a few minutes before Tyler cautiously entered the room.

"Hi!" Tyler called, as he walked into the room. "Roger tells me you're not feeling quite up to calisthenics yet." He wavered when he saw Emily sitting nude on the chair next to her bed.

"Are you sure it's okay for me to come in?" he asked, finding it difficult to maintain eye contact with Emily.

"I told Roger to ask you in," Emily replied. "Besides, after some of the positions you had me pose in for those pictures last year; there is no part of me you haven't seen intimately."

"Emily, I've apologized a million times for that. I don't know what more I can say," Tyler replied.

"I know. I was wrong to bring it up again," Emily sighed. "Come over and sit next to me. We have to talk."

Tyler took a seat on the bed facing Emily's chair. Although he tried to maintain eye contact, his attention was drawn to the faint red lines on Emily's chest, reminders of how her chest had been literally ripped open.

"My battle scars," Emily laughed, seeing where Tyler's eyes had settled. "Madam Pomfrey assures me that they will completely disappear within another day. Lucky I'm not a Muggle or I'd be hideously scarred for life. Actually, if I were a Muggle, I'd be dead."

Tyler quickly reached for the hand that was lying on Emily's leg. He was clutching it in support before he realized just how far up her thigh it was or how close his hand now was to her personal area. He went to jerk it away, but Emily held it tightly.

"I trust you Tyler," she said, and then sighed. "What hurts most is the knowledge that someone hates me so much that they'd actually try to kill me."

"We all have a pretty good idea who that someone was," Tyler cut in angrily.

"But the evidence is all circumstantial," Emily pointed out. "Denise has never hidden her dislike of me, but I can't believe she'd go as far as to try and kill me."

"If not her, then who?" Tyler asked in an agitated manner.

"I don't know," Emily answered nervously, looking toward the door in a panicked manner. "It just doesn't seem right to jump to conclusions without proof. What if she's innocent?"

Emily began squirming around in her chair nervously.

"I doubt she's innocent," Tyler declared. "Emily, is something wrong? All of a sudden you seem extremely panicky."

Emily's eyes were watering. She looked at Tyler in desperation. "Tyler, I have to pee. I have to pee really bad."

Tyler jumped to his feet. "I'll help you up," he said offering his hand for support.

"It's too far," Emily cried, desperation evident in her voice. "I still need help just getting in and out of bed. Do you think you could possibly carry me?"

Momentarily, Tyler just stared, his eyes wide, his mouth gaping.

"Please, Tyler!" Emily begged. "I don't want to have an accident."

Without further thought, Tyler dropped to one knee, slipped one arm behind Emily's back and the other under her thighs. Then mustering all his strength, he managed somehow to get to his feet. Once standing, he was surprised at how light Emily was in his arms. He was also amazed at how soft and smooth her skin was and how wonderful it felt to hold her in his arms. He hurried across the room and pushed the door to the bathroom open.

He expected to find a room full of stalls, but was surprised to find a normal bathroom with a sink, shower and toilet. With embarrassment, he placed Emily on the chamber pot. Once he was sure she was stable, he turned to leave, but already he heard a steady stream of urine meeting the water in the pot.

"Tyler, please don't go," Emily cried, tears now streaming down her face. "I feel very unsteady, like I might tip over." She audibly gulped and then took a steadying deep breath. "Besides, I need you to do something else for me if you think you can. I know I can't move my arms enough to do it

myself."

"Emily, I'd do anything for you." The words were said with such inflection that there was no doubt to their sincerity.

She tilted her head and looked toward the ceiling, but her eyes remained closed. "You're going to need a small wad of tissue paper," she said, trembling with each word.

When he returned her to the ward, Emily asked that Tyler place her on the bed instead of back in the chair. It was with great reluctance that he allowed her to slip from his arms.

"Should I draw the covers up?" he asked.

"It's rather hot in here," Emily replied. "I'd rather you didn't unless it bothers you to see me like this."

Tyler laughed. "It bothers me, but in a pleasant way."

Suddenly the expression on Emily's face turned to one of seriousness. "Tyler, we have over two years before we're fifteen. Assuming we become a couple, you're going to see me more often without clothes than with them on. You have to remember that I'm not trying to turn you on or seduce you by being nude; it's just how I feel most comfortable. I guess what I'm trying to say is that I don't want you to ever read too much into the fact that I'm naked."

"I understand," Tyler said, nodding his head. "But you need to understand that I think you're beautiful and that I enjoy very much looking at you."

Emily smiled. "Do you remember the first time that you saw me naked?"

"I'll never forget it," Tyler answered.

"I told you then that it was okay for you to look at me, even examine me; that it didn't bother me to be seen nude. It still doesn't bother me to be seen nude or for that matter be examined, but the way you look at me now is so different than how anyone else has ever looked at me. You make me feel so extraordinary, like I'm some sort of deity."

"That's because you are," Tyler said. Then without warning he leaned over and kissed her. Although it hurt tremendously, Emily forced her arms around his back. She had to hold him. Just a few minutes ago she had kissed Roger and it had been pleasant; this was more than pleasant, this was heaven!

"Excuse me!" a man's voice barked. "I'm pleased that you two have reconciled, but..."

Before Harry could utter another word, Tyler was on his feet and shaking frenziedly. He felt sure that the professor was about to pull out his wand and perform the Avada Kedavra curse on him. Instead, Professor Potter ignored Tyler, went over to the bed, leaned down and kissed his daughter.

"I'm glad to see that you're improving," he said. "Yesterday you could barely move your arms and today you're able to hug." He looked at the covers pushed to the bottom of the bed. "Your idea or his?"

"Mine, Daddy!" Emily cried. "You know how hot I get, besides Tyler has seen me nude often. It's

no big deal."

Harry nodded his head, but his expression was still grim. "Where is Madam Pomfrey?"

"She had to go down to the greenhouse. It was a good thing Tyler was here. I had to pee really badly and he carried me to the bathroom." The words were no more out of Emily's lips when she knew this was probably not the proper time for such honest chatter.

"I'm sure he enjoyed that," Harry said, looking sternly in Tyler's direction. "Your mother will be here shortly, we'll discuss it further then. Meanwhile Tyler, I think you should hurry off before you miss lunch." Tyler took the hint, said good-bye and quickly departed the room.

Once Tyler was gone, Harry turned to Emily and his grimace weakened. "You like him a lot, don't you?"

"Yes, I do," Emily answered honestly. "I have this feeling that we belong together."

"I like Tyler. He's definitely not like his brother," Harry said. "Just be careful, don't rush things. After all you're only twelve and I don't want you getting hurt."

"Then you're not upset?" Emily asked.

"Of course, I'm upset!" Harry answered. "Show me any father that wouldn't be upset to walk into a room and find their nude daughter lying on a bed kissing a boy. It's just that... well, you're always naked and I trust you."

"Daddy, will you hug me?"

"Sure, now you want to get me in a questionable position," Harry said jokingly, but he wasted no time taking his daughter in his arms and hugging her tightly. He then slid her up in the bed and adjusted her pillow. "He really carried you to the bathroom?"

"You know how I am Dad. When I have to go I have to go," Emily said. "I was sort of embarrassed to ask him, but it would have been worse to have an accident right in front of him."

Harry nodded his head in agreement.

"He was so loving and gentle, especially when he patted me dry."

Harry looked at Emily and forced a smile. Sometimes Emily was too open with information. Harry would have rather not been made aware of that little detail.

"Dad, would you do me a favor, please?" Emily asked. "It has nothing to do with Tyler; it involves my medical treatment."

"Certainly, sweetheart. Anything I can do," Harry answered.

"That jar on the bed stand contains a healing balm that has to be rubbed onto my chest," Emily explained. "Madam Pomfrey is going to do it when she returns."

"And?" Harry questioned, not understanding what this had to do with him.

"I know its weird on my part, but I don't like her rubbing my chest," Emily explained. "Her hands are rough and well it just feels strange to have her touch me. Would you rub it on me before she gets back?"

"Emily, you're not a little girl any more. You've developed breasts. It wouldn't be proper for me to do that," Harry made it clear.

"That's silly," Emily argued. "Breasts are just another body part, what's the big deal. You're my Dad; it's not like you're going to get sexually excited or something by touching me. When we wrestle, you often touch Caitlin and me, even Jamie. It doesn't bother any of us because we know it's innocent. Besides, I'm asking you; actually I'm imploring you."

Harry picked up the jar and stared fixedly at it. Emily's arguments were sound, but still a part of him felt that doing this would somehow be very wrong, even to some perverted. At that moment Hermione walked into the room. Harry couldn't remember when he had ever been so happy to see her. He handed her the jar before she even had a chance to kiss Emily.

* * * * *

Friday, January 6, 2006

"Miss Zacherley, a moment, please," Professor Flitwick called, hastening to catch up to Jamie.

"How is your sister doing?" he asked concernedly.

"As good as new," Jamie answered happily. "Madam Pomfrey is going to discharge her today."

"Good, good. I was very anxious," Flitwick explained. "I almost felt that I was an accessory to the crime. After all, the culprit undoubtedly learned the Summoning Charm from me."

"You mustn't feel that way Professor. I know Emily doesn't blame you in the least," Jamie exclaimed. "Who would think that anyone would ever use a Summoning Charm in such a vicious way?"

"True, but perhaps I should have placed more emphasis on how dangerous it would be to use such a spell on an individual," he answered.

"I don't imagine it would have mattered," Jamie replied. "I don't believe that the individual that cast that charm had the slightest concern for my sister's well being."

"You sound like you have a good idea who the wrongdoer might be," the Professor surmised.

"No solid proof, but yes, a very good idea, Professor."

"Then I suggest you keep a particularly watchful eye on both your sister and the probable perpetrator. A person with such blatant hatred is apt to strike again," Professor Flitwick said uneasily.

"Do you have a class to which you must be hurrying?" he asked.

"No," Jamie answered. "This is a free period for me."

"So it is for me." Flitwick said, smiling. "I was wondering, Miss Zacherley, if you'd have the time to follow me to my office. There is something of great importance I'd like to discuss with you."

"Certainly, Professor," Jamie said, and they headed off toward the professor's nearby office. Jamie scarcely had time to contemplate what the tiny professor might wish to talk to her about, when she was being ushered into his office.

"Please have a seat," he said indicating a chair. "May I get you something to drink; tea, pumpkin juice, a warm butter-beer?"

"A butter-beer please," Jamie answered. "There is nothing better than a warm butter-beer on a cold day."

The professor prepared their drinks and then climbed into a chair next to Jamie. "Miss Zacherley, would it be presumptuous of me to ask you what your plans are after you depart Hogwarts?"

"Not at all sir," Jamie said, and then she wavered briefly. She wasn't even sure herself what her plans were now. Alex and she had intended for so long to go into training together to be Aurors, but now she no longer felt well matched to the position.

"I'm not certain, Sir," she finally admitted. "I've always had this dream of becoming an Auror. At least I did until I was required to kill Madame Hooch. I'm not sure any more that I want an occupation where you fairly often find yourself in a kill or be killed position."

"That is understandable," Flitwick said. "Killing is never easy, even when the casualty is a person of ill repute. You are undoubtedly the best student I have ever taught at Hogwarts. Even better than Hermione Granger and that is saying something. Have you every considered working in the field of Charms?"

"There are rather few opportunities other than teaching and I'm certainly not qualified to do that," Jamie answered. "Besides, even if I were, what learning institute would give a professor's job to someone just out of school themselves?"

"A school that prides itself on hiring the most qualified person available for a job, regardless of their age or experience," Professor Flitwick stated unequivocally. "It is supposedly a secret that I intend to retire at the end of this school year, therefore I imagine every student in the school is aware of it. Am I correct?"

Jamie didn't answer, she just nodded her head shyly.

"Miss Zacherley, I am extremely proud of the Charms program that I have established at Hogwarts. I feel it is one of the best courses of study in the wizarding world," Flitwick declared. "I do not want to see it deteriorate at the hands of a substandard teacher. I've recommended my replacement to the Headmaster and he has agreed, pending her acceptance."

"I'm sure that anyone you would propose will do a superb job," Jamie said honestly. "Sir, the Hogwarts' rumor mill has it that you suggested a woman, but that she has other commitments. Would it be too forward of me to ask who you wanted to step into your shoes?"

"I'm afraid my shoes are rather small," the little professor said with a laugh. "If I can talk you into accepting the position, I feel you'd be much better off wearing your own shoes."

"Me!" Jamie's eyes at once filled with tears. It was all she could do to resist picking up the small professor and squeezing him tightly. He had just presented her with an opportunity that even in her wildest imagination she had never dared to dream of happening.

Suddenly her tears of joy turned to tears of distress. How could life throw her such a cruel choice? Was she to be forced to choose between a dream come true and the boy she loved more than life itself?

* * * * *

Saturday, January 7, 2006

"Evan, are you angry with me?" Caitlin asked dejectedly, sitting down next to the first year.

"No! Why would I be angry with you?" he answered impersonally.

"That's what I've been trying to figure out," Caitlin replied. "You've been avoiding me all week and when I do corner you.... Well you're different. It's like you don't even want to be around me any more; like you don't want us to be a couple anymore."

"It's you who shouldn't want me," Evan shouted. "Look at you! You're famous, a celebrity. Not only are you the most powerful Hyperempath in over a century, but also you're the smartest witch in your year and you're beautiful to boot. I'm just a little nothing, zilch, nobody. I'd probably be failing half my classes if it weren't for your help. I don't even do things to you like a proper boyfriend should."

"You are not a nobody," Caitlin protested. "And what do you mean by saying that you don't do things to me like a proper boyfriend?"

Evan looked at Caitlin bashfully. "Well, Randy says that a proper boyfriend licks a girl down there," he whispered. "You know, where you pee."

"Oh he does, does he?" Caitlin said, fuming. She looked around the common room, but fortunately, for his sake, Randy was nowhere about.

"Evan, you and I need to have a good long talk, but not here, somewhere private, away from prying eyes." Caitlin reached for her robes and hastily slipped them on. "Will you come with me to my parent's quarters?"

"Okay, if you want, but don't you want to put something more on than just your robes?" he asked anxiously.

"That would be a waste of time," Caitlin said. "I'll be undressing again as soon as we get there anyway."

Caitlin didn't give Evan time to question, instead he found himself rushing to catch up to her as she stepped briskly through the portrait hole. They didn't talk much on the way to the Potter quarters. Evan was too busy panting as he endeavored to keep up with Caitlin, who was setting a brisk pace, her robes billowing behind her. He wondered quietly what type of view Caitlin was affording those students headed the opposite direction.

The first year boy had never been in this part of the castle before and tried to absorb all the highlights as they scurried through the various passageways and staircases. Finally Caitlin stopped outside a doorway.

"Wait here a second," she said opening the door. "Mum doesn't like it if I just burst in unannounced with friends. She has a thing about it not being proper for a student to see one of their adult professors nude."

Evan nodded. He had forgotten that the entire Potter family were nudists and that more than likely two of his professors were parading about in the buff just beyond this door. He had little time to consider this situation before Caitlin returned and ushered him inside. She had already removed her robes and had even slipped out of her trainers.

"They're on their way out, so we'll have the whole place to ourselves," she said matter-of-factly. "Do you want to take your clothes off and get comfortable?"

Evan just stared at her thunderstruck. Was she serious? Caitlin was already nude. Her parents were about to leave and now she was suggesting that he get naked, too. What were her intentions?

"Good morning, Mr. Creevey," Harry said reaching out his hand to the young boy. "How is your brother?"

"Good morning, Sir," Evan said tensely shaking his professor's hand. "Colin is fine, very busy."

"What are you two up to this morning," Hermione asked, giving her daughter a questioning look.

Caitlin gave Evan a scornful look. "Evan and I need to have a long private discussion about relationships and sex," Caitlin said, not even blinking an eye.

"Just make sure that all you do is just talk about it," Hermione said, giving Caitlin a trusting smile.

"Mum!!!" Caitlin said, turning bright red.

"Yes," agreed Harry. "It would be a shame for Mr. Creevey to not even live to finish his first year at Hogwarts."

"Dad!!"

Before Caitlin could say another word, Harry scooped her up in his arms and gave her a big hug. "We're just kidding, Honey. Your Mum and I both trust you." Harry gave Evan an evil look. "It's him I don't trust." Then he smiled and messed up Evan's hair with his hand. "We should be back in time for us all to have lunch together."

Evan stood watching the door quietly close behind the Potters. "I can't believe your parents," he said looking at Caitlin in amazement. "They don't seem to have any problem at all with us being here alone together even though you're nude."

"The fact that I'm nude has nothing to do with anything. How long would it take to slip clothes off if we were planning to mess about? They trust me to use good judgment. That is one of the wrong conclusions people in general jump to about naturists. They think our nudity relates in some way to an eagerness to be sexually active. Believe me, it doesn't."

Caitlin studied Evan a moment. "I'll take your hesitation as a signal that you'd rather keep your clothes on," she said. Her voice had a sound of disappointment to it.

"Were you serious?" Evan asked. "Do you actually want me to get undressed?"

"Only if you're comfortable with it," Caitlin said. "That day in the Quidditch changing room you seemed to adjust quickly to being nude. I thought given the opportunity that maybe you'd like to give it another go."

"But what if your parents come back?" he asked. "What will they say if we're both totally starkers?"

"Not a thing if we're behaving ourselves," Caitlin answered. Then she added, "And we most certainly will be."

"Will you turn your back?" Evan asked timidly.

Caitlin chuckled. "If it makes it easier, but it's kind of silly, don't you think? I've already seen you naked and will again once I've turned around."

Evan agreed and didn't persist. Instead, he quickly slipped out of his shoes and socks; then his other clothes until his only remaining article of clothing was his boxer shorts. He gulped and dropped them to the floor.

Caitlin smiled. "Now that we're on equal footing, we need to talk. Look at me and tell me what you see, leaving out all the complementary adjectives."

Evan looked at Caitlin incredulously. "I'm not sure what you mean."

"Okay! Then let me start," she said. "I see a naked boy."

Evan laughed. "I see a naked girl."

"I see a boy that I like to spend time with," Caitlin added. "He's extremely easy to talk to and accepts me for what I am. He doesn't try to change me."

"I see a friend, a special friend. Someone that makes me smile just by walking in the room," Evan said.

"I see someone that I want by my side as I experience life and the challenges that it will bring."

"Really?! You want me by your side?" Evan couldn't believe his ears.

"Evan, I can't give you any guarantees," Caitlin said. "I'm thirteen, you're only just twelve. People change, circumstances change. A year ago I couldn't picture myself dating anyone other than Matt; now he and I hardly speak. You make me feel good. You make me feel comfortable with myself. Forgive the comparison, but you're like a comfortable piece of clothing that a person doesn't want to ever discard."

"But you're so special. You're beautiful, you're brilliant, you're a Hyperempath," Evan argued. "I'm just a"

"Alone, you're just a naked boy. I'm just a naked girl, but together we're a couple and I'd like to see us stay that way." Caitlin leaned to kiss Evan on the cheek, but was drawn to his lips instead. She found herself kissing him like she had seen her mum kiss her dad. Their arms wrapped around each other until their bodies were merged in an unyielding embrace.

Suddenly, Caitlin broke the hug. She looked at Evan, nervously. "Sex, we've got to talk about sex."

"Sounds like I'm just in time," called a cheery young female voice from the door. "That's one of my favorite topics of conversation."

Evan looked around nervously for something to cover himself with. It was one thing to be naked in front of Caitlin, but he didn't want anyone else seeing him like this. He looked apprehensively toward the sound of the voice; to his shock, Emily was standing just inside the door already removing the last of her clothing.

"Hi Caitlin! Hi Evan!" Emily said nonchalantly as she sauntered into the room.

Evan felt like he needed to pinch himself. He had to be dreaming; this was too weird to be actually happening. Emily was totally naked, yet it didn't seem to bother her one bit that he was in the room. Moreover, she didn't even seem to be aware or care that he was unclothed.

"Either of you guys want a butter-beer?" she asked, getting one for herself. "Sex talk is always better with butter-beer."

She got them both a drink and then flopped herself down on the chesterfield next to Caitlin. "What prompted the discussion of my favorite topic," Emily asked, looking from Caitlin to Evan. Then her expression became serious. "You guys are considering doing it are you?"

"Of course not," Caitlin answered. "We both know the penalties for underage sex. It's that prat Randy. He told Evan that he wasn't a proper boyfriend because he wasn't licking my pussy."

"He is such an arse," Emily declared. "I honestly don't understand what Kim sees in him." Emily considered Caitlin and Evan for a moment. "So I imagine you guys got together today so that he could learn how to do it properly."

"Emily!" Caitlin shouted. "You know better than that."

"Yeah!" Evan agreed. "That's gross. No one would ever lick a girl's pee hole."

Caitlin and Emily exchanged looks before Caitlin spoke. "Evan, how much do you actually know about sex? Don't be embarrassed. Please trust me and answer honestly."

Evan's face blushed. "Not much," he admitted. "Only what I've learned here at school and so far that's been mostly about animals; you know, birds and bees and that stuff. We haven't discussed people to a great extent."

"But you know how babies are made?" Emily asked pointedly.

"Everybody knows that," Evan answered defensively. "A man and woman have sex and she gets pregnant. Then nine months later a baby pops out." He hung his head in embarrassment. "I just don't understand exactly what having sex involves."

Caitlin kissed Evan on the cheek and then placed her hand reassuringly on his leg. "Don't be embarrassed. Until I was ten, I thought the stork brought babies. Emily had the luxury of having parents who answered her questions appropriately since she was a toddler; I only got the accurate facts after I was adopted."

"Babies aren't a necessary result of having sex," Emily interjected. "Precautions can be taken to avoid the girl becoming pregnant. Most people just have sex because it feels so good. My sister says it's the greatest feeling in the world. I can't wait till I'm of age."

"Our parents do it every night," Caitlin pointed out. "Mum says that sex between two people that love each other is the most beautiful experience in the world."

Evan stared at Caitlin with an expression of both understanding and confusion. "But exactly what is sex? How do you do it?" he asked. His voiced sounded pained as if it hurt him to ask a question to which he was obviously expected to already know the answer.

Evan had expected the girls to laugh at his lack of knowledge, especially Emily. But it was Emily that quietly explained. "The act of having sex is when a boy inserts his penis into a girl's vagina." She spread her legs just slightly and pointed to the little slit between her legs.

"Does that mean I'll never be able to have sex?" Evan asked, disheartened. "My penis is too small. I don't think it's long enough to even reach inside of Caitlin."

Caitlin flushed. The thought of Evan penetrating her sent shivers throughout her body.

"You guys have a few years to go before you need worry about that," Emily said. "I'm sure by that time you'll be more than adequately equipped for the task."

Evan seemed somewhat relieved. "Then all that stuff Randy was telling me about licking a girl down there was all a lot of bull; he was just having a go at me."

"Not exactly," Caitlin began, and the girls spent the next hour explaining foreplay and oral sex to Evan.

When they finished, Evan's head felt like it was spinning out of control. He was about to ask the girls how they knew so much about sex when the door once again opened. This time it was Jamie, who seemed quite in a world of her own. She outwardly ignored Evan's presence which, considering his state of undress, he appreciated.

"Do you know when Hermione and Harry will be back?" she asked no one in particular.

"Any time now," Caitlin answered. "They said they'd be back in time for lunch."

"Good," Jamie said, heading toward one of the bedrooms. "I have to talk to them." She returned in a few minutes sans her clothes and suggested that the group start preparing lunch.

Evan was beside himself. He didn't know what to do. He had actually gotten fairly comfortable being undressed in the company of just Emily and Caitlin, but Jamie's presences made him extremely tense. She was so much older than the other girls and her body was magnificent. Plus he was extremely leery of sitting to lunch with two of his professor's in his present state of undress.

Caitlin kissed his cheek and then grabbed his hand. "You did great for a first time being nude

around other people," she said. "I'm proud of you. Would you like to put your clothes back on before my parents return?"

"What about Emily and Jamie?" Evan asked. "Will it bother them that I'm dressed while they're still nude?"

Caitlin smiled. "Not in the least. It's all about being comfortable and right now I sense you'd feel much better with your clothes on."

Chapter Nineteen The Second Task

Jamie was exceedingly thankful when Evan, Emily and Caitlin all decided to go outside and entertain themselves in the snow after lunch. She wanted to be able to talk privately with Harry and Hermione without being too obvious about it.

Jamie watched distractedly as Hermione fed Ben. She wondered if all wizard parents pretended that the spoon was a broomstick flying toward their child's mouth. Jamie remembered her own mother playing a similar charade when she fed a then baby Emily. That seemed like it had been a lifetime ago.

"Jamie, what's bothering you?" Hermione asked.

"Nothing," Jamie lied. "I'm fine!"

"No you're not," said Harry emphatically. "You're not yourself. You barely touched your lunch and now you seem lost in thought."

"Professor Flitwick told us that he finally discussed the position with you," Hermione confided softly.

"Finally!" Jamie cried, startled by Hermione's declaration. "How long have the two of you known that he was considering me?"

"He never really thought seriously about anyone else," Hermione admitted. "Harry and I didn't think it was in our place to say anything before he personally talked to you. Besides, we didn't wish to raise your expectations in case either the Headmaster or the Board of Governors withheld their approval."

Jamie nodded her head in understanding. "Has the Board approved my selection?"

"Yes," Hermione answered. "I'd be lying if I said it was undisputed. There was some dissension based primarily on your age and lack of experience, but Severus can be very persuasive when he puts his mind to it. There will be a chair waiting for you at the head table next autumn if you decide to accept the position."

Again Jamie nodded, but she continued to stare impassively at the wall.

"It's Alex; isn't it?" Harry asked. "You two have intentions to train together as Aurors. You're concerned how he'll react if you change those plans."

"I can't lose him," Jamie cried, bursting into tears. "I love him so much. Yet this is a dream come true and I don't, if truth were told, think I'm actually cut out to be an Auror. What am I going to do?"

"Trust Alex," Harry said. He placed his arm around Jamie as she buried her tear filled face in his shoulder.

Hermione also wanted to comfort Jamie, but tending to Ben had her at present occupied. "Harry is right," she said caringly. "If he truly loves you, he'll understand. He'll want what is best for you and what will make you happy."

"But I love him," Jamie pleaded. "What if during three years away from each other, he finds someone else?"

"Then it wasn't meant to be and it's best you find out now rather than be miserable together," Harry replied. "If your love for each other is genuine, it will survive both time and distance. You need to have faith in both him and your feelings for each other."

"Harry and I didn't see each other for five years," Hermione interposed. "In school we were delusional enough to think we loved others. For us it took time and separation to realize that we wanted to be much more than platonic friends. Fortunately, we both realized, before it was too late, that our school relationships would not survive the test of time."

Harry chuckled. "You and Ron would have ended up killing each other if you had gotten married."

"We weren't married and I wanted to kill him when I found out about all the girls he was sleeping with," Hermione retorted. "But he's changed. Sam and Ron have a wonderful relationship." Hermione looked at the floor and shook her head as if trying to shake out unhappy memories from the past.

"But we're not talking about Harry and my past mistakes," she said. "We're talking about you and Alex. When I look at you two, I see Harry and I and the way we feel about each other now. We took some wrong turns on the way to find true love. You and Alex took the straight route and I believe your love will withstand the worst of times."

"Jamie, you can't keep secrets from someone you love and you can't lie to them either," Harry said. "You have to go to Alex. You have to tell him how you feel about him, how you feel about being an Auror and about the opportunity you have been presented with. Have faith in him and his love for you."

Jamie hugged Harry, and then moved to embrace Hermione. She knew that they were both right. She had to tell Alex. But she was frightened; more scared than she had ever been in her entire life.

* * * * *

"Does that mean that you and Tyler are officially a couple again?" Kim asked.

"Not publicly, thus far," Emily answered. "I mean, I'm willing and I'm sure we will be. We just haven't actually committed to it verbally."

"Then have you given up on the idea of him having to prove that he trusts you?"

"I guess," Emily replied. "I'm not even sure what he could actually have done to prove that."

"Yeah, that would be kind of hard," Kim agreed.

"What about you and Randy?" Emily asked.

"We haven't formally broken up, but I imagine it's just a matter of time," she answered sadly. "He just doesn't understand how I can have feelings for another boy and still claim to care for him."

Honestly, I can't explain it to him because I'm not even sure I understand my own feelings. Sometimes I feel like I'm just being selfish."

"I think I understand how you feel," Emily said. "But I can also sympathize with Randy. You're attracted to Brian and want to explore a relationship with him, but at the same time you still like Randy and don't want to lose him if things don't work out with Brian."

"Yeah," Kim agreed. "I don't know what to do. I'm afraid that ultimately I may lose them both."

Emily didn't respond verbally, but nodded her head in concurrence.

"Here comes Tyler," Kim said, hurriedly changing the subject. "He certainly looks keyed up about something."

"I finally figured it out," Tyler said breathlessly as he reached Emily and Kim. "I know what I can do to prove that I trust you. Then we can get back together." He gave Emily a hopeful, nervous smile.

"You don't have..." Kim started to say, but Emily quickly interrupted her.

"You actually thought of a way," Emily said, sounding amazed. It was obvious that she was both impressed and interested. "What is it?"

"I have to show you," Tyler said, his voice sounding extremely anxious.

"Okay! Then show me!" Emily said, her voice on tenterhooks.

"Not here!" Tyler protested, looking around in near panic. "It has to be someplace where no one can watch us. Maybe an empty classroom?"

"I know where we can go," Emily blurted excitedly. "There is a room that Jamie and Alex use whenever they want some privacy. We won't need to be concerned about anyone walking in on us by chance."

Emily hesitated and then studied Tyler warily. "Why do we have to be alone?"

"Now who doesn't trust who?" Tyler snapped.

"It's not as much a case of trust as it is experience," Emily explained. "The last time you got me alone in a deserted room, you talked me into posing for nude pictures."

"Won't you ever forget that," Tyler begged. "I've apologized a million times. That wasn't me; that was a scared little boy that was frightened of his brother's threats. I've changed. I'll never hurt you again."

"Then you don't mind if Kim accompanies us?" Emily asked.

Tyler's face turned pallid. "I can't do it in front of her," he pleaded. "I'm not even sure I have the nerve to go through with it with only you in the room."

"Tyler, I'm not forcing you to do anything you don't fancy doing." Emily turned to Kim. "Let's go to the library. We might have time to finish that Potions essay for Professor Malfoy before dinner."

"Wait!" Tyler cried, panic etching his voice. "Okay, she can come, but she has to swear an oath of silence."

"No she doesn't," Emily declared. "Kim is my best friend. I'd trust her with my life. If you trust me, you trust her."

Tyler nodded his head in defeat as Kim whispered to Emily. "I thought you weren't going to make him prove his trust in you?"

"I wasn't," Emily answered softly, "but I have to see what he's come up with. Even if it's something lame, I'm going to get back together with him."

Kim just shook her head. "You know, sometimes you're extremely evil."

Emily laughed. "It's the Slytherin in me."

Tyler hadn't even noticed Emily and Kim whispering between them. His mind was miles away thinking about what he was planning to do. It would have been difficult enough in front of Emily, but now he was faced with doing it in front of both girls. He was simultaneously sweating and shivering at the thought.

The trip through the corridors and up the sundry staircases to the Room of Requirements was made in near silence. Tyler felt like a condemned man being led to the death chamber. The only difference being that he had volunteered for this trip. When they reached the stretch of blank wall opposite the huge tapestry of Barnabas the Barmy, Emily paused.

"This is the place," she commented. "We need to walk past this bit of wall three times concentrating hard on what we need." She glanced at Tyler. "Is there anything special you require?"

Tyler wanted to shout out 'an enormous bottle of nerve potion', but merely shook his head no.

Emily stared crossly at Tyler. "Did you ask for this type room? You can't possibly think that I'm going to pose for additional pictures; not after what happened the last time."

Tyler reached into his rucksack, removed a camera and handed it to Emily. "You're not going to be the subject this time," he said, his voice quavering. "I am."

Without further comment Tyler slipped off his trainers, and then removed his socks. He didn't look at either girl, but rather stared at the ceiling tensely as he unbuttoned his shirt and removed it.

"Is he going to take off everything?" Kim asked, uneasily. "Maybe it would be best if I left."

"Don't be silly," Emily replied. "You saw plenty of nude boys and men on the cruise. It's no big deal. Besides it gives Tyler the opportunity to show that he truly trusts us both. Here, you can take the pictures." She handed the camera to Kim.

Kim just stood frozen in amazement. Emily was correct in saying that she had seen hundreds of people nude on the cruise, but this was somehow quite different. This time she was fully dressed and the viewing was semi private. Plus, Tyler was a good friend.

Kim wasn't the only one unmoving. Tyler had stripped down to his boxers and now stood petrified in front of the girls.

"I imagine that's the hardest item to remove for someone who has never been openly nude," Emily said understandingly. "Would you like me to help?"

Before Tyler's mind had fully processed this question or he had the opportunity to say no, Emily was leaning directly in front of him with her hands on the leg openings of his boxers. The next second the boxers were at his ankles and Emily was on her feet, a startled look on her face. She hadn't realized how close her face was to Tyler or that he was keyed up. She had actually been poked in the nose.

Tyler's first reaction was to cover himself with his hands. "Don't be embarrassed," Emily said with uncharacteristic sensitivity. "It's normal to be excited under such circumstances. Would you feel more comfortable if Kim and I got undressed, too?"

Kim gave Emily a wide-eyed look.

"I doubt that would mitigate my excitement any," Tyler answered with a nervous laugh.

Emily giggled. "No, I imagine it wouldn't. If it helps any, I like seeing it that way. My sister thinks I'm weird, but I like them. Jamie says I should have been born a boy so that I'd have one of my own."

Tyler began to relax slightly. "If you were a boy, I guarantee I wouldn't be standing here like this," he said, forcing a laugh. "Could you please take the pictures so that we can get this over with so that I can get my clothes back on?"

Emily nodded and began to advise Tyler how to pose. A few times he hesitated getting into the suggested position, but she reminded him that he had situated her in exactly the same manner. Kim snapped away happily. Finally, when they finished, Tyler joyfully got dressed.

When he completed dressing, Emily smiled. "You actually do finally trust me." She hugged him, and then kissed his lips lightly. "Kim and I have to decide what to do with these pictures. Why don't you go ahead and we'll see you later at dinner?"

Tyler gave Emily a concerned look, but then he turned to leave,

"Oh! By the way, Tyler! If you're still interested, I'd like very much to be your girlfriend again," Emily called out.

Tyler turned back and flung his arms around Emily, literally lifting her off her feet. After they kissed, this time much more aggressively, Tyler departed leaving Kim and Emily alone to determine the fate of the just taken pictures.

"What are you going to do with them?" Kim asked impatiently. "You'll have to keep them somewhere where no one but you or I can see them."

"I'm going to do exactly what Tyler trusts me to do," Emily exclaimed. "I'm going to destroy them."

"What?" Kim said in disbelief. "Can't I have at least one? He has the cutest arse."

"And you already have two boyfriends," Emily reminded her. "I'll thank you to keep your eyes and hands off Tyler's butt. Let's hurry down to dinner. I can't wait to tell Caitlin that Tyler and I are a couple again.

"I can't wait to see the expression on Denise's face when she finds out," Kim said.

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"Nott, I detect concern in your voice," Slytherin noted. "Recruitment seems to be progressing smoothly and the Ministry is still ignoring my existence. Why the concern?"

Knott studied Slytherin, not certain if he dared to answer frankly. Although Slytherin at times treated him almost as an equal, he knew his master possessed the power to kill him with no more than a mere thought. He hesitated to upset his master.

"Honesty is always the best policy when dealing with someone highly proficient in Legilmency," Slytherin said, a hint of irritation evident in his voice.

"I'm sorry, Lord Slytherin. It's Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix," Knott admitted fretfully. "Although the Ministry continues to refute your very existence, the Order has been successful in convincing many. Their numbers have grown evenly with ours and..." Knott took a deep breath. "I fear that the loyalty of their membership to their cause is greater than that of many of our constituents."

Slytherin nodded his head. On the surface he didn't appear troubled by Knott's comments. "You are not the first to voice concern over the commitment of many of our number. Keane has voiced similar worry. He suggests that perhaps it is time I reveal myself to the wizarding world with an impressive show of strength. I take it you concur with his thoughts."

"I would never be so bold as to question your judgment, Great Lord, but perhaps now would be a good time to give our world a demonstration of your great power," Knott said, trembling.

"I'm inclined to agree with you both," Slytherin said, much to Knott's surprise. "But as long as the Ministry refuses to acknowledge my return, there is no need to rush into anything haphazardly. If we time this properly, we might be able to eliminate Harry Potter at the same time. Without their leader, the Order of the Phoenix will crumble into ashes."

"Do you have a plan?" Knott asked, uncertainly.

"Eric has given me a suggestion that has great merit. It will involve the gratuitous killing of a number of students, but sometimes sacrifices must be made for the sake of advancement. I prefer not to go into further detail until all preparations have been finalized."

Slytherin abruptly changed the subject. "Have you contacted Malfoy concerning the Mudblood?"

"Yes, My Lord. He informs me that she infrequently leaves the castle and when she does it is more often than not in the company of Potter. Draco, however, pledges to be vigilant and inform us at once if she leaves unaccompanied."

"He had better," Slytherin replied, impatiently. "I am quite eager to discover what it is about that woman that has this body and mind that I occupy so entranced."

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"Jamie, what's the matter?" Alex asked concernedly.

"Nothing, I'm just tired," she lied.

"It's more than that," he argued. "You just seem to be going through the motions tonight. I'm making love to your body, but your mind seems to be miles away. You're not thinking of anyone else are you?"

"No, Alex! Never! I love you and only you." She hugged Alex, pulling their bare bodies so tightly together it felt like they were about to mesh. "I could never feel about anyone else the way I feel about you." She started to cry. "I can't stand the thought of losing you."

"You're not going to ever lose me," Alex insisted. He kissed her passionately. "We'll be together the next three years for Auror training and then shortly after we graduate we'll be married. I intend to spend the rest of my life making love to you."

Jamie knew this was the moment of truth. She couldn't put off telling him any longer. She took a deep breath as her body shivered uncontrollably. "Alex, I'm not cut out to be an Auror."

"Not cut out to be an Auror," Alex repeated with a laugh. "You're top of our class in every subject not to mention that you are the gutsiest girl I've ever met. You'll undoubtedly finish top of our Auror class, too."

"I can't go," she cried. "I don't want to spend the remainder of my life constantly in 'kill or be killed' situations."

"But it was your idea," Alex replied, shock evident on his face. "Ever since we were first years, you've talked of becoming an Auror. It was you who swayed me. We were going to do it together."

Jamie couldn't look directly at Alex. She didn't want to see the disappointment that she knew must be etched on his face. "I know," she answered glumly. "The job always seemed so vital, so glamorous." She forced a laugh. "I pictured myself saving the world, you by my side." Jamie shook her head forlornly. "Then I actually had to kill someone."

"Alex, it was horrible," Jamie cried. She had experienced the event over and over a thousand times in her mind.

Caitlin and Emily watched nervously as Hooch hustled about the dungeon making preparations. Neither of the girls had ever seen the witch look so happy, yet so frightening at the same time.

Jamie had just finished nursing Ben and was now giving nourishment to Timmy, their captors having not fed any of them since breakfast. Because of Timmy, Jamie didn't speak, but both Emily and Caitlin could read the expression on her face.

"Jamie doesn't think they'll get here in time," Emily said despondently. "Neither do I."

"We can't give up hope," Caitlin said encouragingly. But the words were barely out of her mouth when Hooch approached her.

"The Great Lord Slytherin told me to be swift, but it is difficult to hurriedly extricate revenge that I have waited so long to realize. My only regret is that I won't be present to actually witness the demise of two of you.

"My lovely Caitlin," Hooch said nastily. "I imagine you expect me to torture you unmercifully. Admittedly, it would give me great pleasure to turn you into a human shish kebab, but it will give me even more pleasure to know that you have died at the hands of your rescuers."

"Do you see that crossbow?" Hooch asked sadistically. "It is aimed directly for your heart and the arrow it holds has been soaked in a deadly poison. Can you imagine Hermione's grief when the opening of the dungeon door sets it off? I can only hope that she will be the one to actually open the door."

"But that is only the beginning," Hooch cackled. "In your hand you will be holding the rope that will suspend Jamie Zacherley above the Pyramid of Death. When the arrow pierces your heart, your hand will go limp and Miss Zacherley will become four nicely separated pieces."

"What about me?" Emily inquired, not actually knowing what possessed her to ask such a question.

"You, my dear, are what they refer to as a warm up act," Hooch laughed. "That is why I haven't secured your sister in her harness yet, nor suspended her above the pyramid. I want both her and Caitlin to have a good view as I first mutilate and then kill you. Their deaths will come so fast that they won't get to suffer. Through you they can experience how brutal and horrible death can be."

"I was hoping you didn't intend to leave me out of all the fun," Emily said bravely. Her words sounded plucky, but Emily was scared to death.

"You sound so spirited," Hooch bellowed as she reached for the breast ripper. "We'll see how brave you sound after I've reduced your tits to a proper size. And that's only for openers. After that we'll see how long you can survive the pear."

"Leave her alone," Jamie pleaded, lying Timmy on the cold floor next to Ben. "She hasn't done anything to harm you. If you must torture someone, torture me."

"You don't understand at all, do you?" Hooch cried. "You're just like Granger. Torturing you wouldn't have the desired affects. It hurts you more to have someone you love harmed than it does to be tortured yourself. Watch, you'll soon understand what I mean."

Emily closed her eyes as Hooch approached. She had never been so frightened or felt so helpless in her entire life.

"Stop, don't you touch her!" Jamie screamed.

But when Hooch turned to sneer at Jamie, instead of a naked girl, she found herself facing a beautiful pure white unicorn. Caitlin had witnessed the almost instant transformation. Jamie was not only now in her Animagus form, but she was also free, the aged leather on her ankle bindings having burst due to pressure of the transformation.

Hooch dropped the breast ripper and reached for her wand as the unicorn, Jamie, lowered its head to charge.

"Avada Keda..." Hooch screamed. But before she could complete the curse, the unicorn's horn had entered her chest and was protruding out of her back.

Jamie gave another shudder as Alex held her firmly. "When I transformed back, my hair and face were covered with blood, her blood."

"But she was going to torture Emily and then kill all three of you," Alex argued.

"I know," Jamie agreed, hanging her head. "She was an awful woman. I keep telling myself that she deserved to die and that I had no choice."

"You didn't," Alex insisted.

"I know and at the time I didn't even hesitate," Jamie cried, "but I still have nightmares and wake up trying to wipe her blood off my face. Alex, I'm not sure if I could ever kill again. What if I should falter and my delay caused the death of another Auror? What if that Auror was you? I couldn't live with myself."

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"Caitlin, are you sure we won't get in trouble," Evan asked, looking nervously around the dorm room.

"I told you before; boys are allowed in the girls' dorms with permission," Caitlin reminded him. "Besides, it's not like we're going to do anything wrong. I just get tired of everyone staring at us in the common room."

"I guess you can't really blame them," Evan answered innocently. "You're so beautiful, plus you're naked. I like to look at you, too."

"And I like you looking at me like you do," Caitlin said, blushing slightly. "But I think the others watch us hoping that they'll catch you touching me or us kissing."

"I'd never do that," Evan said, sounding offended.

"You know, not all touching is bad," Caitlin said, shyly. "For instance, girls like to have their hands held."

"How does a boy know what parts of a girl he's allowed and not allowed to touch?" Evan asked timidly.

"That's a hard question. It sort of depends on the girl and how far the relationship has progressed," Caitlin answered. "Even grabbing the hand of a girl you don't know could get your face slapped."

"I'd never do that," Evan swore.

"I know you wouldn't," Caitlin said, her voice sounding a little gloomy. "Except for when we danced at the Yule Ball, you've never even held my hand."

"I didn't want to be fresh or too forward," he explained.

"I imagine it's difficult for a boy," she said. "Reading a girl's mind and trying to figure out what is expected and what is forbidden." Caitlin couldn't help but notice that Evan's eyes were looking longingly at her breasts.

"Why can't a girl just come right out and tell a guy what he can and can't do?" Evan asked with a tone of frustration.

"Because we sometimes aren't sure ourselves," Caitlin admitted. "I'll never slap you though as long as you listen if I say no or stop."

"Can't you at least give me some guidelines," Evan beseeched.

Caitlin gave Evan a big hug. "Okay," she said with a laugh. "Picture me in a swimming costume. At this point in our relationship, if it's covered it's off limits. If it's exposed, you can touch it."

"Is it a one piece or two piece swim costume?" Evan asked quite seriously.

"Two piece," Caitlin said, laughing and shaking her head.

"A big old-lady type two-piece or a tiny bikini?"

Caitlin face broke into a big grin. "How can someone as sweet and innocent as you have such a tainted mind?" she asked, with a giggle.

"You didn't answer my question," Evan persisted.

"Okay, if you insist! The tiniest bikini you can possibly imagine with two miniscule triangles for a top and a practically nonexistent thong for a bottom," she joked.

"Wow! I bet you'd look super in that," Evan said, keenly.

"I'm glad you think so," Caitlin said throwing her arms around Evan. Shyly he placed his hands on her back and shivered as he made contact with her soft smooth bare skin.

"Would you like me to scratch your back?" he asked bashfully.

"Would I?!" Caitlin cried excitedly. "I love having my back scratched. Do you really want to do it?"

"Yeah, if it's okay with you," he replied.

"It's more than okay," she said ushering him to the end of her bed and then flopping herself down and using his lap as a pillow. "I'll warn you though that I never get tired of having my back scratched. You might regret ever offering to do this."

"I don't think so," Evan said, gazing at Caitlin's form adoringly.

For the next hour, Caitlin felt like she was in heaven. She prayed that none of her roommates returned to the dorm early because she didn't want anything to cause Evan to stop. His hands were so soft and gentle as they tenderly caressed her back from her shoulders to just below her waist. Occasionally he would caress her side causing her to break out in goose bumps. He never touched the sides of her breasts; she was glad, but at the same time disappointed. Like she had said, sometimes a girl isn't sure what she really wants. The only thing she was sure of was that she didn't want their relationship to end.

"I better be getting back to my dorm soon," Evan said, resting his hand briefly on the small of Caitlin's back. "I'll do this every night if you like. I love holding and caressing you."

"I love being spoiled," Caitlin purred. "How about every other night? You deserve some spoiling, too."

"Making you feel good makes me feel good," Evan answered. Then he started caressing Caitlin again, but this time his hand didn't move up her back, it remained near her waist, just above the point where her cheeks separated.

"Did you say that the bathing suit had a practically nonexistent thong for a bottom? he asked, mischievously.

Caitlin froze. Why was Evan asking this? Was he just joking around or did he actually intend to caress her bum. She was kidding when she said the bottom of the suit was a tiny thong. How would she react if he stroked her there? She didn't want him to touch her there, at least not yet, but a part of her body was excited by the thought.

Suddenly the door to the dorm opened. Caitlin sighed in both relief and disappointment.

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"But being an Auror is all you've ever talked about, all you've ever planned for," Alex argued. "What will you make of your life?"

"I've been offered a position," she responded warily. "You can't whisper a word to anyone, but Professor Flitwick wants me to be his replacement."

"You! The Charms Professor!" Alex shouted.

"It's something I never dared dream of happening, but it's not worth losing you over," Jamie declared. "I can't bear to lose you or not see you for the next three years. I don't have any choice but to turn down the position and go into training with you."

"No way are you turning down a teaching position," Alex declared. "You'll be brilliant at it."

"But we planned to train together; to be together." She embraced Alex. "I've been miserable every summer while we've been apart. I'll go crazy if we're apart three years."

"We won't be apart three years," he affirmed. "I'm not going to train to be an Auror."

"But it's all we've talked about," Jamie pleaded. "You can't give up your dream because of me."

"I won't be," Alex said guiltily. "I love you Jamie. I think I have from the first day we met; I just wouldn't admit it to myself for fear of destroying our friendship. I've never really wanted to be an Auror; I've wanted to be with you."

"But why didn't you tell me," Jamie pleaded. "I would have understood."

"I know you would have," Alex agreed, "but I couldn't bear not being with you for three years either. It seems we both were willing to give up our aspirations to be with each other."

"What do you really want to do after you finish Hogwarts?" Jamie asked.

Alex looked at her lovingly. "I want to marry you. However, since you're going to be a Hogwarts Professor, I probably should get myself a decent job first. I've always wanted to be a lawyer, one that looks out for the underdog. I really enjoyed locking horns with Rishard."

"You were good, too," Jamie said adoringly. "You'll be a wonderful barrister."

"The best part is that we won't have to be apart. We can get a place in Hogsmeade and I can Apparate to London for classes."

"I'll have my own quarters here at Hogwarts," Jamie suggested "Maybe the headmaster will allow us to cohabit." Jamie started to cry uncontrollably.

"What's the matter love?" Alex asked apprehensively. "You should be happy. Everything is going to work out fine."

"I know," she sobbed. "That's why I'm so happy."

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"What would you have done if he had actually started rubbing your bum?" Emily asked.

"I honestly don't know," Caitlin said. "I think he was just teasing, but just the thought of it got me all excited."

"What do you mean by excited?" Emily asked, a grin on her face.

"You know very well what I mean," Caitlin answered, annoyance evident in her voice. "It was like when you and I experimented, I got all moist down there."

"You actually love that little guy, don't you?" Emily asked.

"I don't know," Caitlin confessed. "There are so many different kinds of love. I love Mum and Dad and Jamie in one way. I love you in another and I think I love Evan. But I thought I loved Matt and look how horribly wrong that turned out." Caitlin just shook her head with consternation. "Do you realize how close I came to making a horrible mistake with Matt? I could have been taken away from Mum and Dad."

"I think you're just oversexed," Emily said.

"Just what do you mean by that?" Caitlin asked, irritation evident in her voice.

"Well, maybe that isn't the right way to put it," Emily apologized. "I think it has a lot to do with you being a Hyperempath. You're more easily aroused and have a lot of difficulty not surrendering to your desires."

"Are you claiming that you wouldn't get aroused if Tyler started caressing you?" Caitlin asked heatedly.

"Of course, I would," Emily admitted. "The difference between you and I is that I could enjoy it and then put my brain back in gear and know when to say stop. You get lost in ecstasy and forget the consequences."

Caitlin hated to admit it, but Emily was right.

"But what do I do?" Caitlin asked. "Can't I ever kiss him or allow him to even lightly pet me? I like how it feels when he touches me."

"How much do you trust him?" Emily asked.

"I think he genuinely cares for me," Caitlin answered. "I don't think he'd ever take advantage of me or purposely hurt me."

"Then I think you're going to have to put both your fates in his hands. Most boys rely on the girl to set limitations and say no," Emily explained. "You're going to have to explain to him that because of your unique circumstances, you might not be capable of saying no and that he is going to have to look out for both of you."

"I can't believe I'm looking to my younger sister for advice," Caitlin observed, "or that I'm basically going to end up trusting my fate to a first year. Mum must know how my abilities affect my hormones. I'm surprised she even lets me date."

"I'm sure she worries a lot about us both, but how successful do you think she'd be at preventing either of us from dating?" Emily asked.

"We'd just do it behind her back. At least this way she can watch out for us," Caitlin replied.

"I think we should watch out for each other, too," Emily suggested. "We both have a long time to go before we reach fifteen."

"Too long," Caitlin added.

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Friday, February 17, 2006

"Do you want to head to the library and finish that charms essay for Flitwick?" Emily asked as she and Kim departed the Great Hall after finishing dinner.

"I can't," Kim replied. "Remember, I have that meeting tonight about the second task." Kim checked her watch. "Actually I'd better hurry. I'm supposed to be meeting the others at the Quidditch Pitch in ten minutes."

"See you later," Emily said as Kim rush off. "Good Luck!"

It was just a meeting; Kim certainly hoped she wouldn't be in need of any luck tonight, but with Rishard Simone running the events one could never be certain. She reached the door just as the remainder of the team was ready to depart.

"It's about time," Jamie scolded in a kidding way. "You had Nora quite worried. She thought you were going to chicken out and that she would be required to take your place tomorrow."

"She still might have to participate," Kim said. "Simone doesn't seem to like anyone to sit out."

"Yeah!" Nora agreed. "I think he just figures that the more of us running around in his scanty costumes the better the chance of one of us exposing ourselves."

"Well, unless someone knows some excellent warming charms, we're going to be colder than a witch's tit tomorrow," Nora declared.

Several of the boys and all the girls just stared at Nora.

"It's just an expression," she said contritely. "Oh Come on now. Don't pretend you've never heard it before. I've often heard Muggles use it."

"That's not all that will ice up tomorrow," Dick commented. "The temperature is supposed to be well below freezing all day with little if any sun."

The Hogwarts team arrived at the Pitch to find the American team already assembled and looking rather forlorn. It didn't take long to figure out their dejection; it appeared that the challenge involved water and no one was looking forward to getting wet in sub freezing temperatures.

Before the teams had a chance to exchange comments, Rishard arrived along with Harry and the American coach. Rishard seemed to have regained his nauseatingly bubbly personality.

"It's so good to see all your happy little faces again," Rishard said in his little singsong way. "Although I'm disappointed that you didn't wear your uniforms tonight. You all look so adorable in them."

"He'd look cute with my fist in his face," Dick mumbled.

Jamie and Kim, although neither fans of Dick's, both giggled at his comment.

"Please be sure that you dress appropriately tomorrow, I don't want to see any of you gorgeous people out of uniform tomorrow," Rishard warned.

"The hell he doesn't," Caitlin cursed. "He'd piss his pants if a couple of us ended up partially exposed, the fruity pervert."

"Caitlin! You're starting to sound more and more like Emily," Jamie scolded. "I think she's becoming a bad influence on you. You're right though. He is a pervert."

"Now then," Simone started. "Tomorrow's task is rather straightforward; it is called 'Bridging the Gap'. As you can see we have two small ponds, one for each team. The ponds are ten foot deep at all points. There is a platform secured in the middle of each pond. The distance from land to the platform is approximately seven feet.

"Each team must traverse across the two expanses. You will have only two boards with which to make a bridge. The two boards are four and five foot in length and quite inflexible. Also, only three people may occupy the center platform at one time."

"Are there any questions so far?" Rishard asked.

"Yeah!" Dick yelled out. "What about that water? With the temperature as low as it is someone could freeze to death if they fell in."

"Very good question," Simone said, putting his arm around Dick's shoulder. "Do you notice anything peculiar about the pond water?"

"No," answered Dick, shrugging his shoulders.

"Does anyone?"

Quite a few of the students raised their hands, but Rishard seemed to show preference to calling on the boys. "Yes, you handsome devil," he said indicating one of the American boys.

"I don't believe that is water sir," the student answered. "Water would be frozen with the temperatures being as low as they've been the last few weeks."

"Very good," Rishard said reaching out and patting the boy's arse. "The ponds do not contain water. Although it closely resembles water this fluid is actually Petrificus Potion."

Jamie gasped causing the other students to stare in her direction.

"I take it you are familiar with Petrificus Potion?" Rishard asked.

"Yes! It is the potion equivalent of the Petrificus Totalus spell," she replied. "Any part of the body that comes in contact with the solution becomes rigid."

"Quite correct. If I were your professor, I'd award your house ten points for that correct answer," Simone giggled. "Touch it with your fingers and you will lose their use. Submerge an arm or a leg and they will become incapacitated. Fall completely in the potion and you will become dead weight for your team, only your eyes will move for the next hour. Remember all member of the team are required to finish the task, even any that are debilitated."

"There will be a few additional challenges to make the task slightly more difficult, but I don't want to ruin the fun by discussing them just yet. I'd rather they be a surprise in the morning. Now unless there are any further questions I suggest you all get a good night's sleep. Before you leave please see your coach who will give you a bottle of a specially prepared potion that you should immediately drink. It will help take your mind off the cold tomorrow."

"What is it Harry," Jamie asked as he handed her a sealed flask.

"I haven't the slightest idea," Harry answered. "Mister Simone refused to divulge the actual contents, but he assured everyone that it is harmless and that the effects only last eighteen hours from the time of ingestion."

"Must we drink it?" Caitlin asked.

"Yes!" Harry confirmed. "Rishard insists that I make sure that everyone completely downs their bottle. He says it would be an unfair advantage if one of the players were slighted." Harry watched as each player finished his or her drink. By the comments, it sounded like there were three different beverages each with their own unique taste.

Once the teams separated, Jamie called her group into a huddle.

"This doesn't seem like that difficult a challenge," she said. "We just need to work together as a team and take care that no one falls into that potion."

"That's for sure," Dick agreed. "I certainly don't intend to be burdened with carrying anyone through the entire contest."

This type of attitude from Dick seemed to surprise no one.

"Okay, call me stupid if you must," Nora said, "but I don't understand how this is possible. Neither of the boards is long enough to reach for land to the platform."

"You're not stupid," Kim assured Nora. "It took me awhile to figure it out myself. What we have to do is lay out the first board with enough weight supporting so that someone can walk out on it sort of like a diving board. That person carries the second board with them and lays it from the end of the first board to the platform and then walks across. The tricky part is that we can't have more than three people on the platform at a time. That means we have to keep communicating and shifting the boards around so that no one gets stranded."

"It's going to be another circumstance of making sure we have people of proper strength and weight at the correct position at the right time," Jamie said. "I'll try and figure out a strategy tonight," she said resisting yawning. "Assuming I can stay awake. Suddenly I can barely keep my eyes open."

"Me, too," said Kim and many of the others yawned in agreement. "I wonder if those drinks had a sleeping draft in them so that we couldn't stay awake to make plans."

"It's possible," Jamie said. "We better all hurry back to our dorms before we fall asleep out here and freeze to death."

Once inside the castle, everyone separated and then scurried toward their common rooms and then into their dorms. Dick and Kim were silent as they hurried to the Slytherin common room only exchanging yawns as they head toward their separate dorm wings.

"What happened? What's the second event?" Emily asked excitedly as Kim sat down on her four-pollster bed.

Kim opened her mouth to speak, but instead yawned and then collapsed in a motionless heap.

Emily just shook her head and smiled. The strain of trying to juggle two boyfriends was obviously taking its toll on her best friend. She didn't even try to wake Kim, but instead removed her best friend's clothes and then tucked her in for the night. She knew Kim had a hard day ahead of her.

* * * * *

Saturday, February 18, 2006

The loud talking of Janice and Denise awakened Emily. They had no respect for anyone else. If they were sleeping, they expected everyone to walk around on tiptoes, but if they were awake then everyone else should be too.

Emily checked her watch. It was good that Janice and Denise were so rude. If she and Kim didn't hurry they'd miss breakfast. Emily stuck her hand through the drapes of Kim's bed and gave her a gentle shake. "Time to get up sleeping beauty or we'll miss breakfast."

Kim stretched and then rubbed her eyes before slowly opening them. "Emily why are you waking me in the middle of the night? Its pitch dark."

"What are you going on about," Emily retorted, pulling Kim draperies open. "It's the middle of the morning. Open your eyes and get out of bed, lazy."

Kim didn't answer Emily; instead she screamed and then started crying uncontrollably. Her eyes were open. She was blind.

Chapter Twenty See, Hear and Speak No Evil

Emily was still recoiling from the shock of Kim's initial scream when the dormitory door flew open and Professor Ginevra Weasley rushed into the room.

"Professor! It's Kim! She's blind," Emily cried hysterically.

Ginny ran to Kim's bed, dropped down on her knees and took the trembling girl into her arms. "Calm yourself," she said soothingly. "Everything will be all right. The blindness is only short-term; it's a result of the potion that bastard, Simone, gave you last night. The effects will wear off within eighteen hours. Your sight will return sometime this evening."

Although her professor's words calmed Kim slightly, she still could not stop crying. She continued to whimper softly as Ginny stroked her back with sensitivity.

"How could he do something so cruel and hateful?" Emily shouted. Immediately her thoughts turned to her sisters, Jamie and Caitlin. "Are all the contestants blind?"

"No," Ginny answered. "Some have lost their hearing while others have no capacity to speak. Jamie was the first to recognize the effects of the potions when she awakened this morning. She roused Caitlin and then they alerted your parents, who in turn alerted the heads of house. Professor Malfoy is with Dick Bancroft now."

"Do you know how Jamie and Caitlin were affected?" Emily asked concernedly.

"Caitlin is totally deaf and Jamie can't speak," Professor Weasley answered solemnly.

"I have to go to them," Emily shouted urgently.

"No you don't," Ginny asserted. "They have each other, plus your parents are currently seeing to them. Their disabilities are much more easily dealt with than Kim's affliction. Your friend is the one who needs you at the moment."

One glance at the look of desperation covering Kim's beautiful tear stained face and Emily understood Professor Weasley was correct.

"He did this to them for that stupid contest?" Emily asked, shaking her head in frustration. "Couldn't he have simply blindfolded or gagged them?"

"That's what your father asked Rishard," Ginny said. "I think he was ready to thoroughly thrash the man. He probably would have if Hermione hadn't intervened. Rishard claimed that there was too great a chance of cheating with blindfolds, ear plugs and gags."

"He could have at least warned them what was going to happen," Emily sighed, her voice echoing disgust.

"That would have been the considerate thing to do, but Rishard maintains that would have spoiled the surprise and given the participants too much time to adjust to the handicap before the task," Ginny responded.

"Rishard is an arse," Emily sputtered, before remembering that she was talking to a school professor and not a fellow student. "I'm sorry Professor, that was impertinent of me."

"No apology necessary," Ginny said, giving Emily an honest smile. "I totally agree with your appraisal of the man. Now, can I count on you to take care of Kim up until the team gathers together? She'll need assistance showering, getting dressed and making it to the Great Hall for breakfast."

Emily nodded her head, but then recognized that Kim wouldn't be conscious of this physical gesture. "Of course I'll take care of her. She's my best friend," Emily said soundly, grasping Kim's hand and squeezing it tightly.

"Then I'll leave matters in your capable hands," Ginny said, giving Emily another smile. "Don't worry Kim, Draco is familiar with the potion Simone used. He assures us that there will be no lasting affects; you'll be as good as new this evening."

Kim waited until she heard the door close behind Professor Weasley, and then whispered. "Are we alone?"

"We are now," Emily answered. "Janice and the Butcher were here, but they departed just before Professor Weasley. I like her; next to Mum and Dad, she's the coolest professor we have. She wasn't even fazed that we were both nude."

Kim turned scarlet. "I forgot! Oh my God! I can't believe I just sat here totally starkers and allowed my professor to stroke my back. What must she think of me?" Kim asked.

"She's okay with the whole nudist thing," Emily said reassuringly. "Professor Weasley has seen Caitlin and me naked numerous times. She's even popped into our quarters already when Mum was nude. Honestly, I think she'd give naturism a try herself if it weren't for Professor Malfoy; he likes looking, but otherwise he's a prude."

Kim didn't responded, but rather sat silently, a vacant expression on her face.

"Kim, are you okay?" Emily asked when she realized Kim wasn't listening. "Don't be concerned, Professor Weasley said you would be all right by this evening."

"I know," Kim answered glumly. "It's just that I always sort of took my vision for granted. I can't imagine having to live the remainder of my life like this. I think I'd rather die."

"Kim, don't talk like that," Emily scolded.

"I'm serious," Kim insisted. "People who are whole go through their entire lives not being thankful for how good they have it. I'm actually grateful Simone gave me that potion. I'll always have a greater respect now for handicapped people and an appreciation for how lucky I am."

After some prodding, Kim reluctantly got out of bed and allowed Emily to steer her to the bathroom. She blushed profusely as Emily guided her to a seat on a chamber pot. Although Kim had progressively gotten accustomed to being seen nude, she still preferred privacy for such personal matters as relieving herself. Emily, of course, considered Kim's insistence on modesty as silly.

"It's just a natural body function," Emily reminded her. "You don't hide in a stall when you eat or

drink. I don't understand why people feel it is so shameful to purge body waste? It's a natural body function; everybody does it."

Much to Kim's relief, she was able to convince Emily that, despite her blindness, she was fully capable of relieving herself unaided. She did, however, appreciate Emily's help when it came to such things as applying paste to her toothbrush.

"Would you like me to wash you?" Emily asked as they entered the shower room.

Kim shivered at the thought of her best friend touching her in such an intimate way. "I think that I can manage," she answered, uneasily, "if you'll just guide me under a shower head."

Emily did as requested and after helping Kim adjust the water temperature; she went to an adjacent shower and began to bathe herself. She was shampooing her hair, not paying close attention to Kim, when she heard muffled sobbing. Emily looked in the direction of the weeping to discover Kim on all fours desperately feeling about for her dropped soap.

Emily hurriedly picked up the soap and then helped Kim to her feet. "I feel so helpless," Kim cried.

"I'm sure you'd become quite independent in time," Emily said reassuringly. "Fortunately, yours is just a temporary handicap and until it passes, I'll be here to help you."

Without thought, Kim reached out to touch Emily and then pulled her best friend into a tight embrace. They stood wordlessly, holding each other closely, as the water cascaded off their glistening bodies. Had someone observed them, the meaning of the embrace might have easily been misconstrued. Neither girl gave thought to this nor were they the least bit self-conscious. Providence had brought them together and only death would end their extraordinary friendship.

* * * * *

"Ron, why doesn't Severus just call the competition off?" Sam asked. It was obvious that she was extremely irritated.

"I'm sure he would, if it were within his authority," Ron answered. "Severus may be the headmaster, but he still has to abide by the directives of the Board of Governors."

"I can't believe that the Governors approve of Simone's shenanigans," she countered disgustedly. "First he forces the contestants to wear those licentious costumes, and then he introduces those dreadful spiders into the first event. Now he's slipped disability-causing potions into the competitors' drinks. What's next?"

"I don't know," Ron answered, shaking his head in frustration. "Rishard, or at least the people he works for, seem to have all the angles covered. When complaints were raised concerning the costumes, they were quick to point out that until recently such competitions were held in the nude. They also reminded everyone that two of the school's most celebrated professors were devout nudists."

"That's totally different," Sam interrupted. "Being a naturist is poles apart from being forced to dress in provocative and suggestive costumes. Besides, most of the contestants aren't naturists."

"You don't need to convince me," Ron said, raising his hands in capitulation. "I'm just pointing out some of the arguments they've used. Personally, I think some of the Governors are either under the Imperius Curse or have accepted bribes. But we all know how much my opinion counts for."

"Ronald Bilius Weasley! You know very well that I value your opinion highly," Sam shouted, affronted by Ron's comment.

"You know what I mean," Ron replied apologetically. "In our world the opinion of a werewolf isn't worth a Knut."

"Perhaps in the Wizarding World," she said, pulling Ron into her arms, "but not in our world." She kissed him passionately.

* * * * *

The room was bustling with excitement as Kim entered the Great Hall guided watchfully by Emily. Evidently word had rapidly spread about the fortune of the competitors because Emily was acutely aware of many eyes falling upon the two of them as they crossed the hall to the table where the team was all seated together.

Unlike the other students who were talking animatedly, the Hogwarts competitors sat in near absolute silence. Emily helped Kim to be seated and then without waiting for an invitation plopped herself down at the table beside her friend. Jamie and Caitlin both gave Emily strained smiles of approval, but said nothing. Both girls had faraway looks covering their faces. As Emily glanced from face to face, she realized that all the contestants had the same gloomy expressions.

"Are you guys coping all right?" she asked.

Caitlin just stared at Emily questioningly, but Jamie nodded and gave Emily a weak grin. It was then that the bleakness of the situation became wholly apparent to Emily. In little more than an hour the competition would be commencing; it would be crucial for the players to communicate among themselves, but how? Kim was blind and it appeared that Nora Jordan and Lee Wilson, the two reserves, were suffering the same adversity. The three would need a great deal of assistance during the task, but half the people available to give that help couldn't hear them and the other half couldn't speak

Jamie had always been the group's leader; now she was unable to talk and even if she could Caitlin and Donald couldn't hear her words. Maybe she could use sign language with them, Emily thought, but that certainly wouldn't work with Kim and the others that were sightless.

Emily shook her head with disgust. How could the competition be considered fair with the Hogwarts team being at such an obvious disadvantage? Unless? Her eyes quickly darted to the nearby table where the American contingent was seated. One glance was all it took for her to discern that the Americans, as well, had been treated to Rishard's wicked potion.

Emily hoped that somehow the team would be able to deal with their temporary handicaps and prevail in the day's competition, but at the moment that wasn't her pressing concern. After sharing her observations with Kim, she concentrated on assisting the girl to acquire a healthy breakfast.

Kim's first sightless meal was both frustrating and messy. Once again she was reminded of how much for granted people take their vision. Kim had just finished eating when she felt someone's hands grasp her shoulders in a heartening way.

"I'm pleased that you are handling the situation so well," Professor Granger said reassuringly. "What Mr. Simone did to you is inexcusable. Mercifully it is only short-term."

Hermione kissed Kim on the cheek, then in turn approached Nora and Lee and likewise offered them words of encouragement. As Hermione made the rounds of the sightless students, Harry placed a blank parchment in front of Caitlin and Donald, the students that were rendered deaf by the potion. He pointed his finger to his eyes and then to the parchment. "Watch the parchment," he said. His words appeared briefly and then vanished.

"I want to apologize to you all for what I'm sure was a frightening experience when you awoke this morning," Harry declared. "I also want to guarantee you that neither the Headmaster nor myself were aware of the effects linked to the potions you were given. Mr. Simone had informed us that you would be required to perform today's task while handicapped, but he never divulged the extent of the handicaps or how they would be imposed."

"What he did was beyond the pale," Harry emphasized. "Professor Malfoy has examined the vestiges of the potion and assures me that the effects, although devastating, are only temporary. When you awake tomorrow morning you will have returned to your normal complete selves. Meanwhile, it is my unpleasant duty to notify you that the task will go on as scheduled. Your afflictions are just considered another obstacle that must be overcome."

Kim raised her hand warily, hoping to get Professor Potter's attention.

"Yes, Kim. Did you have a question?" Harry asked.

"Yes, Sir," she answered. "I was wondering, couldn't Caitlin cure us? Not just us! I wouldn't want to cheat. I mean all of us. The American team as well."

"I'm sure that Mr. Simone would consider that a violation of the contract," Harry answered bleakly. "Unfortunately, the option isn't even available to us. It seems that the loss of her hearing has negatively affected Caitlin's Hyperempath powers."

Kim frowned.

"If there are no further questions, I'd like to stop by the American team's table and reassure them before we all head down to the pitch," Harry said. He looked desolately toward Caitlin and Donald. "I'm sorry, but I can't allow you to hold onto those parchments. It would be considered any unfair advantage."

Don and Caitlin both nodded their acquiescence and reluctantly handed back the parchments. Although it was nothing like actually hearing, it had been nice to briefly discern what was being discussed in the room.

Emily noticed that Ron and Sam had joined Harry and Hermione as they conversed with the American students. After a few minutes the Americans rose to their feet and departed the hall along with their coach. Ron and Sam remained with the group to provide any needed assistance.

"It's time to proceed down to the pitch," Harry commented upon returning.

"Emily, I'll lend Kim a hand," Hermione offered. "It would be best if you rejoined your friends."

Emily nodded her agreement. She noticed that Jamie and Caitlin were assisting Lee Wilson, but was shocked to see Dick Bancroft placing his arm compassionately around the shoulder of Nora Jordan.

Emily watched transfixed until Tyler touched her hand. "We have to hurry back to Slytherin House and get our winter robes," he said concernedly. "It's bitter outside." He watched as the Hogwarts team departed the hall. "They're going to freeze to death in those miniscule costumes. They might as well be naked."

"Most of them are!" Emily said. Then without further explanation, she grabbed Tyler's hand and they scurried off to get their robes.

* * * * *

"Roger, what are you doing here?" Emily asked in surprise.

"The same as every one else," Roger replied with a laugh. "There wasn't much logic in keeping the shop open when all of Hogsmeade is here to watch the competition. Besides, this isn't exactly ideal ice cream weather."

"You can say that again," Tyler said with a shiver. "Just the mention of ice cream makes me cold. You're welcome to sit with us if you like. No sense in you sitting alone."

"Thanks for the offer," Roger said graciously, "but I'm waiting for someone. Oh! Here she comes now."

Emily and Tyler looked in the direction Roger was facing and were both stunned to see Amanda and Alex headed their direction.

"You're meeting Amanda?" Emily questioned, surprise evident in her voice. "Are you guys dating?"

"Not exactly," Roger answered nervously. "This is sort of a trial run to see if we feel we have enough in common to try the whole dating thing."

"I think it would be great if you two started seeing each other," Emily said enthusiastically. Before she could comment any further, Amanda and Alex caught up to them.

"Hi Roger!" Amanda said in greeting. Her voice seemed to crack slightly with tension. "I hope you don't mind if Alex sits with us?"

"Not at all," Roger replied graciously. "Why don't the five of us locate seats together?"

Everyone nodded agreement to this plan as they all headed out onto the pitch where special seating had been erected surrounding the two temporary small ponds where the task was scheduled to take place. After searching fruitlessly for about five minutes, they were about to give up on finding

adjoining seats when a voice called out to them. Evan was standing, waving frantically to them and pointing to an empty section of bleachers next to him.

"How did you manage to get such great seats?" Amanda asked as they joined Evan.

"I've been here since before dawn," Evan answered sleepily.

Emily was astonished as she looked about. She had never seen so many cameras or photographers gathered in one place; it looked like a paparazzi convention.

"These contests have become tremendously popular," Roger said, as if in answer to Emily's as yet unasked question. "Today's event is being broadcast to wizards worldwide. The competitions have become the equivalent to the Muggle Olympics."

"At least the Muggles have the decency to allow the participants to dress appropriately for the weather," Amanda commented. "Contestants in their winter events don't participate in skimpy bathing costumes." She looked concernedly at Jamie and the others. "They all look like they're freezing to death."

"Here comes that Simone character," Alex interrupted. "I think they're ready to begin."

Rishard whipped out his wand, pointed it at his own throat, and said, "Sonus!" Suddenly he was able to speak over the roar of the crowd. His voice echoed, booming into every corner of the stands.

"Welcome! Welcome to the second event in this thrilling competition between the students from The Salem Witches' Institute and Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

"Today's task is called 'Bridging the Gap'. As you can see, we have erected two small pools, one for each team. The pools are ten foot deep at all points. There is a platform secured in the middle of each pool. The distance from land to the platform is approximately seven feet.

"Each team must cross the two expanses. They have no tools, only two boards with which to make a bridge. The two boards are four and five foot in length and quite rigid. Also, only three people may occupy the center platform at one time.

"In order to make the task more exciting, the contestants have all been temporarily afflicted with a disability. The rules were explained to them last evening because one third of the players are now incapable of hearing. Another third have lost the ability to speak and the final third have been temporarily rendered blind."

There was a sudden gasp from the spectators.

Evan's face was pallid. "When did this all happen?" he asked fretfully. "What is Caitlin's handicap?"

"She's lost the sense of hearing," Amanda answered. She was about to reassure Evan, but was interrupted by the booming voice of Rishard.

"Don't worry," Rishard said in a heartening way to the crowd. "I assure you that the handicaps are only transitory. When they wake up tomorrow, all participants will have returned to normal."

"One more thing," Rishard said, suppressing a nervous laugh. "The ponds do not contain water. Although it closely resembles water this fluid is actually Petrificus Potion. It is the potion equivalent of the Petrificus Totalus spell. Any part of the body that comes in contact with the solution becomes rigid.

"Touch it with your fingers and you will lose their use. Submerge an arm or a leg and they will become incapacitated. Fall completely in the potion and you will become dead weight for your team, only your eyes will move for the next hour. Remember all member of the team are required to finish the task, even any that are out of action."

"Coaches, please assemble your teams at the starting point," Rishard added. "We will begin as soon as the certified judges are in position and all set."

"It looks like everyone is going to participate again," Alex commented. "The substitutes have ended up being regular starters."

"I'm sure that thrills Nora Jordan," Amanda remarked. "I think she'd just as soon watch from the bench."

"She wouldn't be doing much watching today," Emily said dejectedly. "She is one of the contestants that was struck sightless."

"Do you know which contestants have what disability?" Roger asked.

"Yeah! I sat with them all at breakfast this morning," Emily informed. "In addition to Nora, Lee Wilson and Kim Thatcher are also sightless. Donald Thomas and Caitlin are for the short term deaf, while Jamie, Jeffery Mac Dowell and Dick Bancroft have lost the ability to speak."

"Finally, someone found a way to shut up my dissolute brother," Tyler joked. "In his case, I sort of wish the potion's effects were unending."

"It must be weird for Jamie and Dick," Amanda noted. "Normally they are both constantly arguing with each other. Today they have to settle for giving each other nasty looks."

"Not being able to easily communicate with each other is going to make this task extremely thorny," Roger remarked. "Jamie was the team leader for the first task. Her inability to talk is going to mean someone else might have to step up and take control today."

"Who makes the better leader, someone who can't talk, someone who can't hear or someone who can't see?" Emily asked.

"I'm more worried about that Petrificus Potion than anything else," Evan said fretfully. "What if someone falls in the pond? How will their teammates get them out?"

"Good question," Alex agreed. "Those boards may be sturdy, but they're only about eight inches wide and three players on each team will need to be guided across."

"Neither team looks primed today," Amanda observed. "They're all just standing around as if in a stupor."

"They're most likely all still disconcerted. It must have been an awful shock when they woke up this morning," Alex stated. "That was only a few hours ago. They've had very little time to adjust and

now the task is about to begin."

When Rishard gave the signal to start, both teams, at the outset, seemed perplexed. Not surprisingly, it was Jamie that stepped forward for the Hogwarts team and took control of the situation. Her first action was to group Kim, Nora and Lee together and then gesture instructions to Caitlin, indicating that she should keep the trio enlightened as to what was taking place.

Next, Jamie indicated for Dick and Jeff to each get one of the two boards and follow her to the pool's edge. She placed the longer board on the ground and then slid it so that most of the board extended in the air over the water like substance similar in fashion to a diving board. Jaime then motioned for Donald to join her and Jeff as they stood on the end of the board. She then indicated for Dick to walk out on the board while carrying the shorter plank.

At first Bancroft hesitated, giving Jamie a 'do you think I'm crazy' look. Then, as if a light went on, Dick understood Jamie's plan and nodded his approval. Slowly he walked out on the plank; it wobbled slightly, but remained in place. Cautiously Dick bent down and placed the other board in place. Six inches of wood touched and extended over the island platform, while the other end just covered the edge of the 'diving board'.

Dick took a deep breath. He felt as if he were walking a tightrope three foot above the deep pool of Petrificus Potion since nothing was securing the second board in place. He took a wary step and placed a slight bit of weight on the board; it remained in position. He held his breath as his full body weight moved to the second board, and then without hesitation he leapt to the platform.

Dick had made it to the middle of the pool. He quickly made sure the boards were still properly lined up and then gave Jamie the okay signal.

"I never thought I'd see the day that those two would work in concert," Tyler said, taken aback. "Did they actually just exchange smiles?"

No one responded; Emily and the others were all too absorbed in the spectacle that was taking place before them. Even the American Team had seemed to be watching the group from Hogwarts, but they now were quickly replicating the procedure.

Jamie hadn't wasted time checking on the American Team; instead she had motioned for Caitlin to bring Nora and Lee forward. She had Caitlin explain to Lee what Donald's job was and then had him take the boy's place. Once Lee was weighing down the board, Donald began his journey across to the platform. Donald had watched Dick vigilantly and was able to repeat the Slytherin boy's efforts without any difficulty. It was Nora's turn next. Caitlin guided the girl until Nora had her feet positioned securely on the first board.

"Keep shuffling your feet little by little to the left," Caitlin instructed. "I'll tell you if you are getting too close to the edge of the plank. To help you maintain your balance, Jamie will hold your right hand. I'll let you know when you've reached the halfway point."

Nora inched her way along the board at an agonizingly slow pace. At the speed she was moving, the Americans would surely catch up soon. Caitlin was about to urge Nora to move more rapidly, when a scream penetrated the air. One of the American girls had just fallen into the pool.

"That's right! Take it nice and slow," Caitlin said positively. "Haste makes waste. Careful now, your left foot is about to touch the second board; you will need to lift it up about an inch. Perfect! Now let your right foot touch before lifting it. Great! You're on the second board. Keep moving slowly to

your left. Reach out your left arm so that Dick can help steady you."

"You made it," Caitlin screamed in excitement as Dick gave Nora an unexpected hug.

Jamie gave Caitlin a nudge, encouraging her to cross next, but Caitlin frantically shook her head and shouted, "No!" She held three fingers up in front of Jamie's face. "Remember, only three people are allowed on the platform at a time."

"Good thing Caitlin remembered that," Alex groaned in relief. "If she had crossed over to the center, the team would have been disqualified."

The American team had thus far only managed to get two people across to the platform and was currently struggling to rescue one of their numbers from the pool. If Hogwarts could maintain a steady pace and avoid any calamity, the contest could, without doubt, be won.

Dick pulled the four-foot board onto the platform and then stood back as Jamie deftly sent the longer plank flying through the air in his direction. Bancroft wasted no time getting the five-foot plank set into position and then sent Donald on his way toward the other side.

The Ravenclaw boy had no difficulty placing the shorter board in position and then hurrying across to terra firma. The Hogwarts team had now successfully moved one contestant completely from side to side. With Donald safely ashore, Dick sized up Nora and then looked to Jamie for guidance. He felt that he could adequately support Nora's weight by himself, but was concerned about sending the blind girl out on the plank. Since neither he nor Donald had assistance supporting the planks, they would be unable to give her any balancing aid. Also, Dick was concerned whether Donald's guidance of Nora would be as through as Caitlin's had been.

Jamie seemed to comprehend Dick's concern, but indicated that he should try. Jamie obviously felt that they just couldn't afford the luxury of exchanging boards after each individual.

Dick gave Nora a hug and then helped position her feet on the board. He took her hand and then gave her a gentle nudge indicating that she should start her journey across. Dick wished that he could somehow warn her that he would not be able to offer her constant support; that he would need to withdraw his hand and that for a time she would be on her own.

Dick watched intently as Nora moved little by little along the board listening to Donald's instructions and encouragement. Bancroft panicked briefly as Nora neared the second board. Don had forgotten to warn her about stepping up an inch. It looked like she stubbed her toe, but somehow still managed to maintain her balance. Everyone breathed a collective sigh of relief when the young girl finally reached shore. Hogwarts had two across and the Americans had only just managed to get their petrified player out of the water.

Since it was illegal to walk the boards around the pool to the starting side, it was necessary for Dick to remain on the platform so that the planks could be passed to him and then back to Jamie. Once the boards were set up again as they had been originally, Lee and Caitlin were the next to cross. Lee was guided across in a similar fashion as Nora and then Caitlin followed. Both players finished their crossing to the far side without incident.

While Hogwarts was getting their third and fourth players complete, the American team had found it necessary to abandon the platform and essentially start over. This was necessitated because two boys had to carry the petrified girl across the plank bridge. That required the platform being empty to start with so that the three could arrive at the same time and then proceed to the finished side.

The one male contestant had to then return back to the platform with the planks. Thus while Hogwarts now had four members of their team safely back ashore, the Americans had only gotten two people totally over and done with.

Jeff, Jamie and Kim remained on the starting side of the man made pond. Since Dick was still on the platform, they could not all journey there at once. The decision was made for Jeff to undertake the trip first and then after he had successfully made it completely to the other side Kim and Jamie would venture out to the platform. This meant moving the boards around quite a bit, but there seemed to be no viable alternative.

When Jeff had safely joined his teammates on the far side, Dick lobbed the four-foot board in the direction of Jamie and then situated the five-foot board in place before assuming his anchor position. The shorter board had to be on the side nearest the girls this time around because it was necessary for Jamie to retrieve it on her way out to the middle platform.

As Jamie guided Kim onto the board, she realized the failing in her plan. Neither she nor Dick would be able to help talk Kim across the planks. When out of Jamie's reach, Kim would be on her own until she made it to Dick's waiting hand. The other team members could yell encouragement, but their view of the planks was restricted; they wouldn't be able to advise Kim when she had reached the juncture of the two boards.

Jamie squeezed Kim's hand, after which she gave her an encouraging nudge to get started. She would have preferred to move along the plank directly next to Kim, but doubted very much that Bancroft could counterbalance their combined weight.

Jamie held on to Kim's hand tightly until the younger girl arrived at the point where the boards joined. Then she gave a slight pull hoping that Kim would comprehend the meaning of the tug.

Kim hesitated, and then felt around with her foot until she located the spot at which the two boards met. At this point, Jamie had to release her grip on Kim's hand. Kim, though, continued to move forward with deliberation, carefully checking her footing before placing her entire weight down. In a short time she felt Dick's fingertips touching hers and knew she would safely make it to the platform.

Without deliberation, Jamie nimbly started across the temporary 'bridge', stopping only to retrieve the shorter board once she had passed over it. Only after she had joined Kim and Dick on the platform, did she check on the progress of the American team.

"It's in the bag," Emily shouted excitedly, throwing her arms happily around Tyler.

"I like your enthusiasm," Tyler said, kissing Emily's cheek, "but let's not celebrate until each and every one of them is safely back on land."

Emily gave Tyler a disgruntled look, but begrudgingly returned to watching the contest.

Dick and Jamie wasted no time setting the boards in position for the final passage. As Jeff and Donald provided counterbalance, Dick was the first to triumphantly cross.

Once again, Jamie gave Kim a cheering squeeze as she sent her on her way. Dick had his arms waiting to grasp Kim's hand as Caitlin called directives to her friend. Kim's outstretched hand was mere inches from Dick's fingertips when the crowd gasped and then screamed. The distraction was all it took to cause Kim to lose both her concentration and balance and cause her to plummet into

the pool headfirst.

The crowd once again screamed as Kim's body vanished below the surface of the pool.

"What happened?" Amanda asked, totally baffled. "What caused the crowd to initially yell?"

"It was that American boy that you girls know," Roger explained. "Isn't his name Brian? Anyway he was on the platform for the Americans just like Bancroft was for Hogwarts. And like us they had three more players to move onto the platform. Obviously he realized that they didn't have the time to move the boards around as often as we did. He evidently decided to clear the platform by leaping to the other side of their pool."

"Is that legal?" Alex asked.

"Evidently! They haven't been disqualified," Roger elaborated. "Brian didn't make it all the way to shore, but he did manage to grab the side of the pool. He appears to have only be petrified from the waste down."

"Who cares about him," Evan demanded. "Look at Kim! What happened to her team costume?"

Kim's rigid body had returned to the surface, but was now floating face down in the pool of Petrificus Potion. Being drenched in the potion plainly had nullified the concealment charm.

"Her nudity isn't the crucial concern," Emily said nervously. "Her nose and mouth are under water. Even though she's petrified, doesn't she still need to have air?"

"I believe so," Alex answered concernedly. "If the potion works the same as the spell, she isn't truly petrified, but rather just in a full body bind. Only seeing a basilisk's eyes indirectly can turn you to actual stone."

"Then they have to get her turned onto her back before she suffocates," Emily cried in desperation.

Fortunately Jamie and Dick seemed to have the same idea. They had hurriedly dissembled the bridge and Dick was already poking Kim's body with the one board in order to send it floating toward the platform and Jamie. Jamie couldn't risk touching the potion so had to wait until Kim was directly next to the platform, at which time she slid her plank under Kim's ankles and lifted the girl's feet onto the platform. Then avoiding the potion, Jamie drug Kim onto the platform unceremoniously by her feet.

Quickly Jamie turned the nude girl onto her back. Unable to speak, Jamie made the hand sign for OK only to promptly realize that Kim was unable to se this gesture.

Although Emily didn't seem to feel that Kim's exposure was of vital concern, it appeared that the paparazzi and the majority of the male spectators had a differing view. Flash bulbs popped incessantly and it looked as if every Omniocular in the stadium was focused on her.

"Jamie, hurry, put your plank back in place," Caitlin yelled. "Dick is coming to help you with Kim."

The longer plank was already in place extending over the water look-alike substance with Donald and Jeff firmly holding it. Jamie had barely positioned her plank when Dick hurried back across to the platform. Without delay, he placed his hands under Kim shoulders while Jamie grabbed Kim's

ankles. Together they easily picked the thirteen year old up off the ground and started back across the plank bridge. As soon as they reached land, Caitlin hurried back out on the makeshift bridge and retrieved the shorter board. It was only when Caitlin reached shore and the other plank was lifted that Hogwarts was declared the winner.

Caitlin looked in the direction of the American team. Their last player was just leaving the platform. Hogwarts had won by less than a minute.

As soon as the win was declared official, the security trolls at last allowed Harry, Hermione, Severus and Madam Pomfrey to sprint to Kim's side. Hermione quickly covered the nude girl with a blanket as Madam Pomfrey examined her.

"She'll be fine as soon as the effects of the two potions wear off," Madam Pomfrey declared. "Actually, in her present state she's probably much warmer than the other contestants."

* * * * *

"I'm disappointed, Rishard," Eric said as he and Rishard watched the crowd depart the Quidditch Pitch. "Extremely disappointed."

"Disappointed?" Rishard cried, aghast. "What did you expect? I thought the task was thrillingly exciting and I delivered the teenage nudity that our male viewers crave."

"Are you actually trying to take credit for that young lady's costume evaporating into thin air?" Eric asked irately. "What kind of fool do you take me for? You know as well as I do that the Petrificus Potion does not dissolve clothes. That young lady was undoubtedly naked through out the entire task. My guess is that she was probably using some sort of concealment charm that had its effects negated by the potion. I doubt she is the only one using the charm; more than likely that is why there have been so few wardrobe malfunctions. I suggest you look into that."

"Sadly, that was one of the few bright spots of the day. Didn't I make it clear to you that I expected the action to be stepped up a notch today? Where was the near death experience?" Eric asked.

"I thought you were being facetious," Simone answered. "You didn't actually expect me to place those kids in genuine peril, did you?"

"What did I say to you at the conclusion of the first task?" Eric asked. "Didn't I clearly articulate that you might actually need to kill or maim someone? Have you never studied Sociology?"

"No," Rishard answered, baffled as to what relevance that had with the current discussion.

"If you had, you would understand that maintaining the status quo is never enough," Eric explained. "Just as primitive man at the outset was pleased to merely have food and basic shelter, as time progressed, he desired more. The same is true of our audience."

"The time when they would be content with a flash of bare boob is long gone. Even total nudity no longer satisfies their hunger for thrill and excitement. They demand more and it is our duty to deliver it."

"I'm not sure I understand what exactly you expect of me," Rishard said nervously.

"I just expect you to broadcast the final event," Eric proclaimed. "I'm going to personally make all the meticulous arrangements, the first being a change in venue. Instead of holding the third event here at Hogwarts, it will be held on Fantastic Island."

"Fantastic Island!" Richard declared aghast. "But I thought that was a highly restricted complex. It's certainly too dangerous a place to take children; the Ministry would never give their permission. "

"The Ministry has already given their blessing," Eric replied in a boastful manner. "You'd be surprised at what positive results a few well placed curses can produce."

"But... there are dragons and Chimaera there," Rishard blubbered. "I've even heard that they have a Nundu in captivity. Someone could be hurt, perhaps even killed."

"I can't believe how thick you are," Eric asserted. "That's the entire idea. I suggest you stop worrying about those inconsequential little brats and start worrying about yourself."

* * * * *

Sunday, February 19, 2006

"Do you have any idea why Rishard wants to meet with all the participants?" Caitlin asked as she and Jamie departed the Gryffindor common room together. Both teams had been ordered to meet with Mr. Simone in the Charms classroom at eight o'clock.

"Simone feels that Kim wasn't an isolated case. He thinks the majority of us were using the concealment charm rather than wearing his decadent costumes."

"Well, he's right. You'd think the pervert would be pleased about that, rather than upset," Caitlin protested. "Because of the charm's failure poor Kim ended up on display totally nude. If we'd have all been wearing the actual costumes, the most show that the deviates in his audience would have gotten might have been a few quick peeks at assorted body parts. Instead they got to gawk at Kim totally naked for a good ten minutes."

"Don't remind me," Jamie said, a feeling of guilt churning her stomach. "My plan totally backfired. How is she managing the situation?"

"Not too good," Caitlin answered. "I wish it could have been you or I in her place. Better yet, Emily. Nothing embarrasses her." Caitlin sighed. "Kim just isn't like the three of us. She enjoys naturism, but isn't comfortable being nude when others are fully clothed."

"Now, thanks to me, the entire wizard world has seen her starkers and her pictures are being disseminated on the wizard net," Jamie groaned.

"Don't blame yourself," Caitlin pleaded. "You had no way of knowing that the potion would cancel out the charm. It was just bad luck."

"I know," Jamie said sadly, "But that doesn't alter the fact that nearly every boy over the age of

puberty is wanking off to her nude pictures. Worse, because she was petrified, the poor girl can't even get a moment of privacy by running out of the picture and partially hiding in the frame."

"Some of the girls are shoddier than the boys," Caitlin declared. "Emily tells me that Denise keeps hanging up life-sized pictures of Kim in the Slytherin common room; labeled pictures."

"Labeled? What do you mean by labeled?" Jamie inquired.

"Arrows pointing to her various body parts with nasty comments," Caitlin said, blushing. "Like firm succulent breasts and wet juicy...."

"Never mind! I get the idea," Jamie interrupted. "She wasn't happy nearly killing Emily. Now she's moved onto mortifying Kim. Don't the prefects do anything about the pictures?"

"You forget; Emily and Kim are in Slytherin House." Caitlin reminded her. "Even people like Doris and Tyler are hesitant to go against the house majority."

"I just pray that one day that girl gets her comeuppance," Jamie declared.

"Me, too," Caitlin agreed. "Is Dad going to be at this meeting?"

"Both Hermione and Harry," Jamie answered. "Also, Alex! Harry and Alex were looking over the original copy of the contract that we all agreed to, hoping to find a loophole that would permit the use of the charm."

"I hope they find one," Caitlin affirmed. "Even after what happened to Kim, I prefer the concealment charm over the actual costume. I don't want to be worried with tucking myself in every few minutes."

"I agree," Jamie said.

Caitlin and Jamie were the last to arrive and as soon as they were seated, Simone cleared his throat in order to attain silence.

"This meeting was called for two reasons," Simone announced. "The promoters have decided on some minor changes to make the last event of the tournament a bit more exciting. Before I reveal those changes, however, I would like to discuss the intentional violation of tournament rules that occurred on Saturday. This breach of contract could have resulted in Hogwarts being disqualified. Disqualification did not take place only because investigation showed that both teams had breached the contract."

"I want it understood that no such abuse will be tolerated during the final event," Simone barked.

At this point Alex shot his arm into the air. "Excuse me sir. Exactly how do you feel the contract was breached?"

"Just who are you and why are you at this meeting?" Rishard squealed. Evidently he had forgotten his previous encounter with Alex.

"I'm Alex Ward," Alex stated, taking to his feet. "Jamie Zacherley, one of the Hogwarts contestants is my intended. It was at her suggestion and encouragement that many members of both teams decided to use a concealment charm rather than wear a flimsy costume that often had a tendency to

shift and expose private body parts. I read and reread the agreement numerous times and fail to see that this violated any provision of the contract."

"Then young man, I suggest you never decide to enter the field of law," Rishard replied smugly. "The contract clearly states that for all events the participants must wear the team uniform provided by the promoters and nothing but that."

"Now if it is alright with our junior want-to-be barrister, I'd like to continue."

"I'm sorry, Sir, but that's not what the contract says," Alex stated politely.

"I think I know the conditions of the agreement, young man," Simone protested. "I wrote the damn contract."

"I think that if you take the time to reread the contract carefully, you will see that you are quite mistaken," Alex stated emphatically. "The contract actually states clearly that the contestants must wear nothing more than the team uniform during participation. Obviously, your intention was to insure that no one put on a cover up."

"No one violated your terms. The contenders that used the concealment charm actually wore less than the team uniform. They were physically nude," Alex reported.

"Let me see that," Rishard said, angrily ripping the document out of Alex's hand. After studying it momentarily he threw the paper back at Alex. "You're trying to twist the meaning with semantics."

"Actually, I'd say it was you that was endeavoring to change the actual wording," Hermione declared. "Plus, I can't see what difference it makes. Either way, to the audience, the contestants appear to be wearing your tacky uniforms. Even you must admit that despite what occurred with Kim, there is less chance of accidental exposure using the charm." She hesitated for effect. "Surely you wouldn't want these children used as sex objects."

Rishard became extremely flustered. That was exactly what he wanted, but, of course, he certainly couldn't readily admit it. "Fine," he said, a beaten tone to his voice. "I suppose it doesn't matter whether they wear the actual uniform or use the charm." Quickly he tried to change the subject. "What I really sought to discuss with you tonight is a thrilling change in venue for the final event of the competition."

Rishard cleared his throat. "I'm tremendously pleased to announce that the concluding event of the competition, scheduled for June, will take place on Fantastic Island."

At first the room was completely silent, and then burst into chaotic discussion.

"Excuse me, Sir," Kim said raising her hand shyly into the air. "Does such a place in fact exist? I was under the impression that the supposed existence of an island containing fantastic magical beasts was a myth."

"Many people are under that impression," Rishard confirmed. "But let me assure you, the existence of Fantastic Island is not a falsehood. Much like Hogwarts, its location is unplottable, but I can guarantee you that it actually exists."

"I've known of its existence," Harry declared, "but it isn't exactly a petting zoo. Many of the beasts living there are considered exceedingly dangerous. I was under the impression that it was off limits

to all but the most highly specialized and trained animal keepers. You can't seriously plan to hold the third event there."

Rishard nodded his head. "Until recently it was indeed a highly restricted area and the Ministry had actually encouraged the belief that its very existence was a fable. During the last two years, however, private enterprise has spent millions of Galleons on protective wards and charms to make the island completely safe."

"In a few months, advertisements will begin appearing announcing the opening of Fantastic Island as the premier vacation destination for wizard families. It is expected to over night become the magical world's equivalent to Disney World." Rishard paused briefly for effect and to let everyone take in this information.

"Due to a highly placed connection, we have been granted the opportunity to take part in a sneak peek at what the island will offer vacationers."

The students burst into thrilled applause, followed by excited discussion. Harry and Hermione simply stared uneasily at each other. They shared a horribly sickening feeling in their stomachs.

Chapter Twenty One Intimate Contact

Monday, February 20, 2006

Kim shrieked, her face suddenly glowing red as she crossed the threshold into the Slytherin common room. Plainly, Denise and Janice had arisen early and decided the room needed redecorating. Life-sized graphic nude posters of Kim now adorned every previously empty expanse of wall space in the large room.

"Why?" Kim cried, shaking her head in dismay as tears pooled in her eyes. "What have I ever done to make them hate me this much?"

"You became my best friend," Emily answered sadly, cradling Kim in her arms. "Pull yourself together and I'll help you take them down."

At that moment, Tyler entered the room carrying a ladder. When he saw the girls, he paused and gave them both an apologetic look. "I was hopeful that I'd get these removed before you got to glimpse them," he said dolefully, primarily addressing Kim.

Kim soulfully nodded her appreciation of his intentions.

"Let me help you," Emily said, tossing her robes, out-of-the-way on a nearby chair. "I'll do the climbing if you'll hold the ladder steady for me."

"Are you sure you wouldn't rather have me climb the ladder?" Tyler asked uncertainly, studying Emily's diminutive skirt. "You're not exactly dressed suitably for ladder climbing."

"I'm dressed just fine as long as a gentleman, such as you, is steadying the ladder," she responded with a laugh. Then she gave Tyler a light kiss on the cheek. "Besides, even if you're a bad boy and peek, you know it's no huge deal with me."

Kim shook her head in bewilderment. "You think I'm over reacting to the pictures, don't you?" she snapped. "You're so comfortable with your body that I imagine you wouldn't even bother removing the posters if they were of you."

"That's not true," Emily responded defensively, as she neared the top rung of the ladder and stretched precariously to grasp one of the poster size pictures. "These pictures are most certainly offensive. Besides, you and I are different individuals with dissimilar mind-sets. I'd never think to impose my values on you."

"I'm sorry," Kim whimpered apologetically. "My flare-up was totally unjustified. It's just that.... Damn it! Denise got away with stripping you naked at the Yule Ball and butchering you. Now she's making my life miserable by hanging these explicit pictures everywhere. Whatever happened to old-fashioned paybacks and good conquering evil?"

"Mum and Dad tell me that good still always ultimately triumphs over evil; it just sometimes takes an awfully long time," Emily declared.

"Maybe it's selfish of me, but in Denise's case I could sure go for some instant gratification," Kim announced. "Don't you agree, Tyler? Tyler?"

Tyler surely agreed, but at the moment was too busy delighting in what he considered a truly spectacular view to coherently respond.

* * * * *

"Hermione, please be reasonable," Harry implored. "The third task is months away. There is no reason we must make a decision tonight."

"No, there certainly isn't," Hermione agreed. "If you'd rather, we can spend the next four months quarrelling about it. Meanwhile you can sleep on the chesterfield."

"You're not serious," Harry said with a laugh, but then he took a good look at Hermione's somber face and realized that she definitely was not joking.

"I most certainly am," Hermione retorted. "If Fantastic Island is as safe and sound as Simone claims, then there is no reason I shouldn't go along with you on the trip. I'd like to see all the rare magical beasts. Besides, you'll need a female chaperone for the girls."

"But what about Ben and Emily?" Harry asked concernedly.

"What about them?" Hermione inquired. "Emily will sleep in the Slytherin dorm like she always does. As for Ben, Ginny and Sam will without doubt battle over who gets to take care of him."

"But do you think it's a prudent idea for us to travel that far away from Hogwarts together," Harry argued. "Who would take care of the kids if something unanticipated happened to both of us? I'd feel much better knowing you were safe here at home."

"Ah! Ha! You're not convinced that Fantastic Island is as safe as they allege," Hermione asserted triumphantly.

"No, I'm not," Harry admitted reluctantly. "The blending of ancient wizard spells and wards with Muggle technology is until now uncharted territory. I know that computers are capable of doing incredible stuff, but..." Harry paused.

"But what if the technology isn't up to snuff and the electrically enhanced enchantments for some reason fail?" Hermione cut in. "Do they have enough trained wizards on hand to control all the beasts? Never yet has a Nundu been subdued by fewer than a hundred skilled wizards working together."

"I know," admitted Harry half-heartedly. "I'm sure the financiers of Fantastic Island have taken every reasonable precaution to insure visitor safety, but some beasts should simply be steered clear of."

"Surely they aren't using any of the more dangerous beasts in the final task. Why have the challenge even take place there?" Hermione inquired.

"Publicity," Harry answered simply. "The whole wizard world will be tuned into the final task. Using Fantastic Island as a background for the competition will give the new resort millions of Galleons of free media hype."

"Hermione, I'm sure every conceivable safeguard has been taken," Harry again maintained.

"All but one," Hermione said stubbornly. "Harry, ever since we were eleven, I've always been beside you giving support. I've no intention of stopping now simply because we're married with children."

"Your love and support has at all times been my greatest strength," Harry admitted, and then he looked at Hermione with pleading puppy dog eyes. "Will you really make me sleep on the chesterfield if I refuse to say you can go with me?"

"No," answered Hermione dejectedly. "I couldn't sleep without you lying next to me. Harry, we're not just a run-of-the-mill married couple, we're a team. If there is even the slightest chance of you and the students being in danger, I want to be there."

Harry studied Hermione's resolute face. "I was just being over protective," he admitted. "I love you so much. I feel in the wrong whenever I place you in danger." Harry paused and studied the floor. "Truth is, I want you with me. I need you with me. Without you, I'm only half a wizard. I only feel strong and whole with you by my side."

"I love you Harry," Hermione said, heaving a deep sigh as tears dampened her eyes. "Let's go to bed so that I can properly show you just how very much I adore you."

* * * * *

"Have you discussed this at all with the Headmaster?" Draco asked concernedly.

"Certainly! You don't think for a minute that I'd embark on such a ground-breaking venture without his approval?" Ginny asked.

"And he actually agreed to it?" Draco asked disbelievingly.

"Not at first," Ginny admitted. "He agreed with the general concept, but was concerned with just how I intended to put into action my plan. I think that initially he thought I anticipated having actual students volunteer to model for the class."

"I think you'd be hard pressed to find many students willing to disrobe in front of their peers," Draco said. "I expect that even the Potter girls, as uninhibited as they are, would balk at the idea of their classmates examining and touching them intimately."

"I'm not sure," Ginny said undecidedly. "I frankly don't think they'd have an issue with it. But indubitably, Harry and Hermione wouldn't consent to them being fondled and probed. Plus, this isn't being done solely for the benefit of the boys. I want the girls to have the same opportunity for education and I sincerely doubt any of the male students would volunteer."

"I think it was wise to discard the idea of live models from the student body ranks," Draco declared. "What made you think of Polyjuice?"

"Actually, it was something you did," Ginny acknowledged. "I had discussed my plans with Hermione and as much as she agreed with the concept of the students becoming more familiar with the bodies of the opposite sex, she was strongly opposed to the boys actually touching a female

classmate or visa versa. Then she remembered what you had Crabbe and Goyle do during your sixth year."

Draco looked at Ginny questioningly, an innocent, childlike expression on his face.

"Draco, don't act all naïve," she reprimanded. "Harry knew that you were using the Room of Requirement during your sixth year; he just didn't know what exactly you were doing in there. He had also figured out that the young girls standing guard for you weren't really girls, but rather Crabbe and Goyle using Polyjuice Potion that you had stolen from Professor Slughorn."

"I had a bad habit, back then, of underestimating Potter," Malfoy answered testily.

"How did you ever convince Crabbe and Goyle to be of assistance to you?" Ginny inquired.

"That was easy," Draco said with a smirk. "You forget who I was working for at the time. Those two dunderheads would have jumped off the Astronomy Tower if I had ordered."

Ginny nodded her head in concurrence. "Did they comment on how it felt to be a girl?" Ginny questioned and then she gave Draco a shy look. "Did you check them out?"

"Did I check them out?" Draco barked, seemingly affronted. "It was Crabbe and Goyle. I'm not a bloody poof. Do you really think I'd ever want to see those two blokes naked?"

"Well, they didn't look like themselves," Ginny said defensively. They looked like two little first year girls."

"Exactly," Draco retorted with a huff. "I was seventeen at the time and shagging Pansy Parkinson whenever I desired. Why would I want to inspect two guys that were for the short term flat-chested little girls?"

"Didn't you even ask them what it felt like to be a girl?" Ginny asked.

"I didn't push the issue," Draco admitted. "They weren't exactly happy with me. Not that I totally blamed them. It must have been creepy, suddenly being a girl and your willy gone."

"I think I'd enjoy being a boy, if for no other reason than to have a trouser snake," Ginny confided, blushing deeply. "It must be nice not to need to semi strip and sit on the loo every time you need to piddle."

Draco shuddered. "If it's all the same to you, I'd prefer that you stick with your original issue equipment. Just the thought of you with a willy gives me the shivers. Exactly when do you propose to conduct this experimentation?" Draco asked, trying desperately to erase the picture that was dwelling in his mind. "You're going to need a fairly large quantity of potion and my on hand supplies of powdered horn of a bicorn and shredded skin of a boomslang are nearly depleted. I'll need to order additional stores. Then, since the fluxwood has got to be picked at the full moon and the lacewings have got to be stewed for twenty-one days...I'd say that the earliest I could have the potion ready would be in about a month."

"That will be fine," Ginny said excitedly. "I still need to make arrangements to get bits of the boy and girl my students will be changing into."

"You're not just going to have the students supply strands of hair?" Draco asked.

"No! That was one on the Headmaster's foremost concerns," Ginny elucidated. "He doesn't want anyone changing into someone they know."

Draco nodded his head in understanding. "I can appreciate how that could be somewhat awkward."

"Sandy, my roommate from college, has a brother and sister, fraternal twins, that are fourteen. I'm going to have her send me some of their hairs."

How will you explain why you want their hair?" Draco asked.

Ginny hung her head guiltily. "She knows about me and what I am," she confessed shyly. "You can't live with a person for four years without accidents taking place. It just got to the point that I couldn't lie to her anymore."

"Aren't you frightened that she'll tell someone?" Draco asked concernedly.

"I was at first, but I trust Sandy," Ginny said confidently. "Besides, who would believe her? Anyway, she's cool and so are her siblings. The important thing is that none of my students will ever get together with them, so the embarrassment aspect is no issue."

"When are you going to tell the students?"

"I think I'll wait until the potion is ready," Ginny answered. "I don't want to get them excited and then have something go astray."

* * * * *

Saturday, April 1, 2006

Evan looked up from his copy of *The Standard Book of Spells (Grade 1)* and stared longingly at the attractive, young, nude, blonde witch sitting across the common room table from him. "Caitlin, have your feelings toward me changed?" Evan asked glumly.

Caitlin was caught off guard, but not wholly surprised by Evan's question.

"What do you mean? she asked, acting puzzled.

"Did I do something wrong? Are you angry with me?" he asked nervously.

"Of course not, silly," she said hurriedly getting to her feet and rushing to his side. Caitlin leaned down and kissed Evan's cheek. "You can't envision how much you mean to me."

"Then why are you afraid to be alone with me?" he asked dejectedly.

"I'm not afraid to be with you," Caitlin laughed nervously. "What makes you say such a ridiculous thing?"

"Because it's true," Evan insisted. "Remember the night you invited me up to your dorm room and

you allowed me to scratch your back?"

"Yeah," Caitlin answered dreamily. "That was nice."

"Then why haven't we done it since?" Evan asked. "That was over a month ago. We haven't been anyplace alone since then?"

"Evan, I'm sorry," Caitlin said, sobbing as she gave into her true feelings. "I am afraid."

"Afraid, afraid to be alone with me?" he questioned.

Caitlin covered her face with her hand and rubbed it roughly. "Evan, we have to talk," she said, jumping to her feet and grabbing her robes off a nearby chair. "Will you come with me? We can't talk here."

Caitlin scurried towards the portrait hole, not even waiting for Evan's reply. She had climbed through the hole and was out in the hall, not realizing she hadn't securely closed her robes, before Evan caught up to her.

"Where are we going?" Evan asked nervously.

"Somewhere that we can't be disturbed," Caitlin announced as she hurried down the hall. "I can't put this off any longer."

Evan rushed to keep up with Caitlin despite a sickening wrench in his stomach. He just knew that she was going to break up with him.

They hurried down stairs, through halls, and finally up stairs again. Evan was so confused that he no longer had any idea what part of the castle they were in.

Caitlin finally stopped at a stretch of blank wall and started concentrating. Evan didn't question her; he was too worried about what was about to happen. As Caitlin walked back and forth, Evan stared blankly at the picture of a moth-eaten troll relentless clubbing a wizard.

It was only when Caitlin finally stopped pacing that Evan recovered from his stupor. He looked at the wall, shook his head, blinked his eyes and then stared at a highly polished door, a door that had not previously existed.

"The Room of Requirement," Caitlin said, offering no further explanation as she reached out, seized the brass handle, pulled open the door and led the way into the room.

The students had barely crossed the threshold when they both froze; Evan surprised, Caitlin horrified.

I... I didn't ask... ask for this," Caitlin stuttered. "The Room of Requirements only appears when needed and when it does it is equipment for the seeker's needs. Evan, I wanted a place where we could be alone and talk in private. I didn't ask for this. Please! Please believe me."

They had entered a sumptuously decorated bedroom, but a bedroom unlike any either student had ever seen before. Most certainly there was a bed, a huge appealing bed adorned with hundreds of pillows, but there was also a gigantic bath sunk in the middle of the floor. About a hundred golden taps stood all around the pool's edges, each with a different jewel set into its handle. Aside of the

pool size bath hung two large fluffy towels each embroidered with a name, Caitlin, Evan.

"This is quite a room," Evan marveled fretfully.

"You must think I'm a slag," Caitlin cried, "bringing you to a room like this. The room obviously misconstrued my thoughts."

Evan noticeably gulped. "You were thinking about us going to bed together," he gasped. "I thought you were about to break up with me."

"I wasn't planning on us going to bed together," Caitlin sobbed. "But I'm afraid of it happening. I'm only thirteen; you're twelve. Do you know what would happen if we had sex together?"

"I'd probably make a fool of myself," Evan said, sullenly.

"No you wouldn't," Caitlin insisted. "I can't think of anyone I'd rather have take my virginity."

Caitlin's eyes went wide with shock. Had she actually just said that out loud? Did she actually want to lose her virginity to Evan or was it just her overexcited Hyperempath emotions taking over?

"We have to talk," Caitlin said, shaking her head in disbelief. Seeing no other place to be seated, Caitlin clutched Evan's hand and led him toward the bed. "We're just sitting, nothing else." She wondered whether she was forewarning Evan or herself.

The bed was high and the effort needed to climb onto it caused Caitlin's robes to become undone, exposing her legs. Caitlin noticed Evan staring pensively at the point where her young legs joined and uncharacteristically quickly pulled her robes shut.

Caitlin reached out and clasped Evan's hand. It was no larger than her own. "Evan, as you know I'm a Hyperempath. They tell me that I might possibly be the strongest ever of my kind."

Evan stared attentively at Caitlin, a combination of awe, love, lust and affection in his eyes.

"Not everything about being a Hyperempath is good," Caitlin continued. "Although my touch, even my thoughts, can heal, uncontrolled they can also kill. I need to be constantly on my guard. When Matt and I were dating, I once almost accidentally killed him."

Caitlin took a deep breath. "I also feel things more intensely than other people; much more intensely. Without someone to share the pain I will probably not survive giving birth to a child. It's not only pain that is more intense, but also pleasure. You can't envisage how intense it feels when we kiss. I've been warned that when the time comes for me to enjoy sex, I'll probably pass out from the pleasure."

"I have a big problem, when it comes to physical contact," Caitlin sighed. "When I'm feeling aroused, which happens quite easily, my body takes over and my mind doesn't function properly. Normally if a boy tries to go too far, hopefully a girl will have the common sense to tell him to stop."

Caitlin stared at Evan pleadingly. "I'm incapable of saying no. That night when you scratched my back, you could have had your way with me and I never would have stopped you. Despite the consequences, I wouldn't have stopped you."

"What if someone tried to rape you?" Evan asked, concernedly. "Wouldn't you be able to fight them off?"

"I'm told that depends entirely on the person and my feelings toward them," Caitlin explained. "If I were attacked by a stranger, I'd be able to resist and fight because there would be no passionate feeling, only hate. If you were to try to go further than proper, I doubt I'd be able to mount even the least bit of resistance. Although I'm not sure that would be considered rape because I'd want to have sex with you."

"You want to have sex with me?" Evan asked, dumbfounded.

"No! Caitlin said, clutching her face and shaking her head. "I like you very much, but we're too young. Once I reach fifteen, that's a different situation. I'm likely to jump you,"

Evan blushed copiously. "I'm confused," Evan said, now shaking his head. "You said you wanted to have sex with me, then you said no, you didn't. Which do you mean?"

"My brain is currently in control. I know the consequences. As much as I care for you, I know we have to wait until I'm fifteen. Unfortunately in a passionate situation my brain won't be in control."

"Would it be that awful if we did made love?" Evan asked. "I mean... I'm not even sure if I know how or whether I can do it correctly, but it sounds great. Some of the guys in my class claim to have done it and they say it feels terrific."

"I heard it feels wonderful, too," Caitlin exclaimed, "but those guys are lying to you. If they actually had sex with a girl they wouldn't be at Hogwarts to brag about it. Hasn't Professor Weasley discussed the consequences of underage sex in Anatomy of the Sexes class?"

"Not that I'm aware of," Evan answered. "I imagine that the biggest concern would be pregnancy."

"I think I could handle being pregnant better than being taken from my family," Caitlin stated. "The international magical world's age for consensual sex is fifteen. Anything prior to that is considered rape. If both parties are under age, neither is sent to Azkaban, but rather both taken from their now declared unfit parents and placed in a juvenile detention center until they are fifteen. The centers aren't coed, so we wouldn't even get to see each other. We'd be stuck there until we were fifteen. You get an education, but nothing that compares to Hogwarts."

"But how would anyone know?" Evan asked, quite shyly.

"The same way they know when we are born. Our names would all of a sudden appear in the offenders' log. Within minutes enforcers would be dispatched. They'd probably arrive while we were still in the act. We'd be immediately taken into custody, no hugs, no good byes, no collecting of belongings. Our parents would receive an owl telling them what occurred. There is no trial, no appeal and no exceptions. Your name appearing in the log proves you were guilty."

Evan stared at Caitlin, a stunned expression on his face. Finally, after a time he spoke. "I can understand why you're concerned with us being alone."

Caitlin nodded her head. "It's not that I don't care for you," she said. "It's more that I care for you too much."

"Yeah," said Evan numbly. For the next few minutes they both sat, neither talking, just thinking.

"I guess we better head back to the common room," Caitlin finally said.

Evan bobbed his head in agreement. "This is some room," he marveled. "Maybe we can come back here when we reach consensual age." He looked despondently at the pool size bath. "That looks like fun."

"Doesn't it," Caitlin said encouragingly. "It's a shame to let it go to waste. It's still early, would you like to get in for a bit?"

"Sounds like a cool idea," Evan replied, "but I didn't bring a swim costume."

"Nor did I," Caitlin laughed. "But it isn't really a pool, it's a bath tub and I don't normally wear anything when I take a bath."

"Neither do I," Evan agreed naughtily. "Do you think we can trust ourselves?"

Caitlin didn't answer. Instead she dropped her robes to the floor and jumped into the neck high water. "Hurry in," she shouted. "The water is nice and warm."

Evan quickly followed suit. Unlike the first time when he had been unclothed in the Potters' quarters with Caitlin, this time he didn't feel the least bit self-conscious. Actually it felt appropriate that they should both be here together and nude. When Evan got into the pool, he realized that what was neck high water for Caitlin, just about covered his head. He either had to doggy paddle or keep bobbing up and down to keep above the water line.

They spent the first few minutes playing with the seemingly endless choice of taps until the bath water was filled with so many heavily perfumed bubbles of varying colors and sizes that they could have used them to play hide and seek.

"I love this," Caitlin exclaimed. "I can't remember ever feeling so clean," she lifted her arm to her nose, "or smelling so good. My skin even feels extra soft. Here, touch."

Caitlin held out her arm toward Evan for him to touch, but his eyes seemed glued to her glistening breasts. A smile covered her face as she studied the longing look in Evan's eyes. Then she heard a voice in her head. It was as clear as if Jamie was standing right next to her.

"Breast, butts, arms, legs; even vaginas and penises are just body parts. After hundreds of years of brainwashing we have come to think of some parts of our bodies as special, untouchable. And they should be untouchable if a person's intentions are improper. Harry, I doubt sometimes that you are capable of impure thoughts. You wrestle and tickle Caitlin and Emily all the time. There isn't a place on their bodies that at one time or another you haven't come into contact with, but it wasn't perverted or dirty. It was in the course of natural fun."

"Harry, I may have these things hanging on my chest, but I'm still a little girl at heart and want to be a part of the family fun. I'm not going to react any different when we're horsing around if you grab my wrist or my breast because I know it's not done in a tainted way."

Evan's intentions might not be totally naive, but they also most certainly weren't perverted. She had touched his bare chest, what was it that made her chest so extraordinary that it should be off limits to him? Nothing, absolutely nothing at all, breasts, butts, even vaginas and penises are after all just body parts.

"Evan, do you remember when I told you that you should always picture me wearing a bathing costume and that it was permissible for you to touch any part of me not covered by the costume?"

Evan nodded his head disappointedly.

Caitlin took a deep breath. "I'm no longer wearing that bathing costume. You can touch any part of me that you wish. I trust you."

* * * * *

"You're late," Emily scolded as Caitlin entered the spacious bedroom that the girls shared in their parents' quarters. In general both girls slept in their individual house dorms, but on weekends they enjoyed spending time together catching up on the events of the week.

"I'm sorry," Caitlin said apologetically, her face radiant in the dim light. "Evan and I sort of lost track of time."

"Oh!" said Emily, impishly. "And just what, pray tell, were you and Evan doing that was so important?"

"We were up in the Room of Requirement," Caitlin answered honestly.

Emily stared severely at Caitlin. "Jamie and Alex go there when they want to be intimate. Please tell me that you and Evan didn't have sex."

"If we had, I doubt I'd be here to talk about it," Caitlin answered truthfully. "We just went there to be alone and talk. He was concerned that I wanted to break up with him because I've been so distant the past month."

"Then you finally explained to him the whole Hyperempath thing and how you're oversexed?" Emily questioned.

"I'm not oversexed," Caitlin said, irritation abruptly evident in her voice. "My powers just make me feel things more intensely than other girls and I tend to lose my self-control."

"Semantics," Emily said, shrugging her shoulders. "How did he take it? Did you guys end up breaking up?"

"Thankfully, no," Caitlin advised, a dreamy look once again on her face. "Actually, we had a wonderful time. You can't imagine how gorgeous the room was. I felt like a princess."

Emily studied Caitlin anxiously as the third year girl explained in detail all the features the room had taken on.

"One of you had to have wanted for the room to have those characteristics," Emily said apprehensively, when Caitlin finished. "I doubt it would have supplied a bed and bath on its own if you just asked for a private place to talk."

"I know," Caitlin admitted. "I think that subconsciously both Evan and I wanted to share a special time together."

"I'm just relieved that things didn't go too far," Emily said, cradling Caitlin in her arms.

"Me too," Caitlin sighed. Then ostensibly without reason, she began to giggle.

"What?" Emily asked.

"Evan got a stiffy," Caitlin confided. "It most certainly wasn't huge, but it felt really neat."

"What do you mean, it felt neat?" Emily questioned, her voice sounding worried, but slightly envious at the same time.

"Evan had been staring at my breasts pensively," Caitlin explained. "I knew he wanted to touch them, but that he was afraid of what my reactions might be. Then I thought about you and Jamie and how you both go on all the time about all body parts being the same and how silly people acted about 'private parts'. I realized that I trusted Evan and didn't have a problem with him touching me."

Emily shook her head in disappointment. "Sometimes I just don't believe you," she said crossly. "You spend the past month avoiding being alone with the guy because you don't trust yourself, then you turn around and tell him he can feel you up."

"That's not exactly what I told him," Caitlin replied guiltily. "In point of fact. I told him that he could touch me any place that he wanted. Touching someone gently and lovingly is quite different from grabbing a feel."

Emily rolled her eyes and stared at the ceiling in disbelief. "Semantics again! That sounds like a brilliant way for you to both keep your emotions in check," she retorted sarcastically. "Until now I always considered you the smarter sister. How did Evan respond to your offer?"

"At first he just looked at me in a thunderstruck way," Caitlin commented. "Then he drew me toward him and hugged me in a tight embrace. That's when I felt his willy go all firm."

"Did he feel you up?" Emily asked.

"No, he didn't feel me up," Caitlin retorted.

There was something weird about the tone of Caitlin's voice. Emily wasn't sure if her sister was more upset by the use of the phrase 'feel you up' or by the reality that Evan hadn't in fact done so.

"He kissed me, then suggested we get dressed and return to the common room," she said, disappointment evident in her voice. "He was afraid that things were getting out of control."

"What do you think?" Emily asked.

"They probably were," Caitlin admitted, "but at the time I really wanted him to touch me." She glanced guiltily at Emily. "I wanted to touch him, too. Have you ever actually handled a penis?"

"Not really," Emily replied. "Naturally, being a nudist my whole life, I've brushed against them, but I've never actually held one in my hand or stroked it. Have you?"

"Once," Caitlin answered, blushing profusely. "It was an accident. When I was thrown in the pool

during holiday, in panic I grabbed for something... anything to hold onto. My eyes were closed and I ended up clutching Dad's penis. As soon as I realized what it was, I instantly let go."

"What did Dad say?" Emily asked, aghast.

"He pretended it never happened. He just scooped me out of the water and into his arms. Once I calmed down, he placed me back on my feet. We've never talked about it."

"What did it feel like?" Emily questioned.

"I don't really remember," Caitlin answered, embarrassed by the recollection. "It all happened so fast. Besides... it was Dad."

"Yeah!" replied Emily understandingly. "I've always had sort of a fascination for the male penis. Jamie always said I should have been born a boy so that I'd have one of my own to play with. I'd love to touch and examine one," she shuddered, "but most certainly not Dad's."

"I know what you mean," Caitlin agreed. "Why don't you ask Tyler? He'd do anything for you. I'm sure he'd let you check him out."

"I've already seen him nude, but I'd be hesitant to actually touch him," Emily replied. "I'm afraid one thing would lead to another and we're even younger than you. I almost wish Professor Weasley had gone along with Denise's wild idea of having nude models for the class. I'd like to really examine a boy, but have no emotions involved."

"Something like that will never happen at Hogwarts," Caitlin said, dejectedly.

* * * * *

"Timmy, would you come here and take a seat with Mum and Dad? There is something we'd like to discuss with you," Sam said hesitantly.

Timmy looked apprehensively toward his parents who were both sitting on the couch, his Mum patting any empty spot between her and his Dad. He could tell by the look on their faces that he was in trouble. He been found out and now he was about to be punished. Timmy walked timidly toward his parents. He was sure he deserved whatever punishment he was about to receive. The only thing he wasn't sure of was what exactly he had done wrong this time.

"I'm sorry," Timmy said remorsefully, as he took a seat between the two adults. "I promise I won't ever do it again."

"Do what again?" Ron asked, looking questioningly at his son.

"Whatever it is that you're going to punish me for," Timmy answered warily.

Sam snickered. "I guess I better check out our quarters after we're finished talking. It seems someone has a guilty conscience."

Ron put his arm around Timmy's shoulder and gave him a hug. "You shouldn't always be expecting the worst, Son," he said, smiling. "Sometimes when we fancy talking to you, it's because we want to share good news."

"Are we going to go on another nudie cruise with the Emily and Caitlin?" Timmy asked eagerly,

bouncing up and down between his parents.

"Not this year," Ron, chortled. "But we have discussed going on vacation with the Potters and if we do it will most likely be at a clothing optional resort."

"That's not what Dad and I want to talk to you about though," Sam said, gently massaging her small tummy. "We were wondering how you'd feel about having a little brother or sister?"

"I'd like to have someone my own age to play with," Timmy answered excitedly. "Can we go buy one now?"

"It doesn't quite work like that," Ron replied, repressing a laugh. "Babies grow and are nurtured inside their mothers until they reach a size large enough to survive in our world, then they are born. Even then they are dependent on their parents and siblings to take care of them. It will be awhile before you can play with a baby, and it will always be younger than you; it will for all time look to you for guidance."

Timmy's face carried a look of disappointment. "Is that why Aunt Ginny is getting so fat? Is a baby growing inside her?"

"Yes! Aunt Ginny will be giving birth early this summer," Sam answered.

"Will you get fat, too?" Timmy inquired.

"I'm afraid so," Sam answered sadly. "That's one of the unpleasant parts about having a baby."

"I'm sure you'll still look beautiful," Ron interrupted, supportively.

"I suppose that's a matter of opinion," Sam replied. "It sort of depends on whether or not you think whales are beautiful."

"Is a baby already growing inside you?" Timmy asked innocently. "How did it get there? When will it come out? Is it a boy or a girl?"

Ron eyed Sam optimistically. Even though he taught the subject, fielding questions about sex still made him edgy, especially when the questioner was his own son.

"We won't know whether it's a boy or girl until it's born," Sam answered. "Either way, I'm sure we'll all adore the baby. Right now it is quite tiny. It will be six months until the little one is ready to come out, sometime around Halloween."

"The baby is already growing inside you?" Timmy asked, a look of wonder covering his face. "How did it get there?"

"Each month a woman's body produces a seed," Sam explained. "Usually the seed simply ends up being discarded by the body, but every so often one of them becomes fertilized in which case it remains in the body and begins to grow. That's what happened with Aunt Ginny and now with me." Sam smiled. "You were once a seed inside of me, no bigger than a pea."

Sam hugged Timmy in her arms. "My body nurtured you until you were prepared to be born. Now look at you; you're a handsome young man ready to start primary school in the autumn."

Timmy sat silently, staring intently at his mother, a look of puzzlement spreading across his face,

and then he shook his head.

"There's something I don't understand," he said timidly. "How did I get out of you? How will the baby get out?"

Ron face turned crimson. He had been concerned that Timmy might question how fertilization took place, this he hadn't expected. Sam, however, seemed unruffled.

"Timmy, haven't you ever wondered why you have a penis and Emily and Caitlin have vaginas?"

"Because I'm a boy and they're girls," Timmy answered confidently.

"Yes," Sam answered, holding back a laugh. "But there's a reason why boys and girls were created with different equipment for taking a pee. When you become an adult, you'll learn that the penis and vagina both serve purposes other than just relieving yourself. When a woman gives birth, the baby leaves her body through her vagina."

Timmy gaped at his mum, aghast. First, he gazed at himself and then he stared at the slit between his Mum's legs. "I'm much too big," he said, appalled. "I could never have come out of there."

"Most certainly not now," Sam said, wincing at the very thought. "You were much smaller when born, just over seven pounds. It's not comfortable, but that area of a woman is extremely flexible and can stretch open surprisingly far."

"When it's time, can I see my little brother... or sister be born?" he asked.

Sam first looked at Ron who was frantically shaking his head no, obviously remembering his experience during Ben's birth. Then she looked at Timmy, so eager and optimistic.

"I don't see any reason why not."

* * * * *

Monday, April 10, 2006

"You won't be needing your books today," Professor Ginny Weasley announced as the students hurried to their seats. "I've arranged a special treat for you."

"Maybe Thatcher is going to give us an up close and personal look at her bod," Janice whispered spitefully.

"I'd hardly call Potter or Thatcher showing off their not so private tidbits a treat," Denise sniggered.

"Miss Graves, that will be enough chitchat," Professor Weasley chastised. "Oddly enough, today's curriculum had its groundwork laid with a similar malicious comment you made at the beginning of the school year."

"A comment that I made," Denise replied innocently. "What comment was that Professor?"

"You criticized our textbook as being somewhat behind times and suggested that you'd all learn more by examining actual individuals nude," Professor Weasley explained.

Kim and Emily exchanged uneasy glances. Was the Professor actually about to ask one or both of them to disrobe and allow the classmates to examine them?

"Although I'm sure your suggestion at the time was intended more to embarrass certain classmates than it was to further education, it did have some merit," Ginny continued. "Our textbook is undeniably antiquated and being able to examine at your leisure someone of the opposite sex would certainly be extremely educational."

"Professor!" Tyler called, raising his hand apprehensively. "You're not suggesting that some of us actually strip off our clothes in front of our classmates and allow them to check us out starkers, are you?" His eyes glanced fleetingly in Emily's direction. "Even if some of us wouldn't mind doing it, it's just not proper."

"The Headmaster and I agree," Professor Weasley replied. "We even had concerns with you examining professional models; additionally no age appropriate models were available. That is why we decided to use this."

Ginny walked over to her desk and uncovered two large cauldrons, each containing a slow-bubbling, mudlike substance.

"Is that Polyjuice Potion?" Kim asked excitedly.

"Yes!" answered her professor. "Miss Thatcher, since you are obviously familiar with this potion, would you please do me a favor while I explain its use and effects to the other members of the class?"

Kim nodded and hurried up to her professor's side. "Kim would you please run down to Potion Master's office in the dungeon? I left two envelopes containing hair strands there that we'll be needing to complete the potion."

Kim nodded, and hurried out the classroom as Professor Weasley continued to address the class. "Can anyone tell me the use of Polyjuice Potion?"

Emily's hand shot into the air in a way very reminiscent of her mother. "Polyjuice is an extremely complicated potion to prepare, but when correctly brewed it transforms you into somebody else. The effect only lasts for an hour, but for that time you look exactly like the person you added a bit of to the potion."

Tyler raised his hand. "Professor, does that mean that if I drank that potion containing a bit of my brother, I'd become him?"

"Not exactly, Mr. Bancroft," Ginny elucidated. "Your mind would stay unchanged. Mentally you would remain yourself, but physically you would have all the attributes of your brother."

"What a waste of a complex potion," Emily exclaimed to the amusement of most of the class.

Ginny smiled. "Today you won't be changing into anyone you know. I've sent Miss Thatcher to retrieve hair strands that were sent to me from overseas. These hairs are from a boy and girl approximate to your age. I've also arranged for you to be excused from your other classes for the

remainder of the day. You will each be given enough of the potion for three doses. That will allow you to remain in the outward appearance of the donor for three hours.

"You can remain here; return to your dormitories or for that matter, you may go anywhere you like before drinking the potion. You can do so in privacy or in a group, your choice. For three hours you will experience being the opposite sex. For homework, due next week, I want a full roll of parchment on what the experience felt like."

Kim hurried breathlessly into the classroom to find her fellow students staring dumbfounded at each other. They were about to undergo a change, an extremely weird change.

"Perfect timing, Miss Thatcher," Professor Weasley said, taking the two envelopes from the girl's outstretched hand. "There was no need to run though, you look washed-out. Take your seat and Miss Potter can bring you up to snuff while I add the final ingredients to our potions."

Kim returned to her desk next to Emily. While Kim listened to Emily update her on what she had missed, she smiled as she watched Professor Weasley pour the potion into separate flagons and then add the hairs.

When called forward, one by one the students approached the professor's desk and were handed their individual container. They all clutched the containers securely as they departed the room.

"Where are you going to do it?" Emily asked Tyler as they departed the room.

"I'm not sure," he croaked nervously. "A part of me wants to be alone to transform and another part of me is uneasy to be off on my own."

"I know what you mean," Emily said understandingly. "Why don't you come with Kim and I? We're going to go to the Room of Requirement so that we can be totally alone and undisturbed."

"But..." Tyler shilly-shallied. "Won't that be sort of creepy? I mean you will both be guys and I'll be a girl and well... I sort of intended to get naked and sort of check out the new equipment."

Emily laughed. "What did you think Kim and I are going to do? Come on, it will be fun," Emily said grabbing Tyler hand and pulling him along. "We can show each other how to properly do certain things."

Tyler's mouth dropped wide open, but he uttered not a word. He had the feeling that he was about to partake in the most bizarre experience of his young life."

Chapter Twenty-two Fantastic Island

Kim, Tyler and Emily firmly clutched their containers of Polyjuice Potion as they made their way speedily up to the seventh floor. Emily chuckled mildly to herself as she realized that she and her sisters seemed to be becoming frequent users of the Room of Requirement. Her face colored as Emily wondered if possibly one day Tyler and she might use the room for a much more personal experience.

"Okay, this is the place," Emily advised when they reached the stretch of blank wall opposite the enormous tapestry of Barnabas the Barmy. "We have to walk past this bit of wall three times, concentrating hard on what we need."

They did so, turning sharply at the window just beyond the blank stretch of wall, then at the man-size vase on its other side. Tyler had screwed up his eyes in concentration; Kim was whispering something under her breath. Emily, on the other hand, was having a difficult time keeping her mind focused on the task at hand.

"Emily," called Kim excitedly, as they turned around after their third walk past.

A highly polished door had appeared in the wall. Tyler was staring at it, looking slightly wary. He wasn't concerned so much with entering the room, but rather with what they were going to do once inside. Emily reached out, seized the brass handle, pulled open the door, and then stood motionless, gawking at the sight before her eyes.

"I think somehow the room got confused," she mumbled sheepishly. "We must have all been concentrating on different needs."

In the center of the room was a huge bed, much like the one Caitlin had described to her and next to it was a large bathing pool. One wall of the room, on the other hand, was lined with dressing rooms such as used in clothing stores.

"Well, I certainly wasn't thinking about a bed," Kim countered sharply.

"Neither was I," Tyler responded, almost defensively.

"I believe that was me," Emily admitted guiltily. She looked at Tyler and then shook her head apprehensively. "My mind just wandered; I wasn't concentrating properly."

"Exactly what were you thinking about?" Kim grinned impishly.

"Nothing! Just forget it," Emily said, flustered. She sat her container of potion on a nearby table. "Just pay no attention to the bed and let's get on with what we're here for."

The words had barely escaped her lips before Emily's clothes had dropped to the floor and she stood bare before the others.

"What are you two waiting for?" she asked impatiently, her hands on her hips. "Get naked."

Tyler and Kim exchanged nervous glances, and then just stood momentarily staring dumbfounded at Emily.

"Oh, come on!" Emily said exasperatedly. "You two aren't going to play shy and bashful, are you?"

We're best friends. Certainly you aren't still ill at ease about being nude in front of each other."

"I thought possibly we could take our clothes off in the booths and come out after we've transformed," Kim suggested timidly.

Tyler nodded his support of this idea.

"If we do it that way, we'll miss out on half the fun," Emily argued. "Don't you want to watch as I sprout a penis?"

Tyler resisted the urge to shout, no. He adored Emily and was quite smitten with her current appearance. He'd much prefer to gaze at her in this form. The idea of his girlfriend suddenly developing a willy was thoroughly revolting. Nor did he look forward to his own emasculation.

"I have an idea," Tyler said cautiously. "Why don't we just forget about taking that disgusting looking potion and just inspect each other?"

Emily's eyes widened at this notion. "You wouldn't have a problem with Kim and I touching you?" she asked.

Tyler had, for a moment, forgotten that Emily wouldn't be the only one exploring his body. He looked nervously from Emily to Kim. "I... I think I could handle that better than the alternative," he stuttered. "The whole idea is just weird," he faltered briefly, "and gay. I'd still be me, a guy, but trapped inside a girl's body. Meanwhile, you two would be two naked blokes. I'll feel like a fag just being in the same room and looking at you."

Kim nodded sympathetically. "I understand, but what you suggest would negate the whole idea of the experiment. Professor Weasley doesn't just want us groping and feeling each other up. She wants us to actually experience being a member of the opposite sex. Besides, I'd feel out of place. I don't think either of you want an audience when you get to explore each other intimately."

Tyler and Emily both blushed at Kim's statement, knowing that she was correct. When the time eventually came for them to closely explore each other's body, they both wanted it to be in a romantic setting, not as a part of a class research project.

"You're right," Tyler conceded. He gave Kim a nervous glance, and then turned away and started to slowly remove his clothes. Kim audibly gulped and likewise began to disrobe, although at a snail's pace.

Emily tapped her foot impatiently until Tyler and Kim, their backs still to each other, finally completed undressing. "Come on you guys," she said encouragingly. "We're best friends, a team. Time for a group hug!"

Apprehensively, Kim and Tyler turned toward Emily and the three friends united in a tight embrace. Tyler couldn't believe his good fortune. He was twelve years old and engaged in a hug with two nude girls, arguably the two best-looking girls in his year at Hogwarts. He shivered as he felt their bare breasts press against his naked chest.

"We better let go of Tyler before he gets a stiffy," Emily suggested with a giggle. "I can't wait to transform into a boy and see what it feels like to have one."

"One what?" Kim asked. "A penis or a stiffy?"

"Both," answered Emily eagerly. "Let's get started."

"I take it then that we're not going to use the changing rooms at all?" Kim asked forlornly, gazing longingly at the booths along the wall.

"As I said, watching the conversion will be half of the fun," Emily repeated. "Look! I know you guys are edgy, so I'll go first."

Neither Kim nor Tyler argued; they weren't the least bit eager to drink the thick, sickly yellow colored mud-like solution.

"Professor Weasley said we each had enough potion for three doses," Kim reminded Emily. "So only drink a third of what is in the container."

Emily nodded and picked up her container, careful not to spill a drop. Pinching her nose, Emily drank two large gulps of the potion. It tasted like overcooked cabbage.

Immediately, her insides started writhing as though she'd just swallowed live snakes - doubled up, she wondered whether she was going to be sick - then a burning sensation spread rapidly from her stomach to the very ends of her fingers and toes - next, bringing her gasping to all fours, came a horrible melting feeling, as the skin all over her body bubbled like hot wax. Emily's chest and groin area felt like they were being ripped apart. Before her eyes her hands started to grow, her hair shortened and her chest flattened.

"Oh my god!" Emily shrieked as the slit between her legs closed and then painfully took on a new shape. Momentarily, Emily was in agony and then as suddenly as it had started, everything stopped. She lay face down on the stone floor trying to catch her breath.

"Are you okay?" Tyler called, rushing to her side, but it wasn't a pretty girl he helped to her feet; it was a strapping boy of about fourteen.

"Yeah, I'm fine," answered a deep voice definitely not belonging to Emily. "I just feel a little weird."

"You look fabulous," Kim said gushingly. "Is there any chance of you keeping that form; I think I'm in love."

Although Kim was only joking, one look in the mirror confirmed to Emily that she indeed had assumed the form of an extremely handsome boy. Tyler even looked a bit envious.

"This is unbelievable," said Emily, first rubbing her chest and then grasping her new appendage. "Unbelievable! Who is going to go next?"

"I guess I will," Kim volunteered, worriedly. "I imagine the hairs were all from the same boy, so we'll undoubtedly end up looking like twins."

As Kim studied her potion, Tyler suddenly jumped backward. He had kept his arm around Emily when helping her to her feet and just now realized that his hand was resting on a boy's arse.

"Tyler, it's still me," Emily said in her now deep masculine voice. "I still love you."

"I love you too," Tyler answered tensely, "but can we please not talk about it anymore until after you're back to being you?"

"I though perhaps you'd like to hold and caress me," Emily said wickedly.

"Sure, offer me heaven when it's turned to hell," Tyler retorted. "You're an evil tease, Emily Potter."

"I'm sorry," the boy Emily replied sincerely. "I'll make it up to you when I transform back. I promise."

"If you two are about done lollygagging, I guess I'm set to do this," Kim said half-heartedly.

"Okay," Emily said reaching out to grasp Tyler's hand, but then realizing he had deliberately stepped out of her reach. "Whenever you're ready."

Emily watched intently as Kim swallowed two gulps of the potion. The involved pain had caused Emily to miss some of her own transformation and she wanted to see every bit of Kim's. She stared in fascination, as her friend slowly became a mirror image of Emily's boy self.

"What a waste," Tyler commented as the change ended. "I find myself locked in a room with two gorgeous girls, just to have them both become boys; naked boys at that."

"I like the subject Professor Weasley chose for the experimentation," Kim commented, admiring her nude male form in the mirror. "He's quite good looking and well endowed. Don't you think so, Tyler?"

"Guys don't look at other guys down there," he said firmly, averting his eyes to the ceiling. "We especially don't chat about each other's size."

"Guys are so odd. Girls are always checking out other girls," Emily remarked. "Maybe not their twats, but most certainly their breasts and arse."

"Oh wonderful!" Emily shouted excitedly. "I have to pee. I can't wait to see what it's like to do that standing up."

"Can I watch?" Kim asked uncertainly.

"Of course you can," Emily answered without hesitation. "I just hope this room came equipped with a chamber pot. How about you, Tyler? Do you want to watch me use my new gizmo for the first time?"

"No!" he answered empathetically. "That would be gay. Guys just don't do that."

"Oh come on now," Kim said, shaking her head in disbelief. "I've seen the inside of the boys' bathroom. You guys have those urinal thingies hanging on the wall right next to each other without even any partitions between them. Surely, you occasionally glance to your right or left."

"Never," Tyler rejoined, as if to do so would be a dreadful sin. "Guys always look straight ahead at the wall. Only a fag would check out another guy when he was taking a leak."

"How about a girl?" Emily asked mischievously. "Would you watch a girl take a pee if you had the

opportunity?"

Tyler blushed, and then sheepishly nodded his head yes.

"Well you'll have the occasion as soon as you drink your potion," she said with a giggle.

Tyler shook his head awkwardly. That wasn't exactly what he had in mind.

"But before you transform, I need to find a bathroom," Emily said desperately, clutching her groin as if in agony.

"Over there," said Kim, pointing to a lone urinal hanging next to a washbasin on an otherwise blank wall. "I don't remember that being there when we came in."

"I don't believe it was," Tyler replied, stupefaction evident in his voice.

Emily didn't comment, but rather hurried toward the plumbing device, wasting no time in relieving herself. "Wow," she said, flicking the last drop of urine from the tip of her penis and stepping over to the sink in order to wash her hands. "I wouldn't mind having one of these on a permanent basis. It certainly makes taking a pee more convenient."

"I don't think that would make Tyler very happy," Kim said, glancing at the appalled expression on the young boy's face. "Besides, you'd have to lengthen all your dresses so that a stiffy wouldn't show beneath the hem."

"Speaking of stiffies, will you show Kim and I how to make ours get hard?" Emily asked Tyler, without the least amount of embarrassment."

"Emily, take it easy," Kim suggested. "Tyler hasn't even transformed yet. Aren't you eager to see him as a girl? After all, we have three hours for experimentation."

"I'm sorry," Emily said honestly. "I was being selfish. Go ahead, Tyler. Drink your potion."

Truth be told, Tyler was not at all keen to drink the potion. The very notion of swallowing the concoction gave him a sick feeling in the pit of his stomach. However, the girls had drunk theirs and he most certainly didn't want to give the impression of being a coward.

Tyler pinched his nose shut, raised the mixture to his lips, closed his eyes and then took two quick gulps and prepared himself for the worst. His stomach writhed. Abruptly he experienced a sucking sensation; his groin area felt as if it were being turned inside out. Without thinking, he moved to clutch his private area. It was too late; the change was complete. It was gone. His hand was grasping his newly formed vagina.

Emily's eyes had been fixed on that section of Tyler's body, engrossed by the dramatic change, taking place. "If you'd like, I'll show you how to do that properly," she said with a laugh and then for the first time she looked at Tyler's altered face. She gasped in shock.

"What's the matter?" Tyler asked with concern. "Do I make that ugly a looking girl?"

Emily didn't answer, but instead she turned to Kim. "What have you done?" she asked, alarm evident in her voice.

* * * * *

"I know it's not very large, but they allocate the lodgings based on seniority and family size," Jamie explained.

Alex looked approvingly around the accommodations. "I think it's grand," he said excitedly. "You can always do an expanding charm if you feel you need more space. It's nice that the Headmaster is giving you such early access to it."

"He thought that I might want to do some redecorating spells before we moved in. What with preparing for NEWTS and the final challenge, the school year will be over before we realize it." Jamie sighed.

"I can't believe how fast the last seven years have passed," Alex remarked. "Soon we'll be having to say our good-byes to good friends, some of whom we may never see again."

Jamie nodded her head dejectedly in agreement, and then tried to brighten the conversation. "I still find it hard to believe that I'm actually going to be a Hogwarts Professor. Professor Zacherley! It just gives me goose bumps thinking about it."

"You deserve it," Alex said, taking Jamie in his arms and embracing her tightly. "You've worked hard and now it's time for you to reap the benefits. Just imagine, someday you'll be teaching the sons and daughters of our classmates."

"That's a good many years in the future," Jamie exclaimed. "As my dad always said, a lot of water will go under the bridge between now and then."

"Meaning?" Alex asked.

"That it is a long way off. Enjoy life; take one day at a time,"

"Speaking of enjoying life, what are we going to do for furnishings? We at least need a bed. You know, for sleeping and other good things."

"Other good things?" Jamie questioned naughtily. "Do you actually think we'll have time for such niceties with you studying to be a legal representative and me teaching full time?"

"We'll make time," Alex guaranteed.

"I guess we can find a few minutes for sex once or twice a month," Janie conceded, a devilish grin on her face.

"Please tell me that you're joking," Alex implored. "I was hoping we'd do it every night once we moved in together."

"Have you been talking to Harry?" Jamie questioned. "I don't think he and Hermione ever let a night pass."

"We've talked," Alex admitted, "but not about that." His voice suddenly took on a grave tone. "Has he discussed the third event at all with you?"

"Not really," Jamie declared. "He doesn't know any more about it than the contestants. Just that it will take place on Fantastic Island and that some of the beasts located there will be involved."

"He hasn't come right out and said anything, but I've gotten the impression that he is extremely concerned with the task taking place there," Alex divulged. "He gave me the impression that he's worried about the safety of the contestants."

"I love Harry, but sometimes him and Hermione worry too much," Jamie declared. "Emily, Kim and I will be fine; so will everybody else. I imagine it's because of all the ordeals that they've been through, but the two of them have a tendency to be rather paranoid. I'm sure the island wouldn't have been approved as the location for the task if it weren't one hundred percent safe."

"I suppose you're right," Alex conceded, "but nevertheless I'll be glad when this whole competition is over and you're home safely in my arms."

"I'm here right now," Jamie answered lovingly. "If you like, I can do a cushioning charm on the floor while you lock the door."

Suddenly, the third task was the farthest thing from Alex's mind.

* * * * *

"Our numbers are growing appreciably, Master," Nott said confidently.

"Yes," Slytherin agreed, although his voice seemed somewhat disheartened. "Intimidation has a way of convincing people which side to take in a conflict. I wish more were joining our ranks due to allegiance."

"Many are," Nott injected timidly. "The Bancrofts for a case in point. They were loyal followers of the Dark Lord and are extremely enthusiastic to serve you in whatever way you wish. They have two sons that will also undoubtedly help swell our ranks when they graduate Hogwarts."

Salazar nodded his head approvingly. "What has become of this Draco Malfoy of whom you spoke so highly? I thought he was to deliver the Mudblood wife of Harry Potter into my hands?"

"He still promises to do so, but he assures me that she has not left the confines of Hogwarts castle since our last discussion of her," Nott said enlighteningly. "Malfoy remains in regular contact with me. He lastly informed me that she would be accompanying her husband to the final task on Fantastic Island. Perhaps we could snatch her then."

Slytherin snapped the quill he was holding in half and abruptly jumped to his feet. "That is unfortunate," he said, striding across the room. "I very much looked forward to meeting this Hermione. The mind of the body I occupy is extremely besotted with her." He paced the room silently for several moments as Nott watched tensely."

Finally his anger seemed to calm and he returned to his seat. "I imagine in war even I must make some sacrifices," he said solemnly.

"I'm not sure I understand," Nott whispered cautiously. "Do you not feel that would be a good time to kidnap the Mudblood?"

Slytherin sighed. "Our plans are finalized and they won't be altered. Everyone on Fantastic Island will die."

"But Master, the oldest son of the Bancrofts' is a member of the Hogwarts team," Nott declared.

"If that be the case, then their first act of loyalty to me shall be accepting without question the death of their eldest offspring."

* * * * *

Tyler looked around the walls of the room urgently searching for a mirror. Once he sighted one, he ran toward it intent on finding out what had traumatized Emily to so great an extent. As soon as he saw the face he now bore reflected in the mirror, he stopped dead. First he gawked at his mirror image and then he turned to Kim and Emily. "How? I thought the hairs were from an American acquaintance of Professor Weasley?"

"So did I," Emily concurred. She glared at Kim suspiciously. "Perhaps Kim would care to enlighten us."

"I had to do it," Kim insisted. "It was an opportunity to get somewhat back at her for what she did to you at the Yule Ball and for the humiliation she has been causing me with those posters."

"Will all the second year boys be transforming into her?" Emily asked concernedly.

"No! Just the Slytherins," Kim answered regretfully. "The Professor had separate envelopes of hair for each class. I only had time to switch the ones for our group."

"Where did you get the strands of Denise's hair from?" Tyler questioned.

"I ran back to our dorm and got them from the hair brush on her dresser," Kim explained. "That's why I was so out of breath when I returned to the classroom."

"She's going to kill you when she finds out," Emily sighed. "I understand your reasoning, but didn't you think about the consequences? What about Professor Weasley? She could lose her job. Denise's father is on the Board of Governors. "

"Why would she lose her job?" Kim asked fretfully. "I'm the one that switched the hairs."

"The whole idea of having us take the potion was the Professor's," Emily explained. "She had the Headmaster's approval, but I doubt the Governors were even consulted. Secondly, she was the one that gave you access to the hairs. Your heart was in the right place, but I think the consequences will far out weigh the benefits."

"I don't think Denise will ever find out," Tyler said hopefully.

"You can't be serious," Emily huffed. "Five boys have or will change into Denise. They'll all have seen and examined her nude body closely." Emily pointed toward Tyler's now female chest. "They all know now, beyond a doubt, that she stuffs her bra. You actually don't think anyone will confront her?"

"No I don't," Tyler said, and he went on to explain his reasoning. "Obviously I won't let it slip, knowing the cost, but I don't think the other guys will either. They're all scared to death of Denise. They all know the depravity she is capable of. Then there is always her cousin, my brother Dick, to be considered. I doubt that any of the guys will even talk about it amongst themselves, fearing retribution."

"Then this was all for nothing," Kim groaned. "I tried to get even with the bitch by embarrassing her and all I did was put Professor Weasley and myself in possible jeopardy. If Tyler is correct, Denise will never even know that all the boys got to examine her form up close and personal."

"Sometimes things just don't work out, despite good intentions," Emily sighed. "Have faith, Denise will get her just payback some day."

"What I don't understand is why Denise thinks it's necessary to stuff her bra," Tyler said, admiring the reflection in the mirror. He looked at both profiles, even turned to appreciate the rear view. "I think she has a really cutie body. Nothing is wrong with her small perky boobs and this is a great arse. Hell, if she'd smile once in awhile instead of walking around with her nose in the air, I'd even consider her pretty."

"I agree with what you said earlier, Tyler," Emily said, quickly interrupting him. Her voice sounded worried. Obviously she was not at all pleased with the way he was appreciating the body reflected in the mirror "This switching sexes is totally unnecessary. I think we should allow ourselves to transform back at the end of the first hour and forget about using the balance of the potion."

"But we haven't actually spent much time on close examination or touching of our new differing body parts," Kim complained.

Emily grabbed her chin, trying to hide her grimace. She was only sure of one thing at the moment. She was willing to do whatever necessary to prevent Tyler from becoming more acquainted with Denise's body.

"Look! We're good friends. Best friends!" Emily asserted. "And we're not little kids anymore. I think we're mature enough to touch and examine each other on a clinical level without letting childish emotions get in the way."

Kim just stared at Emily, a petrified expression of dread etched on her face.

As the potion began to wear off and Emily started to transform back to herself, she reached out and grabbed Kim's hand. "If you're concerned about Tyler touching you in intimate places," she said nervously, "I'm sure he'd be willing to limit his journeying to me."

"It's not that so much," Kim revealed timidly. "I'd trust Tyler with my life and I know how much he adores you. Truthfully, it might be better if it were I he examined. Considering the feelings you two have for each other, it might be difficult for you both to maintain a detached mindset. My concern was more with how you both would feel when it was my turn to scrutinize Tyler."

Tyler noticeably gulped as he and Emily exchanged penetrating looks. He had the feeling that he was about to boldly go where a twelve-year-old boy had never gone before.

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As a side note to our story, none of the boys ever did divulge to Denise or anyone else, as far as we know, that they had transformed into her likeness. Evidently they all considered it a secret better kept to themselves. Denise did, from time to time, catch a number of the boys from her year sneaking peeps at her, especially her 'well-endowed' chest, and then abruptly turning away and laughing. It irritated her a great deal, but she simply chalked it up to teenage male hormones and immaturity.

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Wednesday, June 14, 2006

"Ron, what's bothering you?" Sam asked, a tinge of irritation evident in her voice. "You've been pacing the room like an expectant father for the last thirty minutes."

He shilly-shallied momentarily and then finally sat down next to her. "I'm concerned about the third task," he said uneasily.

"The third task?" Sam questioned. "It's not till next Saturday. Besides, why the sudden concern. I know you'd like to see Hogwarts win, but it isn't like it's a life or death situation."

"That's just it, it may well be just that," Ron said, shaking his head in frustration. "Harry has been acting really odd the past couple of months and I was finally able to get him in a corner today and drag the truth out of him. I thought perhaps Hermione and he had been arguing, but it's worse than that. Somehow, they've both gotten this weird idea that something dreadful is going to happen on Fantastic Island. They have absolutely no legitimate reason to be concerned; not even any circumstantial evidence. Yet they are both convinced beyond a doubt that the students' lives will be in peril. That's why Hermione is going with him; her being a chaperone is just a facade."

"But if there is no proof? Ron, I'm sure the promoters have taken every conceivable precaution. Don't you think that perhaps Harry and Hermione or just being somewhat overprotective?" Sam asked.

"No!" Ron declared adamantly. "I've been best friends with those two since we were all eleven. They both have a nose for trouble. If they mutually agree that something awful is going to happen, then something awful is going to happen."

"Assuming that they are correct," Sam conceded. "I can't see that you wearing a rut in our carpet is going to help them any. They're a team; they defeated Voldemort. I'm sure they can take care of themselves."

Ron still shuddered when anyone spoke the Dark Lord's name. "That's the problem," Ron admitted. "They're only two-thirds of the team that defeated He Who Must Not Be Named. I was there, too. My contribution might not have been as key to the defeat of Voldemort as Harry's or Hermione's, but without me they might have failed."

"Do you want to go with them to the Island?" Sam asked.

"You know I can't do that," Ron retorted. "You're pregnant. I have responsibilities. I can't just go running halfway around the world because of gut feelings."

"What if they're correct? What if something awful does take place? What if something happens to them because you weren't there to help? Could you live with yourself?" Sam hounded.

"Are you telling me to go?" Ron asked, a dumbfounded expression on his face.

"You guys are a team," Sam emphasized. "You've always been a team. If something happened to them because you weren't there, you'd never be able to live with the guilt. You don't have a choice; you have to go."

"But what about you and Timmy?" Ron asked guiltily.

"We'll be fine," Sam insisted. "I was a single mother when I gave birth to Timmy and I managed. I'm not weak and helpless you know."

"I know," Ron faltered. "It's just that I feel so guilty leaving you."

"You'll feel even more guilty if you don't go. Don't worry about us. Timmy and I will be fine," Sam maintained.

"If you're positive, I'm going to pop over and advise Harry and Hermione to figure out a way to get me included in the group," Ron said.

"I'm sure," Sam persisted. "Just one thing Ron. I might have raised Timmy by myself, but that doesn't mean I want to ever go it alone again. Promise me that you'll take care of yourself and return home safely to me. I love you."

* * * * *

Friday, June 23, 2006 08:00

"I keep thinking I've forgotten to let you know something important," Hermione fretted.

"If you have, I'm sure it's covered in your written instructions," Ginny laughed, dropping the manual size instructions on the table. "You'll probably be back before I get a chance to thoroughly read through this."

"I guess maybe I did go overboard," Hermione admitted, looking at the book length instructions. "Mothers tend to be overly concerned. You'll know what I mean quite soon. Emily can probably answer any questions you might have."

Emily nodded and gave Ginny a reassuring smile.

"What time is the Portkey scheduled to depart?" Ginny asked.

"We'll be using three; the first leaves at 09:00 and the last at 09:10." Hermione explained. We'll check in this morning at the resort hotel and then we're all scheduled to go on a tour of the Island after lunch. Tonight the third task will be explained in detail to the contestants.

"The task itself commences Saturday at noon, Island time. There'll be a party Saturday evening and then we'll return to Hogwarts on Sunday. You're sure that you'll be okay taking care of Benjamin? You look like you're about ready to give birth."

"I am," Ginny said with a laugh. "Just three more weeks to go. But seriously, even though I look like a whale, I feel fine. Watching Ben will be a good experience."

"Just remember to give Sam a call if he becomes too much to handle," Hermione reminded her. "She's more than willing to take over."

"We'll both be all right. Don't worry about Ben and I, just relax and enjoy yourself," Ginny recommended.

"Mum, it's going on nine o'clock," Emily reminded her. "I know it's hard for you to leave Ben, but you're going to miss the Portkey if we don't hurry."

Hermione nodded, then gave Ben a last hug and kiss before allowing Emily to drag her from the room.

"Honestly Mum!" Emily chastised. "I know you love Ben, but you're only going to be gone for two days. A person would think that you never expected to see him again."

Hermione didn't answer, but instead looked back longingly as they turned a corner and Ginny and Ben disappeared from view. *Had she possibly seen her son for the very last time?*

"You had me worried," Harry shouted as Emily and Hermione hurried down the steps to join him. "I'm not sure what I would have done if you hadn't arrived by departure time."

"It was hard saying good-bye to Ben," Hermione said, tears filling her eyes.

"Get a grip Mum. I'll keep an eye on Ben," Emily assured. "You guys will be back before he even realizes you're gone."

Hermione clenched her lips, and then enveloped Emily in a bone-breaking hug.

"Mum, people are staring," Emily whispered, gasping for air. "You and Dad will be back in two days. Ben and I will be all right."

When Emily finally struggled free from her mother's grip, she gave Harry a hug and kiss, and then ran off to wish her sisters and Kim good luck.

"I'll be leaving in the first group with Rishard and the officials," Harry advised a teary eyed Hermione. "You'll be supervising the second group which will be composed of the girls from both teams. Ron will be departing last with all the boys. A party from the resort will be meeting us on the beach with transportation to the hotel."

"Why aren't we going straight by Portkey to the hotel?" Hermione asked.

"It seems the computer controlled electrically enhanced wards and spells surrounding the resort are even stronger than those protecting Hogwarts. Not only can't you fly or Apparate into the resort itself, but Portkeys also can't penetrate the barriers."

Hermione nodded, ostensibly impressed with the security. "It's almost nine," Harry said, glancing at his watch. "I'm going to join my group. I'll see you on the beach." He gave Hermione a brief kiss and then departed. Hermione turned and headed toward the female participants.

She smiled as she noted Alex and Jamie clutching each other in a passionate embrace, clearly oblivious to the staring onlookers. The apparent love that Alex and Jamie shared reminded her so much of the feelings that she and Harry carried for each other.

Hermione was not quite as comfortable with the display of affection Caitlin was heaping on Evan. It wasn't that Hermione didn't approve of Evan; just the opposite, she liked the boy immensely. It was more the age situation. Jamie and Alex were legally adults in the wizard world; Caitlin was only thirteen, Evan even younger. Such strong emotions at such a tender age could without doubt lead to trouble.

Despite her fears, Hermione had to smile as she watched the two young people. They were unquestionably the embodiment of the term odd couple. Caitlin in the last year had undergone an incredible growth spurt. She was now slightly taller than Hermione. Although still thin, her body was definitely taking on the structure of a young woman. Evan, on the other hand, was small for his age and probably still a couple of years away from his growth spike. The difference in heights was dramatic by itself, but especially evident when they hugged. Evan's face was actually leaning against Caitlin's chest.

Momentarily, Hermione wondered whether Caitlin was actually wearing clothing or simply using the concealment charm. Considering the proximity of Evan's lips to Caitlin's breast, she decided she didn't really want to know.

As she arrived at the girls, Hermione noticed that Harry and his grouping had suddenly disappeared. "I'm sorry," she said, clearing her throat, "but we must bring the farewells to an end, the first group has already departed. Our Portkey will activate in under five minutes.

"Make sure your knapsacks are secured tightly. Is there anyone who hasn't used a Portkey before?" Hermione asked in a businesslike fashion. She was surprised that a few hands shot into the air.

"A Portkey is an object used to transport a wizard or group of wizards that can't or don't want to Apparate. Ours has a prearranged departure time of 9:05. We will be using the same Portkey to return on Sunday," she explained. "Portkeys can be anything, usually something unobtrusive that a Muggle wouldn't pick up and start playing with.

"This cane will be our Portkey today," she said showing the object to the girls. It gives us plenty of space to allow all of us to hold on." Hermione checked her watch. "Nearly time. You just need to touch the Portkey, that's all, a finger will do."

With some difficulty, owing to their large backpacks, the nine of them crowded around the old cane held out by Hermione.

"Be sure to maintain contact," Hermione warned, "or you'll be left behind.

Hermione began a count down. "Ten...nine...eight..." Everyone grasped the cane tighter, no one desiring to be left behind. "three...two...one..."

It happened immediately. As if an invisible hook were attached behind their navels, they were all suddenly jerked irresistibly forward, their feet instantly leaving the ground. They sped forward in a howl of wind and swirling color, arms and legs banging together, their hands stuck to the cane as though it was pulling them magically onward and then--

They slammed into the ground. Hermione and a few of the others managed to remain standing upright, but most of the girls were scattered pell-mell about the beach.

"Sand makes a much nicer landing spot than concrete," Emily said, getting to her feet and dusting herself off." Obviously she was calling to mind her arrival in Fort Lauderdale the previous summer.

"Look at the water, isn't it beautiful?" one of the American girls commented. "I live in New Jersey and the Ocean water there is filthy compared to this."

"Plenty of time to admire the scenery later," Harry called out. "Hermione, you better move the girls out of the way, Ron and his group will be arriving shortly." Hermione scooted the girls over to where Harry was standing and they all waited eagerly for the arrival of Professor Weasley and the male contestants.

Once Ron and his group had arrived and gathered their equanimity, Rishard Simone called for everyone's attention.

"You all look divine today," he remarked in his normal irritatingly high voice. "I'm so pleased that you all remembered to wear to your exquisite uniforms like the good little girls and boys that you are."

"I bet he'd pee his pants if he knew that not a one of us is in fact wearing his degenerate costumes," Caitlin whispered quietly into Kim's ear. "I'm pleased that all the others, especially the guys, realized that we were better off using the concealment charm."

"I just hope, in fact, we are," Kim uttered uncertainly.

"It is now my splendid glee to introduce our host for the weekend," Rishard crowed pompously, "the founder of Fantastic Island, Dr. Milton Soderbergh."

A short, stooped back, elderly man wearing Muggle clothes slowly approached them, leaning heavily on his walking stick. He didn't speak until he was in the midst of the contestants. At first he seemed scandalized by the uniforms the competitors were wearing, but he quickly collected himself.

"Welcome to Fantastic Island," he said, pride obvious in his voice. "I'm extremely pleased that we have been selected to host the final event of your contest. Fantastic Island is the culmination of my life long work and dream; a place where wizardkind can see and study beasts that until now most have only been able to read about. I'm sure that in your classes, many of you have read **Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them** by the erudite Newt Scamander. I am proud to say that nearly ninety percent of the creatures listed in that book now call Fantastic Island their home, hence the name.

"But enough from me, you didn't come here to hear an old man ramble on. We have transportation

waiting to take us to the resort's main hotel." He gestured toward a number of off-road vehicles parked nearby. "After you have settled in and enjoyed a hearty lunch, we'll embark on a safari-like tour of the island. I sincerely hope you enjoy your stay."

"He seems nice," Jamie commented as she and the other girls started walking toward the waiting transport.

"Yeah," Nora agreed. "He's the type that usually plays the kindly uncle or grandfather in a Muggle movie, except in this case he's not a Muggle."

"It's very nice to meet you," Harry said, extending his hand to Dr. Soderbergh, "I'm Harry..." But before he could finish Dr. Soderbergh grabbed Harry's outstretched hand and shook it vigorously.

"Harry Potter! It's a delight to meet you. "You can't imagine how pleased I was when I saw your name on the guest list," Dr. Soderbergh said excitedly. He turned beaming toward Hermione. "And is this charming woman your beautiful wife, Hermione?"

"I'm not quite sure about the beautiful part," Hermione said, blushing, "but thank you. It's a pleasure to meet you Dr. Soderbergh; I've read all your books."

"Please, call me Milton," the doctor insisted.

"This is our good friend Ron Weasley," Harry said in introduction.

"An honor Mr. Weasley," Dr. Soderbergh said, eagerly taking Ron's hand. "I can't believe all three members of the covenant are here at my resort. Please, come ride with me so that we can talk."

As they went to climb into the waiting vehicle, Dr. Soderbergh gave Harry a strange look and then said, "Excuse me, but make I ask why you're carrying that manky old boot."

"It's a Portkey," Harry replied. "So are Hermione's cane and Ron's fedora. There're how we got here and our return ticket home."

"Goodness gracious! I'm thankful that I asked," Milton replied urgently. "It would be best if you secured those here on the beach, perhaps in that abandoned work shed. It is chancy to transport anything charmed through the gates onto the actual resort grounds. The intensified wards protecting the resort sometimes have a odd affect on charms. I wouldn't want to see your return trip culminating at say the North Pole."

Hermione waited until Harry returned to the vehicle and secured his seatbelt before questioning Dr. Soderbergh concerning the safety of Fantastic Island. "Doctor, is it true that you actually have a Nundu in captivity here?"

"Not just one," the Doctor replied proudly. "Up until last week we had a pair, but the female just gave birth to cubs, now we have a family of four."

"Four!" Hermione gasped. "But the East African gigantic leopard is arguably the most dangerous beast in the world. Its breath can cause disease virulent enough to eliminate entire villages. My understanding is that fewer than a hundred skilled wizards working together have never yet subdued one. Do you actually have a staff large enough to control four?"

"Most certainly not," the doctor answered, frankly as the parade of vehicles drove onto a road

leading away from the beach. "If our safety and security were dependent on old-fashioned magic alone, Fantastic Island could not exist. It is only the blending of up-to-the-minute Muggle technology with ancient magic that makes our being possible. We'll be reaching the outer perimeter fence in a few minutes. I think you'll find that one picture is indeed worth a thousand words."

Hermione nodded and sat quietly taking in the gorgeous scenery while waiting expectantly for them to arrive at the enclosure. When they reached the crest of a ridge, she was the first to catch view of the fence and gasped audibly.

"How tall is it," she asked, gaping in awe as a tourist would at New York City's skyscrapers?"

"Sixty feet at the lowest point and five feet thick, charged with over 200,000 volts of electricity," Dr. Soderbergh explained.

"Then you actually control the beasts with electrified barriers rather than magic?" Hermione questioned.

"No!" Dr. Soderbergh continued. "We are dealing with the strongest and most powerful magical creatures the world has ever known. In time, some of these creatures would penetrate even the best built Muggle ramparts."

"I don't understand," Hermione said, shrugging her shoulders. "Then how?"

"These iron barriers are not designed to hold the creatures in nor is that the purpose of the electrical charge. They are rather just parts of the amplification system. Old wards, charms and spells do the actual work. We have combined Muggle computer technology with old magic. The electricity intensifies the magical power. Imagine a simple repelling spell if you would. Now imagine a wand positioned on every square foot of the immense fence casting the identical spell and you have some idea of the power generated. The creatures have learned to maintain a sensible distance from the fence."

"But Muggle technology isn't foolproof," Hermione maintained. "Electricity can fail and computers develop glitches and programs stop working."

"Certainly, all that is feasible," Dr. Soderbergh admitted, but we have taken every conceivable precaution. We have a secondary backup system in place and even that system has built in fail-safes."

"Nothing can be made one hundred percent foolproof," Hermione insisted.

"I agree," the doctor conceded with a deep sigh, "but we have done everything wizardly possible to insure the integrity of our security system. We feel confident that we are prepared for any eventuality. For our system to fail it would have to be a case of deliberate systematically planned sabotage. Honestly," he laughed, "who would ever consider such an act of hostility against a zoological park?"

At this statement, Ron, Harry and Hermione exchanged troubled looks.

Chapter Twenty-three No Where to Go

Dr. Soderbergh suggested that they all sit back, relax and enjoy the scenery, since the drive to the hotel, which was located near the center of the circular shaped island, would require about twenty-five minutes time. Hermione, though, glanced briefly at the vehicle's speedometer and then made some quick mental calculations.

"Doctor, is the entire coast line of the island secured by electrified wards and spells?" she questioned. "The expense to install nearly one hundred twenty miles of such high tech security would seem to be astronomical."

Dr. Soderbergh appeared momentarily dumbfounded by Hermione's knowledgeable query, but quickly regained his composure. "I see that the accounts of your intelligence are not over exaggerated," he replied with an indulgent smile.

"Our original strategy was to fully enclose the island, but as you surmised, the cost was plainly overwhelming. Instead we opted to divide the island in half," he explained. "Creatures with a classification of XXX or below are allowed to freely roam this on side of the island; those categorized XXXX and above are secured beyond the barrier."

"What about the outer limits?" she asked nervously. "What prevents the beasts from swimming by way of the ocean to this side or for that matter leaving the island entirely?"

"Most of our creatures are not well adapted to swimming, but still we have erected barriers that extend well into the ocean so that they cannot reach this side of the island. As for leaving the island entirely... There is no place to go," Soderbergh emphasized. "This is a remote uncharted island. Furthermore the beasts such as dragons and griffins, that can fly, are maintained in separate areas from which escape by flight is out of the question."

"It seems that you've covered every eventuality," Hermione conceded, although her voice did not sound as yet completely convinced.

"We feel that we have," Dr. Soderbergh proclaimed confidently.

Although the contestants from both teams had gotten to know each other remarkably well throughout the course of the year, they nevertheless had still chosen to group as teams for the ride to the hotel. Caitlin had been searching for signs of any magical creatures, not paying much attention to the other occupants of her transport vehicle.

"This place is worse than a Muggle zoo," Caitlin commented, turning to truly look at Kim for the first time since they had climbed into the land rover. "There is too much ground covering in which to hide. I haven't seen a single beast yet."

She stared at Kim incredulously. "Why are you sitting with your hands like that?" Caitlin asked.

Kim was sitting with her left hand covering her crotch and her right hand and arm held across her chest.

"Didn't you feel it?" Kim asked.

"Feel what? Caitlin rejoined.

"Every so often I feel a strange twinge," Kim explained. "I think it's from the electrified wards. I'm afraid they might cancel out the concealment charm. Remember how the Hogwarts wards affected you and Emily last summer?"

Caitlin laughed.

"What's so funny?" Kim asked indignantly.

"You," Caitlin answered. "You've gone on a nudist cruise and have been seen naked by numerous people since then; you've even had nude posters of yourself displayed throughout the castle, yet you're still shy and modest about your body. Personally, I'd much prefer being seen nude than in this degrading, provocative costume." She glanced down at her own body.

"Yeah, I guess I am being rather silly," Kim responded, dropping her arms to her side. "If Nora can get comfortable with being seen naked by Bancroft, I should stop acting all timid and shy."

"Nora?" Caitlin questioned, a perplexed expression on her face. She turned her head and glanced to the rear seat of the vehicle where Nora was sitting snuggled next to, of all people, Dick Bancroft. They were holding hands and Dick's other arm was around the normally timid girl's shoulder.

"I don't believe it," Caitlin gasped. "Nora and Bancroft; talk about opposites attracting."

"Yeah! But at least she has someone," Kim replied mournfully.

"I'm not sure if I'd be jealous if I were you," Caitlin answered. "Unless Bancroft does a one-eighty, I think I'd prefer to be unattached rather than with him. Besides, what do you mean? I thought you were still dangling two boy friends?"

"Past tense," Kim replied sadly. "I'm afraid that I screwed that up big time. Randy dumped me because I couldn't make a choice between him and Brian. Then Brian decided that although he had strong feelings for me, it was ridiculous for the two of us to get serious at such a young age, especially with an ocean normally separating us."

"I'm sorry," Caitlin said genuinely, "but I guess Brian does have a valid point."

"I know," Kim admitted regretfully. "Plus, I think he has feelings for Debby. I imagine she likes him too, but neither one of them will own up to it. They're best friends and I think both are afraid to jeopardize their friendship by trying to be more."

"Been there, done that," Caitlin responded briskly. "Matt, Randy and I were also best friends, now Matt and I barely speak."

"But you have Evan and he adores you."

"He is very special," Caitlin said, a smile covering her face. "I know we doubtless make a rather odd looking couple, but I don't care." She bit her lip and then shook her head. "I think he might be the one. Of course, I once thought that about Matt and was proved wrong. I guess only time will tell."

"At least you have a chance to find out," Kim replied disconsolately.

"You'll find someone special," Caitlin said encouragingly.

"All the good ones are already taken," Kim responded dejectedly.

"Give it time. Relationships don't always work out," Caitlin said. "You and I are living proof of that. Maybe a relationship will falter and one of those so-called good ones will become available."

"This bond won't," Kim said, "and I don't want it to. They're perfect together. It's just that when he touched me, I thought I would melt."

Caitlin gave Kim a penetrating look. "Exactly whom are we talking about?" she asked concernedly.

Kim hesitated and then replied uncomfortably, "Tyler."

"Emily's Tyler?" Caitlin replied, horror-struck. "But she's my sister; your best friend."

"I know," Kim answered nervously. "That's why you must promise to never tell her. I'd sooner die than risk the possibility of losing her friendship."

Caitlin stared penetratingly at Kim for a few moments then asked, "What did you mean by him touching you? Were Tyler and you fooling around? Did he somehow cheat on Emily with you behind her back?"

"Oh, no! Tyler would never deceive Emily. He adores her," Kim insisted. "And even if he wanted to, I'd never let it happen. It was all completely innocent. Emily was even there when it happened."

Caitlin stared at Kim, a look of total bewilderment impressed on her face. "I'm confused. Perhaps you should tell me exactly what happened."

Kim blushed crimson. "Did Emily tell you about the experimentation that we conducted in Professor Weasley's class?"

"Are you referring to when you took Polyjuice and all changed sex?" Caitlin inquired.

Kim nodded meekly.

"I wish I had been able to do that," Caitlin stated enviously. "Emily said it was really neat getting to be a boy for a short time."

"Sometimes I think Emily would have been happier being born a boy," Kim sighed, a trace of exasperation unmistakable in her voice. "I've never known a girl to be so captivated by the male sex organ."

"Yeah," Caitlin agreed with a laugh. "Jamie says that Emily has been enthralled by the male penis ever since she was a toddler. Her birth parents thought it was just a phase that she would grow out of, but evidently she hasn't. Anyway, what does this all have to do with you and Tyler?"

"Well," Kim began, "Tyler, Emily and I all took the potion together in the Room of Requirement. We thought it would be amusing to watch each other transform, but in reality it made us more nervous. Tyler didn't like looking at us as naked boys. It made him feel gay and Emily was

uncomfortable with Tyler checking out his temporary female form."

"She told me about you substituting Denise's hair," Caitlin admitted uncertainly. "That was a truly inspired prank, but I can understand Emily being worried about Tyler getting to be so familiar with Denise's body."

"Isn't it ridiculous? Emily actually regards Denise as a rival. You'd think that by now she'd realize that Tyler has eyes for no one but her," Kim proclaimed. "Anyway, getting back to the testing. We were supposed to take three doses of the potion and really get acquainted with our temporary bodies. You know, touch and examine ourselves thoroughly, but Emily and Tyler both wanted to cut the test short."

"That surprises me," Caitlin responded. "I would have expected Emily to enjoy being in a boy's body."

"Oh, she did," Kim replied, "but like I said, she was nervous about Tyler getting too familiar with Denise's figure. I hate to admit it, but Denise is nicely proportioned."

"I doubt either you or Emily have anything to agonize about," Caitlin said.

"Maybe not," Kim answered, blushing, "but Emily still considers herself a tomboy. She has no idea how hot the boys think she is."

"But Emily said you had to write a two foot parchment on body differences and how your temporary features felt and reacted. How could you do that if you cut the experiment short?" Caitlin asked.

"We examined each other," Kim answered uncomfortably, her face blushing copiously.

"You and Emily actually both examined and touched Tyler intimately?" Caitlin asked, her face bearing a shocked expression.

Kim nodded meekly. "It got Tyler exceedingly excited having two girls touch him simultaneously. He had sort of a mishap."

Caitlin stared inquiringly at Kim; part of her wanting a full explanation of just what Kim meant by an accident; the other part of her, in truth, preferring to remain ignorant.

"When you finished with Tyler, did he examine you and Emily?" Caitlin asked fretfully.

"Not exactly," Kim began meekly. "It was necessary for both Emily and I to examine Tyler because he was the only boy present, but there was no need for him to inspect both of us; girls might be built differently, but the parts are essentially the same."

Caitlin sighed. "So he just inspected my sister while you sat back and watched?"

"Not exactly," Kim muttered. "Tyler and Emily thought that their close feelings for each other would make it difficult to maintain a controlled situation."

Caitlin was stunned. "Are you saying that he examined you?" she asked, taken aback. "How did you feel about him doing that?"

"Scared and nervous," Kim replied. "I'd never been touched intimately before, but it somehow all seemed logical. This wasn't sexual, we were doing research for a class project and clearly Emily and Tyler would be unable to maintain a methodical approach."

"And you thought you could?" Caitlin asked, astonished.

"I did until he fingered me down there," Kim confessed. "It might have been totally scientific to him, but I didn't want him to ever stop touching me. He was so gentle and it felt so good."

Caitlin was bowled over. "Exactly how far did you guys carry out this testing?" she questioned apprehensively. "You didn't do anything more than touch, did you?"

"No!" Kim answered. Although her voice was empathic, it also sounded slightly disappointed. "We didn't do anything more than what a person could do by themselves."

Caitlin pondered all this newly acquired information for a short time before responding discreetly to Kim. "I've never been touched there by a boy. Evan once innocently placed his hand on my bare upper thigh and that was enough to cause me to break out in a nervous sweat. I can understand you being aroused, but don't be too swift to equate sexual arousal with love."

"Do you think I was reacting more to what Tyler was doing to me than actual feelings I have for him?" Kim asked.

"I don't know," Caitlin responded, shrugging her shoulders, "but you're currently in a terrible, no-win, position. The worst thing would be to react without being sure of your true feelings. At this point you seem to have a lot more to lose than to gain."

"Yeah," Kim agreed sadly. "I wish I had Divination so that I could see the future in a crystal ball."

"I have Divination and thus far all I've ever seen in the crystal is clouds and my own reflection," Caitlin sighed. "Trelawney says that my inner eye is nonexistent. Mum and Dad told me not to fret about it. They say that I should just live properly today and the future will take care of itself."

"Look!" Jamie yelled excitedly, catching everyone's attention. "It's a Niffler village."

Dr. Soderbergh signaled and the three vehicles came to an abrupt halt.

"I wish all of our creatures were as obliging as those little buggers," Soderbergh said happily. "They build their towns right out in plain sight next to the road. They actually seem to like people and attention." The doctor placed his wand at his throat in order to amplify his voice. "If you'd like to get out and observe the Nifflers at close range, feel free to do so. I would, however suggest that you first remove any shinny or glittery objects because of the Nifflers' predilection for such objects."

The Niffler is native to Britain. The animal is fluffy, black and long-snouted. Although the Niffler is gentle and even affectionate, because of its burrowing nature, it can be destructive to belongings and should never be kept in a house. Goblins often keep Nifflers to burrow deep into the earth for treasure.

"You'll notice that we have a number of new pups," the doctor announced. "Many of our females recently gave birth to litters ranging in size from six to eight."

The students spent several minutes cuddling the newborns until they were finally gathered back onto their conveyances.

"I know you'd like to spend more time with these lovable creatures," Soderbergh said kindly, "but we must be moving along. I would like you to have a few hours to enjoy the many amenities the resort has to offer before we sit down to lunch. Speaking of which, lunch will be served in the main dining room at one o'clock. Please feel free to dress comfortably for lunch and the tour of the park this afternoon. It is not necessary for you to wear your unique competition uniforms."

Rishard glared angrily at Soderbergh as if he had just uttered one of the three unforgivable curses, but he resisted making any comments as they continued their journey. After a few minutes more the vehicles passed through an ornate gate and they got their first view of the beautiful sprawling resort hotel.

* * * * *

"Wow! This room is great," Caitlin exclaimed, canceling the concealment charm as soon as the door closed behind her. "Look at the size of these beds. They make our old four posters back at Hogwarts seem dinky."

"They are by comparison," Kim declared. "I imagine that these rooms are designed to accommodate a family of four." Kim likewise canceled her concealment charm and then flung herself spread eagle onto one of the beds. "This feels great. I could spend the rest of the day here."

"Now that would be a waste of paradise," Caitlin complained. "How can you think of sleeping when we're on a lush tropical island populated with the most fantastic beasts in the world?"

"Can I help it if I enjoy a comfy bed?" Kim sighed, stretching contentedly.

"I wonder what kind of view we have," Caitlin said approaching the closed draperies. Then without warning bright sunlight filled the room as she flung the window coverings open wide.

"Are you crazy?" Kim shrieked, quickly covering herself. "We're naked. Close those blinds before someone sees us."

"What if they do?" Caitlin laughed. "We're naturists. I'm not ashamed of being seen nude. Besides, the resort is practically empty. Come here and look at this gorgeous pool. The water is crystal clear."

Kim slowly got off the bed and walked toward Caitlin dragging the bed coverings with her to hide her bareness.

"We have three hours until lunch," Caitlin declared. "Let's go take a swim."

"I don't know about you, but I didn't bring my bathing costume," Kim stated. "I guess I could wear a top and shorts or maybe even our hideous event costume."

"What's wrong with what you have on?" Caitlin inquired.

"How can I swim wrapped in a bed cover?" Kim asked.

"Don't be silly," Caitlin laughed. "The pool area is empty. Let's skinny dip."

"But it's broad daylight," Kim said hesitantly, "What if someone sees us?"

"Then we'll ask them to join us," Caitlin replied matter-of-factly. "The worst that can happen is that someone will yell at us and make us get out of the pool."

Kim stared first at the pool, then at Caitlin and then once again back at the pool. "Sometimes you're as crazy as Emily," Kim said shaking her head in exasperation. "Why do I let you two talk me into your insane antics?" She dropped the bed coverings to the floor. "Come on, let's run and get in the water before I come to my senses."

Kim opened the sliding glass doors and without pause the two young girls bounded toward the pool, jumping in without even first checking the water's temperature.

"The water is great," Caitlin proclaimed.

"Yeah," Kim agreed, looking toward the open door to their room, which now seemed somewhat distant. She gulped. "We didn't even bring towels with us."

"The sun and air will dry us," Caitlin said unworriedly. "Let's swim for a while and then lay out in the sun. I could use a little tan."

"But what if someone comes along while we're tanning?" Kim asked anxiously.

"That would be great," Caitlin answered, excitedly. "Then maybe we could play some pool games. There is a volleyball over there next to that lounge chair."

"Yeah! That would be fun," Kim replied, but her voice didn't sound quite overjoyed at the prospect.

The girls had been swimming for about ten minutes when a voice called out, "Is this a private party or can anyone join?"

Emily and Kim looked up to see Brian and Debby standing at the pool edge, both clad in towels. Brian's towel was folded and concealed his body from waist to knees. Debby's was secured under her arms and extended to mid thigh.

Kim looked like she wanted to run and hide, but Caitlin just smiled and said, "The more the merrier. Come on in."

Brian gave Debby's hand an encouraging squeeze. "You can do this," he said. "Just close your eyes and take a deep breath."

A moment later, both towels were lying at the edge of the pool and the two American students had joined Caitlin and Kim in the pool. It was no surprise that Brian was nude, after all Kim and Caitlin had originally met him on a naturist cruise, but Debby was also sans a swim costume.

"I've been trying to convince Debby to give naturism a try for years," Brian confessed as the four splashed happily about.

"I always thought he was just being a typical boy," Debby added. "You know, trying to get a peek

at a girl naked. But during this contest I realized that he honestly doesn't consider nudity to be an important thing. Also, he's been so supportive of me. When he suggested that we join you guys today for a swim, I decided to give it a try."

Within the next thirty minutes, Kim and Caitlin were joined in the pool by all but three of the remaining contestants. Only Jamie, Nora and Dick remained absent. Although all the competitors from both teams had finally adopted using the concealment charm rather than wearing the actual revealing team costume, they were still not all completely comfortable with being seen totally nude. Therefore, some of the contestants decided to wear swim costumes. A few of the girls opted for a halfway approach; they kept their bottoms on but swam topless.

"We wondered where everyone had got to," Jamie called out as she approached the pool accompanied by Nora and Dick. "How's the water?"

"It's great," Caitlin confirmed. "Why don't you three discard your clothes and join us?"

Nora and Dick both exchanged nervous looks, but it was Jamie who spoke. "As tempting as that idea is, I'm not sure if it would be appropriate for me now that I'm about to..."

"What does you becoming a professor have to do with your being a naturist?" Caitlin yelled. "You always taught me to be an individual and not to give in to majority pressure. I never thought you'd be one to sell out."

"I'm not selling out," Jamie protested. "It's just that..."

"You're selling out," Nora protested. "You've spent the last year convincing me to be brave and strong and now you're the weak one. If you truly believe in something deeply, you don't just give up your beliefs for convenience sake."

"But I have responsibility now; an image to maintain now," Jamie insisted.

"Professors Potter and Granger don't seem to have any trouble with getting paid respect and the entire wizard world knows that they are practicing naturists. I think you should listen to your own preaching. People should be judged on their merit, not what they do or don't wear. Dick and I are going to go swimming and if you're half the person I know you to be; you will too."

Nora quickly discarded her blouse and jeans and was soon standing at the edge of the pool wearing only her bra and knickers. She glanced impatiently at Dick. "What are you waiting for? I thought you wanted us to do things together?" Nora took a deep breath, unhooked her bra, slipped her knickers off and dove in the pool.

Dick noticeably gulped and then quickly slipped out of his garments and followed Nora into the pool leaving Jamie standing at the edge open-mouthed.

"It's not really about being a naturist," Caitlin said. "It's more about changing. You don't fix something that isn't broken. You've been a success your entire life and everyone loves you just as you are. We all want you to be a great professor, but we don't want to lose the person we've loved and respected in the process."

Jamie smiled and said, "I love you Sis," before slipping out of her blouse and skirt and jumping naked into the pool.

* * * * *

"Hurry and get dressed," Kim bellowed. "Dr Soderbergh said that lunch was at one o'clock."

"He also said that we should dress comfortably for lunch," Caitlin retorted. "I'm quite comfy like I am."

"If I didn't know better, I'd think that Emily was channeling through you," Kim retorted. "She's the one usually pushing the boundaries of nudism, not you."

"I'm just pushing your button," Caitlin answered back with a laugh. "I know I can't tour the park or eat lunch like this, but you have to admit that it would be nice if we could."

"Yeah," Kim reluctantly agreed. "So what are you wearing? I'm going to dress in a halter and shorts."

Caitlin winced. "I don't know how you can endure to wear jeans and shorts. I hate rough restrictive clothing that rubs against my body." She walked over to her duffle bag and pulled out a brightly colored garment, effortlessly slipping it on.

"That's cute," Kim commented, checking-out the vivid backless sundress. "But isn't it awfully short?"

"Actually, it's intended to be worn as a bathing suit cover-up," Caitlin commented innocently as she checked herself out in the full-length door mirror. She stretched her arms high over her head and turned around in a full circle to see the effect this had on the garment's already minimal coverage.

"Remind me to be certain and sit lady-like today and not climb any trees," Caitlin said, her voice sounding slightly guilty. "Dad gets nervous when I wear exceptionally short outfits and this seems to have shrunk a good deal since I last wore it."

The girls both applied hair-grooming charms and then rushed out the door and headed toward the main dining room. As they entered the room, Hermione seemed at first to glare at her teenage daughter. Caitlin smiled and tugged her ear in greeting. Hermione gave an annoyed smile and tugged her own ear in return.

When everyone was lastly seated, Dr. Soderbergh got to his feet. "Again, welcome to Fantastic Island. Before we begin our meal, I would like to quote a few words from a dear friend. And here they are: Nitwit! Blubber! Oddment! Tweak!"

"Thank you!"

He sat back down. Everyone clapped politely, but most of the students bore puzzled expressions on their faces. Harry's eyes seemed to be watering.

"Did you know Professor Dumbledore?" Harry asked, his voice shaky.

"Rather well," Soderbergh said, hanging his head sadly. "A great man, a great wizard and a terrible loss to our world. I had the pleasure of working on several projects with Albus and his partner, Nicolas Flamel, when I was a much younger man. Throughout my life, I often sought out his counsel and opinion."

Harry nodded his head sadly. After all these years, Harry still greatly missed Dumbledore's sage advice and guidance.

The meal served by the resort was sumptuous and rivaled the feasts provided at Hogwarts. After everyone had finished dessert, Dr. Soderbergh got to his feet again. The room fell silent.

"Ahem - just a few more words now that we have all satisfied our desire for food. I'm quite pleased that the television network has decided to make use of Fantastic Island as the location for the third task of your intercontinental competition. Fantastic Island is the culmination of my life-long dream to create a safe environment for wizard-kind to view the magical creatures of our world.

"But this is in no way akin to a Muggle zoo. Our interactive park will never be complete. Our goal is to educate you, entertain you, and at the same time thrill you."

Suddenly Soderbergh seemed a tad dejected. "Regrettably construction is running slightly behind schedule and not all of our interactive attractions are available for your enjoyment. Today you will only be able to experience our Safari into Fantasy and Dragon Encounter rides, but I hope they will give you an understanding of our ultimate goal."

"Now if you'll please follow me, we'll proceed to Dragon Encounter. It's a bit of a walk, but Apparition is unfortunately not possible within the park."

"Rides?" Kim questioned. "I wonder what he means by rides."

Caitlin shrugged her shoulders. "Anything is better than walking around all day looking at penned up creatures."

Both Kim and Caitlin squinted as they walked out into the bright sunshine. "I thought a heavy rain storm was predicted for today," Caitlin said. "The weather man must have been wrong again. There isn't a cloud in the sky."

"I wish there were," Kim uttered nervously. "Caitlin, I don't want to upset you, but in this bright sunlight your dress is translucent."

"Translucent? What do you mean translucent?" Caitlin asked.

"Transparent, see-through," Kim repeated horror-struck. "You can see everything and I mean everything. You might as well have remained nude."

Caitlin appeared not to be the least bit disconcerted by this revelation.

"I guess it's good then that we all went skinny dipping this morning," she said unconcernedly. "No one will be seeing anything they haven't seen prior to this. I wouldn't want to embarrass anyone."

Kim just stared dumbfounded at Caitlin. "Are you sure you're not Emily using Polyjuice?"

"I'm sure," Caitlin laughed. "Unlike Emily, I wouldn't, with intent wear something that I knew was completely see-through, but I'm not going to scream and go hide in embarrassment either. I'm comfortable with my body and with people seeing it. I guess, though, that this explains why Mum gave me that strange look when we entered the dinning hall for lunch. She must have known this outfit would be transparent out in the bright sunlight. At the moment, I doubt that she and Dad are

extremely pleased with me."

The walk to the entrance of Dragon Encounter took about fifteen minutes and Caitlin could feel many eyes staring at her the entire time, but it didn't fluster her. She knew that nudity in and of itself was completely innocent.

"Wow!" Kim said as they approached the roped off queue area. "They must really expect this place to be popular. Can you imagine being at the back end of a line that long?"

"I'd rather not," Caitlin said as they walked directly into the main door of the large building in front of them. "This must be some sort of exhibit," she said, slightly disappointed. "They certainly don't have any live dragons in here."

They continued down a long winding corridor until they finally came to a large open area decorated to resemble a wooded area. There, they saw a platform and next to it what resembled roller coaster cars on a track.

Once everyone was assembled, Dr. Soderbergh cleared his throat to get his or her attention. "This will be our transportation for our encounter with dragons. Each train holds twenty-four passengers, so we'll all be able to ride together. Please watch your step when boarding and be sure to pull the body restraint down and secure your seat belt."

"Harry, why do you think they have such a sophisticated restraint system?" Hermione inquired. "It seems rather over-kill for a slow tour tram."

"I imagine they just want to make sure that no one gets out while we're in motion," Harry answered unconcernedly. "Even at a slow speed someone could get hurt by trying to get off and then sue, plus people are so destructive nowadays. I imagine it is also partly to prevent vandalism."

"Dr. Soderbergh, everyone is secured," said a security guard who had just finished inspecting everyone's restraints.

"Then let's begin," Soderbergh said expectantly.

The guard approached a panel and pushed a button. Immediately a traffic signal on the wall turned from red to yellow, and then just as quickly to green. Without warning heads hit the back of the cushioned seats as the coaster straight away sped off.

It sounded like everyone was screaming. No one had anticipated a roller coaster ride; especially not one that it seemed was instantly rocketing along at over eighty miles an hour.

They were surrounded by total darkness. Without warning, a brilliant blue flame temporarily blinded Hermione and then the coaster went into a spiraling corkscrew. It shot down one hill and then up another until it was totally inverted. Hermione was about to close her eyes when she saw two huge deep red eyes staring at her before the coaster was again blasted with flame.

It was the longest thrill ride that any of them had ever experienced; at every peak and valley they were greeted by the sound of horrible roars and the blast of furnace-like flames. Finally the coaster slowed dramatically and everyone thought they were returning to the starting point, but instead they entered a glass like tunnel and were suddenly basked in dazzling sunlight. As their eyes tried to adjust to the bright light, a voice emanated from speakers embedded in their head rests.

"We hope you enjoyed the first part of Dragon Encounter, Flying with the Dragons, a simulated dragon flight. We are now entering Land of the Dragons. The tunnel through which we are now traveling is made from one of the strongest polymers known to man; it is fireproof and virtually indestructible. The material has been magically charmed so that we can see out and study the dragons in their natural habitat, but so that the dragons cannot see us.

Our journey begins in a lush valley of New Zealand, home to the Antipodean Opaleye. Unusually for a dragon, it dwells in valleys rather than mountains."

Caitlin gasped. They were about to pass within a few yards of a female Opaleye who was nesting on a group of pale grey eggs.

"The Antipodean Opaleye is of medium size, just between two and three tons. It is arguably the most beautiful type of dragon with its iridescent, pearly scales and glittering, multi-colored, pupil-less eyes, hence its name. This dragon produces a very vivid scarlet flame. By dragon standards it is not particularly aggressive and rarely kills unless hungry. Compared to the Hungarian Horntail it could actually be considered docile."

Harry felt a brief shiver at the mention of the Horntail. He still vividly remembered his encounter in fourth year with a very angry Horntail.

The tunnel went dark briefly as the coaster began to climb slightly.

"I think we're going from one enclosure to another," Hermione commented. "It's clever how they've avoided us seeing any barriers between the dragons."

"Great Britain is the native home of two dragon types," the programmed voice continued. "You will need to watch carefully in order to spot the Common Welsh Green because it blends well with the lush grass of its homeland."

Kim nudged Caitlin and pointed to a pair of dragons barely visible in the tall grass.

"This breed is among the least troublesome of the dragons, preferring like the Opaleye, to prey on sheep and actively avoid humans unless provoked. The Welsh green has an easily recognizable and surprisingly melodious roar. Fire is issued in thin jets. The Welch Green's eggs are earthy brown, flecked with green."

"I wish Hagrid was alive to see this place," Hermione said, her voice melancholy.

"Yeah!" agreed Harry sadly. "He loved Baby Norbert."

The journey continued for another fifteen minutes as they visited Norwegian Ridgebacks, Ukrainian Ironbellies and many other breeds, including the most dangerous of dragons, the Hungarian Horntail.

What no one had become conscious of during the journey was that as they had progressed from breed to breed, they had also climbed higher and higher. Dragon Encounter ended as it began, with an exhilarating coaster ride that started with the highest coaster drop in the world.

"That was terrific," Kim exclaimed to Caitlin as they exited the ride. "I've been to zoos and amusement parks, but that was the best of both places."

Doctor Soderbergh beamed brightly as he listened to the students talk excitedly and lavish praise on the Dragon Encounter experience.

"They certainly seemed to all enjoy the event," Harry said, shaking the Doctor's hand in congratulations. "If the rest of the park is half as exciting, I'd say you have a guaranteed success on your hands."

Hermione was still trying to catch her breath, but nodded in agreement.

"We wanted to be more than just a wizard version of a Muggle zoo," Soderbergh elucidated. "Even looking at the rarest and most interesting of magical creatures can become, after a time, boring, especially to teenagers."

"I doubt that anyone will ever consider that experience boring," Hermione commented, trying unsuccessfully to adjust her wind-blown hair.

"In time we plan to have over a dozen such rides," Doctor Soderbergh remarked. "Unfortunately, only four will be completed when the park initially opens and of those four only one other is available for you to enjoy today."

"Is it another coaster type ride?" Hermione asked apprehensively.

"No," Soderbergh replied with a grin, noting Hermione's obvious nervousness. "This is more like a safari ride. We're working on some ideas to make it fairly exciting, but they aren't ready to implement as of yet."

As they followed the signs toward Fantastic Safari, Caitlin noticed that Debby and Brian seemed to be lagging behind, but she declined to point this out to Kim feeling it might be upsetting to the girl.

"Dr. Soderbergh," Ron asked uncertainly. "You mentioned that Fantastic Island was the home to nearly all of the beasts described in Newt Scamander's book. Does that mean that you have Acromantula?"

"Oh yes!" Soderbergh answered animatedly. "We started out with only one couple, but now we have one of the largest colonies in the world. It would undoubtedly be even larger, but the creatures have the unfortunate habit of sometimes feeding on their young."

Ron quaked. Although Ron had often in the past showed his outstanding bravery, when it came to any type of spiders, he was an admitted coward.

"Don't tell me that you're afraid of spiders," Rishard Simone, barked teasingly. "I thought members of the covenant of three were purportedly fearless?"

Ron resisted pouncing on the obnoxious twerp. As much as he would inwardly like to crush Simone, he had the image of a Hogwarts professor to maintain.

"You'd be fearful of Acromantula, too if you'd experienced them at close range as Ron and I have," Harry responded angrily. "You're hardly someone to pass judgment on another's manliness."

"Well, I never!" Rishard spouted haughtily. He placed his hands on his hips and walked temperamentally away from Ron and Harry.

"I swear, one of these days I'm going to kill that little fag," Ron cursed.

"I'm afraid you'll have to take a number," Hermione said understandingly. "There are a lot of people ahead of you."

Ron smiled resentfully.

"Here we are," Soderbergh called out breathlessly pointing to the entrance sign that read, Safari into Fantasy. "Unfortunately we'll have to split up and take two vehicles."

"Team USA, this way!" Bud Ryan, the American coach, shouted.

Hurriedly the American team boarded the first of two waiting transports.

"I think I'll ride with Coach Ryan and his team," Rishard said, throwing Ron, Hermione and Harry a sneering look.

"I wonder if he actually imagines that will upset any of us?" Ron asked no one in particular.

When Rishard and the American team were all secured in their vehicle, it departed.

"Who is driving?" Hermione asked.

"No one," Soderbergh answered proudly. "This excursion is completely computer charm controlled. We have a fleet of these vehicles that will escort our visitors through the park. They take different routes so that other than your own group, you never see another human during the safari. If you'll all please board, your vehicle will depart as soon as the other is completely out of sight."

"Aren't you going with us?" Hermione asked.

"No, unfortunately I must get back to the hotel and make some last minute arrangements for tomorrow's competition," Soderbergh answered apologetically. "The journey is completely computerized and the vehicles are charmed to locate and point out the various creatures. I hope you all enjoy your adventure. I'll be looking forward to hearing your observations at dinner tonight."

"Wait for us," Brian and Debby called out frantically, running to catch up to the already departed vehicle containing their teammates.

Harry jumped in front of the two students. "You'll never catch up to them; besides you can't get on the transport once it is moving. Can we make room for two more?" he called out to his team.

Caitlin and Kim scrunched close together and motioned frantically for Debby and Brian to join them.

"Hurry, take a seat," Harry said, returning to his own seat next to Hermione.

Brian smiled guiltily to Caitlin and Kim as he and Debby squeezed in next to them.

"So you two finally came clean with each other," Kim said, staring knowingly at the young couple.

Debby blushed. "What are you talking about?" she asked anxiously.

"It was clear that you two were meant to be more than friends," she declared. "I think everyone could see it. Is that why you lagged behind; so you could talk and snog in private?"

"We weren't snogging," Brian protested.

"Brian, I'm not mad," Kim said. "Maybe a little envious, but I'm not angry." She hesitated briefly. "But, if you weren't snogging, then how did you happen to get Debby's lip gloss all over your neck and face?"

Debby jerked her head in Brian's direction, and then turned a vivid red. There was no denying the incriminating evidence.

"I'm sorry Kim," Brian pleaded. "I didn't mean to lead you on or hurt you. Honestly, I didn't even recognize that my feelings for Debby went beyond simple friendship."

"Don't apologize," Kim said sincerely. "I'm happy that you two finally woke up to your true feelings for each other."

As they were chatting, their transport began to slowly move. Ron, Hermione and Harry, who were all sitting behind the driver's seat, exchanged anxious looks. It was unnerving to be riding in a Muggle type vehicle and watch the steering wheel turn, yet know there was no one actually driving. For a time they followed the road, which ran parallel to, and about twenty-five yards from the security fence.

"Isn't this the same road that we used to get to the hotel?" Brian questioned the girls. "If we didn't get to see any beasts before, what is going to make this trip any different?"

"That is," Kim answered, her voice shaking as she pointed to a ramp ahead. "It looks like we're going to leave the main road and actually go under the protective barrier."

Everyone fell silent as they proceeded down the thirty-degree incline and entered a torchlight tunnel.

"Do you think we are actually going under the fence?" Hermione asked uneasily. "How can that be safe?"

"I'm not sure, but it must be," Harry responded. His hand, however, had automatically reached for his wand.

The passage continued for some time until finally dim natural light was visible ahead.

"Are we coming out of the tunnel?" Ron asked nervously.

"Yes and no," Hermione answered. "It looks like we're going to remain in this protective tube, but it appears that we are now above ground." She looked around. "We must be in an extremely dense forest. Despite it being mid afternoon, it's extremely dark."

Without warning the speakers implanted in their headrests came to life. "Please relax, you are completely secure. For your safety and to avoid any accidents all wands have been temporary deactivated."

Hermione and Harry exchanged uneasy looks. No matter how safe they might actually be, neither

was fond of the thought that their wands would not function.

Hermione grasped Harry's hand and as he looked in her direction, she indicated the top of the transparent tunnel. They both glanced at Ron, who fortunately was looking straight ahead.

Suddenly there was a scream, then another and another. Spiders, Not tiny spiders like those Hermione had noted, but spiders the size of carthorses, eight-eyed, eight-legged, black, hairy gigantic spiders were thudding down onto their protective tube.

"Harry, they can see us," Hermione screamed. "They're trying to get to us."

The students, both male and female were screaming in panic, trying to undo their restraints and escape the vehicle that now seemed to be moving ahead at an excruciatingly slow speed. Ron's eyes were closed; sweat was pouring from every pore of his body.

"Attack of the Acromantula is the first of many adventures you will experience on your safari today," the bodiless voice in their headrests announced. "This beast is believed to be wizard-bred, possibly intended to guard wizard dwellings or treasure. Despite its near-human intelligence, the Acromantula cannot be trained and is highly dangerous."

Hermione wondered how many of the students had calmed enough to hear any of the informative dialogue.

"This creature originated in Borneo. Its distinctive features include the thick black hair that covers its body; its leg span, which may reach up to fifteen feet; its pincers, which produce a distinctive clicking sound when the Acromantula is excited or angry; and a poisonous secretion."

The description continued, but most of the listeners were more interested in the ride moving on than they were in learning more about the beasts. Finally the tube sloped and the transport was again underground.

"You can open your eyes," Harry said, nudging Ron.

Ron peeked before slowly opening his eyes. "That was bloody dreadful," he cursed. "They should warn people what the hell to expect."

"Actually, they did have a list posted of the beasts we would see," Hermione explained. "But they didn't make it clear that we'd view them from an entrée's point of view."

"I'm glad that's over," Caitlin sighed. "I thought for awhile there that I'd pull an Emily and pee my knickers."

"How could you do that?" Brian asked innocently. "You noticeably don't have any on."

"It's just a figure of speech," Caitlin retorted, crossly.

They next encountered a Chimaera before traveling underwater to observe at close range a Hippocampus and then a group of Kelpies. Once again on dry land, they visited the Quintaped followed by a Sphinx.

"I think that was the same Sphinx that I bumped into in the maze during the third task of the Triwizard tournament," Harry said conversationally.

Hermione was about to comment when a shrill alarm sounded and the vehicle came to a sudden halt.

"Please remain seated, the safari ride will continue momentarily."

"I wonder what's wrong?" Nora asked, gazing concernedly at Dick.

"I doubt that it is anything important," Dick said. "You have to remember that this place uses a lot of Muggle technology and Muggle stuff is constantly breaking down. We'll probably start back up in a couple of minutes."

Just then, off in the distance, there was a great flash of light followed by the sound of a huge explosion. Within seconds the tube in which they were traveling was filled with a foul smelling smoke. Red lights began to flash on the ceiling of the tube and their seat restraints suddenly unlocked.

Over the speakers came a loud voice commanding, "Emergency evacuation! Emergency evacuation! Please follow the arrows to the nearest emergency shelter immediately!"

"Harry, what are we going to do?" Hermione asked staring at the flashing red evacuation arrows.

"That's the direction the smoke came from; if we follow the arrows we'll be heading in the direction of that explosion."

Chapter Twenty-four Dead or Alive

"Before we do anything, we need to comfort the students and perform the Bubble-Head Charm on everyone," Harry said, steadfastly. "We won't be going anyplace if this smoke proves to be toxic."

"What if our wands still won't function?" Hermione asked, concernedly.

"Pray that's not the case or this might end up being our tomb," Harry replied, solemnly.

Providentially, whatever had caused the ride to malfunction had also lifted the ward that caused their wands to not work. Hermione gasped a sigh of temporary relief as she helped Harry and Ron cast charms on all the students. Once everyone's head was enclosed in a bubble of breathable air, the trio started checking the emotional state of the students.

"They're a brave lot," Ron stated after a few minutes; clearly impressed by the students. "Even the younger ones seem to be emotionally in control of the situation."

"Hermione, at the speed we were traveling before coming to a standstill, how long do you imagine it would have taken us to get to the point where that explosion occurred," Jamie asked tentatively.

"Oh! I don't know," Hermione answered, somewhat inattentively. "Assuming this tube runs in a straight line to that point, I'd estimate somewhere between a minute or two. Why do you ask?"

"Weren't we supposed to start off a minute after the American team?" Jamie inquired. "But we were delayed slightly because we waited for Brian and Debby to get on board."

Jamie didn't need to clarify her query any further. Harry, Hermione and Ron immediately realized where she was headed with her questioning and they swapped troubled looks, but before any of them could speak there was another explosion; this one coming from the direction in which the ride had originated.

"If there was any question as to what direction to head, that settled it," Harry remarked, clenching his fist, an anxious expression covering his face.

"Yeah! I sure don't want to go back to where those spiders are," Ron said. Just the thought gave him the shivers.

"Harry, you don't think that ..." Hermione couldn't bring herself to finish the sentence.

"I don't know, Hermione," he said, shaking his head in frustration, "but we have to find out for sure, one way or the other. If the American team was involved in the explosion up ahead we have to check for survivors; see if there is anybody we can help."

Hermione nodded, fighting to retain her composure. They were students, not yet adults, just kids actually. Their lives were just beginning. They had to be all right.

"Listen up, everybody," Ron shouted to the students. "We're going to disembark the vehicle and proceed on foot in the direction the arrows indicate. Everyone stay together and keep alert."

"Professor Weasley, should we draw our wands?" Jeffery MacDowell asked.

"Not just yet," Harry cut in. "Everybody is a little jumpy and we don't want to hazard someone

getting hurt by a misfired curse. We'll give you the word if wands are needed."

"Do you actually think we'll need wands?" Hermione whispered apprehensively.

"I don't know," Harry said shaking his head sadly. "It depends on whether that explosion involved this shielding tube and if so, whether it was breached or not."

"If it was breached, we're no longer secure in here," Hermione muttered.

"No, and it most certainly isn't any safer out there," Harry said, gesturing toward the transparent wall of the tube. He looked forlornly at the ten students whose lives were now in his, Ron and Hermione's hands. Less than an hour ago they were all screaming in glee; would they soon all be screaming in horror and pain?

* * * * *

"Have you received a report from Keane yet?" Slytherin asked, commandingly.

"Yes, My Lord," Nott answered, uneasiness apparent in his voice. He dithered slightly before continuing on. "Eric has run into some slight problems."

"Out with it!" Slytherin bellowed. "I'll not kill the messenger today. You are much too loyal and valuable a servant for me to forgo."

"Thank you Sire," Nott said, groveling at his master's feet. "It seems that Eric underestimated the safeguards that Doctor Soderbergh had built into his security systems."

"Am I to understand that he has botched his assignment," Salazar Slytherin snarled angrily.

"N-N-Not entirely," Nott stammered. "Although Keane was able to successfully disable both the primary and secondary shields, it appears that the major barriers of the island were safe guarded by yet a third source of which he was unaware."

"Then he has failed," Slytherin retorted, his voice coupled with disappointment and anger.

"Not entirely," Nott clarified. "Although the outer wards remain intact, preventing the beasts from escaping or overrunning the island. The interior wards have failed."

"Meaning exactly what?" Slytherin queried impatiently.

"The students and their chaperones were on a safari ride at the time the interior wards failed. They are now trapped behind the island's protective barriers," explained Nott.

Slytherin smirked. "They are imprisoned together with the creatures they sought to observe; how perfect. What is their likelihood of survival?"

"Infinitesimal," Nott answered. "The wards protecting the tubes in which they were traveling cannot be restored because of an explosion that caused a rupture in the system. Now that the tube can be seen by each and every one of the creatures it is only a matter of time before it becomes penetrated and over-ridden. If Potter and his companions remain in the tube, it will ultimately become their last

resting place. If they leave the tube, they are at the mercy of the island's creatures. Either way, they will most surely perish."

Slytherin nodded his head approvingly. "Perhaps I won't have to kill Eric after all," Slytherin laughed. "Has news of this 'tragedy' been made public yet?"

"The Ministry has been trying to keep a tight lid on the event, but it is just a matter of time before word gets out. After all, reporters from all over the world are headed there for the competition that was to occur tomorrow."

"Have Eric assist the news media surreptitiously in any way he can," Slytherin ordered. "We can't have the Ministry thwarting the people's right to know. And make sure the world realizes that this was no accident. Credit should be given where credit is due." Salazar shrugged dramatically. "It appears that I will never have the pleasure of meeting the great Boy-Who-Lived and his lovely Mudblood wife. How sad! I had so eagerly anticipated the time when they would prostrate themselves in my presence and kiss my feet before I killed them."

* * * * *

After about twenty minutes of silent walking, Harry came to an unexpected halt. "Hermione, wait here with the students while Ron and I explore what is around this bend."

Hermione glared warningly at Harry, as she reached for her wand. "You're doing it again, Harry," she said with meaning. "Jamie is quite capable of staying back with the other students. You, Ron and I are a team; we have been since our first year at Hogwarts. I didn't suddenly become incompetent when I said 'I do'."

"Sorry! Just being overprotective again," Harry muttered apologetically. "I love you."

"I love you, too," Hermione said, kissing Harry briefly. "Now let's go see what lies in store for us around that corner."

Harry gave Ron a resigned look as they lingered for a moment while Hermione passed on instructions to Jamie. Then as the students waited nervously, the three professors slowly disappeared around the curve.

They had only gone a short distance when Harry again stopped. "Did you hear that?" he asked.

"All I hear is some birds twittering," Ron retorted.

"That's the problem," Hermione cut in. "We're in an enclosed protective tube. We shouldn't be hearing any birds unless... unless the tube has been breached."

They proceeded cautiously and then suddenly all three froze. They were faced with a horrific sight.

"NO! NO!" Hermione screamed. "They can't be dead. Those poor innocent children." She buried her head in Harry's shoulder, tears streaming from her eyes.

"What happened?" Ron questioned, the revulsion of what he was viewing choking his voice. "My god! They were cremated alive; they didn't even making it out of the vehicle."

"Hermione, I need your help," Harry urged. "Can you piece this puzzle together? What went wrong; what exactly do you surmise took place here?"

Hermione clenched her teeth, trying to gather her wits about her. She looked away from the traumatic scene and gazed out the gaping hole in the protective tube, staring at the soon to set sun. Then she saw the powerful, large grey African beast.

"Harry, it was an Erumpent, like that one" she exclaimed, pointing at a rhinoceros like beast in the distance. "An Erumpent attacked the tube and the result was a catastrophic explosion."

"But I thought they were rather passive and wouldn't attack unless sorely provoked?" Harry questioned. "Surely, this section of the tube was charmed to be invisible. How could the beast have even seen it?"

Hermione shook her head trying to make sense of the awful series of events that had occurred. Then as if a light was turned on, it became clear to her, the only rational explanation.

"The beast was frightened," she exclaimed.

"By what?" Harry asked incredulously. "And why would it attack a vehicle it couldn't even see?"

"I think it could see the vehicle," Hermione replied. "I think that's what scared it. Consider this. Our vehicle stopped and the alarm sounded in the tube before the explosion ever occurred. What if the Erumpent was peacefully grazing adjacent to this section when suddenly the tube and the vehicle within it became visible? It would have felt challenged and thus attacked. The Erumpent's horn can pierce everything from skin to metal, and contains a deadly fluid, which will cause whatever is injected with it to explode."

"Then Soderbergh is responsible for these deaths," Harry asserted irately. "Him and his damn glorified zoo."

"I don't think so, Harry," Hermione said. "Dr. Soderbergh was too confident in the safeguards. The only thing he wasn't primed for was sabotage. Remember his remark:

"For our system to fail it would have to be a case of deliberate systematically planned sabotage. Honestly, who would ever consider such an act of hostility against a zoological park?"

"Then you don't think that this was all just a dreadful accident," Harry declared. "You think this was a deliberate act of sabotage? You think these innocent students were murdered. But who..."

"Someone horrible, with no conscience. Someone that wants the Wizarding World to know that he is back and organized to assume the throne," Hermione announced tremulously. "Someone that wanted to use this tournament as a stage to announce his intentions and cause worldwide pandemonium, Salazar Slytherin"

Harry bobbed his head in agreement; it all made sense. "The greasy bastard," Harry bellowed. "He killed these defenseless students just to gain worldwide media hype."

Hermione grimaced. "Slytherin wanted the news coverage, but I don't feel the American students were his primary target; I think you, Ron and I were. He wants to show the world that the Covenant

of Three is only human and no match for the power of Salazar Slytherin. He's hoping to bring the world to its knees without ever hurling a curse."

"And just like Voldemort, he doesn't care how many innocent lives he destroys in the process," Harry voiced disgustedly as he dejectedly viewed the slaughter. "It's going to be dark soon. We have to find a safe place to spend the night, but first we need to account for everyone that was in that vehicle."

"Do you think anyone could have possibly survived?" Ron asked skeptically.

"Doubtful," Harry declared. "But if anyone did, we have to locate them straight away. No one can survive in this place unaided. Hermione, is there enough remaining aura for you to recognize the bodies?"

"Not for me," she said, shaking her head disconsolately. "Caitlin's abilities are far superior to mine. She might be able to identify them, but I hesitate exposing someone her age to such carnage."

"Regrettably, it appears that we are once again at war," Harry declared, heaving a deep sigh. "Children must age quickly during such times. Besides, they all must pass this point eventually. We could shield the scene from their view, but they have a right to know the awfulness our world faces."

"I'll go get Caitlin and prepare the others," Hermione said, solemnly.

* * * * *

"Dad, I think you should have a look at this," Caitlin called out, anxiously.

With Hermione's assistance, Caitlin had been identifying the charred vestiges in the vehicle based on their lingering aura traces.

"We know that there were eight passengers riding this safari rover, two adults and six students," Caitlin noted. "I've been able to identify remains of the six students and that," she pointed to a pile of ashes, "is what's left of the American coach, Mr. Ryan. I can't, however, find any hint of Mr. Simone."

"Is it possible he was carried off by the Erumpent?" Harry inquired.

Hermione pointed to a large pile of ashes. "The Erumpent that caused this tragedy died in the explosion, but look what Caitlin noticed." She indicated the ruins of all the other seats where ashes had been found; there were remnants of still buckled seatbelts. "I saw Rishard jump into this seat next to Bud Ryan; look at the remnant of his belt."

"It's been cut using a Muggle knife," Harry said, shocked.

Ron looked at the others dubiously. "So, you think Rishard is still alive? That somehow he managed to cut his belt and flee the vehicle before the explosion? But why would he be carrying a knife and what would make him consider it necessary to escape the vehicle?"

"Harry, the time between the ride stopping and the explosion was too brief for him to both sever the

belt and also sprint out of danger," Hermione stated without doubt.

"I know," Harry agreed, his voice edged with disgust. "That's what has me sickened. I think the belt had been cut long beforehand."

"Then you believe he knew that the Erumpent was going to attack?" Ron asked incredulously.

"No, I'm sure that element wasn't planned," Harry answered. "But I do believe that he was aware that there was going to be a malfunction and that he was primed to evacuate the vehicle when it occurred."

"I'm confused," Ron admitted. "If the explosion wasn't part of the plan, than what was the actual purpose of the breakdown?"

"We may never know for sure," Harry said, shrugging. "Right now we don't have time to speculate or even search for Rishard." He glanced in the direction of the setting sun. "We need to see if we can locate food and water, then find a place to bunker in for the night."

"We're going to leave the tube and go out there?" Caitlin whispered nervously.

"We have to," Harry said giving Caitlin's shoulder a reassuring squeeze. "Once the sun sets it will be pitch dark in here. We wouldn't be able to make out anything approaching and if we use our wands for light, we could attract unwanted attention."

Caitlin gulped in understanding.

"Will you please get Jamie and the others, so that I can explain our plans?"

Caitlin nodded and hurried off.

"Harry, do you think it's safe out there?" Hermione asked concernedly.

"No, but it's not safe in here either," he made clear. "At least out there we have someplace to run and someplace to hide if we're attacked. In here we're like a hamster trapped in a tube with only one way to go." He paused briefly. "I got the impression that the safari was taking us from one enclosed area to another. If other Erumpents are the only dangerous beasts in this part, we should be safe as long as we give them a wide berth."

Hermione and Ron both nodded their concurrence. Harry had led them out of numerous dangerous situations in the past. Hopefully, his judgment would win through at least one more time.

The students gathered around and listened apprehensively as Professor Potter explained his strategy. Although most of the students were leery about venturing out of the tube, they were also hungry and thirsty. What the Professor said made sense. As secure as the tube might seem, it was like being trapped in a cattle chute.

"Everyone stay together," Harry called out, as they slowly negotiated their way out of the ruptured tube. "Pair up with someone and don't let them out of your sight."

"Do you think we'll find any food and water?" Hermione asked, as they slowly made their way through the dense underbrush.

"Water, yes," Harry said confidently. "I'm sure the beasts have a natural water supply, although, it might be necessary to perform a purification charm. As for food, I'm not sure. I believe the Erumpent is a plant eater."

Hermione nodded her head in conformation.

"Look!" Lee Wilson shouted excitedly, pointing up at a nearby tree. "Are they bananas?"

"Good eye," Harry said, slapping the Hufflepuff boy proudly on the back. "Only question now is how do we get to them?"

"Climb," Caitlin said, matter-of-factly. "Mum always says I'm half monkey, now is my chance to prove it. I'll just need a boost up to the first bough."

"Caitlin!" Kim cried, grabbing her friend's arm. "You can't climb a tree. Have you forgotten what you have on?"

"You're right," Caitlin said gratefully. "I almost forgot. This is my favorite cover-up. I wouldn't want to chance damaging it." Without faltering or asking permission, she hastily slipped the article of clothing off over her head.

"Who'll give me a boost?" Caitlin asked, standing unashamedly with her hands on her hips, totally naked except for her trainers.

Harry looked beside himself, ready to burst.

"Harry, it's okay. Don't get agitated," Hermione said, holding him back. "She's a naturist and these are her friends. You reprimanding her would only embarrass you both."

Jamie quickly ran to assist Caitlin, pulling a reluctant Donald Thomas along with her.

"How are we going to do this?" Don asked Jamie; doubtful as to how exactly one should go about properly lifting a nude girl.

"Jeff, come here and help us," Jamie called out urgently to the tall boy. "We'll do this like Muggle cheerleaders. If you can bend down slightly, Don and I will assist Caitlin to stand on your shoulders. Then try to stand straight. Once she is balanced, she should be able to reach the lowest branch. Don, be ready to catch her if she slips."

Three times they tried and failed. Don's face had ended up a brilliant red. The last attempt had required him to catch Caitlin in a rather private way.

"No big deal," Caitlin said indifferently, readying herself for another try. "Just promise me that you won't tell my boyfriend. He's never touched me there."

"I wish I had her confidence," Hermione said, clutching Harry's hand.

"Because she is so secure with her body?" Harry asked.

"No." Hermione replied sadly. "Because she's so positive that we'll return to Hogwarts. Harry, what will become of Ben and Emily if we don't make it back?"

"We've been in worst situations," Harry affirmed. "We'll make it through this."

Hermione squeezed Harry's hand as she gave him a weak smile.

"She made it." Nora shouted excitedly.

Everyone's eyes were glued on Caitlin as they watched her ostensibly swing from branch to branch effortlessly.

"I thought Emily was the Tomboy in the family," Harry remarked to Hermione. "Caitlin is amazing; she reminds me of a Muggle trapeze artist."

Hermione simply smiled with obvious pride.

"That's something you don't see everyday," Don said, his eyes fixed attentively on Caitlin.

"No," Jeff agreed. "Do you think we could hide her dress? I wouldn't mind her remaining unclothed."

"Be careful what you say boys," Jamie warned. "That's my younger sister you're chatting about." Then she snickered. "You'll in all likelihood get your wish. Caitlin prefers being nude and most likely won't cover herself unless ordered by Harry or Hermione."

After the group had gorged on bananas, they luckily with no trouble located a nearby source of drinking water. Jamie had been accurate about Caitlin's desire to remain unclothed. Although prompted several times by a persistent Kim, Caitlin showed no inclination to cover herself.

Harry had been upset when Caitlin first shed her clothes to climb the tree. He was even more disturbed that she had remained nude. "Hermione, don't you think we should tell Caitlin to put her clothes back on?" Harry asked, disconcerted.

Hermione looked desolately toward Harry. "If I ask you a question, will you give me a truthful answer?"

"I never lie to you," Harry said, wholeheartedly.

"I know you'd never lie to me," Hermione said, taking Harry's hand and squeezing it firmly. "But sometimes you don't tell me the entire truth, either. Honestly, what do you think the odds are of us all getting out of this situation alive?"

Harry looked Hermione directly in the eye. "Slim to none," Harry answered straightforwardly. "If all the protections are down, this island will shortly be swarming with beasts. Everyone will be scampering to Apparate safely off the island; they've undoubtedly presumed us all dead. I'm afraid that we're totally on our own."

"Then we have much greater concerns to worry about than our daughter's propensity to loathe clothing," Hermione declared. "She's not hurting anyone by being nude. No one other than you seems disconcerted. Actually the others seem quite taken with Caitlin's spunk. As hot and humid as it is, I'd absolutely consider joining her if it weren't for the inappropriateness due to the fact that I'm their professor."

Harry knew Hermione was correct. He also had come to recognized that nudity in and of itself was

totally innocent, but it was still hard to standby and watch teenage boys eyeball his unclothed daughter.

"Harry, it will be dark in a few more minutes," Ron reminded. "Unless you have an alternative suggestion, we ought to return to the shelter of the tube."

Harry glanced toward the ruptured tube, an unreadable expression on his face.

"I'm not eager to go back in there either," Hermione said. "It makes me feel rather claustrophobic."

"We don't have much choice," Harry answered regrettably. "If we remain out here, we're end up prey for the creatures of the night. This is the type of climate Lethifolds favor. I'd rather not end up smothered in my sleep."

"Harry, don't Lethifolds glide along the ground?" Jamie interjected. "Actually, aren't most of the more dangerous creatures land dwellers? What if we slept up there?" She pointed to the treetops.

"Jamie, that's a great idea," Nora declared sardonically. "Only one slight problem. Not all of us are as athletic as you and Caitlin. It would be a struggle for some of us to climb a tree, much less stand on someone's shoulders and hoist ourselves up to a limb."

Harry stared up at the tall trees surrounding them. "They would be the safest place for us to spend the night," he agreed. "But Nora is correct. Not everyone is athletic and the animals seem to have destroyed all the lower branches."

"What we need is a rope," Ron stated. "Unfortunately I didn't bring one with me and there seems to be an absence of usable vines."

"We could always use our clothes," Kim suggested timidly.

"That would work," Hermione chimed in excitedly. "If we made a rope of clothes, Caitlin could tie it off in the tree. Some of us could climb the makeshift rope and then pull those not capable of climbing up after them."

"Excuse me," Debby said. Being an American, she felt like an interloper, but a question was bugging her. "I can see the advantage of sleeping in the trees for safety reasons, but how does one keep from falling out of the tree once asleep?"

"We'll undo the clothing rope and use the garments to tie ourselves securely to the tree," Jamie suggested. "Then in the morning we can remake the rope in order to get down."

Lee Wilson looked around nervously. "That means we'll be dressed in nothing but our boxers until morning."

Lee had not taken part in the skinny-dipping earlier at the pool. He had chosen rather to remain in his bathing costume.

Hermione gave Lee a thoughtful look. "Lee being seen in your boxers is no more revealing then wearing a swim costume. There is no reason for you to be discomfited or ashamed. In times of crisis people must often do things they wouldn't do under normal circumstances.

"I have no idea how Nora or Debby dress under their outer garments, but I know factually that Kim,

Jamie and myself never wear a bra or knickers. Therefore, when we strip off our clothes, we will all be as naked as Caitlin is now. I somehow doubt anyone will notice your boxers."

Hermione had barely finished speaking when she started to unzip her jeans. "Are you sure about this?" Harry inquired.

"No," Hermione answered. "But you and I are the teachers. We must set an example. And in this case I think it's best to act before anyone has too much time to think."

As Harry started to remove his shirt and jeans, he noticed with pleasure that all the students, including Dick Bancroft and Nora Jordan had followed Hermione's lead.

Soon all the boys and men, including a redder than normal Ron, had stripped to their under shorts. Bancroft was the only male that preferred briefs to boxers.

Hermione wasn't at all surprised to discover that Debby also went sans knickers, nor that the attractive American girl also preferred the fresh look.

Nora seemed the most nervous of all the girls, despite the fact they were all nude and she was still covered with her modest bra and bikini style knickers.

"It's okay," Dick said reassuringly clutching her hand in support. "Don't be embarrassed. You're beautiful."

"You don't understand," she said, her eyes watering. "I've struggled my entire life to fit in and even now I stand out like a sore thumb." She pulled her hand away from Dick.

"What are you doing?" Dick asked. He was completely bowled over, as Nora unclipped her bra and quickly stepped out of her knickers.

"They're all completely starkers, and not a one of them looks as if they're the least bit embarrassed by it. If I'm going to die on this damn island, at least I'm going to die the same way as my friends. Now if only I could rid myself of this jungle growing between my legs, I'd be just like them."

Nora jumped slightly as an arm slipped around her waist. "Nora, you're one of us. You're like a sister; you don't have to change. But if you're really serious about wanting that gone, I can help you," Jamie said giving Nora a peck on the cheek. "Personally, I've never had pubic hair, but Hermione tells me that she was quite self-conscious when she first removed hers."

"Do it!" Nora said clenching her lips. "Please, before I wimp out."

"You won't feel a thing," Jamie said reassuringly, drawing her wand out of its holster and pointing it at Nora's vagina. "Aufero pubic saeta"

"Oh My god!" Nora exclaimed, looking down at herself. "I feel like I'm ten again. I'm nuder than nude."

"I like it!" Dick declared ecstatically, ogling Nora.

"You would," Nora retorted testily. "And would you please look me in the eye when you talk to me?"

"I always do," Dick replied.

"Funny, I don't remember having any eyes positioned between my legs," Nora retorted.

"Don't be so hard on him," Jamie said. "He's like a kid with a new Christmas toy. Give him time to get accustomed."

"I'm worried that time is something we have little of remaining," Nora answered darkly. "I feel like the odds are stacked against us and getting poorer by the minute."

Jamie didn't reply, but instead gave Nora a heartfelt hug. "Right now we have to help the others tie these clothes together into a rope."

Once they finished making the makeshift rope, Caitlin was once more hoisted into the tree where she secured the rope. Everyone then tried, in turn, to climb the rope. Some were capable of the challenge and quickly joined Caitlin in her treetop roost. Others had to tie the clothing rope around their waist and be pulled up into the heights of the tree. The last trace of sun was just disappearing as the final survivor was raised off the ground.

"Okay, everyone find a partner and stick together," Harry instructed once again. "Take a couple of articles of clothing with you and use them to tie yourselves to the tree. It will prevent you falling out if you thrash about in your sleep. Guys if more ties are needed, it may be necessary for you to drop the boxers and rip them into strips."

A number of the boys winced at this suggestion, but none openly complained. After all, how could they protest? The girls, including Jamie and Professor Granger were already totally starkers.

Harry was the first to take the plunge. He deftly stripped off his boxers and then began ripping them into semi-equal strips.

"Let me know when you're positioned as comfortable as possible," Harry said softly to Hermione. "Then I'll secure your arms and legs to the tree."

"Harry, do you realize how kinky that sounds," Hermione giggled uncharacteristically. "If you made that proposal to me in our bedroom, I'd presume you wanted to give bondage a try."

"Sounds like an idea," Harry said mischievously, "But I'm afraid we'll be going to sleep tonight without our usual relaxing work out."

"Guys, I'm sorry for eavesdropping, but the walls in this tree are rather nonexistent," Ron apologized. "I know this is going to sound bizarre, but if Sam were here I'd have sex with her and I wouldn't care who heard or saw us. I don't have that opportunity; I'll likely never see her again. If you'd like, I'll turn my back and try to shield you so that you can be intimate together."

"Ron, what if the kids heard or saw us?" Hermione asked, shocked.

"They're a good group," Ron replied. "I think they'd understand. They aren't trolls; they know our world has deserted us and it's only a matter of time until this awful place catches up with us. Think about it. I doubt I'll be going to sleep anytime soon."

Hermione and Harry exchanged silent longing looks; they both wanted to take Ron up on his offer, but knew they just couldn't. They'd always said that when the time finally came, they wanted to die

together. They just never expected it to be this soon. Would this be their final night?

"At least it's a beautiful night," Kim said, trying in vain to find a comfortable place to position herself. "The sky is full of glowing stars."

"I don't think those are stars," Caitlin answered uncertainly. "Jamie, what are all those glowing lights above us?"

"I'm not sure," Jamie replied, "but they're definitely not stars. Stars don't jump about."

"Oh shit!" Caitlin exclaimed. "It looks like one of those stars is getting nearer. I think it's some sort of animal."

The three girls froze, daring not to move. Whatever the creature was, it was getting closer and closer; swinging between branches with the agility of an orangutan.

"I think it's some sort of monkey," Caitlin declared. "A green monkey!"

"It's a Clabbert," Jamie declared. "I've never seen one before, but they're a tree-dwelling creature, in appearance something like a cross between a monkey and a frog. They originated in the southern states of America, but since have been imported worldwide. The light is from the large pustule in the middle of its forehead, which turns scarlet and flashes when it senses danger. Around here, I doubt it ever stops flashing."

"Are they dangerous?" Kim asked worriedly.

"They're considered harmless and can be domesticated, but I wouldn't scare one. They have short horns on their heads and razor sharp teeth," Jamie expounded. "I think this one is simply curious and wants to get a closer look at us. Stay still and don't frighten it."

The girls remain motionless as the hairless, mottled green creature creep closer and closer until its long supple arms were within reach of Caitlin. She held her breath as the beast stroked her skin with its webbed hand, playing momentarily with her breast. Then it sniffed the air and without warning plunged its nose toward her pussy. Caitlin tried not to move or scream, but her body shook uncontrollably. Jamie had drawn her wand, just in case. The Clabbert raised its head showing its wide mouth full of razor-sharp teeth. It appeared to be grinning. The creature reached out, grabbed an overhead limb and was gone.

"I think you've made another conquest," Jamie laughed.

"Did you see his thingy?" Kim chortled. "I thought it was going to try and have sex with you."

"Ugh! That's sickening," Caitlin cried. "It couldn't actually do that, could it? It's not even part human."

"I don't know," Jamie giggled, "but if I were you, to be on the safe side, I'd sleep with all orifices covered tonight."

Caitlin felt a strong urge to hurl.

* * * * *

Saturday, June 24, 2006

After breakfast, all the Hogwarts students made their way out to the Quidditch Pitch. Although the final task of the tournament was taking place on the remote Fantasy Island, special provisions had been made for the students and staff to view the event. Huge screens had been erected so that the event could be watched as it occurred on the wizardnet's version of Muggle television.

The gates of Hogwarts had been opened to the all citizens of Hogsmeade and neighboring villages so that one and all could take pleasure in the unique occasion. Vendors hawked souvenirs as supporters of all ages vied for the best to be had seats. Sam and Timmy were sitting next to a very pregnant Ginny while Katie Belle and the Headmaster along with many other members of the staff, including Neville, occupied the row directly behind them.

"I can't believe you of all people wore robes today," Tyler commented. "It's a beautiful sunny day. You're going to bake."

"Do you think so?" Emily teased naughtily.

Tyler shook his head. "Don't tell me that in this massive crowd you're wearing nothing but the concealment charm?"

"I bet she is," Evan declared. The young Gryffindor boyfriend of Caitlin Potter was sitting on Emily's other side.

"There's one way you can both find out," Emily suggested.

"You don't mind if I touch you?" Evan asked, speechless. "But I'll see you nude."

"You see Caitlin naked all the time," Emily reminded him. "I see no reason why you shouldn't see me; she and I both have the same equipment, it's just arranged a little differently."

"I can't get over how open you and Caitlin both are," Evan said, tentatively touching Emily's knee lightly.

"On the other hand, I can't understand why most of the world is as priggish as it is," Emily remarked. "As warm as it is today, there is utterly no reason for anyone to be wearing clothes. I shouldn't even have to hide behind this stupid spell. We should all be sitting here fully exposed to the sun and air and enjoying their gentle touch on our bare skin."

"But not everyone is as beautiful as you," Tyler remarked, placing his open hand on Emily's lap. She cleared her throat as a declaration of caution, but didn't make her boyfriend remove his hand.

"You're thinking erotic nudity, the type depicted in magazines and Muggle movies. That, unfortunately, is how most people view nudity. Being a naturist isn't about displaying yourself. It's about being comfortable with your body and being one with nature. Everyone should be able to enjoy the benefits of nudism, whether young or old, tall or short, slender or weighty."

"Sorry, but I'd rather look at you or Caitlin than that old portly lady over there," Evan observed.

"And so you should," Emily retorted. "You're twelve years and she's about one hundred twelve." Emily struggled for an explanation. "It's so hard to put in plain words for a non naturist. There are thousands of people here, but you hardly pay any of them attention. If you had grown up in a naturist environment, you would treat them the same if they were naked. What it boils down to is that people are people whether they have clothes on or not. We should be judging what is inside a person, not their physical presence whether clothed or not."

"I don't know about Evan, but I kind of think I understand what you're trying to say," Tyler muttered. "Nonetheless, I hope you don't mind if I continue to stare at you."

Emily sighed. "Actually I hope you never get tired of looking at me. Just be careful what you do with that hand or you might be looking at me through black eyes."

"Oh look!" Evan screeched excitedly. "I think it's about to start. I can't wait to see Caitlin."

"Witches, wizards and all creatures of near human intelligence I give you the Minister of Magic, Percy Weasley," the unseen announcer's voice proclaimed.

"I don't want to listen to that pompous git," Alex complained. "We want to see the competition."

"You just want to see Jamie ten times bigger than life in that miniscule costume she's forced to wear," Amanda teased.

"I'd rather have the real thing here with me now," Alex sighed.

"He's just being a classic politician," Amanda remarked. "Going for the photo op when there is a huge audience available, although, he doesn't appear to be very happy."

"My friends, it is with great sadness in my heart that I address you today. Like you, I had planned to spend my afternoon watching the valiant students of Hogwarts do battle with our American neighbors from across the sea."

Weasley seemed to be stumbling for the correct words.

"There is no easy or painless way to put this," he finally said. "Our world suffered a great tragedy yesterday. All members of both participating teams died in a catastrophic disaster. American coach Bud Ryan died along with his team, as did event facilitator and popular media personality Rishard Simone.

"We here at home not only lost eight bright and talented students, but also three celebrated heroes from the war against He-Who-Must-Not-Be Named. Harry Potter, once known both as the Boy-Who-Lived and the Chosen One, died with his team, as did his Muggle born wife, Hermione Granger. I personally knew and cherished both these great people. The third member of the Covenant of Three also perished; my younger brother, Ronald Weasley, who I loved deeply and will miss greatly."

"You fucking, lying bastard." Ginny Weasley was on her feet screaming and shaking her fists at the face on the screen. "You've disowned the entire family and haven't spoken a word to Ron since the day he was bitten. You hollow lying sack of shit."

"Ginny, please try to calm yourself," Severus coaxed, putting his arm around the distraught woman. Most of the crowd had turned in the direction of the shouting and were now staring at the

Headmaster and the hysterical pregnant witch.

"Mummy, what did that man say about Daddy?" Timmy cried. Sam couldn't answer; she just buried her son's head in her chest and sobbed uncontrollably. Katie hugged Sam, but remained silent. She knew that at a time like this no mere words could express her feelings or give solace to the grieving woman.

Emily just sat shaking her head. "No, no," she said softly. She kept repeating the same words louder and louder as tears flooded her eyes. "No, no, not again. Not again God, not again. I can't..."

Her words were muffled as she buried her head in Tyler shoulder. Evan wordlessly hugged them both.

Amanda and Alex hadn't spoken; they were just clinging to each other desperately as each cried on the other's shoulder.

"I can't believe the insensitivity of that git," Severus barked. "How could he announce something like that to the world without first contacting those intimately affected."

"Minister Weasley, Minister Weasley, will you take questions?" a reporter called out.

"Yes, but just a few, please," the Minister answered. "As you can imagine, I'm quite distraught.

"Can you give us any more information as to what actually happened?" the reporter questioned.

"As you can imagine, details are still rather sketchy at this point," Weasley explained. "Fantastic Island was protected by a new and as yet untried blending of magical spells and wards along with Muggle computers and electronic enhancements. It appears that while the teams were experiencing one of the parks attractions, the system failed. There were at least two explosions. Either the blasts themselves or the creatures that were thus set free killed all the victims. The island has been totally evacuated and quarantined "

"Is a rescue team being dispatched to the island?" the reporter asked.

"To rescue whom?" Percy replied. "All humans have been withdrawn. The island is currently overrun with highly dangerous beasts. We've already suffered an enormous loss of life. I'm not about to jeopardize more lives in order to search for bodies that more than likely no longer even exist."

Another reporter raised his hand and was acknowledged by the Minister. "What about Dr. Soderbergh? Will he be allowed to return to the island in the future to continue his work?

Percy seemed uneasy with this question. "The ministry holds Dr. Soderbergh personally responsible for this tragedy. Unfortunately, he somehow managed to flee the island unnoticed, but a warrant has been issued for his arrest. I expect him to be taken into custody within hours. Now if there are no further questions." Minister Weasley turned to leave.

"Minister, I understand that the *Quibbler* has rushed out a special edition," Justin Finch-Fletchley shouted. "They claim that this was no accident, but rather a deliberate act of terrorism carried out by Salazar Slytherin's supporters."

The Minister stopped and turned to face the reporter. "The *Quibbler*!?" Weasley said sounding

affronted. "Are you seriously placing any credence in something published in that rag?"

"The *Quibbler* was the first to print that insightful interview with Harry Potter concerning the return of Lord Voldemort," Justin pointed out.

"Correct, they did," Minister Weasley confirmed with a laugh. "I believe that was over ten years ago. As the Muggles sometime say, even a blind squirrel finds an acorn once in awhile. I think you can be assured, however, that ninety-nine percent of everything published in the *Quibbler* is one hundred percent garbage."

"But this article is written by the editor, herself," Finch-Fletchley plodded on. "Luna Lovegood claims that she had just arrived on Fantastic Island minutes before the catastrophe occurred. She also writes that Dr. Soderbergh personally informed her that Slytherin's followers had already claimed responsibility for the incident."

"Does she, in fact?" Percy exclaimed. "Does she also mention in the account her most recent expedition in search of the nonexistent Crumple-Horned Snorkack? Or was it the Blibbering Humdinger she was off searching for this year?"

"Be reasonable Justin," Percy declared derisively. "On one hand you have a former Hogwarts prefect who went on to become school head boy and ultimately the esteemed Minister of Magic." He smirked, pointing at himself. "On the other, you have an eccentric girl who holds a variety of rather weird beliefs, which have no basis in fact. A young lady who was given the moniker Loony by her peers and now edits both a sleazy rag and a nudie magazine."

"Who do you think the prudent wizard should believe and trust?"

Chapter Twenty-five Missing

"That was the worst night's sleep I've ever had," Kim complained, her body aching all over. "I don't know how Tarzan and Jane ever managed to sleep in a tree."

"Well, for one thing, they had a tree house. For another, Jane didn't have to sleep with one eye open all night for fear that Cheetah would bugger her," Caitlin mumbled. "Every little noise made me twitch."

"Funny, how back home the sounds of nature are calming and here they're... well, here they're just plain scary."

Caitlin nodded her concurrence. "I hope we get out of this tree soon. I have to pee and I just don't feel right doing it while up here."

"Consider yourself lucky," Kim stated. "I've been holding back a number two all night. If I'm required, I could probably bring myself to pee in front of the others, but I'll simply die if I have to do the other item with anyone watching."

"Yeah, some things should always stay private," Caitlin agreed. "I think even Emily might be hesitant about doing that openly. Poor Emily, she most likely thinks we're all dead."

"It's just a matter of time," Kim replied downheartedly.

Caitlin glared at Kim.

"Don't look at me that way. I'm just being rational," Kim explained. "I don't want to die any more than anyone else, but I can't possibly imagine how we're going to get off this island."

"Mum and Dad will find a way," Caitlin said positively. "I just know they will."

"Okay, listen up everyone," Harry called out. "We don't see any signs of the Erumpent or any other dangerous beasts, so we're going to get out of this tree. We'll do up the rope thing again and then slide, one at a time, down to the ground. Then Caitlin will untie it from the limb before she jumps down into my arms. Once we're on firm earth, I'm sure many of you will be keen to get your clothes back on, in spite of them being rather the worse for wear."

A number of the students, especially the boys, nodded their agreement.

"Then what?" Jeffrey McDowell asked.

"Then we'll decide on the best course of action to take," Harry responded. "Our ultimate goal is to get back to that abandoned work shed on the beach and our Portkeys. We'll discuss our options for doing just that, but first let's get out of this tree. I for one am tired of playing monkey."

Harry and Ron climbed down the makeshift rope first so that they could steady it for the others. Climbing down went much easier than climbing up, although Nora did lose her grip and end up plummeting down on top of both Ron and Harry. It was a toss up as to who was the most embarrassed, student or professors, as they untangled their intertwined bare limbs.

They made fast time and soon only Hermione and Caitlin remained in the tree.

"Caitlin, as soon as Hermione is on the ground, untie your end and toss it down," Harry instructed. "Then you jump. Don't worry, Ron and I will be ready to catch you."

"Professor Potter, look!" Nora cried out, excitedly. The Ravenclaw girl was anxiously pointing in the direction of an Erumpent, lumbering toward them.

"Hermione, you don't have time to climb down," Harry shouted. "Just jump; you too, Caitlin. Ron and I will catch you."

It was at least twenty feet from the tree limb to the ground, but Hermione didn't hesitate. Unfortunately, Ron wasn't prepared for the impact Hermione's weight, though trim, would have when falling from that height. He was sent sprawling and Hermione hit the ground awkwardly, her ankle shattering on contact.

"What about the clothes rope?" Caitlin asked, neither she nor Harry aware of Hermione's plight.

"Just forget it," Harry yelled. "Jump!"

Harry stumbled when Caitlin hit him, but managed to remain upright.

"Let's get out of here before that thing gets too inquisitive," Harry ordered.

"Harry, I'm sorry. Hermione's hurt," Ron said, his voice etched with remorse. "I dropped her; I think she's broken an ankle."

"Then I'll simply have to carry her," Harry said firmly, certainly not about to leave Hermione behind. He effortlessly swept the stunning nude witch into his arms before she had a chance to protest or for that matter even utter a word.

"Everyone, this way," Harry called out, heading in the direction of the safari ride tube.

"But, Harry," Ron exclaimed, running next to his best friend, "I thought you didn't want to stay in the tube? Weren't you apprehensive of being trapped in there?"

"I didn't and I still am," Harry answered, "but Hermione and I discussed it last night. It seems like the only way out of this place. I'll explain once we're out of harm's way."

Luckily, Harry's earlier supposition concerning the Erumpent seemed to be holding true. The animal didn't seem to be looking for a fight. As long as the group didn't provoke the beast it seemed to be content to let them alone.

As soon as they were back inside the tube and it was apparent that the Erumpent was not following, Harry placed Hermione gently on the ground.

"Caitlin, will you have a look see at your Mum and do what you can about her ankle?" he asked.

The young girl quickly did as requested and, in spite of Hermione's protests, began methodically examining her mother. When she reached the lower limbs, Caitlin's skilled hands first stroked Hermione left leg, then her right. When she reached her Mum's right ankle, she briefly cupped it in her hands as she closed her eyes.

"Just a few bruises and her right ankle was shattered," Caitlin said, almost casually. "She's fine now."

Harry gazed at both his wife and daughter with astonishment, as Caitlin helped Hermione back to her feet. Caitlin's abilities were now so potent that they sometimes made Madam Pomfrey seem like a fraud by comparison.

Once confident that Hermione was satisfactory, Harry gathered Ron and all the students together. "We have to make a decision," Harry said solemnly. "I'd rather we all remain together, but I'll not force anyone to do something with which they are uncomfortable.

"If I thought that the Ministry had dispatched a rescue team, I'd most likely recommend that we remain here. Regrettably, I think that is doubtful. In all likelihood, they presume us all dead. As you all know, there was a second explosion. Hermione and I believe that it occurred near the starting point of the safari ride. If that blast also breached the tube, it could soon be teeming with creatures, possibly Acromantula.

"I feel the tube is our only way to safety, but only if we use it without delay before it becomes infested. I suggest that we follow the tube until we get to the termination point of the ride. Then, if the key fences are still secure, we should be able to follow the main road back to the beach.

"As much as I'd like to, I can't give you any guarantees that we'll all make it. If anyone feels more secure staying here, we will treat you as adults and allow you to make that choice. If we make it home, we'll send back a rescue team. Take a few minutes to make your decision."

Harry turned and walked a distance away in order to give the students the opportunity to discuss the situation privately. Ron and Hermione followed him. Likewise without discussion Jamie, Caitlin and Kim joined the three adults.

"What if the tube is already infested?" Brian asked apprehensively. "We know what is out here. We made it through the night without any problem Death could be waiting around any corner of this damn cylinder."

"True, but how long will we survive here without them," Debby commented. "They're arguably the three greatest heroes of the century."

"If they don't make it, no one will ever be sent to rescue us," Nora added.

"I'd rather take my chance in that tube with them" -Dick glanced at the professors- "then spend my last days here living in constant fear with nothing to eat but bananas," Dick said reluctantly. "What's more, if the tube does become overrun, what's to prevent the creatures from taking over this section of the park?"

It only took a few minutes to reach a unanimous conclusion.

"Do you think it would be safe to go back and grab our clothes?" Lee Wilson asked meekly.

"As long as the Erumpent isn't hanging around," Harry responded understandingly.

"Forget it," Ron said wincing. "It looks like the Clabberts had other thoughts."

Everyone looked in the direction of the tree in which they had spent the previous night. A group of the creatures were having a fun time shredding the clothing rope into small pieces.

Kim smiled and whispered to Caitlin. "It looks like I'm no longer the only reluctant nudist."

Kim was correct. Everyone in the group was starkers and would apparently be remaining that way for some time to come. The only exception was Dick Bancroft, who was still clad in his tidy whites. Nora was animatedly quarrelling with Dick, apparently determined that he should get rid of them.

* * * * *

The group had been walking for about thirty minutes without any misfortune. Nora and Dick, although keeping with the group, had been lagging slightly to the rear in order to better enjoy each other's company. As they passed a secluded dark alcove, Dick pulled Nora aside with the intentions of getting a brief kiss and, if he were lucky, perhaps grabbing a quick feel. All of a sudden Nora screamed and Dick jumped away.

"I'm sorry; I just wanted to kiss you," he whispered anxiously, trying to quiet the girl.

"There's something in there," she cried, pointing to a mass in the dark corner.

Hermione was the first to react, running back in the direction of the two students and shouting, "*Lumos!*"

Harry and Ron pointed their wands, ready to counter if there was the slightest movement.

"It's Rishard," Hermione said sorrowfully. "I think he's dead."

Caitlin hurried forward and knelt next to the unmoving form. She placed her hand on the man's chest and then shuddered before quickly leaping back.

"He's dead," she said. "The body has been pumped dry. This is just an empty shell."

"What's she mean by pumped dry," Kim asked, shivering. "Has something sucked his blood out?"

"Not just his blood," Hermione explained, examining the corpse. "An Acromantula attacked Mr. Simone. Because the spider can only digest fluid food, predigestion must take place outside the spider's body. Some people believe that spiders suck blood; this is not correct. Spiders inflict a wound with their fangs and, through the wound, inject digestive enzymes into the wound to liquefy the tissues of their prey. Then the spider pumps the victim dry, leaving nothing but an empty shell behind."

"What a horrible way to die," Nora sighed.

"By the appearance of the body, he was killed while he slept," Harry noted. "Poor bloke didn't even have an opportunity to defend himself."

"Don't be too quick to feel sorry for him," Ron said, after finishing searching Simone's bag. "I think he might have had something to do with this debacle."

In one hand Ron held a map of the safari ride's tube system and in his other some sort of Muggle mechanism with different colored wires attached to what appeared to be candles. The device was imprinted with a large number two.

"Ron, be careful!" Hermione shouted. "That's a bomb!"

Ron froze. "A bomb?" he questioned. "You mean the stuff Muggles use to blow up things?"

"Yes! And if you drop it, we'll be what gets blown up," she said forcefully.

Hermione cautiously took the apparatus from Ron's trembling hands and gently placed it on the ground. Then she began carefully examining the contrivance. Meanwhile, Harry began checking the map.

"Rishard was the bastard responsible for the second explosion, the one that occurred near the launch point of the ride," Harry said, pointing to the diagram which indicated that a bomb was to be placed near the Acromantula exhibit. It must have been equipped with a timer that delayed the explosion until both safari vehicles were well by that position."

"But how did he manage to do it without being seen?" Ron asked.

"Think about it," Harry said. "All he had to do was bend over out of the vehicle and place the device on the ground while everybody else was enthralled with the monstrous spiders that were covering the tube. Would you have noticed him?"

"No," Ron admitted. "I had my eyes closed."

"He probably cut his seatbelt so that he'd have greater mobility," Harry explained. He pointed once again to the chart. "Rishard was supposed to plant the other bomb" -Harry pointed to the device that Hermione was still examining- "near the end of the ride."

"I didn't like the git, but I would have never believed him to be a follower of Slytherin," Ron comment.

"But something doesn't make sense to me," Jamie questioned. "Richard had no way of knowing, beforehand in which vehicle various people would be riding. If not for the unexpected attack of the Erumpent, the first car would apparently have made it safely out of the tube before this bomb went off. Slytherin would have failed in his goal to kill the Covenant if the three of you had been riding in that vehicle."

"No," Hermione disagreed. "That eventuality was planned for and that's why I think Rishard Simone was under the Imperius Curse and not acting of his own volition. This bomb has a number two printed on it for a reason. It doesn't have a timer. When activated, it would have at once gone off, killing the bomber along with his victims."

For a time everyone remained silent, then Bancroft asked the question that was troubling everyone. "If Simone was killed by an Acromantula, where is it now?"

"Where is it or where are they," Harry replied, soberly. "Clearly creatures have entered the tube. Simone's body is testament to that. I would speculate that during the night scouts passed the point where we were camped. Sometime later, they found Simone and killed him. Whether they are ahead of us or have returned to their web-spun home at the other end of the tube is anyone's guess."

"Harry, how close are we to the finishing point of the safari tube?" Hermione inquired.

"Close," Harry responded, checking the map. "Probably less than another thirty minutes of walking."

"What beasts are outside the tube?"

"Considering the distance we've walked, I think we can assume that we've left the Erumpent's area behind and are now within the enclosure that is home to the Nundu," Harry replied.

"We certainly don't want to have to face them," Hermione exclaimed. "The Nundu is arguably the most dangerous beast in the world. It takes at least a hundred skilled wizards working together to subdue one and didn't Dr. Soderbergh say he has four of the creatures?"

"I doubt, too, that the bubble head charm would be sufficient to protect us from its disease causing breath," Jamie put in.

Hermione nodded her agreement.

"The next area is home to Quintapeds and then we've gone full circle," Harry noted.

"Quintapeds," Hermione repeated with astonishment. "But I thought they were only found upon the Isle of Drear off the northernmost tip of Scotland. Drear is unplotable; how could Soderbergh have possibly caught specimens?"

"Haven't a clue," Harry said with a shrug. "At the moment I'm more worried about the hairy eight legged beasts that might be ahead of us inside this tube than I am about the furry five legged carnivorous beasts that might be outside."

"So what are we going to do?" Jamie asked concernedly.

"Our choices haven't changed much since this morning," Harry answered. "We can either plunge forward and face what awaits us or we return to live with the Erumpents. That, however, would now be only temporary. The Erumpent is no match for a colony of Acromantula."

"Then we push forward," Nora urged.

"That would be my decision, Miss Jordan," Harry said. "And I suggest we do so with haste. Ron, will you please bring that Muggle bomb with you. We might have need of it, but please be extremely careful."

Hermione stared worriedly at Harry. "Harry, what are you planning?"

"Not planning anything, my love," Harry replied. "Just keeping my options open."

* * * * *

As they moved along, Harry kept referencing the map plans they had found with Simone's body.

"Hermione, have you noticed the numbers that are engraved every so often on the tube?"

"Yes, I have."

"I'm not sure what they indicate, probably just panel numbers, but the same numbers are posted on this map," Harry said. "At least it gives us an idea of where we are and how much further we have to go."

"Number fifty," Hermione said, pointing to the nearest panel.

"According to the map, that means we are now in the region inhabited by the Quintapedes," Harry explained. "The numbers should be decreasing. When we reach number one we should be at the end of the tube and back on safe ground."

"Forty-nine," Hermione said excitedly. Harry had to smile. Hermione sounded like a little girl calling off mileage posts on a Muggle highway.

"Forty-eight."

With every number that Hermione called out, the smiles of the group increased. Soon everyone was calling out the numbers in unison.

"Twenty-five."

"Quiet, everyone!" Jamie said, hushing the group. "I think I heard something."

Everyone stopped and remained motionless.

"What did it sound like?" Ron asked.

"I'm not sure exactly," Jamie replied. "Wait, there it is again."

This time everyone heard a distinctive clicking sound. Ron's face paled. He would never forget that sound. Worse, it was getting louder and more frequent.

"Spiders!" Ron called out. "And not just one or two. They're moving this way."

Harry grabbed Hermione's hand. "Do we run or fight?" he asked.

Hermione forced a smile. "I'm not prone to running," she said courageously.

"Ron, give me that Muggle bomb," Harry ordered.

"Harry, no! I won't let you sacrifice yourself," Hermione cried.

"I assure you that I'm not going to play hero," Harry answered her. "I doubt there is enough explosive to kill them all anyway, but it might get two or three and make the others hesitant."

"How are you going to set it off?" she asked concernedly.

"I figured a few well placed Reducto Cruses might do the trick," Harry clarified.

"But what if the blast breaches open the tube?" Ron queried.

"Then my friend, we'll have a choice of whether we want to be killed by the Acromantula or the Quintapede," Harry replied pointedly.

The students had overheard the conversation of the professors and knew that their remaining time was short.

"I've been a fool for seventeen years," Bancroft declared. "Zacherley, for what it's worth, I'm sorry for being such a prat. My brother seems to be the only one in the family with any brains."

"I don't know about that," Jamie said, giving her one time nemesis a grin. "You managed to find yourself a jewel of a girl. I only wish you both had the opportunity to spend the rest of your lives together."

"We do," Nora said, forcing a laugh. "Unfortunately it will probably be less than an hour."

Harry placed the bomb in position and then the group backed away so that they could avoid the direct impact of the blast. "Jamie, will you assist Hermione, Ron and I?" Harry asked. "The rest of you keep low."

Harry surveyed the students; they were so young and held such promise. No war was worth the cost of innocent sacrifice.

"They're getting closer," Harry said as the distinctive clicking became more and more intense. "There must be at least a couple dozen of the monsters. Wait until I give the signal, then hurl your first spell at the bomb. Then hit the ground. The blast should take out at least a few of them and cause the others to temporarily retreat. If the tube bursts, we'll all make a run for the opening." He laughed. "If we're going to breathe our last breath, let's at least make it fresh air."

Kim gave Caitlin a hug as the two girls waited apprehensively.

They could now see the first of the monstrous eight-eyed spiders. "On three!" Harry shouted.

The spiders were twelve feet from the bomb.

"One!"

Six feet.

"Two!"

The first few spiders were adjacent to the device.

"Three!"

As one, they pointed their wands and shouted, "*Reducto!*" Then all four lunged to and hugged the floor as flesh, blood and hairy legs were strewn around them.

When Harry looked up he saw the remains of four, possibly five spiders; it was hard to be certain. The detonation had also managed to breach the protective tube. "Is everyone okay?" Harry shouted.

Receiving no notice to the contrary, he called, "Hurry, everybody out through the break."

Once out of the tube, Hermione's first priority was to take a head count. Once she was sure everyone had made it out safely, she turned to Harry. "I could hear the spiders regrouping to attack again," she said. "I think there are too many of them for us to handle."

"I don't think we'll have to worry about the Acromantula killing us," Harry said, pointing to a pack of Quintapedes that had every path of escape blocked.

Slowing the carnivorous beasts, which have a particular taste for humans, started advancing on the group.

"This is it then, isn't it, Harry?" Hermione asked, forlornly.

Tears welled in Harry's eyes. "I love you Hermione, but unless you have a miracle up your sleeve, the next time we'll talk will be when you meet my parents. I just never thought it would end like this; alone on a deserted island."

"You're not alone!" shouted a voice from behind them. "You've got us!"

Was he already dead or was he just dreaming? Damn, that sounded like Neville's voice, but how could...

Harry turned to see Neville Longbottom helping an extremely pregnant Ginny through the break in the safari ride tube. On Ginny's other side was a girl with straggly, waist-length, dirty-blond hair, very pale eyebrows, and protuberant eyes: Luna Lovegood. Severus Snape, Katie and Professor Flitwick followed them. Sam hurried to Ron's side, tears streaming down her face. Students followed the faculty, mostly sixth and seventh years. Alex and Amanda pushed their way through to Jamie, Emily hurrying in their wake.

The assemblage wasn't just composed of Hogwarts students and faculty; townspeople were also represented. Harry saw Stan Shunpike, whose release from Azkaban he had been instrumental in obtaining, and Florean Fortescue, who Harry had rescued from Voldemort's clutches. Of course Fred and George Weasley were there. In all nearly two hundred people had come to their rescue. Harry had been so overwhelmed that he had momentarily forgotten all about the Quintaped that had them surrounded.

When he turned again to face them, they were gone. Legend has it that the original Quintaped were Transfigured humans. Evidently the breed had maintained a large degree of their human intelligence and realized they were sorely outnumbered.

"Sorry, we took so long," Neville said, giving Harry and Hermione a wink, "but we had to do a little exterminating on the way here. Is everyone all right?"

"Our group is fine," Harry said, choking back his emotions. "But, all except for two, the American team along with their coach perished; so did Rishard Simone. But how did you guys find us? How did you know we were alive?"

"You have that persuasive, beautiful blonde to thank for that," Neville said, indicating Luna. Luna was looking around, a vacant expression on her face, trying to find the beautiful girl to whom Neville was referring. "Her and Dr. Soderbergh; between them, they convinced us that the Ministry was lying yet once more."

At last Luna turned her protuberant eyes upon Harry in surprise. "Harry, do you know that you're naked?" she asked seriously. She gave Harry an approving once over and then looked at Hermione and then at all the other survivors. "You're all nude. Are you all members of some alliance? Is this an initiation? Should I be naked, too?"

Luna had started unbuttoning her blouse as she spoke and was about to remove it when Harry stopped her. Ron gave Harry an annoyed look that caused Sam to punch him hard on the arm.

"What was that for?" Ron complained. "I wasn't going to touch, but you can't blame a bloke for wanting to window shop."

"If you do any more window shopping, I'll have to think twice about the welcome home present I was going to give you," Sam threatened. She turned to Hermione. "I'm not sure if I even want to know why you're all naked, but you might want to find something to cover yourselves with. Justin Finch-Fletchley from the Daily Prophet is here with us and his photographer accompanied him. They lagged behind to take pictures of the dead Acromantula, but I'm sure they'll be joining us before long."

Harry and the others were offered garments to cover themselves with before Justin and his photographer got to see them nude; even Caitlin reluctantly covered up. Harry, Ron and Hermione all agreed to sit for an interview with Justin and Luna, but begged that it be conducted back at Hogwarts. Everyone was eager to bid farewell to Fantastic Island.

* * * * *

"That covers everything I can think of," Hermione said, after she, Ron and Harry had spent two hours explaining every detail of their adventure. "Now it's your turn. I'd like you and Luna to fill us in on what happened from your viewpoints."

"You go first, Luna," Justin suggested. "You have the fascinating, truthful narrative; I just have the Ministry's fabricated version."

"Did someone mention my name?" Luna asked turning away from the window and staring misty eyed at the group. "I'm really glad to be back at Hogwarts."

"Luna, will you tell us your version of the story?" Harry asked

"Sure Harry," Luna said. "By the way, you really looked nice naked. You should do it more often."

"Ah, thanks," Harry said, rather flustered by Luna's remark. "Would you please tell us what happened when you got to Fantastic Island?"

"Well, Uncle Miltie had invited me to come a day earlier than the other reporters," Luna started.

"Uncle Miltie?" Ron questioned.

"He's not really my uncle," Luna clarified. "My Dad has known Dr. Soderbergh since forever. They've searched for *Crumple-Horned Snorkacks* together. Uncle Miltie has seen me naked often. Of course that was ages ago; I was just a baby."

Harry was starting to think that Luna's account of the events might last longer than the group's actual stay on Fantastic Island.

"This wasn't my first time on the Island," Luna told them. "I've been there numerous times to see my Uncle and check on the development of the resort. Anyway, I caught up to Uncle Miltie just as you guys departed on the safari ride. I went with him to the park control center; he wanted to check on your movement."

"When we walked into the control center, we surprised a man that was making some unauthorized entries into the computer system. When he saw us, he ran. I didn't have my wand and neither of us got a very good look at him. Before Uncle Miltie could determine what damage the trespasser had done, we heard an explosion. Initially we had no idea what had happened."

"That was probably when the Erumpent attacked the American team's vehicle, causing the tube to explode when its horn made contact with it," Hermione said, cutting in.

"You really have a stunning body Hermione," Luna said dreamily. "Are you positive that you wouldn't reconsider posing for *Playwizard*?"

"No, I don't think so," Hermione replied, smiling and shaking her head. "What did you and Dr. Soderbergh do after you heard the explosion?"

"I was panicky and got my wand out of my overnight bag," Luna replied. "Uncle Miltie keep pushing buttons and typing things into the computer. He looked like he knew what he was doing, but I found it all rather intimidating. I just watched him type away. It was rather boring. Finally Uncle Miltie sighed and said that all the main fences were safe and sound, but that there had been a fracture in the safari tube near the Erumpents' compound. All the systems protecting the tube were down. Then we heard another explosion. An alarm alerted my Uncle that it had occurred near the beginning of the ride, in the neighborhood of the Acromantula. He tried frantically for about fifteen minutes to get the safety doors to close, but they'd been sabotaged."

"That was undoubtedly the timed bomb that Simone planted," Ron remarked.

"Did you know that you have a rather big willie?" Luna asked. "I never saw any real live ones before today, but yours seems much larger than any I've ever seen in pictures. Is that because you're a werewolf? I bet it's really huge when you get a stiffy."

Ron's face turned a brighter red than his hair. He wished he could do a wandless Disillusionment Charm and merge with the furniture. "What did you and your Uncle do next?" he asked, trying to get Luna back on topic.

"Nothing," Luna answered. "They wouldn't let us do anything."

"Who wouldn't let you do anything?" Harry asked.

"The representatives from the Ministry."

"Where did they come from? How did they get there?" Harry asked.

"That's what Uncle Miltie asked them, before they hexed him," Luna replied. "They told us they were in charge and that they'd do any questioning. We were informed that the island was to be evacuated and quarantined. The guy in charge told me that if I wrote anything about the attack by Slytherin's agents that I'd be arrested and end up in Azkaban with Dr. Soderbergh."

Justin dropped his quill, an astonished expression covering his face. "Your source that Slytherin was behind this whole affair was the Ministry itself?" Justin's mouth dropped. "You've just as good as called the Minister of Magic a bold faced liar."

"What else is new?" Harry asked disgustedly. "Fudge, Scrimgeour and Emma Wrong were all

deceiving two faced liars. Why not Weasley?" Harry turned to Ron. "No offence mate."

"None taken," Ron replied.

"I'm just about through," Luna said, sounding slightly annoyed and as if all of a sudden she was in a rush to finish her story and irritated at being constantly interrupted. "Anyway, the ministry lackeys weren't the sharpest tools in the shed; they reminded me a lot of those dimwits from the Inquisitorial Squad that held us captive in Umbridge's office. They left Uncle Miltie and me alone while they went to round up the rest of the staff. I wasn't about to let them send my favorite Uncle to Azkaban, so I covered him with my invisibility cloak."

Harry looked at Luna with surprise.

"What? Did you think that you were the only person in the world with an invisibility cloak?" she questioned. "I had mine in my bag; wouldn't think of traveling without it. I told the ministry dunderheads that Dr. Soderbergh had snuck out and they believed me. When I was Portkeyed off the island, Uncle Miltie simply joined me hidden under the cloak. Once in London we Apparated to Hogsmeade and then rushed to Hogwarts and you know all the rest."

"Well, you don't." She pointed to Ron, Hermione and Harry. "But you do." She indicated Severus, Ginny, Neville and Justin. "Anyway, why don't you carry on from there, Justin?"

Justin nodded his agreement. "I told you earlier about Minister Weasley's speech and my dialogue with him. As a follow up, I wanted to see first hand the reactions of the students and staff of Hogwarts and possibly interview some of your friends and colleagues." Justin looked uncomfortably at the trio. "I'm sorry. I believed Minister Weasley. I thought you were all dead."

"Luna and I arrived at Hogwarts about the same time, but with quite different agendas," Justin continued. "I was fighting through the milling crowd trying to get my bearings when suddenly I heard Luna's amplified voice. She had somehow managed to climb up onto one of the viewing towers."

"Hello, I'm Luna Lovegood." Luna's voice echoed out through the stadium. There were quite a few snickers and jeers, evidently many people knew Luna by reputation.

"Please, don't laugh," she called out. "I know many of you think of me as Loony Lovegood, but what I have to say today is important. Please hear me out."

"I just came from Fantastic Island. I was with Dr. Soderbergh when the explosions occurred. Those detonations were not an accident. Fantastic Island was sabotaged."

There was more hissing and booing.

"Whether you believe that or not is unimportant. What is essential is that you help me. Not everyone was killed. There are survivors, but they can't endure there for long."

There was more booing.

Luna started to cry. "Please, please, you must believe me. I'm not making this up. They're my friends; some of the few people that have ever cared about me. If you don't help me, they're all going to die."

"I believe you, Luna!" Neville Longbottom had gotten to his feet.

"I believe you, too," shouted Ginny.

"What can we do? How can we get to the Island?" Neville called.

"Dr. Soderbergh can give the Headmaster the coordinates, if he'll make us Portkeys." Luna pleaded.
"But we're going to need at least a hundred volunteers. Please, I beg you. Don't let them die!"

"Severus ended up turning volunteers away," Justin concluded.

Hermione ran to Luna and hugged her tightly, only stepping aside when Harry and Ron insisted on having a turn. Then in turn the trio hugged Neville, Ginny and Severus.

"Harry, can I ask you one last question before we call it a day?" Justin asked.

Harry nodded. "Sure Justin, one for the road."

"When are you going to accept the position of Minister of Magic?"

"Not me. Not ever," Harry answered emphatically. "I enjoy teaching; I'm no politician. But if the right person challenges Weasley, I will openly support them."

"Who is the right person?" Justin asked.

Harry shook his head. "I wish I could answer that, Justin, but I'm not even sure a person exists with all the qualities needed."

"What qualities are those?" Justin prodded.

"Obviously honesty," Harry replied without delay. "Someone who will tell it like it is without first considering the political ramifications." Harry considered the subject further. "Someone who is open minded, and will consider all possibilities. But most importantly, a person who will in time of crisis do what is right, not what is easy."

Harry glanced around the room. Luna, had drifted off, absorbed in tracing her own palm lines. Then Harry, without thinking, blurted it out. "Someone like Luna Lovegood."

Luna looked up. "What?! I'm sorry! Did you ask me something, Harry?"

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"I must be the most pandered to woman in the entire world," Hermione sighed, after experiencing still yet another orgasm Harry had spent the entire evening pleasuring her, while rebuffing all of Hermione's efforts to return the favor. "Are you sure I can't at least do you once?"

"Not tonight," Harry insisted. "Tonight is all about you and how much I adore you."

"In that case why don't you give me a kiss and then just hold and caress me until we drift off to sleep," Hermione asked, cuddling closer to her lover.

"Your wish is my command," Harry teased, kissing Hermione deeply and passionately.

"I can taste me on your lips," Hermione confessed bashfully. "I feel so lucky and spoiled. There was a time I thought I'd grow up to be a lonely spinster like Madam Pince."

"You can't be serious," Harry said. "You're beautiful."

"Have you forgotten the unattractive bucktoothed girl you met on the Hogwarts Express?" Hermione asked. "The girl without any friends." She sighed. "Even when you, Ron and I became best friends, neither of you ever saw me as a girl. Is it any wonder that I jumped at the chance to go to the Yule Ball with Victor?"

"I admit that for many years, I was blind," Harry said. "Even when I realized how lovely you were, I was ignorant of my true feelings toward you."

"It all worked out for the best," Hermione sighed. "Although I genuinely missed you the five years we were apart."

Harry nodded desolately. "It must be awful to be alone; not have anyone to love or love you in return."

"You're thinking about Luna, aren't you?" Hermione asked.

"How did you know?"

"I know you," Hermione answered. "You've always had a soft spot in your heart for her."

Harry suddenly looked defensive.

"Don't get excited," Hermione said reassuringly. "I'm not jealous. I know you don't have those types of feelings for her. It's just that you care about her and feel sorry for her."

"Do you think she was telling the truth when she said that I was the first man she'd ever seen naked? Wouldn't that mean that she's never had sex?"

"I've never known Luna to lie," Hermione remarked. "Maybe she just hasn't met the right guy yet."

"Do you think she plays for the other team?" Harry asked.

"I don't think so," Hermione replied, "but then it's tricky to tell if a person is gay unless they openly flaunt it like Rishard did. Ginny never mentioned anything and I imagine she would have known; she and Luna became best friends during their last three years of school."

"Harry, do you seriously think Luna would make a good quality Minister of Magic?" Hermione asked, shifting the subject.

"I'm sure she would drive most of the intelligentsia crazy, but yes, I do." Harry replied. "She's a little mad, but like Ron once said it's in a good way. When she's focused, she makes the right decisions and she isn't the type to be bullied or bought. Luna is her own person."

"I never thought I'd say this, but I agree," Hermione said kissing Harry. "Do you think she'll actually run?"

"I don't even think she thought I was serious," Harry replied. "I think she thought I was having a go

at her."

Hermione started kissing Harry's neck and then moved down to his chest. "Speaking of having a go; are you sure I couldn't interest you in a little oral pleasure."

Harry gulped as Hermione's tongue moved further and further down his body.

"If you insist," he said, trying to sound laid back.

"I insist!"

* * * * *

Friday, June 30, 2006

It was the last day of the school year and as customary breakfast was a noisy event. Some students were saying their final good byes, this being their final year at Hogwarts. Others would be returning in the autumn, but would not see best friends for two long months.

"It has been an eventful year," the Headmaster said, speaking to Hermione and Harry as they sat down for breakfast.

"You always were one to understate things, Severus," Hermione replied, giving the Headmaster a meaningful smile.

Hermione looked out over the sea of students, some smiling and laughing, others crying as they hugged friends.

She saw Alex and Jamie embracing Amanda and wondered if their friendship would endure now that their school years were ended. So many times even the greatest school friendships die away due to time and distance. Alex and Jamie would be residing in the castle together while she taught and he continued his legal education, but Amanda, who had been such a large part of their lives, was now moving on.

Hermione eyes moved to Nora and Dick, the most unforeseen pairing of all time. Dick had changed radically in the last few months. Even Jamie said she was starting to like the previously loathsome Slytherin boy. Hermione hoped their relationship would continue beyond school. Dick had a confidence building effect on Nora and without Nora, Hermione was fearful that Dick would revert to his old self.

Then there were the younger students. Hermione watched Tyler, Kim and Emily, a young version of Alex, Amanda and Jamie. In the fall they would be starting their third year at Hogwarts. Would their friendship continue to grow and survive through seven years? Hermione watched as Tyler's looked lovingly, or was it licentiously, at Emily. They were holding hands, but instead of staring into Emily's eyes, Tyler's eyes seemed glued to Emily's chest. Hermione shook her head with annoyance. Obviously, Emily was once again using the concealment charm while she sat stark naked in the Great Hall. Emily would always be an extremist when it came to naturism. Hermione wondered in what new ways her daughter would push the limits of public nudity in the next four years.

As Hermione turned her eyes toward Caitlin, the delivery of the morning post and her copy of the

Daily Prophet interrupted her thoughts. After a fast glance at the front page, she turned quickly to the editorial page. Justin had been writing a series of articles concerning the happenings on Fantastic Island and the series was scheduled to conclude today.

My Outlook on the World by Justin Finch-Fletchley

Those of you, who have read my previous columns devoted to the happenings on Fantastic Island and the handling of those same events by the Ministry, will not be surprised to hear that I consider our current Minister both a hypocrite and a dupe.

This is probably a good time to remind you that this is an editorial and that my views do not necessarily reflect those of the owners or management of this paper. In fact, I find that that we infrequently agree on any significant issues. I appreciate that thus far I have been given latitude to speak my piece. Today, I'm most likely going to step over that imaginary line drawn in the sand. Therefore, if this column abruptly disappears from the *Prophet* after today please know that I have appreciated your loyal readership.

With that said, I'd like to recommend that the Minister of Magic, Percy Weasley be impeached. The Weasel, and the name seems rather appropriate, has time after time displayed his ignorance and lack of concern for his constituency. The Weasel seems concerned with only one thing and that is power and remaining in office to brandish that authority.

In wrapping up my discussion with Harry Potter the other day, I asked him if he would reconsider accepting the position of Minister of Magic. Sorry to say, he still feels he is not the right person for the post. He does, however, feel that changes need to be made and that Weasley has proven his incompetence. Potter is even prepared to support the right person in a confrontation against Weasley.

At first, when asked, the hero of the wizard world was unable to come up with anyone he considered a viable candidate. Finally he recommended Luna Lovegood.

Pause for laughter

Yes, I laughed too, until I thought about the job and the person. Potter considers honesty to be the primary qualification for the position. Say what you will about Luna Lovegood, but she is one of the most truthful people I have ever had the pleasure of dealing with. She will tell it like it is without worrying about the political consequences.

Harry Potter also feels that a good leader must be open to all suggestions and possibilities. Luna has a reputation for believing in the unbelievable. But most importantly Miss Lovegood is a person who in time of crisis does what is right, not what is easy.

I'm not even sure if this intelligent, likeable woman would be willing to take on such a challenge, but I hope she will be encouraged to do so.

I'm also not sure what the future holds in store for this reporter, but I complete this column today with a feeling of righteousness in my heart. I could have done what was easy, but I've chosen instead to do what is right. I hope you'll do the same and support Luna Lovegood for Minister of Magic.

Until we meet again. Bless you all.

P.S.

Mister Minister, sometimes it pays to be determined in your beliefs no matter how impossible they may appear to be. Dr. Soderbergh showed me some interesting pictures of a creature he intends to feature when *Fantastic Island* finally opens. He's been searching for it for years. It's called a *Crumple-Horned Snorkack*.

"Harry, you won't believe Justin's column today," Hermione squeaked excitedly. "He's committed what amounts to editorial suicide; writing in the *Prophet* that everyone should support Luna for Minister of Magic. I can't believe the paper published his editorial."

Harry gave the paper a swift read before responding to Hermione. "I doubt if it got proof read. Justin knows the tricks. He probably submitted it just prior to deadline. Sadly, I'm afraid he will pay the price. The *Prophet* is infamous for cowering to the will of the Ministry. Percy would have him hung if it were possible; he'll definitely see that Justin loses his job."

"Do you think Luna will do it?" Hermione asked. "Will she actively seek the position?"

"What do you think?"

"I think it depends on what happens to Justin," Hermione replied. "If the *Prophet* fires him, I think she'll run. If she runs, I'm going to help her with her campaign."

"I love it when we agree," Harry said leaning close and giving his wife a peck on the cheek. "What are your plans for today?"

"Jamie and I are going into Hogsmeade after the Express departs," Hermione elucidated. "Last evening I asked Ginny if she wanted to accompany us, but she's not feeling up to it. If the baby doesn't come soon, I think Poppy might induce labor. Ginny is really anxious and Draco being sick doesn't help any."

"Draco's sick?" Harry questioned. "Is that why he didn't come with the rescue party? I didn't want to say anything to Ginny, but I was sort of troubled that he wasn't in attendance. I know we were once enemies, but I thought that was all in the past."

"Draco didn't even know we were in need of rescuing," Hermione explained. "He had to go away that morning because of some sort of emergency. Neither of them said exactly what it was and I didn't want to appear nosey. We were all back at the castle before he ever learned of the dilemma. He was really angry at Ginny; he understood her desire to go, but felt it was impetuous, considering her condition."

Harry smiled. "In time Draco will learn that you can't step in the way of a determined woman, especially a determined pregnant woman. You would have done the same thing."

"You really are getting to know me, aren't you, Mr. Potter?"

"About time isn't it," Harry joked. "What exactly is the matter with Draco?"

"I'm not sure," Hermione answered. "Poppy thought it was a cold, but the Pepperup Potion didn't seem to help. He's even paler than normal and very shaky. He almost looks like someone on the verge of a breakdown."

"Let's hope not," Harry said. "Ginny will have her hands full enough with a new baby; she doesn't need Draco sick to boot. What are you planning to do in Hogsmeade?"

"We need to go to Flourish and Blotts. Jamie has to put in an order for next years Charms textbooks and I want to take a look see at Emeric Switch's new revised Transfiguration series. Then we're going to meet Caitlin and Emily for lunch and go shopping."

"Sounds like you girls have the day all planned," Harry said. "I guess I'll go flying for awhile and then curl up with a good book. Just Crookshanks, Alfred and I."

"I'm sorry, Harry. I didn't mean to exclude you," Hermione said. "Would you like to come with us?"

"No. You girls enjoy your day. I was just giving you a..."

"Hermione, the baby is coming," Katie Bell yelled. "Ginny's water broke on the way down here for breakfast."

"Harry, I have to go," Hermione squawked excitedly. "Would you please explain to Jamie and ask her to pick up an evaluation copy of Switch's book for me?"

Before Harry could answer, Hermione was scurrying from the Great Hall.

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"Draco's a dad! That's hard to believe," Harry said, shaking his head. "The womanizer has a daughter. That poor girl won't be allowed to date until she's thirty-five. Draco will assume that all boys are as lecherous as he was."

"Oh Harry! Molly is just a tiny baby. It will be a long time before her dad has to worry about boys," Hermione exclaimed. "Ben and her will only be a year apart in school. Wouldn't it be something if they..."

"Don't even think it," Harry said barging in. "I've tried to reconcile my differences with Malfoy and I think I've done a fair job, but I'd rather not think about our children someday dating. I wouldn't stop it, but I'd certainly never encourage it either."

"Mum! Dad! Is Jamie with you?" Emily called out, as she and Caitlin burst into the room.

"No," answered Hermione. "I thought you three were meeting for lunch." Hermione looked to Harry. "You did talk with Jamie this morning didn't you?"

"Yeah! She understood your wish to be with Ginny," Harry said. "Jamie said that she would pick up that book for you and then meet Caitlin and Emily for lunch." Harry turned to Emily and Caitlin. "Maybe you guys just somehow missed each other in Hogsmeade. Have you checked the castle? Maybe she's in her new professor's quarters."

"We checked everywhere in the castle, she's not here," Caitlin muttered nervously. "And no one saw her in Hogsmeade. We checked everyplace. She never even went to Flourish and Blotts. It's like she just disappeared."

Harry ran for the Marauder's Map and quickly confirmed that Jamie was indeed not in the castle.

"Where can she be," Hermione asked concernedly. "She's certainly no little girl that has to report her every move to us, but ... Harry, Jamie wouldn't just go wandering off and not tell anyone. She's too responsible."

"You don't think she could have been kidnapped, do you?" Caitlin at last asked.

"Why would anyone want to abduct Jamie?" Emily questioned. "She's not rich and certainly no celebrity."

"Harry," Hermione cried. "What if it was a case of mistaken identity? What if someone was after me and snatched Jamie by mistake."

"Who would want to kidnap you Mum?" Emily asked and then realized whom and answered her own question. "Slytherin!"

Hermione, Emily and Caitlin all looked at Harry hoping he would immediately dismiss this conjecture as preposterous, but he didn't. Harry didn't want to acknowledge it, but he was concerned that in all probability that was exactly what happened.

Something distressed him even more. What if Slytherin dealt with mistakes in the same manner as Voldemort? Harry's dreams were still haunted by images of that day.

From far away, above his head, he heard a high, cold voice say, "Kill the spare."

A swishing noise and a second voice, which screeched the words to the night: "Avada Kedavra!"

A blast of green light blazed through Harry's eyelids, and he heard something heavy fall to the ground beside him; the pain in his scar reached such a pitch that he retched, and then it diminished; terrified of what he was about to see, he opened his stinging eyes.

Cedric was lying spread-eagled on the ground beside him. He was dead.

Harry couldn't control his emotions. Tears formed in his eyes. Was it by now too late? Was Jamie already dead?