

The Real Epilogue

By

DrT

Table of contents

| | |
|------------------------|----|
| The Real Epilogue..... | 1 |
| Chapter I..... | 3 |
| Chapter II..... | 11 |
| Chapter III..... | 20 |
| Chapter IV..... | 29 |

Chapter I

Three Days After the Final Battle

Percy Weasley approached Hermione Granger, who was quietly eating breakfast by herself at the foot of what had once been the Slytherin table. Near the staff table, Ron and a number of Sixth and Seventh year DA students were arguing with the professors that, since no Slytherin student had stayed to defend Hogwarts, the House should be dissolved and the Slytherin fifth and sixth years, at the least, be 'sent down', ie expelled so that they could not return.

The professors were, in turn, pointing out that of those students who had stayed and fought for the fallen Dark Lord, only half had been Slytherin. All those students were facing charges, and would at least be expelled. Most Slytherins had been neutral. O.W.L.s and N.E.W.T.s started that very day, and the neutral Slytherins were in effect punishing themselves.

Hermione really didn't care at the moment (although she knew she should), and was trying to enjoy her oatmeal. While she knew, in the short term, she would be occupied in finding her parents and restoring their memories -- and no doubt giving many many explanations -- she was unsure of her medium term plans, let alone her long-term ones.

What were left of her possessions, taken when she had been captured, had been returned the previous day. The previous evening, some of the rewards she, Harry, and Ron would receive had been announced. Amongst those rewards, they had been awarded N.E.W.T.s in their fields of study. While Ron was overjoyed, Hermione was not pleased. She knew, now that she could not return to Hogwarts to complete her final year, there would always be little gaps in her knowledge.

Harry had fallen between the two opinions, acknowledging Hermione was correct, but basically glad he wouldn't have to bother with the exams themselves.

"Miss Granger?" Percy inquired. While his family had welcomed him back unquestioned, in part because of the loss of Fred, Percy knew that neither Hermione nor Harry was as willing to fully forgive those who had stayed neutral until the end, or in his case, had been somewhat neutral until very near the end.

"Yes?" Hermione replied, then sipping some tea.

"Would you know where Mister Potter is?"

"No," she replied. She didn't know his exact whereabouts, after all.

Percy frowned. "No idea at all?"

"Not really," she answered. She also didn't think she owed anyone any answers.

"Well, when did you last see him?" he demanded, attracting some attention.

"Last night, when we all separated to go to sleep." She calmly ate more oatmeal.

"Did he say where he might be this morning? I can't find him."

"No," Hermione replied. "He didn't say where he was going, or where, last night."

"Going!" Percy shouted. This attracted everyone's attention.

Hermione swallowed more oatmeal and said, "Yes, going. You informed us that the so-called 'neutrals' would not be punished, and that included people like Madam Umbridge, who sent the Muggle-born off to be tortured or killed. So, Harry left this morning. I need to speak to Professor Flitwick, and then I'll be off as well."

"Off where?" Ron demanded, striding over.

"Off across the world, to find my parents," Hermione said simply, but raising her voice so everyone could hear. "It's quite clear that the Pure-Blood bigotry which has always dominated the Wizarding world in Britain will once again just be toned down a bit to where it was before Voldemort" everyone still shivered at the name and glanced around, just in case some fanatic would appear to enforce the taboo "made it a tad worse this past year."

"Now, Hermione. . . ."

"Don't you 'now, Hermione' me, Ron Weasley!" Hermione snapped, standing up. "I was tortured for being a Muggle-born, and apparently only those who actually wore the Dark Mark will be punished! There are many many more who should be, and I don't just mean animals like Greyback." She slapped her spoon down. "Never mind." She looked around and proclaimed, "Many of you fought to end the oppression and terror of the last year. Well, unless you change British wizarding culture, you're just biding time until the next Pure-Blood lunatic comes along to start it all over again. You can't go back to the status quo, because that's what caused the problem in the first place!"

She picked up her handbag and her pack, and strode out of the great hall. Ron, despite his much longer stride, had a difficult time trying to catch up to her, which wasn't all that surprising, considering the size of the breakfast he had eaten. He lost her at the ward boundary, when she disappeared.

Stunned at her departure, Ron turned around and saw that most of the staff, remaining students, and the others who had been present had followed them as well. "How do I get to Australia?" Ron demanded.

"You don't," Percy answered. "The International Confederation blockaded all magical travel out of the country at the end of last August. She'll be back."

"Somehow, I don't think so," McGonagall said thoughtfully. "In any case, she was right. Many of us, perhaps most of us, did things which were morally wrong, as we did our best to survive and even do some good along the way. I confess that I did. However, in doing so, I was not merely serving my own survival, but doing my best to help the students. I did not do as good a job as I should have. That is still different from those who whole-heartedly aided the Dark Lord's regime, and even served it enthusiastically."

"First of all, at least for those in the Ministry, they were only following orders," Percy said stiffly. "Secondly, how can we really tell who was enthusiastic at work yet aiding the resistance as well? I supplied my father a great deal of information after Minister Scrimgeour's death, and later slipped Bill information as well. Can we really prove who knew I was doing so and yet turned a blind eye to what I was doing? To what my father and others were doing? We can't give truth potions to everyone, now can we?"

"Your second point may have some validity," McGonagall answered. "As for the first, obeying an immoral order is an immoral act. Those who were enthusiastically supporting the regime will have to be punished in some ways, even if those who merely kept doing their old jobs in the same old way probably can't be. And yes, I think everyone at the Ministry should be so examined."

From the crowd noises, Percy could tell they agreed. He would report what happened this morning to the Acting Minister, and he and his new advisors would have to figure this out. In the end, it was very fortunate that all the Marked Death Eaters had been killed or captured. Percy would not have been surprised to know that the Ministry of Magic would in near-complete disarray until late in August. In the end, a 'Truth and Reconciliation Committee', set up in late June and which operated through the next year, helped restore internal order.

All the unMarked Ministry employees would have to testify under truth potions. Nearly a third, such as Delores Umbridge, wound up being dismissed or at least retired early, while a quarter of the remaining would never be promoted -- some were even put back to whatever grade they had held before Voldemort's takeover. The fifth who had quit or been imprisoned were restored with back pay. In addition, new guidelines and competitive entrance exams were instituted for most positions (only the aurors had previously had anything similar, and even they had been fairly lax).

The Committee also took complaints and heard testimony from the general population. Mere informers were noted. UnMarked enforcers were generally lightly fined, although some were imprisoned. UnMarked true followers, like Greyback, were of course fully punished or even executed if caught.

Rewards would be given to those who had fought in the resistance, although Shackbolt, named the permanent Minister just a few days after Hermione had left Hogwarts, got few other rewards. Still, his name would show up in the Muggle New Year's Honors List along with numerous others. Only he and Harry, however, would be knighted.

That morning in the late spring, however, there was a small, very nervous crowd in front of Gringotts, waiting for the 8:00 opening. The Dark Lord had fallen, and that was, to some degree, a relief for most of those present. Still, that meant that times were still uncertain. Few had known whom they could trust, even amongst their friends and family, other than those they knew could not be trusted at all.

Finally, the doors opened, and the crowd made its way in. There had been many goblin guards on display since the previous August. Since a dragon had broken out through the tunnel system and the great front doors, even if the main building had not been very damaged, there were even more.

One cloaked wizard went over to a free desk and said quietly, "I wish to meet with a senior

manager."

"Well, management does not wish to meet with wizards," the goblin sneered. "Begone!"

The goblin found himself with a wand-point under his jaw. The sneer now increased. "If you use any magic, wizard, we will destroy you and your family, and there will be rebellion."

"If I decide I have to use magic, there will not be a goblin left alive to rebel, at least in this building. I certainly wouldn't care at the moment any more if you died than you would care about me. As for family, I have none. As for killing me. . . ." The wand forced the goblin's chin up.

The goblin looked up and realized who was talking to him. He swallowed nervously, even though the wand, hidden from everyone else's view, was withdrawn. "I understand."

"Good. I would prefer not to go that route."

"That is good to know. Follow me."

Hermione apparated disillusioned to the women's loo she knew of at Heathrow. She had, to her relief, gotten all her most important possessions back, although not on purpose. Her bag had been emptied, but she had some well-hidden compartments. She still had over £3,000, a debit card drawing from the accounts her parents hadn't remembered they had, and her passport.

She was off to find her parents.

"What are you doing, bringing THAT back here?" a goblin demanded of the desk manager.

"Mister Potter wishes to speak with a senior manager."

Harry pulled the hood of his cloak back and glared. The goblin shivered and nodded. Harry was glad he had not yet placed the Elder Wand back in Dumbledore's tomb, as it seemed to have an effect on people. He had also used the wand to fix his eyes, and his revealed eyes seemed to have an even more interesting effect on people he wasn't happy with. "The senior director is conferring with the other heads of the bank," the goblin said nervously. "There are several other members of senior management on site, however."

"I'll meet with anyone with some real authority. If that means meeting with more than one goblin, that's fine. If there is anyone who knows about my accounts and especially my vault, they would also be welcome."

"Please wait in this room over here, Mister Potter."

"Fine. However, I do not intend to wait around for long."

Ten minutes later, Harry was joined by four different goblins. He stopped them when they started to introduce themselves. "No offense, but I don't care. At this moment in time, I don't really care about much, to tell the truth. First of all, is at least one of you familiar with my accounts and vault?"

"Vaults, Mister Potter," one goblin answered. "You are familiar only with your Trust vault. In the normal course of events, you would have been notified of the others by your seventeenth birthday, had not the late Albus Dumbledore assured us you already knew about them. You have access to all three vaults. As for your accounts, they are in trust until you are twenty-one."

"And the trust officers?"

"Currently? Albus Dumbledore directed that we be all goblins, should he be killed. For the next three years or so, until you reach twenty-one, if any openings occur you and we have to agree on new candidates. Even though the bulk of your Trust investments is in the Muggle world -- there are few large-scale investment opportunities in the magical world, you know -- I assure you, we have taken great care in making you money, as we only make our share from your profits, not your expenses."

"And the money and bullion and such in any vaults, are they separate from the Trust?"

"For the most part they are. There are coin, loose jewels, and bullion in all three of the vaults."

"And the value of the wizarding money not in Trust?"

"Just over three million Galleons."

"And the value of the bullion?"

"If exchanged today? Just over twelve million Galleons."

"And would I need all three vaults if that was all gone? The bullion and most of the cash, I mean."

That stunned the goblins for a moment. Then the account manager said, "No, all the other objects could be stored in the largest, oldest vault without damage."

"And would it still be easily searchable?"

"Yes, Mister Potter, it would be."

"Fine. Do I own any property? As in houses, I mean."

"You own a great deal, from blocks of Muggle flats to half of Godric's Hollow to urban property like all of Grimmauld Place, all around the world. You even own the land the world cup was held on a few years ago, which has transient Muggles staying there at times. However, so far as I know none except for Black House would be immediately occupiable."

"I see." Harry glared at the quartet, who all shivered a bit under his eye. "Tell me, would you like

to continue to administer the Trust after I turn twenty-one?"

All four had to agree they would. While not nearly the largest magical fortune in Britain, it was the largest in western Europe that the goblins currently solely administered.

"You will, of course, have to show me you were, and remain, successful and honest stewards. Beyond that, I'm asking you not to sell any residential or rural property without prior consultation."

"Agreed. Shall we administer your small share of the Black estate as well? On the same terms, of course."

"Yes, although I might be getting rid of the actual house at Grimmauld Place. Anything else, from your point of view, before I go on?"

"From what we are told, you might know something about a missing dragon and the need for new doors that we have?" another goblin asked mildly. "If so, we should also discuss that."

"I think you should discuss confiscating Death Eater assets in association with the Ministry," Harry retorted. "Recoup any losses you have had over the last year that way."

"You would back our participation in that?" a third goblin asked.

"Yes, for whatever that is worth," Harry said simply. "In addition," he went on, turning to the account manager, "I wonder if you know how many goblin-made objects I have in my vaults?"

"One-hundred and sixty-eight," he answered promptly. "In your vaults."

"How much would they be worth on the open market, outside of Britain?" Harry asked. He knew that these days, there couldn't be much of a market in magical Britain for anything beyond the necessities. Selling in Britain would not bring much, if anything, and he wouldn't put it past the goblins to value the objects that way if they thought it was in their interest.

"Nearly two million Galleons," the account manager growled. "Perhaps more if properly auctioned."

"Take them all," Harry said dismissively.

All four goblin jaws dropped. "What?" one finally asked.

"Take the damn things," Harry snarled. "Or would that include things like portraits?"

"There are three jeweled picture frames," the manager confessed.

"Don't damage the paintings," Harry warned. "Put them in plain frames. Consider it a fine, a gesture, or a gift, or whatever."

"But. . . ."

"I always thought Binns was a bigoted and total incompetent. Well, he is, but he wasn't quite as biased against you as I had thought. I disapprove of some of your values. However, as I want you to

respect mine, I have to respect yours." Harry glared, and again the four shivered. "I currently have no quarrel with you as a people. If giving, or returning, these objects allow us to work together better, fine. If not, at least I tried."

"And the Sword of Gryffindor?" the third goblin asked.

Harry shrugged. "If the Sorting Hat is fully repaired, then the Sword seems to belong to it. At least it can summons the Sword. It apparently isn't mine."

"Anything else?" the third goblin asked.

"Yes, how much of a processing fee would you charge me to convert all my bullion to cash?"

"Well, if we converted it all at once, the price would crash," the account manager explained. "It would be best to convert it over at least a six-week period. If so, we will only charge three percent."

"Very well. Do it. Invest half the money along with the Trust." Harry scowled. "Consider that part of my test on how you are handling my money, as this money I have control over."

"Understood," the manager agreed.

"Which British banks do you deal with?" Harry asked.

"Most of the commercial banks," the second goblin answered. "Of the regular banks? Primarily Barclays."

"I'd like three hundred thousand Galleons exchanged into British Sterling and transferred to Barclays, and thirty thousand exchanged into a bearer's draft in Australian Dollars. Leave three hundred thousand here. The rest, including the remainder of the money from the bullion, transfer all that to the investing branch of Wizarding Bank of Switzerland."

The goblins glared at him.

"Do you know the Muggle saying of not keeping all your eggs in one basket?" Harry demanded.

"Good point," the fourth goblin said, speaking for the first time.

It took just over another hour for Harry to work out the details with the goblins. The goblins then showed him to a place where he could apparate from. When he was gone, the four goblins sighed with relief.

Harry appeared back in the forest near the world cup site. He took a few minutes to make certain he was alone, then he set up the tent which had been returned to Hermione the afternoon before. He set up the wards, as Hermione had taught him, and then called out, "Kreacher! Winky!"

The two elves appeared. "Master called?" Kreacher demanded.

"Yes. I'll need you to go back to Grimmauld Place and take care of it." Harry frowned. "What's wrong?"

"Kreacher was hoping to go to Mistress Narcissa," Kreacher grumbled.

"Does she want you?" Harry asked.

"Yes, Mistress does," Kreacher asserted.

"Then I will likely grant you permission in a moment."

"Really?" Kreacher was surprised.

"Yes." He looked at Winky. "Do you still want to bond with me?" He had talked to the little elf the day before leaving Hogwarts. She had joined with Kreacher, much to her own surprise, in part to get revenge for Dobby. She now felt she should fulfill Dobby's fantasy of working for Harry, although she didn't want to stay a free elf.

"Yes, please," Winky said. "Winky needs a family."

"Can you deliver a message to a witch who's surrounded by Muggles without being seen?"

"Yes, Master, if she is known to Winky and within three hundred miles. Further than that, Winky might need more time."

"That is satisfactory." Harry turned back to Kreacher. "How badly damaged was Grimmauld Place?"

"When Master ran away? The House of Black was not damaged, but most of the things in it was, Master, except the Mistress' portrait. The few things Master and his followers left were taken or destroyed."

"You are not to let anyone know where I am, ever."

"Yes, Master."

"Will that rule still apply after you are transferred to Narcissa Malfoy?"

"Yes, Master."

Harry looked at Winky, who nodded. "Winky can never tell her new Master the secrets of her old Masters," she added.

"Fine. Tell Narcissa that I will transfer the house and contents to her for a hundred Galleons, and that you go with the house. I would, however, appreciate anything of Sirius', or Remus' or mine or my friends, be returned to me. Is that acceptable practice?"

"Yes, Master." Kreacher looked very happy.

Chapter II

Thirty minutes later, Hermione, just starting her second non-fiction Muggle best seller of the morning, felt an envelope pressed into her hand by someone who was invisible.

A glance showed that no one was paying attention. Hermione marked her place and opened the envelope. The enclosures took her breath away. She realized that Harry must have been successful at Gringotts, as it was a very large cashiers' check. 30,000 Galleons translated into just over \$350,000 AU, after the exchange fees. There was also a Gringotts' draft for 3,000 Galleons.

A quick glance at the note made Hermione smile slightly. Harry had used block letters. Only the lightly penciled symbol of the Deathly Hallows on the envelope gave the origin away. Hermione tore that off and dropped the otherwise blank envelope into a nearby trash can.

My dear partner:

The enclosed are not loans but gifts, which I hope will help you bring your family back, or help them set up a better life where they are. If it's what you'd like, then I hope R had the sense to come with you. If he again chose comfort over devotion, you'll have to decide what you want to do about it. I shall, of course, back your choice.

Our time together, and I mean when we were alone together, was stressful. Yet in that time, I felt complete. The nights we comforted each other made me realize how much you have always meant to me.

I made many errors this past year, and you paid the price for many of those errors. I will never forgive myself the pain you had to suffer because of my mistakes, or thank you enough for the loyalty and trust you have given me, along with your affection and friendship, and yes, love. I do know you mean more to me than anyone ever has. I hope we will always at least be best friends. If we are both still alone when you come back, we can decide then what that might mean for us.

At the same time, I know as much as you love me, as much as we loved each other this past winter, you are not in love with me. I know that I could easily fall in love with you or L. I know I often dreamed of G as well. Perhaps we will get together in the future, perhaps you are with, or will come back to, the Great Prat or find some new path. In any case, as I said, I hope we will stay best friends.

Kr is going to the ferret's mother. I have made a deal with the weepy one. She is working with me. I hope you and I will find away to make all their lives better and fairer, in a way that will work for everyone concerned.

If you need me in a matter of hours, instead of days, call her. She handed you this message, and can now find you for me, if you call her. Send any other messages to me through the bank. I will be camping out for a while, as I think about what to do with my life. I'm not sure where. Since you had me get my passport last year, I have lots of options.

**all my thanks, and my love,
H**

Hermione smiled. She went into the nearest loo and checked that her glamour was still intact and she soaked the bit of envelope with the pencil mark into mush before tossing it in the trash. Hermione next tore Harry's letter into sixty-four pieces. Then she took a walk around the terminal, tossing scraps away one at a time. She was not terribly surprised to note that there was no one who was obviously a wizard anywhere she could detect, but she wouldn't lower her guard until she had to.

A few minutes after the last piece of paper was tossed, a casual glance at the nearest display panel showed that the main section of her plane was starting to load. She made another trip to the loo and took off her glamour. Thirty-six minutes later, the plane took off with her on board.

Harry sat in a stuffed chair, his feet on an ottoman. He regarded his elf. "Winky, I know you are used to one way of acting. We're both going to have to change a bit. Now remember, no punishing yourself. Understand?"

"Yes, Mister Harry," she replied, remembering that the Master preferred this other form of address.

"You cleaned up and fixed the tent very well. Did you enjoy dinner?"

"Yes, Mister Harry. Thank you, Mister Harry." It was odd, but if, as he claimed, cooking helped the Master relax, she would learn to live with his bouts of cooking. At least she got to clean up.

"And thank you for cleaning up the dishes, and for picking up The Evening Prophet. Is there anything you need?"

"No, Mister Harry."

"Then goodnight."

"Goodnight, Mister Harry."

Harry decided to read the paper's account of Hermione's impromptu speech that morning before turning in himself.

The next night, Molly Weasley sat her youngest son and daughter down in an unused classroom at Hogwarts. She had spent the morning and afternoon with George.

"How's George?" Ginny asked. Two mornings after the battle, the full impact of Fred's death had hit him, and he had barely functioned in the few days since.

"He's a little more alert," Molly answered. "Now, enough of this. Where are Harry and Hermione?"

The two shrugged. "Hermione is trying to get to Australia, and we don't know where Harry is," Ron finally said.

"Then why aren't the two of you more worried?" Molly demanded.

The two exchanged looks. Finally, Ginny squared her shoulders and said, "We're not worried, because we know they'll be back."

"And why are you so certain?"

Ginny took a deep breath and said, "Because we're bonded."

"What!"

"Last April, about five weeks before he was killed, Dumbledore gathered the four of us together. He told us that we should be bonded, and we all freely gave our consent." Ron winced, which both Molly and Ginny observed. Ginny therefore had to be a bit more honest than she had planned. "Well, actually, Harry and Hermione were bewitched. They both thought, and think, that they were dreaming, if they remember it at all. Still, they gave their consent."

Molly sat at a student's desk, stunned, not noticing that it was far too tight a fit.

"So, I was magically bonded with Harry, Ron with Hermione. Then the three of them were lightly Obliviated, so that they wouldn't really remember, until I gave a password, which I wasn't to give until after Voldemort's death. I just haven't gotten a chance to yet. As to why he did it," Ginny went on, "Dumbledore knew he could likely be killed, and that it would be up to Harry to kill Voldemort. He would need Hermione and Ron helping him. This was his way of insuring that they would stick together."

"How?" Molly demanded.

"How? Oh, right. Ron and Hermione became sworn followers of Harry."

"I didn't really remember," Ron admitted. "Percy nosed all this out, from the different recording books in the Minister's archival office, where oaths are recorded. That's where he was sent to work after Scrimgeour was killed, since no one really pays them much attention. He told Bill at some point. Bill told me, which is why I kept going back to try and find them last winter."

Molly frowned, and said in a very quiet, angry voice, "Tell me exactly what was sworn, and the order." Ginny did so, with Molly asking clarifying questions along the way.

After nearly fifteen minutes, Ginny finally finished, and Molly looked stricken.

"What?" Ron asked.

Molly gave Ron a look that made him squirm. "You are both very foolish, you most of all. First of all, you are Harry's sworn vassal. Everything you have is his."

"What do I have?" Ron retorted, unconcerned.

Stricken by the realization, Ginny whispered, "You have Hermione."

"Exactly. And she is not only sworn to Harry, she swore to him first. If he demanded it, Hermione could not refuse."

"Harry would never. . . ." Ginny started, but her mother cut her off.

"Harry would never FORCE Hermione," Molly agreed. "However, if he and Hermione decide they wish to be together, then legally they can be. The bonds you swore, you foolish girl, allows Harry one wife, but as many concubines as he wishes. You are not his wife, at least not right now. You are just a concubine. So is Hermione, even if Harry never, well, never takes the option to enforce it."

She glared at Ron again. "It says a great deal about you, none of it good, that you could abandon your liege lord, never mind your sworn bondmate, even for a few days. And yet you expect that bond to bring her back to you? It will prevent her from falling for any other man except for you and Harry, but that does not mean she has to come back to either of you. She can do without a man if she chooses."

She rounded on Ginny. "The oaths YOU swore prevent you that option. You are Harry's, no matter what, no matter how he acts or reacts. I'm ashamed of the pair of you!" Ron and Ginny shrank back. "The pair of you are coming back to the Burrow with me tomorrow. Yes, it is habitable again. The two of you will be working on it with me to make it more than merely inhabitable, and yes, young lady, we'll get you permission to use magic. As a bonded concubine, you're allowed. By the way, you should NOT have been allowed back to school this year, and you will not be coming back next year. Neither of you are to contact Harry or Hermione. They will come to you if they want to, and you will explain your conduct."

Molly ignored her children's protests as she wriggled out from behind the student desk. She grabbed each one by an ear, and dragged them yowling down the corridors.

The next morning, Harry sat happily in the tent, digesting the nearly Edwardian breakfast Winky had prepared for him. He was looking through The Daily Prophet and the second issue of the resumed Quibbler. The back half of each issue had columns of personals -- people trying to locate family and friends. One ad in The Quibbler caught his eye:

Elven Gravedigger:

While I am pleased you have your privacy, can we talk in private?

Snorkack Girl

"Winky?"

There was a slight 'pop'. "Mister Harry?"

"When you go out, could you deliver a letter for me?"

"Of course, Mister Harry. May Winky know who to?"

"Luna Lovegood. I think she's probably still at Hogwarts, but she may be at her father's house, outside Ottery St. Catchpole."

"Winky knows, and will find."

Australia is a very large place. Hermione had deliberately not told Harry or Ron where her parents

should have been directed to. She had even slightly misled them as to the names she had given them. She hadn't trusted Harry's link to Voldemort at the time, nor could she be certain Ron might not break if captured.

It was time to search Hobart, and see if she could find them.

Since Hogwarts was still in disarray, it was fairly easy for Luna to disappear after dinner. She wasn't certain why Harry would wish to meet with her at a place called Little Whinging, but she was not prepared to argue.

She apparated to the location given, a rather run-down back garden. "Harry?"

"Over here," Harry said from near the house.

"Why are we here?"

"This is my Muggle relatives' house," Harry answered. "I was checking to see if it was damaged since they ran off. The Death Eaters visited at least twice, but it only took me less than an hour to undo the alarms and alerts they put up."

"Where are your relatives?"

"I'm not sure," Harry admitted. "Winky found them, but I didn't ask where. I sent along some money -- I know my uncle will appreciate that, if nothing else. If they want to, I even arranged a way for them to mail me. They can come back here now, or sell the place." He looked more directly at Luna. "Did you eat dinner?"

"Just a little," she confessed. "But not much."

Harry could see she was nervous, which threw him a bit. "Come on. I know a place we can eat a little something but have some privacy. If you don't call me Harry, no one will recognize me." He cast a slight glamour on himself.

"Very nice," Luna admitted. She was wearing Muggle clothes, so felt no reason to change. Harry cast a mild glamour on her anyway, so she looked a bit older.

Less than fifteen minutes later, they were at a busy little eatery-- not quite fast food, not quite a regular restaurant. Luna wasn't terribly hungry, but accepted a small order of fish and chips, while Harry ordered the shepherd's pie and some bread and cheese. He ordered them both shandy, and the waitress, taken in by the glammers, took the order.

"First of all," Luna said, "the main reason I needed to see you. I believe this is yours."

Harry blinked in shock as she handed him the resurrection stone.

"I found it the evening after the battle, after Daddy and I had had a long talk. I just felt it, and felt a connection to you as I touched it." She gestured, and Harry took the ring. "Harry, do you have all three Deathly Hallows?"

Harry spent the time waiting for their dinner to arrive, and through about half way eating their dinner, briefly outlining his experiences. Luna was, to say the least, thrilled and impressed. She did understand why Harry's possession of the three objects had to be kept secret.

"I understand why you wish to disperse the objects from each other," she finally said. "I do think you would be wiser to keep the wand, even if you rarely use it. Unless you mean to retire from the world, you may need it."

"But I don't want to risk someone winning the wand directly," Harry pointed out.

"I suppose that's true," she had to admit. "And the ring?"

"Did you use it?" Harry asked.

Luna nodded. "I said a proper goodbye to my mother."

"If someone has all three, they could force the dead to stay Earthbound until their own death. I'm not sure, but it might be used like Dumbledore claimed Grindelwald would have, to command armies of Inferi, perhaps even mummies and vampires as well."

Luna again nodded. "It needs a better hiding place than near a path through the forest, however."

"I'll take care of it," Harry assured her.

"I guess this brings me to the second thing I need to talk to you about," Luna said. "Daddy told me what he tried to do to you, Hermione, and Ron."

Harry saw how stricken she was. "I forgive him, of course. I think we all understood the pressures he was under."

"But to do that to you. . . ."

Having just finished eating, Harry placed his left hand over her small right hand. "I saw the painting of us. I understand, and like I said, I forgive him."

The waitress came back, and Harry ordered them ice cream for afters.

"I swore on my mother's body to take care of Daddy before all others," Luna said. "I'm glad we can still be friends."

"Just friends?" Harry asked, curious.

Luna looked confused.

Harry shrugged. "I am, unfortunately, even more famous than I was. On the one hand, there is no way I could ever meet girls and just date. On the other, I know three wonderful women that I really like."

Luna was just looking surprised.

"I know this will sound stupid, and maybe even arrogant," Harry admitted. "In fact, telling you this way will probably mean we can never work out, but I just don't know how else to say it. It looks as if, despite all their fights, Ron and Hermione might still try and date. I have some sort of crush on Ginny that I don't understand. But you and I connect, somehow, at least it seems that way to me."

"We do," Luna agreed. "And if it weren't for the fact that you are already bonded to Ginny, and perhaps to Hermione as well, I'd. . . ."

"What!" Harry didn't shout it, the word came out more as a soft, strangled squawk.

Luna frowned. "You didn't know?"

Harry merely shook his head, his jaw slack.

"You have no memories of going through a bonding ceremony with Ginny, or receiving oaths from Ron and Hermione?"

A year before, Harry might have dismissed the idea. But now he searched his memories, and partially remembered. "That . . . that wasn't a dream?"

"Mostly likely not," Luna said. "What can you remember?"

The bistro was not terribly busy, so Harry cast a diversion spell, which would prevent anyone from paying much attention to them. Then he dredged up what he could remember from his 'dream'.

When he was finished, Harry paid the bill, left a large tip, and the pair went for a walk in the mild evening.

"How did you know, by the way?" Harry asked.

"I can see auras," Luna answered. "Yours changed a year ago April. I congratulated Ginny, and she told me that it was a secret, that the bonding would help protect you against Voldemort's mental intrusions, just as thinking of your godfather had that night in the Ministry."

Harry stopped, shocked. "She knew about that?"

"Apparently."

"Damn Dumbledore!" Harry pulled the shocked Luna into a hug and then duel-apparated them to the Hogwarts' ward boundaries. It did not take them long to make their way to the headmaster's office.

"Back again, Harry?" Dumbledore's portrait inquired.

"Damn you!" Harry shouted.

"Quite possibly I am," Dumbledore agreed. "Why now?"

"Did you bond me to Ginny?" Harry demanded.

"I did, and had Ronald and Hermione swear full vassalage to you before bonding them as well. Had Voldemort tried to possess you again, those bonds would automatically trigger the same response which allowed you to drive him from your mind at the Ministry. That also decreased the chances of either of your vassals deserting you. Without the bonds, Ronald may not have returned, and I knew you needed both."

"So I was always just a pawn to you," Harry spat.

"You were always more than that, but I had to use you as a pawn," Dumbledore agreed. "Until Voldemort actually took and used your blood, I saw no likely way for you to even have a chance at surviving. I then did what I could to both ensure your victory, and perhaps to give you a life afterwards."

"And knowing what you know now, would you have done things differently?" Harry snapped.

"I don't know," the portrait admitted after a moment's hesitation. "After all, this did work, although at a terrible price to the magical world."

Harry snorted.

"What?"

"The magical world did not suffer in the least," Harry pointed out. "Magical Britain and Ireland did, and so did some of the Muggles here. The rest of the world set up an embargo once Voldemort took over the Ministry. The British Isles are not the entire world."

Harry turned to Luna. "I'm sorry. I would have liked the chance to get to know you as more than a friend."

"You still can," Dumbledore offered. "Ginny Weasley is your concubine, or consort if you prefer. Under the old customs, a man of your position can easily have up to at least five, as well as a wife. You have one, or two if you and Hermione have been intimate."

"I thought she was bonded to Ron?"

"She bonded herself to you as your vassal first. Unbonded women belong first to their lord, and only second to any bondmate or even husband who come later."

"How can these bondings be legal?" Harry demanded. "I did not give consent! Not to mention we are too young."

"All four of you gave your consent, even if you, Hermione, and later Ronald all thought you were dreaming. As for the age issue, Ronald and Hermione were of age, and you are the head of your family. For such a bonding, the traditional age of consent is sixteen for the Head of a family and fourteen for any girl, as it is quite the old custom. Should you marry Ginevra or Hermione, that would prevent you from marrying another, of course, but you could still have a total of five concubines without any trouble. I doubt you would want more than that, but it would be possible."

"Oh, like I could just go around doing things like that," Harry said with contempt.

"I do like you," Luna said quietly. "You're the only boy I can even imagine wanting to be with, being touched by. But you're right. As much as I admire Hermione, as friendly as I have always been with Ginny, it would be difficult, especially these days, for me to share you with them. I'm not saying I won't, but I think you will have to work things out with Ginny and especially Hermione before we need even consider any such options."

"I am sorry," Dumbledore offered. "Had I known, I would have bounded you instead of Ginny. However, Harry, at the time you were seeing Ginny."

"That's right, seeing! Why the hell should I have my life set now? Ron and Hermione usually fight more than they snog. Why should they be bonded now? They might not have stayed together." Harry glared. "I take it divorce is difficult."

"Divorce is easy," Dumbledore said. "However, you are not married yet. You are bonded, and the bondings are for life."

"You might have been a great planner and a master manipulator," Harry told the painting, "but you never understood anything about love."

Luna walked over to the portrait. "I, Luna Lovegood, do curse the spirit of Albus Dumbledore. May he do atonement in the afterlife until such time, if ever, as he truly both understands and repents his actions taken against myself, Harry Potter, and Hermione Granger."

She turned and marched out of the room. Harry decided there was nothing more he wanted to say that night, and followed her out.

Chapter III

Hermione:

I have found out some very important and disturbing news. Let me know when you are able to deal with it, as while it is not exactly pressing, it does need to be addressed before you come back, or soon thereafter. Certainly we must address it before we see Ron or Ginny at the least, as I understand Ron stayed here. I'm sorry if he's hurt you again.

*love
Harry
**

Dear Harry:

That was a somewhat mysterious note! I found Mum and Dad the day after I arrived and disenchanted them that very night. While they understand why I did what I did, that does not mean they are by any means anything but outraged. In short, they are staying in Australia. It took some fast talking at the Australian Ministry of Magic (they are not pleased I slipped through the magical embargo on Britain via Muggle means). Still, Mum and Dad are now licenced to practice in Australia, thanks to the Ministry, and their bank accounts (moderately large from selling their practice, the house, and the contents of both), plus your generous gift means they can set up in practice here (well, they are moving from Tasmania to Perth). I fear it will be a while before they forgive me enough for them to want to spend time with me.

I can be back in five days, as I must go back as a Muggle, since I came here that way.

I am very disappointed in Ron. As much as I care for him, he has shown us twice he is unreliable. I know he does not have a clue about how angry you really were with him; you hid your feelings far too well. Perhaps I need to rethink my relationship with him. If you aren't uncomfortable, perhaps we can discuss the subject?

*love from
Hermione*

Hermione

I can't tell you how sorry I am about your parents. Hopefully, they will forgive you more quickly than they think they will. As for Ron, we will need to discuss him.

The tent will be in the first location we moved it to after Ron left, from four days from now until seven days from now at noon. Avoid Diagon Alley and Hogsmeade. Be careful, as the Aussies will have notified the Ministry where you are, and may even tell them of your travel schedule.

*love
Harry*

*

Dear Harry:

Thank you for the reminder. Normally, I would have realized that, but as you can imagine, I am a bit flustered. I shall adjust my travel plans accordingly.

*love from
Hermione*

Hermione checked the flights on-line before going to the airport, and purchased her tickets that way, rightly guessing that the Australian Ministry of Magic was not quite up to more than physically checking the airline counters (which was still far ahead of their British counterparts), and that only rarely. She slicked down her hair a bit and tied it in a bun, and if anyone was looking for her, no one recognized her. She flew from Hobart to Singapore, which not only had no Ministry as such but which banned the use of magic by everyone who was not a licenced citizen. Had any magical agent dared slip into the city-state without previous approval, they would have been arrested, as Hermione would have been had she tried to slip out of the airport.

From Singapore, Hermione managed to catch a flight to Brussels, and then got on the train system, taking just over a day to wind up on a train to London. Hermione disappeared from the lavatory in the train just before its arrival.

She saw the tent where she expected it, but it seemed deserted until Winky appeared. "Mistress Hermione," the little elf said with a bow. "May Winky take your clothes and clean them?"

"In a moment," a very tired Hermione said. "Can you tell me where Harry is?"

"Mister Harry apparated to a small town nearby, Mistress. Mister Harry is buying good foods Mistress likes for a late dinner."

Hermione looked at Winky, puzzled. "Why are you calling me 'mistress'?" The elves had always addressed her as 'miss'.

"Does Mistress prefer another title? Winky could think of no other right title, at least until Mister Harry talks with Mistress."

Hermione looked at Winky thoughtfully, but Winky caught on and panicked. "Please, Mistress, do not trick or force Winky! Mister Harry forbids Winky to punish Winky. Winky would die before asking Mister Harry for clothes! Dobby was right, Mister Harry is kindest, most wonderful Mast . . . Winky means, bestest employer, ever!" Winky looked towards the opening. "Mister Harry is home! May Winky please take Mistress Hermione's dirty clothes?"

"Winky! I'm back!" Harry called. "Hermione!" He set the bags of groceries on the floor and hugged Hermione. Despite her confusion, Hermione hugged Harry just as enthusiastically back.

Winky grabbed the groceries and Hermione's knapsack and popped away.

Hermione broke the hug and asked, "I'm glad to see you, but why did Winky call me 'mistress'?"

Harry frowned. "Winky!"

Winky appeared, nearly weeping. "Winky is sorry, Mister Harry. May Winky please iron her ears?"

"No, of course not," Harry answered. "Put the groceries away, and when you're done, sit quietly on your stool for five minutes."

Winky pouted, but answered, "Yes, Mister Harry."

"Sit on her stool?" Hermione asked.

"She keeps begging to be punished, and it seems a time-out bothers her more than a physical punishment, but I can't have her hurting herself."

"I would hope not. Now, I've been on the move for over fifty hours, and I'm past tired. What's up?"

Harry sighed and took Hermione over to the sofa and sat down with her, taking her hands in his.

"Harry," Hermione said, eyes wide, "you're scaring me a little."

"Well," Harry said ruefully, "there's nothing to be frightened of. Angry, but not frightened."

"Angry? At whom?"

"In declining order, Dumbledore, Ginny, Ron, Percy, Bill, and then maybe a few others."

Hermione's eyes narrowed. "What did Dumbledore do?" she nearly growled.

"It was a year ago late April," Harry said. "He enchanted you, me, and Ron, so we thought we were dreaming. It's some form of hyper-aware state, where you're totally honest, and your magic rises to the surface."

"I've read about it," Hermione said tersely. "Go on. What did he make us do? Or rather, what were we willing to do in a state where we were both honest and lacking inhibitions?"

"Apparently, the order is somewhat important. First, you swore an oath of full fealty to me." Hermione's face, which had been growing flushed with anger, now started to pale instead. "Then Ron did the same thing. Next, Ginny swore an ancient bonding oath to me."

"She's not old enough to marry!" Hermione snapped.

"Since she was over fifteen and from a poor family, according to this ritual she was old enough to bond herself as a concubine to the head of an ancient family who was at least sixteen, which I was. Since you're Muggle-born and Ron's a Pureblood, you could do the same and did. It is an old spell, used to bind political marriages. You know, the kind where the couple might be separated by distance at times, in order to insure loyalty in all the partners. However, since you were my vassal before you bound yourself to Ron, who also became my vassal, well. . . ."

"You can claim me as your concubine as well," Hermione said faintly. She collapsed back onto the sofa. "I can have no other."

"And, since in fact there were many nights where we slept together, and even a few where we, well, you know. . . ." Harry stopped, blushing.

"Made love? Shared oral sex? Not to mention that time when it was my period and you took my anal cherry?" Hermione nearly snarled.

"Yes," Harry admitted. "Ginny knew all the time. Apparently, by custom one person had to be aware it wasn't all a dream. Percy found out last summer, although he was not then aware that we weren't aware. He shared the information with Bill sometime last autumn, and when Ron finally got to Bill's, Bill told him, which was another reason Ron came back."

"Do you know what all this means?" Hermione demanded.

"I think so," Harry said. "For you, it means you can never marry anyone but Ron or me, or legally have sex with any guy other than the two of us. In fact, you may never even be attracted to any male other than Ron or me. If Ron doesn't marry you, he can marry one other woman if he has both our permissions. Even if he marries you and I marry someone else, I could still legally have sex with you. Not that I would, if you didn't want me to, you know that!" Harry added.

Hermione merely nodded.

"I can marry anyone, and have I think three more concubines. Not that I would!"

"Go on."

"If I married you, then Ron would have no legal claim on you afterwards, at least until I die. Ginny can never legally have sex with any other guy but me."

"And what does it mean for you? Anything else?"

Harry made a face. "It makes me wonder how much of my life was even more directly masterminded by Dumbledore, for one thing. Did he cast other spells or charms or whatever on me? Ones we may never find out about? Was that why I was so angry during fifth year, and so passive during our sixth year? After all, his painting doesn't have to tell me, even if I ask."

"Maybe," Hermione agreed. "Who knows about these bonds? Besides the people you named, I mean."

"Luna figured it out, and told me when I told her I was interested in you, Ginny, and her, but wasn't sure about anything. She went with me to question Dumbledore's portrait, and cursed his memory when we were done. It turns out, she was falling for me during spring our sixth year, but of course she wouldn't want to be part of this mess, at least until you and I figure out what we want to do."

"Whereas you and I are stuck in it," Hermione said simply.

"True," Harry agreed. "I really do think Dumbledore or Ginny or someone was influencing me sixth year. I'm not normally a jealous person, but from the start of Sixth year until Dumbledore bound us, I was very jealous of anyone interacting with Ginny. I can't say it's been totally non-existent since then, but it has been a lot less powerful."

"That is somewhat odd," Hermione agreed. "What else have you learned that was odd?"

"I was quite surprised to learn that Percy was actually feeding information to his father and Bill the whole time." Tired, Hermione laid her head on his shoulder.

"We could be in trouble," she said.

"I had guessed that," Harry said. "How much trouble?"

"Well, when I left it looked like Kingsley could be taking over what's left of the Ministry. . . ."

"With help from Mister Weasley and Percy," Harry pointed out.

"True. And Neville, Luna, and Ginny were the leaders at Hogwarts."

"True."

"Now, you of course. . . ."

"We," Harry said firmly.

"Fine. We set up the destruction of Voldemort, and you pulled it off. However, Kingsley, Lee, George and their friends and associates, well, I guess we could call them the Voice of the Resistance."

"Advantage, Kingsley and Percy," Harry muttered.

Hermione nodded. "And Percy knows how the Ministry has been run. Since he and Kingsley get along, they'll be setting up the new Ministry. We won't have any say." She frowned. "Any more than we really have in who we'll be with the rest of our lives."

"Does this explain why we are so in love in them, Hermione? Especially you and Ron?"

"Probably. I had sometimes wondered," Hermione answered. "Any love potions would make us act very different, and any love charms would have worn off long ago."

"Yet within a few days of Ron leaving, while we both missed him, we also were happy as, well. . . ."

"Lovers, Harry," Hermione said. She snuggled close. "I love you more than Ron, I like you more than Ron. You're certainly more interesting, more affectionate, and more caring, not to mention amuch better and more considerate lover. Why else, other than this silliness, would I be in love with him more than you? Why, even though I love you, would I probably deny it again if the prat walked into the room?"

Harry hugged Hermione and breathed in her scent. "I know. Like I said, since the early part of sixth year, I've been jealous of anyone who gets near Ginny, even though I really didn't think I was the jealous type. Yet I was so happy taking Luna to Slughorn's party, I'm so happy with you."

Harry felt Hermione stiffen a bit. "Hermione, you are fantastic, and I don't just mean in bed. It has

nothing to do with the fact that we've had all kinds of sex and I haven't with Ginny. You know that Ginny has only wanked me off a few times."

"You never actually said that."

"Really? Well, she said we had to wait for regular sex. She wrinkled her nose in disgust at the mere idea of oral sex. Still, it's not about sex. It's about respect, which she and Ron have never given us, and affection, which they seem to demand."

"True. As for sex, well, I don't know if it's unique to Weasleys or a common wizarding attitude," Hermione agreed. "Ron will let me go down on him, but nearly vomited at the idea of returning the favor."

"For someone who eats nearly everything, he doesn't know what a sweet treat he's missing." Harry gave up resisting his urges and kissed her neck.

Hermione giggled, but kept on track. She didn't stop Harry, though. "So, why did Dumbledore do this? Because of the bloody quest for Horcruxes?" Harry mumbled his agreement. "Ron left us for a while even with the bondings. We might not have succeeded on our own. We succeeded more by luck than skill as it was." Hermione purred for a moment, then pulled away from Harry's talented tongue. "I don't know what I want in the long term, but I do know what I want, what I need right now."

"Whatever you want, or don't want, Hermione," Harry promised.

Hermione leaned back onto Harry. "Then tonight, at least, I want you. I want to suck you hard and then take you in my bum. . . ."

"That time of the month again?" Harry knew Hermione really liked anal during her period.

Hermione nodded, and then said, "We started off consoling each other last winter, and then had a passionate time, and yet as soon as Ron showed up, we went back to being siblings, instantly. And now that we're alone. . . ."

"We want to make love again."

"Ron and I never really made love, Harry, as much as I love him. We fucked." She caressed Harry's cheek and kissed the side of his mouth. "You have never just fucked me. We've always made love. Make love to me, Harry. To hell with the sheets and my period, and I don't care if we make a mess."

Harry braced himself and then stood with Hermione in his arms. "Just one more bit of information."

"What's that?"

"Shack wants to meet with us whenever you get back, and he's willing to do so on neutral ground."

"Hogwarts?"

"We'll decide on a time in the morning."

"We will. Together, as a team. See, that's one reason why I love you, Harry. And I have some ideas I should research before we meet anyone."

And with that, the couple went to bed early.

*

A rather smug Minister Shacklebolt, accompanied by Percy Weasley, met with Harry and Hermione in the Room of Requirement three days later. "Harry?" the Minister said, "we need to talk. I wish you hadn't disappeared, although I understand why you needed some time alone."

"Have a seat, Shack," Harry answered, and he and Hermione sat.

"This is the Minister!" Percy protested. "Not just an interim. You should show more respect."

"Congratulations," Hermione said. "And this is the Chosen One, the Conqueror. By rights, he is Lord Potter, not Harry."

"But. . . !"

"By fact, and by the rules and laws in force at the time," Hermione said sternly, "Voldemort was in charge of the Ministry. According to the customs and traditions he reintroduced, when Harry killed him, he conquered. He controls magical Britain by Right of Conquest, and anything you've done is illegal, although he may choose to ratify it." Percy winced

"She's right," Shacklebolt had to agree.

"Obviously, once things are arranged to our satisfaction, I will be surrendering that power, and we can send the whole idea of 'right of conquest' back to the history books where it belongs," Harry said quietly, glad that McGonagall had allowed them access to the library the last few days while keeping their presence a secret.

"What do you want?" the Minister asked.

"First tell us what you've done," Hermione retorted.

"Full pardons for all those in the resistance, which of course includes the two of you. The trials for Marked Death Eaters start in a few days."

"Including the Malfoys?" Harry demanded.

"Only Lucius is Marked. We've also worked out a deal with the goblins. The Malfoys have lost the standard five percent of their vault value, and if Lucius is convicted, he'll lose most of his personal share of the Malfoy fortune, which would be another twenty percent or so. The same will happen to all the other Marked Death Eaters. Sixty percent of all such fines will be used by the Ministry to rebuild. That will include things like Hogwarts, the Ministry, and such. Thirty percent goes into a relief fund for the general population. The goblins collect the rest."

"Yes," Percy said prissily, referring back to the general fund, "not all Pure-Bloods were treated well by the regime."

"Fuck the Pure-Bloods," Harry snapped. "There were never more than a hundred Marked Death Eaters -- they did NOT control a population of over thirty thousand without lots of help, most of it from the Ministry. What about all the Muggle-borns tortured by unMarked members of the Ministry, and whose families were killed or imprisoned by the Death Eaters or even the Ministry?"

"Politically. . . ." Percy started.

"If people like Umbridge aren't tried, convicted, and severely punished, I'll destroy the Ministry and then leave," Harry threatened.

"Who do you think you are, trying to. . . ?" Percy started, but went silent. Harry's glare was more than that. Percy could feel the magic pouring off the young man before him.

"Politically, we cannot give the Muggle-born special treatment," Kingsley said quietly. "All the laws of the last year are going to be dropped, however, and they will receive equal treatment. As they tended to suffer the most, they will no doubt be getting greater compensations, but that will all come out of the same fund. Some members of the Ministry left, even if they were not forced to. Others were forced out. Both will be welcomed back. Some played a double game, active in the Resistance while going to work. Some still managed small acts of resistance from within the Ministry."

"Like Mister Weasley," Harry acknowledged.

"Exactly. Some went along too much with the regime, but realized that these were not temporary measures, measures they could live with for a short time but not permanently, and came around in time to help out before the end."

Percy flushed. "I did rather more than that," he protested weakly.

"You did. Others went along, reluctantly or enthusiastically. I can't promise you convictions, Harry. I can promise you they will be removed from the Ministry, convicted or not. Dean Thomas recommended a Truth and Reconciliation Committee, where minor abuses have to be publically confessed, and with no criminal prosecution, although with a line drawn for major abuses."

Harry and Hermione looked at each other, and Hermione said, "If the guidelines are well-drawn we could support that. Go on."

"As for you two and Ron, given what you did, along with the Order of Merlin, First Class, and many other awards, you know we have awarded you your N.E.W.T.s. . . ."

"Are you just trying to keep us from learning Seventh year material, or is it something else?" Harry demanded.

"You don't think the two of you would be disruptive at Hogwarts? Do you really think you could have just slipped into the normal student body?" Percy snapped. "You'd both have had to be Head Boy and Girl, and you're certainly beyond typical students. What else could you do? Be the first day students in two hundred years? That's not a good example, either."

"If you're really worried about learning, we'll provide the two of you with tutors for whatever you

want," Shacklebolt promised.

"Nonsense," Hermione snapped.

"Tell us the real reason, or leave. Or better yet," Harry snarled, "just let us leave."

"Married students can't attend Hogwarts!" Percy shouted, which made the Minister roll his eyes.

"Hermione and I aren't married," Harry said.

"Not the two of you to each other! You're bonded to Ginny, and you're bonded to Ron," Percy said.

"I don't recall bonding with anyone," Hermione stated.

"Part of my duties was to check some automatic recording ledgers. There are automatic recorders for magical marriages, bondings, and adoptions and such. I saw that Dumbledore had bonded the four of you, well, the two couples, a year ago last April." He frowned. "Had a devil of a time hiding that!"

"And when did you discover this?" Hermione demanded.

"Last August."

"And when did you inform Ron and Ginny?" Harry demanded.

"I told both Ginny and Bill last August," Percy confessed. "Bill told Ron when he showed up last winter."

"At least that explains why no one, except maybe the twins, were all that surprised when you showed up at the final battle," Harry said.

"I notice Bill DIDN'T tell Harry or me when we were at his place. Now, go get your brother and sister," Hermione ordered.

"Why?" Percy demanded.

"Because they will be part of the discussions Harry and I need to have while we decide if the two of us stay in Britain. Because we already found out about this bonding nonsense, and wondered if you would have the guts to tell us before we forced it out of you. Inotice you didn't mention the fact that Ron and I are Harry's sworn followers."

Percy and the Minister looked stunned. Finally, Shacklebolt turned to Percy and said, "Go get them, and bring them here."

Percy left, and the Minister turned to the two.

"And what do you want from us?" Hermione demanded.

"Let's make a deal we can live with," Kingsley said.

Chapter IV

"Where shall we start?" Hermione asked.

"First of all, what you two decide to do about the Weasleys can affect what we're trying to do to rebuild."

"Then let's leave that for a bit," Harry suggested.

"Very well," the Minister agreed. "Then on to the goblins. . . ."

"Do you know about my deal with the goblins?" Harry asked.

"Yes," Kingsley agreed. "They aren't happy about it as a whole, but they did admit it was not really unfair."

"Then my agreement with the goblins holds for the moment, unless you can give me a good reason to withdraw everything from them," Harry said firmly.

"But. . . ."

"We're the only large country which relies on one major wizarding bank," Harry pointed out. "That both gives the goblins too much influence here, and it causes too much resentment on both sides. The Swiss bank will be handling some of my investments. The goblins, if they have really thought things through, should see I gave them what they claim they want most from wizards -- the treasures they made for us. They can't have all my business as well, when we don't agree on how business should be done on all things."

"And if they don't think things through?" Shacklebolt demanded.

"Then both sides have to live with the consequences."

After a moment of silence, Hermione asked, "To get back on track, what are you offering us?"

"I want the three of you to go through auror training," Shacklebolt answered. "Mrs. Weasley. . . ."

"Don't EVER call me that!" Hermione snapped.

"But. . . ."

"Harry and I have not decided what we are going to do about all this mess Dumbledore left us. Even if Ron and I officially marry, my name will still be Granger, or if you really must, Granger-Weasley," Hermione commanded.

"You do realize that wizards. . . ."

"Only do that for women when they are marrying some wealthy Mudbloods? So that Mrs. Tonks really should be Black-Tonks? Yes. But as far as I'm concerned, if I stay. . . ."

"We stay," Harry added supportively.

"I know, Harry. Still, if I stay in Britain and with Ron, I will Ms Granger-Weasley, and so will any children."

Shacklebolt shrugged, as he didn't care. "Whatever. In any case, I am hoping you will also take the legal training available. In that case, you will become the Assistant Minister in charge of reviewing cases in about three or four years. That might not sound important, but in actuality, you will be one of three people able to order prosecutions or appeals -- myself as the Minister, the Head of the MLES, and yourself. Mister Potter, you and Mister Weasley will be more active on the auror side. I am also hoping to send you two for some Muggle training, legal and forensic."

"All this will take a while," Hermione pointed out.

"It will," the Minister agreed. "This is part of a long term reform plan, not a quick fix. I'm the youngest minister in European history, and by several decades. I intend to liberalize as much as I can, while preserving the separation between magical and Muggle societies."

"That could be good," Hermione allowed.

"You still have some credibility with us," Harry said. "Don't waste it on the Weasleys."

Shacklebolt winced. "I know, and I said I understood. Anyway, the other choice you have, Ms Granger, is to go in as the Assistant Minister in charge of Magical Creatures. That would take about a year's training. Lord Potter. . . ."

"Mister is fine . . . from you."

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Percy was back with Ron and Ginny in about half an hour. "Hermione!" Ron's tone was more snappish than joyous. "There you are! Come on. Mum wants to talk to you about marriage arrangements. . . ."

"What?" Hermione snapped back. "You've never mentioned marriage before. What makes you think I'd marry you now?"

Ron frowned and looked at Percy. "But you said. . . ."

"I said they knew about the bondings," Percy corrected his youngest brother in his usual arch tone. "I did not say how they felt about them."

Ron frowned, confused.

"Do you think I'm overjoyed to find out that I was bonded against my will to my casual boyfriend before I was even eighteen?" Hermione demanded.

"You both agreed to the bondings," Ginny said quietly.

"In a dream-state," Hermione pointed out in turn. "Yes, I fantasized about marrying Ron. You

fantasized about marrying Harry before you had even met Harry." Ginny winced slightly at that, but could not deny it. "I also fantasized about marrying Harry, but I also thought more seriously about putting the idea of marrying anyone off until I was well-established in a career."

"Proper witches have their children, then start any career," Percy pointed out primly. Ron unwisely added, "That's right."

"Then to echo something Harry said earlier, fuck Pure-bloods and their bloody customs," Hermione shouted, stunning Ron, Percy, and Ginny. "Not to mention the fact that I now learn that the only reason you really came back is because you were drawn to us because of your bondings to Harry and myself."

"Those weren't the only reasons," Ron protested.

"But they were the main reasons, weren't they? They drew you back and that stupid device of Dumbledore's led you to us." Hermione turned on Percy. "What penalty would your dear Ministry have inflicted on Ron just a few weeks ago, if they knew he had dared to agree to a bonding ceremony traditionally used only amongst upper-class Pure-bloods to bond himself to a Mudblood?"

Percy gritted his teeth, but said, "They would have given Ron of the option of suicide or killing you, or execution for both of you."

"Did you know that, too, before you came back? You did, didn't you? I can see it in your face."

"Hermione," Ginny started.

Hermione cut her off. "And don't you start. Harry would have likely ended up at least dating Luna our Sixth year and maybe beyond if it wasn't for you. What did you do, feed him jealously potions the whole bloody year?"

Ginny flushed.

"I thought so."

"Ginny!" Percy was shocked.

"Shut it, Weatherby," Harry snapped. "Ginevra Weasley. You have voluntarily bonded yourself to me as my concubine. You are my possession, I am your lord, am I not?"

Ginny hung her head. "Yes, my lord."

"Then take your chair over to the corner, sit on it, and don't say another word." Ginny did as she was told.

"And you probably think I should be acting that way, you sexist, chauvinist git! I'd rather be Harry's slave than your concubine. At least I know he'd treat me with respect. Here are your choices. Expect never to see me or Harry ever again, or modify your bonding oath."

"What? How?"

Hermione tossed down a scrap of parchment. Ron picked it up, read it, and flushed even more than Ginny had. "You can't be serious!"

"Why not? All that would do is give me the power over you that you would have had over me if we hadn't discovered what was going on."

"And if he does swear that, will you two stick around and help us put the wizarding world back together again?" Percy asked.

"The wizarding world wasn't all that affected," Harry pointed out.

"Wizarding Britain isn't even one percent of the wizarding world," Hermione added.

"Here's the deal," Harry said. "One, Ron doesn't change his oath. I supercede it as their over-lord. Hermione and I leave Britain. Ron, you can do whatever you want to do, so long as you do not embarrass us, or try to track us down. You can even marry. Ginny, you'll be staying with your family. Maybe this would be best for everyone, except maybe Ginny." Harry looked at the two Ministry men. "Do you really want someone of my power and reputation hanging about? It didn't work out well with Dumbledore."

"True," Kingsley agreed. "However, if you agree not to try and become either Minister or Chief Mugwump, you'll have lots of influence but you won't be able to interfere as much as Dumbledore did, while still having the power base to protect your interests. We, meaning you and I, can work together, Harry." He smiled. "And you can always leave later."

"True," Harry agreed. "Two, Ron swears the modified oath. That means Ron and Ginny get to announce that they are bonded to Hermione and me a year from next April, on the third anniversary. No public ceremonies. Ginny can call herself Ginny Potter at that point, and any children we have will be considered Potters."

Hermione spoke up. "I will of course call myself Hermione Granger-Weasley, and that's what any children I have will be named. There will be plenty of plain Weasleys." Her face hardened. "In public, we will be good spouses and we'll work hard to make the British Ministry something decent for once. We will expect the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to do a thorough job, and that Ministry corruption is a thing of the past. If it isn't, we'll fight you and anyone else in our way."

"And we either win, or we walk," Harry put in. "We'll be good, if independent, tools. We'll say nice things about that prick bastard Dumbledore, and, if we have to, we'll even reform Snape's image, to that Slytherin doesn't look like a total House of Evil, and so remain one over time."

"We'll be good," Hermione added, "for forty-eight weeks a year."

"And the other four weeks?" Percy asked when Ron wouldn't.

"That's none of your's or anyone else's business," Hermione said. "That doesn't necessarily mean Harry and I will be together any or all of those four weeks a year. It means we get time off."

"It's up to you, Ron," Harry said.

"Do you really think I'll go along with this . . . this . . . charade?" Ron demanded.

"It's not more a charade, or farce or burlesque or whatever than what would have happened if we hadn't found out," Hermione snapped. "In fact, since we're being, unlike you, open and honest here, it's less of one. Still, Ron, it's your choice. You'll never know if I really love you or not, but you never would have known the other way, either."

In theory, Ron knew he had a free choice. In fact, he knew he really had to swear the oath. He owed it to Harry and Hermione, for having walked out on them. He owed it to himself, because he did desire Hermione, he did desire to prove himself the best of the Weasley boys (while doing as little hard work as possible). He owed it to Ginny, so she wouldn't become an old hag. He owed it to the Family, to bring Harry into it via Ginny. He even owed it to the wizarding world, or at least wizarding Britain, to keep Harry Potter, his friend, the Chosen One, active in that magical kingdom as it was rebuilt.

All it would cost Ron was his pride, which, he finally had to admit, had always caused him more problems than he would care to count.

That was all that could be at stake as far as Ron could believe. He could not conceive of true self-sacrifice. Hermione was willing to honor her bonding to him, albeit on different terms than he had wanted. Therefore, she must want him, and her threat to go with Harry could just be a bluff. Had anyone told him that Harry and Hermione were willing to make this deal not for their good, not for their preference, but for the greater good, he would not have believed it.

Ron fought his pride for nearly a minute.

For once, Ron's pride lost. Ron knelt before Hermione and Harry and then swore the modifications to the Oath.

When Ron was done, Hermione turned to the Minister. "We'll report for training on the First of August. Training in the morning, sitting on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the afternoon." Percy's jaw dropped, while the Minister grinned. "Ron should go with you now, Percy, to start learning the ins-and-outs of the Ministry under your guidance. We'll pitch the tent down near Hagrid's. Ron, you can start coming to visit on weekends starting in July."

"And what will you two be doing there before now and August First?" Percy demanded.

"We'll be working with Professor McGonagall to straighten out Hogwarts, and Harry will also be available in Hogsmeade in the afternoon," Hermione answered. "Ginny will help us."

Ginny looked up hopefully.

"That reminds me," Harry said. He slipped off the light robe he had been wearing, showing he was now dressing in very expensive Muggle casual clothes. "Ginny, you are now my possession. Take off all your clothes."

"WHAT!" Ron and Percy shouted.

"All she has from now on only comes from me, right down to getting her clothes and a new wand." Harry looked at Ginny. "Shouldn't you be naked by now?"

"Yes, my lord," Ginny answered with a smirk. As she quickly complied, Ron and Percy averted their eyes, and growled until the Minister did the same. Ginny stood there, nude, until Harry handed her his robe.

"Gentlemen," Harry said in farewell, even if he was thinking, 'Or rather Minister and Weasleys.'
"Come along, Ginny. It's time to start your concubine training."

"Yes, my lord," Ginny answered. It wasn't how she had planned on becoming Harry's, but the important thing was, she was becoming Harry's.

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Nineteen Years Later

December

Sitting nude under an umbrella and big floppy hat and sun glasses, in a beach chair on the fringe of the beach of the Caribbean island sex club, Hermione Granger-Weasley was happy. Magically tanned and covered with a sun-screen potion she had invented, only a few smile and laugh lines betrayed the fact that she was not well under thirty. Still, not even the most critical of the other women would have guessed she was in fact 37 rather than 32 or 33. Most, in fact, would put her at around 28 to 30.

She had found this club on the internet back in 2001, and she and Harry had spent a long week here every winter since. While it was a swing club with a very attractive staff who could be invited to play as well, she had never taken advantage of the fact that nearly all of the males panted over her body. She had discovered her own exhibitionist streak when she had discovered internet porn in 1999, and had been posting anonymously on Redclouds and Watchersweb since late 2000, a vice that only Harry and Luna knew about. Although shy, Harry let her indulge on the island, and they often drew appreciative crowds here when they had sex. Every once in a while, Hermione would choose one of the attractive woman who flocked around Harry to join them, although the woman's partner at most got to watch and masturbate.

Other than this one week a year, Harry and Hermione had spent nearly all their private time away from the Weasleys away from each other as well since 2003. Even before then, they had usually spent half the time apart as well.

Hermione spent her alone time at major magical research centers around the world. While she spent much of her time organizing various aspects of the Ministry, Hermione was now also an internationally recognized expert on magical theory. All this allowed Ron to pretend that the time Hermione and Harry spent together was innocent as well.

Between 1999 and 2004, Harry had wielded the elder wand and had gone through and crushed the Darker and criminal aspects of the magical societies of the Atlantic -- Europe, Africa, and the Americas. No one thought that Dark magic practitioners were gone, let alone gone for good. They were just practicing on a very small scale. The same was true of crime. The crime families were broken, and more legitimate ways of trading between the magical and Muggle worlds had been set up. One of Harry's offices in the MLES actually liaised with their Muggle counterparts to make certain that neither world preyed on the other.

Because his activities took him around the world, Harry actually only spent between 30-40 weeks a year in Britain. He generally spent 10-12 weeks a year camping, which included the two or three weeks he kept for himself. Harry had developed a Muggle identity as a travel photographer. He took Ginny and the children camping every July. All this gave him plenty of time to study local conditions. Somehow, Harry, with or without Ginny or his family, managed to fit in without really being noticed. He had developed a nose for the Dark, and local Ministries were often surprised by his tips.

Hermione saw Harry coming towards her, two drinks in hand. She smiled as she saw women (and a few men) licking their lips at the thought of joining, or being joined to, Harry. She noted that Harry hadn't allowed any woman to tag along for her approval.

Hermione had noticed that, over the years, Harry had never suggested a red head, a Chinese, or a woman with lots of chestnut hair. Half had been blondes (natural or otherwise), and most of those blondes were slim and dreamy-featured. The rest were an eclectic mix, and Hermione always had the final say. Hermione's suggestions were a mix as far as their looks, but were always naturally submissive.

"Thank you, my love," Hermione said, accepting the large mix of fruit juices. Harry returned the smile and snuggled next to her, kissing her shoulder. "No pretty little fishes?"

"None are as pretty as you," Harry returned.

"Flatterer."

"Maybe in thirty or forty years, but certainly not now," Harry claimed. "Honestly, have either of us ever looked at another woman the first two or three days here?" This was, after all, their first full day at the resort.

"Good point." Hermione lowered her voice. "I've been meaning to mention this. I heard that load of goblin dung you told Al last September." This was the first chance they had had to talk about it in private.

Harry snorted as he remembered the scene from three months before. "What was I supposed to tell the poor boy? That because he was born three weeks early, I was out of the country and his prick Uncle Percy named him?" He snorted again. "Albus Severus. Poor kid."

"He was the bravest man I ever knew'," Hermione teased.

"Actually," Harry said thoughtfully, "he might have been. Close, anyway. On the other hand, he was also an emotionally-stunted, snarky, stalker."

"Were you disappointed Al was Sorted into Hufflepuff?"

"Not at all, even if Rose was upset they were separated." Rose, to Ron's disappointment, had been Sorted into Ravenclaw.

Hermione leaned over and took Harry in hand. "Is there anything about the magical world we need to talk about? Or can we relax and have fun?"

Harry pretended to think, and then said, "No, I can't think of anything."

Hermione sat her drink down, removed her hat, and then leaned over. Quickly, a small crowd gathered to watch a true expert work on the most admired tool on the island.

Harry leaned back and relaxed, one hand gently caressing his lover's shoulders and back. He closed his eyes, forgetting about everything except the pleasure.

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That night, as Hermione lay cuddled in his arms, Harry reflected. Life wasn't perfect, but it was awfully good. He loved Hermione, but over the years her need to dominate had become so pronounced he knew he couldn't have stood it had they been together full time. This in turn had led Ron, totally dominated at home, to be the most aggressive auror in Britain. It was also driving young Hugo towards either secretly becoming the true heir of the Marauders and the Weasley twins, or worse, perhaps a bully. Only time would tell.

Harry was not surprised at this aspect of Hermione's personality, as Hermione had from the start taken great pleasure in 'training' Ginny. Ginny had learned to enjoy her submission in the bedroom, and to enjoy the spankings she now deliberately provoked whenever any woman other than Hermione or Luna got too close to Harry.

Harry enjoyed all his children. Unlike most parents, who think they know their children, Harry actually did understand his. Luna's first child and Harry's eldest child, Peverell, was now a sixth year Ravenclaw and rebelling against his mother and grandfather by being nearly a clone of his 'Aunt' Hermione (while only Hermione and Ginny knew of Harry's intermittent but long-term affair with Luna, Harry had made certain that she and her children, and Teddy Lupin, were considered part of Molly's One Great and Happy Weasley Family). James, the oldest of the three publically acknowledged as his, was probably the most well-adjusted of his six: smart, happy, and outgoing; mischievous without being cruel.

Dian, Luna's second child, to the surprise of everyone was a spritely second year Hufflepuff. The more staid Puffers were unsure what to do with a pretty, happy girl who tended to dance rather than walk. Rather than the abuse Luna had had to endure in Ravenclaw, the older Hufflepuff girls had adopted her as a mascot, perhaps because unlike Luna she didn't feel the need to talk about obscure or mythical creatures. Instead, Dian's passions were music and dance.

Rose and Al (Harry generally refused to even think of the boy as Albus) were practically fraternal twins, for although they were conceived nearly four weeks apart, they were born within an hour of each other. Despite loving his father very much, Al was something of a 'momma's boy', and Harry suspected that over time, Al would become his mother's advocate. Harry was glad they had made a connection on the Platform, and he made certain he wrote Al at least once a week.

Just as Dian was much like Luna, so Rose and Lily were much like their mothers. Harry was glad that Rose was by nature an intellectual, because Hermione was determined that her children would be intellectuals and scholars. ('Good luck with Hugo,' Harry thought. 'That boy is the only slow Weasley I've ever met.') Rose had also inherited the sensual streak her mother had only discovered after the war. While Rose loved and absorbed all the books she got as presents (as demanded by Hermione, nearly everyone gave her children books), she had asked her godfather Harry for makeup

and bath oils, knowing that he was the one person who could defy her mother. (Harry was godfather to all of his children from Hermione and Luna, as well as Teddy Lupin and George's oldest son, Fred.) Rose was also a natural flirt, which Hermione blamed on Fleur's influence in the family.

Within the family, Lily was an out-going tom-boy, the most likely child to strip off and jump into Granny and Grandpa's pond on any warm day. With any stranger near by, she was likely to be hiding behind Ginny's skirts, unless she was angry. She had far and away the loudest temper of all of Harry's children. Still, she was one of the youngest of the extended Weasley family, and the youngest of the few girls. She often played the baby.

Yes, Harry decided he was generally very happy with his family, biological and extended. His job was currently fairly easy, with no Dark activities visible. The Ministry was still moderately incompetent overall, but it seemed to be fairly open and honest these days. Since Harry's faction espoused the training of the Muggle-raised in traditional magical culture, and came down hard on any violations of the various secrecy regulations, even the strongest pro-Pure Bloods were still willing to go along with the agenda.

Both Harry and Hermione would have liked Professor McGonagall to have stayed on as Headmistress, but she had refused to officially take the position, and after two years she had gone back to head Gryffindor (until she had felt Neville was ready to take over a few years before) and teach. Like all the teachers who had taught that terrible year that Snape had controlled Hogwarts, she did not feel worthy to become the head of the school.

Harry felt Hermione shift, pressing close against him. He kissed her shoulder, cupped her breast, and fell asleep a very happy man.

He was now Harry Potter, well-respected and certainly one of the most powerful mages alive. He was no longer 'the Boy-Who-Lived', 'the Chosen One'. He had his own life. He was no longer Dumbledore's puppet with the scar.