

# **The Hairs of The Founders**

By

Hermione

## **Chapter One Wedding Night Blues**

The boy who lived surveyed the house. He was no longer a boy. He was now a man. He no longer went to school. He was now a Professional Quidditch player.

Harry James Potter stood in the lounge room, inspecting the sight. They'd done all right out of the deal they had made with Sirius. He had offered them either his house or Chrystal's after the wedding. Unbeknownst to anyone else they had ended up taking Sirius' because most of Harry's things were already there. And because of the security that was already in place. Not that they really needed it. He and his girlfriend Hermione Granger were placed under a very powerful charm, known as the Fidelius Charm. This meant that even if someone searched and searched the house they would never find them, unless their Secret keeper revealed their whereabouts. That was unlikely given that the person who was their Secret Keeper was someone that everyone but a select group of people thought was dead.

They were hiding because Harry was part of a prophecy, The Prophecy of Saoghal that foretold the fate of the Wizarding world.

It wasn't that he couldn't handle loneliness. He wasn't alone. Hermione, having found out that he intended to go into hiding, had refused to allow him to go alone. The thing Harry hated was the uncertainty. There was a future laid out for him, which someone knew the outcome of, yet he himself did not know what would happen. Waiting was not one of Harry's fortes.

They had just come back from Sirius Black and Chrystal Quille's wedding. They had had an exhausting night and both of them were ready to head straight for bed. Harry remembered that it was their first night in their home together. He walked over to Hermione and nuzzled his face in her neck.

'Sweetie,' he whispered. 'Do you realise that this is our first night totally alone since Christmas break?'

'Honey,' he replied. 'Do you realise that this is our first night alone in our new house?'

Harry picked her up and carried her upstairs.

\*~\*

Lavender Brown stared out the window of her room in the staff quarters at Hogwarts. She had spent the evening gazing into The Orb hoping that she would see something different. But every time it was just the same thing over and over again, the same horrendous nightmare.

She was all alone.

Her friends had all left Hogwarts permanently. She had broken up with Seamus. It had ended quite nastily in fact. Her father had been killed in one of the London explosions. Her mother had been dead for years.

She was cursed with the ability to see the future. It was absolutely dreadful knowing exactly what was going to happen and being unable to prevent it. Like last Christmas. A week before the Shrieking Shack Explosion she had gazed into The Orb. She was scared about the future. She had looked into The Orb and had seen her then boyfriend Harry Potter, snogging her roommate Hermione Granger. Lavender had instantly blamed Hermione, walking around the house cursing her and calling her a slut, but it had made Lavender face facts. Harry Potter didn't love her. His thoughts were otherwise occupied and had been for quite a while, even though he'd tried to deny it.

Worse was the fact that she knew what would happen in the final confrontation between the Heirs of the Founders of Hogwarts. It was a secret that she could not tell anyone. She was already burdened with the knowledge. She knew how terrible it would be to burden someone else with that knowledge having carried it herself for almost a month. She just hoped that when the time came,

she and the others could be strong.

She looked out the window gazing at the stars.

'Come what may,' she whispered.

\*~\*

Chrystal White and Sirius Black had just reached their honeymoon destination.

Chrystal turned towards her husband.

How lucky she was to finally snare him after all this time, and she hadn't even had to use her Celtic powers either.

'Sirius, you've got to get me out of this dress, I can barely breathe,' she said. 'I think the others might have been a bit younger when they wore this dress.'

The wedding dress was a white and gold medieval gown, made out of chiffon and silk that had been worn by the White women since the days of Rowena Ravenclaw. Chrystal, at the age of thirty-six was probably the oldest bride in the family.

'No darling,' Sirius replied untying the laces of the corsetry. 'The others just haven't had about eighteen years of professional Quidditch playing behind them. They were all anorexic twig thin women like your mother and probably got married as soon as they finished at Hogwarts. Now, the other side of the family's much more interesting. Tell me about this fairy relative you have.' He had finished with the laces. She took a deep breath in.

'Finally,' she said with a smile on her face. 'I think I'll tell you about the fairy later.'

She ran over and jumped on the bed next to where Sirius had been sitting.

'Thank you for this perfect day,' she whispered.

'Anytime my dear,' he replied as he dimmed the lights with his wand.

Not another word was spoken until the early hours of the morning.

'Are you frightened Sirius?' Chrystal asked somewhat hesitantly.

He looked at her quizzically.

'Why would I be scared?' he asked.

'About Voldemort,' she replied. 'About what the future holds. About The Prophecy.'

'I don't see the point Chrys,' he replied. 'I've spent too many years wallowing in self-pity to waste time now. It's true that I may not have very long with you, and if that's the case I intend to enjoy it.' Sirius saw the look of apprehension on her face. 'Listen darling, I know you think that you're the one who will die if Voldemort is to be defeated, but you don't know if that's the case. Lavender's character could be the same as Voldemort's. I struggle to believe that you are evil, despite your family background. There's far too much good in you.'

'But Ravenclaw and Slytherin,' she began but Sirius interrupted her.

'Don't spoil our honeymoon Chrystal,' he said somewhat coarsely. 'Don't worry about it. Soon enough I will be searching for Prongs and you will be flying around on a broomstick. Lets enjoy the little time we have.'

He breathed a sigh of relief as she snuggled closer to him.

'Great way to start a marriage,' he thought.

\*~\*

The man known as the Dark Lord stood in his castle. He was weaker. He had lost so much in the

past twelve months. The main blow had been that a vital link to his immortality had been destroyed. In fact his immortality had been destroyed. The bells were linked to his immortality.

Damn Lucius for taking them there. Damn Lucius for failing and damn Lucius for receiving a Dementor's kiss. Now he was without his right hand man for the second time, given that Wormtail had also received a Dementor's kiss.

Worst of all Voldemort cursed himself. He kept overlooking things that were important. He had overlooked the protection that Harry Potter would receive by his mother dying for him, he had overlooked the Phoenix tears, and now he had Harry Potter's blood in him. Had he overlooked something there?

He did not know what his next step would be. His loyal Death Eaters were out reaping havoc in the Wizarding and the Muggle worlds but he had still remained silent. His recruiting process at least was working, at the next full moon he would initiate two more ex-Hogwarts students, thanks to Lucius' son. Perhaps he could groom the young boy to take over his father's position.

He glanced down at his hip.

He wondered if he should worry about the snake that had just appeared there, the day after Christmas.

\*~\*

The final chapter in the saga of the Founders had begun. None knew when the actual day would come.

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The entire British wizarding community seemed to have gone mad in the wake of the upcoming European Cup. Profiles of players were splattered all over the pages of the Daily Prophet, miniatures became on sale and not a day would pass when Ginny Weasley would not hear some mention of the Cup. She herself was looking forward to it, but with each day that passed, the excitement could not bring a smile to her brother Ron's face.

*He's been like this since Sirius' wedding.*

It wasn't very difficult to figure out why.

He had been moping around since Harry and Hermione had disappeared, and it didn't help that his girlfriend, Rose was also Harry's sister. He seemed to be pushing her away more than trying to get through this rough patch.

Ginny wondered what she could do to help him. If Quidditch didn't excite him, she didn't know what would. And he would be off for his Hit Wizard Training soon. He would be in confinement for several months, and given Ron's state of mind, Ginny wasn't exactly sure that would be a good thing.

She sighed as she pulled out a piece of paper to write a note to her Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher, who would surely be able to pass it onto Harry.

*Dear Harry,*

*I'm not sure whether or not you will get this but I'm writing to ask you if you could hang around for a couple of minutes after your first European Cup match. Ron is really depressed you see and I think if he could just talk to either or you for a couple of minutes it would improve his mood.*

*Hope that everything is going well,*

*Love Ginny.*

Ginny hoped it would work.

She got ready for bed thinking of the upcoming match. It brought a smile to her face. Not only was

it a chance to cheer Ron up, but she would get to see her boyfriend Draco Malfoy again.

\*~\*

The morning of the first match of the European Cup descended upon Scotland much quicker than anyone anticipated. Soon enough the players had gathered from all over Europe for the most coveted trophy bar the World Cup. Only the top four teams from each league is invited to play. Harry's team was fourth ranked in the British and Irish Quidditch league. Today would be his first game. His first professional game, his first game for Puddlemere United and certainly the first game he would play in the International Arena.

He hoped he was ready.

Last night he and Hermione had performed the charm that protects Animagi from being killed with the Avada Kedavra Curse. But Harry was aware that there were far more threats than just that curse. Earlier that morning his mother removed the Fidelius Charm on Harry and would remove it from Hermione just before the game. Once the charm was removed, anyone would be able to find them.

He looked at Ginny's letter one more time. Ron was depressed. Harry would linger for only a short amount of time after the game and hoped it was long enough to get some sense out of Ron.

Harry looked up and Oliver Wood was by his side.

'Well Potter you scrub up well in those robes,' he said referring to Harry's brand new navy blue robes. 'You ready?'

'As ready as I'll ever be,' Harry replied. He swallowed and followed Wood out. At least he was playing at Hogwarts where at least the ground was familiar.

Because he was the Seeker his name was the last to be announced.

'POTTER' resounded through the grounds.

The sun streamed into the grounds of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry as Harry made his way onto the pitch.

There were many more people here than any game Harry had played before.

Harry mounted his broom, then the umpire blew his whistle starting the game.

Harry caught the Snitch in a matter of seconds, leading to disgruntled crowd members. It was a freak occurrence actually. The Snitch was released, the whistle blew and Harry caught sight of it as it flew past the side of his ear. He raced after it and caught almost instantly, before any Chaser had a chance to score.

Harry knew he was lucky.

He was playing in the big leagues now and he knew it would be virtually impossible to keep his win-loss record to what it had been at Hogwarts. All the same he was relieved when the game ended, it meant that he could get out of the public eye and perhaps have a heart to heart with Ron.

He slowly changed out of his gear and went into the player area, where Hermione, Ron and Rose were waiting for him. Hermione had an access pass and had brought Ron and Rose with her.

'Rose and I are going to have a little chat,' Hermione said, breaking the silence. 'We'll go and get a drink and meet you two back here in an hour.'

After they had left the room, Harry took a good, hard look at Ron. His best friend looked extremely worn and tired.

'What's up Ron?' he asked. 'Don't be ashamed, you know you can tell me anything.'

Ron looked at Harry slowly.

'I never thought I'd say this, growing up in my family, but I'm lonely,' Ron replied. 'I miss simply

being able to owl you and Hermione. You're my best friends and it's really quite difficult to envisage life without you. You've no idea. On top of that, I start training in a couple of weeks, and we'll be in confinement for at least a month, which is a month of Rose's holidays, and when I get back, she'll be back at school and I won't be able to see her frequently either. I mean what am I supposed to do Harry? Immerse myself in work. I'm not that sort of person. The Cannon's don't even have training for a while, given that the pre-season tournament is cancelled due to the Cup.'

'It's hard for us too Ron,' Harry replied. 'Look, we've been in confinement for two weeks. At least you've got something to do. The only thing I've got to look forward to is Quidditch training, and every time I break the spell I have to worry about someone trying to kill me. So I'm bored. Hermione is doing Mediwizard training by correspondence, but she's not finding it very challenging at all, so she's bored. I feel like I'm holding her back, I don't want her to resent me for the rest of her life because of it. On top of that I've just found out I have a sister, and I can't spend any time with her, and when I finally get to see her, both she and my best friend look like hell. I know it's difficult Ron. We never said it would be easy. We just have to do the best we can to get through it. You need to be strong for Rose, I need to be strong for Hermione and we both need to be strong for each other.'

'I know you're right Harry,' Ron said. 'I feel better just being able to talk to you. I'll try and see you after each Quidditch match, except when I'm in training. Give you an update on what's going on in the outside world.'

Harry laughed.

'We'll need it,' he replied. 'We can't even get The Daily Prophet, the reliable source that it is.'

At that moment Hermione and Rose reappeared.

'Come on,' Rose said. 'Butterbeer at The Three Broomsticks, my shout. You two need to be seen in public and besides I believe the rest of the Puddlemere team are going, so you should too Harry.'

He looked at Hermione who nodded, before the four headed to Hogsmeade for a Butterbeer.

The Three Broomsticks was unusually rowdy for this time of year, but it was a good chance to catch up with everyone they hadn't had a chance to speak to for a while.

They walked in the room and immediately spied a table at which Fred, George, Lee, Angelina, Katie and Alicia were sitting. They beckoned for them to come over.

'Harry, Hermione,' George yelled. 'Haven't seen you for a couple of weeks. What have you been doing, hiding?'

Harry didn't quite know what to say.

Wood appeared at that moment to save Harry.

'Nah,' Wood said. 'We've just been working him hard. How are you anyway Weasley?'

Harry breathed a sigh of relief that Oliver had managed to deflect George from that question, so that he didn't have to try and explain where they had been for the last couple of weeks. George and Fred began rabbiting on about Weasley Wizard Wheezes, for so long that Harry almost became bored with it. It took Angelina to come over and distract Fred to end the conversation. But given that Angelina was there, the talk immediately turned to Quidditch, which Harry wasn't so sure Hermione wanted to listen to. She hadn't been too keen for Harry to play in the Cup at all, but she had supported him, given the protective charm he had cast. As long as he wasn't hit with the Avada Kedavra curse Hermione said she would support him playing. And to be honest, he had been quite nervous walking out on the pitch. Enough people had already tried to kill or harm him during a Quidditch match, and he wasn't entirely sure that he was doing the right thing. But he did seem to have the support of Sirius and Dumbledore.

'What do you think Harry?'

'What?' Harry looked up and was torn out of his contemplation. George had obviously asked a question and Harry hadn't been paying attention. 'I guess I'm just knackered, I didn't sleep much last night.'

'Well,' George replied. 'We were thinking of having a farewell party for Ron, before he goes off for his training. Night after the cup ends. What do you think?'

'Umm,' Harry replied. What could he say? He hadn't really thought about what his reply would be to question would be.

'It's a nice idea George,' Hermione interrupted. 'But Harry and I are going on a bit of extended vacation after the cup. Gift from my parents for doing so well in my N.E.W.Ts.'

Fred and George raised their eyebrows at each other but didn't question it.

'Don't worry,' Harry replied. 'We'll be back in time for the League. I think our first game's against the Cannons. Couldn't let my team face the Weasley's without me!'

Harry and Hermione quickly made their apologies after that and apparated back to their house.

'I hated that,' Harry said to her as soon as they had arrived.

'I know,' she replied softly.

'It's not fair to lie to friends that,' Harry replied. 'I bet Fred and George are thinking that we're really rude now.'

'Look Harry,' Hermione said. 'Once it is all over and we explain it to everyone I'm sure they won't hold it against us. Anyhow, I think Rose is right about us making an appearance. It's important. If people don't think we're hiding, then they won't go looking for us. So let everyone think we're going on an exotic holiday somewhere.'

'You're right,' he conceded. 'You're always right Hermione, I don't know why I bother disagreeing with you.'

## **Chapter Two Seeking**

Ginny Weasley opened her scrapbook of the European Cup. She had been collecting all the articles about the British Teams. It was a lot different to follow the games when you knew a few people on the teams. And when you got to go to all the games, because your boyfriend had bought you season tickets.

### **Draw Week One**

*Ballycastle Bats (UK) vs. Minsk Mermen (RA)*

*Braga Broomfleet (MT) vs. Schafthausen Schlössel (GA)*

*Porsuk Pixies (BS) vs. Warsaw Werewolves (PC)*

*Ludvika Elves (SC) vs. Nivelles Noctures (FS)*

*Puddlemere United (UK) vs. Sirgriuil Sunrays (FS)*

*Heidelberg Harriers (GA) vs. Naples Knights (MT)*

*Moscow Turmani (RA) vs. Ajka Ants (PC)*

*Haugesund Hounds (SC) vs. Frunze Fairies (BS)*

*Knittlefield Kneazles (GA) vs. Nizhniy Gnomes (GA)*

*Copenhagen Cobblers (SC) vs. Deva Dragons (BS)*

*Badajoz Bulls (MT) vs. Wimbourne Wasps (UK)*

### **Czestochwa Acromatula vs. Bigonville Bombers (FS)**

*Corinth Centuars (MT) vs. Den Haag Harpies (GA)*

*Veilkiye Vampires (RA) vs. Iceland Icicles (SC)*

*Grodzisk Goblins (PC) vs. Quafflepunchers (FS)*

*Pride of Portree (UK) vs. The Vultures (BS)*

### **League Codes**

#### **RA Combined Independent States Quidditch League**

*PC The Polish and Czech Quidditch League*

*UK The British and Irish Quidditch League*

*BS The Quidditch League of the Black Sea countries*

*GA The German and Austrian Quidditch League (includes Holland)*

*FS The French and Swiss Quidditch League*

*MT The Quidditch League of the Mediterranean Countries*

*SC The Quidditch League of Scandinavia*

Week One

POTTER CATCHES THE SNITCH IN FIVE SECONDS! IS IT SKILL OR LUCK?

### ***SHORTEST QUIDDITCH GAME IN THE HISTORY OF THE SPORT!***

Harry Potter, the boy who lived, made wizard history again today as he caught the Snitch in five seconds in his first professional Quidditch game. The eighteen year old, who is fresh out of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, was drafted by Puddlemere United in the National Quidditch Draft, after their former Seeker Hamish Dalton was tragically killed in an explosion in



London. Before the tournament Puddlemere was rated an outside chance, with the hot favourites being the Turmani, the Vultures and the Broomfleet, but the drafting of Potter has left supporters wondering if he can weave anymore magic this cup and give the thirtieth ranked team a chance.

### **□ILLE BRINGS THE PRIDES HOME AGAINST BULGARIA!**

Bulgarian Quidditch officials were not impressed when Scotland's very own local talent knocked out the only team from Bulgaria to qualify for the European Cup. The Vultures were red-hot favourites for this years Cup, after they demolished every other team in The Black Sea Quidditch League. However, their star player Viktor Krum paled in comparison to Chrystal □ille, the Prides' thirty-six year old Seeker, who grabbed the Snitch from above Krum's head. Krum's performance was very out of character; he is not known to make mistakes like that. Whether luck or skill, the Prides will most certainly grab the chance to go further in this cup, not having won a European Cup since the days Catriona McCormack was a player.

### **BATS BEAT MERMEN**

The premiers of the British League had an easy run today against the Minsk Mermen, beating them by four hundred points. The Mermen scored just once.

### **WASPS WIN!! FOUR BRITISH TEAMS THROUGH TO THE NEXT ROUND!!**

Ludo Bagman appeared very happy today when commentating for his old team. The Badajoz Bulls didn't give them many problems. The Wasps made it look easy as they kept putting the Quaffle through the goals.

### **Draw Week Two**

*Ballycastle Bats (UK) vs. Braga Broomfleet (MT)*

*Porsuk Pixies (BS) vs. Ludvika Elves (SC)*

*Puddlemere United (UK) vs. Heidelberg Harriers (GA)*

*Moscow Turmani (RA) vs. Frunze Fairies (BS)*

*Knittlefield Kneazles (GA) vs. Deva Dragons (BS)*

*Bigonville Bombers (FS) vs. Wimbourne Wasps (UK)*

*Corinth Centuars (MT) vs. Iceland Icicles (SC)*

*Quafflepunchers (FR) vs. Pride of Portree (UK)*

Week Two

### **PUDDLEMERE DEFEATS HEIDELBERG. WOOD SAVES THE DAY!!**

Puddlemere United' Oliver Wood showed the Wizarding World that there's much more to Quidditch than simply catching the Snitch. In a competition that has been largely dominated by the ability of each teams Seeker to catch the Snitch before the other teams, Oliver Wood showed that you don't need to catch the Snitch to win the game. Wood did not allow the Harriers to score once and despite their Seeker beating Potter to the Snitch, it was all to no avail, with the Puddlemere Chaser, Ebony Fraser put the Quaffle through the hoop making the score one hundred and sixty to one hundred and fifty.

### **CATRIONA MCCORMACK SHOWS HER COACHING SKILLS!!**

There is only one explanation for the Pride of Portree's convincing win today over the Quafflepunchers. That is teamwork and it can only be attributed to the amazing skills of coach and former captain Catriona McCormack. The former Chaser, who led the Prides to victory in two league finals in the sixties, has come to show her finesse in coaching with the wonders she has worked with the Prides in recent years. Daughter, Meagan is an almost unbeatable Keeper, the three Chasers work together as one in a fashion that would suggest that they had only ever played

together and Seeker Chrystal □ille rarely fails to catch the Snitch.

## **BRITAIN MOURNS! TWO BRITISH TEAMS KNOACKED OUT IN ONE DAY!**

Both the Wasps and the Bats have been knocked out of the European Cup today.....

### **Draw Week Three - Quarter Finals**

*Braga Broomfleet (MT) vs. Porsuk Pixies (BS)*

*Puddlemere United (UK) vs. Moscow Turmani (RA)*

*Deva Dragons (BS) vs. Bigonville Bombers (FS)*

*Pride of Portree (UK) vs. Iceland Icicles (SC)*

Week Three

### **NOT EVEN POTTER CAN STOP THE RAIN.**

The Russian Turmani today again demonstrated why they are the hot favourites for the European Cup. The fourth ranked British Team had no chance today as they were pounded by the team from Moscow. Seeker, Harry Potter had several chances to catch the Snitch, however catching it would have guaranteed victory for the Turmani. In the end the Turmani Seeker managed to beat Potter to the Snitch, sealing victory for the favourites.

### **PRIDES HEAT MELTS THE ICE!**

Once again the Prides showed that teamwork is the key to a Quidditch victory as they applied the heat to the Icicles in a convincing victory. Now the only British Team left in the competition, and playing on home soil, now carry the hopes of Britain on their shoulders.

### **Draw Week Four - Semi Finals**

*Moscow Turmani (RA) vs. Braga Broomfleet (MT)*

*Bigonville Bombers (FS) vs. Pride of Portree (UK)*

Week Four

### **PRIDES THROUGH TO THEIR FIRST FINAL IN THIRTY YEARS!**

McCormack and □ille saved the day for the Prides today against the Bombers, in a repeat of their performance against the Quafflepunchers.

### **Final**

*Moscow Turmani (RA) vs. Pride of Portree (UK)*

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The end of the week drew near.

He had spent the last week searching, and was still no closer than he had been three months ago to attaining his goal. He had searched every part of the wood, but he could not say with any certainty

The sun set and he was reminded once again that he had failed in his goal. When the sun had disappeared, so did he.

Sirius appeared in the foyer of Dunvegan Castle. Alasdair McLeod was waiting for him.

'Sirius,' he said. 'I see you have returned once again unsuccessful.'

Sirius nodded.

'Do not let it worry you,' he said. 'If the creature is to be found, you will find him eventually. Chrystal is waiting for you in the drawing room.'

Sirius made his way slowly into the drawing room. He hadn't been sure about the decision that he

and Chrystal had made about staying at Dunvegan Castle, but when they were going to be at Hogwarts for most of the year, it didn't seem worth staying elsewhere. Also, they had offered either of their houses to Harry and Hermione. They didn't know whether or not they had accepted, and didn't want to know. But they had to have a starting point. The money in Harry's vault would not last forever. Especially now that Lily and possibly James were alive and that Rose exists.

He entered the room.

'No luck Sirius?' Chrystal asked.

'None at all,' he replied. 'I just wish I could be sure we hadn't missed him. Anyway, how come you're waiting up for me? I thought you were supposed to be resting for tomorrow's big game.'

Chrystal was playing in the finals of the world cup early the next morning.

'I know, I know,' she replied. 'I just couldn't sleep. I feel a need to find him. I just wish I could be helping.'

'You are helping,' he replied. 'Trust me, you need to keep up your public profile. People would wonder if you suddenly stopped playing, unless you were pregnant. You're at the peak of your career Chrys, enjoy it while you can, because I dare say that my godson will soon be a Quidditch legend in his own right and nobody will care about you anymore.'

'Thanks, darling,' she said with a slight smile upon her face. 'I constantly need to be reminded of that fact. And let me remind you, I'm not past my prime yet. I think I will go to bed now. I do need some rest.'

Sirius watched as his wife made her way upstairs. She seemed so detached in some sense, like she was losing inspiration to live. Sirius felt that she was willing herself to die, because she believed with such conviction that if Voldemort fell she would be the one to die. Sirius didn't honestly believe that her character was the same as Voldemort's, it just simply wasn't a possibility. *What could he do? How could he help her?* He had thought and thought about this the entire time he had been searching.

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## □ *ILLE VS. KORVA*

### *THE SHOWDOWN OF THE CUP!*

Lavender looked at the headline.

Even after the three months that the cup had been going on, she still couldn't get used to the headlines including people she knew. She had never really enjoyed Quidditch at school, but had gone to all the games because Parvati had dragged her along.

And now her home had been invaded with continued games.

The other thing that bothered her were the constant mentions of both Harry's and Chrystal's names. Harry was okay; she could deal with that, despite not having really gotten over him. But her old Professor was different. There was something about her that Lavender just couldn't put her finger on. There was something she didn't like about her.

It wasn't because a lot of the boys thought she was pretty. Lavender personally couldn't see it, but she could see a few features that may cause eyes to turn. It wasn't because she was a good professor, and Lavender herself was unsure of how well she would be able to teach Divination. There was just something about her that made Lavender uncomfortable. She had noticed it the first time she had met her, at Harry's seventeenth birthday.

Lavender didn't want to be bonded to her in such away. But that was unavoidable; they were part of the same prophecy. Still, she would have preferred to be bonded to Hermione Granger, and given that Hermione had stolen her boyfriend that was saying a lot.

She sighed as she put down the paper. Only one more game of Quidditch before life could resume a kind of normalcy.

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Scotland had certainly come alive for the final of the Cup.

The village of Hogsmeade was decked out to the fullest, banners in all the store windows and the Three Broomsticks had taken on an entirely new appearance.

Most places were decked out mainly in purple and gold, but a few rebel houses sported the Russian colours. It seemed like the entire British wizarding community was making their way to Hogwarts for the final. Fred and George Weasley had been up since sunrise, hoping that customers would fill their pockets with their products before the match, as it was expected that the match could literally last for days. Their prediction had paid off. They had pulled in more money that morning than they had for the rest of the year, (well, excepting the previous two months during which the cup had been on).

George looked at his watch.

'Time to go up?' he asked his twin.

'I think so,' he replied. 'The match begins in twenty minutes and we need to go through security. You okay here, Dean?' Fred asked Dean Thomas, who had been working for the twins over the break. It had worked quite well, as Dean who was not to start his job at the Ministry until September, was not really that interested in Quidditch, despite having a brief stint on the Gryffindor Quidditch team. It meant that Fred and George could go to most of the games and leave the store in the hands of someone they knew they could trust.

'Yes,' Dean replied. 'I'll be here until Ernie comes is that right?'

'Yes,' George replied. 'Best be off now.'

He and Fred walked out the door. Just before they reached Hogwarts, Fred noticed his twin was looking a little off colour.

'What's up?' he asked.

'It's just that,' George started before biting his tongue.

'What?'

'Don't worry,' he said.

'Hang on a minute,' Fred said as they stood in the queue to make their way into the stands. 'I'm your twin. Do you know what that means? It means you are obliged to tell me everything.'

'It's just that, well I promised Katie I'd ask her to marry me if the Prides win,' he replied. 'It was in a moment of insanity. But now that the time is approaching, I'm not sure I can go through with it.'

Fred looked long and hard at his twin. Then he finally asked what he believed to be true.

'You've got stronger feelings for her than you've ever had for anyone, don't you?' he said. 'It's obvious George. The question is do you want to spend the rest of your life with her?'

It wasn't hard for George to quickly nod in reply.

'Then you should ask her George,' Fred said. 'Regardless of whether or not the Prides win. You and Katie have a chemistry that is obvious, you simply belong together. Whereas Angelina and I don't have quite the same bond. You're the more sensitive one George, I always knew you would be the first.'

George looked at his twin very solemnly.

'So did I,' he replied.

\*~\*

Chrystal □ille was pacing the Quidditch change room. Deep down she knew this could possibly be one of her last matches. Catriona had been addressing the team and she had tuned out. It was now evident that she had finished. People were about to disperse for a couple of minutes before the match began.

'Hang on,' Chrys said. Everyone turned around surprised. Chrystal never really had much to say about the team's tactics. There was a good reason she was a Seeker and it wasn't just because she won games. Even though she did have a personality that most people on the team couldn't resist.

'What is it Chrystal?' Catriona asked.

'I think everyone here knows that this will probably be my last chance at winning the European Cup,' she began. Most people in the room nodded. There had been a secret bet on how long Chrystal would last as a Quidditch player once she and Sirius Black had married. Everyone knew that she wanted children, and pregnancy wasn't exactly the best state for your body to be in while playing Quidditch. 'It's the only trophy I haven't got yet, and it's one that I would very much like for my wall. But I think that most of those trophy's are due to Cat's great coaching. If we play by her tactics we should win today. I promise you I will not catch the Snitch today unless we are guaranteed the game. But I'd really like you to help me to finally have that trophy on my wall, and on yours as well. However, I want it done for Cat, not for me. And then *when* we win, I will throw us all a big party at Dunvegan Castle.'

At that moment Ludo Bagman's voice resounded through the rooms. He was announcing the Moscow Team. The Pride's assembled at the door. The team members were checking their purple and gold robes, several members were nervous at the prospect of playing their first European Cup final. Chrystal waited until she heard "□ILLE" then she made her way out to the pitch and mounted her broom. The crowd noise was overwhelming.

The umpire blew the whistle and the game had begun.

Chrystal immediately began scanning the sky, searching for the Snitch. She knew that this Russian team was tough, and their best chance of winning would be catching the Snitch early. She managed to tune out all the sound, so she could concentrate on the game. She knew that her team was ahead by one goal.

She began to circle around the ground, looking for a glimpse of flickering gold. It was hard to concentrate with all the supporters dressed in purple and gold. Finally out of the corner of her eye, she saw the glittering. Immediately she turned around and headed towards the shining. The other Seeker had seen it too. If the Prides were to win, Chrys was going to have to catch it before the other Seeker.

The other Seeker, Korva was diving towards the Snitch. Chrystal was gaining on him as she sneaked a look to the left of her. She pulled up quickly hoping that the other Seeker hadn't seen the Bludger heading their way and that he didn't catch the Snitch. Then she dived somewhat suddenly straight towards the ground. The crowd was yelling in a confused manner. Thankfully, that confounded with he actions had made the other Seeker look around and he hadn't seen her dive. She spiralled closer and closer towards the ground.

She felt the cool metal in her hand as she pulled up and breathed a sigh of relief. She'd done it. They'd done it. The final frontier had been overcome. Now all she had left was the immense feeling of joy that came with it. She landed on the ground where her teammates embraced her as they were all cheering.

The rest of the afternoon was a blur. She was exhausted and her home became invaded with Quidditch players and friends.

She finally spied Sirius and Harry among the crowd.

'Thanks for the pointers Harry,' she called out to her husband's godson. 'Couldn't have done it without you. Celebrate a while, but don't hang around too long. As much as I'd love you to stay.'

'We'll talk later,' she mouthed at him as she walked towards the door.

There were photos to be taken, interviews to perform and general celebrations to be had. Chrystal's entire afternoon was filled, with her having almost no time to even contemplate their victory.

After what seemed like hours, there was just Sirius and her father left. She was lying on a couch contemplating the game. That was it.

The end had come.

She hadn't really been thinking about it before the game, but she just felt that now was the time. She had achieved all her dreams in the area of Quidditch. And to tell you the truth, her heart just wasn't in it anymore.

\*~\*

George Weasley and Katie Bell were walking around the lake at Hogwarts.

George was extremely nervous. It was a while before he spoke.

'Katie, I, um,' he stuttered.

'Look George,' she said interrupting him. There was a tone of disappointment there. 'You don't have to propose you know. You shouldn't do that just because you said you would after one too many Butterbeers.'

'No Katie,' he said quickly. 'It's not that I don't want to. In fact, I was thinking about it earlier. I have something I want to say, and I was going to say it regardless of the outcome of the match. ' He gazed longingly into the eyes of the girl he had grown to love. 'I want you to be my wife Kathryn Bell. I want to be with you everyday for the rest of my life.' George reached into his pocket and pulled out a tear shaped diamond ring. 'Please say you will.'

His heart stopped beating in the time it took for Katie to look at the ring and then reply in the affirmative.

*Yes, life goes on. Take that Voldemort!*

### **Chapter Three Life goes on**

Molly Weasley was ecstatic when she heard the news. Arthur Weasley just looked proud.

'I can't believe it George,' Molly said. 'First Percy's news and now you bring great news too. This is marvellous. A fantastic month. A grandchild on the way and another son married, now if only we could find a nice girl for Bill and Charlie. I don't care much for that Veela girl that Bill has found. Ron can wait a while yet.'

'What can I wait for?' said Ron as he made his way down the stairs carrying a single bag which contained only a couple of changes of clothes and some parchment, a bottle of ink and a quill.

'To get married dear,' his mother replied.

Ron gave his mother a look of confusion.

'Rose still has two more years at school and I'm not even thinking about it,' he said.

'Katie and George dear. They're getting married,' she said before she got a glimpse of her son. 'Oh you're ready. I can't believe my little boy's all grown off and going off to training. You will be careful won't you? I don't want some awful wizard from the Ministry knocking on the door and telling me my son's dead. If only you'd work with Fred and George then I wouldn't have to worry.'

'Don't worry Mum,' he said. 'I'll be very careful. You won't even know I'm gone.'

Molly ran over and gave him a big hug, making Ron's cheeks match his hair.

'Yes well I'd best be off,' he said. 'I'll be back in about a month. Don't watch the clock too much.' He added knowing the number of times they had glanced at the clock and seen Ron's hand pointing to Mortal Danger.

He embraced his mother and shook hands with his father.

Ron smiled at his brother and Katie as he walked out the door.

'That's the most grown up thing I've ever heard about you George,' he said as he apparated to the office of Magical Law Enforcement where he would begin his training.

Ron surveyed the room. It was cold, dark and empty. He had no idea what to expect, he had just been told to apparate to this particular office, where he would commence his training by receiving instructions as to what he was to do.. He had no idea who any other applicants were. A man in a black cloak entered the room. Ron couldn't see his face.

'Ronald Weasley?' he asked in a deep peculiar voice.

Ron nodded his head.

'Here is your first task,' the man said handing him a piece of parchment.

Ron looked at the parchment, and then looked up and the man was gone.

Glancing back at the parchment, he looked at his instructions.

*Say your name.*

Ron looked at the parchment and said;

'Ronald Weasley.'

Suddenly words began to appear in front of him.

*Welcome to your Hit Wizard training.*

*Your first task is to locate your partner. You do not know their identity and they do not know yours. Your map awaits you with further instructions in the Old London Gaol. Do not let anyone follow*

*you, Wizard or Muggle. Our agents, on sighting you may hit you with a spell that will cause a coloured spot on your clothing. This symbolises that they had the opportunity to kill you. The number of spots you receive will count towards whether or not you qualify.*

*Good Luck.*

As Ron finished reading the words disappeared.

*Old London Gaol, where's Hermione when I need her? I don't know anything about Muggle London. I guess I'm going to have to learn. Quickly.*

Ron walked out the door wondering where to go to next.

\*~\* A few days later \*~\*

Ginny Weasley made her way onto Platform Nine and Three Quarters. It was her final year at Hogwarts, and the last year any of her family would be at Hogwarts. She had followed in the steps of two of her brothers and was Head Girl. She spied Rose Heaney on the Platform.

'Rose,' she called. 'Over here.' Ginny beckoned for her to come over. She saw the smile on her friend's face, as she made her way over.

'Ginny,' she said with a smile. 'Isn't it hard to get back to reality after the Cup?' She was full of excitement. 'I don't know how I'll be able to concentrate on anything year. I'm already too busy thinking up Quidditch strategies. We're sure to win the Cup again this year.'

'Just as long as you don't waste too much time writing letters to some Hit Wizard,' Ginny said teasingly.

'Gin, you don't want to imagine me and your brother,' Rose said knowing exactly what kind of reaction she'd get. 'That's just not pretty.'

'Okay, okay,' Ginny replied. 'Let's get on the train.'

They settled into their compartment, as Ginny began to fill Rose in on all the family news that she hadn't already heard from Ron.

Rose was astounded that George and Katie were going to get married. It seemed a rather grown up thing to do, especially for one of the twins.

'I agree,' Ginny replied. 'Mum's so happy. She thinks all she needs to do now is find a nice girl for Bill and Charlie. She doesn't really like Fleur too much either. I think she's wasting time though. They'll find someone when they're ready. They're still fuming about Draco though.' Ginny had finally worked up the courage to tell her parents that she was dating Draco Malfoy, when her older brother Charlie had threatened to do it for her, if she didn't. 'They knew Lucius fairly well I think. Dad didn't lose too much sleep when Lucius was kissed.'

'It's hard to imagine your parents in any kind of situation with Draco's dad,' Rose said sighing. 'Anyhow I think Draco is a far better person than his father.'

On that note they pulled out an old set of exploding Snap cards to fill up part of the journey.

\*~\*

'You wanted to see me Alastor?' Chrystal asked as she entered the room. Even after all this time she couldn't shake the image she got when she first saw Alastor Moody. And now he was head of her department.

'Your leave is up,' he said brusquely.

'I put in an application for an extension,' she replied. 'I need an answer fairly soon.'

'I have your application here on my desk,' he snapped. 'I know why you need a reply as well, it's just that now is not exactly the best time for my Aurors to be taking extended leave.'



'Look, I know the climate's not the best it's ever been,' she began, but stopped when she saw the look on his face. He certainly wasn't very impressed at all.

'You haven't exactly helped that at all, taking things into your own hands. I'm down at least one potential Auror, because of your interfering. Additionally, I'm still fending off questions from the powers that be about Lucius Malfoy. He was a very influential man regardless of whether or not he supported Voldemort.'

'I thought I'd explained that, there was no other option! Besides sixteen years ago I was commanded to bring him to justice by any means possible.'

She was angry. If she hadn't set the Dementors on him, Chrystal had no doubt that he would have escaped, or worse.

'Did you want him to kill Harry, or Ron or Hermione? He'd already killed the Hogwarts groundskeeper as well having performed the Cruciatus Curse right before my eyes.'

'What happened to three strikes?'

'I wasn't prepared to wait for the third. Knowing my luck, it would have been me.'

'Calm down my dear,' the old man began. 'I am on your side, but I'm being asked questions. Given your history, they wanted me to suspend you, but I've already talked them out of it. I had no idea at the time that you would want to extend your leave. I can't really grant you leave under the current circumstances. The number of Auror applicants is down. We're not replacing our retiring Aurors, let alone the ones being killed or injured. I just can't let a good Auror go at the moment. Why do you think I'm in here running the show despite having retired? The answer is because they don't want to take some from the field who could be of some use.'

*Great, now what am I supposed to do? I'm supposed to be teaching, beginning tomorrow. I don't want to spend all day in a courtroom listening to stupid prisoners.*

'However, I have a solution to your dilemma,' he said. 'I know the work you're doing for Dumbledore is important and I'm not referring to the teaching. I don't want to drag you away from this; because I know if it comes to the crunch you'll quit. Besides, I feel the need to have an Auror stationed at Hogwarts, so you will remain there, teach if you like, but if we need you, you will be summoned and expected to return immediately.'

'Okay,' she said slowly. 'Do you think Hogwarts is no longer secure?'

'I have doubts,' he said. 'But I would feel better with a Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher who actually knows what they're talking about.'

'I understand,' she said. 'I had best be off then, my presence will already be missed.'

'Fine, and remember *Constant Vigilance!*'

Fantastic, great way to start a year. And I've still got that little matter to discuss with Rose.

That's what she was dreading. She knew the girl had a right to know. But Chrystal wasn't quite sure how to tell her. She almost hoped that Lily was around to do it, however given the fact that she was Harry and Hermione's Secret Keeper, she wasn't around in human form too much, even in the Staff Quarters at Hogwarts it wasn't likely.

\*~\*

After what seemed like hours the Hogwarts Express reached Hogsmeade station. Rose wasn't sure how she should feel, with everything that had happened over the summer.

She had spent the first couple of weeks before the wedding with Harry, Hermione and Lily. Then after they had disappeared, she returned to what she thought of as home. It hadn't been the best holiday at all. Firstly she was struggling to deal with the fact that the legendary Harry Potter, whom

she'd once had a crush on, was her brother and that her parents were not only not dead and had not wanted to give her up. Secondly, the entire time she had been with her 'real' family she felt like she was betraying the only parents she had ever known and vice versa when she was home. Her adoptive parents had been very understanding. But the exchange hurt not just Rose, but them as well. They felt as if she had been taken away from them in a way that they could never recover. It would have been far easier on them if Rose had been abandoned. But they had learnt to expect the unexpected when they discovered that Rose was a witch and they had been counting the days until something like this happened. As a result each were apologetic to the other all summer, and Rose was happy when Molly Weasley had invited her to stay for a week surrounding the end of the European Cup.

Suddenly she felt a nudge. It was Ginny; she must have been lost in thought.

'What were you thinking about?' she asked.

'Look Gin,' she began. 'I don't think it's a good idea for people to know that I'm Harry's sister. If anyone asks about it, just say I know him well because I'm with Ron.'

'Okay.' Ginny replied slowly not really understanding what her friend was getting at.

'It's just not wise Ginny,' Rose said. She hoped she was being sensible. She didn't feel like taking any unnecessary risks. She had been so worried when Ron had been kidnapped last year, and it was all because he was Harry's friend. She shuddered at the thought of what they might do to Harry's sister.

Ginny was a good friend. She was trustworthy. Rose had come to Hogwarts from a Muggle family. She knew no one and had little idea what to expect. Ginny, then in second year had been very friendly to her. Ginny had told her little of the reasons behind why she didn't have many friends in her own year, but despite this, Rose instinctively knew she could trust her.

Soon enough they were in the Great Hall at Hogwarts, watching the sorting, singing the school song before digging into their meal. Rose glanced up at the table and spied her godmother. Rose wondered what Chrystal wanted to talk about. It seemed weird to call her Chrystal, when she was used to calling her Professor Filde. She sincerely hoped she wasn't going to try and mother her. She had all the mothers she needed between her real mother and her adopted mother and didn't need someone to try and make up for the years of neglect that they perceived she had had.

'What's wrong Rose?' Ginny asked again. 'You seem to be the total opposite of yourself tonight. Please tell me what's going on.'

'I'm sorry Ginny,' she replied. 'There's just a lot going on at the moment that I need to get used to. It will take some time. Look I have to go and see Professor Filde, oops I mean MacLeod after the feast; I think if you're going to show the first years to their rooms, I'll head up now.'

Rose left the Great Hall and went straight to the girl's bathrooms. She felt like she was going to be sick.

She emerged ten minutes later and slowly made her way up to Chrystal's office. She was going to be assertive. She saw her godmother waiting for her.

'Please don't try and mother me Professor,' Rose said hurriedly. 'I don't need it.'

'Rose,' she replied with a sense of shock in her voice. 'That's not my intention. Please sit down; I've just got a small request.'

Rose sat down hesitantly. She wasn't too keen on sitting in teacher's offices since McGonagall had told her about her mother.

'Look Rose, I've been talking to Lily and we don't think you should tell anyone who you really are, okay? We're very unsure as to who we can trust at the moment and we don't want to put you in anymore danger than you might already be.'

'I'd already thought of that Professor,' she answered quickly. 'In the same way I shouldn't call you or Sirius by your real names either.'

'I hadn't thought of that,' Chrystal confessed. 'I guess that's okay because of your association with Ron, but just watch who hears it okay.'

There was an awkward silence in the room which Rose didn't really care to try and break.

'Rose,' Chrystal said almost pleadingly. 'Tell me what's wrong. How are you coping?'

'Fine,' she lied.

'I know you're not telling the truth,' her godmother said quickly. Rose could hardly hide her surprise. Rose had become very good at hiding her feelings. She thought about what to say and before she knew it she burst into tears. Suddenly everything that was happening to her was just overwhelming to even think about.

'I just don't know what's happening anymore,' she sobbed. 'Everything's all messed up, nobody understands as much as they try to help.'

Rose felt Chrystal come around and hug her. The feeling of the embrace in itself was comforting.

'I'm not going to pretend to know what you're going through,' she said softly. 'But if you ever want a shoulder to cry on mine will always be free for you.'

Rose sat there and sobbed for what felt like hours. The when she had finished shaking, Chrystal handed her a cold face washer.

'Go upstairs and get some sleep,' Chrystal said to her. 'You'll feel better in the morning.'

Rose strangely felt better as she made her way up to the sixth year dorms. Her problems weren't solved but at least she felt better for vocalising them. She sat at the window and stared at the sky. She could see fireworks in the distance. It gave her a warm fuzzy feeling inside.

\*~\*

He was almost there. This was the first one he had done in a while; usually he got his minions to do it. Additionally, he had wanted to wait until the European Cup was over. He liked Quidditch after all, and there would be added security anyhow.

He wondered why he hadn't actually just sent one of his Death Eaters to go and bring her to him. He had entertained the thought more than once however he knew this was something he wanted to do himself. He withdrew the [photograph](#) from his pocket and stared at the blonde-haired woman.

'Hufflepuff,' he whispered.

Glancing at the photograph it was easy to see that the girl was pretty. Her blonde hair fell gently and her blue eyes sparkled. She looked nothing like her awful ancestor. Thinking about Helga Hufflepuff gave him a surge of anger. He was a hateful creature with her brown eyes and brown hair. It had been almost all her fault. She had been the cause of the fall of his great ancestor. She and that hateful Gryffindor. Between the two of them they had destroyed one of the greatest wizards that ever lived.

He had not deciphered the Prophecy, however he didn't care. He was going to enjoy destroying the spawn of Hufflepuff and Gryffindor. He would enjoy inflicting the most amount of pain possible until they broke. Lavender Brown and Harry Potter. The Boy Who Lived. He would ensure that the boy who lived became the boy that died at the hands of the most famous wizard ever. But first things first, the girl. Hufflepuff must fall before Gryffindor.

Now was the time to focus on her.

Not only had his servant provided him with a photograph he had given him a fairly detailed description of what the girl did. She spent her day trying to teach the ridiculous subject of

Divination. In his opinion Divination was something you could either do or not, teaching it was a waste of time. Then the stupid girl would spend her afternoon marking her stupid assignments before heading to The Three Broomsticks to have a few drinks. As to whether or not she was a Seer he had no idea. It just didn't matter. He was going to destroy her.

He entered the back door of the pub, having got the blueprints from another one of his subjects. He turned the corner and spied Madam Rosmerta.

'*Avada Kedavra*,' he whispered as he pointed his wand at the hateful creature. She had always been awful to him, treated him like dirt.

He didn't even watch her die, he had already moved on to his next target. He wanted to find this one for himself.

\*~\*

'AHH,'

He grabbed at his forehead and sat up.

'What's wrong Harry?' Hermione asked groggily.

'Voldemort has attacked the Three Broomsticks,' he said between breaths.

'What do you mean?' Hermione asked.

'He killed Madam Rosmerta,' Harry answered. 'Then he walked inside the pub and asked if anyone knew a Lavender Brown. No one answered so he sent sparks into the ceiling and it came crashing down.'

## **Chapter Four Knowledge**

Ron walked out of the information booth. Now he had instructions on how to find Old London Gaol he felt a little better. He hoped he would receive an owl when he got there, because he had no idea what he was supposed to do when he did. He wandered down the streets of London, realising that he had never really spent much time there; he only ever came to London to go to Diagon Alley or to Kings Cross. It was strange not being at Hogwarts anymore.

Ron turned a corner and arrived at the building. He'd done well so far; no one had followed him. He had no marks on his robes. He looked around and saw a man in a top hat beckoning for him to walk over. The man handed Ron a piece of parchment. It was a clipping from The Daily Prophet.

Another wizard mysteriously disappeared today from his London flat in Lambeth.

Ron looked up to ask the man a question, but he had already vanished.

*What am I supposed to do now?*

After staring at the parchment he figured that he was supposed to go to the man's apartment. He also figured that he may as well Apparate there to avoid being followed, so he found an empty room in the gaol and pictured the man's apartment. He was relieved when he reappeared to be standing in what appeared to be a wizard's apartment. He was also relieved to see Terry Boot there. Terry had been in their year at Hogwarts, a Ravenclaw prefect.

'Terry,' he said. 'What are you doing here?'

Terry didn't answer straight away.

'Did you get a bit of parchment?' he asked. Ron nodded in reply. 'I guess you must be my partner then. Got any idea what we're supposed to do now?'

'No,' he replied. 'I was only told that I was to find my partner. But perhaps we should Apparate back to headquarters and find out what's going on. This is all rather cryptic to me.'

Terry nodded and they both apparated back to the office of Magical Law Enforcement. Ron didn't know Terry that well and wasn't quite sure how he felt about being Terry's partner but knew he could have done worse.

There was a wizard waiting there for them. It was Alastor Moody. They both recognised him from the time Barty Crouch had impersonated him for a year in their fourth year.

'Well done both of you,' he said. 'Boot, you lose points for being hit once and Weasley, you lose them for trusting the man at the gaol but apart from that well done the both of you. You are both accepted into the program. Report back here in two days at seven in the morning.' He walked out of the room. Then re-entered almost as quickly as he had left. 'How would you boys like a quick crash course in being in Law Enforcement?' Moody didn't give them a chance to answer. 'The Three Broomsticks has been attacked. Apparate there and help question the survivors.' He left again.

Ron looked at Terry.

'Just like that?' he asked.

'I guess so,' Terry said. 'The Three Broomsticks eh?'

Ron's heart sunk as they arrived at the Three Broomsticks. It reminded him of the Shrieking Shack explosion just before Christmas. There weren't quite as many bodies though. A wizard spied them.

'Weasley, Boot?' he asked.

They nodded.

'Go and question those people over there,' he pointed towards a corner where a group of people were sitting bundled in blankets, as he handed them a piece of parchment and a quill.

Ron marched over, with Terry following behind him.

'Names please,' Ron said in what he thought was an official sounding voice.

'Fred and George Weasley,' they said in unison.

Ron looked up and saw that it was Fred, George, Angelina and Katie sitting there.

'Sorry,' Ron said extremely embarrassed. 'Didn't see you there. What happened?'

'Some guy came in,' Fred said. 'Asking for Lavender Brown. When no one replied he shot the ceiling down. Then he shot the Dark Mark in the sky.'

'All we wanted was a quiet drink after work,' George said. 'Instead we almost got blown up.'

'Do you know who it was?' Terry asked.

'No idea,' Angelina replied. 'Never saw them before in my life.'

The others nodded in agreement.

Terry and Ron reported back to the wizard in charge.

'Take them up to Hogwarts,' he said. 'Get them checked out by the hospital matron and then they're free to go. So are you two. They'll be a copy of the report for you to sign in a couple of days. Thanks for your help.'

They nodded and went back to where the group were sitting.

'We're to take you to Hogwarts to get checked out by Madam Pomfrey,' Terry told them. George and Fred exchanged looks but stood up and followed.

'Nice to see you Ron,' George said with a grin.

'Thought you were in training,' Fred said winking at him.

'Crash course,' Ron replied somewhat defensively. 'Besides I passed the preliminaries thank you very much and they're going to train me. So watch out, because if you step one foot out of line I'll be on your back.'

'Nice to know,' George said. 'I'll find Charlie for you so you can get a sneak up to your girlfriend.'

Ron blushed. He knew he wasn't going to see Rose for a while, but he hadn't contemplated sneaking up to see her, even being this close to Hogwarts.

Terry looked at Ron with a touch of bewilderment.

'Girlfriend?' he said. 'I thought you were with Parvati. At least that's what Padma said.'

'I was,' Ron replied. 'I'm not anymore. By the way I'd better introduce you.'

'I know them all,' Terry said. 'The famous Gryffindor Quidditch team.'

'Ah,' replied Ron knowing that they wouldn't have the slightest clue who he was. 'Anyway, Fred, George, Angelina and Katie, this is Terry Boot. He was a Ravenclaw in my year. He's my partner. But don't tell anyone that.'

The group was silent until they reached the entrance to the castle. They spied Chrystal waiting there for them, Ron forgetting for a moment that she had been an Auror before she became their professor.

'Ron, Terry,' she said spying them. 'Madam Pomfrey is waiting for you. What's it like? As bad as the Shrieking Shack?'

'Not as bad,' Ron replied quietly keeping to himself that he still held himself partially to blame for the attack. 'There aren't as many dead, though quite a few are injured.'

'I'm on my way there,' she said as she slipped a piece of parchment into Ron's hand. 'That will come

in handy later,' she whispered as she walked past him. Ron shoved the parchment into his pocket and led the group up to the hospital wing.

After Madam Pomfrey had thoroughly examined the Weasley twins and the girls, and determined that there was nothing wrong with them, they were all free to go. Terry left quickly, telling Ron that he would see him in a couple of days.

'You'd better head off quickly,' Ron replied. 'Mum'll be having kittens.'

'Nah, she'll look at the clock and realise that there's nothing wrong,' George said. 'Besides we want to see Charlie and it's not that late. You coming?'

'How about I catch up with you later?' Ron said feeling the piece of parchment in his pocket.

Fred and George snickered as the group headed down to what was now Charlie's cabin. Ron didn't care. If he was this close and he had a message in his hand he wasn't going to not see Rose.

He glanced at the piece of parchment.

*Rose will be waiting for you in my quarters. You know the way. Sirius will not be there.*

*Most of the staff will be out assisting the investigations. There will be little chance of anyone finding out.*

### **Chrystal...**

Ron discretely moved through the passages, the way he always had to get to the staff quarters to see Charlie. He came up to the portrait of the ballerina, whispered the password and crept through. He silently crept to the door of Chrystal and Sirius' quarters, and opened the door to see Rose sitting there.

He ran to quickly embrace her, before brushing her hair away from her face to reveal the red eyes.

'Why have you been crying precious?' he asked in a soft, gentle voice.

She looked at him with pleading eyes, and he knew that he should not ask any more questions. He just held her tightly.

'Well, I don't know if you feel like celebrating, but they've accepted me in their training program,' he said. 'So can't you at least be a little happy?'

She gave him a smile. He had almost forgotten how her smiles made him feel.

'I'm sorry Ron,' she said. 'I'm just trying to cope.'

He couldn't imagine what she was going through. He knew she was having trouble to just having her family dumped on her. When she had agreed to find out, she didn't quite realise what the consequences were.

'Don't worry,' he said. 'It'll take some time, but you'll get there eventually. And in the meantime, I'm here for you. Well except for the rest of September anyway.'

He got a bigger smile out of her.

'What did I do to deserve you Ronald Weasley?' she asked.

'You didn't give up,' he replied. 'I had better go before the twins leave without me. And before your mother gets worried.' He indicated Crookshanks in the corner. Rose stifled a giggle.

Ron gave her a big kiss and then crept down to Charlie's cabin. Charlie greeted him with a knowing look, before offering him a cup of tea.

'Honouring Hagrid's tradition,' he said softly. Ron smiled. Somehow Charlie had always had a way of making Ron feel better no matter what. 'Here's to Ron getting accepted.'

On that note everyone raised their teacups and toasted Ron.

Two days later he kept that in his mind as he apparated to the office of Magical Law Enforcement for what would be one of the most intense months of his life.

\*~\*

Sirius and Chrystal made their way back to their quarters after what had been an exhausting night.

'Do you think we should knock?' Sirius asked Chrystal, not entirely happy that she had let her goddaughter visit with her boyfriend in their room.

'Don't be ridiculous Sirius,' she replied. 'I left Crookshanks to keep an eye on them.'

'Did Rose know this?' Sirius said laughing. 'Because if I remember correctly Crookshanks in the room didn't stop Harry and Hermione doing anything.'

'That's because they didn't know,' she said. 'And yes, before you ask, Rose does know. That was one of the conditions. Anyhow I only wanted to cheer the girl up.'

'Have you told her?' Sirius asked, slightly more seriously.

'It wasn't the right time Sirius, trust me.'

They entered the room to find only Crookshanks there. On the sight of Chrystal and Sirius she transformed.

'That's better,' she said. 'I needed to stretch my back a bit. What's it like down there?'

'Well Madam Rosmerta is dead,' Sirius began. 'In addition there's two other wizards dead, they're Rosmerta's cousins from Belgium and there's quite a few more injured. The pub of course will need to be rebuilt, but the villagers seem more than willing to do that. It won't take long with the aid of magic.'

'I'm going to need to talk to Harry,' Chrystal said quietly. It was what Sirius had been dreading but knew was coming. 'I know it puts him in danger, but I need to know if he saw anything.'

'Who do they think it was?' Lily asked.

'Voldemort himself,' Sirius said. 'It is important that Chrys speaks to Harry for another reason. Voldemort was looking for Lavender. We don't know why, but it could be because she's in The Prophecy, or it could simply be because she's a Seer who's seen the outcome of the confrontation of the heirs. But at any rate things are stepping up. There was a lot of Death Eater activity over the summer and a lot of unexplained disappearances. Our contacts don't know what's going on. It appears that Voldemort only tells those involved with each project what they're to do. By the way, when are you meeting with Draco?'

'Tomorrow,' replied Chrys. 'That's why I need to talk to Harry tonight.'

'Okay,' Lily said. 'We'll Apparate to Padfoot's Manor and I'll cast the charm, but please be quick.'

They apparated quickly and Lily wasted no time revealing her son and his girlfriend. They were lying in bed, Harry still distressed over the sight he had seen.

Chrystal and Sirius took their time asking Harry what he had seen. Harry wasn't able to add much to what they suspected except that it was definitely Voldemort who attacked the pub. Sirius handed Harry a vial of Sleeping Draught, so that he could sleep undisturbed for the rest of the night.

'Harry there's something else for you,' Chrys said. 'These are Auror training manuals and books about counter curses to every dark curse imaginable.' She pointed to a large stack of books. 'It's to help you prepare yourself. And it will give you something to do. I've also got an Arithmancy chore for Hermione. These books are Arithmancy books,' she said pointing to another stack. 'See what you find out about "character" and the characters of the founders. I think there may be another interpretation to the character reference. I just fail to believe that either Lavender or I have the same character as Voldemort.'



They bid the couple farewell before Disapparating quickly after Lily had recast the charm.

'That wasn't much help then, was it?' Lily asked when they had arrived back at Hogwarts.

'No,' Chrys replied. 'Hopefully Mr Malfoy will be of more help tomorrow. At least I've given them something to do. It would be a shame for them to waste away.'

On that note Lily farewelled them and Sirius dragged his wife into bed.

'What's up Chryssy?' he said affectionately. 'Thinking about the things we can't change again?'

'Am I that much of an open book?' she replied.

'Yes,' he said. 'So have you definitely decided to quit the Prides?'

'Yes,' she replied firmly. 'I've already spoken to Catriona.'

'I guess everyone should get to retire on a high,' he said. 'But I'd like to give you an excuse to quit.' He knew he was infuriating her by being cryptic. But he enjoyed it and wasn't going to change his personality to please his wife.

'How about we have a baby?' he said seriously. 'You're not getting any younger my dearest. And I want to have an heir to give my empire to.'

Sirius wasn't quite prepared for the look of shock that appeared on her face. He thought she'd be pleased; after all she had always wanted children.

'But then I'll pass on the curse of being the Heir of Ravenclaw to them,' she said plainly and simply.

'Then you don't have to worry about it,' he said somewhat unsurely. He honestly had no reply to that comment.

'Yes I will,' if it's my child,' she said.

'Chrys darling' he said softly. 'I don't think it will come to that. I think you know that it's your destiny. You know that you could die in this battle and if that happens I want to have a piece of you to keep.'

'That's not a reason to have a child Sirius,' she said. 'It's a bloody selfish reason in fact.'

'No the reason is because I want to,' he said. He was getting tangled in circles. Nothing he said was right. He was losing faith in his ability to convince her.

'Is that the honest reason Sirius?'

He looked carefully at her, before he replied.

'Yes.'

A smile appeared on her face.

'Well,' she said smugly. 'My last dose of Sterilis was about a year ago. I guess we could try tonight.'

She giggled as she threw the covers over his head. Sirius breathed a sigh of relief as he followed her.

\*~\*

Sirius looked at his wife hopefully in the morning.

'Well were we successful?' he asked.

She shook her head.

'Not this time,' she said. 'I have to go and meet with a certain young person. Have a good day.'

She walked out the door as she threw her robe over her shoulder. Sirius was surprised by the disappointment he felt and by the look of loathing on his wife's face.

\*~\*

Chrystal walked towards Hogsmeade with a touch of trepidation. She had no idea what Draco Malfoy would have to tell her. And she felt awful about the accusation she had made to Sirius the night before. It wasn't that she didn't want a child but she had sincere reservations about bringing a child into the world under these circumstances. She couldn't guarantee that she would be around to bring the child up, she couldn't guarantee that the child would be safe, for if she had a child it would certainly be in danger because of who it was, just like her goddaughter was. And to be honest she was surprised that Sirius had wanted a child. Harry was different. He was grown up. His and Sirius' relationship was more of good friends, with Sirius being Harry's mentor. Perhaps looking after Harry the previous summer was what had brought this on. She spied Draco Malfoy's small Hogsmeade cottage out of the corner of her eye. She knocked on the door.

Draco, not looking like Draco but like the complete opposite, answered the door with a grim look on his face.

'Thanks for being on time Professor,' he said. He showed her into his small lounge room and asked her to sit down. He produced a pot full of tea and told her to help herself.

'Things are beginning to happen, Professor,' he said solemnly.

'Please call me Chrystal,' she said almost pleadingly. 'If we are to work together.'

'Fine, Chrystal,' it sounded very forced. 'Voldemort is indeed responsible for last night. We were all summoned. He was looking for Lavender Brown and was told that she was at Hogwarts. I have been assigned to question her. I am even talking to you under the pretext of my investigation. I am to use whatever means necessary to find out the outcome of the confrontation, or more specifically the pairs.'

'I see,' she said contemplating this for a moment. 'If Voldemort finds out the pairings he doesn't need to kill Harry, he needs to kill either Lavender or myself. We're far easier to get to. Less protected.'

'Exactly,' Malfoy said. 'All he needs to do is work it out. But he's given me six months to do it in. It seems excessive. Almost ridiculous.'

'So he has other plans,' she responded pondering the absurd amount of time Draco had been given to discover this. 'Any ideas?'

'He made mention of islands off the coast of Scotland,' Draco said grimly. 'I'm not certain but I think it has something to do with the abductions recently. I don't know whether or not you had noticed, but all of the missing people are Muggle-born. The Ministry is concerned naturally. A friend from the Falcons says the Board of Governors for Hogwarts are seriously concerned about Muggle-born students.'

'That's all you know?'

Draco nodded.

'He's careful, he didn't get where he is without being cautious. Only those who are involved in a project are ever told. This means I'll be out of the loop for while.'

'At least it will keep you safe for the time being,' she said. 'And Ginny too for that matter.'

'Any news on The Covenant?'

She shook her head.

'There's no sign of James anywhere,' she said sighing. 'We have a few operatives working on it, but we can't spare that many. It's not a high priority. The war is approaching. It will be fought in a different way to the last though. We won't stand for Voldemort's dominance this time.'

'Keep an eye on Ginny for me,' he said. 'Let me know if you don't think she's safe. She's the reason I'm not a Death Eater you know. She made me see what my father truly was.'

'I'll tell you a story one day Draco,' she replied. 'I'll keep an eye on Ginny. I'd better go; I have a class in half an hour. Thank you.'

Draco showed her to the door.

'When the time comes, let me know.'

She nodded and hurriedly made her way back to Hogwarts wondering if Snape knew anything about these disappearances. She hoped he did almost as much as she hoped that Hermione could solve the mystery of the pairings before Voldemort did. Draco had been assigned far too much time. There was something wrong there. She knew that Draco must not be the only Death Eater assigned to the Prophecy. Hopefully they would find out first.

## **Chapter Five Inquiry**

Sirius made his way to the Headmaster's office for an operative meeting. He had not spoken to Chrys since her meeting with Draco and wondered what he had said. He was still a bit disappointed. It wasn't just that Chrys wasn't pregnant; it was her entire reaction to him suggesting it. He glanced at his wife as he made his way into the room. She didn't look too happy at all. It couldn't be a good sign. Not at all.

'Well, we're all here,' Dumbledore said surveying the room. 'Let's get this underway.'

'I spoke with Mr Malfoy today,' Chrys said. 'He seems very concerned about his welfare and Ginny Weasley's as well.'

'That's understandable,' Dumbledore said. 'He's put himself at great risk if anyone discovers that he is spying. What did he have to say?'

'He's been assigned to decode The Prophecy of Saoghal,' Chrys said. 'He's been given six months. It seems a strange amount of time and I wouldn't have said that Divination was his strong point from my limited knowledge of him. I'm not entirely convinced that there's not something more sinister going on. The only thing I can tell you with certainty is that he's scared.'

'Six months?' Sirius exclaimed. 'I would assume Voldemort must have other plans if he's giving Draco that amount of time.'

'Perhaps he does not want the confrontation,' Dumbledore said contemplating the thought. 'Perhaps he feels he will be defeated and is trying to delay the confrontation for as long as is practically possible.'

'That's certainly a possibility,' Snape said from the corner. 'Voldemort seems to have quite a few schemes in his head. I can guess that he is trying to implement at least one of them at the moment. I unfortunately do not have any knowledge of his latest exploits. I can not comprehend why he would attack The Three Broomsticks or why he would be after Madam Rosmerta. I can hardly envisage her as a threat to him.'

'The other thing Draco mentioned was that Voldemort has plans for some islands in Scotland,' Chrys continued. 'It has something to do with Muggle-borns. It requires some investigation, I feel.'

'Who would be appropriate for such an assignment?' Dumbledore asked. 'Depending on the way we did it, it would place the person in great danger.'

A thought came to Sirius' mind.

'What about air surveillance?' Sirius asked. 'I mean the Ministry uses Aurors to do surveillance by air, so why can't we?'

'What are you suggesting?' McGonagall asked.

'What if we found an operative to fly over the islands?' he said. 'I'm not talking about on a broomstick though. That would bring too much attention if someone was flying in an area where there's normally not a lot of broom traffic. I'm talking about on horses. People who are just training. Jockeys. They fly all over so-called deserted areas of Scotland because they can't risk Muggles seeing the flying horses. If we just got someone to fly a little lower than usual they could get a pretty good view. All we would need to do is supply a horse and I think we can take care of that fairly easily.' That is if Chrys would agree. He glanced at her and saw that she had gotten his meaning.

'Who do you have in mind?' Dumbledore asked.

'I could ask Alec McLachlan for a trustworthy jockey,' he replied. 'That way we can use a legitimate person who won't be questioned. Remember jockeys are very proficient at defending curses.'

'Alec is trustworthy enough,' Dumbledore replied contemplating the thought. 'He's a good operative. He should be able to find us a trustworthy jockey. Well if Severus has nothing to add,' Dumbledore glanced at Snape, who was shaking his head, 'I guess that's it for today. I think we should be concerned about the increase in missing persons recently, but we won't act until we know something conclusive.'

Sirius made his way to the door with his wife.

'I'm not teaching this afternoon, are you?' he asked her as they made their way towards the Staff Quarters.

'I've got third year Hufflepuff's after lunch,' she replied.

'Then the rest of the afternoon off?'

She nodded.

'How about we go to Black Manor then?' he asked her. 'We could have dinner with Mum, Alec and Maddie then come back early in the morning. I'm sure they'd like to see us and I may be able to get some work done as well.'

She nodded once more.

'Sounds fine,' she said. 'I had better go and teach my class. You had better go and let your mother know that we're coming so she doesn't have a heart attack when we walk in.'

She headed towards her classroom with Sirius wondering the reason for the coldness in her voice. He hoped it had nothing to do with the night before. She had just seemed so distant and detached throughout the entire meeting. Going through the motions.

He sighed as he walked to the fireplace in their suite to let his mother know she should expect them.

\*~\*

He met Chrys in the Entrance Hall once she had finished her class. They walked in silence towards the village of Hogsmeade until she finally broke the uneasy silence.

'Do you think Voldemort killing Madam Rosmerta is related to the disappearances?'

'Well she's not Muggle-born,' he replied. 'I think he killed her because he disliked her and for no other reason. I can't see why else he would go after her. I mean, she had no real allegiances. I agree with Snape's comment about her being seen as a threat. It's simply not plausible. She wasn't a Death Eater; there was no sign of a Dark Mark anywhere on her body. He only killed people who were her family and they're about as pure-blood as they come. I just don't see how it can be related.'

'Nor can I,' she murmured. 'And it's so unusual for Voldemort to do such a trivial task himself. There must have been some motivation.'

Sirius thought about this for a while.

'How many Muggle-borns are missing?' he asked.

'Fifty-six at last count,' she replied. 'Though Alastor said that many of their families have been told that they're dead, not that they're missing. After all some of them have been missing since well before summer and the chances of them being found alive are slim.'

'Hmm,' Sirius thought a little longer. 'Do you have a list of the missing?'

'It's in my bag,' she replied. 'I thought you might want something to do this afternoon while we wait for Alec to make his way back from the stables. That is if Madeleine's news doesn't keep us busy all afternoon.'

'Well,' he said ready to defend his sister. 'Between what she and Alec are set to inherit and what Alec makes on the horses, she didn't need to work, which was good because having met my nieces

and nephew she would have had her hands full. And now that one of them is at school, she has a bit more spare time so she makes do with the local gossip.'

She laughed.

At last. The sound of her laughing was a relief.

'So you're okay?' he asked hesitantly.

'Just a bit worried,' she said. She paused as if to say something and Sirius stared at her piercing blue eyes. 'I'm sorry about last night. I should have been more honest with you. I just snap too quickly. Why don't we have a talk about it somewhere quiet away from everyone when we get to Black Manor?'

Sirius nodded. He would do that. He wanted to know why she was hesitant. And he hoped that he would be able to understand her hesitancy.

With a nod they apparated and appeared outside Sirius' family home.

Sirius spied his mother, who had apparently been waiting there since he had contacted her to tell her that they were coming.

'It's so nice to see you both,' she said leading them inside. 'A very pleasant surprise. Madeleine is out with the children; she won't be back until at least four, so why don't you and Chryssy take a couple of horses out for a ride. That way you can see what's changed since you were last here.'

Given that Chrys had expressed her wish to talk Sirius took his mother up on the offer.

'Afternoon tea will be at four,' she said as Sirius led Chrys towards the stables. 'Don't be late.'

'That gives us just over two hours,' he said as he harnessed up a horse. 'I know a pretty little spot. Come on.'

He handed her the reins and quickly saddled another horse up, mounted and was out the stable door quickly. Sirius led her to a nice flowing creek in a meadow not too far from the house, but far enough away that it was unlikely that anyone would bother them.

'What's the problem then?' Sirius asked.

'I have a few concerns, Sirius,' she said. 'Last night you said that you wanted a piece of me in case I die in the conflict. That is not a good reason to have a child. At all. It's selfish and it will only result in trouble. Part of my hesitation comes from the fact that I don't know that you would be fine if that happened. I don't know if my child would be okay. I don't want what happened to Harry and Rose to happen to my child.'

'Chrys,' he said. 'I know I began digging a hole last night, but can I explain a little more. If you were to die, I would survive. I would be upset, angry and would probably feel like I wanted to die for a while, but ultimately I would be fine. And if we had a child, well there's my family and your father who would be more than happy to help if it were needed. Your child wouldn't be abandoned, I would guarantee it would grow up knowing just how much it's mother cared for it.'

'On a similar note,' she continued, 'I don't necessarily want to bring a child into the world knowing that I may not even be there for it in a year's time. And it's selfish on my behalf. If I can't see it grow up, then I don't want it. But on the other hand, you touched a sore point. I've changed over the years in a lot of ways. I know that before you went to Azkaban I wanted a husband and my six children, but that was before I knew about The Prophecy. That changes everything. When my mother died, I received the ring along with the curse of being the Heir of Ravenclaw. I can't help but think that if I die before the conflict, then the ring will pass to my child and they will have to live with the curse. That's just not fair on them. I could live with that though if I knew you could.'

'As I said to you last night Chrys, Sirius said pausing. 'I think you now that it's your destiny. And it wouldn't pass to them unless you died. Then it would be my problem as well and believe me I am

quite prepared for that. Tell me this *mo òilleachd* do you have any other objections? Or can we get on with it?'

'*Na mo gròdhaich,*' she said and pulled him closer toward her. 'You win now that you've wooed my heart into accepting your point of view. But you're right about my age. It could take a while, so shall we get started.'

Sirius smiled. That was a much better outcome than what he had hoped for. He guessed they wouldn't get to those papers that afternoon.

\*~\*

Looking at his watch, Sirius decided that they had better head back to the house so that they wouldn't miss afternoon tea.

Sirius was glad to see his sister and his niece and nephew, but was even more pleased when he noticed that Alec was home early.

'Sirius,' he moved forward and shook his hand. 'We'll have afternoon tea with this lot, and then make our way to the Billiard Room for some brandy and cigars.' Sirius ignored the dirty look he was getting from his sister.

'Sounds good,' he replied. 'We may have to tie this one down though.' He pointed at Maddie. 'She doesn't look too happy about it.'

Everyone laughed at the look of Maddie's face as a house-elf brought out the afternoon tea. Sirius got stuck into the food.

'Despite the wonders of the Hogwarts kitchen, there's nothing like home-cooked food,' he said tearing into a cupcake.

'If you like food so much why did you marry someone who couldn't cook then?' Maddie asked, mouthing an apology to Chrystal over her shoulder.

'That's why I'm working at Hogwarts,' he replied laughing. 'Didn't you know?'

'Well we wondered,' Maddie replied teasing her brother.

Alec gave Sirius a look and then they excused themselves as the words 'typical men' could be heard from his sister's mouth.

'Well Sirius, I am assuming that because you and your wife are here out of the blue, there's something you want to ask?'

Alec had always been very blunt and straight to the point. It was one of the things Sirius liked about him. But Sirius didn't know how he felt about putting one of Alec's jockey's in great danger.

'*Gòidhlig?*' Sirius asked Alec. Alec nodded to show that he'd understood. They conversed in Gaelic so that if anyone overheard them, apart from the family it was unlikely that they would understand them.

'We have a favour of you Alec,' Sirius began. 'That is the operatives do.'

'I wondered how long it would be before they required something,' Alec muttered.

'Well, you've no doubt heard of the disappearance of Muggle-borns,' Alec nodded. 'The count is over fifty now and we have intelligence that suggests something funny is going on the northern Scottish isles. What we're suggesting is that a jockey fly over there while training winged horses, I know they do it a lot anyway as there aren't any Muggles around. They could see if there's anything going on and report back to us. What we need however, is a jockey we can trust. And that's where you come in. We'd want to look at the Outer Hebrides, the Orkney Islands and the Shetland Islands. We can even provide a horse if necessary.'

'So you want me to recommend a jockey,' Alec said slowly and deliberately. 'And I would suppose

most of their contact is with me and I will need to pass on the information onto you or Chrystal.' Sirius nodded. 'There's only one jockey I can trust with a job like that. Terri Hamber, the jockey who won when you and Harry came to Loch Avie. She can give as many curses as she gets; she can look after herself and is an exceptional handler of winged horses. I'll talk to her tomorrow. Don't worry about a horse. I've got some new ones that need breaking in and Terri should be able to handle them on her own.' He switched to English. Now I should find Troy, he'll want a game of Billiards. Come help me Sirius.'

Sirius obliged, played a few games with his nephew and then enjoyed the best food his mother had to offer. He sat with his mother after dinner and then later made his way up to the room that had always been kept for him, no matter how long he was away from home.

He opened the door to see his wife waiting for him.

'*Mo duinne,*' she said. 'Is it all arranged?'

He nodded his head in reply.

'Alec says that there's one jockey he would trust with his life,' he said. 'He's going to send her. Her name's Terri. Have you heard of her?'

Chrys nodded her head.

'I've met her before,' she replied. 'Several times while you were in Azkaban. She lives in the old servant quarters down the meadow. Her parents died a couple of years after she began working for Alec and Alec and Maddie decided to look out for her. She's a nice girl. I think she was a Hufflepuff. The point is that I trust her.'

He nodded his head in reply.

'I trust Alec,' he said. 'And if Alec trusts her, then I'm willing to trust her. Besides she won't be told strictly why she's doing it.'

'I hope she tells us something useful,' Chrys said. 'Voldemort appears to be getting more and more careful about whom he tells information. It makes our job so much harder.'

Sirius looked at the clock. He'd almost had enough of this tonight.

'Let's go to bed,' he said. 'We've got an early start in the morning. I've asked one of the house-elves to wake us. We can't have you being late for your first class no can we?'

\*~\*

The next morning Alec farewelled his brother-in-law and his wife before heading out to the old servants quarters. He knew Terri would be awake; they had gotten into the habit of having a cup of coffee together before heading out to the stables several years ago. And he figured that that would be the best time to approach her. He opened the door to see Terri sitting at the table ready for their morning coffee. He took a deep breath and racked up the courage to ask her.

'I've got a special job for you,' he began. 'Before you agree, I need to tell you that it's extremely dangerous, perhaps even life threatening. And despite you being the best jockey in Scotland there's no guarantee that you'll be safe.'

'Is it for the operatives?' she asked. Alec couldn't help but show the surprise on his face. 'Don't try and deny it; I've known for a while that you and Madeleine are involved. Mrs Black was distraught, because she'd already lost Sirius, she didn't want to lose the two of you as well. I comforted her because no one else was home.'

'Oh,' Alec said. If she already knew about the operatives it would make things much easier.

'I'll do anything to help,' she said. 'My parents were a few of the first victims of Voldemort's new regime. I swore if I ever got the chance to help the operatives I'd grab it and make the bastards pay.'



Now what do you want me to do?

'We need surveillance done of the Northern Isles,' he said. 'The idea would be for you to fly over and report on anything you see. It's perfect because you can legitimately fly over the Isles, there aren't many Muggles there and you would be using the horses that need breaking in anyway. It's the perfect cover.'

'It's not a problem Alec,' she said. 'When do I leave?'

'When we've finished the coffee,' he replied. 'It's a matter of importance.'

She nodded to show she had understood. Alec hoped that she would be safe on her trip.

## **Chapter Six Pondering**

Terri extinguished the flames with her boot. So far she had discovered nothing on her journey and she had been gone for weeks. Whether or not she actually expected to she couldn't say. There were just the Shetland Islands left, the most northern islands and the most remote. If she were to find anything it would have to be there. Just one more day and then she could go back to the comforts of a warm bed. That was a prospect she was looking forward to. She hadn't quite realised how demanding this would be, or how strongly compelled she felt to actually find something and to actually be helpful to the operatives. If she could do anything to injure Voldemort, she would give almost anything, given that he had destroyed her family. She pulled the crumpled photo out of her pocket. There were just four people in it, taken that summer three years ago when she had just started at the McLachlan's and she had been celebrating the fact that she finished school. She gazed at the people in the photograph. There was her dad with his normal smiling face, her mum, laughing and looking very pretty and her eleven year old brother. He'd been such a silly little boy but she had loved him for it. They had all been so happy that night. Then she had come home one night after work to find the dark mark hovering above the house. She could never understand why her family had been targeted. They were harmless with no political ties whatsoever. Just a quiet little family in Northern England who mainly kept to themselves. She knew one thing for sure. She would have her revenge on Voldemort if it killed her.

She saddled the horse, who had been broken in quite well after the amount of time it had spent in the air and threw her sack on its back. She then recast the disillusionment charm and threw an Invisibility Cloak over her head. She mounted the horse and fastened her omnioculars around her neck. She gave the horse a small kick in the belly and it immediately soared into the air.

\*~\*

Rose had the Quaffle in her hand and was soaring towards the goals. She flung the ball through the hoop and then looked toward the sky for a sign of the Snitch. Slytherin had given them a tough challenge. The scores had been level the entire game. It was going to be up to the Seekers and Rose hoped that their Seeker was up to it.

Rose caught sight of a gold flickering and a scarlet uniform heading towards it. She hoped it was the Seeker. The Quaffle came towards her again; she picked up and spied Natalie McDonald ahead of her. She passed the Quaffle quickly and watched Natalie put the Quaffle through the hoop. The commentator was getting quite excited.

'Leigha McLachlan receives 150 points for catching the Snitch,' they yelled. 'Gryffindor wins!'

Rose landed her broom.

She had just won her first game as captain. And to beat Slytherin was something she knew she would never forget. She hugged Ginny and the other team members before they all made their way back up to Gryffindor Tower to celebrate.

Rose couldn't believe her luck. The game had gone exactly according to plan; the only flaw being that Ron and her parents had not been there to see it. And by picking someone who was a good flyer as Seeker, it had appeared to pay off.

Giving Ginny a smile, she told everyone that she had to write to her family while she was still reliving the game. She headed up to the sixth year dorms and wrote a letter to Ron and her adopted parents, knowing that they would be proud of her. Then she pulled out another piece of parchment.

Having met her mother, Rose was very curious to know what her father was like. She had seen Harry's photographs of him; so she had an idea of what he looked like but she didn't know him. She began to write.

*Dear Dad,*

*My name's Rose Lily Potter and I'm your daughter. I was born after you supposedly died in May 1983. I had often wondered about my real parents and the reasons that I had been given away until Lily was revealed to us last year. I always hoped you'd be proud of me. Since I met Lily I have wondered about you and what you're like but I only have a limited amount of information.*

*I know you were a Quidditch player, a Chaser who played for Gryffindor, Puddlemere United and England, so I know you would understand the way I feel today.*

*I captained my first Quidditch match today. I am a Chaser like you. It was Gryffindor versus Slytherin and it was a tough match. But we won.*

Rose went on to write a long letter describing the match. She felt better having written it. Then she picked up the other two letters and headed towards the owlery. She thought for a second and then turned around and headed back and picked up the letter for her father. She sent off the other two letters with school owls before turning to her own owl and handing him the letter.

'This is for James Potter,' she said. 'It's for Prongs. See if you can find him for me.'

The owl hooted in reply and took off into the air. It was a silly idea, but Rose couldn't help but think it might just work. After all they had tried everything else possible to find her father.

She sighed as she made her way back towards the common room; where she knew a "small celebration" was brewing, hoping against hope that she would succeed where the others had failed.

\*~\*

Terri avoided the inhabited areas of the Shetland Islands, knowing that there would be nothing to be found there. As she reached the uninhabited areas she decided to keep the Invisibility Cloak on. Despite the legitimate reason she would have for being there, she didn't fancy a Death Eater noting her presence, then tracking her down for it.

After an afternoon of nothing, Terri came to the last island. Haaf Gruney, she remembered the name from the hours she had spent surveying her father's maps as a child. She knew that this islands was uninhabited by humans. Muggles still believed that trolls and giants lived there, despite the banishment of the giants. She focussed her omnioculars on the isle. She let out a sigh of disappointment. She couldn't see anything. She soared down, a little closer just to make sure. She was about to give up when at last she saw it. A flicker of life. She soared down even closer, conscious of the fact that she couldn't let anyone see what she was doing. The omnioculars caught it all. Terri could hardly believe what she was seeing. When she had seen enough she flew back to come of the eighty odd islands that were uninhabited. Only a few more had the same sight on closer inspection. Whoever was in charge was certainly doing a very good job of keeping their operations a secret. She was usually quite observant and had almost missed it. She turned around and encouraged the horse to head back towards the mainland. What she had seen had certainly unsettled her. It had sent a shiver down her spine, which was still there. She wanted nothing better than to get home and soak in a warm tub of bubbles.

She pushed the horse for several hours as they flew over the rough sea below. She breathed a sigh of relief as she saw the settlement of John o' Groats below her. *The mainland*. It wouldn't be too much longer before they could set down. And she felt relieved that they had reached the mainland before dark. All she had to do now was fly down to Wick and once she was past the town, she could find Alec's friend and from there she would be able to Floo back to Loch Lomond for a short ride back to Black Manor.

She spotted the acquaintances house and descended the horse. She was welcomed into the house and quickly shown the fireplace.

'Alec McLachlan,' she said.

Alec's head appeared in the fireplace.

'Ah, Terri,' he said. 'Good you're back. You can leave the horse there if you'd like. My friend, Tobias will ride her back tomorrow. You can Apparate so you can have a good night's sleep. Then you can have the week off.'

'Thanks Alec,' she said. 'Would it be too much trouble if there was a nice cup of hot cocoa of me on arrival?' The cheekiness came out despite her exhaustion.

'Not a problem.'

Alec's head disappeared from the fire. Terri thanked Tobias and quickly Apparated back to Black Manor.

She opened the door to the mansion and found Alec waiting there with the hot cocoa.

'We'll talk later,' he said. 'When you get back from your holiday. You look like hell. In fact you look like you could use a good hot shower and a couple of good night's sleep.'

Terri nodded and sat down to drink her cocoa. Although the drink warmed her insides up, there was no way to erase the horrifying images that were stored in her mind. She didn't think she'd sleep well tonight. She didn't think she'd sleep well again for that matter.

\*~\*

Hermione stared out the window.

Bored was not a strong enough word to describe how she felt.

She was certainly not used to having so much free time. She had been undertaking Mediwizard tuition but she wasn't enjoying it at all. At least she had realised during this time of solitude that she didn't want to be a Mediwizard. That left her with two other possibilities. Being an Auror or being a teacher. She sighed. She wasn't going to be able to answer that question while she was in seclusion. At least Harry got to play Quidditch, he didn't quite understand how she was feeling. She glanced at her watch. He would be back in about an hour. She would talk to him then. She stared at the Arithmancy book in front of her, hoping that she would be able to come up with an answer to Chrystal's question.

She became so enthralled in what she was reading that when Harry came up behind her and tapped her on the shoulders she jumped at least a metre high. She breathed a sigh of relief when she saw that it was Harry.

'How was practice?' she asked.

'Good,' he replied. 'And before you ask, yes the charm has been recast and no, I was not in any danger.'

'I just get worried Harry,' she replied. 'When you're gone, I'm sitting here alone, thinking of something to try and fill in my time.'

'Well,' he began, 'have you succeeded?'

'Perhaps,' she replied. 'There's something I want to talk to you about.'

'That sounds serious,' he replied.

'It is,' she said. 'Maybe you'd better sit down.'

They both made their way over toward the couch.

'There's no easy way to say this so I'm just going to blurt it out,' she began.

'You're going to leave aren't you?' Harry asked.

'Leave?' Hermione raised her voice in surprise. 'Why would I do a thing like that? I happen to love you Harry James Potter.'

'Well,' Harry said. 'It's just that you seem bored. You've put your life on hold for me and you have absolutely nothing to do that actually stimulates you. Your problem is that you're just too smart.' He lent over and pecked her on the cheek.

'That's true,' she said nervously. 'That's what I wanted to talk about. You see, the other day I was thinking. I was almost resenting you because I've put my life on hold and I don't know for how long it's going to be on hold. And I was annoyed because I realised that I would have to put my life on hold again when I decide to have children. I don't want to be a career mother; I want to actually be a mother to my children; at least until they start school. So I was getting frustrated that I was wasting all this time now, when the thought came to me that while I've got all this time perhaps I should have my children now.'

'You want to have a baby?' Harry asked in surprise. 'You want to have a baby now?'

'Yes,' she replied. 'I think it's perfect, because we both would be around to watch it grow. If we wait until after; we'll both be working too hard and have other things to worry about. It's the perfect timing.'

'Have other things to worry about?' Harry asked. 'Don't you think that Voldemort trying to find us and kill us is something that's pretty big to worry about?'

'Harry please be reasonable,' Hermione said. 'I don't need an answer now; I just want you to think about it. And if you can't do it for yourself, please think about it for my sake.'

Harry agreed to think about it before hurrying upstairs to soak in a hot tub. Training had been physically very hard, everyone having come back after the European Cup and he didn't feel like he really wanted to strain himself mentally either. But Hermione had given him no choice and she had a point. The least he could do is think about it for her sake. Although he hadn't wanted her to feel obliged to sacrifice so much for him, he was very grateful for it. Although he could stand the loneliness, it was much better to have someone to share the solitude with.

Harry lay in a hot tub full of bubbles contemplating the thought. An hour later he had come to a decision. He stepped out of the bath, retrieved his glasses and threw on his bathrobe, thankful for the fact that Padfoot's Manor did actually have modern conveniences. Then he made his way into the study to sit down and write to Sirius.

\*~\*

Sirius read the letter from his godson with some amusement. Sirius was never quite sure what to expect in the sporadic letters that he had been sending him since they had gone into hiding. Harry had certainly let Sirius overtake the father role in his life, despite knowing that his father hadn't died. Sirius reread the short letter. He knew that it would be easy to fulfil this request for his godson. He just needed a bit of help from his wife and then Lily could deliver the requested item to Harry in a few days time.

Sirius, although amused, wasn't surprised by the request. It had only been a matter of time after all. After all with some people you just know.

He called out to Chrys. He needed her help in this one.

Sirius smiled at his wife as she emerged from their bed. He liked it when she wasn't wearing her robes. Although she was only about a month pregnant, Sirius thought he could see a small increase in body size. Chrys kept telling him that it was only his imagination, but Sirius definitely could see something. He glanced at her tummy as she got out of bed.

'Honestly Sirius,' she said when she saw where he was looking. 'You can't possibly see anything yet. Why have you gotten me up anyway?'

Sirius showed her the letter, which she read carefully.

'I think I can find exactly what you want,' she replied. 'It just might take a couple of days. Can I go

back to bed now?'

Sirius laughed.

'Only if I can join you,' he replied.

\*~\*

Ron finally returned home from training. He was exhausted as he collapsed into the couch at The Burrow. He knew that the other members of the household (that is Fred and George) would be home soon and he couldn't wait for someone to give him an excuse to laugh. The training had been intense, hard on him both physically and mentally and he had missed everyone an alarming amount. Terry was getting on his nerves additionally. Ron hadn't had much association with Terry at school; but he could say now that Terry was a boring sod. Having Terry as your mate was not nearly as good as having Harry as your mate. Additionally he missed Hermione's comments and above all Ron was certainly surprised how much he missed Rose. Recalling that she had had her first game as Gryffindor Quidditch captain, Ron decided that he should write to her and find out how she went while he waited for the twins.

As he sat down, a school owl soared in and dropped a letter on his lap, resting on his shoulder for a moment, pecking at his fingers then soaring off. Ron smiled; Rose had beaten him to it. He enjoyed reading the happy; laughing text of her letter. That was good. It obviously meant that she was feeling better than the last time he had seen her. Ron sincerely wished that there was a Hogsmeade weekend coming up so he could pay her a visit, but given his earlier conversation with Sirius, he knew that there wouldn't be any such weekends for quite a while; especially given the recent disappearances of Muggle-born wizards and witches.

Ron smiled as Fred and George appeared in the lounge room. Immediately he was bombarded with questions and filled in with what George would expect from him for his upcoming wedding, given that George and Katie had decided to marry on Halloween and there was therefore a lot of work to be done between now and then.

No rest for the wicked. What was going to be a nice quiet evening of recuperation after his full on five weeks of Hit Wizard training quickly turned into a help Fred and George with every aspect of the wedding night. But it was good to be home.

\*~\*

Rose was wondering what had happened to her letter. If her father was dead or couldn't be found the owl should have returned by now. She sat down to begin her homework when her faithful owl glided in the window with the piece of parchment. Her heart sunk. She knew that he mustn't have been able to find her father. It had been a bad idea. Rose snatched the piece of parchment and placed it in her Potions text.

\*~\*

Lily looked strangely at the package that Sirius placed in her hand. It had taken Chrystal a week to locate but it had been worth it in the end.

'Harry needs this,' Sirius said. 'I can't let you know what it is or why he needs it, but I need you to get it to him. Is that okay?'

Lily eyed the package carefully. It didn't appear too dangerous, but she did wonder what it held.

'Okay,' she said. 'You win. I'll take it to him and if anything happens to him because of it, I will hold you responsible for my son's demise.' Lily had not forgotten the numerous pranks that Sirius had played on everyone at school.

Lily took the package and apparated from the cottage in which she had been staying. She arrived at Padfoot's Manor and after exchanging greetings, gave the package to her son.

'It's from Sirius,' she said. 'I have no idea what it is; but he said that you required it.'

Harry gave his mother a smile.

'That was quicker than expected,' he replied. 'Why don't you stay for dinner? We could use some company. I'll go and locate Hermione. She needed some help with work, so I'll give her a hand if you wouldn't mind keeping an eye on the dinner.'

Harry pointed towards a pot, which held a basic casserole that was sitting on the stove. Lily nodded as she went over and gave the stew a stir. She inhaled the aroma and after giving her son a look of approval he disappeared up the stairs.

Harry was nervous.

In fact he was very nervous.

Since Harry had made a decision about Hermione's request, he had simply been waiting for this package to arrive from Sirius. He had no idea what Hermione's response would be; but if he was going to grant her request, then he was going to ask this of her.

He opened the package from Sirius and read the enclosed letter. Sirius had indeed been efficient. Harry drew in a breath before making his way into the small room that they had been using as a study.

Hermione heard him come in and gave him a smile as he entered the room.

'Do we have company then?' she asked. 'Your mum's here for dinner perhaps?'

Harry looked at her questioningly. Hermione pointed towards a shell.

'It's been charmed so that you can hear everything that goes on downstairs,' she explained. 'I guess Sirius was being quite cautious.'

Harry stared at Hermione. Her beautiful hair and eyes glistened in the light sun that streamed through the window.

'And Harry you're a liar,' she said breaking the silence. 'I am not doing work; nor am I in need of help. You've come to a decision about my request and you want to tell me. And I would guess that you want to talk to your mother as well.'

'You read me like a book, beautiful,' he replied shaking. 'Yes I have made a decision and this isn't quite how I wanted to tell you.' Harry took in a deep breath before clasping his hand around the package that Sirius had sent him. 'I understand where you're coming from with your request Hermione. So I want you to understand where I'm coming from. I didn't expect to be here and doing things this way in my life. I didn't expect to be in solitude with my girlfriend with not much to fill our time. I have reservations about you wanting children now, but I can deal with that if you really feel that we will be able to manage.'

Hermione nodded.

'I can understand that,' she said.

'So if we're going to do this I have one request,' Harry said pulling his hand out of his pocket. Harry got down on one knee in front of Hermione and opened the box, which held his grandmother's engagement ring. 'I want to marry you Hermione. I want to spend my life with you and I want you to have my children. I know we don't need to get married to do that; but I want to. I love you Hermione.'

Hermione glanced at the ring, at Harry's pleading face and despite her surprise she knew what her answer would be. She reached towards Harry's face and kissed him.

Hermione eased the ring onto her finger. It was a perfect fit.

'Where did you get it Harry?' she asked.

'I asked Sirius,' he said. 'I told him he could take money from my vault. It turns out that Chrystal had all my mums' jewellery from when my parents disappeared and she still had the ring because Mum has no use for jewellery at the moment. Apparently my grandmother, my dad's mother had said this ring was for my future wife. It was hers. She died not long after I was born.'

Small tears were forming in both their eyes.

They embraced before they walked downstairs to tell Lily.

Harry entered the room, where Lily was standing stirring dinner.

'Mum,' Harry said. 'I just asked Hermione to marry me and she said yes.'

'You did what?' Lily asked.



## **Chapter Seven Soul-mates**

Rose stared at the piece of parchment. Her heart began to race. Drops of sweat were forming on her forehead. She couldn't believe it.

A hoof print.

It had to be her dad. Only a person would have the ability to think that the owl was awaiting a response.

She sat there staring at the parchment.

The earlier despair was soon forgotten as Rose sat down and pulled out a fresh piece of parchment as an idea came to her head.

*Dear Dad,*

*I knew you were alive, I just didn't think I could find you so easily. Everyone has been looking for you so hard, that I guess it has never occurred to anyone to just send you an owl.*

*I don't know where you are, or how you can travel, or whether you can apparate and I don't know what you look like. But if you can make your way to the edge of the Forbidden Forest at Hogwarts I will check every night for the next week. If I find a stag I will force them to reveal themselves and hopefully our paths will cross.*

*If this is not possible, send me another hoof print and I will try and come up with another way for you to be found. I hope though that it's possible. I want to meet you and get to know you better.*

*Love,*

*Your daughter Rose.*

Rose hurriedly picked up her books and her homework and practically ran up to the owlery. She found her owl and quickly gave the letter to the owl.

'Find Prongs again for me,' she said to the owl. 'Find James Potter.'

The owl obediently hooted and flew off into the sky.

Rose quietly walked back to Gryffindor Tower. She was going to locate Ginny and tell her everything. She was going to need some help for this one and she hoped that Ginny would be the best person to help her.

\*~\*

The owl had returned. The stag lifted his head up to see it soaring towards him. He was just getting used to the fact that he had a daughter; but more importantly the fact that someone realised he was alive. He was pondering how this could be. He had come to the conclusion that somehow, Chrystal must have seen Lily and transformed her. He remembered the look on her face from the night that they had "died". She couldn't believe they were dead. She had shaken them and screamed but it had not woken them. James had tried to reach out and let her know that he was fine. But he was frozen. Unable to move and could not feel anything until he awoke in the St Mungos morgue to find himself transformed and unable to retake his human form.

He read the letter. Could he make it to the Forbidden Forest at Hogwarts?' He hadn't tried to apparate for a long time, not knowing the location of those that knew his Animagus form. But he could certainly try. He shook his head at the owl to let it know there was no reply. Hopefully all would go according to plan. It would only be a matter of time now, before he would be reunited with his family.

\*~\*

Lily's mouth was wide open.

She had dropped the casserole covered spoon on the floor.

'I asked Hermione to marry me,' Harry said having hoped for a better response. He wasn't sure if his mother was upset, astounded or just shocked.

It took Lily quite a while to come to terms with what her son had just told her. In her head she kept seeing her one year old son telling her that he was getting married.

'I'm sorry Hermione,' she said finally. 'It's not that I'm unhappy, I'm not truly. It's just that I guess I still see Harry as a one year old boy. I keep having to tell myself that he's a grown man now.'

Lily walked over and embraced her son and Hermione.

'I am very happy for you both,' she said. 'And I am very proud of you. However I think our dinner's ruined.' Lily pointed toward the pot on the stove which was beginning to smell like charcoal.

'That's okay,' Harry replied with a smile on his face. 'I'm sure there's some leftovers in the fridge.'

They sat down over a dinner of warmed up soup and made plans for the marriage to occur as soon as was practically possible.

'I don't want a big wedding,' Hermione kept saying over and over again. 'I just want to be with Harry, for as long as we have together.'

They ended up agreeing on plans by the early hours on the morning. Harry was adamant about one thing. Ron was going to be his best man, and he wouldn't do it without Ron being there. And he wanted to talk to Ron before it happened.

Lily walked out of the house early the next afternoon and apparated back to Hogsmeade. She quickly transformed into Crookshanks and made her way back towards the castle.

It was ironic really. She, the one had to remain hidden for the safety of her son and his fiancée, would have to organise their wedding in the shortest amount of time possible. The feat would have to fall upon Sirius and Chrys. And the practicalities of them getting married while they were in hiding were still swirling around Lily's head. Luckily Harry had thought everything through. Lily walked in the entrance to the castle and made her way up to the staff quarters. As soon as she entered Sirius and Chrys' room she announced herself with a big miaow before transforming.

Sirius spied her almost immediately. He was sitting in the sitting room, glancing at a book.

'What did Hermione say?' Sirius asked with a cheeky grin on his face.

'You should have given me some warning Sirius Black,' she said. 'That was very cruel.'

'I take it she said yes then,' Sirius replied. 'Anyway Lily, it's not my place to tell you. That's Harry's job. Are we happy?'

'Well I guess so,' Lily said. 'I mean I've known Hermione very well for quite a while now and I think she's a good match for Harry. It's just hard getting used to the fact that my son's all grown up.'

Lily sat down with Sirius and went through Harry's plans. It was all quite simple really. Lily would reveal them from hiding, Lupin would marry them in front of a small group of friends and then all would go back to normal. And they would put a notice in The Daily Prophet a couple of days later with photos to try and keep Voldemort under the illusion that Harry was leading a normal life and hence wouldn't begin looking for his Secret Keeper. It was only after they had made all the plans that Lily realised that Chrys wasn't there.

'She's gone to see Alastor Moody,' Sirius said rolling his eyes. 'Bloody Auror stuff. You know I'm not too keen on being married to an Auror?' Lily nodded. 'Well Chrys is the closest "stationed" Auror to The Three Broomsticks so she has to deal with all the loose ends there, despite other Aurors living in Hogsmeade. It's Moody's revenge for all the paperwork he had to do when she got Lucius kissed.'

'I can't see her being too happy about it,' Lily replied. 'She always hated that kind of thing. I'm sure she would have just resigned if possible. Working three jobs last year kind of pushed her to the edge. She said as much. I didn't think she'd quit Quidditch though, but I guess you had to do some persuading there.'

'Interestingly enough I didn't,' Sirius replied. 'It was entirely her choice. I think after the Cup was over she'd had enough. So Scotland's without their Seeker for the next World Cup. Looks like it might be Harry's job eh?'

'She wouldn't have quit for Harry,' Lily replied.

'They've only come head to head once and I believe Harry won,' Sirius answered.

'I also believe that that was his birthday and Chrystal let him win,' Lily replied. 'If I'm not very much mistaken.'

On that note Chrystal walked in the door.

'There's no point debating my Quidditch days,' she said. 'They're over.' She pointed to her stomach. 'Especially at the moment.'

Sirius and Lily burst out laughing when they saw the deadly serious look on her face.

Lily stood up walked towards the door as Chrys snuggled in Sirius' arms.

'I guess someone had better tell Rose that her brother's getting married,' she said. 'It's probably best that it's me. I don't know how she'll take it, but I think we should be more worried about how Ron will take it.'

Lily transformed and pushed the door open with her paw. She slowly made her way towards Gryffindor Tower hoping that Rose would be in there. She also hoped that Rose would react well.

This weekend. Her son was getting married on Saturday and she had no idea where James was. It wasn't fair. He should be there for their son's wedding. And they had no idea where he was.

Lily arrived at the fat lady and rubbed against the frame. The fat lady seeing "Crookshanks" answered Lily's question;

'If you're looking for Miss Heaney and Miss Weasley they're not here. They headed out an hour ago with heavy robes. I would suggest that they're somewhere outside.'

Outside was not a word Lily particularly wanted to hear. Although the snow was not falling yet, it was cold and the last thing she wanted to do was go out there by herself. Especially in her cat form. But somehow she felt something was happening. Something wasn't quite right. She headed straight back to the staff quarters, hoping that she wouldn't be interrupting anything.

She wasn't. Sirius and Chrys were still sitting on the settee where she'd left them.

'Rose isn't in Gryffindor Tower,' Chrys said when she saw Lily. 'She's outside searching for something. I'm not sure what but she can't find it.'

Sirius and Lily's mouths dropped. *How did she know that? Had she done what she swore she'd never do?*

'Well am I right?' Chrys asked. 'She's cold and she's looking, so I assume she's outside looking for something.' She looked at the look on their faces. 'It came to me okay. I don't do that kind of thing.'

Accepting her explanation for the moment, Sirius scooped up Lily and threw Chrys her thick cloak.

'First stop Hagrid's,' Sirius said. 'I mean Charlie's.'

Chrys shuddered at the thought of the hut not belonging to Hagrid anymore.

They made their way down to the hut and were surprised when they found just Charlie and Ginny inside.

'Where's Rose?' Sirius asked Ginny.

Ginny looked as if she was not going to tell.

'Do you know what's going on Charlie?' Sirius asked Charlie who was beginning to show a look of concern on his face.

'She was here, but then she said she had some work to do,' he answered. 'Is something wrong? You look as if you think she's dead or something.'

'No she's not,' Chrys answered. 'Bu we were looking for her and she's somewhere cold and afraid. We need to know where.'

Out of concern for her friend Ginny spoke up.

'She's looking for Prongs,' she whispered.

'What?' exclaimed Lily as she transformed from Crookshanks.

'She wrote a letter, the day we won that Quidditch match,' Ginny began. 'She was just writing it because she wanted to feel close to her dad, and then on a whim she sent it. It came back with a muddy paw print. She decided that she would send another letter. It said that he should meet her on the edge of the Forbidden Forest. I tried to get her to tell one of you, because she doesn't even know what he looks like in his Animagus form. She just didn't want to get everyone's hopes up. She decided that she would just try the Revealing Charm on any stag she saw. Then if she was successful she would bring him to you, Mrs Potter.' Ginny added the last comment looking directly at Lily.

Lily felt her heart tighten. A letter. Who would have thought that something so simple could locate her husband? They had been searching so hard for so long, Lupin had in fact devoted the majority of his time over the last four months to searching and Sirius had spent the greater part of summer searching and yet they had found nothing. James. She longed to hear his voice, see his face and feel his touch. She needed to feel his arms around her and his voice telling her that everything was going to work out fine. She needed to hear him tell her that he would keep her safe. Her heart had almost broken when she lost him. The thought that he might actually be here was almost too much to bear.

'Well she won't have gone too far,' Lily said. 'It's best we go and find them *both*.'

She was not going to give up. Charlie located a spare lantern and the five of them made their way outside. Charlie glanced at Lily.

'Shouldn't you transform?' he asked her. 'It wouldn't be wise for anyone to see you.'

'Who's going to see?' she asked. 'Hopefully James.'

She answered her own question. Her nerves were rattling. She hoped that Rose had been successful. She didn't want to think that there was a possibility that she hadn't. They walked up and down the edge of the forest looking for some sign of Rose or Prongs.

'Are you sure she said the edge?' Lily asked Ginny who nodded in reply.

They paced the edge once again looking for a glimpse of life in a wood that appeared dark and deserted. Finally they got it. Sirius spied a flash of dark hair just inside the perimeter of the forest.

'Rose?' he called. 'Are you there?'

'Yes,' replied the chattering voice. 'I'm in the clearing Uncle Sirius.'

The group ran to the shaking body. The girl was in tears. She turned to her mother.

'I thought he'd be here,' she said. She began to bawl which only accentuated the shaking. 'I thought we'd found him.'

Lily held her daughter close and tried to reassure her despite the feeling of disappointment that was rising in her stomach.

'It's okay darling,' she said in a soft, soothing voice. 'At least you tried.' She stroked the girl's hair. 'Let's take you inside and give you a nice warm cup of chocolate.'

Rose nodded and Lily began to head towards Charlie's hut. They hadn't succeeded. Lily let out the breath she was holding. Perhaps tomorrow. As long as there was hope Lily knew deep down inside that they would find him. He was out there somewhere. He was alive and he was trying to be found. She let out a large sigh of breath and kept walking towards the hut.

They were just outside Charlie's hut when she heard it. She and Chrys exchanged glances. She had heard it too.

'Right, let's go,' Chrys said.

Sirius, Chrys and Lily turned around instantly. Rose, already slumped on the ground, looked as if she wanted to, but didn't have the strength. Sirius held her under the armpit and helped her stand. They then made their way back towards the Forbidden Forest. All of them saw the full moon above them. Despite its light, their surroundings seemed darker. As they reached the clearing where Rose had been standing Sirius called out.

'Prongs, can you hear me?' he yelled loudly.

This time they all heard it. It was closer and sounded as if it was coming towards them.

'We're over here,' Sirius began repeating this again and again until finally they could hear a galloping sound approach them. The stag entered the clearing.

James.

Lily knew instantly that it was James. She could not forget his Animagus form. There was no disputing that this was James. Her chest began to tighten as she had to try and stop herself from hyperventilating. Her heart was pounding at a million miles an hour. They had found him. Sirius located his wand and pointed it at the stag.

*'Revalo'*

The stag was instantly transformed into the form of James Potter. He glanced around at the people who were in the clearing.

'Sirius, it's good to see you again. Finally,' he began. 'Chrystal, is that you?' She nodded her head. 'You've changed.' He moved over and embraced his old friends. He glanced around again. His attention turned almost immediately to Rose. 'You're Rose aren't you?' he said. 'You have to be.' She nodded. 'Thank you for saving me,' he said. 'If I have to eat another blade of grass ever again I think I'll be sick.' He walked over, embraced his daughter before picking her up and spinning her around in the air. 'You're all grown up. I guess that's going to take some getting used to.' Then his attention was focused on Lily. Her heart was pounding. It was James. After seventeen years, she had found him again. 'My darling,' he said as he ran towards her and kissing her like he had never done before. 'I've missed you so much.'

'You're hurt,' Lily said noticing a gash that ran from his shoulder to his elbow. 'We'd better get that seen to; but how?' She glanced at Sirius. They would have some explaining to do. 'We can't take him into the castle like this and I certainly can't go into the castle as myself.'

'Take him to my cabin,' Charlie suggested. 'Then we can fetch Poppy. She won't tell anyone. By the way James I'm Charlie Weasley. I think I've changed since you last saw me. I believe you came and saw me in a Quidditch match at Hogwarts.'

James had another glimpse at the figure.

'I'd agree with that one,' he said. 'And who's the younger Weasley then?' James had spied Ginny out

of the corner of his eye, trying to stay out of everyone's way.

'That's Ginny, Dad,' Rose said. 'She helped me find you.'

'I owe you my thanks then Ginny,' he said. 'But I agree with Lily, I need to get near a fire and have this awful scrape seen to. And I think Rose needs a fire as well and perhaps a warm drink of some kind.'

The group, now exhausted made their way back towards Charlie's hut. Charlie instantly put the kettle on.

'What happened to Hagrid?' James asked innocently. Seeing the looks on their faces he thought he shouldn't have asked that one. 'I guess I've got a fair bit of catching up to do then?' Everyone agreed with him. Charlie poured tea for everyone and sent Ginny to fetch Dumbledore.

'He'll be the best person to catch you up,' Charlie added as Rose pulled out her wand and began to tend to her father's wound. 'Where have you been? We've been looking for you for months.'

'I've been wandering in the Welsh wilderness,' James said. 'Somehow I got stuck on the Isle of Anglesey and ended up in Llyn Alaw. It took me a while to work out where the hell I was and then working on trying to find Lily was almost impossible. How long has it been?'

'Almost seventeen years James,' Sirius replied.

'I've been out of contact with the world for seventeen years?' James couldn't believe it. No wonder people looked different. 'It should have twigged when I saw Rose. Or better yet when I read her letter telling me she was Gryffindor's Quidditch captain. So seventeen years, and what month is it?'

'October,' Sirius replied. 'Not Halloween yet.'

'That makes you sixteen then,' he said to Rose examining the job she had done on his arm. 'Nice mending there. When's your birthday?' The entire cabin laughed at this, it was entertaining that a father should ask his daughter when her birthday was.

'Actually I don't know whether Rose knows the right date,' Lily said between giggles. 'It's May 31<sup>st</sup>. 2 months before Harry's.'

'Speaking of Harry,' James said. 'Where is he?'

'I think it would be best to fill James in now, don't you think?' Chrysty emerged from the shadows to ask. 'How much do you know about what's happened in the past seventeen years?'

'Nothing,' James admitted. 'I didn't even realise where I was until about a month ago.'

'Okay then,' she said. 'I'll begin and someone can take over when I don't know what happened.' She glanced carefully at James who was drinking his tea, while Rose tended to his wound. She knew that Rose needed to hear a lot of this just as much as James did. 'On October 31<sup>st</sup> 1981 I was summoned to Godric's Hollow to attend a scene. I didn't realise that it would be you guys, or I never would have gone. When I got there, I found the most devastating scene I've ever seen. I knew then what happened. You realise Voldemort fell that night?' James shook his head. 'Apparently when he tried to kill Harry the curse rebounded onto him and killed the mortal part of him. When I found your bodies, as far as I could see you were dead. Like Lily, I hadn't realised about the delay before you transformed. Sirius was already there, grieving for you. He was determined to take Harry and I left him there while I went and summoned help. Sirius told me he was going after Peter. I begged him not to but he insisted. He located Peter the next day and Peter was one step ahead of him. He cut off his finger and blew up a street of Muggles to make Sirius look even guiltier. Sirius was sent to Azkaban without a trial and Peter was for an intents and purposes dead because nearly no one knew he was an Animagus. So the outside world Sirius was dead. Harry was taken to live with his aunt and uncle who tried to hide the magical world from him, hoping that they could put a stop to it.'

Sirius took over.

'Harry came to Hogwarts and I will him tell you about it, when you see him. However Peter was apprehended by Harry, two of his friends, Remus and myself when he was in third year. Peter escaped and returned to Voldemort and helped him restore his body. Then the cold war began. Cornelius Fudge refused to believe that Voldemort had been restored to power. So Dumbledore and the operatives have been trying to keep Voldemort at bay and seemed to be successful until last year. He appeared to directly target Harry and blew up The Shrieking Shack. Harry luckily was not there at the time, but five students were killed. Now disappearances are occurring all over the place like his last rise to power.'

'You remember Sooghal don't you James?' Lily asked him. James nodded. He knew that bloody prophecy. 'Given that Voldemort went after you he must believe it.'

'So Harry's in hiding then?' James asked. His question was answered by everyone's nodding, 'Whatabout the others.'

'I'm Ravenclaw, James,' Chrys said softly. 'I didn't know until after you were gone.'

'But why aren't you hiding then?' he asked.

'I'm safe for the moment,' she replied. 'We know two will fall, either Harry or him and one of Ravenclaw or Hufflepuff. We don't know which and from our intelligence we know that Voldemort does not know which.'

'For now, only a small group of people know that Rose is Harry's sister,' Lily said. 'These are the only people who know I'm alive. I'm Harry's Secret Keeper. So whether or not you should reveal yourself is debatable. Besides you're from Gryffindor's line as well. He may come after you too.'

Dumbledore and McGonagall made their entrance into Charlie's hut. They immediately ran straight towards James.

'Has he been filled in?' Dumbledore asked. Everyone in the room nodded. Dumbledore glanced at the exhausted James and the shivering Rose. 'Might I suggest we get some sleep for tonight and reconvene in the morning,' he continued. 'Charlie, perhaps you might allow the Potters to stay in your hut tonight. Your room in the Staff Quarters is still empty. Shall we meet here, say at ten o'clock?'

Everyone left the hut, leaving James and Lily to get reacquainted.

It was only later when they were lying in bed, that Lily realised she hadn't told them Harry's news.

## Chapter Eight Pensieve

*"Past is past and we must live the present to survive the future." (Martin Ducavne)*

*"Nothing that was worthy in the past departs; no truth or goodness realised by man ever dies, or can die." (Thomas Carlyle)*

*"The past is only the present become invisible and mute; and because it is invisible and mute its memories, glances and its murmurs are infinitely precious. We are tomorrow's past." (Mary Webb)*

\*~\*

Chrys and Sirius were in their sitting room still amazed at the events that had unfolded. They both couldn't believe that after all their hard work something as simple as a letter and a hoof print had brought James to them.

Chrys could tell that there was something wrong. Sirius had been very unsettled since they returned and there had certainly been something lacking from James' reappearance. He had certainly given off the vibe that he was not completely comfortable with this James.

'Aren't you glad to see your best friend?' she asked softly.

Sirius didn't reply. He took along time stewing over the question.

'Of course I'm glad to see him,' Sirius eventually replied defensively. 'But he's not James. Not the James I remember anyway. He's different. He doesn't understand. It was different with Lily. She knew exactly what had been happening in our world. She got to see both of us for who we are now. I don't know if you realise just how much James' statement about you changing is true. You've changed a lot more than physically. You're practically a different person. You've been changed by living, existing in the world, whereas James has not. He looked like a shadow of his former self. You saw the shock on his face when he saw Rose didn't you?' She nodded in reply. 'He had completely lost track of time. If I know James Potter, and I did once know him well, I'd say that he's going to struggle with completely losing seventeen years of his life.'

'I don't disagree with you Sirius,' she answered. 'But by all accounts he should be dead. If people see him then they will think they're seeing a ghost. I think that will be harder for him than losing seventeen years.'

'There's absolutely no way we can understand what we have been through,' Sirius continued. 'He cannot possibly understand what has made me into the man I am today. Seventeen years is a long time not to see someone when you've only known them for ten.'

'Sirius, it's a little less than half our lives,' Chrys replied. 'You were thirty-eight this year.'

'If only there was a way to make him understand,' Sirius said. 'Preferably before he meets Harry if that is at all possible. Harry had enough trouble getting used to Lily and Rose and they'd been in the wizarding world.' Sirius realised what had been forgotten in the night's activities. 'I wonder if Lily told James about Harry. I wonder how he'll take that. He hasn't seen his son for the best part of his son's life and he's going to be reunited with him on his wedding day!' Sirius laughed. The idea was quite amusing.

'Rose didn't get told either,' Chrys said. 'And I believe that was the whole point of tonight's exercise. It doesn't matter, I'll tell her tomorrow. I've got sixth year Gryffindor's at nine. Perhaps you can find Ron. You know him better than I do. You've got a better idea of how he'll take it.'

'I doubt the news will shock him,' Sirius said. 'It's just that he's finding it slightly difficult to deal with everything that's happening. He's not only got his problems to deal with, but Rose's as well. And he's been assigned Terry Boot as a partner. I think Ron will be doing his best to get to next stage where Terry isn't his partner anymore. The guys a know-it-all and can seriously get on your nerves.'



'Hopefully that's all he is,' Chrys added. 'He was a very ambitious student, especially for a Ravenclaw. If I hadn't known his house I could have easily assumed he was a Slytherin. On another note, do you know who the responsibility will fall on if it comes to war, don't you?'

'Yes,' Sirius said. 'The Hit Wizards. They're the only ones trained in that kind of thing.'

'Have we any news from the Isles?' Chrys asked. 'Surely Terri must have returned by now.'

'Not yet,' Sirius replied. 'But I'm due to speak to Alec tomorrow. Now back to important matters. How can we get James to understand? How can we show him?'

'I might have an idea,' she replied a smile coming to her face.

\*~\*

'Rose, can I see you a minute?' Chrys called the girl over to her at the end of the class. 'I guess you must be wondering why we were looking for you last night?'

'Actually Lily came and found me this morning,' she said. 'She told me.'

'Are you holding up okay?'

'I'm fine,' Rose replied. 'Much better now, after last night I feel like a weight has been lifted off my shoulders.'

'What class do you have at ten?'

'Herbology,' she replied. 'Can you get me out of it please?'

'Here,' Chrys handed the girl a note. 'Give this to Professor Sprout. I hope she won't mind too much. If anyone asks, you're helping me for the next couple of hours. I'll see you down at Charlie's cabin after you've made your excuses for Herbology.'

Chrys glanced at her watch and hurried down to the hut. She wanted to beat everyone there so she could have a few minutes with James.

She reached the hut finding James alone. She knew she would have about ten minutes until everybody else arrived.

'Morning James,' she said with a smile on her face. 'You're looking much better.' He was. A lot can be said for a decent night's sleep in a comfortable bed. 'Did you and Lily get a good chance to talk last night?'

'Yes,' he replied glancing at his watch which still worked. 'You're early. No surprises there.'

'I wouldn't assume you know me that well James,' she replied. 'I came to talk to you about Sirius.'

James nodded. Chrys could sense that he had an idea where this was going. Sirius had given out enough vibes the night before that suggested he was uncomfortable.

'Is it about Azkaban?' James asked. 'I'm still struggling to believe he went to Azkaban. I'm still, after seventeen years, struggling to believe that Peter had the ability to fool everyone and Sirius was the one who suffered because of it.'

'I know,' she replied. 'When Sirius first told me I couldn't believe him. It was too difficult to conceive. Anyway, Sirius is concerned that both of us have changed so much that it might be difficult for you. We realise that you won't understand where we're coming from. And we can't make you understand by telling you what happened because by doing that you can't understand the emotions. You can't possibly conceive what type of world we were living in.'

'I realise things haven't been easy,' James began but Chrystal cut him off.

'It's not that,' she said. 'You just need to see.'

'I need to see?' he asked clarifying what she had just said.

'Sirius and I talked about it and we decided that I should take you through my Pensieve,' she said.

'Those are private memories Chryssy,' he said slightly taken aback. 'I don't know if I really *need* to see them.' Chrys noticed the stress he put on the word need.

'*Teasairg mi,*' she said under her breath. *Save me.* 'I would have to chaperone you of course. But we think it's something you need to see. Simply because you've been isolated from the rest of us for so long. We would have got Lily to do it as well if she hadn't been living in Gryffindor Tower for the last four years. She got a better insight into a lot of things than we did. Will you at least try it? For Harry's sake as well as ours?'

He nodded.

'I will do it for Harry's sake,' he said. 'On the condition that you siphon out anything that I shouldn't see. I may not know Sirius now, but I knew him very well in the past and I wouldn't put it past him to play a joke on me for old time's sake.'

'I don't blame you James,' she said. 'The only thing I can't show you is what it was like for Sirius in Azkaban. He doesn't talk about it too often but I imagine that he will open up about it eventually.'

At that moment they were joined by Dumbledore, McGonagall, Lily, Sirius, Rose and Snape. Chrys knew she would never forget the look on James' face when he saw Snape. It was a look of sheer disbelief.

'Snape?' James exclaimed almost angrily. 'What the bloody hell is Snivellus doing here?'

'Calm down James,' Dumbledore said in his slow and careful manner which always seemed to have a calming effect. 'Severus is the Potions master. He has also been working closely with me on other matters. He is trustworthy James. You have my word on that.'

'Right,' James said, not sounding entirely convinced but accepting that he must take his old Headmaster's word on it. 'So I guess you'll have to bring me up to speed on what's going on.'

'As you are no doubt aware, Voldemort has returned,' Dumbledore began. 'Recently there have been disappearances similar to his last rise to power. You may or may not remember the disappearances that occurred last time; however this time they all appear to be Muggle-born witches and wizards that have vanished. This is unlike the first time, when it was powerful witches and wizards that would possibly stand in Voldemort's way that disappeared.' Chrys noticed Sirius flinch when Dumbledore mentioned this. *Some scars just don't heal.* 'We have sent an operative to investigate some intelligence but we believe that Voldemort has not killed them, that he is merely holding them. For what reason we don't know, but we're certain that he's torturing them. The Ministry of Magic is only just getting concerned about this now. I am sorry to say that it appears that Mr Fudge and I have had a parting of the ways. He refused to believe that Voldemort was back and that unfortunately put him a few years behind us. He was forced to recognise it during Harry's fifth year when Voldemort attacked the operatives at the Department of Mysteries in the Ministry of Magic. Then last year he attacked the Shrieking Shack in Hogsmeade. We believe he was directly targeting Harry. Harry fortunately was not in the shack at the time of the attack; however he does feel somewhat responsible for the deaths that occurred. Whatever the case may be, it is evident that Voldemort believes the words of The Prophecy of Soaghal. He has made numerous attempts on Harry's life and I have no doubts he will do the same to you, if he learns you are alive. You have been protected against the Avada Kedavra curse once by the protective charm and we have no evidence that it will work again if you were to be hit with the killing curse again. For now, Harry is being hidden, under the Fidelius with the additional protection of this charm. He is, however, emerging from hiding to play Quidditch and keep up public profile so that Voldemort does not actively seek his Secret Keeper. If he gets hit by the Avada Kedavra curse, we will be more prepared than we were with you and Lily. We will fake his death and he will live in full hiding. We can use this to surprise Voldemort, for he believes that if Harry is dead, he will not fall.'

'So the short of it is that both Harry and I are in danger,' James stated. He almost didn't believe what

Dumbledore was telling him. If it had been somebody else he probably wouldn't have, but it was Dumbledore. He had so much faith in Dumbledore that he couldn't imagine the tale being false. 'So people don't know that Lily's alive and they don't know Rose is a relation because that would place her in danger?'

'That's right,' Lily said. 'Only a small, select group of the operatives do.'

'And I take it Snivellus is one of them? James asked spitting out Snape's name as if it were something distasteful.

'He's part of The Covenant James,' Lily said. 'The covenant that is entangled with the Prophecy. Do you remember it?'

'Yes,' James said with certainty. 'I remember that bloody prophecy and the covenant that it talks about.'

'Anyhow if we get back to business at hand,' Dumbledore said. 'Severus you called this meeting, what is it that's on your mind?'

'I have been called upon to make a list of all the Muggle-born students at Hogwarts,' Snape said. 'If I do this and they're taken it will be entirely my fault. Yet if I don't I will almost certainly be killed.'

'Have you been given a deadline?' McGonagall asked.

'Yes,' Snape said. 'It's like with Mr Malfoy, I have six months.'

'What's he planning for six months?' Sirius asked.

'I don't know,' Snape said woefully. 'I would suggest that's what the operatives need to work out.'

'Why don't we ask Professor Brown?' McGonagall suggested. 'I normally don't think much of Divination, but the girl has an indisputable gift.'

'Well if nobody has any other suggestions, shall I see to arrangements for James?' Dumbledore asked.

'I should hear back from Alec anytime in the next couple of days,' Sirius said. 'I'll call a meeting then.'

'James,' Dumbledore said. 'It would be best if you stayed out of sight here at Hogwarts. I shall prepare a room for you in the Staff Quarters. Where will you be until then?'

'James and I have some business to attend to,' Chrystal said. 'He shall be in our quarters. Sirius will fill you in. James might I suggest we get started. You should cover yourself with a cloak; if people recognise you they will most certainly panic.'

James agreed quickly, but he certainly wasn't used to this assertive Chrystal. And he wasn't sure that he liked it either.

He followed her up to the Staff Quarters, realising that he had never been there before. She showed him into a suite of rooms that had the label "Black" on the door. James spied the stone dish with the rune carvings around the edge. He knew that they had expected him to agree. That gave him a light feeling of discomfort but he was sure that it would pass.

'Before we do this I have a few questions to ask you,' James said. 'I hope you're okay with that.'

'Anything James,' she said softly. There was a friendly tone to her voice. 'You don't need to be so nervous around me, I won't hurt.'

James didn't think he was really showing his nerves but he certainly felt them.

'First is just a point of curiosity,' he said. 'How on earth did you get Sirius to marry you? I never expected the man to ever settle down. Did your father threaten him?'

Chrystal laughed in surprise.

'Actually James, it was Sirius that wanted to settle down,' she said. 'I told you that we'd changed. When Sirius was freed I wanted to be with him but I wanted to take things slowly. I wanted to pick up where we left off. Sirius didn't want that at all. We came to a compromise but I think I gave in more than he did over time. I always did when it came to him. But whether or not you want to believe it, Sirius was the one who wanted to get married; he's the one who wants children. I think Azkaban helped him put things in perspective.'

'You gave in?' James asked. 'So when's the baby due?'

'Is it that obvious?' she said in surprise. 'June.'

'It's not obvious Chryssy,' he said. 'You're not exactly showing, but you mentioned children and giving into Sirius. I take it you got over Lucius then?'

James was a little surprised by the response he received and instantly realised that he'd said the wrong thing.

'Sirius is in trouble tonight then?' he asked raising his eyebrows.

'Probably,' she said with a grin. 'I forget how much he used to tell you, it's just taken me by surprise that's all.'

Sensing that she was slightly uncomfortable, he glanced over at the silvery light coming from the Pensieve.

'Shall we? Wait I need my wand, or at least a wand.'

'Oh, I almost forgot,' Chrys said reaching over and opening a draw. She pulled out a wand and handed it to him. 'We've been keeping these safe for you.'

James examined his wand. The mahogany had not changed in seventeen years. It was exactly as he remembered it.

He and Chrys pointed their wands at the Pensieve. They prodded the silvery stuff with their wands and then were pulled into the Pensieve. James looked around and found himself in Dunvegan Castle.

*'Aren't you working tonight Chryssy?'*

*James saw Alasdair MacLeod enter the room.*

*'I've got to go out on a call. I was just coming to find my bag.'*

*She apparated and James found himself in a familiar place.*

*Godric's Hollow. He shivered. He knew that this was the night that they had "died." He didn't really care to relive his death, but he knew he had agreed to see what had happened afterward. He looked around.*

*The house had been destroyed. He could see Sirius bending over something. He shuddered as he realised that it must be his body.*

*'What's going on Sirius?' Chrystal asked.*

*'They're dead,' Sirius replied screaming like a wounded animal. 'Lily and James, he killed them.'*

*James watched as Chrystal shook his lifeless body.*

*'James, no, you can't be.' She began to sob. 'Have you found Lily, Sirius?'*

*Sirius pointed toward the rubble of the house. James watched as Chrystal ran over towards Lily's body.*

*'Lily, no.' James watched as Chrystal held Lily's body close to hers and sobbed. He heard her cry "why" over and over again. Chrystal seemed to catch sight of Sirius again. 'Sirius, was it you?'*

*Before he had a chance to answer she spoke again. 'How could you do that to James and Lily? He was your best friend.'*

*'It wasn't me, mo Crystal,' Sirius finally spoke softly and as if he had given in.*

*'What do you mean it wasn't you? Who else would it be? It's not like they would trust Remus at the moment and Peter can't even stand up for himself let alone anyone else.'*

*'It was Peter,' Sirius said with conviction. 'I have to find him immediately.' James couldn't help but shiver at the cold tone in Sirius' voice as he explained to Chrystal over and over again how he had convinced James and Lily to change Secret Keepers.*

*'Peter? Why do you want to find him? Leave him alone; I'm sure he doesn't want to see you after what you did today. I can't believe you. You were their Secret Keeper. You talked to me about it.'*

*'Well there was a change of plans wasn't there?' he replied. 'I was too obvious. So I convinced them to change to Peter so that they would be safe. I mean who would believe that the Potter's would choose snivelling Peter Pettigrew as their Secret Keeper. It's laughable. I promise you Chrystal ìille-MacLeod I did not betray them to Voldemort. Mise docha teasd, mo cridhe[1].'*

*'Mise creid thu a Shirius[2],'* she replied. *She appeared to be more accepting of what he had said.*

*'I must find Peter and take revenge for Lily and James, mo cridhe,' he said determined.*

*My love, he had called her. James recognised that even though he didn't recall the rest.*

*'Don't do it Sirius, it's not worth it. If you do that they'll take you to Azkaban for sure.'*

*'Eadh os. Crìochnaich chaidh dlìthaich[3],'* Sirius sounded forlorn. *'I don't care anymore mo cridhe, mo Crystal.*

*James didn't quite understand what they were saying. He had always hated it when they spoke in Gaelic. It always gave him the impression that they were saying something that they didn't want anyone else to understand. The fact was they slipped in and out of either language unconsciously. If Sirius was going to tell her something important, he would usually tell her in Gaelic. And she would normally reply. Now while he didn't fully understand what Sirius was saying, he could tell that he had given in, that he didn't seem to have any will left to live. It was devastating to watch. He sounded as though he was in the "depths of despair."*

*A ministry official arrived.*

*'I've got to go, I love you Sirius, mo gràdh. Promise me you won't do anything stupid. Toilich a Shirius,' she pleaded.*

*'Toilich, a Chrystal,' he said.*

*He had promised that he wouldn't do anything stupid, but James didn't quite believe it. He knew this Sirius. This Sirius was deeply wounded and wanted revenge. James just wasn't quite sure what lengths he'd go to get it, however from the little he'd been told he could deduce it.*

*James felt himself being sucked to another location. He was at the Ministry of Magic; in the office he had been in so many times to visit Lily. A witch James didn't recognise ran into the room.*

*'Did you hear Chrystal?' the witch was calling. 'Sirius Black has been captured by Hit Wizards. He blew up a street full of Muggles and Peter Pettigrew with a single curse. Now all that's left of Pettigrew is a finger. Apparently Black was the Potter's Secret Keeper and now Pettigrew's going to get the Order of Merlin, first Class..'*

*The witch ran out of the room.*

*'No he wasn't,' James heard Chrystal say under her breath as she burst into tears.*

*James shook. He couldn't believe that the wizarding world had just accepted rumour for fact and with it locked away an innocent man for twelve years. Was that the world they still lived in? And*

*Pettigrew getting the Order of Merlin. The thought made him want to vomit.*

*Again their location changed. Now James knew they were in Azkaban. Even in the Pensieve it had an eerie feeling. James could feel the Dementors sucking things out of him. James saw Sirius sitting in the cell. He looked like hell.*

*'I've already told you I believe you Sirius, isn't that enough? I've decided. I'm going to give up being an Auror just like you wanted.'*

*James was shocked by the comment. For Chrystal to give up being an Auror was an enormous sacrifice on her part. Sirius hadn't replied. She spoke again.*

*'Don't worry about money, I'll keep playing Quidditch and Dad said he'll help me. I'm going to search for a way to free you, and then we can go and find Harry and we can have our own children and live together in a big house in the forest away from prying eyes. I love you mo a Shirius.'* James watched as Chrystal moved towards Sirius and held him in her arms.

*Again James felt himself being pulled away. He had wanted to stay and try and comfort his friend. He found himself again at Dunvegan Castle.*

Chrystal pulled him out of the Pensieve.

'I don't want you to see the next one,' she said. 'The long and short of it is that I killed my mother.

James couldn't help but hide the shock.

'She was a Death Eater,' Chrystal continued. 'She was Voldemort's mistress.' She spat out the words. 'She would have killed me; I was just doing my job. Mr Crouch had authorised us to use whatever means necessary to bring a Death Eater to justice. That was why I couldn't do what I promised to Sirius. If I found a way to free him without proving his innocence, then potentially other Death Eaters would have to be freed as well. After that night I couldn't do that. They hauled me through a vicious enquiry at work and then I was lumped with courtroom duties for the next six months. After that I was given mainly air surveillance. It was supposed to be punishment but I made it into something. I buried myself in work and became engrossed in that. I shut out and anyone else who tried to get close. I was hurting. I suppose Sirius was as well but I didn't stop to consider that. Then Sirius escaped from Azkaban he didn't make an effort to let me know that he was fine. But what angered me more was that he didn't even let his family know. Heather, Maddie and Alec were the only people besides my Da and Remus that I let anywhere near me. I was so angry that he didn't let them know he was fine.'

'Alec?' James asked.

'Oh of course you won't know,' Chrystal said. 'Madeleine married Alec McLachlan. He's one of the operatives. I don't know if you remember him. He was a Ravenclaw, the year behind me.'

James nodded his head in response.

'I remember what happened to his poor sister,' James said. 'She was a Ravenclaw in my year. I think I've had enough information for the moment,' James said as he took his glasses off and rubbed at his eyes. He was feeling over overwhelmed. 'Do you think I could have a cup of tea or something warm? I can still feel the cold of Azkaban. Then later we can continue.'

'Sure,' she replied. She went away and made the tea and brought it to him on a tray. 'What else did you want to ask me?'

'Ah,' James said. 'Well I wanted to know if Lily had found someone else. I love her but I don't want her to feel as if she's indebted to me.'

'We only found Lily about five months ago,' Chrys replied. 'I know you're confused. There are gaps to be filled in and I think Lily and Sirius will have to do some of that. In can only show you me, and glimpses of everyone else. But in terms of Lily having found someone else, honestly I don't think

that's possible.'

'I just worry Chryssy,' he said. 'About Sirius, well I guess I don't have to worry about him anymore, and Snape.'

'Don't be,' Chrys said softly. 'She's been searching for you as hard as anyone else.'

There was a knock on the door. Sirius and Dumbledore entered.

'How'd it go?' Sirius asked.

'I guess there's still a lot for me to catch up on,' James said. 'Just tell me the truth and don't play a prank on me when you're telling what happened.' He walked over and play punched Sirius in the arm. Yes he could see that Sirius had changed but it would be fine. They would get to know one another again. 'We're about to go back in. Would you like to join us?'

Sirius shook his head. James knew he shouldn't be so disappointed. The memories in the Pensieve would probably be too painful for him to want to relive.



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[1] I would rather die my love

[2] I believe you Sirius

[3] It's over. The end has come

## **Chapter Nine Reunion**

*They were back in the Pensieve again. James was in a place that was unfamiliar. He glanced around before spying Remus out of the corner of his eye. He figured that this must have been either Chrystal or Remus' house.*

*'Chryssy,' he said to a figure lumped on the couch. 'How'd it go?'*

*'I'm stuck in the courtroom for the next six months. Holding my wand at the ready in case some criminal goes crazy. And worse, it's Mr Crouch's courtroom. That's not the reason I became an Auror.'*

*Remus moved over and held her close.*

*'You just need to be strong and you'll be fine,' he said softly. 'There are lots of people here to help you pull through. We're all here to help you. We're all here to help each other. Look, I have something to tell you.'*

*'What?'* she glanced up at him with a look in her eyes that James found heart-wrenching.

*'I found out why You-know-who was after James and Lily,' he said.*

*'Oh,' she said with a flat tone to her voice.*

*'There's a Prophecy,' Remus said. He handed her a piece of parchment.*

*'I already know,' she said glancing at the paper. 'James and I tried to decipher it quite unsuccessfully before they went into hiding.' She turned around, her face as pale as a ghost and threw her finger out at him. Her appearance made James shudder. He had never seen her look so awful. 'Do you know what this means?'*

*James could see a ring on the middle finger of her right hand. It was shaped like an eagle. It was a beautiful ring and with the information that he had gotten last night James could guess the symbolism of it.*

*'That's the sign of Ravenclaw,' Remus said observantly. 'Are you trying to tell me you're Ravenclaw's heir in some obscure way?'*

*'I don't know what it means,' she said. 'It was my mother's. I was drawn to it when she died, and now I can't take it off. I've made assumptions. The eagle is the symbol of Ravenclaw. My mother's family are a very old pureblood family. I tried to find the family bible but I was unsuccessful.'*

*'I'll look into it for you,' he said. 'Is there anything else I can do?'*

*'Bring Sirius to me,' she said. 'Or find whoever stole Lily and James' bodies, turn them into werewolves and retrieve Lily and James so we can bury them.'*

*'That's not funny,' Remus said. 'I would never wish this upon anyone.'*

*'I know,' she said sorrowfully.*

*James then found himself at a Quidditch pitch in Portree. He knew this must be the Pride's training ground. It was also a couple of years later. Chrystal looked a bit older, more mature but in a way she appeared even more haunted than previously.*

*'What's happened to you Chryssy?' Remus was talking in quite a strong voice to her. 'You're obsessed. Not just with Quidditch but with your Auror responsibilities as well.'*

*'I have to prove myself,' she said and walked away from Remus. 'I have to be the best and then no one will hurt me again.'*

*'That won't happen Chrys,' he said. 'You can't avoid people hurting you. You've shut everyone out. Your father, me and Sirius' family. You can't keep doing it. Chrystal MacLeod, get it through your*



*head. James and Lily are dead. They're not coming back. Sirius betrayed us and will be in Azkaban for the rest of his life. As to being the Heir of Ravenclaw and the stupid prophecy, well you-know-who's gone isn't he? So you don't need to worry about it. And besides, you're nothing like your mother. Now, I am going out to dinner with Sirius' family tonight. Madeleine has announced her engagement, to Alec McLachlan. They would like you to join their celebrations. I am going to oblige them. So go and shower, but I will be waiting to take you with me. Forcibly if I have to.'*

*'No, Remus,' she said with a sigh. 'I'll come.'*

*James found himself in the Ministry of Magic again. He saw Chrystal sitting at a desk with a man James thought he vaguely recognised holding her shoulders. Again she looked older. A wizard with red hair whom James thought he recognised walked in the room.*

*'Chrystal, there's no easy way to tell you this,' he began. 'Sirius Black has escaped from Azkaban.' James saw the stunned face. It was obvious that she couldn't believe it. James himself was shocked. He hadn't been told about Sirius escaping. 'Listen, Cornelius Fudge has declared a state of emergency. All Aurors and Hit Wizards are to drop what they're doing and help in the search. My entire department has been put onto it and Merlin help us if any of us come face to face with Sirius Black. I need to ask you, is there anything about Sirius that we should know?'*

*'I don't think so,' she said slowly and deliberately. James knew she was lying. 'How did he escape Arthur? How is it even possible?'*

*'No one had any idea whatsoever,' the wizard said. 'All they know is that in his sleep he's been calling out. He's been calling, "He's at Hogwarts." They think it can only refer to Harry. Who else would be at Hogwarts? Fudge is sending Dementors to guard the school. Anyway, Crouch has decided to send you home. You would be useless in a search for Sirius, even if you did want to do the right thing, your emotions would get in the way. Crouch thinks that if you find him you will kill him. I am not quite as naive. If you do however happen to see him or find him before we do, make sure you do the right thing. Get him to stay away from Hogwarts and Harry. He will almost certainly be caught if he goes there. I'm asking you to do this for the sake of Lily Evans' son and for the sake of my son as well.'*

*'I didn't realise they were close,' Chrystal said softly. 'Why do you think he will come to me?'*

*'I met you when you were six Chrystal,' the wizard named Arthur said looking guiltily at the other man in the room. 'There was a spark between you and Sirius then and there was a spark between you and Sirius the last time I saw the two of you together. If he requires help it's you he will come to. I'm sure of it.'*

*Not having known what had happened James didn't think it was likely he would come to Chrystal for help. He knew what Sirius thought of Aurors.*

*Chrystal didn't answer but picked up her bag and disappeared. James felt himself being dragged somewhere. He looked around and did not recognise the surroundings, but he knew somehow that this was Sirius' family's home.*

*'Heather?' she called. James saw Sirius' mother emerge from the house.*

*'Chrissy?' she asked. 'Is that you?' Chrystal nodded in reply. 'Has Sirius contacted you? Do you know where he is?'*

*'No Heather I don't,' she said. 'I've come to wait with you. He'll need to show himself eventually if he thinks he can survive this manhunt.'*

*'Thank you for coming,' Heather replied.*

*Again James had changed location. He found himself at The Three Broomsticks.*

*'He's back,' Remus said. 'It is undeniable.'*

*'Who?'* Chrystal asked.

*'You-know-who,'* Remus replied.

*'How?'* James saw the white face. He never thought he had seen anyone so frightened before.

*'Peter.'*

*'But Peter's dead,'* she said. *'Sirius blew him up. That is if you listen to popular opinion.'*

*'No he didn't,'* Remus said reluctantly. *'The point is he helped Voldemort regain his body. He is alive once more. Harry witnessed it.'*

*'Harry Potter?'* she asked. Remus nodded. James' eyes opened wide. Harry had witnessed Voldemort's rebirth. The thought was almost unbearable. *'What do they want me to do?'* Chrystal asked shaking. *'I'll do anything.'*

*'Dumbledore has asked me to gather the old crowd,'* Remus said. *'But he wants you to keep an eye on the office of Magical Law Enforcement and especially on Azkaban and the Demenot's loyalties.'*

*'Can't I do anything useful?'* she asked.

*'Chrissy,'* he said. *'That could be more useful than you realise. Fudge will not acknowledge that Voldemort has returned.'*

James could not understand how he could be so stupid. If Voldemort was back they would be best to act immediately.

*'If what happened last time happens again,'* she said. *'You can tell Dumbledore I'm quitting. I'm not going to hang around and be a part of it. If the Ministry crumbles you'll have to find yourself another Snitch.'*

Then he was guided to the day when Sirius went to trial. He watched in awe as he got a first glimpse of his son, testifying for his best friend. The trial was followed by the day that Chrys had met Harry at the wizard races in Loch Avie. James watched in awe as he got glimpses of his unknown son. He watched his son's seventeenth birthday party and the Quidditch match that Sirius had orchestrated for him. He watched the match with pride; his son was certainly a good flyer. James watched the glimpses of Harry at Hogwarts with pride. He watched as people were pulled out of the Shrieking Shack with horror and was startled to discover his daughter had been one of the seriously injured. He watched the death of Hagrid and the events that followed it with despair and watched his son stand beside Sirius at his wedding with some amusement. Harry certainly bore a resemblance to him. People would have said that he was James except for the eyes. Lily's green eyes.

Chrystal pulled James out of the Pensieve once more.

*'Do you understand?'* she asked. James nodded his head. *'Of course there are some things that I can't tell you or show you. You will need to talk to Sirius.'*

*'I understand that,'* James said. *'Now I have a bit of readjusting to do. My son's in hiding. My daughter is a sixth year prefect. And I actually have a daughter, that one's hard. Sirius is married, Peter's been kissed and is now wondering around in the wilderness without a soul and Remus is where?'*

*'Ask Sirius,'* she replied. *'He'll be here in two days anyhow. And speaking of that, I have to go and take care of a few things. Can I leave you here to wait for Sirius?'*

*'That's if you trust me,'* he replied as she moved toward the fireplace to Floo away.

*'Pregnancy's a damned nuisance,'* she said with a smile. *'You can't Apparate anywhere!'*

Chrys emerged in the Burrow. She certainly loved the house. She had fallen in love with it when she had visited as a six year old. It was so different to the pretence that was Dunvegan.

'Molly?' she called out. 'I'm here to help with Hermione's dress.'

Molly Weasley emerged from a pile of material.

'Chrystal,' she said. 'It's lovely to see you. I'm glad to finally have a hand. What with George and Katie's wedding only a couple of weeks away as well, there's just so much to do.'

Chrystal sat down and picked up a piece of material.

'How's Ron taking it?' she asked.

'Well I don't exactly know,' Molly said sighing. 'Ron had a thing for Hermione at one time. I know something went wrong and I'm not exactly sure what, but I certainly have the feeling it has something to do with Hermione realising she was in love with Harry. I saw it for quite a while although it probably wasn't obvious to her. I think Ron's problem is that he misses them. They have each other and he is cut off from pretty much everybody. But I saw a spark in his eyes when I asked him to find the other Gryffindor's for Saturday. It will certainly be a surprise for them.'

'Well you only get married once,' Chrys said. 'I know we're taking a risk with inviting all these people, but they're all trustworthy and we will memory charm most of them before they leave, just in case.'

'Does Harry know that you've found James yet?' Molly had lowered her voice.

'No,' Chrystal replied. 'I think Rose is planing on giving that to Harry as a wedding present.' Molly tried to stifle the laughter.

'I guess it's a good gift then,' Molly said. 'Although not quite what Harry would be expecting, I think. That girl really is a breath of fresh air. Come on now, let's see to this lace.' Molly handed Chrystal some material and a pattern. They buckled down and got straight to work, hoping that the dress would fit.

\*~\*

Lily walked into Sirius and Chrys' sitting room to see James there sitting, contemplating.

'How did it go?' she asked softly walking over and placing her hand on James' shoulder.

'Informative,' he said. He was struggling to absorb the information bestowed on him. Chrystal had been right, he had needed to see. But he couldn't shake Azkaban, nor could he shake the sight of his daughter was pulled out of the rubble of the Shrieking Shack. To think he had almost lost her before he found her. His hatred towards Voldemort was growing, even more than it had been before. That man had cost him so much.

'Can you take some more information?' Lily said softly, breaking his chain of thought.

'If it's important,' he replied sighing.

'Well the reason that we were looking for Rose last night,' she began seeming slightly nervous.

'Well we were looking for her because I had some news for her from Harry. I'd just been to visit Harry and his girlfriend, her name's Hermione, anyhow I had just been to visit them and Harry told me that he had asked Hermione to marry him.'

'What?' James asked in disbelief. He wasn't sure he'd heard right. He thought that Lily had said that Harry was getting married.

'Harry asked his girlfriend to marry him,' Lily said again in the most soothing voice she had.

'They're getting married at Hogwarts on Saturday evening.'

'My son's getting married?' James asked. 'But he's just a kid.'

'He's just as old as we were when we got married,' Lily replied. 'I know this is hard for you, you've missed so much.'

'Who is this girl anyway?' he said, almost yelling. 'Do we know we can trust her?'

'I was her pet for five years,' Lily snapped. 'She is trustworthy. Her name's Hermione Granger, her parents are Muggles. She was in Gryffindor and she's one of the smartest witches to have ever come through Hogwarts.'

James' head was spinning.

'Lil,' he said calmly. 'Can you just leave me alone for now? I need to think.'

He tried not to glimpse at her face as she stormed out the door. She was angry at his reaction, he knew that, but he was surprised. It wasn't exactly the kind of thing you expected to get sprung on you. He didn't know what to do or say. And he couldn't explain why he was feeling the way he was.

\*~\*

Harry turned around to embrace Hermione. The feel of her skin instantly warmed him, sending tingles down his back. So soft, so smooth, there was just something about her that made him almost shiver inside. She had his heart and his soul. It had taken Harry a while realise that she'd already held them for a long time. She would be gone tomorrow night, believing in the superstition that a bride shouldn't see the groom the night before the wedding. The thought of having to spend a night alone without her was almost unbearable. He had organised with his mother for her to put Ron under the Fidelius when Hermione left so that they could spend some time talking before the wedding. Although he didn't want Ron's approval, he wanted to know what his best friend thought.

Hermione stirred in his arms.

'What's the matter Harry?' she said yawning.

'Nothing my dear,' he whispered. 'Go back to sleep.'

He gently stroked her hair as she closed her eyes and fell into sleep. He just sat gazing at her.

There is nothing as amazing as watching the one you love sleep. There is something about the innocence they exude, something that makes you want to protect that innocence at all costs. It was an ironic thought really. Hermione's innocence had long been stolen. Harry knew that it was he that was responsible for Hermione being in this situation. If it hadn't been for him and her involvement with him she would be at least partially safe. She would not have put her life on hold. He would make it up to her if he possibly could. He did not know when or how, but he would do whatever it took.

\*~\*

Lily sat in her room in the Staff Quarters at Hogwarts. It was a hidden section, very difficult to find if you weren't actually looking for it or didn't know it was there. She had been surprised by James' reaction initially however after mulling over it she realised that it should not have been wholly unexpected. Lily had herself been shocked when she first saw Harry. So much taller than he was in her imagination, part of the reason she had jumped on Hermione the way she had was due to her surprise at seeing Peter but also Harry. She could understand that James was shaken and she wished she could do something to help him. They had talked all night, the night before and Lily had managed to fill James in on some things however, it was obvious to Lily that he was overwhelmed. He was having a lot of trouble adjusting and was so unsure on where he stood with everyone. The previous night he had told her that she was free if she wanted to be. The comment had hurt her. The James she knew and loved would not have let her go so easily; he would have died trying to keep her. She sat down and began to cry. She was entirely overwhelmed by the activities of the last couple of days. She would be gaining a daughter whom she did love and respect and she had regained a husband who was no longer the man she remembered. Part of her was also jealous at the way Rose had taken instantly to James. She seemed to relate to him so naturally, it was quite a shock to Lily. And Rose had instantly started calling him Dad. Whereas Rose had been uneasy around her, and at first their relationship was very forced and awkward. As both of them had gotten

to know each other, things had relaxed a little but Rose was yet to refer to Lily as Mum. Perhaps it was because she had time to get used to the idea that her parents really did love her, or perhaps it was the fact that Lily had physically abandoned her, it didn't matter why, Lily had to blame herself.

She mulled over these thoughts for a while until she heard the door open. She looked up, it was James.

'I've upset you Lil,' he whispered softly. 'I'm sorry. I'm just shocked. And angry. Not at you, but at the situation. And I'm jealous that you've had so much more of Harry than I have.' He walked over towards her and wiped the tears from her eyes. So gently, so tenderly, it almost made Lily's heart break. 'Please remember that I love you and I wouldn't do anything to hurt you, my dear.'

'Oh James,' she said as her tears increased. He again reached to brush the tears from her face, this time brushing the hair out of her eyes. He glanced at his face. It was one of concern. She reached up to touch his face, to feel the feel of his skin. 'May I?' she asked. He did not reply only nodding as she reached up and ran her fingers through his hair. Her spine began to tingle in a way that only James could manage. Gradually their petting became kissing, before they managed to tear each others clothes off without breaking the contact of their bodies. The touch of his skin gave Lily sensations that only her James could. That was all Lily wanted. To be as close as possible to James and never let him go again. And as they made love for the second time in seventeen years, Lily knew she had been found again.

\*~\*

Friday evening Lily and Ron apparated to a prearranged destination. Hermione was insistent, she would not see Harry on their wedding day until she was walking down the aisle. Lily let out her held in breath when she saw Harry and Hermione waiting there for her.

'*Harry and Hermione Revalo*,' she said softly as Harry and Hermione appeared before Ron's eye. 'I'll make this quick, do you have everything you need Hermione?' She nodded. 'Okay, Ron stand over there.' Ron moved over towards Harry. '*Harry and Ron Fidelius!*' Lily waited for a couple of seconds until Harry and Ron had apparated before turning to Hermione. 'They're gone. Would you like to head to Hogwarts now?'

Hermione nodded.

'It's probably safer than standing around here,' she said. They apparated to Hogsmeade and Lily decided to inform Hermione on the latest developments as they made their way to Hogwarts.

'We've found James,' Lily said softly.

'Uh-huh,' Hermione said. Lily almost had to stifle a giggle; it was obvious Hermione had not really taken in what Lily had said.

'Hermione, we found James,' Lily said again.

'I heard,' she said before it finally clicked what Lily had said. 'You found him? Where? When? How?'

'Rose found him actually,' Lily said. 'She sent him a letter.'

'A letter?' Hermione asked in disbelief. 'She sent him a letter.'

'Sometimes the simplest ideas are often the best,' Lily said with a smile. It was obvious that she was very proud of her daughter. 'I'm sure you want to try your dress on tonight. Molly Weasley has done a wonderful job. But would you like to meet James first?'

'I guess so,' she replied extremely hesitantly. Lily could detect the edge of trepidation in her voice. It must be bizarre to meet someone that you know so much about. Lily led Hermione up to their special quarters taking a path where no one would see them. She opened the door to reveal James sitting on the bed twiddling his thumbs. Lily laughed.

'James this is Hermione,' she brought Hermione over to James. 'Harry's fiancée. I lived as her cat for five years.'

'So you've said Lily,' he replied.

Lily watched as James looked up and down Hermione a couple of times.

'It's nice to meet you,' he said finally. 'I've heard a lot about you and I have to say that so far it seems as if I haven't been told anything.' He walked over and embraced her awkwardly. 'Welcome to the family Hermione.'

\*~\*

Ron and Harry apparated back to Padfoot's Manor. There was a slight chill in the air.

'I won't do this without your blessing,' Harry said finally breaking the ice. Ron had a surprised look on his face.

'Why do you need my blessing?' he asked. 'Hermione's her own woman.'

'I just need to know that you're okay with this that's all Ron,' Harry said with a sigh.

'Harry,' Ron began choosing his words carefully, 'I already gave you my blessing last Christmas. I won't deny that I had feelings for Hermione at one stage, but I'm well and truly over them. She wasn't happy with me, and if I'm completely honest I wasn't happy with her. There's something about the way she looks at you, and the way you look at her. There's a longing. A need to be as close together as possible. It's almost sickening mate.'

'Really?' Harry asked. 'I didn't realise that it was that obvious.'

'Harry,' Ron said, 'I'm fine about you and Hermione. If I wasn't going to be then I wouldn't be your best man tomorrow.'

'Thanks Ron,' he replied. 'It means a lot to me. So how's Hit Wizard life?'

Ron grimaced as he filled Harry in on the ins and outs of the Hit Wizard world including Terry Boot and how frustrating Ron was finding him. Listen to Ron's chatter made Harry relax and took his mind off his nerves for the coming day.

## Chapter Ten Nuptials

*My beloved speaks and says to me: "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away; for lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away." - Song of Solomon 2:10-13*

*You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride, you have ravished my heart with a glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace. How sweet is your love, my sister, my bride! how much better is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your oils than any spice! - Song of Solomon 4:9-10*

*This is my beloved and this is my friend -- Song of Solomon 5:16*

Saturday morning dawned on everybody quicker than expected. Lily was unsure what time Harry would be arriving, but knew that it would probably be early in the morning sometime. After all it wouldn't take them long to apparate to Hogsmeade and then walk up to the castle. She was pacing up and down the Black's sitting room. She wasn't sure when she was going to spring James on him, she couldn't really think of an appropriate time to do so. Lily glanced at the sofa on which Harry's outfit had been placed. She wondered what he would think of it when he saw it. Harry had worn the Lamont tartan for Sirius' wedding, but this time he would wear his own. His grandmother, James mother had been very insistent of it on her deathbed. Whatever else she had been Mary MacTavish was a very strong minded woman. And although Lily didn't entirely go for tradition to the extent that James' family had, she had felt compelled to promise Mary that her grandson would be married in tartan. So she had located the red, green and blue tartan that James had worn on their wedding day and the one that James' father William had worn. Tears had welled in her eyes when she had found them, they seemed to symbolise the time before her family was torn apart. Glancing at them again she figured they should fit between the two of them. William's should fit James and James' should fit Harry. Lily was certainly having to get used to how scrawny James was, but that must be what happens when you eat nothing but grass and plants for seventeen years. She had also managed to locate one for Ron to wear.

James entered the room throwing off the cloak he had been using to cover himself while walking between their rooms and the Black's. He immediately walked over and embraced Lily.

'How're you doing?' she asked him.

'I've finished reading the last lot that Chrys gave me,' he said. 'Do women honestly believe you can learn everything from books?' Lily knew from the tone in his voice that he was only joking, but she didn't find it funny. 'I think I'm caught up. I just can't believe I don't know my own son at all. And today he's getting married and I haven't seen him for almost seventeen years. Tell me about him again.'

James had requested this several times and Lily continued to oblige him.

'Well he looks like you,' she began. 'He has my eyes though. He has a scar on his forehead, like a lightning bolt from that fateful night. He's a bit better built than you are. But then you've lost weight over the past seventeen years.' She kissed him on the neck. 'He's very intelligent. He doesn't let things pass him by unnoticed.' He returned her affections. 'He's a fantastic Quidditch player, he's a Seeker, and in fact he was the youngest Seeker in 100 years or so for Gryffindor. He began playing in his first year at Hogwarts and has recently been drafted for PuddlemereUnited. He caught the Snitch in five seconds in the opening game of the European Cup.' James' affections became more intense. 'He's kind and caring. He's incredibly loyal to his friends and family, excepting the Dursley's of course. But then they didn't exactly treat him very well.'

'Mum?' Harry called when he walked in the room. Lily was thankful that her clothes were still on. *Harry mustn't be able to see James.* Lily realised that he would only be able to see his back. Having

not told James where Harry was, Lily realised that he wouldn't be able to see or hear them.

'Hold on a minute,' she said softly to James.

'*Harry Revelo!*' James turned around instantly.

'Dad?' Harry asked with his jaw dropping to the ground. 'Is that really you?'

'Harry?' James said at the exact same moment. 'That's Harry?' It was almost mayhem for a couple of minutes while Lily explained that it was in fact James and Harry. Both men found the likeness astonishing. Harry was better built and perhaps a little taller, but the real main difference between the two men were their eyes and of course Harry's world famous scar.

Lily didn't know what she had expected when she brought the two men in her life together but she was certainly prepared for awkwardness. Instead there was none, Lily stared in disbelief as she watched tears form in both their eyes.

'I can't believe you found him,' Harry said, his heart pounding. 'Finally after all this not knowing, you've brought him to me today of all days.' Harry walked over and embraced his father. 'Thank you for never giving up hope and trying every possible charm to protect yourself. This way I get to know you.'

'Well I have to help the lovely lady Hermione get ready,' Lily said. 'I'd best be going. By the way Harry, this is your wedding present from Rose.'

'Rose?' he asked. James explained how Rose had found him as Lily left to help Hermione prepare. Harry began to feel a little nervous about being left alone in the room with someone he barely knew and with so much expectation upon him at the same time.

'I'm sorry Harry,' James finally said at last. 'I know this is awkward and strange. We don't know each other anymore and I've missed so much of your life. I'm going to make a strange request of you that until this week I would never have dreamt of asking.'

'Okay,' Harry said hesitantly, intrigued by what this request would be. He was still getting used to the idea that his father was in the room.

'I'm giving you a Pensieve as an engagement gift,' he said. 'Normally I wouldn't dream of asking this, but Chryssy guided me through her Pensieve and it made a difference than just telling me what had happened. My request is that you put some memories in there, a good selection of your life, both the good and bad so I can understand what you have been through while I've been away. Rose has agreed to do the same. I've wiped the Pensieves. They have been in the family for quite a while. I'll understand if you don't agree.'

Harry looked as if he were contemplating the thought.

'You want both good and bad?' he asked. James nodded. 'I can do that.'

'Thank you,' he said. 'You have no idea how much.'

On that note James pulled out the tartan kilt.

'This is ours,' he said with pride. 'My mother was Mary MacTavish. The MacTavish's belong to the Fraser Clan. This is the Fraser tartan. Wear it with pride. My mother wanted you to wear this on your wedding day. In fact, she made Lily promise you would when she was on her deathbed.'

Harry was overwhelmed. He knew the ring had been his grandmother's as well. Suddenly Harry had the huge sense of family responsibility that he had never felt before. A year earlier he had had no family except the Dursleys. Now his family was coming alive to him. And it was strange and uncanny. Yet it was the most fantastic feeling in his life.

'Thank you,' Harry said. He meant it. He was extremely grateful. 'The Dursley's aren't coming are they?'



James laughed.

'Well I daresay that Petunia was invited, only because Lily insisted,' he began. 'She was always like that with Petunia, and left it up to Petunia to say no. Dudley was invited as well but I know what Vernon's response on the subject will be, so I am quite unsure as to whether they will come, but if they do I'm sure they'll be on their best behaviour.' Harry had to stifle a giggle. The thought of the Dursley's on their best behaviour was a strange one.

'Another thing Harry,' James said. 'When you and Hermione return to hiding tonight we were wondering if perhaps you might remain at Hogwarts. There's a hidden room that as far as I am aware only Lily and I know about. Lily has prepared it for you. It's just easier in case we need to get to you, or in case anything should happen to Lily and we need to quickly recast the Fidelius using someone else. Have a think about it. Talk it through with Hermione and let your mother know.'

There was a knock on the door. Harry moved to open it and found Ron standing there with Charlie. Lily must have already removed the Fidelius.

'Ron,' Harry moved to shake hands with his friend. 'It's so good to see you. Are you okay after last night?' Harry whispered the question into his friend's ear.

'Fine Harry,' he said, although Ron was starring at James Potter with a look that suggested he was wondering whether or not he was hallucinating.

James broke the silence.

'I take it you are Ron Weasley,' he said. 'I'm James Potter, Harry's father.'

'I wasn't expecting you to be here today,' Ron stammered. It was obvious to Harry that he was astounded. 'I hadn't realised that you had been found.'

It took Harry a couple of seconds to realise that Ron's nervousness stemmed from the fact that this was Rose's father not Harry's.

'Rose has told me a lot about you Ron,' he said again appearing to be eyeing him up and down. Harry wondered if he had done this to Hermione. 'You seem well presented, if a little nervous.' James picked up a kilt and threw it at him. 'I hear you're a Keeper for the Chudley Cannons. I hope they have a better run this year than they have in the past.' James chuckled and Harry could see Ron relaxing slightly.

'Um, Mr Potter,' Ron said. 'How do I put this on?'

'Call me James,' he replied. 'I'll show you.' James took hold of the kilt and began to demonstrate.

Harry was silently relieved at his father's casual manner. It made it easier to get to know him and to try and break the ice of seventeen years.

\*~\*

Hermione tried not to show anyone how nervous she was. She was waiting in Lily and James' room for Lily to return with her mother. Hermione was insistent that her mother would be there to help her get ready. She had no idea what her mother's reaction would be. And it wasn't that her mother's opinion would change her actions, it was just that she wanted her mother to be happy for her. Chrystal, Rose and Ginny were there trying to offer her advice, but they weren't really helping to calm her nerves.

'Honestly Hermione,' Chrystal said eventually. 'This should be one of the happiest days of your life. You're marrying the man who you have loved for years and he loves you. What could be better? If you don't relax and enjoy it, you'll regret it later.'

It took Hermione a while to realise that there was some truth in what Chrystal was saying, although Hermione was still worried about her mother. In fact she was more worried about what her mother's reaction to all of this would be. Lily appeared soon enough and with her was Emilia Granger.

Hermione searched her mother's face for a sign but Emilia Granger had always been very good at hiding her feelings.

'Mum,' Hermione said gingerly, 'thank you so much for coming.'

'I take it nothing I say will change your mind then?' her mother said. Hermione's heart leapt into her throat. *She's not happy about this. She's going to try and stop it.*

'It's not that Mum,' she said gingerly. 'I have to do this, I love Harry and only God knows how long we will actually have together. I don't want to lose him. I want to be with him. I want to be his wife.'

'It's just that we don't know Harry that well Hermione,' her mother said. 'We only know him through what you've told us, excepting that one time last year when we met him. I must admit he is good looking.' Her mother seemed to pause for breath here. 'You seem to love and trust him and I do trust your judgement Hermione. Do you love him?' Hermione nodded. 'Then you have our blessing.' Hermione was ecstatic at the sudden turn around, but realised that her mother was just voicing her concerns. 'Harry wrote and asked for our permission before he proposed you know. That made a fantastic impression on both your father and I. Just promise me you'll come home more often.' Hermione winched. 'Now can you please introduce me to everyone in this room.' She gave Hermione a big smile which helped her relax slightly.

'Well this is Chrystal, you met her last year, this is Ginny, she's Ron's sister,' Hermione turned to Lily and Rose. She hadn't told her mother anything about what had been happening. What would she say about Rose and Lily's relationship? A thought came to her. 'This is Rose, she's Ron's girlfriend and this is Lily, Rose's mother.'

'Hermione Granger,' her mother said. 'You may be eighteen but I can still tell when you're holding something back.'

'I think perhaps you'd better tell your mother what's going on Hermione,' Chrystal said. 'I know you wanted to protect them, but you can't hide the truth forever. And it is better that they hear it from you. Why don't we all come back a little later?'

'Protect me?' Emilia asked as everyone left the room.

'The truth is Mum, my life is in danger,' Hermione said. 'So is Harry's. We've been in hiding for the last few months.' Hermione watched her mother's jaw drop as she explained exactly what was happening in the wizarding world at the present time and exactly why she was being targeted. And as she did, Hermione felt a huge weight lift off her shoulders. When she had done Emilia Granger said nothing but helped her daughter prepare for her wedding.

\*~\*

Lavender gazed in her mirror trying to perfect her fair hair. Although she was not happy about Harry marrying Hermione she was still going to be present at his wedding. And she was going to look stunning too. She had to look stunning because she was nervous about seeing Parvati and Seamus. She hadn't really given Seamus a proper explanation as to why she broke up with him, her letter had only said that her father had died and she needed some space. She knew it wasn't adequate, he deserved a better explanation but besides I'm in love with someone else and you don't want to get involved with me because I'm cursed with the ability of seeing the future she couldn't think of a true explanation that actually would satisfy him.

*There*, she thought as she pushed the last pin in, *her hair was perfect*. She slowly walked down to the entrance hall where she spied Parvati with her perfect dark locks and her tight fitting dress robes. She had missed her friend. She walked toward her and embraced her.

'Lavender darling you look gorgeous,' Parvati said. 'But I don't understand how someone can change so much. You look stunning but you look withdrawn.'

'You look good yourself Parvati,' Lavender said. *You coy little princess.* She had no intention of playing nice with Parvati. She knew she could be a backstabbing bitch whenever she wanted. 'We should head up to the hall. Everyone should have arrived by now.'

'How can you stand still being here?' Parvati asked as they made their way up the staircase. Lavender shuddered. It was going to be a long night.

\*~\*

Harry was guided to a room which he did not find very familiar at all. *It's strange how you can live somewhere for so long and still not be very familiar with every nook and cranny.* James opened the door to reveal the room especially set up for their wedding. It looked fantastic; Harry was expecting it to be nice, given that Mrs Weasley had had a big hand in the preparations, but this was spectacular. What he also wasn't expecting to see were all his classmates from his year at school, the Gryffindor Quidditch team both past and present and the entire Weasley clan there. He turned around and additionally jumped when he saw Snape there with McGonagall and Vector. He should have assumed Snape was there for his protection but it did make him a bit nervous. No one seemed to blink when they saw James.

'But won't they see you?' Harry asked whispering.

James laughed.

'Those that know I'm alive can,' he said. 'The others cannot. Charms are a wonderful thing.'

Harry took a deep breath. He certainly was nervous. He had made jokes about nerves to Sirius at his wedding but he had no idea just how spot on he had been. His father tried to offer advice earlier; however Harry struggled to put that advice into practice. He began to pace up and down, despite the friendly face of Lupin smiling at him. Everything seemed so surreal. He was hiding, he was eighteen, he was about to marry the love of his life and they were going to have children. If someone had told him all this, as well as the fact he was a wizard eight years ago he would have laughed at them. But the hard lessons learnt during his Hogwarts years had taught him to expect the unexpected. All these people he knew from school were coming up and congratulating him. It was all a bit overwhelming really. Then he remembered. He was here because he was going to marry Hermione. She was one of the best things that had ever happened to him, there was nothing to be nervous about. He took a slow deep breath and tried to relax.

Harry heard a door open and knew it must be Hermione. He knew she would be accompanied by Rose, Chrystal and Lily. He watched as Chrystal was the first to make her way between the two rows of chairs. He paid little attention to her, to Rose or his mother as they headed towards him, he had eyes only for one person and that was his Hermione.

Harry had never seen her looking so beautiful dressed in white with a large bunch of tulips in her hands. He had to stop the tears from welling in his eyes as he saw her. *I still can't believe she loves me.* He managed to hold out until he saw the tears in hers as her father handed her arm over to Harry. He gazed into her sparkling eyes as Lupin joined them together. Harry meant every word he pledged.

*'...You are my heart and my soul, Hermione. I would give my life for you. I was lost before I found you but now you have completed me...'*

*'...It took me so long to realise that I love you Harry, but now that I have I don't ever want to let that go. I am not only marrying my love, I am marrying my best friend.....'*

When they were done pledging their lives together Ron handed Harry the two rings. Harry smiled when he saw that they were exactly the way he'd drawn them, Hermione gave him that cute little smile of hers that she gave when she was happy as he placed hers on her finger. He then lifted her veil over her face, wiped the tears from her eyes and kissed her like he'd never kissed her before.

'You're mine now Mrs Potter,' he whispered in her ear.

'Mrs Potter?' she asked. 'I kind of like the sound of that.'

The celebrations began immediately following the bridal kiss. Dumbledore clicked his fingers together and almost immediately the room was transformed into that of a royal banquet. Everyone sat down and tucked into the banquet that was reminiscent of the feasts held at Hogwarts when there was no threat on the school and its students. Everyone in the room felt young again, as they watched the love that flowed between the newly married couple. They kept the speeches to a minimum, a few words from Ron, Sirius and Hermione's father before they took to the dance floor for their first dance. Hermione was desperately tried all week to teach Harry how to waltz and it had kind of paid off. He only stepped on her toes about four times during the waltz.

The rest of the night was fantastic for Harry. It gave him a chance not only to catch up with many friends however he had also been given an opportunity to demonstrate his love for Hermione in such a beautiful setting. Harry himself was not normally a romantic, but the way Hermione looked that night could have turned him into one very quickly. By the end of the night it had passed in a blur that Harry was almost disappointed it was over.

When the time came for them to leave Harry carried his bride up to their new quarters that Lily had found for them at Hogwarts. Lily recast the Fidelius when they reached the room and Harry was certainly sure that they wouldn't be disturbed. He lay her down on the bed.

'How about we work on making that baby?' he whispered.

\*~\*

Terri returned from her holiday.

It had not really been a holiday, it had been a life-saving week isolated from anything that made her think too hard. She had spent the entire time trying to get the images of her trip to the Isles out of her head. It was almost impossible but over time she had managed to push them away. They were still there; she knew that they'd never completely disappear. She certainly knew she couldn't face seeing them again nor even trying to describe them.

She walked into the stables where she knew Alec would be at this time of day. He smiled as he saw her and walked over to greet her.

'You look much better,' he said. 'Holiday's done you good. You'll be right for the Loch Lomond races then?'

Terri pulled the omnioculars out of her pocket.

'Here is what I saw,' she said. 'I don't want to see these images again. I don't want to talk about it. You can watch it if you'd like or send it to your contact, but I don't want any mention of it again. I'll be here tomorrow morning, but for now I'm going to Hogsmeade for a couple of drinks with friends from Hogwarts.' She left the stables planning to get very drunk that night.

Alec watched as she disappeared. He couldn't help but look at the images on the omnioculars. Terri's willingness to distance herself from them had sparked some interest. After he had thought, he immediately regretted it. He placed the omnioculars straight into a package and sent them with Leigh's letter. He knew that Sirius should view them as soon as was possible. The operatives were going to have their work cut out for them. His gut wrenched as he thought of the images. Despite the way Terri had looked, he shouldn't have delayed. He had thought that she was just exhausted. He had assumed that if she had seen anything worthwhile she would have said something. Now he understood why she hadn't said anything. That mistake was going to be costly. And if someone died because of his lack of forethought he knew he would never get it off his conscience.

## Chapter Eleven Halloween

*"Things are seldom what they seem,  
Skim milk masquerades as cream;  
Highlows pass as patent leathers;  
Jackdaws strut in peacock's feathers.*

*Very true,  
So they do."*

*--Things are seldom what they seem, HMS Pinafore; Gilbert and Sullivan*

Lavender sat gazing out the window of the Divination Tower. She was expecting her third year Hufflepuff class in just over half an hour. She had not had a good week at all. She was still quite annoyed, to put it nicely, that Harry had actually married Hermione. She had had another tiff with Seamus the night of their wedding and couldn't understand how a person could be so persistent in their affections towards someone who had told him that there would never be anything between them. Parvati additionally had been downright rude to her. And she still hadn't worked out why Voldemort would be searching for her. She believed that what she had seen in the Orb was the future and Voldemort searching for her now would simply contradict what she had seen. She therefore wasn't too worried about it. She knew he would find her when the time was right. And she really wasn't in any hurry for that day to come, just as long as no more wizards were harmed or killed.

The thought of her father was still very close to her. He had meant everything to her; it had always been just Lavender and her father for as long as she could remember. She hadn't wanted to think that Voldemort could possibly be linked to her father's death, but now the facts seemed to point in that direction. After all he was a Muggle-born wizard and Voldemort was notorious for targeting Muggle-borns. There was the added factor that it now appeared that he was looking for her. Lavender however, couldn't understand why he would look for her at The Three Broomsticks of all places. She hadn't visited there since the day of The Shrieking shack explosion. Although Harry had been convinced that they had been targeting him, Lavender was sure that it was her they had been targeting. A couple of Death Eaters with the instructions that Lavender was Harry's girlfriend would have seen Harry, Ron and Hermione enter, mistake Hermione for her and then have blown up the Shack. She had been making a habit of visiting Hog's Head, although it was a rowdier pub it gave her a sense of anonymity that she cherished since the events of her final year at school. She didn't think that there was a single person from her year that didn't know about what she had seen in the Orb. Parvati, much to her disgust, had told everyone that Lavender was a true Seer and used what she had confided to her in confidence as an example. Lavender was only thankful she hadn't told her more. Parvati just didn't realise that foreseeing the future was a curse not a gift. It had created a huge rift between them that had been evident at Harry's wedding.

She had tried gazing into the Orb to discover why Voldemort wanted her now. So far she had been unsuccessful. She decided to try again, but this time just to try and glimpse the future. She cleared her mind of all thoughts and feelings. She sat down in front of the Orb and gazed into it, concentrating hard. She cleared her mind and let the Orb reveal its secret to her.

*She was in an unfamiliar room and she could tell that she wasn't there by choice. She was sitting in a fashion similar to this, gazing at an Orb. She knew it wasn't her own though. There was something uncomfortable about this ball that did not impress Lavender. She was being asked, no, she was being made to gaze into the Orb and inform her companion of what she was seeing. She did not recognise this person and their presence was making her very uncomfortable. In fact it was disturbing her ability to see properly. She saw herself giving a false prophecy, which seemed to*

*please her companion. She watched as she was released.*

Well if that was all Voldemort wanted her for that was fine. She could certainly cope with that. She would just make up a prophecy to suit herself, one that would distract him from the Prophecy of Saoghaland her part in it. That would be simply perfect. She stood up and began to prepare for her lesson.

\*~\*

Harry sat in their isolated rooms in Hogwarts glancing at the Pensieve, while Hermione was out doing some research. He had agreed to put his memories in there both the good and the bad so his father could get to know him. Harry knew that there was no point hiding the horrid facts of his past from his father. It was all too widely known and James would find out eventually. He was just deciding which memories to put in there.

He decided to begin with the night that they had "died". He had vague memories of the night and felt his father should see them. Then he choose some memories of his time with the Dursley's both good and bad, but especially the time when he set the boa constrictor on Dudley and the time when he exploded Aunt Marge. He knew his father would appreciate them. He put in his memories of the night that he learnt he was a wizard and his first experiences of Hogwarts. He put every confrontation with Voldemort, as well as the night he had met Sirius. He put in his first game of Quidditch, as well as some of his more memorable games and the night of the draft when it was revealed that James had played for Puddlemere as well. He put in some of his memories of Hermione. He put in the Triwizard tournament.

When he was done he collapsed into a chair. It was exhausting work filling up a Pensieve but part of him felt better having done it.

\*~\*

The sun rose early on Saturday morning despite the fact that winter was approaching quickly. The operatives assembled in the Transfiguration classroom after breakfast. Sirius had managed to locate a charm that would enlarge the projection of the image from the omnioculars he had received from Alec, so that the images would project onto the wall. It was the most practical way of showing the images to the entire group at once. When the entirety of the group had arrived Dumbledore called the meeting to order. Harry sense that although he and Hermione were still hidden, Dumbledore knew they were there.

The first item if business was of course the omnioculars' images of the Isles. Everyone knew they must contain something, otherwise Alec would not have sent them. And they must contain something that was indescribable in words; either because it was just too difficult or Alec feared that someone would overhear the conversation. Sirius used the charm and set the omnioculars running.

At first there was nothing. A few images of trees far off in the distance were all that was visible on the wall. Thick shrubbery that let in almost not light and appeared as if there were no entrance. Harry began to wonder if it were a waste of time. Finally small images emerged from tiny gaps in the greenery that could be animal, but certainly weren't plant. They were pale in colour with touches of brown and black. It was difficult to try and focus on them. As the images came further into focus it became more evident that they could be human. Could be was the operative word. Perhaps a better way to describe it would be used to be human. The faces that Harry was seeing looked haunted, starved and broken. Their gaolers looked dazed as if they existed in a dream world. Perhaps they were under the Imperius, forever floating in a dream world of commands. This was almost certainly the work of wizards. There was no way what Harry was seeing could possibly be anything but magically induced. His heart began to pound as he glimpsed two faces that he recognised from Hogwarts. There appeared nothing to hold the prisoners except the iron chains that bound the ankles of one man to the next. Chain-gangs. The shivers began to run up and down his

spine. They reminded Harry of the pictures he had seen in history classes at prep school of the Muggles who were transported to the colonies for crimes no worse than stealing a loaf of bread to feed their starving families. Glancing at the wall again, he saw the conditions under which they were condemned to sleep. In the freezing Shetland Islands, only 640 kilometres south of the arctic and as close as Scotland gets to the Arctic Circle; they were bound to sleep with little more than the ragged clothes on their back and a few tattered rugs to share around the group of over one hundred wizard and witches. The whole scene was reminiscent of the Nazi concentration camps of World War II. Harry shuddered at the thought as he came to the realisation that there was probably nothing the small group of operatives could do in the near future.

'I'm going to be sick,' Harry heard someone say behind him. 'Minerva do you have a bucket or something?'

It was Chrys. Hermione whispered that she wondered if it was morning sickness or the gruesome images that were on screen. Sirius took the hint, as McGonagall located a bucket, and switched the omnioculars off. The room was full of people who appeared as if they were in a trance.

'Severus, do you know anything about what's happening here?' Dumbledore at last broke the trance-like state of everyone in the room who realised that there was work to be done.

'I have no idea,' he said almost reluctantly. 'If Voldemort is responsible for this I'd almost be surprised. It's not really his style to hold people. If this is his work he must have a plan, given that he would usually just kill them. He may torture a few for a while but usually his instructions are to kill. There are at least a hundred people there if not more.'

'I recognise a good many of those faces,' Dumbledore said despondently. 'They are all Muggle-born witches and wizards, all of the ones that I recognise. And additionally they're not surprisingly the ones that have been missing.'

'Their families believe that they are dead,' McGonagall said. 'In my opinion they'd be better off dead than alive like that. It's simply terrible.'

'The point is that we can't just storm in there and save them,' James said. 'We don't have enough people for starters and we have no idea exactly what we would encounter there.'

'We shall have to do some background investigation,' Sirius said. 'I can think of the most appropriate way to do it.' On his face a grin emerged. Harry could tell he was reminiscing of the days when the Marauders explored the school grounds and got up to other such mischief. Chrys lifted her head up from the bucket. She looked green.

'Are you serious?' she asked.

'Yes,' he replied. 'On both accounts, I'm Sirius and I'm serious.'

'Any wizard is going to realise what's going on,' she replied. 'And don't try and be funny Sirius, it's not an appropriate time.'

'Perhaps you should inform us,' McGonagall said. 'We're not telepathic despite our other strengths.'

'We have an unusually large number of Animagi in the room,' Sirius began. 'And Animagi have to be good for something other than amusement purposes. I am proposing that we send the Animagi to the Isles to investigate. From the outside it appears that the keepers are only concerned with the people. It probably would be dangerous to send people to investigate.'

'Sirius does have a point,' Dumbledore said. 'It may be the best option. Chrystal, the keepers do appear as if they aren't concerned with wildlife. Terri would have had to have been quite low to record these images.'

'You have a point,' she conceded before she was sick again. Her head emerged with a more determined look. 'When do we go and who will be going?'

'Well unless you stop throwing up you won't be leaving the bathroom,' James replied tongue in cheek.

'It's morning sickness,' she replied. 'Everything seems to set it off.'

'Well in this room we have two cats, a stag, a dog, a winged horse, a lion and a thylacine' Sirius began. 'If we located Rita Skeeter we'd have a beetle.'

'I don't trust Rita,' Snape said. 'In fact, I don't trust journalists' full stop.'

'Good point,' Sirius replied. 'Then there are the students I trained last year.'

'How many of them are trustworthy?' Snape asked. 'I know you trained two from my house.'

'I trained two from each house,' Sirius replied. 'Only five of them succeeded. Of those there's Harry and Hermione, a lion and a thylacine, as already mentioned.'

'A what?' asked Charlie.

'A thylacine,' Sirius replied. 'According to Hermione it's an extinct Australian animal. It's kind of like a cross between a wolf and a tiger.' McGonagall began to shake her head.

'Trust Hermione to come up with something original,' she said with a laugh. Harry realised that it must have been the first time McGonagall had heard of Hermione's Animagus form. After all she may or may not be aware that Harry and Hermione were in the room.

'Then there's Draco Malfoy,' Sirius continued. 'He's a snake.' Harry laughed so hard that he was glad that only Hermione, who shot him a dirty look, and Lily, who ignored his reaction, could hear him.

'A snake?' Snape said with a touch of disbelief. 'How Malfoy-like.'

'The form chooses the wizard, Snape,' Sirius said.

'No I understand why you're a giant mutt of a dog then Black,' Snape retorted.

'Do you think he is trustworthy?' Lily asked Snape, ignoring the previous exchange.

'Black? Definitely not,' Snape said. Then seeing the look on Lily's face he was quick to add, 'Now Malfoy, I would trust him with this assignment.'

'And I don't know about the others,' Sirius said. 'I'm not particularly willing to find out where their loyalties lie right at the moment.'

'So we have a wide range of creatures,' Minerva said. 'We will set out soon to ensure that we have the most amount of time possible. In the meantime I guess we should keep our eyes and ears open. Severus, how's your list going?'

'I'm finding it extremely difficult to write,' he said. 'I do not think I can give it to Voldemort in good faith, especially after having seen what Terri has found. If there was away that I could give him a false list, or assure him that the Muggle-borns will not leave Hogwarts. He'd see right through it and I would be no use to anyone anymore. The only thing I can do is help to prepare students for what may lie ahead.'

'That's all that anyone can do,' Dumbledore said. 'We shall meet back here in an hour and hopefully we shall discover what we're up against. Until then.'

\*~\*

McGonagall had located Lavender in her quarters. She felt uneasy asking a Seer to look into the future for her, especially given what she herself thought of Divination. But Lavender was really a small chance that they might actually discover what Voldemort was up to. Minerva was unsettled at how careful Voldemort was being. He was covering his tracks and now that he had regained his body he was no longer desperate. He knew he held the balance of power with his followers and since his well-crafted attack on The Shrieking Shack last year fear was beginning to grow in the



hearts of witches and wizards all over the country.

'Lavender, I'm sorry to interrupt' she said softly to the girl who was delved in books. 'We need you to try and find something for us. We think Voldemort is planning something for April. We're not sure what and we need to be prepared.'

The blonde girl glanced up at her.

'I can only try,' she replied. 'I cannot guarantee anything. I've never seen something that would happen in a specified amount of time before. I've just seen glimpses of the future. I cannot necessarily tell you when they will occur.'

\*~\*

Draco took a deep breath in. He couldn't think of a reply to his mother's accusation, which was extremely unusual for him. It just went to show him that she didn't understand him one little bit. And on top of that it had really stung. Because it was true. Draco struggled to comprehend how someone he loved so much could always hurt him so much.

'Mother,' he said solidly. 'I will not be returning to Malfoy Manor just yet. I have work to do and when I am finished I will return. I have been given assignment and I will complete it if my life depends on it. I will not end up like my father. A bitter failure.'

'Your father was a fine man Draco,' she replied. 'You just were not able to see that.'

'He was a lying, cheating adulterer,' Draco spat. 'He tried to kill a twelve year old boy when he lost Dobby and where did get him? Absolutely nowhere.'

'He had his moments,' she replied looking reminiscent. 'When will you come and see me then? I've been quite lonely since your father was killed. He just isn't the same anymore. In fact I've been quite lonely for quite a few years Draco.'

'I'm almost finished my training Mother,' he replied. 'I'll be home for Christmas. I promise you that.'

'Wonderful,' she replied. 'Bring that girl, what's her name again? Virginia?'

'Yes,' he replied sighing. 'I'll bring Ginny.'

Draco sat down on the couch once his mother had left. He opened the Divination books in front of him. He wondered why The Dark Lord had given him such an assignment. He hadn't taken Divination at school and was now given an assignment on a Prophecy. Then again he had taken Arithmancy and the Prophecy dealt largely with Arithmancy.

Draco heard a knock on the door. He opened it to find Snape there.

'Are you particularly busy this weekend Draco?' he asked.

Draco shook his head. After all he was only planning on decoding the Prophecy. And the longer he could put off doing anything about it, the longer he wouldn't have to see the Dark Lord.

'Come up to Hogwarts,' he said. 'We're doing some undercover investigation. Meet us in the Transfiguration classroom in about forty-five minutes.'

Snape turned around and headed back to the castle. He had some work to do before they gallivanting began. He had a feeling that although he was not an Animagus his services would be required.

## Chapter Twelve Reconnaissance

*"Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that. Hate multiplies hate, violence multiplies violence, and toughness multiplies toughness in a descending spiral of destruction....The chain reaction of evil -- hate begetting hate, wars producing more wars -- must be broken, or we shall be plunged into the dark abyss of annihilation."*

*--Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968)*

Gingerly Harry and Hermione made their way to the Transfiguration classroom. They knew that no one could see them or hear them and yet they were cautious just the same, not knowing the effects that the charm had on ghosts. And not wanting to be discovered. Harry had been studying the Auror manuals that Chrys had given him. He was learning quite a lot and developing his skills, yet he was not exactly ready to try them out. He shuddered as he thought about the images he had seen. Although Harry didn't really want to see them in reality, he knew that it would be extremely important that they find out what was going on and help those poor witches and wizards who were being held captive. They opened the door and found the Transfiguration classroom full. Even Malfoy was there. Harry seriously wondered whether Malfoy was trustworthy for this mission, but it Snape trusted him, Harry would have to go with his lead.

'I have arranged several port keys on short notice,' Dumbledore said. 'Are there any Animagi here that haven't had the protective charm cast on them?' Given that nobody answered positively he continued. 'We shall spend today searching the uninhabited Isles of Shetland. Everyone will go in pairs; we do not want anybody killed if at all possible. Once on the Isles, please remain in your forms at all times. Your port keys will reactivate in five hours. That way all the staff members will be back in time for the Halloween feast. Professor Snape and I will be surveying your process by means of these.' He held up a round coin-shaped object. 'This will allow us to see through your eyes; each of you should take one.' He passed them around. 'Now the port keys should be active. Remember to stay in pairs. Good luck.'

Harry took hold of Hermione's hand before picking up the port key, a small button which Harry was fairly confident he could place in his pocket until the time when they would return. He felt himself being pulled through the air and arriving at a location different to one that he'd ever seen before. He ensured that Hermione was fine, he had been becoming slightly more protective of her recently before surveying the area where they had landed. It was cold, wet and windy. The position of the sun looked as if it were going to set within a few hours. Yet Harry would have described the coast as naturally beautiful, in spite of the dampness. He nodded at Hermione and they transformed into their Animagi forms.

Together as lion and thylacine they wandered the island. The more they searched, the more they felt as if they were wandering in circles. There did not seem to be any life on this island at all.

\*~\*

Chrys and Sirius were on a different island.

They too had been wandering for hours and had found nothing. They came to yet another fork in the forest and decided to take the right path, hoping that it would lead them somewhere they had not yet explored.

\*~\*

Draco felt as if he had drawn the short straw being paired with McGonagall. They were both small creatures and it was difficult for them to cover a lot of ground quickly. Draco at least enjoyed sliding along the ground and feeling his belly slide over sharp rocks without any harm coming to his skin. He saw a rat and hissed at it, before chasing it behind a rock. Draco had learnt early that eating a raw rat when in his Animagus form actually tasted quite good, he wouldn't have dreamt of eating

one otherwise. He slithered along surveying the ground. He could see no sign of any recent life here, no tracks and especially no sign of human droppings. Draco was almost disappointed that they hadn't found anything. There were a few Death Eaters that he would have dearly liked to have given a venomous bite to, and as of yet he hadn't come across them whilst in his Animagus form.

There was a flicker of life off in the distance. Draco slithered towards it, hoping that he would come across someone. He seriously doubted Dumbledore's intelligence given he had sent them to an apparently deserted island. Additionally it was cold and he being a snake really wanted a slither of sunlight to warm him up.

The flicker of life had gone. Draco returned to McGonagall confessing that he had found nothing.

\*~\*

Lily and James had discovered a brick hut which seemed odd given that the island was supposedly uninhabited. It had been built fairly recently and definitely had not been built by hand. To the wizarding eye it was obvious that it had been built with aid of magic, and most certainly built in a hurry. They quickly glanced at each other before deciding to go in and investigate. Lily scampered in the door and immediately sprung up onto an old wooden desk that was in the corner of the room. It was covered with piles of parchment that Lily hoped would give them an idea of what was happening. She examined the first piece of parchment.

*My Lord,*

*So far we have captured seventy Muggle-borns. They are being kept in enchanted wrist and leg-irons. They are involved in building the fortress and farming supplies. We have destroyed their wands and are slowly crushing their souls. They will become your obedient servants. We shall be ready on the day you name. We await further instruction.*

*A.*

Lily committed the parchment to memory, while James nudged through the remaining parchments. There were blue prints of what appeared to be a fortress and parchments with names and serial numbers next to them. They had certainly found the right island. Now all they had to do was find the prisoners.

\*~\*

Harry and Hermione came to what appeared to be an abandoned hut. They tried to stay out of sight and watch it for a while as they hadn't come across anything else that seemed remotely related to wizards on the island. They lay down in the bushes near the entrance to the shack as Harry began to groom himself. Hermione, the thylacine gave him a look, but Harry ignored it and returned to grooming himself. After all he acted like a lion when he was in his form. It just came naturally. He learned over and began to lick Hermione's coat. She smiled as he began to do that. He was glad that he had found something to entertain them while they waited for a sign of human life.

The grooming session was brought to an end when they heard a noise from behind the bushes and saw two men walking towards the hut. They were deep in conversation.

'Is everything ready for the next stage?' the first man asked.

'The fortress is well under construction,' the second replied. 'The fortress here will commence work in the next couple of weeks. We will bring some prisoners over here and we shall obtain some new ones for you. All Muggle-borns of course. One day we will rid the world of Muggles and Muggle-born witches and wizards. Then we will get the Squibs.'

'Are the Ministry doing anything yet?' the first man asked.

'They seem to be concerned about the number of Muggle-borns missing but they aren't actually looking,' the second man replied. 'There's some talk from the Hogwarts board of governors that they might look at not taking Muggle-borns, but at this stage it's just talk.'

'The Ministry of Magic is hopeless,' the first man said laughing. 'Especially with someone like Fudge in charge. His term is up in April. I doubt he'll be re-elected which gives us the opportunity to run our own candidate.'

Harry and Hermione's eyes and ears were wide open. Fudge's term was almost up. The worst thing that could possibly happen was that a Death Eater could be elected in Fudge's place.

\*~\*

Lily and James continued on from the hut. They knew that they were looking for something that resembled a fortress. Finally they caught a glimpse of the fortress. It was an impressive stone building that looked extremely imposing. They spied a couple of men that looked like guards in front of the entrance. Lily went up to them and began to rub herself against their legs.

'Is this your cat Jack?' one of the men asked.

'No,' the man named Jack replied. 'It looks like a stray. In fact it looks like it swam over to the island.'

'I'll take it back over,' the first man said. 'We can't have any form of animal just wandering in here from the main islands. I'll just lock it upstairs for now.'

The man grabbed her tightly around the belly and walked inside the tower. Lily began to wail and complain and began to scratch aimlessly at the air. At least she would get a chance to see inside the fortress. She just hoped that he didn't suspect anything.

The man began to shake her.

'You had better not be an Animagus,' he said shaking her so hard it was difficult for her to concentrate on maintaining her form. 'And if you are, well you won't be able to get out of here without transforming, which you won't be able to, or without a wand which you can't get without transforming. I'll just keep you here until I'm ready to leave.' He threw her into a room that was no bigger than a cat box. *Great. Now I'm stuck here.* She surveyed the box-like room and assessed the options. If she escaped and she was fairly sure she could, the man would know she was an Animagus. *Or would he?*

\*~\*

Harry and Hermione came across a snake. Harry decided to try and talk to it; perhaps it could shed some light on what was happening. As Harry inched towards the snake, it tried to slither away. He realised that it must be frightened of his lion form. He transformed quickly and began to speak to the snake.

'It's alright,' he said. 'I'm a wizard and I just want to ask you a few questions. I promise I won't hurt you. Is that okay?'

The snake took a while to reply and then finally allowed Harry to ask him a few questions. The snake chatted to Harry about the increasing number of men that were coming to the island. The snake didn't like it very much, they were bringing stones and banging together large buildings. It had been happening all over the islands, the snake had been talking to sea serpents who had found the same thing on other islands. The men that had arrived were not kind either. They had pointy sticks which had destroyed a lot of the snake's family.

Harry glanced at Hermione. There were certainly wizards about. Just what they were up to he was unsure of.

\*~\*

Sirius and Chrys had finally found something.

It was a stone wall that looked as if it were a perimeter fence.

'What do you think Sirius?' Chrys asked. 'Should I fly over and have a look?'

'Good idea,' he said. 'I'll wait for you here. I'll keep an eye on you.'

Chrystal spread her wings and soared into the sky. She flew high at first so she could work out where she should fly, before descending lower to get a good glimpse of what was below. What she could see was obviously not the same as the images she had seen on the omnioculars. It looked like some kind of training facility, a fortress of some kind.

As she glanced around inside she saw the Muggle-born prisoners. They looked worse in reality than they had in the Omnioculars. It was scary for her to think that they had once been strong men and women. She shuddered as she recognised the faces of Helena and Hermia Edwards. They had been Gryffindors and Lily's roommates. To see them as they were now was totally devastating for Chrystal.

She descended a little lower and saw some men standing at the entrance.

\*~\*

The men stared at the sky.

'Another flying horse,' Dom commented.

'Well they're native to this area,' Max replied. 'I'd be surprised if we didn't see one.'

'I still don't like it,' Dom replied. 'How about we hit it? Make sure it's not suspicious.'

A smile appeared on Max's face.

'Right, on the count of three,' he said. 'One, two, three.'

'*Crucio*,' they both said at once smiling as they pointed the wand at the horse.

They laughed as the horse began to shake and fell from the sky.

'Shall we go and make sure it's dead?' Dom asked.

'Nah,' Max replied. 'It'll be dead soon enough falling from that height. Let it suffer.' The men laughed.

\*~\*

She had been soaring through the sky. Then she had let herself be seen and she knew as soon as she had seen the men that it had been a mistake. They raised their wands and Chrystal had braced herself but she wasn't fully prepared for the shock of being hit with two *Cruciatus* Curses at once. Her whole body had filled with immense pain and the best she could do was retain her Animagus form. She couldn't fly and plummeted to the ground. She hated the feeling of falling that far, she knew it was well over fifteen metres. The curse had been lifted but all she could do now was let herself fall and brace herself for the impact. She only hoped she wouldn't have a fatal injury for her or the baby. Any other injury could be repaired magically.

Bang. Crunch.

She smashed into the ground. Pain radiated from her leg, through her pelvis and right up her back. Her stomach cramped and she could barely retain her form. She lay on the ground in agony wondering how long it would be before she could no longer hold her form and one of the guards found her. She hoped that Sirius had seen her fall.

\*~\*

Katie Bell sat in her bedroom gazing at her reflection in the mirror. She couldn't believe that it was finally Halloween. Moreover she couldn't believe that the reflection in the mirror was actually her. She gazed at the blonde curls falling from the pile on top of her head. The blue eyes smiling brightly back at her. The stunning white dress that fitted her perfectly. Her mother-in-law had certainly done wonders with just a piece of material.

'Katie, are you ready yet?'

It was her father. Andrew Bell had been ecstatic when Katie had told him that she was going to marry George. He loved George like a son and was glad to see his only daughter marrying such an honourable, well sort of, man.

Katie walked out to her father.

'How do I look Dad?' she asked.

'Just like your mother,' he said as the tears began to well in his eyes.

\*~\*

Lily had decided. After what she thought was about half an hour she had pondered over the options. She only really had one choice. There was no way she could wait until the man returned. She had no idea when that would be and she knew that it was certain that James would be worried about her. She glanced at the other side of the wall and thought hard.

*'Foris accomodo'*

She smiled as a cat flap appeared in the wall. She had always found this charm useful in making cat flaps appear where ever she needed. Now the silly man would think that he had locked the cat in a room with a flap. It was unlikely that he would go looking for her.

She stealthily made her way around the fortress, trying to remain out of sight. She managed to get glimpses of the entire fortress on her way out. It was certainly a training facility of some description. There were a few people there that she recognised as Slytherin's from school. Lily figured that it had to be a Death Eater training facility. The man who had carried her in had had a dark mark on his arm after all. There were just a few more rooms to check before she returned to James and hopefully the port key.

\*~\*

Sirius watched as the winged horse plummeted towards the ground. Instantly he headed straight towards her. As he reached her his heart sunk. Something was very, very wrong. In his dog form his sense of smell was heightened. At that moment he wished it wasn't. He could smell a mixture of fresh blood and vomit, a smell that even he who was used to weird and wonderful smells found it difficult to cope with. He swallowed to keep the gall from rising up his throat.

The winged horse was lying on its side, barely moving. She was covered in cuts and swellings. He could see immediately that she wouldn't last the hour and a half until the portkey reactivated. He himself had next to no knowledge of first aid charms. He pointed the magic eye at her, in the hopes that either Dumbledore or Snape might see and send them help.

'Chrys,' he said softly. 'Can you hear me?'

She nodded, but Sirius could tell that it was difficult.

'Do you think you can stand up?' he asked in the same tone.

She shook her head grimacing in pain.

'Where does it hurt mo cridhe?' he asked.

'Everywhere,' she said in a strained voice.

'Can you tell me what happened?' he said as he moved over to try and lick her wounds.

'Got hit,' she said between strained breaths. 'Cruciatus. Men. Laughed. Fell.'

'That's enough,' he said. 'I get the gist. We'll get you home, just hold on tight.'

He did get the gist. She had been hit by the Cruciatus Curse while she was in the air. All that she could probably do was maintain her form until she hit the ground. As he licked her wounds, he

hoped that someone would come and help them.

\*~\*

Severus was disgusted.

'Dumbledore,' he said. 'What do you think Sirius is licking?' Honestly the man's disgusting.'

Dumbledore moved over to glance at the image he was getting from Sirius' magic eye. He wasn't nearly as disgusted as Severus.

'I believe that's Chrystal,' he said. 'And I think she looks quite hurt.' A sense of alarm sounded in his voice. 'I think we should send Poppy to her immediately.'

Severus thought quickly. If they sent Poppy Pomfrey to that island the Death Eaters would know that Hogwarts was involved in today's activities. They could retaliate. There was only one option. He must go and hope that if he were seen that he could come up with a plausible reason for being there.

'No Professor,' he said as Dumbledore prepared to summon Madam Pomfrey. 'I will go. I can come up with a plausible reason for being there. Do you have an emergency portkey?'

'I'll locate one,' Dumbledore said disappearing for a second. 'Here Severus. It will take you there in a minute, and will reactivate within five of you arriving. Make sure you cushion her, otherwise there's absolutely no way she'll survive being transported.'

Severus swallowed and hoped that the excuse that came to mind would work. He arrived and the dog looked relieved to see him.

'Don't say anything,' he whispered. 'You're my dog and this is my horse.'

Snape took off his cloak and wrapped it around her.

'Cushioning charm,'

Sirius began barking. Snape glared at him then realised two men were heading towards him. Snape turned towards them and began yelling.

'Are you responsible for my horse?' he screamed.

'Snape,' one of them said. 'What are you doing here?'

'I was letting my horse fly around somewhere there was no danger of Muggles seeing her,' he said glaring at the two men. 'It appears she has been hit by a curse of some description. She probably won't make it back to my homestead.' The men looked worried. 'I assume you are not supposed to be drawing attention to yourselves. Might I remind you that many trainers use this area to train their horses. Is this the only one you've hit?' They nodded quickly. 'Then make sure it doesn't happen again.' He snarled and sent them off. 'Right hold on to her,' he said to Sirius. 'Try and support what looks to be a broken hip.'

The dog walked over and held the hip with its paw. The sight was quite amusing and if it hadn't been such a serious matter Severus would have found it quite amusing. Within seconds the portkey was activated and they were being sucked towards Hogwarts.

\*~\*

Lily reached the last room of the fortress.

She had a pretty good idea already of what kind of place it was already yet she wanted to ensure they hadn't overlooked anything. She pushed the door open with her paw and it revealed an empty room. Okay, she could go now and find James, who hopefully wasn't too worried about her.

\*~\*

George glanced at the beautiful sunset behind his beautiful bride as she made her way towards him. If their life together could be as beautiful as she appeared tonight he would be the luckiest person

alive. He had been blessed with so much, despite the world collapsing around them. He had a loyal family who loved him, a successful business that managed to cheer people up and he had the love of a beautiful woman.

This was the night. The one perfect night where he would pledge his life to her.

He smiled as Andrew Bell handed Katie's arm to him.

There, under the stars of a country sky, in front of their family and friends, they pledged their lives to each other.

\*~\*

Snape, Sirius and the wounded horse landed in the Transfiguration Classroom. Dumbledore ran over immediately.

'She passed out just before Severus arrived,' Sirius said. He was worried; he'd never seen Chrys so injured before. 'We need to get her to the Poppy straight away, can you help us?'

Dumbledore helped them carrying her to the hospital wing gently to avoid any further injury. Sirius couldn't believe how much blood there was, and he had no idea where it was coming from. The blood just added to his fear. He didn't want to lose her, not now after all that had happened to them.

\*~\*

Lily located the fence and jumped it easily. It had taken her a lot longer than she had initially thought. She hoped she wasn't too late; she didn't want to have to try and apparate from an unknown destination. She looked around trying to locate James but it was difficult given that the sun had already set. She glanced at the bushes thankful that James was there waiting for her. She bounded towards him and jumped on his back.

'Lots of information,' she whispered into his ear. 'How long until the portkey's active?'

'Only a few minutes Lily,' he replied. 'If you weren't careful I would have disappeared without you.'

In a few minutes time, the remaining Animagi on the Shetland Islands were whisked back to the Hogwarts Transfiguration Classroom. Lily surveyed the room immediately realising that there was something wrong.

'Where's Sirius and Chrys?' she asked. 'And where's Dumbledore and Snape?'



## Chapter Thirteen Pain and Hurt

*"Please come now, I think I'm falling  
I'm holding on to all I think is safe  
It seems I've found the road to nowhere  
And I'm trying to escape  
I yelled back when I heard thunder  
But I'm down to one last breath  
And with it let me say  
Let me say  
Hold me now  
I'm six feet from the edge and I'm thinking  
That maybe six feet  
Ain't so far down"  
n Creed, One Last Breath, Weathered*

n

At that moment Dumbledore entered the room. He looked very worried and severe. Harry felt quite worried.

'Professor McGonagall would you be so kind to go to the Halloween feast and oversee proceedings,' he said. 'I am needed elsewhere. Draco, you may return home, but I would prefer you to go, as you intended to go, to George and Katie's wedding. You thought that you might be putting Ginny in danger; well I would feel more comfortable knowing that you are there to keep an eye on her. We shall reconvene in the morning. 9 o'clock.' He turned and left the room. Harry was a little stunned.

McGonagall looked shocked and his parents looked like they had never seen behaviour like that before.

'I guess I shall follow my instructions,' McGonagall said. 'As for the rest of you, I shall see you in the morning. No doubt Albus will have his reasons for being so abrupt.'

Minerva and Draco left leaving the Potters to contemplate what was going on.

'Something serious must have happened to Sirius or Chrys,' Lily said after some discussion. 'I think we should all head towards their Quarters and try and find out what's happening.'

They headed slowly up towards the Staff Quarters conscious of keeping James out of sight, before reaching the empty quarters of Sirius and Chrys. Harry did not like this at all, it was making him nervous.

Making the decision at once they headed straight to the hospital wing.

\*~\*

Madam Pomfrey was surveying her patient to the best of her ability. *She can fix it; she's not going to die. I'll have her in my arms in a few minutes.*

Sirius was trying to console himself. He couldn't believe the grim look on Poppy's face.

*Why hasn't she done anything yet?*

Sirius had never feared losing someone as much as he feared losing Chrys now. Faced with the possibility he no longer wanted her to be in the damned prophecy and he had to confess that he

didn't want her going into battle against Voldemort. He glanced at her lying on the guernsey again. He had trouble fathoming the blood. When people in the wizarding world hurt each other it was usually internal, invisible to the innocent eye, but this act of violence had done damage both inside and out.

Rage began to build up inside him. *How could someone do something like this to what would have appeared to be an innocent creature? What kind of people were they fighting against? What kind of people found pleasure in pain?* Sirius wasn't sure he wanted the answer.

'Sirius,' Poppy was talking to him now. 'Tell me exactly what happened.'

He drew in a breath. He didn't really know and that was the truth of it. But he was determined to answer the question as best he could.

'She flew into the air,' he began in a flat voice. 'She was trying to see what was on the other side of a wall. She was flying very high to get over the other side of the fence before she just plummeted to the ground.' He relived the images of the horse flying so gracefully before just dropping. They were playing through his mind over and over again. 'I ran to her and she said that the Cruciatus Curse had been placed on her. She was breathless and in a lot of pain. I don't know if she said anything else. I just recall all the blood.'

'And Dumbledore said that she's pregnant?' she asked.

Sirius nodded. He hadn't thought about that.

*What if she's lost the baby? I put so much pressure on her to have this child. What if she thinks it's my fault?*

'Chances are Sirius I can only save one of them,' Poppy said shaking him out of his thoughts. *One of them.* 'I can remove the child and place it in a magic womb for six months and I can mend her wounds. But I may not be able to do both. Removing the babe may kill her. I need to know what you want me to do.'

'Is the child in danger?' Sirius asked in a daze.

'If she's had the Cruciatus put on her chances are that the babe is already dead,' Poppy said. She said it plainly and simply, yet with a touch of sympathy. *Already dead. My child is dead.* 'Her pelvis has been shattered and it's sent fragments into the womb. The chances of saving the babe aren't good; maybe if you took her to St Mungos there would be a better chance. A trained Mediwizard would be able to do a better job. If I do anything here she's at risk of infection.'

'St Mungos?' Sirius questioned. He didn't think it was a good idea. 'We can't take her to St Mungos. They'll ask too many questions. We can't tell them where we were and what we were doing, it's a bad idea.'

Poppy surveyed his wife again.

'Well perhaps if I de-bone her,' she murmured. 'If I remove her pelvis and her femurs perhaps we can wait it out and see what happens, but if I have to make a decision Sirius, I need to know what it is. I know it's not easy and I know I'm putting pressure on you, but if I do nothing they both could die.'

'Save Chrys,' he said shaking. 'She's more important than the baby. I need her. I don't want to lose her.'

He sat down beside his wife as Poppy tended to her wounds and instructed Snape to prepare some potions to aid her. He watched as Snape left hurriedly. He hoped that everything would be fine. If only he had stopped her from flying.

\*~\*

Draco did as Dumbledore had requested and apparated to the Bell family home where he knew the

wedding reception was being held. He knew that he would have missed the ceremony, as it was already dark and he knew they were getting married at sunset. Additionally he had not told Ginny that he was going to be late and he sensed that he was going to be in a little bit of trouble when she saw him. Whatever her attributes were, one of them certainly wasn't her temper. Draco had been on the wrong side of her temper enough to know that he didn't really want to be there again.

Draco glanced at the gorgeous house that welcomed him. It wasn't Malfoy Manor, it was in fact quite a lot smaller, but all the same there was something about it that called out to Draco. *This is a home. I never had a home. I had a house, but not a home.* He wandered up to the house and entered it wandering around trying to find the reception. He finally found the ballroom and saw that it was filled with people. Filled with people he didn't know. He looked around for a glimpse of someone he knew. Draco felt relieved when he spied Lee Jordan. *At last someone I recognise.* He walked over to Lee.

'Lee,' he began. 'I don't know if you recognise me, but I'm Draco Malfoy. I'm looking for Ginny. Have you seen her?'

Lee eyed him up and down a few times. His dreadlocked hair shook slightly.

'She's over there,' Lee pointed at a table. 'She's armed with brothers. You'd better be careful.' He had a bit of laugh.

'I'll just use some Malfoy charm,' he said. 'It won't be a problem.'

He took in a deep breath and headed over towards Ginny. She was standing next to a table talking to her brother Bill. She look beautiful dressed in her lilac coloured bridesmaid dress. Little hyacinths were tucked into her swept up hair allowing little curls to cascade from it. He crept up behind her.

'Sorry I'm late,' he whispered in her ear as he put his arms around her waist.

'Draco,' she said with surprise. 'I though you'd decided against coming.' She looked very happy to see him. 'Now you're a little more than fashionably late. Would you care to explain why?'

'I can't' he said. 'Not now. I'll explain later. I promise you Ginny.' He looked at her sincerely.

'Alright,' she said. 'As long as you explain.'

'Good,' he said nibbling at her ear. 'Now I need to congratulate your brother, can you take me to him?'

\*~\*

Lily and James came flying into the hospital wing. Harry and Hermione were with them. They knew that if Chrys or Sirius were there they would be in the screened off section of the hospital and headed straight there. They found Sirius sitting beside a bed over which Poppy was fussing over with Dumbledore's help.

*Chrys.*

'What's wrong?' Lily asked. 'What's happened?'

'She got hit by the Cruciatius,' Dumbledore said. Sirius just sat there, in a daze, staring at his wife. 'She fell and has a few internal injuries.'

Lily stared at her. She looked almost lifeless.

'Sirius,' James said moving over and placing his hand on his shoulder. 'Do you want us to stay?'

Sirius shook his head.

Lily moved over towards Sirius and embraced him.

'She'll be fine,' Lily said even though she didn't fully believe it. 'She's a survivor.' Lily and James made their way to the door. 'You know where we are if you need us?'

Sirius didn't even acknowledge Lily's offer if he even heard it. His concentration was solely on Chrystal. He didn't even acknowledge Dumbledore leaving, or Snape returning with a potion. Madam Pomfrey had to shake him roughly to get his attention.

'Are you ready for this Sirius?' she asked. 'When we give her the potion it will induce labour and the child will be expelled. There is a high chance that only one of them will survive, but there is little chance if we do nothing. It will at least be less painful without bones.'

Sirius' troubled eyes looked towards the hospital Matron.

'Do whatever is necessary to save her,' he said firmly.

'We must wait until she is awake,' Madam Pomfrey said. 'It shouldn't be too much longer now.'

She was right. Chrys began to stir within the half an hour and while Madam Pomfrey explained to her what needed to be done, Sirius was fairly sure she hadn't really comprehended. But she had agreed and Madam Pomfrey began to administer the potion. Sirius watched as his wife's body began to change, as she began to strain.

'Is everything alright?' Sirius asked concerned.

'It hurts so much,' Chrys said in a weak voice.

'I know honey,' he said.

The next few hours passed slowly and Sirius had little idea of what was going on, every cell in his body was focused on his wife and child. Madam Pomfrey did not show him the child when it emerged, she only shook her head.

'I'm sorry Sirius,' she said. 'The babe is dead. Would you like me to get anybody for you?'

Sirius shook his head as he glanced at his sleeping wife. She would be devastated, when she worked out what was going on.

'Call me when she wakes,' Madam Pomfrey said as she headed to her office.

Sirius stroked Chrystal's forehead. It was sticky. He could smell the smell of fresh blood and vomit. He couldn't shake it from his mind. He kept staring at his wife. She was almost unrecognisable. He knew that Madam Pomfrey had fixed the internal injuries and had removed the immediate danger, but Sirius couldn't help feeling that something was wrong.

\*~\*

Ginny had led Draco to her brother so that he could congratulate him. While Draco was talking to George and Fred, quite civilly in fact, she reflected on the day she had just had.

*She had flooed to the Bell home earlier in the morning to find that Alicia and Angelina the two other bridesmaids were already there. Katie was having a bath to try and calm her nerves, so there wasn't too much for Ginny to do except to join in the champagne breakfast that was underway. Andrew Bell, Katie's father and only living relative was there with them. Katie finally had emerged from the bath and the three girls immediately set to making her look beautiful. Ginny had really enjoyed this. She was definitely the sort of girl who enjoyed make-up and fashion, as was Alicia, so they two of them had fun with Katie's hair and make up while Angelina helped Katie with her dress. When Katie was ready, they themselves left her to have a bit of time alone and got themselves ready. It was while Ginny was getting dressed into her lilac coloured dress that she had received Draco's owl.*

Ginny,

*Something has come up. I'm not sure when I'll make it to the wedding, but I promise I will be there as soon as I possibly can.*

*Love Draco.*

*Ever since Draco had agreed to spy for Dumbledore he and Ginny had an agreement that he wouldn't tell her anything she didn't need to know. But it was hard when she had to explain where her boyfriend was to others when she didn't know herself. Plus she worried about him dreadfully whenever she received these letters from him. She had been angry at first, this was the first time someone in her family had acknowledged that Draco was Ginny's boyfriend and he wouldn't be there, all because he had to do something secret. She had sat down on the bed in the room she was changing in and bawled her eyes out. After about half an hour she had a headache from crying so much. It was then Alicia entered the room to help her with her hair and makeup. She had never been especially close to Alicia, but she needed someone to talk to. She had poured her heart out to Alicia, conveniently omitting the facts that Draco was both a Death Eater and a spy. Alicia had surprised Ginny by asking her if she suspected that Draco was cheating on her. Ginny was astonished that anyone should suggest anything, but it was then that Alicia told Ginny that she had thought Lee was up to something for a while and then finally she caught him with Blaise Zabini, a girl in Malfoy's year. Alicia began to sob as she related the story that Lee had been commentating at one of the Catapult's games and he had run into Blaise afterward. She had asked him out for a drink and the affair had started from there. Ginny had felt so sorry for her and the two girls spent the next half an hour crying in each others arms. Angelina walked in to discover the two girls comforting each other. She had given them a hurry on, because Katie was waiting for them all. Alicia quickly helped Ginny with her makeup and then fixed her own up before they made their way down the staircase to meet a gorgeous Katie at the front door.*

*The ceremony itself had been beautiful and Ginny was amazed at how serious George was. They had chosen exactly the right time of day to get married because as the sunset over the lake on the Bell family property the entire scene became mesmerising. Ginny had wished that Draco had been there to share it with her. It had been unfortunate that he was unable to, and Ginny hated the fact, but she knew he had important work to do. By the time he had arrived, smartly dressed in his black dress robes, Ginny had almost given up hope of him even coming. Then he had snuck up behind her with his sparkling eyes and a smile on his face and Ginny couldn't help but forgive him. There was something about Draco that made her feel safe and secure, that meant she just couldn't stay mad at him for very long.*

'What do you think Ginny?' Fred asked her for the second time pulling her out of her mind.

'I'm sorry Fred,' she said. 'I was just daydreaming. What did you ask?'

'Whether or not we should have a look at any of these potions of your boyfriends for Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes?' he replied. Draco had been studying experimental potions for St Mungos and from what he had told her in his letters he had come across a couple of formulas that he thought Fred and George might be able to use.

'It's worth a shot isn't it,' Ginny said. 'I mean, just give him a commission deal. If it's successful then you'll both make a lot of money and if it isn't, at least you don't have to pay him for it.'

Fred and Draco laughed.

'Right you are Ginny,' he replied as Angelina came to drag Fred away to dance. 'Look after my little sister tonight Draco.'

Draco put his arm around Ginny.

'Shall we dance?'

\*~\* 1<sup>st</sup> November \*~\*

Sirius awoke the next morning to find that Chrystal was still sleeping. Sirius placed his hand on her forehead. She was burning up. Sirius had never felt a person this warm before.

'Poppy,' he called. 'Something's wrong.'

\*~\*

Dumbledore walked wearily into the Transfiguration Classroom. He was somewhat nervous about what had been discovered yesterday. The look on Minerva's face when he had briefly come in had told him everything. What they had seen was not pretty. He glanced around the room. Everyone was there except for Harry and Hermione, or at least they could be there, he was unsure. And of course, Sirius and Chrystal.

'I apologise for my briefness last night,' he said in the commanding way that only he could. 'I needed to help Poppy deal with the injuries of one of our party. Chrystal is in a stable condition for the moment. We need to ascertain the severity of the situation. Can you start Minerva and Draco?'

'Well at first there was nothing,' Minerva said. 'We wandered for hours without finding anything. We then came across an old abandoned hut. It had blueprints for a fortress on them.'

A dishevelled looking Draco pulled out the blueprints.

'As you can see,' he said pointing to several places on the map, 'it is obviously built magically. We could not find any information on where it was to be built or why, yet it appears very dangerous.' He pointed at certain parts of the blueprint that appeared to be harbouring magical weapons.

'Thank you,' he said thoughtfully before turning to Lily. 'Lily, what did you and James see?'

'Well at first we found nothing like Minerva and Draco,' she said. 'But after a while we came across some similar blueprints. One difference was though, we actually found a fortress. I managed to sneak inside in my cat form, well actually I was captured and it appears to be a training facility of some description, like that of the Muggle army. I saw no sign of the ghostly people that we saw earlier yesterday. These were all wizards; they were strong and appeared to be developing their skills. It's almost certain that someone is preparing for war.'

'Is it possible that this could be a Ministry training facility?' James asked. 'I know it sounds far-fetched, but if the Ministry had a facility like this they would almost certainly keep it under wraps.'

'Chrystal would know,' Dumbledore looked up surprised that it was Severus who spoke. 'James and Lily you weren't here for the earlier part of Voldemort's rise. She knew everything that was happening at the Ministry, even down to classified stuff that only Fudge knew. I don't know how she did it, but she knew. We've searched many training facilities similar that have been set-up by the Ministry. It would be strange if she didn't know this one.'

'Yet it is a possibility,' Dumbledore said. 'What did Harry and Hermione find?'

'Hermione told me that there wasn't much to see,' Lily began. 'One thing however she said was that she thinks she knows what's going to happen in April. Fudge's term as Minister is up and from what she and Harry overheard the Death Eaters are building up a candidate to replace him. If a Death Eater gets in that position of power the wizarding world in Britain is almost certainly doomed.'

'That leaves us with two problems,' Dumbledore said. 'Who is their possible candidate and where is this concentration camp? As I understand it none of you located it?' Everyone nodded. 'I shall go and ask Sirius. There was definite Death Eater activity on their island; Severus had a run in with a couple of them when he was assisting Sirius with Chrystal. I shall call another meeting very soon. Say tomorrow afternoon. I shall just have to contact some of the members of the Order to discover if they are able to attend. It is imperative that we find these people before their spirits are broken.'

Dumbledore made his way to the hospital wing to find Madam Pomfrey fussing over Chrystal. Lily and James came with him. Sirius looked concerned. Dumbledore could see why when he glanced at the gaunt woman. She looked dehydrated and pale, the sight being enough to worry about anyone.

'What happened?'

'She has a temperature,' Sirius said. 'Poppy thinks she has an infection, however she can't find the source.'

Dumbledore glanced at her.

'May I try Poppy?' he asked. After she nodded he pulled out his wand and waved it slowly over her body. 'Ah, you could not find it because it is in her blood. It involves her entire body.'

'Can you tell what is causing it?' Sirius asked. Dumbledore shook his head.

'I would suggest that it's obviously a very powerful organism although not one that magic cannot deal with,' Dumbledore said. 'If we guess correctly she will be fine. Poppy would you like me to ask Severus to brew some Potions?'

'Thank you Albus,' she said gratefully. 'A Bezoar Draught for starters, that will cover any toxin disease, then we need something for the organism, we'll start with a Mandrake Infection Draught.'

'Lily can you go to Severus' private dungeon and assist him with the draughts,' he said. 'The one where you have been working on the Lycanthropic Draught.' Lily nodded and headed straight for the Dungeons while James sat down next to his friend as Dumbledore tried to assist Poppy.

'She'll be fine,' he said. 'You know she's a survivor.' It didn't seem to cheer Sirius up. 'What happened yesterday? Do you want to talk about it?'

Sirius shook his head however, he began to speak anyway.

'We came across a compound of some sort,' he said. 'Chrys decided to take a look, so she flew above the compound to see what was below. Then I saw her fall. I've never seen that before, she never showed me Pegasus until she was confident in her form. She just plummeted to the ground, there was no sign, no warning, she just fell. I saw some men guarding the entrance, they were laughing. Chrys said they hit her with the Cruciatius. She can resist it in human form but not when she's a horse. I ran over to her and all I could smell was blood and vomit. It was enough to make me sick myself. I've never seen so much blood before James. When we were younger we used to see so much pain and destruction but there was never blood. We used to think we were invincible. The truth is I've never contemplated losing her. Now that it's staring me in the face I know I can't. Two things helped me get through Azkaban James; the first was the fact that I was innocent. The second was the fact that there was someone out there who believed me. Neither were happy thoughts James, so the Dementors couldn't suck them out of me. I almost lost all my feelings for Chrystal except for the thought that she knew I was innocent. Now with this damn prophecy the prospect of losing her is very real. I don't want her confronting Voldemort. He'll slaughter her like a baby lamb.'

James said nothing just walked over and placed his hands on Sirius' shoulders. It was the only comfort he could offer his old friend.

\*~\*

Lily made her way down to the Dungeon surprised that Severus was waiting for her.

'Dumbledore sent you didn't he?' he asked. 'Something's wrong.'

'He needs a Bezoar Draught and a Mandrake Infection Draught,' she said. 'I'm here to help if you need it.'

'Do you remember how to make either?' he asked her.

'The Bezoar,' she said quickly. 'I can get to work straight away.'

He handed her the ingredients and they worked silently beside each other.

'It's ironic,' Severus said after a while. 'This is how we got to know each other, practicing Potions in the dungeons.'

'James was awfully jealous,' she said softly. 'He still is, I think.'

'I would never touch another mans wife,' he said defensively. "I have some honour.'

'I know Severus,' she said. 'I would never have been with you if you hadn't.' There was an odd

silence in the room. It was as if there was something he was holding back, but wasn't sure as to whether or not he should reveal it. Finally he chose to speak.

'Lily,' he said softly. 'I went to Godric's Hollow that night. I heard about the Dark Lord's plan to attack you. I saw you lying there, seemingly dead. It broke my heart. I'm sorry.'

Lily was somewhat shocked, but she had wondered how many people had seen her lying there. But some people would have had a need to see. Severus was one of them. They had a connection that neither could explain, it wasn't love but they cared very deeply for each other.

'It's okay,' she said. 'I understand. Now lets get these Potions done or we're all going to have to grief counsellors for Sirius for the rest of eternity.'

\*~\*

Rose took Natalie McDonald up to the Hospital Wing after Quidditch practice. They had been having a friendly match between the Gryffindor reserves and the Gryffindor team to play Ravenclaw the following week, when she had uncharacteristically fallen from her broomstick. Rose's number one priority was ensuring that her team members would be ready for the match, so she immediately called the practice to a halt and headed straight for Madam Pomfrey.

Rose knew she would be fine; however she was just a little anxious about this game. It would be the first one that her father watched and she wanted to make a good impression. She wasn't quite sure why it mattered so much, she knew he would love her anyway, it was just that Quidditch was one of the few common links that she had with her father and she didn't want that shattered.

At last they reached the hospital wing, allowed Madam Pomfrey to mend Natalie's broken bone and were about to leave when Rose noticed the exhaustion on Madam Pomfrey's face.

'Is there anything the matter?' she asked. Madam Pomfrey shook her head and encouraged the girls to leave. As they were headed out the door Rose spied Madam Pomfrey heading towards the sealed section of the hospital wing. She recalled that neither Chrys nor Sirius had been at the feast the previous night. Sensing that there was something wrong and unable to satisfy her curiosity, Rose sent Natalie ahead and waited quietly behind the door to the sealed section of the hospital wing. Finally she heard voices emerging from inside.

'What's happening now?' she heard Sirius ask.

'Neither potion has worked,' Madam Pomfrey said. 'I think we should take her to St Mungos tomorrow. I know how you feel about that however I think it's a matter of life or death here.'

She didn't hear Sirius' response but realised that he must have agreed as Madam Pomfrey didn't say anything else. She watched quietly as Madam Pomfrey exited the room, before sneaking in to find Sirius sitting there holding Chrys' hand. He noticed her standing there and looked grateful.

'Thank you for coming Rose,' he said. 'Did you hear what Poppy said?'

'Yes,' she said softly. 'What's wrong with her?'

'She has an infection in her blood,' he said. 'Poppy thought it was a bacterial infection but it's not responding to any of the potions. Feel her, she's burning up.'

Rose did as she was instructed, and then took her hands, placed them above Chrys and slowly ran them over her. She concentrated hard.

'It's a magical toxin Sirius,' she said. 'It's in her blood and her bodies trying to fight it just like it would an ordinary toxin. Do you know how she got it?'

He shook his head.

'Poppy wants to take her to St Mungos but they'll want to know what happened?' he said lamenting. 'I can't tell them yet I can't risk her life.'



Rose took another glance at her godmother. A magical toxin like this would not respond to standard potions. She knew that. Ever since the Shrieking Shack explosion last year, Rose had immersed herself in books on medical magic. She was going to be prepared in case she was ever in that situation again. Two of her best friends had died beside her, with Rose being unable to help. This time was different. She could help, but she knew there was only one way to do it. The question was could she risk it?

## Chapter Fourteen Dreams and Healers

*"she'd do anything to sparkle in his eye,  
she would suffer, she would fight, and compromise  
she's been wishin' on the stars that shine so bright  
for answers to the questions that will haunt her tonight*

*she must rinse this all away  
she can't hold him this way  
she must rinse this all away  
she can't love him this way*

*how she'd be soothed, how she'd be saved if he could see  
she needs to be held in his arms to be free  
but everything happens for reasons that she will never understand  
'til she knows the heart of a woman will never be found in the arms of a man*

*and if she runs away she fears she won't be followed  
what could be the worse than leaving something behind  
and as the depth of oceans slowly become shallow  
it's loneliness she finds...  
if only he was mine*

*she'd do anything to sparkle in his eye  
she would suffer, she would fight, and compromise  
she's been wishin' on the stars that shine so bright  
for answers to the questions that will haunt her tonight"*

***--Rinse, Vanessa Carlton, Be Not Nobody***

Harry stood in the hospital wing with Sirius. He knew that no one could see him there, but he felt that it was important that he be there for Sirius. After all Sirius had been there for him through some pretty tough times. He was surprised when he saw Rose enter, however he assumed that his mother must have told her what was going on. Despite the initial clash of personalities, Rose and Chrystal usually got on extremely well. Harry watched as she spoke to Sirius who was there in body but not really in spirit. The he watched as she did this strange thing, she placed her hands over Chrystal just the way Madam Pomfrey and Dumbledore had, but without a wand. She turned to Sirius and told him what was wrong, Harry couldn't believe that, how did she know? It was eerie. While she was holding her hands above Chrystal she looked possessed. Harry was suddenly very scared for his little sister. And most importantly, Sirius seemed to be oblivious to the entire incident.

\*~\*

Lavender was cautiously making her way towards Hogsmeade. She had not been there since the day of The Three Broomsticks explosion, but after the week she'd had she really needed a drink. First of all Professor Trelawney was driving her crazy, Seamus had knocked on her door three times to ask her to reconsider, she had tried to make amends with Parvati on several occasions and then there was the strange request from McGonagall. It was almost incomprehensible to her that McGonagall would ever consult the services of a Seeress however she had made the request. Lavender had glanced in the Orb and so far she had come up with nothing. She couldn't work with the pressure of an exact date over her head. *Perhaps she should assign it to her seventh year Divination class.*

She made her way down High Street realising just how quiet it was when there were no students there on Hogsmeade weekends. She first passed the ruins of The Three Broomsticks, which were slowly being rebuilt. Madam Rosmerta's nephew was taking over the management of it. She was

glad she hadn't seen the explosion in reality, her dreams were bad enough. She felt so responsible for what had happened that the thought had plagued her for the last couple of months. When she reached Honeydukes she turned right down the path that led to The Hogs Head. She had not been to this pub too often and wasn't sure if she particularly liked it but she knew that she needed a drink. She walked into the decrepit looking pub and headed straight to the bar.

'I'll have a shot of vodka and a shot of gin thanks,' she said. The bartender looked at her as if she were crazy but obliged by pouring the two shots and placed them on the bench.

'Anything else I can get for you little lady?' he asked.

'Unless you can rustle up some absinth probably not,' the bartender looked at her, poured a glass of green looking fluid, collected payment and left Lavender to her own devices. She took the gin and vodka and poured them into the absinth on the hopes that they might dull the hallucinations. It had been Parvati that had introduced her to this combination and Lavender had grown a liking to it around the thirtieth glass. The alcohol helped to dull the memory of the visions she kept seeing, while the absinth seemed to make her hallucinate pleasant visions. Most of the time these had to do with Harry, coming to her and telling her that it was really her that he loved. In reality she knew this would never happen. She had seen the way that Harry stared at Hermione, even when she and Harry had been together. The fact that he would realise it eventually had always been inevitable, Lavender had just hoped for more time. Sometimes it was another man, one she didn't recognise coming to her and telling her that it was she he loved. She was always the happiest when it was this man. She wished she knew who it was. She glanced at her empty glasses and ordered another few shots.

\*~\*

Rose glanced at the bed once more and then at Sirius. He seemed almost oblivious to everything that was happening around him. Rose could tell that Chrys would not last until the next day, especially if she had to be transported to St Mungos. She also knew that she would probably not get another chance to sneak into the hospital wing. Rose glanced around and made sure that nobody other than Sirius was in sight. She lifted her hands above Chrystal's body and felt again for the toxin. To heal her, the toxin had to be neutralized. It was a strong toxin, a magical one and it must have been in her body for a while. It would take a lot of fighting and it would be draining. But she knew the incarnation and could not stand by and let her godmother die.

*'Consanesco aboleomaleficus!'*

She repeated the incarnation again and again with her hands placed over Chrystal's body. She repeated the incarnation until she could no longer feel the toxin. Then everything went black.

\*~\*

Lavender had finished her fourth round of shots when her vision began to blur. A man began to walk towards her. She was bitterly disappointed when she saw it was Seamus.

'What are you doing here Lavender?' he said to her harshly. 'It's not safe.'

She gave him a drunken look that said 'I'll do what I want' before he continued.

'It's really not safe Lav,' he said softly. 'Are you drunk?'

She nodded. She was beginning to get teary. Seamus had come to rescue her. He was looking out for her.

'Do you want me to carry you home?' he asked. Again Lavender nodded. Right now all she could think of was snuggling up in her nice warm bed. At least she knew she would not remember her dreams tonight. Seamus picked her up, commented on the fact that she was twice as heavy when drunk and slowly carried her back to Hogwarts.

It wasn't the first time he'd tendered to her drunk. It had happened on numerous occasions over

summer. It hurt Seamus to watch her destroy herself that way. She'd been such a happy girl the summer before when she and Harry were going out. Even after Christmas when she and started flirting with Seamus there were still glimpses of that girl. But something had changed after the Divination exam last year. Seamus didn't know what she had seen, but she seemed to try and shut everyone else away from her. Seamus would not have a bar of it; he cared for her and would keep persisting despite her assurances that they didn't have a future. After all it wasn't her place to try and protect him. Seamus thought back to what he'd heard earlier that afternoon that had caused him to start searching for Lavender in a furious panic.

*He'd been at The Leaky Cauldron with Dean, having a nice afternoon catch up and talking about their jobs at the Ministry. Dean was talking about something when Seamus overheard somebody talking.*

*'Lavender Brown?'*

*'Yes Lavender Brown, she's studying to take over the fraud Trelawney's job at Hogwarts.'*

*Seamus hushed Dean.*

*'She a Seeress then?'*

*'From what I've heard she's a most accurate one.'*

*'Why does the Dark Lord want a Seer for? He's already got one. And he must want her for some reason because he's asked for her unharmed.'*

*'Apparently she's Hufflepuff's heir.'*

*The voices became even softer.*

*'The Dark Lord has tried to get at Gryffindor's Heir, Harry Potter, numerous times. But he hasn't tried Hufflepuff's. I think he might want to use her as bait. She used to date the Potter boy a little while back.'*

*'I still cannot understand why he went after her himself.'*

*'It doesn't matter anymore. Your job is to find the girl and bring her to our Master. But you are not to take her from Hogwarts, and she is not to be harmed. Is that understood?'*

*Seamus had looked at Dean.*

*'I've got to go and warn her.'*

Seamus had headed straight for Hogwarts and when he had found her gone he had headed straight for the pub in Hogsmeade. He was the only person aware of how much Lavender had been drinking and was not surprised to find her in a drunken stupor. He was just thankful that she was alright. He hoped that in the morning he could explain it to her.

He put her to bed by which time she had already passed out and performed a simple hydration spell so she wouldn't feel so hung-over in the morning. Then he pulled a blanket out of the cupboard, opened his bottle of bourbon and drank shots as he lay on the floor.

\*~\*

*She was dreaming. She was asleep in the hospital wing with Sirius and Harry there. Poppy had come in and told Sirius that the potions had not worked, that she was going to die if they didn't take her to St Mungos. She heard Sirius reluctantly agree. She wanted to call out to him. She was fighting; she knew she would be fine. She saw her goddaughter enter the room. She listened to the exchange between Rose and Sirius half heartedly, however she was surprised when she saw what Rose did next. Rose placed her hands above her body and tried to find the source of the infection. Chrystal could feel the girl's emotions. They were strong. She was determined but scared. She spoke to Sirius again and then Chrystal could see her concentrating. The girl seemed indecisive*

*now. Willing yet unwilling. Then she held her hands over her body and cast an incarnation. Without a wand. Chrystal could feel enormous pain as if something was being sucked out of her body. Then she witnessed her goddaughter fall to the floor, Harry moving over to try and help her and to gain Sirius' attention. Finally Sirius saw the girl and carried her out to Poppy. The dream started again. And again. And again.*

Chrystal awoke screaming.

*'I've lost the baby. It's dead.'*

She knew instantly. She looked over and saw Sirius sitting there as if he were in a trance.

'Sirius,' she said softly. 'Sirius, can you hear me?'

There was no response. She tried again.

'Chryst,' he said with surprise. 'Are you awake? Am I dreaming?'

'I'm awake now Sirius,' she said. 'And if you're dreaming it's a very unusual dream because I'd be dreaming it too.'

He placed his hand gently on her head.

'You don't have a temperature anymore,' he remarked. 'You must be getting better.'

'Tell me what happened Sirius,' she asked.

'You told me that you got hit by the CruciatuS while you were flying,' he began. 'You plummeted to the ground. Snape came and helped me get you back here.' *I got hit by the CruciatuS. No wonder the baby's dead.* 'Poppy had to induce labour, but the child was dead by the time it came out. There was no option of placing it in a magical womb. We thought you were going to be fine, but you began spiking a very high temperature. Dumbledore said you had some kind of infection in your blood.' *The infection couldn't have been from the fall. It's way too early for that.* 'We're trying to work out what caused it.'

It didn't make sense to her. There was no way she could have got an infection like she had apparently had in that amount of time. It had to be something else. *But where could she have got it from?*

\*~\*

Rose awoke in a bed in the hospital wing. She looked over and saw Ron sitting beside her.

'What happened?' she asked him. 'And what are you doing here?'

'You went to visit Chrystal and apparently passed out for no reason whatsoever,' he said. 'Harry owled me and told me I should come and visit you. Aren't you pleased to see me?' He looked a little put out.

'How did he know?' she asked. 'And yes I'm always pleased to see you.'

'He said he was in the room when it happened,' Ron said. 'I think he wants to talk to you about it.'

Rose realised what she must have done, although she couldn't remember doing it. The fact that Harry could remember it was not good. Not good at all.

'Is Chrystal going to be alright?' she asked Ron desperately.

'According to Sirius, she will be just fine,' he said. 'Now Madam Pomfrey has just wanted to run some tests and wants you to get some rest, so why don't you try to sleep. I'll be here when you wake up.' He gave her a smile and she closed her eyes and tried to sleep peacefully.

\*~\*

*Lavender was lying in bed and she spotted Seamus on the floor. She got up out of bed and sat*

*beside him. He was drunk, very drunk; she could smell the bourbon on his breath. She was drunk too. She wondered what had possessed him to get so drunk. She knew the answer, it was about her. She felt guilty. She took his hand in hers. He turned towards her at her touch.*

*'Why do you torment me Lavender?' he asked.*

*'I cannot explain Seamus,' she replied. 'I am sorry for hurting you. I do have feelings for you. I don't want to destroy you.'*

*'You have feelings for me,' he said bitterly. 'But do you love me?'*

*She was about to say no, when she actually considered it. She loved Harry, yes that was true and she loved her dark handsome stranger. In fact he looked a little like Seamus. Perhaps he was Seamus. All she knew was that she was confused.*

*'I think I do love you Seamus,' she said the comment taking her by surprise as much as it took him by surprise. 'It's because I do love you that I've been pushing you away.'*

*'Will you let me make that decision?' he asked.*

*She glanced at him. She could grant him that at least. She deserved to give him a chance.*

*She lent over and kissed him. It felt different to when she had kissed him before. There was more excitement, more wanting and more yearning. She wanted him more than she had ever wanted anyone before. She gradually led him to her bed where everything became more intense. She made a decision to give herself to him entirely. And when she had, she passed out.*

Lavender awoke with alarm to find Seamus in her bed his hand lying upon the badger tattoo just above her left hip.

'What are you doing here?' she screamed at the sleeping naked Seamus. He awoke suddenly and looked just as surprised as she was to find himself in her bed.

'I carried you home last night,' he said. 'I think you'd had a few too many.'

'OH and you think that gives you the right to share my bed.'

'I honestly don't remember getting into your bed Lavender. I promise. I lay down on the floor with a bottle of bourbon and began to try and drink myself to sleep.'

'Why didn't you just leave then?'

'Because I needed to talk to you when you were sober,' he replied bluntly. 'And we may as well talk now. You made your message clear, but this is important.'

'What could possibly be so important that you would stay in my room when I expressly requested you not to?'

'I went out with Dean yesterday,' he said seriously. 'I overheard someone talking about a plot to kidnap you. I'm fairly sure that the people talking were Death Eaters. I came to warn you and to try...!' he bit his lip until Lavender gave him a look that said continue. 'To try and protect you. You realise how much danger you're in don't you? You're the Heir of Hufflepuff and a talented Seer. You could be of great use to You-Know-Who and if you didn't agree to help they would torture you. They may even break you. I didn't want to see that.'

'They want to kidnap me?' she asked calmly. Seamus looked surprised that she didn't react more frightened.

'Yes,' he said. 'The person was instructed not to harm you or to take you from Hogwarts.'

'That's easy then' she said. 'I'll just stay here.'

'Do you promise me?' he asked.

'Yes,' she said. 'You just have to supply me with liquor and everything will be fine.'

He laughed and quickly agreed.

'Do you think anything happened last night?' he asked cautiously.

'Would it be so bad if it had?'

'No,' he replied and leaned over and kissed her. To her surprise she did not pull away, just allowed herself to be kissed and kissed again. An hour and a half later she emerged from her rooms, running because she was late for her first class.

\*~\*

Harry lay in bed trying to sleep somewhat disturbed by what he had witnessed earlier in the day. He had decided that it would be best if he left the room without letting anyone know that he was there. He stayed long enough to watch Madam Pomfrey assure Sirius that Rose would be fine before he owed Ron and went to relay what had happened to Hermione. She had been just confused as he had and after stating it was impossible, she turned to her Mediwizard and Healer books that had been lying dormant since she had decided to give up on the idea. It had made him smile. There was something about Hermione's determination to find the answer that made him love her. Now, given that she still had not come to bed, he almost felt like strangling her. Well, not really but the idea brought a smile to his face.

He shut his eyes determined to get some sleep before what he knew would be a heavy training session of Quidditch the next day. He slowly drifted into dreams.

*'Rowena?'*

*Harry was in a room. He was invisible. There was a woman and a man in the room. The woman was dressed in blue and he thought she might be pregnant. Her hair was like Chrys'. Strawberry-blond ringlets fell gently on her face and her clear blue eyes sparkled. She looked extremely happy. The man was dressed in a silver robe and hair as white as Malfoy's. Harry instinctively knew that this was Ravenclaw and that the man in the room was Slytherin.*

*'Yes Salazar?'* she asked.

*'Are you comfortable?'* he asked. *'Is there anything I can get you?'*

*'Honestly Salazar, I am fine,'* she replied. *'You can stop fussing. If I need anything I won't hesitate to call for you, or for a servant.'*

*'I just worry Rowen,'* he said softly. *'I haven't been around pregnant women that much. I don't know what I should be expecting. He moved toward her, hesitant because of her bulging abdomen. 'May I touch it?'*

*'Of course Salazar,'* she said. *'It's as much mine as it is yours.'* He gently placed his hand on her stomach trying to sense the child that was within.

*'How much longer, my love?'* he asked gently.

*'A month at most,'* she replied. *'Then we will have a new little life that is completely ours.'* He kissed her gently and left the room. He headed out to Forbidden Forest to go hunting.

*'I'm sorry Godric,'* he called out to a man that looked remarkably like Harry. *'I was taking care of Rowena.'* The man called Godric looked terribly jealous, and it seemed to please Salazar.

*A servant came running towards Salazar.*

*'My Lord,'* he called. *'My Lord, Madam sent for you. She said that it's time.'*

*'It's time?'* he asked. *'She said it would be a month.'*

*'Babies are unpredictable,'* Godric smirked. *'You never know when they will come.'*

*'This child will learn that they have done wrong,' Salazar said. 'No child of mine will be unpredictable.'*

*He turned and headed towards the castle hoping that the fool of a midwife was in with his wife. Godric followed him. He was met by the midwife outside her chambers who assured him that everything was happening smoothly. He paced up and down the corridor with Godric watching him with amusement.*

*'Have you thought of any names Salazar?' he asked. 'Perhaps that will keep your mind off Rowen.'*

*'It will be a son,' he said. 'And he shall be one of the most powerful wizards that ever lived. Look at his parents.'*

*'Whilst he has a remarkable genealogy Salazar you should know that that does not always speak to the wizard's power,' Godric replied.*

*'What's taking so long?' Salazar asked, snapping.*

*A few hours later the midwife emerged.*

*'You have a son and a daughter,' she said exhausted.*

*'Twins?' Salazar asked with amazement. 'May I see them?'*

*The midwife led Salazar into his wife's chamber and Godric watched on with envy as Rowena and Salazar celebrated the birth of their children.*

*'The girl is your responsibility,' Salazar said to Rowena. 'I will care for our son. His name will be Kearney Brain Slytherin and he will live up to its meaning.'*

*'You have high hopes for your son then Salazar,' Godric said in an amused voice. 'You want your son to be a strong warrior? Tell me Rowena what you will name your daughter?'*

*She glanced at the babe wrapped in a blanket.*

*'Her name will be Æille Caitlin,' she said to Godric. 'Because she is pure and beautiful.'*

*Salazar scoffed at this and handed the boy to Rowena.*

*'Ensure my son is well cared for Rowen,' he said as he let the room.*

Harry woke up in a cold sweat. He was slightly disturbed that he had been dreaming about Slytherin. He leant over and saw that Hermione was still sleeping. He got up and walked into their study and lit a lantern. He sat at Hermione's desk and pulled out one of her many books on the founders. Normally he wouldn't have given a dream like this a second thought, except for the fact that he just had a feeling there was more to it than just fantasy. And possibly because if he could be given any indication on the pairings of the heirs he wanted to know what it was. There was something disturbing about the twins he saw. The girl especially, with her name being Æille. Harry knew enough by now to know that it meant beauty in Gaelic but it was just strange that Slytherin's child would have the same name as his mother's best friend.



## **Chapter Fifteen Plans and Preparations**

Harry led his father into their quarters early the next morning despite his lack of sleep. Lily had revealed Harry and Hermione's location to James so that he would be able to find them whenever he wanted, that is after she had given them a little time alone for their honeymoon. Harry was going to guide James through his Pensieve as requested. Although Harry didn't really feel that it was quite appropriate after the weekends escapades, it was something he wanted to get over and done.

'You wanted the truth, both the good and the bad right?' Harry asked his father.

'Yes,' he replied looking at his son slightly confused. 'Harry, you're my son. I want to know what has happened to you. I know that it will probably be very difficult for me to see some of these things, but there's nothing I can do about it now.' Harry hoped he was prepared to see both the good and the bad. He was the first to admit that his life had not exactly been pretty.

'Right,' Harry said with certainty. 'Let's do this then.'

They entered the Pensieve, Harry ready to explain anything that his father did not understand.

They began with the night Voldemort had attacked them. Harry watched his father as he witnessed his mother's "death". He appeared as if he were in pain.

*'Do you actually remember this Harry?' his father asked.*

*'I didn't,' he replied. 'I used to have dreams of riding on a flying motorcycle. Hagrid used Sirius' to bring me to the Dursleys. It wasn't until Sirius escaped and Hogwarts was surrounded by Dementors that I actually saw this. And I haven't really been able to forget it.'* His father nodded with understanding.

*Harry showed his father few memories of his life with the Dursleys, but just enough so that he got the idea of what life had been like. He saw the look of anger on his father's face as he watched the way Harry had been treated. It almost made Harry scared, his father looked as if he were ready to murder Vernon Dursley.*

*He showed his father the day at the zoo when he had accidentally set a python on Dudley. Harry was relieved to hear his father laugh.*

*'If you had been there you would have disciplined me,' Harry said with amusement at his father's laugh.*

*'I don't know,' he replied. 'If it had been anyone else, but it was a Dursley!'*

*Harry guided his father through the next few memories, the Dursley's keeping his letters from him, the happy, yet confusing memories of when he discovered he was a wizard and the truth about his parents; the day he first came to Hogwarts and his first game of Quidditch. Harry was happy about the proud face his father was wearing. Then he guided his father through their discovery of the Philosopher's stone and the journey that they undertook to retrieve the stone so that Voldemort could not. His father looked in awe yet proud at the same time. He guided his father through the Chamber of Secrets. James looked at his son with surprise.*

*'You're a Parseltongue?' he asked.*

*'Yeah,' Harry responded. 'Apparently when Voldemort tried to kill me he passed on some of his talents to me.' Harry hoped that this wouldn't change his father's opinion of him. 'It's how I set the python on Dudley and how I managed to save Ginny from the Chamber.'*

*After the surprise decreased, he showed his father the day Fred and George gave him the Marauders map and additionally the day where it insulted Snape. His father watched those memories with a sort of amusement crossed with pride. Then he showed his father the night they had met Sirius. James watched the exchange with intent; Harry could see him concentrating on the*

*exchanges that occurred in the Shrieking Shack.*

*'Do you want to keep going?' Harry asked after he had shown his father how they had freed Sirius.*

*'No,' he said. 'I want to see it all. I need to know.'*

*Harry guided his father through the year of the Triwizard Tournament; he showed him both the glory and the bad. He observed the paleness of his father's skin as he witnessed Voldemort's re-birth. He glanced at his father who was pale and clammy. Harry enquired again if his father had had enough but he insisted to continue. He showed his father the events of the summer after Voldemort's return. His father watched in amazement as he witnessed the Dementor attack on Harry and Dudley that had resulted firstly in Harry's expulsion, then pending expulsion from Hogwarts. James mumbled something about the Ministry being plan idiots. His father was amused as he witnessed the advance guards rescue of Harry from Privet Drive. His father again appeared angry as he witnessed Harry's trial and was further infuriated by the way Professor Umbridge had treated him throughout fifth year. He was additionally saddened as he watched Sirius' duel with Bellatrix Letsrangethat had led Harry to believe he was dead. He didn't comment on Harry's stupidity although noticed that his father was less attentive yet appeared still very interested. He seemed to have calmed down as Harry showed him his seventh year until he glimpsed Harry pulling Rose out of the rubble of the Shrieking Shack.*

*'She was in there?' he asked pale as a sheet. 'She almost died?'*

*Harry nodded.*

*'Did you know who she was?' he asked.*

*'No,' Harry replied. 'You'll see later.'*

*Harry tried to guide his father through the Pensieve, however he appeared extremely distracted. Harry cut his losses and pulled James out of the Pensieve.*

When they were done Harry turned to his father.

'I hope that was helpful,' he said. 'But I'll ask you not to ask me about some of these things again.' Harry was surprised at how strongly his voice came across.

'I understand,' James replied. 'I am very grateful to you for allowing me to see this. I've just experienced a number of emotions in a short period of time. It's quite difficult to comprehend.' He paused for a moment. 'This isn't easy for me to say, but it needs saying. We barely know each other Harry but from what I've seen I'm very proud of the son I have. Despite the challenges you've had to overcome you seem to have turned out alright. I'm glad though that you have the same tendency toward rule-breaking as I did. I hope that we can get to know each other better Harry. Thank you very much. Now, I think we have a meeting to go to. It's in Sirius' rooms as Chrystal is stuck in bed. Afterward I think I shall go and visit Rose. You're welcome to join me if you'd like.'

Harry murmured something that sounded like okay in reply as they headed for the Black's quarters. Harry entered the room to find the doors between their bedroom and their sitting room wide open. Chrys was lying in bed and Sirius was sitting on the bed next to her. Lupin was sitting on the floor next to the bed with Tonks at his side. Mundungus Fletcher and Dumbledore were sitting on the sofa and McGonagall, Snape and Mad-eye Moody were occupying the three chairs. Harry turned around and saw Bill, Charlie and Ron sitting on the floor near the coffee table. On the other side of the table Fred was there and Harry clued that some operation was about to commence. He couldn't see his mother but sensed that she was somewhere, having chosen to hide herself as his father had done. Spying Hermione in the corner of the bedroom he chose to make his way towards her so at least he would have someone to talk about stuff with. He did note that quite a few members of the Order were missing.

Dumbledore called the meeting to order soon enough and explained to everybody the reason for the meeting.

'We sent a small group of operatives to survey the situation on the Shetlands on Saturday,' he began. 'We located the camp of people on Professor Black and Professor MacLeod's island. It is an island known as HaafGruney, to the north-east of the main group of islands and is totally deserted, bar the group of people we witnessed there. All of the prisoners appear to be Muggle-born witches and wizards. It is imperative that we infiltrate the island and free these people before anymore harm comes to them. I believe with the right strategy it can be done. Was there anything else Professor Filch?'

'Only that almost everybody there appeared to be under the Imperius,' she said softly. 'It may be far more difficult to 'save' them than you think.'

'Alastor, how many men can you spare?' Dumbledore asked.

'Well officially the Ministry denies the existence of these islands,' he replied. 'When I reported this to Fudge he told me straight off that I was crazy, which may work for the best. I doubt he will tell anyone what I told him. There are a group of Hit Wizards with not much to do at the moment. If I told the Ministry that I was sending them on training you could have the entire team. It is Mr Weasley's team. Say Ronald, how would you like to lead the team on the expedition?' Harry saw Ron's eyes light up. This kind of mission was the reason he became a Hit Wizard and the chance to lead a team was not going to arrive very often.

'I'd be honoured Sir,' he said to Moody. 'Does this mean I can dump my partner?'

Moody laughed at the suggestion.

'You are finding Terry Boot a little frustrating aren't you Weasley,' he said. 'Nothing escapes my notice.'

Interrupting, Dumbledore continued the planning of the mission.

'Fred Weasley, who can you spare?' he asked directing his attention to Fred.

'I'm unsure as to when George and Katie will be returning,' he said. 'So at the moment it's just me. Percy cannot get caught up in it being a Ministry employee and I will need Ernie and Dean to work in the shop. Angelina will probably be able to help but Lee is busy working in the Diagon Alley store. He doesn't have too many assistants; we've struggled to find ones who are trustworthy lately.'

Dumbledore agreed by nodding his head.

'And Alicia Spinnet?' he asked.

'That one's difficult Professor' he said. 'I haven't seen much of her lately. Things aren't good between her and Lee and as I'm Lee's friend I think that she's been avoiding me. On another note, Bill will be back on Wednesday and I'm sure will be able to assist.'

'Mr Fletcher, how many of your people can be spared?' Dumbledore asked turning to Mundungus Fletcher who had set up a wizard security firm last year.

'I can spare about ten men that are trustworthy,' he said. 'The others I wouldn't trust with a bar of soap, but they do make good security.'

'Right,' said Dumbledore pondering this carefully. 'I shall meet with Professors Black and Snape now to come up with a strategy. I will brief you all throughout the week to prepare to attack early Saturday morning. If anybody has suggestions please come and see me before Thursday. If you have not received briefs by Thursday please come and see me. And if anybody in this room knows anything about Medical magic and is able to tell me how our Defence Against the Dark Arts Professor was magically cured, please let me know. Thank you all.' He added dismissing everyone quite abruptly which had become the manner of the Order lately. Harry caught sight of his mother and father and realised that he and Hermione should stay. He noticed that Snape had also remained.

'Crystal we've gotten the test results back from St Mungos,' Snape said. 'You were infected by a

magical toxin that takes about a week to activate, then another week to kill. The Medi-wizards are just as mystified as to how the toxin got into your bloodstream as we are. It's not native to any environment and has to be made by hand. Have you left Hogwarts recently?

'Only on Saturday,' she replied. 'And that's about a week too late.'

'That means she had to be infected about the time of Harry's wedding,' Lily suggested. 'What did you eat?'

'Sirius and I shared everything on my plate of food,' she said. 'It couldn't have been something I ate. And I was only drinking water all night.'

'Did you give that to anybody? Did you leave it out of sight?' Snape asked.

'I guess I could have left it somewhere,' she said. 'The question still remains that if somebody did slip something into my drink at the wedding, who could it have possibly been? We were extremely careful about the guest list.'

'The other question remains how did you recover?' Snape said. 'That toxin is lethal unless the right antidote is administered. As far as we are aware there is only the one cure and we did not administer that. Yet the second blood screen shows no sign of the toxin. Do you remember?'

'No,' she said evasively. 'I don't. Why don't you ask Sirius?'

'I don't know,' Sirius said defensively. 'All I remember is Rose coming in and collapsing. I was more concerned about her for a brief period of time.' Harry watched the exchange with guilt. He had been there and seen what had happened, however he simply was not prepared to say anything until he spoke to Chrystal and his sister. Finally everybody prepared to leave. Harry turned to his mother and asked for a favour.

'Hermione and I need to talk to Chrystal alone,' he said firmly. 'Can you reveal us and come and get us in half an hour?'

Lily looked curious but agreed once everybody else had left the room. Chrystal looked up in surprise to see them standing there.

'Do you remember what happened?' he asked almost with accusation. She didn't respond. It appeared obvious to Harry that she did and knew that he knew she did. 'I was there.'

'Oh,' she replied. 'I don't exactly remember Harry. I dreamt that something happened, but I am unsure whether or not it was reality. It was Rose wasn't it?'

'Yes,' he said. 'Do you know how?'

'No,' she said shaking her head. 'I can assure you of that.'

'She did it without a wand,' he said.

'I've been looking up everything I could find to try and work out how she could do that,' Hermione said. 'Of course it's very easy to do wandless magic. It's just difficult to do something specific.'

'She looked as if she were draining something out of your body,' Harry added. 'It was freaky. I've never seen anything like it.'

'Did she cast an incarnation?' Chrystal asked.

'Yes,' Harry said. 'But I don't remember what it was. And I want to talk to Rose about it before I go to Dumbledore.'

'When you decide to go to Dumbledore Harry, please let me come too,' Chrystal said. 'I may or may not be able to help, but I'll talk to Lily between now and then and we'll try and work on something. When's the next Quidditch match?'

'Begins on Monday,' he said. 'Against the revamped Cannons, so it could be a very interesting

match.'

'Might be one worth seeing,' Chrystal replied. 'That is if they'll let me out of this room.'

Harry saw Hermione blush. Luckily Lily re-entered the room at that moment.

'What are you two going to do when I re-cast the charm?' she asked.

'We're going to check up on Rose,' he said. 'Then we've got some things to take care of.'

'I'm going to sit with the patient for a while,' she said before she recast the charm, allowing Harry and Hermione to wander around Hogwarts without being seen. They checked up on Rose, who appeared to be doing well. James and Ron were with her and Harry had to laugh at the thought of them trying to get along. Ron was certainly very nervous around James and his father had given Harry the impression that he was slightly overprotective of his little girl. When they had returned to their rooms Harry glanced at Hermione curiously.

'Why did you blush like that?' he asked her in a slightly joking manner.

'Well I just felt a little uncomfortable,' she said. 'After all Chrystal just miscarried.' She had a small mischievous grin on her face. The one that Harry absolutely adored.

'Hermione,' he said. 'Are you trying to tell me in some cryptic way that you're pregnant?' A smile appeared on her face. 'Is that a yes?'

'Yes Harry,' she said. 'It's a yes. Are you happy?'

'Never been happier,' he said as he moved to embrace her.

\*~\*

Ron and James sat by Rose's bedside. Ron was only slightly uncomfortable. It wasn't the fact that he had anything to hide; it was just that he felt slightly uncomfortable in the presence of a man who was supposed to be dead and was just slightly overprotective of his 'little' girl. It wasn't going to stop Ron from staying though. He cared about Rose too much to just leave her there. Madam Pomfrey had assured everyone that she would be fine and that she was suffering merely from exhaustion but Ron wouldn't have felt right if he left her.

James broke the silence.

'What is it about me that makes you uncomfortable Ron?' he asked. Ron found it difficult to hide his surprise. It was a very blunt question. 'You must forgive the directness of my question; it's one of my faults.'

'I'm sorry if I've been rude Mr Potter,' he said before seeing the look on James' face. 'I mean James; it's just strange having to deal with you.'

James laughed.

'It sounds as if I'm some big issue,' he said.

'It's not that,' Ron said trying to get himself out of the hole he felt he was digging. 'I just was never very good with the father thing. And not only are you Rose's dad but you're Harry's dad and Harry is my best friend in the whole world. If anything was to happen between Rose and I, well it would be awkward.'

'Ron,' James said carefully. 'I have learnt over my life that it's not worth worrying about what might happen. You need to live in the present and not worry about the future. Lily used to say that you should let each day worry about itself. Can I ask you something? Do you love my daughter?'

'I think so,' Ron said stammering. 'I've thought I was in love before, with Hermione, but I what I felt wasn't nearly as strong as what I feel for Rose.'

'All I ask is that you promise to take care of her,' he said. 'If something happens, then you'll have to

answer to Harry, but you won't have to answer to me. That is depending on the circumstances of course. From what I've heard you're a fine honourable person Ron. You're brave and courageous and you have a good moral sense. I'd say my daughter is lucky to have you. So don't be nervous about me and don't be nervous around me. I don't bite, in my human form and I'm an herbivore in my Animagus form!

Ron was touched by James' honesty and kindness.

'I promise to take care of her, as much as I possibly can,' he said. 'James can I ask you a question?'

'Certainly Ron,' he replied.

'How's she coping?' Ron said. 'With you and Lily. She was struggling over summer; however she seemed desperate to find you.'

'Do you think she's struggling?' James asked.

'I'm not sure,' Ron replied. 'At first she was feeling smothered by this family that was kind of forced upon her, but last time we spoke about it she seemed very confused. That was the night of Harry's wedding, just after she had found you.'

'I'll look out for her then,' James replied.

\*~\*

Sirius and Severus were waiting for Dumbledore in his office. Remus had decided to accompany Sirius and this did not seem to suit Snape at all. He seemed to be uncomfortable until Dumbledore entered the room.

'Sorry to keep you waiting,' he said. 'Ah Remus, I'm glad you're here too. It will not be easy to infiltrate the fortress if Mr Malfoy's blueprints are accurate. I've located a possible entrance here.' He pointed to an area on the print; the three men peered at the map while Dumbledore pointed at a large area of the map. 'From Lily's information the fortress she was in was only guarded by the two men at the front, so if we can distract them long enough to get the people out that should be all that is necessary. Of course then there's also the matter of their gaolers to consider.'

'Well I'm sure Mr Malfoy will be able to help us with the gaolers,' Sirius said. The others looked at him in surprise. Sirius explained further. 'When he is in his Animagus form he has learnt to produce a venom that will out someone to sleep for an hour. Typical Slytherin thing to do, although I didn't encourage it, it would appear it may be quite useful, don't you think?'

Remus laughed and even Dumbledore himself had a bit of a chuckle.

'So the idea would be that he could slither up to the guards and bite them, clearing the whole tower of guards,' Severus said. 'At least it's one they'd never suspect.'

'Well this may be simpler than first thought,' Dumbledore said. 'Mr Malfoy will lead us in and then Mr Weasley will go in with his team of Hit Wizards and ensure the guards are asleep. Then the rescuers can go in and portkey everyone out. It sounds ridiculous but it just might work.'

As they were laughing the flame in the goblet behind them extinguished.

'The time of the Covenant is here,' Dumbledore said seriously. 'We should form it as soon as possible.' He glanced at a chart on the wall. 'Wednesday evening at midnight. Will you make the arrangements Severus?'

'Yes Professor,' Severus said. 'However don't we require Slytherin's blood?'

'The goblet has not named Slytherin,' he replied pondering the thought. 'If it was required then we would know. Just the people the goblet named should be sufficient Severus. It will provide us with protection for our battle in Saturday.'

\*~\*

Lily sat down next to Chrys' bed.

'How are you feeling today?' she asked.

'Tired,' Chrys said. She sounded more than tired. She sounded flat and lifeless. 'I saw Helena and Hermia there, Lily.' Lily felt shocked. Although the twins had kept to themselves in their early years at Hogwarts they had certainly come out of their shells and had become extremely good friends with the group of Gryffindor girls by the time Lily had reached fourth year. They were kind and funny and they were Muggle-born. 'They looked dreadful Lil, barely recognisable of their former selves. It was awful.'

'I hadn't thought about the twins for a while,' Lily said softly. 'I never thought it was possible that they were victims of this plot. What do you think is going on?'

'I think a war is inevitable,' Chrys said softly. 'Unless we can get in and stop it before it happens many people are going to suffer unnecessarily.'

Lily nodded in response still shocked by the thought of the twins being tortured.

'You sound tired,' Lily said. 'I'd best go. Is there anything I can do for you?' Lily saw the tears well in Chrystal's eyes as she answered.

'The only thing I need is my mother Lil,' she said. 'I need to talk to my mother.'

Lily moved toward her friend and held her close.

'I know what you mean,' she said as she let Chrystal cry on her shoulder. 'I know exactly what you mean.'

## **Chapter Sixteen Good Intentions**

Severus left the meeting with Dumbledore unconvinced of the older man's belief that the rescue mission would be simple if they used the magic of the Covenant. He knew that he himself could not be involved in the mission as it would compromise his position as a spy. And Draco could only be involved on the proviso that the boy remained in his form for the entirety of the mission. The thought made him nervous. He would have to speak to the boy. If he were caught and fed Veritaserum the entire operation could be compromised. And now he had the responsibility of organising the members of The Covenant for Wednesday night. He couldn't shake the thought of joining forces with a werewolf. It was unnerving. Additionally, the thought of invoking the powers of the founders could be extremely dangerous. Lavender's ability to see the future was already stronger than the girl could cope with, Harry was renowned for making the wrong decision and Severus didn't even want to think of the possibilities if Chrystal was burdened with more Celtic ability. The three could be very dangerous and the fall of the Dark Lord would only occur if they work together. He had never questioned Dumbledore's judgement before however he shuddered to think of the consequences if the three did not work together.

Severus sat down at his desk and surveyed the list of the members of the Covenant. Most of them were still at Hogwarts, meaning it shouldn't be too difficult to round them up. He glanced at the name Ronald Weasley again and immediately flooded to The Burrow. He arrived to find Molly sitting on the sofa with a pair of knitting needles.

'What brings you here Severus?' she said with surprise.

'I need to see Ron,' he said. 'Is he here?'

Molly called Ron and he came downstairs quickly. He too was surprised to see Snape there.

'What is it Sir?' he asked. Snape explained to him about the induction of The Covenant and the role he was to play in Saturday's rescue mission. Ron quickly agreed. As Snape was leaving he called out;

'Do you think Terry Boot is trustworthy?'

It gave Ron something to think about. He had never really considered it before.

\*~\*

Wednesday night arrived at last.

The night of the crescent moon was upon Hogwarts and the time had come for the formation of the Covenant.

Covenants were old magic, each designed for one reason. The purpose of this Covenant was to destroy the Dark Lord. It was Slytherin's gift to the world and Harry hoped that he wasn't the only one who hoped that there weren't any unknown consequences to this magic.

He and Hermione made their way to his parent's quarters where Lily was quick to reveal them.

'We're to meet in the Great Hall,' she said. Harry and Hermione nodded in reply.

'How's Chrystal getting there?' Hermione asked. 'Madam Pomfrey hasn't regrown her bone yet?'

'I believe Sirius is going to carry her,' James said. He looked at the two of them very carefully. 'Her bone was regrown on Monday, but she is very unsteady on her feet still. Are you two sure you want to do this?' he asked. 'Once bound to a Covenant, if you break the magic you will die.'

'We're sure,' Harry said firmly for the both of them. They had been in deep discussion about the matter since Dumbledore revealed that the magic of The Covenant should be released before they tried to rescue the imprisoned wizards. They had decided that they should use whatever help was available to them to be able to defeat Voldemort.



Lily indicated that they should leave and they made their way down to the Great Hall, all four of them squeezed under Harry's Invisibility Cloak. And let's just say it was a tight squeeze, however necessary it was. It made the trip down to the Great Hall very slow. They eventually reached there and threw the cloak off after the doors were closed behind them. Harry glanced around. He could see Dumbledore sitting at the staff table with the familiar looking goblet sitting there and McGonagall sitting next to him involved in some deep kind of conversation. Malfoy was talking to Snape; Harry could only guess what they were discussing. He spied Ginny, Ron and Rose who were over in the corner of the room. Harry was glad to actually see Ron in a situation where Ron could see him too. He ran over to embrace his friend. It had been far too long, although it had been just over a week.

'It's so good to see you Ron,' he said 'You've got no idea how much.' Then he turned to his sister. 'You're looking better Rose. Can we have a chat later?' She nodded nervously in reply. Harry wondered if she realised that he had been in the room when she had healed Chrystal.

Harry and Ron caught up on speculation of everything that was occurring in the world. Harry told Ron about the conversation he and Hermione had overheard on the Shetland Isles.

'Have you caught wind of anything at the Ministry?' he asked.

'Do you honestly think that they will tell me anything?' Ron asked with a touch of disbelief. 'Percy doesn't even know anything, mind you he's contemplating quitting the Ministry and concentrating on Weasley's Wizarding Wheezes.'

'Percy?' Harry asked in surprise. 'Quit the Ministry? Are you joking?' Ron shook his head.

'He wants to have more free time to spend with Penny,' Ron said gagging. 'The baby's due in February and he wants to get the house in order and then have time to spend with Penny and the baby after it's born.'

'I can understand that,' Harry said with a pang of guilt. So far he and Hermione had told no one that she was pregnant and they were planning on keeping it a secret for as long as was possible. They didn't want the media to get a hold of it and they didn't exactly feel comfortable telling Sirius or Chrystal given the events of the weekend.

Harry's guilt was brought to an abrupt end by Dumbledore calling for everyone's attention.

'I trust that everyone here is aware that once I ignite the flame of this goblet you are involving yourself in a magical contract that cannot be broken,' he said. 'If there is anyone here who is unsure of their commitment to our cause they should leave now.' Dumbledore paused for a couple of minutes. Harry noted that nobody left. Given that Draco was still there, he took this as a sign that Draco was serious about defeating Voldemort. 'Once the goblet is lit it will protect everyone from being seen until the Covenant is formed. I shall ignite the goblet now. Once it is ignited it will give us further instructions as to where we are to go.' Dumbledore cast a charm which ignited the goblet and a bright white flame emerged from the goblet. The flames appeared to be forming an arrow which was pointing towards the end of the staff table. Harry looked in the direction that the arrow was pointing and saw a hidden door which he swore he'd never seen before. Dumbledore advanced towards the door and opened it without any trouble. On the other side of the door there was a spiral staircase going both up and down. The flames of the goblet changed to point upward and the entire group began to walk up the staircase. It was a long journey until they reached the top of the staircase but when they reached it there was a corridor leading to the left and the right. Once again the flames changed direction, pointing toward the right. They turned and headed down the corridor that led to the right. It was dusty and full of cobwebs. *How long has it been since anyone's been here?* As they continued down the corridor it began to wind and turn and Harry could no longer fathom their whereabouts in the castle. At last they reached an old door that opened when the goblet's flames touched it.

The door opened slowly to reveal a room unlike any other Harry had ever seen. On each of the four

walls were four portraits, a dark-haired man, a red-haired woman, a dark-haired woman and a fair-haired man. Harry recognised the fair-haired man and the red-haired woman from his dream. Under each portrait there was a case that held a weapon. To the side of each portrait there was a banner one for each house.

'This is the Founders room,' Harry whispered to Hermione and Ron. 'I recognise Slytherin and Ravenclaw from my dream.' Ron gave Harry a querying look to which Harry replied that he would fill him in later.

Harry watched as Dumbledore placed the goblet on a large, round table in the middle of the room. Suddenly the flames disappeared and out of the centre and roll of parchment emerged. Cushions sprung from the floor and Dumbledore indicated that everyone should sit down. Harry watched as Sirius gently placed Chrystal down on the cushion. She seemed to be dependent on him more than just physically at the moment. Harry sat down between Hermione and Ron. Once everybody had sat down white robes appeared on everybody's lap and the parchment unrolled itself and began to speak on a high pitched voice that made Harry shiver.

'You are here because you have been chosen by the Founders to defeat the Heir of Slytherin,' it began. 'Each of you have skills that will be vital in his defeat. Place on the robes of the Covenant.' Harry and Ron gave each other a look. If they didn't know that a covenant was very serious magic they would have laughed. So instead they exchanged looks before pulling on the white robes made out of a fine material. 'The Covenant will bestow abilities of the Founders onto this group of members; individually you may not be able to make a difference however together you will work wonders. Once the Covenant is formed, you will be bound to those in it until the day you die.' The parchment exploded and Harry felt dizzy, as if he were under a spell. Another voice sounded.

'The time of the Covenant has come,' it said. It was a deep male voice that Harry thought he recognised. 'The time to defeat my Heir is approaching.' The voice must be Slytherin's. 'Will the Heirs step forward?'

Harry swallowed as he watched Lavender timidly stand up. Harry walked over to Chrystal and helped her stand. Helping her stand he realised for the first time how petite she was.

'To begin the blood of each founder must be placed in the goblet.' Harry looked at Hermione quizzically. *What about Slytherin's blood?* Chrystal drew out her wand and pointed at her wrist.

'*Lacerato!*' she said. Harry saw that blood began to trickle from her wrist. Harry and Lavender did the same. Another voice sounded.

'Blood of my Heir, Blood of Gryffindor given to defeat the Heir of my cousin,' the voice said. Harry made sure Chrystal was able to stand by herself then moved forward and let his blood trickle into the goblet until suddenly the small cut on his wrist healed. Harry stepped back and a female voice sounded this time.

'Blood of my Heir, Blood of Hufflepuff, shed to defeat the Heir of my friend,' it said. Lavender gingerly stepped forward and did the same. After she had stepped back a different female voice sounded.

'Blood of my Heir, Blood of Ravenclaw, shed to defeat the Heir my lover.' Harry was about to help Chrystal forward when Slytherin's voice sounded again.

'Blood of my daughter, Blood of Slytherin, given to defeat the Heir of my son.' Harry looked at her questioningly, but helped her place her blood in the goblet. Again it healed itself and after that occurred the blood began to swirl around in the goblet and began to bubble and began to increase in size. Slytherin's voice was audible once more.

'Those who wish to serve under the Covenant must dip their hands one by one into the blood of our Heirs,' he said. Harry glanced at Hermione and Ron. *Was he sick or something? What was Slytherin trying to do?* Dumbledore, however did not seem as concerned, he placed his hand in the goblet and

moved to stand next to Harry. Sirius moved forward and took hold of Chrystal before both of them stepped forward and dipped their hands into the goblet. Harry followed their lead and gingerly placed his hand in the goblet. It didn't feel like blood, instead it was warm and felt thin and fluid. Hermione, Ron and Rose followed again in a fashion similar to Harry. Each looked slightly relieved after they had placed their hands in the goblet. Lily, James and Lupin followed, and then Charlie, Snape and McGonagall ventured forward. Draco held Ginny's shoulders as the two of them walked towards the goblet. Once everybody had dipped their hand into the goblet Gryffindor's voice sounded.

'Everyone should place their hands on the goblet. The headmaster will then cast the incarnation.'

Everyone did as the voice instructed. Dumbledore then took a deep breath in before he gave the incarnation.

*'We stand before this goblet to defeat the Dark Lord Voldemort,' he began. 'Those that stand here strive for good and for the survival of the light. We invoke the power of the Founders. We invoke the power of the Founders. We invoke the power of the Founders.'*

After he had finished light began to stream from the goblet and Harry felt a kind of feeling like fulfilment. A change had come over everybody in the room. The goblet exploded and the light ended. The glass cases surrounding the weapons shattered sending fragments into the air and scratching those in the room.

'The Covenant has been formed,' Dumbledore said. 'You should all go. Beware; if you turn on the Covenant the consequences will be severe.'

Almost everybody left the room, leaving the Potters, Blacks and Ron there. Chrystal was staring at the portrait of Rowena Ravenclaw. Looking at the two of them, it was amazing to see the similarities between the two women. She picked up the sword lying in front of the portrait. It was silver with blue sapphires in the handle. It was engraved with a cross.

'This is mine,' she said turning to Sirius. 'Harry and Hermione take care. No doubt I'll see you soon. Can we please go Sirius?'

Sirius picked his wife up and carried her out the door. Harry glanced at Hermione. He felt that the time was right to let everyone in on their little secret.

'Hermione,' he whispered. 'Can we tell them about the baby now?'

'I thought you wanted to wait?' she whispered back.

'No we should tell them now,' he said. 'I don't know when we'll get another chance like this. Besides I don't want you to go on the weekend and everyone will ask questions as to why.'

'We'll talk about that later Harry,' she said. 'But we have to tell them now, everyone's wondering why we're whispering.' Harry looked around and saw that Hermione was right.

'What's going on Harry?' Rose asked in that teasing voice she often had. It was a sure sign to Harry that she was getting better.

'Well we've got something to tell you,' he said slowly. 'Hermione's pregnant.'

Harry didn't know what to expect when he told everybody. He knew their reactions would be interesting but he wasn't quite sure what they would be. Rose squealed with excitement and ran and hugged Hermione and Harry as hard as she could. James followed by shaking his sons hand, congratulating him and giving him a sly wink. Ron voiced a loud congratulation, which secretly relieved Harry who had been quite worried about his friend's reaction. His mother however was quiet.

Harry walked over to her.

'What's wrong Mum?' he asked.

'I'm not old enough to be a grandmother,' she said. 'I mean my best friend is just contemplating having children and now I find out I'm going to have a grandchild?' She laughed. 'I'm not angry Harry. I just need to get used to the idea.'

'You wanted to have another child?' his father asked with a smile on his face. His parents began to gaze into each other's eyes and started kissing each other. Harry felt his insides twist.

'Is anybody else grossed out?' Ron asked loudly. Harry nodded and Hermione didn't comment.

'Hey Mum, Dad,' Harry called. 'We'll be in your quarters waiting for you to come and hide me, but meanwhile I want to catch up with Ron and Rose.'

Neither of his parents said anything, Lily just raised her hand in acknowledgement as James continued to kiss her. Harry stole a glance at the Gryffindor portrait grabbed the weapon and then left them to it.

\*~\*

Harry led Rose and Ron to Lily and James' quarters. Harry had filled Hermione in on his dream, as well as Rose's actions on the weekend. Now that he realised his dream was accurate he was on edge. Things appeared to be far more complicated than he had ever imagined.

'How did you do that to Chrystal Rose?' Harry said to her. 'I was actually frightened.'

'You shouldn't run around the castle like that Harry,' she retorted. 'It's a breach of people's privacy.'

'The idea is that I'm in hiding Rose,' he said. 'You wouldn't expect me to just announce my presence so that anybody wanting to have a shot at me could.'

'Cut it out,' Hermione said. 'You'd think that you two were children or something.'

'Just making up for lost time,' Harry said with a smile as Hermione jokingly whacked him on the head. 'Seriously Rose what did you do and how did you do that?'

'It was a simple incarnation really,' she explained. 'Ever since the Shrieking Shack explosion I've wanted to be a Healer. I've wanted to be able to do something if someone needed medical care urgently. So I've been learning by reading and practice with Madam Pomfrey since I've been back at Hogwarts. I even spent a couple of weeks of my holidays at St Mungos. I learnt a lot in a short period of time, the kind of stuff Madam Pomfrey isn't up to date with.'

'But how did you do that without a wand,' Hermione asked. 'That's what scared Harry.'

'I've never used a wand to heal,' she said. 'I don't know why, but I feel like if I concentrate hard I don't need to. I know it's slightly unusual.'

'Slightly unusual?' Ron said. 'Have you ever tried to do magic without a wand? And I'm not talking about accidental magic either. It's not easy.'

'Actually no,' she said going slightly red. 'I'd never thought about it.'

Ron picked up a quill from the desk.

'Try and make this float,' he said. 'Without a wand.'

Rose glanced at the quill and then seemed to focus on it.

'*Wingardium Leviosa*,' she said as she sent the quill into the air. Looking at the stunned faces around she was slightly surprised. 'What's the big deal? I'm sure anyone can do it with practice. All it takes is concentration.'

'No Rose,' Hermione said. 'It's a very rare gift, not many people can do it. It's not something that you can learn. You have to have the ability in the first place.'

'How come Rose can do that then?' Ron said.

'I'm not sure,' Hermione replied. 'If I knew we wouldn't be asking Rose about it. I've searched through most of my books on medical magic for the last few days and I still haven't found anything.'

'I just don't think you should let anyone know that you can do this,' Harry said. 'It could be dangerous for you. Sirius is oblivious to what happened, but Chrystal remembers and she's quite worried about it.'

Rose glared at him.

'Why do you have to discuss me with everyone behind my back Harry?' she asked. 'I did the only thing I could. She would have died.'

'I'm not saying you did the wrong thing,' he said. 'It's just that you don't want any reason for Voldemort to come after you. If you have a rare gift like that, then you leave yourself open.'

'He's just concerned,' Hermione said.

'You don't need to worry about me,' said Rose placing the emphasis on need. 'I don't tell my parents what happens at Hogwarts. I'm not used to having people all concerned about me.'

'You'll just have to get used to it Rose,' Harry said. 'I'm not used to having a family either but I have one now. It's not easy, but wouldn't you rather have a family?'

Rose nodded in reply.

'Give me time Harry,' she said. 'Now if you'll allow it, I'd like to spend some time with Ron.'

Harry shook his head.

'You can sleep in that bed with Hermione,' he said pointing to a queen sized bed. 'Ron and I will sleep in the next room.' Harry opened a door to reveal two single beds and pointed Ron in the direction. 'Trust me, I owe Ron a couple,' he said with a smile.

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The operatives gathered early Saturday morning before dawn in the Hogsmeade offices of Weasley Wizard Wheezes. None of them spoke of the dangers of what they were about to do. Harry was not nervous. He was beginning to get used to doing things like this. And he felt better after having managed to convince Hermione that she should not be involved in the mission. Especially given what had happened to Chrystal last weekend. He knew that he was to remain in his Animagus form for the entire time that the mission was underway; however he was unsure as to how much help he'd actually be able to be. It would be people like Ron who would be making an impact on the operation. This was a new experience for Harry. For the first time it would be his friend who would be in more danger than he would. He knew that Ron could handle himself. Ron was very courageous and he was an excellent tactician as evidenced by his chess games, yet Harry couldn't help but feel slightly frightened for his friend.

Harry saw quite a few people there that he recognised and quite a few that he didn't. His mother was there of course, in her Animagus form rubbing Ron's leg. Ron was in deep discussion with Dumbledore and Moody. Looking around he saw Sirius, Mundungus Fletcher and all of the Weasley boys including George, Angelina, Katie and Alicia were also there, but Lee wasn't, which Harry did notice. *Things must be bad between them.* Harry looked around at Ron's "troops" as he liked to think of them. He looked for a glimpse of Terry Boot. Harry was surprised when he couldn't see him there. He made a mental note to ask Ron about it later. Arabella Figg was there talking to Lupin. Harry wondered what Arabella would be able to do remembering that Dumbledore had caused her to lose her ability to foresee the future when he had forced her to reveal the Prophecy. Then he remembered that she was also known to have a good medical knowledge. Harry glanced over at her again and saw Rose was there as well. He didn't know how she had done it, but Rose had managed to convince Lily that she should be on hand to deal with the injured. Before

long, Dumbledore brought them all to attention and handed them over to Ron. He had gone bright red.

'Thank you all for coming,' he said. 'For the most of you your job is to use the portkeys issued to you to rescue those trapped in the fortress. You will head there once the all-clear has been given to you from Dumbledore. Your portkey will become active and you will be transported all over the fortress. You should retrieve anybody you find and bring them to the centre of the fortress where there will be portkeys waiting for you to transport them back here. Their injuries can then be assessed and they will be transported to the necessary destination to handle their injuries. Are there any questions?'

When no one answered he stated that the advance team would leave now, and everybody else should await further instructions.

Harry felt his heart leap into his throat. His heart was pounding against his chest. *Please don't get hurt Ron.*

\*~\*

Draco Malfoy had gone ahead of the advance group. His job was, in his Animagus form to clear the path for the advance team. He hadn't told anyone except Sirius this before earlier in the week, but the Animagus form he had chosen was a poisonous snake. He had done experimenting and found that when in his form he could use the venom as a weapon. It would not kill, but it would make someone ill enough to pass out for a couple of hours. He slithered toward the fortress, spying the two men standing there. He knew who they were. He recognised them as Death Eaters. Draco was very sly, he knew he would be able to avoid their sight until after he had bitten the first one, he just hoped the second one wouldn't try and kill him. He slithered towards the first man and dug his fangs into the man's heels. It was a good feeling. The man jumped into the air and Draco was quick to lunge at the second to ensure he didn't get accidentally harmed. Both of them fell to the ground. The snake slithered inside with a smile on his snake face.

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'Who's there?' Chrystal called. She was sitting alone in her bed reading while everybody else was on their salvage mission. She hated being confined to bed but after not having a pelvis for a few days earlier in the week she wasn't really strong enough to walk around herself.

'It's Severus,' the man called. 'Severus Snape. Are you decent?'

She laughed.

'Come in Severus,' she said. 'I hear I owe you a thank you. Thank you for saving my life for the second time.'

'Just doing my job Chrystal,' he said. 'Besides I owe you one. I've come to keep you company for a while. How are you doing?'

'How do you think?' she replied quite quickly and harshly.

'Well if I were you I guess I would be a little upset,' he replied softly.

'Sorry for snapping,' she said a little ashamed of herself. 'I'm just a little highly strung at the moment and I've had pretty much everyone asking that question.'

'I hear if you're a good girl you get to go to the Quidditch match on Monday,' he said. 'Although in my opinion if you're not well enough to teach, you shouldn't be traipsing off to a Quidditch match.'

'I can't exactly traipse anywhere at the moment,' she said.

'Well to take your mind off it why don't we try and brainstorm about this toxin,' Severus said. 'My theory is that someone must have slipped it into your drink. You were probably the only person

drinking water; it could have easily been targeted at you.'

'I know that Severus,' she said. 'My question is who? We were very particular as to who was invited. Additionally I wasn't getting any nervous vibes off anyone except perhaps Harry and Hermione.'

'Well if we start from the top and go through the guests,' he suggested. 'Perhaps we can make a list of likely suspects and take it from there. Starting from the top, of the Hogwarts Staff there was Dumbledore, McGonagall, Vector, Sirius, you and myself. I think we can suggest that it is unlikely to be any of the above. Perhaps Vector, I don't know where her alliances lie.'

'Agreed,' she commented. The thought had intrigued her; they didn't really know where Vector allegiances lay. 'Lily and James are unlikely, as is Lupin.'

'Then there was the entire Weasley clan,' Snape said. 'Given Harry's closeness with the family and Dumbledore's faith in them again I think we can dismiss them as suspects.' Chrystal nodded.

'I've known the Weasleys since I was six,' she said. 'Arthur and Molly have always gone out of their way to be helpful, especially when I was going through some pretty rough times. And I remember Bill and Charlie from school.'

'The only likely suspect would have been Percy,' Severus said. 'But that was before that attempt on his life a couple of years ago. He's a changed man and would certainly not be involved in anything like that. His wife is a journalist, but she's a sports journalist and is unlikely to be involved in anything like that, especially being Percy's wife. Onto the other partners, Angelina Johnson, Kathryn Bell and Malfoy. You, for some strange reason trust Malfoy, but he is the only one of them who would have access to a toxin like that, working at St Mungos.' Chrystal nodded again

'Do we know where those girls' allegiances lie?' she asked.

'Some operatives have kept a close eye on them and we believe that they're trustworthy,' Severus said. 'The twins are in the Order and are both pretty cluey. I think if there was something going on with either of them it would have been brought to our attention earlier. Then there's Oliver Wood, he's a difficult one.'

'I trust him,' Chrystal said. 'I can't explain to you why, but I do.'

'Then if we continue,' Severus said. 'There were his Gryffindor friends, we know pretty much what Miss Brown is up to and besides gazing into her orb and getting plastered, that's not much. Finnegan is too obsessed with how Lavender's doing to do much else. What about Thomas?'

'I've never gotten a bad vibe from him,' Chrystal said. 'But to be honest I don't know where his allegiances lie. One woman of concern would be Parvati Patil. I can tell you I don't trust her and she and Lavender have had quite a few disagreements lately.'

'She's a possibility then,' Severus said. 'She's working as a nurse at St Mungos.'

'What?' Chrystal said in surprise. 'Her a nurse?'

'I guess she thinks it's a good place to meet eligible young doctors,' Severus said with a smile on his face. 'Despite the difference in house and appearance she and Miss Parkinson seem to have a lot in common. Silly little girls who only want to catch a rich husband.' Chrystal laughed at this.

'They should go after Quidditch players,' she remarked. 'They're starting to get paid quite generously now. After that there was Rose and somehow I don't think that's likely. The girl healed me.' Chrys put her hand over her mouth after she had spoken. The look on Severus face said it all. 'I shouldn't have said that.'

'I guess not,' Severus replied. 'But for the girl's sake I'll forget that I heard that.' Chrystal looked at the look on Severus' face. He looked upset and exasperated. He looked tired and exhausted.

'Is everything going fine for you?' she asked.

'It's just difficult to keep up the charade of being Voldemort's loyal servant,' he said sighing.

'If you don't mind me asking are you seeing anybody?' she asked him. He immediately looked shocked. 'I could just feel a sort of vibe there.'

'I was,' he said biting his lip. 'I was seeing Narcissa Malfoy. But she believes I'm a Death Eater. It just wasn't working.'

'Well to be honest I don't think much of Sirius' cousin. She can be a nasty piece of work. Are you seeing your mother for Christmas?' she asked.

'What is this ille? Twenty questions?' he asked.

'No I was only wondering that if your mother was going on tour again if you would join us for the Dunvegan Ball on Christmas Eve,' she said. 'My way of thanking you for saving my life.'

'Okay, I accept,' he said standing up. 'I had better go and brew these potions so that they'll be ready when Dumbledore returns with the wounded.'

'Do you want some help?' she asked. 'You'll have to help me downstairs, but my hands are still useful even if I'm not well enough to be out rescuing people.'

'Very well,' he said. 'Miss Weasley will be joining us in a few hours. She has quite exceptional potion making skills.'

He helped her out of bed, she was thankful that she was already dressed and helped her down to the dungeons. He summoned a chair for her to sit at and then gave her a book of potions.

'We need some pain potions,' he said. 'You can summon any ingredients you need from my private stores. Make a variety. And try not to stuff them up Miss ille-MacLeod-Black or whatever you want to call yourself. I've heard about your cooking and hope your Potion making skills are above this.'

She laughed.

'I assure you Severus I got a Newt for Potions,' she said as she got to work making pain medications. 'I was an Auror remember.'

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Ron guided his men into the fortress following Malfoy's attack. He instructed two men to tie up the two guards and led the rest of his men into the fortress. He sent them forward with the instructions to capture not kill any Death Eaters that they came across. Ron himself headed for the centre of the fortress to meet with Malfoy, to organise the portkeys and to tell Dumbledore to send the others. He reached there and found that Malfoy had already spoken with Dumbledore and told him that reinforcements were on the way.

'There's one strange thing Weasley,' he said. 'Apart from the two guards there aren't any other Death Eaters here. I think there are about one hundred prisoners, but no gaolers. I think they know we were coming and we probably only have a limited amount of time before the gaolers return.'

'That's strange,' Ron said. 'I'll send my men in and can you ensure the portkeys are all active?'

'Already done,' Malfoy said as Ron sent the Hit wizards into the fortress. Ron waited for each of his men to report to him before they portkeyed back to Hogsmeade. Each of the twenty Hit Wizards located a few of the prisoners. Ron couldn't believe the people were human. They looked skeletal, as if they had been starved for several weeks. Additionally the fortress smelt. It smelt like rotting, decaying bodies. It brought back the memories of the old wizard's apartment he had been to on his first day of training. Ron knew something was wrong. There should have been more guards, more Death Eaters. The fortress itself was far too quiet. Ron looked around. He was certain Lily had said that there were far more guards than the two that Draco had bitten. He returned to find some of his team arriving back at the portkeys.



'Do I need to send for backup?' he asked them.

The two men shook their heads.

'There are only half dead people there,' one of them said.

'It's probably better if we bring them all here and then portkey them in one go,' said the other, Terry Boot, Ron's ex-partner.

'I'll take this lot then,' Ron said. He grabbed the wrists of the two men then located one of the portkeys. He grabbed it and was transported back to Weasleys Wizarding Wheezes. A temporary hospital had been set up with stretchers laid across the entirety of the basement. Ron could see many witches and wizards, including his family members tending to the wounded. He picked up one of the men, who was unconscious and lay him on a stretcher before assisting the other man who apart from his starved form only had some leg ulceration. He alerted Dumbledore to their presence before pulling him aside.

'There's something strange there,' he whispered to Dumbledore. 'I want to take a few people to search the fortress from here. My men are searching for bodies, but I'm still unsure as to how trustworthy they are.'

'You'd better take Harry,' Dumbledore whispered. 'He's somewhere around, I'm sure he will go and have a look.' Dumbledore winked at Ron, before he Apparated back to the fortress.

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Chrystal made her way slowly to her office following the brewing of potions. She knew that she had a lot of work to catch up on after her week spent in bed. She opened the door to her office and saw an unfamiliar face standing there. The young man was pale and had a haunted look about him.

'Who are you and what are you doing here?' she asked.

## **Chapter Seventeen Retrieval and Abduction**

Harry had been standing near Dumbledore the entire morning. He had overheard his conversation with Ron and immediately apparated to the island. His heart was pounding and his head was spinning. He hated not being able to talk to anyone or merely people acknowledging his presence. He glanced around the fortress. It appeared almost deserted.

Of course he could hear the work of the Hit Wizards dragging the all but dead people towards the portkeys, he could hear the groaning of men in agony. It was the lack of Death Eaters that worried him. The fortress had an eerie air about it. It was the kind of feeling that you got when you knew that something awful was about to happen.

Somehow Harry knew it. They'd been betrayed.

*The question remained how?*

The operatives were always extremely careful about who was involved in their operations. The only people who knew about the operation were the people present in the room the previous Monday. And the only other people involved in the operation were the Hit Wizards. *Was it possible that one of them had betrayed them?* It was the most likely possibility. Harry couldn't fathom any of the operatives being double-agents. Harry continued to roam the fortress. More and more the lack of Death Eaters was disconcerting. The war against the Dark Lord was only in its beginning and already people were betraying them.

*Damn!* He thought as he hit his foot against a stone. The fortress was solid. Obviously a lot of time and effort had been put into its construction. Harry watched in marvel as the stones moved and revealed a passageway. He shivered as he took a step into the passageway. The air was cold and crisp. It almost hurt to breathe it in. *Things are seldom what they seem.* Harry thought as he made his way down the staircase of the passageway. He made his way down the staircase slowly and carefully. He had learnt over the years to be careful where he trod and of the consequences of his actions. He felt each step carefully before he placed his weight on the step. He estimated that it took him almost half an hour to make his way down the flight of about 100 stairs. When he reached the bottom he made his way down the damp and dusty corridor until he reached a door. He pulled out his wand and opened the door. It revealed a damp and dusty office. Harry glanced at the papers on the table. His heart sunk as he read the first one.

*The Order will attack on Saturday morning.*

Harry glanced around the room. *It was too easy.* Somehow he couldn't shake the idea that he was meant to find this piece of paper. He grabbed it off the table and immediately apparated back to Weasley's Wizarding Wheezes, where he ran around searching for his mother. He handed her the note and quickly informed her of his gut instinct.

He watched as the basement turned into mayhem. Thankfully they had almost finished retrieving the prisoners. By now most had been transferred to St Mungos. Ron returned and stated that everyone was out of the fortress. Ron also spoke of being unnerved about the lack of Death Eaters. Dumbledore set the next meeting for the Order for Sunday evening and left people to tend to the patients. Then he disappeared. Dumbledore's abrupt manner was strange. *Where had he gone?* It certainly couldn't be Hogwarts, there's no way he would have apparated.

Harry headed straight for his mother.

'Reveal me,' he said.

'Don't be stupid Harry,' she said. 'It's all over.'

'No it's not,' he said. 'There could still be people there. We need to make sure that they're all safe. Let me and Ron go. I promise I'll stay in my form.'

Lily looked as if she were about to cave in.

'Okay,' she said. 'But I'll reveal you in you Animagus form outside. Then I'll tell Ron to find you.'

They headed out behind Weasley's Wizarding Wheezes where Harry reluctantly transformed into his lion form and was then revealed. Lily headed back inside to find Ron and it wasn't long before Ron arrived and spying the lion ran over cautiously.

'I don't know how I'm supposed to react to you when you're like this,' he said to the lion. 'Should I pat you?' Ron mimicked running his hand over Harry's fur. 'Shall we apparate?'

'Yes,' Harry said before vanishing into thin air. When they arrived back on the island Harry indicated that Ron should jump on his back before they headed into the castle.

Ron had a fairly good idea of the layout of the fortress by now and hence was able to direct Harry around. They checked every room for any sign of life or for any clue as to what was going on. They had worked their way from the top to the bottom and with only one floor to go they still had not found anything. At least they hadn't found any injured people yet.

Carefully they scoured every last corner of the bottom floor of the fortress. Still they had no luck. There was nothing, not even a speck of dust. They had no idea as to what Voldemort was up to and despite having saved many people today Harry knew there would be more casualties. Having one last glance they left the fortress. Making sure no one was in sight Harry transformed back to his normal self. He and Ron sat behind the bushes staring at the fortress.

'What do you think's going on here?' he asked Ron.

'Not entirely sure,' he replied. 'But I was expecting there to be more people.'

'I can't help but thinking that this was a trap,' Harry said carefully. 'No Death Eaters as well as that note I found and fewer prisoners than we know there were. What's going on?'

'I think the burning question is who betrayed us?' Ron said. 'If there's a traitor in the order it spells trouble.'

Harry nodded.

'Did you know that Chrystal was poisoned at the wedding?' Harry asked Ron. He nodded. 'Someone present that night is up to no good. Someone who we think we can trust. And that is a problem.'

Ron didn't get a chance to reply. There was a noisy bang and a bright light soaring into the sky. They looked up and watched as the Dark Mark erupted from the light. Taking one last glance at the smoky ruins of the fortress, they thanked their lucky stars they had already left the fortress and disappeared to Fred and George's basement.

\*~\*

Chrystal's heart pounded as the man turned around.

'I'm looking for the Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher,' he said. 'My name is Marcus Flint. I'm an ex-Hogwarts student.'

'You've found her,' she said. She watched as Marcus eyed her in disbelief. 'Don't underestimate me. What can I do for you Mr Flint?'

'I'm after advice,' he said. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a piece of parchment. 'I received this.' He handed the parchment to her. Chrystal looked over it. It was blank.

'I assume you're not concerned because there doesn't appear to be any writing on it,' she said.

He looked at her strangely.

'I guess that would make sense,' he said slowly. 'It tells me that I'm being recruited to serve the Dark Lord and that I should turn up on Friday for further information. It further says that if I do not

conform that they'll kill my family.'

'Flint,' Chrystal whispered. She had no idea that the Death Eaters were actively trying to recruit Flint. She knew the name. 'Your brother's a first-year. Quite enthusiastic. I see you're in a bit of a dilemma then. You want my advice?' Marcus nodded. 'From my experience if the Dark Lord wants to kill you, you're already dead. There's no use running or trying to hide unless you have friends who are one hundred percent loyal. And if you don't conform you will most likely be hunted down and killed.'

'It's that good is it?' he asked.

'I take it, because you are here, you don't want to be a Death Eater,' she said. Marcus nodded. 'Then there's only really one option. The Fidelius Charm.' She saw the pale look on Flint's face. 'For you and your family. Sit down and I'll explain a little more about how it works.' Marcus sat down at the desk gingerly. 'The Fidelius Charm is the most powerful hiding charm ever created. It means that no matter where you are and what you are doing no one will be able to find you. It works with a Secret Keeper. This person knows your whereabouts and they will remain a secret unless that person tells someone.'

'I understand the bit about the Secret Keeper,' he said. 'I know what happened with the Potters. I'm just curious. If, while under the Fidelius, no one can find you or see you, how come people don't put themselves under the Fidelius to do things like killing people?'

'I can already see why Voldemort would want to recruit you,' Chrystal took no notice of Marcus shuddering when she said the word Voldemort. 'You're intuitive. That's a good question Mr Flint and there are several answers. The first is that any spell you cast under the Fidelius cannot harm another unless they can see you. The second is that the Fidelius will only work if your life really is in danger.'

'Do I have any other options?' he said. 'I don't think that there's anyone I trust with my life.'

'There are many other options Mr Flint,' she said. 'I am merely giving you the best one. Perhaps you should contemplate it for a couple of days and we can talk more later?'

Marcus nodded and quickly made his way from the room.

Things were not going well if Voldemort was actively trying to recruit like this. Not going well at all.

About half an hour later she looked up and saw Lily walking into the room. She looked exhausted.

'Long day?' Chrystal asked.

'You have no idea,' Lily replied. 'I saw Helena, but not Hermia. She looked like she hadn't eaten in weeks. It was so difficult to restrain myself from trying to talk to her. She was screaming that Hermia had been taken a few days earlier. She wanted to know if anyone had found her.'

'Poor thing,' Chrystal said. 'They were so close at school. I doubt that one of them could exist without the other.'

'There were only fifty people,' Lily said. 'There were certainly more on the film we saw. What about when you flew over?'

'Definitely,' she said. 'And I only saw the inside of the compound for a few seconds.'

\*~\*

The order assembled in the basement of Weasley's Wizarding Wheezes on Sunday evening.

'Someone betrayed us,' Dumbledore said quietly. There were only a few people in the room. Some of the Weasleys, Tonks, Alastor Moody, Snape, Sirius, Chrystal, Lupin, Lily and James were there but not visible. Harry and Hermione had insisted on being revealed.

'I think it was me,' Lily said softly. 'They captured me and I escaped. It must have twigged someone. A cat escaping from a room without a door.'

'It's a possibility,' Snape snarled turning towards Ron. 'But I think there's more to it. Weasley when did you instruct those men?'

'I briefed them on Friday,' Ron said defending himself. 'Just like you said to. However, I think the chances are that if anyone betrayed us it was a Hit Wizard.'

'That letter was written before Friday,' Harry said. 'I don't think it could be what you're suggesting Ron.'

'Then it had to be Lily,' Lupin said. 'I don't think it's possible that anyone on that room could have been responsible. We're careful about who we invite to these kind of meetings.'

'Well we careful about Harry and Hermione's wedding and still somehow Chrystal managed to get poisoned,' Sirius said raising his voice.

'I've had another look at the toxin,' Tonks said. 'It's a slow acting one that will essentially eat you up from the inside out. It has to be administered orally, which means inside food and it will take about a week to produce symptoms. It's a difficult toxin to make and a difficult one to cure. I'd say you're very lucky that someone knew some medical magic.'

'Severus and I went through the list again,' Chrystal said. 'There aren't many scapegoats. Could some have bribed a house-elf?'

'It's very unlikely,' Dumbledore said. 'As far as I am aware, they are all extremely loyal to me. I'd be shocked if that was the cause.'

'Can we move back to what happened yesterday?' Chrystal asked. Harry noticed that she seemed uncomfortable with their continual discussion of what had happened to her.

'All I can say is they knew we were coming,' Dumbledore said slowly. 'I don't know where to go from here. There are certainly more people in danger than we rescued yesterday.'

'We try and find them,' James said. 'We have more surveillance, more investigation and we find them. We can start with the other islands; however I suspect that everyone has already been moved.'

'Sirius can you try and organise this?' Dumbledore asked. Sirius nodded. 'Does anyone have anything else to discuss?' When there was no reply Dumbledore continued. 'I shall inform you of our next meeting when a few more developments have been made.'

Again Dumbledore just disappeared. Harry was becoming very disturbed by his behaviour but he felt sure that there would be an explanation. After Dumbledore had left, George invited them to stay for dinner. Apparently George and Katie had moved into the second level of the Hogsmeade shop until they found somewhere else to live. Harry was sick of being confined and quickly agreed without consulting Hermione first. She gave him a look but followed them upstairs.

It looked as if Katie had been preparing dinner for several hours. The table was set with nine places. Harry noticed that Ginny and Rose had been smuggled out of school.

'What are you doing here?' Hermione asked. 'Does anyone know that you're not at school?'

'Calm down Hermione,' Fred said laughing. 'It'll be fine. We'll have them back before anyone notices.' Hermione did calm down but she still didn't look impressed.

'Honestly Fred this is just as bad as when you tried to test your products on first years,' she said but sat down at her place at the table.

'Just trying to warm the air,' Fred said.

'Actually Hermione they do have permission to be here,' Angelina said. 'Fred is just playing games with you. We're going to the match tomorrow remember?'

'Oh,' Hermione said. 'I had almost forgotten about it. Harry versus the Weasleys.' She laughed when she said that. 'I'm going to have to go for Harry I'm afraid.' Harry smiled at his wife.

'That's not fair Hermione,' George said. 'After all the Cannons do have three of us. Puddlemere has only one.'

'Well George,' Ginny interrupted. 'You should be thankful it's not against the Harpies. I would have to go for my sister's team instead of my brother's then.'

Everyone laughed.

The evening passed quickly with Katie's delicious food, reminiscing of old times and gentle conversation that helped them all forget the events of the weekend. Harry realised how much he missed the times that they had spent together at Hogwarts. He and Hermione were so isolated from everyone now. Harry didn't know whether or not it was all worth it. After all he was going to have to face Voldemort one day. *What was the point in hiding?*

\*~\*

After the excitement of the weekend, it was hard for Harry to come to grips with the fact he had one of the most important Quidditch games of his life beginning on Monday afternoon. It was against the Cannons, who with the commonsense to use all the Weasleys and Marcus Flint had not lost one of their three games for the season. Puddlemere was a good team. Thomas Doyle was a fantastic coach. He had been in contention for the English coaching position. Oliver Wood had improved out of sight since leaving Hogwarts. Ebony Fraser, Emma Gallagher and Tadgh Moran were excellent Chasers, Moran being one of the Irish Chasers that had won the World Cup when Harry was in his fourth year at Hogwarts. Their Beaters were very competent, but if you asked Harry, that was Puddlemere's weakness. Harry pulled his navy robes which the gold bulrushes out of his draw. He glanced at the back of his robes at the embroidered name "Potter" on the back recalling when he had been to the World Cup and had imagined himself zooming around in national robes. He was yet to achieve that, but he would be happy knowing that he had been chosen for an amazing Quidditch Team and actually getting a game at the age of eighteen. Malfoy had been drafted by the Falcons and was still yet to get a game. This made Harry feel slightly better about Malfoy being drafted before him, given that Harry had already gotten the chance to play in a European Cup.

Hermione stirred in bed.

'What are you doing Harry?' she asked. 'Surely it's not time to get up yet.' He gave her a smile, before kissing her forehead.

'You can sleep for another couple of minutes,' he said. 'But the bacon that Sirius brought up for us is getting a little cold. I want to get to the ground early. I need to prepare.' Since he had begun playing professionally Harry had gone through mental preparation for each game, usually in the change room before the team warm ups. He liked to do this alone preferably before everybody else arrived. Lily had come in earlier when Hermione was still asleep and revealed them. Hermione would make her way to the game with Rose a little later.

'Are you leaving now?' she asked.

'Yes,' he said. 'I'll see you later. Take care of yourself please.' He leant over to her stomach. 'You take care of yourself too.' Hermione giggled as he kissed her stomach before taking hold of his portkey that would take him to the Cannons home ground.

Harry arrived and sat down in the dressing room, fully clad in his Puddlemere robes. He sat and concentrated on the Quidditch pitch in his mind. He thought about the team he was playing against and felt a feeling of guilt that he would actually be playing against Ron. He had never done that before, except in training. *Right, all I need to do is concentrate on the Snitch and everything will be fine.* He opened his eyes and found that Wood was sitting next to him.

'You ready yet Potter?' he asked.

'I'm fine Wood,' Harry said. 'We just can't underestimate this team. You know how good the Weasleys are.'

'Well if we stay away from the path of the Bludgers we should be fine,' Wood said. 'I don't think either Fred or George would let Flint borrow their baton so that they could hit a Bludger at one of us. Anyway it's time for our team meeting. Doyle asked me to find you.'

Harry stood up and headed into the meeting room. The entire team was assembled and Doyle addressed them with regard to strategy. They all knew that this game was going to be difficult. The Cannons were undefeated so far this season and Puddlemere had already lost a game to the Wasps. Harry was finding professional Quidditch stressful on his body and felt that he needed to build his strength up. He had taken to running early in the mornings to try and build up stamina. So far he had just managed to exhaust himself even more. Hence he hadn't gone for his run this morning. He just hoped that he could hold up for the length of the game, however long it was. Their last game against the Wasps had lasted six hours and by the time Harry had spied the Snitch he was too exhausted to beat the other Seeker to it. It was the first time that Cho Chang had ever beaten him at Quidditch and Harry had not exactly been too happy about it.

Harry was pulled out of his thoughts by the call of the announcer.

'AND NOW FOR THE PUDDLEMERE TEAM,' the announcer said. 'COACHED BY DOYLE I GIVE YOU.... FRASER, GALLAGHER, MORAN, KNIGHT, BUTLER, WOOD AAANNND POTTER!'

Harry heard the screams as he headed out onto the pitch. He saw Ron already in front of the goals concentrating hard and then saw Fred and George soaring in the air with their bats looking ready to beat a Bludger at someone. Soon enough the Quaffle was released and Harry began searching the skyline for the Snitch. It was nowhere in sight. He glanced down at the game below. Ron had just saved Emma Gallagher's attempt at scoring and quickly passed the Quaffle to Marcus Flint. Harry glanced around the pitch again for some sign of the Snitch. He caught sight of the Cannons Seeker and decided to fly around with him for a while. The Seeker did not seem too impressed to have Harry on his tail, but it was evident that he too could not spy the Snitch anywhere either. He tried several times to get Harry to follow him into a dive, but Harry, having not spied the Snitch was not going to get sucked in. After a while the Cannons Seeker gave up attempting to lose Harry.

A few minutes later Harry spied the Snitch. He immediately set off towards it and it took a while for the Cannons Seeker to realise Harry had gone. He soon set off after Harry. Unfortunately George spied Harry heading towards the Snitch and sent a Bludger at him. Fortunately for Harry the Bludger missed him, but sent the Snitch out of sight.

\*~\*

Rose excused herself when the score reached Cannons 120, Puddlemere 140 and made her way out of the stadium. She felt tired and although she was enjoying the match she needed some fresh air. She wandered out of the stand and sat down on a log. October had been an extremely difficult month for her, with finding James and Harry's wedding and she was now trying to put the pieces of her life together. She just needed to figure out where everybody fit. At least Ron had not changed in all of this. He was being really helpful and patient while she was trying to figure everything out. She rubbed her head with her hands as she thought about going back inside the stadium. She felt a hand grab her shoulder. She screamed as she turned around to tell the person off. Then a smelly, sticky hand was thrust across her mouth. She was surrounded by three wizards. She struggled and tried to yell.

'If you scream we'll kill you Mudblood,' one of them said pointing his wand at her. 'In fact I think I'll shut you up anyway.' Rose was shaking. '*Stupefy!*'

Suddenly she was frozen and being carried away from the stadium by these strange men. She longed to scream, to yell, to let someone know where she was. They would all be wondering where

she was. They would be worried about her. Ron would be distraught. Harry would be furious.  
*Where were they taking her?*

\*~\*

Harry was surveying the sky for the Snitch. So far there hadn't even been a glimmer of gold since George's Bludger sent it soaring out of the pitch. His opposite number had also ensured that Harry hadn't left his sight after the incident. He allowed his eyes to wander to the Chasers. Puddlemerehad started well, but with Ron's excellent keeping the Cannons were still in with a chance. He watched as Ron tossed the ball to Marcus Flint. Harry thought that he looked as if he were in pain as he tossed the Quaffle. It was a bad throw. Very unlike Flint. Ebony Fraser had intercepted it and was heading back towards Ron. Harry cast his eyes back to where Flint had been. His broomstick was still there hovering in the sky.

Harry looked on in horror as he watched Flint plummet to the ground. He instinctively pointed his broomstick towards the ground, as did Ron, allowing Ebony to sink the Quaffle. That was of no importance now as Flint's body slammed into the ground. He had been at least 500 metres in the air. *I wonder if wizard's can survive a fall that great?* Ron had reached the injured Chaser first. Harry watched as Ron bent over Flint, felt for a pulse and then slowly shook his head. Harry's gut wrenched. Flint was dead.

'Is there an Auror here?' Ron called. Harry remembered Ron telling him about Magical Law Enforcement protocols. An Auror must inspect a body before it can be taken to St Mungos. Harry watched as Hermione and Chrystal made their way towards them.

'Oh Harry is he alright?' Hermione asked as she grabbed Harry and held him close towards her.

'No,' Ron replied. 'He's dead.' Hermione went white.

'Are you sure?' she asked in a panicky voice.

'Yes,' he said assertively. Chrystal bent over the body and nodded.

'This game is over,' she said to the umpire. The umpire then magnified his voice and informed the crowd that the match was cancelled. The crowd became angry and began to yell and throw things at the people on ground. Chrystal looked towards Harry and Hermione.

'You two should leave now,' she said. 'It's just not safe for you to be hanging around.' Harry began to protest.

'You don't even know whether or not this was a Death Eater attack,' he pleaded.

'And we don't know that it wasn't,' she said firmly. Harry was about to protest again before Hermione suggested that it might not be such a bad idea. Harry reluctantly obliged and the pair disappeared.

\*~\*

No sooner than the pair had left an explosion occurred in the sky. Ron felt his heart sink as he looked in the sky and saw the Dark Mark. *Twice in three days. The Death Eaters are certainly letting people know they're around.* Ron still felt guilty about the few men who had died under his command on Saturday. And now he felt guilty about Marcus. He wasn't a bad chap when you got to know him. Sure he was a Slytherin, but he was a good Quidditch player and a fairly down-to-earth person when you got passed the slyness. The Cannon's coach, Tobias Whitnall made his way over toward Marcus' body. He spoke to Sirius and Chrystal briefly then instructed Ron to show them Marcus' locker. Ron lead them into the Cannons changing area, whispering to Sirius that he needed to talk to him.

'Later,' Sirius replied as they followed Ron into the rooms. Ron pointed to Marcus' locker, which Sirius managed to open only moments before it exploded in their faces.



'Well I guess whoever's responsible didn't want us to see what was in there,' Sirius said. 'We'd better get to the Ministry and let them know what's going on.'

'Hang on a minute,' Ron said glancing at them. 'Did Rose leave with Harry and Hermione?'

## **Chapter Eighteen Frustration and Impulsiveness**

Harry slammed his broomstick into the wall. It was all getting too much to take.

'Can't do this, can't do that,' he said in an agitated voice. 'What am I Hermione? A child? Is that what I look like?'

'Of course not Harry,' she said in her attempt at a soothing voice. 'They're just worried about you.'

'Aren't you sick of them treating you like a child?' he asked her. 'Honestly, we're married and having our first child and its go home. It's not safe. They might be after you.'

'They're just worried Harry,' she said again. 'They don't want you to get hurt.'

'I have to face Voldemort Hermione,' he said bitterly. 'Of course I'm going to bloody-well get hurt. I don't think he's going to stand there and say "Here I am Harry, come and kill me" do you?'

'Calm down Harry,' Hermione said placing her hand on his shoulder. 'They just want you to have the time to prepare yourself. You know, for what's to come.'

He looked at his wife intently. She had sounded nervous and anxious. He didn't care.

'Do you realise how Lavender's coping with this Hermione?' he said. 'She drinks herself to sleep. She tries to dull her gift so that she doesn't see the future. The future scares her Hermione. And as for Chrystal, she's wasting away.'

'Harry be reasonable. She's been sick,' Hermione said. 'And Lavender was always strange.'

'The world is not kind,' Harry said angrily. 'Voldemort rules our world and he is a cruel master.'

\*~\*

They had searched everywhere. There was not a single sign of her. Ron had never been so scared in his life. His heart thumped against his chest. *Where could she possibly be?* He glanced at the ground as a glimmer of gold caught his eye. He lent over to get a closer look at the shimmering. It was a chain. He picked it up and brushed the dirt off it. His heart sunk. It was Rose's. Her Muggle parents had given it to her for her birthday last May. They had wanted her to know that finding her real parents didn't mean that they were no longer there for her.

Ron felt a hand upon his shoulder. He turned his head to see Sirius behind him.

'That's Rose's isn't it?' he said. Ron couldn't speak. He slowly nodded his head. He knew what disappearing Muggle-borns meant. 'We'll go straight to the Ministry. Do you think you can apparate Ron?' Again Ron just nodded and following his acknowledgement they headed straight to the offices of Magical Law Enforcement.

Alastor Moody was there waiting for them.

'I heard about the Quidditch match MacLeod,' he growled the way only Moody could. 'I assume you're here to file a report. I just don't understand why you have brought the other two.'

'Rose Heaney is missing,' Sirius said.

'Oh' Moody said. 'One would assume she's Muggle-born, wouldn't they?'

The three nodded.

'Only a few of the Order know who she really is,' Sirius continued. 'You're one of the few people who do. You can understand the other reasons why we are concerned about her disappearance.' Sirius explained to Moody the circumstances surrounding her disappearance.

'I shall get some people working on it immediately,' Moody said.

'What do you want me to do?' Chrystal asked.

'You can go home and get some rest,' Moody said. Chrystal began to protest, but before Ron knew what was happening Moody had shoved a portkey into their hands and they were whirling towards Hogwarts.

\*~\*

Rose cowered in the corner of the room. She was having trouble breathing due to the smelly rag that was tightly bound around her face. Her wand had been stolen and her hands had been tied behind her back. Her face was dirty with tear streaks where she had been unable to wipe her tears away. She had never been so frightened before. She had heard Ron telling her about the Muggle-borns they had found on the weekend. She hoped that they weren't going to do that to her.

At long last the door opened. She could barely see who it was, but somehow she just knew who it was. The man was tall and thin. Somehow her instincts told her that this was Voldemort. She tried to gasp for air but it was difficult to breathe. She could feel her heart pounding against her chest wall and sweat running down her back. She could only think of one reason why he would possibly want her.

*He was going to use her as bait to get Harry!*

\*~\*

His parents had overheard his yelling and had dragged him into their rooms.

'Do you want everyone to know that you're hiding here?' James asked in a loud whisper when he had shut the door. 'Calm down Harry and let me know what has gotten you so worked up?'

Harry explained what had happened at the match and how he had practically been ordered to leave. Harry wasn't very impressed when his parents expressed the same sentiment as Hermione had. In fact they went a step further suggesting that perhaps he shouldn't be playing Quidditch at all. Harry was about to explode when Sirius, Chrystal and Ron came hurriedly in the room. *I guess this isn't good* he thought as he saw the look on their faces.

'Where's Rose?' Lily said immediately when she noticed who had returned.

'Sit down Lily,' Sirius said. Harry could see that he was nervous. His face always got sweaty when he was nervous. 'There's no easy way to tell you this but it appears that she may have been taken by Death Eaters.'

'What do you mean taken?' His mother's voice sounded almost hysterical. 'How could you let this happen?' she asked Chrystal.

'I'm sorry Lily,' Chrystal said softly. 'I should have kept a better eye on her. It's my entirely fault. I'm not fit to be a mother.'

Sirius ignored Lily's hysteria and Chrystal's confessions.

'Hermione, can you tell us what happened?' Sirius asked Hermione. Harry glanced over at her. He could see she was shaking.

'Well we were watching the game and Rose said she was going to the bathroom,' Hermione began. 'I asked her if she wanted me to come with her, but she said no. I think she just wanted a bit of fresh air. She left and then I guess everything happened with Marcus Flint and I just figured that she was with you.'

'Calm down Lily,' James said. 'It's clearly not their fault.' Harry felt his chest tighten as he glanced at his mother. She was in tears.

'We searched the stadium for her and there was no sign except for her necklace lying on the ground just outside. We've reported it to the Ministry,' Sirius continued. 'The only thing we can do now is wait. I'll go and speak to Dumbledore and we'll get some of the Order on it immediately. We're hoping that she's been taken because they think she's Muggle-born and not for another more sinister

reason.'

'You can wait if you want Sirius Black,' Chrystal said, 'but for now I'm going to keep looking for her.'

'I'm going to help you,' Harry said. 'We've got to find her.'

'No you're not,' Sirius and Hermione said at the same time.

'You're going to bed Chrystal,' Sirius said. 'You haven't completely recovered yet. You're still not very strong.'

'But it's my fault,' she said. 'I should have been keeping a better eye on her.'

'No it's not Chryssy,' James said. 'Rose is sixteen years old; she doesn't need someone to hold her hand every second of the day.'

'Come with me,' Sirius said as he picked up his protesting wife and carried her out of the room. 'Ron can you find Snape, tell him what has happened and ask him to give me a potion for dreamless sleep.'

Ron, looking slightly bewildered agreed before leaving the room, as the shouts of put me down gradually got softer.

'Well I am going to look for Rose,' Harry said. 'And you should all come with me. Anything could happen to her.'

Lily looked as if she were about to agree before James opened his mouth.

'As much as the thought of Rose being thrown into one of these Muggle-born camps is distressing, the thought of losing you both in as many days is worse,' he said. 'Harry, I know you feel frustrated but it's just not safe for you to be out there at the moment. I'd prefer you to be safe and I will hide you and Hermione myself if it means that you can't go searching for her.' Harry began to protest but his father interrupted. 'I'm sorry, but it's simply not safe.'

'You're father's right Harry,' Hermione said. That was not what he needed. He needed someone at least to be on his side, but it didn't appear that it was going to go that way. *How could he expect them to listen to him if his own wife wouldn't back him up?* 'Now I can force you to come to bed with me the way Sirius did to Chrys, or you can just come with me quietly and maybe we can be of some use in the morning.'

Harry begrudgingly followed Hermione. He did however notice that his mother had forgotten to hide them. That was somewhat pleasing to him. He stormed into their quarters and turned to Hermione.

'You didn't have to agree with them,' he said. She looked hurt.

'Yes I did Harry,' she said. 'If a Death Eater had seen you, you would have been of no use to Rose. And personally I prefer you alive.' She turned her back on him and walked into the bathroom. When she emerged she was clad in her nightgown, she got into bed ignoring Harry and turned the lights off.

\*~\*

He glanced carefully at the piece of paper.

*Character = reduction of birth date*

*Double that of the Founders; From Arithmancy text Founders triangle = 3, triangle therefore equals 6.*

*Hermione says first names = 5; but 3 is not a perfect triangle*

*Using full names Chrystal = 4, Harry = 5 and Lavender =6*

*This equals 15 which reduces to 6 = a perfect triangle.*

*Harry = 31<sup>st</sup> July 1980 = 31+7+1980 = 2018*

*Reduces to 11, reduces 2*

*Harry = 2*

*Lavender = 24<sup>th</sup> May 1980 = 24+5+1980 = 2009*

*Reduces to 11, reduces to 2*

*Lavender = 2*

*Chrystal = 10<sup>th</sup> November 196?*

*For a perfect triangle Chrystal must equal 2.*

He looked at his watch. It was the 9<sup>th</sup> of November. He wondered if Ginny knew how old Chrystal was turning, because if her number wasn't two; then her character was not the same as Harry's.

\*~\*

'Remove the gag,' the man whom she thought was Voldemort instructed. Rose felt a smelly young man come and remove the gag. She recognised him instantly; he was the man who had taken her earlier. He was a seventh year last year. He used to be one of Malfoy's friends. *Was it Crabbe or Goyle?* She couldn't remember but for some reason it seemed important to her to know her attacker. He undid the gag and placed his hand on her face. She immediately withdrew from him. He was revolting.

The thin man walked towards her. He appeared intimidating, but Rose was determined to try and keep her cool.

'Do you know who I am?' he asked.

'You're Voldemort,' she said shaking. *Not doing well so far Rose.*

'You do not fear to speak my name then young Mudblood?' he asked her, somewhat amused.

'Why should I?' she asked, still shaking. *Do not make him angry Rose.* 'Your father was a Muggle.'

'DO NOT MENTION MY FATHER, YOU MUDBLOOD,' he yelled. She began to shake in fear. She hadn't intended making Voldemort angry with her. At least he thought she was a Mudblood. He was not using her to get Harry. 'Have you worked out why you're here?'

'No,' she said. She honestly was clueless. She could not think of any possible use he would have for her if he didn't know her relationship to Harry.

'You will be somewhat useful to me,' he said snickering. 'But for now I'll leave you to work out the reason why. It's better for you to sit here wondering why I want you.' He turned and walked out the door. The man she thought was Crabbe or Goyle shoved something down her throat that felt as if it were scolding her throat. Then she felt her head spinning...

\*~\* 10<sup>th</sup> November \*~\*

An owl soared into the room and dropped off a copy of The Daily Prophet. Chrystal begrudgingly paid the owl before she threw the paper on the table. Hermione went over and picked it up.

'Oh my gosh,' she said staring at the front page. 'Harry have a look at this.'

'What is it Hermione?' Chrystal asked. 'It better not be the Prophet announcing how old I am.'

'It's about Rose.'

That comment brought both Harry and Chrystal over to read the paper.

## **Muggle-born spree ends.**

*The Muggle-born kidnapping spree ended last night with the disappearance of a young witch of wizarding parentage.*

*Rose Heaney, a sixteen-year-old Gryffindor student, disappeared from the Puddlemere United and Chudley Cannons Quidditch match, held at the Cannons home ground yesterday. Miss Heaney was one of the more prominent Hogwarts students. She is currently the Gryffindor Quidditch captain and has played the role of Chaser for the past three years. One must wonder, however why Miss Heaney was watching the Quidditch game in the first place. The usual protocol for students leaving school grounds for Quidditch matches has traditionally only been for students watching relatives play. This would not appear to be the reason Miss Heaney attended.*

'It raises questions indeed,' said Chrystal. 'Who would know that Rose wasn't Muggle-born, that would actually know that she was missing?'

'It means that people are going to start asking questions about her parents,' Hermione said. 'They're going to want to know why she was at the game yesterday.'

'That's easy,' Harry said. 'She was there to watch Ron.' Harry glanced over at his friend who was sitting in the corner. He was pale. Harry could see the worried look on his face.

'It's not that simple Harry,' Chrystal said. 'My dad played for the Prides and I was allowed to go and watch him play. But he was also like a father to Sirius. The only father Sirius from the age of ten. But he wasn't allowed to go and watch. And I wasn't allowed to go and watch Sirius play when I was in seventh year.'

'Sirius played Quidditch?' Harry said surprised.

'There were a lot of things Sirius did,' Chrystal said. 'Many of which he doesn't or can't do now. Quidditch was something Sirius really enjoyed. He can still fly and he remembers some of the moves as you would have seen at your seventeenth birthday but there's no way he could play competitively anymore. And he didn't really want to play without your father. They were a fabulous team on the pitch together.'

'Going back to who would have known that Rose wasn't Muggle-born,' Ron said. Everyone else in the room was quiet. Ron hadn't said a word since he had picked up Rose's necklace at the pitch last night. 'Well you asked,' he said when he saw the surprised look on their faces. 'She never lied about who she was. She was not ashamed of the fact that she had been adopted and she always said that she would find out about her parents. And then when she discovered who they were, she was a little more quiet about it. She was very confused. I know you told her not to tell anyone she was related to Harry Chrystal. As far as I know the only person that she actually told was Ginny and I think I can be fairly certain that Ginny did not tell anyone. But I'm fairly sure that anyone who knew her well would have noticed a change in her manner. I know you all did. If someone asked Rose if her parents were magical she wouldn't have lied. She would have told the truth without revealing who her parents were. That article is worrying. Because if she was taken because they thought she was Muggle-born they'll read that and start asking her who her parents are. She'll resist at first but eventually they will make her crack. They will break her.'

Ron was right. They all knew it.

'The question is how can we save her before it's too late,' Harry said.

'Well given that we're locked in this room without wands we come up with a strategy,' Ron said.

'For once Harry, they're not going to let you jump in head over heels without thinking first. I guess over the last eight years they've learnt what you're like.'

Harry agreed with Ron's suggestion and the four of them spent the afternoon considering the possibilities of where Rose could be and how they could rescue her.

\*~\*

Sirius entered the room late in the evening. Chrystal got stuck into him immediately.

'How could you leave us locked up here all day?' she asked. 'I've been going absolutely crazy.' She glanced at Harry. 'No offence meant you guys but it's my birthday and I've been confined to this stupid room.'

'None taken,' Hermione said. 'It's been nice to actually have some company for a change.'

'Well we think we know where she is,' Sirius began. 'Lily gave her a charm for her birthday that allows us to track her if she's missing. We've tracked her to a town in Ireland. In fact we know her exact location, we're just assessing the situation.'

'You couldn't tell us this last night?' Harry asked aggressively.

'We need caution and not haste Harry,' Sirius said.

'If you don't mind me asking Sirius, how do you know she isn't dead?' Ron asked.

'The reciprocal charm goes black,' Sirius explained. 'At the moment it's orange. That means that she's not safe, but that she's not in any immediate danger. It's if it turns red we have to worry.'

'And are we going to sit around and wait for it to turn red?' Harry asked.

'No,' Sirius replied bluntly. 'There are currently operatives working on it. We are keeping you out of it for other reasons. Given the Prophet this morning, I think it is important that you are not seen to be overly concerned about her.'

*That made sense.*

'But what about Ron?' Hermione asked.

'We've asked the media to leave Ron alone,' Sirius said. 'We've told them that Ron is upset and is unable to answer their questions.'

'Are they asking questions about who Rose is?' Hermione asked.

'Naturally,' Sirius replied. 'But as you would be aware only the members of The Covenant, as well as Moody and a few of the other operatives know who she really is. We don't think any of the members of The Covenant will talk.'

\*~\* *The next morning* \*~\*

Rose awoke feeling groggy. She was unsure how long she had been asleep but from the few rays of sun that had made it into the room she realised that it was daytime. Her arms were still tied behind her back, her back felt bruised, as did her stomach. She felt a huge pain run up her thigh as she stood up but besides her head hurting there was nothing else to worry about. She knew she had to get out of here. She tried to gather up some strength. She could possibly need every single bit of strength she could muster.

First things first she had to release her hands from the rope. That would be difficult. She concentrated with her mind and tried to snap the ropes. At first it didn't work, so she concentrated harder and harder until she heard the rope snap and felt her arms free. With the effort she collapsed on the ground. *Okay Rose, be strong and brave.* She breathed in deeply and stood up. The pain seared down her left thigh but she managed to steady herself. She glanced around the room again and ensured that she couldn't see anyone. She couldn't hear anyone either. She headed over towards the door. She tried to push it open. She was unsuccessful. It was locked. It shouldn't be too much of a problem. She concentrated hard and pointed her hands towards the lock.

'*Alohomora!*' she whispered. She breathed a sigh of relief when she heard the click of the lock. She cautiously pushed the door open and walked into the sunlight. It was so bright that it almost stung her eyes. She glanced around to make sure that there was nobody in sight and locked the door so

that no one would realise she was gone. Then she ran. She headed towards the surrounding woods and ran for her life.

*\*~\* The next day \*~\**

Harry sat down on the sofa in Chrystal and Sirius' rooms. He knew his parents would be here anytime. He knew what they were going to say. He had been waiting for it since Monday evening and now it was Thursday and he knew the time had come. Hermione had already suggested it. But to him the thought was unthinkable. He heard the door open and in walked his parents and the Blacks. In full force they were here to demand him to shatter his dreams.

'Hi Harry,' his father said. 'Listen son, we've been thinking that perhaps it's not a good idea for you to continue playing Quidditch.'

'It's just not safe,' Sirius added.

Harry looked at the four of them.

'I'm sick of this,' he said. 'I'm leaving.' Harry stood up and walked out of the room leaving the four of them behind him dumbfounded. He summoned his broom and went flew out the window of the tower heading for Hogsmeade. He didn't stop flying until he hit Weasley's Wizarding Wheezes.

He opened the door of the store he had only entered a few times since its establishment the year earlier hoping that he would run into Fred or George. He breathed a sigh of relief when he saw George and Katie at the counter.

'Hi George, hi Katie,' Harry said as if there were nothing wrong.

'Harry,' George said in reply. 'Why don't you come upstairs with me while Katie takes care of the store?' Katie nodded and Harry headed upstairs with George.

'Harry what are you doing here?' George asked when they reached the top of the staircase. 'Have you gone mad?'

'Listen George I had to get away from them,' Harry explained. 'They're driving me crazy with what I'm allowed to do and what I can't. I need somewhere to stay for a couple of days.'

'Have you and Hermione had a tiff?' George asked. 'Because I've heard pregnant women can be temperamental and if that's the case then you'd better make up with her.'

'It's not that George,' he said. 'I'm feeling stifled and it's not Hermione that's the problem. It's my parents and Sirius and Chrystal. They're too worried about me. I feel like I'm being wrapped up in cotton wool and they're trying to protect me from the big bad world. But in truth they can't. I have to face my destiny one day and them delaying it is not making life very easy for me at the moment.'

'Okay Harry,' George said. 'As long as it's not a problem with Hermione then I'm happy to help. It's probably not a good idea for you to stay here as Katie's still trying to make this place into a home but I'm sure you could stay with Fred.'

'Fred?' Harry asked. 'Isn't he still at The Burrow?'

George laughed.

'I forget that you aren't always up with the latest news and information,' George said. 'Fred got sick of living at home without me. He's moved in with Angelina. Mum's having kittens. She doesn't like it too much. Anyway Angelina's away for a few days, so I'm sure he wouldn't mind some company. Anyhow I'll fill you in on what's been going on while we wait for Fred. He shouldn't be more than a few hours and Katie's going to close up in an hour, so I'm sure she'd love to chat with you Harry.'

George explained to Harry what he hadn't been told about Marcus Flint.

'He went to see Chrystal on Saturday,' George began. 'He had received a letter telling him he had been recruited to the Dark Lord's service. He didn't want to conform and wanted advice, so he went



to Hogwarts to ask the Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher. Chrystal advised him to try the Fidelius Charm if he knew of someone with whom he could trust his life. On Monday he asked Ron to be his Secret Keeper before the Quidditch match. Ron agreed. But as you know Marcus didn't make the end of the game. And Rose disappeared. Sirius has asked to work on reasons why Rose was taken but so far we can't work it out unless he knew she's your sister.'

'That's just unthinkable because it means that he's using her as bait,' Harry said. 'Sirius knows where she is, did he tell you?' George shook his head.

'All I know is that this will lead us to her,' George said opening his hand to show Harry a bracelet. 'Ron acquired this and has gone to try and find her. Unfortunately the git left this behind. Shall we go and find her Harry?'

'Give me the bracelet,' Harry said. George handed it straight to Harry.

'I assume you know how to work it,' George said. 'Because I certainly don't. If I did, I would have gone and got her myself.'

Harry glanced at the bracelet. He knew his mother had enchanted them so that she could always find Rose, but he wasn't quite sure how. He pointed his wand at the bracelet.

'*Revalo Rose*,' he said. He stepped back and watched as a map appeared from the gem. Harry took one look at George before the both of them apparated to the location.

They found themselves in thick scrub.

'She should be somewhere here in the vicinity,' Harry said. 'Do you think it would be best if we called for her?'

George nodded and began calling for her. Harry did the same and started searching for his sister.

'Rose?' he called out. He called out again and again. Each time there was no response.

'Rose, are you there? It's Harry,' he called louder and louder until finally he heard a small voice call out his name. Harry ran toward the voice with George on his heels. Nothing else mattered. He ran so quickly that he almost tripped over Rose, who was lying on the ground. She had covered herself with leaves.

'Harry, thank goodness,' she said. 'I can't move, it's too painful.'

'What's too painful?' he asked as he brushed the leaves off her.

'My leg,' she replied. 'I don't know what happened to it, but I just know that when I woke up it hurt. And I got away and tried to run and the more I tried to run the more it hurt until finally I couldn't move anymore.' Harry looked down. His sister was in tears. Her clothes were tattered and torn and her leg was badly bruised. He got George to help him pick her up.

'Now the question is how are we going to get her home?' he asked George.

\*~\*

Hermione had been looking for Harry for the past hour and a half. She couldn't find him anywhere. She had just been to see Molly Weasley. Molly was a trained midwife and was more than happy to answer some of Hermione's questions. Hermione had found the afternoon just what she had needed after being confined to Hogwarts since Monday. She realised that they had made her stay because Harry had been acting irrationally; nevertheless she had found it frustrating. She would have liked to go and help look for Rose, but she understood the dangers a little better than her reckless husband.

Now she had been looking for Harry for over an hour she was seriously worried about where he could be. She thought that it was probably best to seek the advice of her elders. She wandered into Lily and James' rooms where she saw four adults in deep conversation.

'Hello Hermione,' Lily said. 'Did Molly ease your mind a little?'

'Yes thanks,' Hermione said. 'You haven't seen Harry perchance have you?'

The four of them exchanged looks.

'We suggested that Harry stop playing Quidditch,' James said. 'He didn't take it too well.'

'He stormed out,' Sirius added.

'Great,' Hermione said. 'And that's supposed to make me feel better is it?'

'We were just thinking about trying to find him, but he's very difficult to be found if he doesn't want to be,' James said.

'Well I can tell you that he will have headed straight for somewhere unpredictable,' Hermione said.

She heard a door slam and she heard Harry's voice calling out for Sirius. She felt a sigh of relief when she heard it. At least he was still at Hogwarts.

Sirius opened the door and Hermione was surprised to see Harry and George there with Rose in their arms.

'Rose,' Lily screamed with delight. 'Harry, how did you find her?'

'You didn't tell me you had lost your charm did you?' he said to his mother. Hermione watched as Lily glanced at her arm seeing that her bracelet wasn't there. George immediately handed it over to her.

'I'm sure you want to talk to Rose,' Harry said. 'But for now I think she needs to go to the hospital wing.' Harry handed his sister to his father and allowed his parents to take Rose to Madam Pomfrey. He glanced at Sirius who had a questioning look on his face. 'I'll explain what happened later. For now I need to talk to Hermione.' Sirius nodded and Hermione followed her husband towards their quarters.

'I understand your intentions Harry, but do you think that was a wise thing to do?' she asked.

'No,' he said. 'I was angry and I reacted. I was feeling frustrated being couped up here and had to get out. I went to see the twins. George had the bracelet. Ron had taken it to try and find Rose and had left it behind. I acted on the moment. The gem was yellow so I figured that it was fairly safe to try and find her. She's really been hurt Hermione. She couldn't walk anymore because it was just too painful.'

'I do understand Harry,' she said. 'But you're just so impulsive. I just don't want you hurt.'

'I understand Hermione,' he said. 'But I can't give up Quidditch. I need to do something with my life. Give me your hand.' She gave her hand to Harry immediately. 'I swear to you Hermione that if I no longer have protection from the Animagus charm I will go into complete hiding. I love you and don't want you to be hurt.'

Tears welled in her eyes.

'Thank you Harry,' she said.

*\*~\* 19<sup>th</sup> November \*~\**

She woke up again in the middle of the night. The nightmares had woken every night for the past week. As nice as everyone had been to her when she was found, as much as her parents had smothered her with love, she couldn't shake the thought that there was something she couldn't remember.

In her dreams she saw herself beaten. Every time it was by the boy Crabbe or Goyleor whatever his name was. He could see the bruises forming on her body. The thought of why she had been taken tormented her dreams.

*\*~\* 25<sup>th</sup> November \*~\**

Chrystal cautiously knocked on the door and was relieved that when it opened that only Lily was there.

'Do have a few minutes?' she asked.

'I was just about to have a cup of tea,' Lily replied. 'Do you want to join me?'

Chrystal nodded and sat down on the couch.

'Have you noticed the way Harry's been acting lately?' she asked.

'If you mean his frustrated manner then the answer is a loud yes,' Lily replied as she brought over the teapot and sat it on the coffee table. 'He's clearly not coping too well and I don't think Hermione's doing much better.'

'Did Sirius and I do the wrong thing by advising them to go into hiding?' she asked.

'I would have done the same thing,' Lily said. 'It's really the only advice you can give in that kind of situation. It was the advice we were given and if Peter had been trustworthy then we wouldn't have had a problem. We're lucky you were looking out for us.'

'Yes, but you and James had been married a while before you went into hiding,' she said. 'Your relationship was different to Harry and Hermione's. I think they're struggling to be so isolated which given Harry's childhood is surprising.'

'Hermione's got it harder,' Lily said. 'She barely gets out at all and when she does it's only for appearances. I think that's the reason she wanted to have a baby. So that she wasn't so lonely.'

'That's not a good reason,' she said pondering the thought. Sirius wanted to have a child so that he would have a piece of her if she died. Personally she thought that wasn't such a good reason either yet she had agreed to it.

'Neither is my son marrying her because of it,' Lily said breaking Chrystal's train of thought. 'And I suspect that is why he has. They may have known each other for over seven years but you learn a lot about each other in the first couple of months of marriage. And Harry and Hermione are with each other almost twenty-four hours a day. It's a huge demand on anybody. I know for certain James wouldn't have been able to cope the last month if we had been forced to go into hiding again. It's difficult for him to have so much human contact as it is after being isolated for so long.'

'How are things going there?' she asked.

'Slowly and steadily,' Lily replied. 'This may sound awful but we're still getting to know each other again. James has had an awful lot to deal with on top of what's happened with Rose. And the incessant questions about who her parents are. To be honest I'm not sure how much longer she can take it.' She looked at the photo of Harry and Rose on her coffee table. It was at Chrystal's wedding. They both looked so happy. So much had changed. 'Do you have a solution to Harry's predicament? Because I know my son is suffering.'

'They could stay at Dunvegan,' she said. 'Before you can comment, hear me out. First of all the Dunvegan Christmas Ball is happening this year and as Harry is Sirius' godson he will be expected to be there. But do you remember that I told you, that you should always ask me before you came to visit me at Dunvegan?' Lily nodded as she picked up her teacup. 'Well that was due to the wards of the castle. I don't if you've heard the rumours about my fairy relative?'

'Rumours of a fairy relative?' Lily said in a disbelieving voice almost dropping her teacup.

'Well I am yet to form an opinion,' she continued. 'You have seen the fairy flag no doubt?' Lily once again nodded. 'One of my father's favourite heirlooms. Anyhow it has been rumoured that one of my distant relatives married a fairy. The legends say that she was very superstitious about visitors and placed these wards on Dunvegan as a precaution from unwanted guests using fairy magic. As a

result only her direct descendents can allow people to enter the grounds of Dunvegan, and only if they've been allowed using an incarnation.'

'But Sirius can come and go as he pleases,' Lily said.

'Well some people can have a permanent invitation,' she explained. 'Sirius, Heather and Maddie can come and go as they please. But they're the only ones with a permanent invitation. So if Harry and Hermione were to stay there, it would be impossible for people to just drop in on them unexpectedly.'

'Ah, I see,' Lily said. 'And they would have your father for company.'

'My father doesn't have too many guests,' she said. 'And all of them are trustworthy. Heather and Maddie would be there occasionally. Sirius and I drop in quite frequently, and it could be arranged that you and James could be allowed to enter whenever you liked.'

'But how safe is it?' Lily asked. 'For them to come and go as they please.'

'As long as they are protected using the Animagus charm it seems almost ridiculous for them to remain hidden as they are,' she said. 'Hermione really needs a midwife's advice, she has no idea what she's going through and Molly Weasley would be the perfect one, especially as Hermione knows her well. And if we keep Harry caged up the way we have been, sooner or later it's going to backfire. What do you think?'

'Lets ask them,' Lily said. 'It sounds reasonable enough.'

They took a deep breath in and headed for Harry and Hermione's rooms.

\*~\*

'*Revalo*,' Harry heard as he turned around. His mother and Chrystal had entered the room.

'What do you want now?' he asked somewhat cautiously.

'Got time to have a chat?' his mother asked. Harry nodded and invited them to sit down. Ever since they had suggested that it may not be safe for him to play Quidditch he'd been very reluctant to take their advice.

'We've got an idea for you,' Chrystal said. 'How would you like a little more freedom?'

Harry was completely taken aback.

'What do you mean?' he asked.

'What if there was another option for you than being under the Fidelius? His mother said.

'At the moment I'd jump on it straight away,' he said.

'Well you might want to talk to Hermione about it first,' Chrystal said. Harry doubted that. She would probably over analyse it and be worried about their safety.

'Now we're still not that keen on you continuing to play Quidditch, but that has to be your decision,' Lily said. 'But I also realise that it has been frustrating for both you and Hermione being so isolated from everyone else. So we have a suggestion.'

'Dunvegan is protected my extremely strong wards,' Chrystal said. 'It's impossible to go there unless you've been invited by either me or my father. Then Sirius and his family can come and go when they please. But that's it; no one else can come onto the protected grounds without an invitation. And as far as I am aware this spell has not been broken since it was cast. It's fairy magic.'

'The idea would be that you and Hermione receive a permanent invitation so that you can come and go as you choose,' his mother said. 'Then people can drop in and see you, and you can have a bit more freedom. Additionally you can come and go without having to bother me or get frustrated at me when I won't allow you to do things. Hermione could have Dunvegan's library at her disposal

and could go and see Molly at anytime if she's worried about the baby. She's with Molly at the moment isn't she?"

'That's what she told me,' Harry said.

'You didn't want to go with her?' Chrystal asked with surprise.

'I got the distinct impression that she didn't want me to come,' Harry replied. He watched as the two women raised their eyebrows at each other. 'Do you think we will be safe there?'

'I believe so,' Chrystal said. 'Why don't you talk to your father and Sirius, or even Dumbledore? Let us know in a few days when you and Hermione have talked about it.'

Harry nodded before asking them to leave. Harry knew he had been rash and had jumped into things. He hadn't tried to think about the full consequences of his actions. Now they were becoming apparent. The constant threat hanging over their heads was one thing. Harry knew he could deal with that, but it was the monotony of being with Hermione all the time except when he played Quidditch that was getting to him. He loved her but it was too difficult to be with her all the time and with no other company than his parents. He missed his friends and his freedom. He needed them back. He had already made his decision and he didn't care if it had been made with haste.

## **Chapter Nineteen A New Leaf For Christmas**

Given time to think about it while he was waiting for Hermione to return home, Harry thought that perhaps it would be best for him not to rush anything. Hermione had not been very happy when it came to Harry's impulsiveness in the past month. In fact she had been furious about it. After he had run off and found Rose she hadn't spoken to him for a day. He realised that he had probably deserved it. Nonetheless it had hurt.

His mother had suggested that he talk to his father or to Sirius about it, but Harry felt that he needed some more objective advice. The four of them had appeared to present almost an unmovable front. The big question was who should he talk to about it? He thought about it for a while. The answer was obvious. He should talk to Dumbledore.

Immediately he left his quarters and headed straight for Dumbledore's office. He knew the password, "Raspberry frogs," as Dumbledore had told him a few weeks earlier. He sat down in front of Dumbledore's desk and waited for him to arrive.

He was not kept waiting long. Dumbledore entered his office not long after Harry had sat down. He did not seem surprised to see Harry there.

'You've come for my advice, have you not Harry?' said Dumbledore.

'Yes sir,' Harry said. 'I have been given quite a few pieces of mind lately and I'm not sure whose advice is the best to follow.'

'Well I can only offer my advice Harry,' said Dumbledore. 'I will not however try and force you to take it.'

'Well they want me to stop playing Quidditch,' he said. 'After what happened with Flint and with Rose they don't think it's safe. Even with the Animagus charm.'

'And what do you think Harry?' Dumbledore asked him.

'It's the only thing I look forward to at the moment,' he said.

'I see the dilemma,' said Dumbledore knowingly. 'What else is there?'

'The Fidelius Charm,' replied Harry. 'I'm feeling confined, as if I don't have any freedom. Hermione is feeling lonely and I hope she's not beginning to resent me. Mum suggested we go and stay at Dunvegan. I think they realise how frustrating it is.'

'Do you think Dunvegan is safe Harry?' asked Dumbledore.

'I wanted your advice on that,' he replied.

'The wards around Dunvegan are strong,' began Dumbledore. 'I knew Chrystal's grandfather very well, as do I know Alasdair and Chrystal. As far as I am aware no one has ever been able to break them. I know people have tried and failed.'

'Can I trust Alasdair?' asked Harry somewhat guiltily.

'Don't be ashamed of that question Harry,' said Dumbledore. 'It is quite a reasonable question for you to ask in this situation, after all if you accept the offer you may be putting your life in his hands.' He winked at Harry. 'I've known Alasdair for all of his life and as far as I am concerned he is one of the most trustworthy wizards out there. He was deeply involved with the order during Voldemort's first reign and could always be depended on.'

'I just feel so restricted,' Harry said. 'I don't feel like I'm living anymore. I'm merely existing.'

'What's the point in living if one is not living, eh Harry?' asked Dumbledore. Harry looked up in surprise. 'It is a terrible burden you have to bear Harry. Knowing you must face Voldemort. May I offer some advice?'

'I've come here for advice,' replied Harry. 'Why do you ask if I mind?'

'I thought it appropriate,' said Dumbledore. 'When Grindelwald was in power, I knew that it was I who would have to face him. He knew it too somehow. My story is not unlike yours Harry. You see just as Voldemort stole your family, Grindelwald stole mine.'

Harry didn't know what to say.

'I'm sorry sir,' he said softly.

'Don't be Harry,' said Dumbledore. 'It was in the thirties, when Hitler was beginning to reap havoc in the Muggle world and Grindelwald was controlling the wizarding world. I had fallen in love with an amazing witch. She was intelligent and beautiful. We were expecting our first child when Grindelwald took her. He would send me small notes from her every now and again, just so I would know that she was alive. Grindelwald knew that the agony for me would not be knowing that she was dead, merely knowing that she was existing without me. He was right. And when I finally hunted him down, he killed my beautiful wife in front of me. As for my child, my daughter, he had sent her off to live elsewhere. I never found out where and although I have searched for her for years I have never been able to find a trace of her. The only thing he told me was that she was a Squib. The reason I'm telling you this Harry is because I can sympathise with you Harry. I know what you're going through and am here to listen at anytime you need to. Remember Harry, you are not alone.'

'Thank you sir,' he said standing up to leave the room. Dumbledore had forever seemed like the ultimate. The unbeatable. But Harry could see that although he had defeated Grindelwald, Grindelwald had defeated him too.

He slowly made his way down the staircase towards the staff quarters. He knew that he had to get out of this situation and he had to do it soon before he did something stupid. Something that he would regret for the rest of his life. He opened the door to their quarters. Hermione was waiting for him. She did not look very impressed.

'Where have you been Harry?' she asked. Her voice was heated and she did not seem to be in the mood to listen to his explanations. 'I've been waiting for you for about half an hour now and I've been worried sick about you. Why do you have to keep putting yourself at risk so much? It's completely unnecessary.'

'I was talking with Dumbledore,' said Harry defending himself. 'I wanted some counsel. How are the Weasleys?'

'Everything's fine at The Burrow,' she said. 'Don't change the subject. Why were you with Dumbledore?'

'I was asking his advice,' said Harry. 'We've been given an offer of a change. I wanted his advice.'

'An offer of a change?' she asked. 'And you talked to Dumbledore about it before you spoke to me? Do I even matter to you Harry?'

'Of course you do,' he said angrily. 'That's why I was talking to Dumbledore. I didn't want to get your hopes up if it was a bad idea.'

'You still haven't told me what this offer is,' said Hermione.

'Well it releases us from the Fidelius for starters,' he said.

'Don't even think about it Harry,' said Hermione. 'Don't even think about it.'

Harry turned around and stormed out of the room. He wondered how everything had gone so wrong. He loved her and cared about her so much that it hurt him to see her so angry with him. However it seemed that whenever Harry tried to do something to better their relationship, lately she always seemed to jump down his throat. He knew they had to get out this situation. He had to

convince her.

\*~\*

It took some time and some long and heated discussions before Harry convinced Hermione they should relocate to Dunvegan and remove themselves for the Fidelius. In the end it had been Dumbledore's comment about living had sealed it for both of them. They needed to feel safe however at the same time they both needed to live. They decided that they would remain at Hogwarts until Chrystal and Sirius headed to Dunvegan for Christmas. As a result Harry was much happier and Hermione seemed to be slightly friendlier. He was counting the days.

One day however, a week before they were due to leave, Harry was preparing for Quidditch practice. He needed his mother to reveal him before he could leave and hence had headed towards her quarters. He overheard voices as he reached to door.

'What do you mean you want me to brew a sterilisation potion for you?' he heard his mother ask.

'Because I'm not fit to be a mother,' the answer came. It was from Chrys.

'Are you sure you're not rushing into this?' his mother said. 'I can brew you some Sterlis and if you still feel the same way in a year then I can make it for you.'

'No I want to do it now,' replied Chrys. 'When we go to Dunvegan we're going to bury the child and I want to put an end to it there.'

'You realise that it's permanent don't you Chrys,' his mother said. 'Irreversible?'

'Of course I do Lily,' she replied somewhat hastily.

'I'll do it but I'm not happy about it,' his mother replied.

Harry got the feeling he should make himself scarce. He headed back to his quarters and waited for his mother to come to him. He didn't comment on her flustered nature or the conversation he had overheard. One thing was for sure, he agreed with his mother and he didn't want to know what Sirius would have to say when he found out.

\*~\*

The weekend before the Christmas break Sirius and Chrystal made a special trip to the Dunvegan cemetery.

They had come to bury their child.

Madam Pomfrey had placed the child in a sealed coffin so that neither of them could see it. Yet it was important to both of them that they got a chance to bury their child. It was a cold day and snow had begun to fall. It was just the two of them. Sirius was about to lower the coffin into the hole that they had dug together when Chrystal interrupted him.

'Hold on a minute *mo cridhe*,' she said. 'The child needs a name. I can't have my child's gravestone saying Baby Black.'

Sirius looked at his wife whose eyes were welling with tears. He hadn't seen her cry that often. It always touched his heart when she did.

'Poppy didn't know if it was a boy or girl,' he said.

'What about a neutral name then?' She sounded desperate. Sirius understood her need for a name, so that she could grieve properly. Sirius thought hard.

'My aunt's middle name was Ainsley,' he said. 'It's both a male and female name. It means my own meadow.'

'Ainsley,' she said. 'I like that. How do you spell it?'

'Well for a boy it's A-I-N-S-L-I-E or boy a girl it's A-I-N-S-L-E-Y,' he replied. 'But I think you can



spell a girl's name with the I-E.'

'Let's spell it with the I-E then,' she said. Sirius lowered the coffin into the ground and then the two of them quietly shovelled the dirt on top of it. Sirius felt his heart breaking with each shovel full. He saw the tears in his wife's eyes as they packed the dirt on top of the coffin. When they had finished he engraved the stone with the inscription;

*Ainslie Black.*

*October 1998*

*Victim of the Cruciatius.*

When the job was done the two of them silently made their way up to the castle to grieve. Sirius placed his hands on Chrys' shoulders to comfort her however she pushed them away. He felt alone.

\*~\*

The week before Christmas arrived, meaning the time had come for Harry and Hermione to relocate to Dunvegan. They had met with Alasdair MacLeod several times before they moved. He had shown them the extent of Dunvegan, where the wards would protect them and where their rooms would be. He had been quite generous giving them half a floor of the castle. When Harry had commented on his generosity, he had laughed it off saying that he would welcome some young people in the castle again.

It really didn't take them that long to move their belongings. Hermione had a large number of books that were heavy and required Ron's assistance, but apart from that there wasn't much else. Ron assisted them with the move and then told them that he would see them at the Dunvegan Ball. Harry was slightly disappointed that neither he nor Rose would be spending Christmas morning with them, but Rose wanted to spend the morning with her adoptive parents before she went to the Burrow for lunch and Ron knew that he would be in a lot of trouble if he didn't at least make an effort to spend some of Christmas with his family. Mrs Weasley had been acting a little strangely since Fred had moved in with Angelina, but Ron put it down to her just being old-fashioned. He was confident that she's get used to it eventually.

So Christmas day arrived and Harry woke Hermione with a gentle peck on her cheek. She smiled as she rolled over and saw him.

'Why don't you come and see what Father Christmas brought you my love?' he said softly into her ear.

'That tickles Harry,' she said with a giggle that was Hermione's alone.

\*~\*

Christmas day sped by quickly. Soon enough Chrystal was soaking herself in the bathtub to prepare for the evenings festivities. The entire day itself had been quite painful. The Blacks and her father were trying to avoid the topic of her miscarriage. Alec's usual quips about Sirius being childless were distinctly absent; no one had commented on Hermione's condition and Chrystal saw the pained expression on her father's face with each glance at Madeleine's three beautiful children. Personally Chrystal had had enough of people telling her how sorry they were. It wasn't their fault; Chrystal knew it was hers for taking such a risk.

Chrystal sighed as she dried herself with a towel. She glanced at the medieval blue dress lying on the bed. It had been her mothers. There was no way she'd have ever fitted into it before the miscarriage. But she had lost so much weight in the past two months that her father had commented. She pulled the dress over her head and then rang a little bell for Heather's maid to come and tighten the laces. The maid was quick to arrive and got to work straight away. Chrystal let out a deep breath as she began to tighten the laces. It hurt, but she did not protest. With each tug the dress got tighter and tighter and Chrystal felt as though she was drowning. Then it was over and the

maid was instructing her to sit so that she could have her hair fixed.

After the maid left she glanced at her [reflection](#). *So much skinnier, so much paler. How could she have changed so much in six months?* She took in as deep a breath as the corset would allow before heading down the grand staircase.

Her father was waiting for her at the bottom.

'You look stunning,' he said.

'Now I know you really are a crazy old man,' she replied. 'And you're biased.'

'I'm supposed to be,' he said taking her arm and leading her to the entrance hall where Sirius was waiting for them in his dress kilt. They would stand there and welcome their guests for the next couple of hours.

As the guests flowed through there were a lot of older people that Chrystal recognised although she could not remember their names. Many of her father and Iain Black's friends were there. She shuddered as she always did when she thought of Sirius' father. He had been one of Voldemort's first victims. One that had hit her world hard. At the age of nine she had learnt about loss. Now at the age of thirty-seven she didn't think she had learnt to cope any better.

A familiar face walked in and snapped Chrystal out of her dream world. She was glad to see Meghan McCormack. Ten years younger, Meghan was the daughter of the Pride's famous Chaser and coach Catriona McCormack and Meghan and Chrystal had spent a lot of time together. To Chrystal, Meghan was like her younger sister. However Chrystal's face went pale when she saw who was with her.

'This is Tadgh Moran,' Meghan said introducing her partner. 'One of the Irish Chasers. He plays for Puddlemere.' The dark-haired man at Meghan's side smiled in an unnerving manner.

'Yes Chrystal and I have already met,' he said as he shook hands with Sirius. 'Chrys here dumped me for an escaped convict. I see it was worth it my dear.' He moved to shake hands with Alasdair. 'Nice to see you again Alasdair. Save me a waltz Chrystal,' he said as he headed towards the ballroom with Meghan on his arm. Sirius gave her a look but said nothing. Suddenly she felt as if she couldn't breathe. She excused herself and headed into the garden. *When had Tadgh become so sarcastic? And when had Meghan begun seeing him of all people?* Chrystal thought about the last time she had spoken to him.

It had been in the week after Sirius had escaped from Azkaban. She had not been into the office since Arthur Weasley had sent her home. In fact she had spent most of her time between Black Manor and her own small place in Portree hoping against the odds that Sirius would turn up. She had been devastated when she hadn't seen or heard from him, but she kept telling herself that she was only getting what she deserved. Additionally she had lied to Tadgh. She had told him that she had to help search for Sirius, when the real truth was she was extremely confused. After a week of waiting in anticipation she knew that she could no longer in good conscience continue a relationship with Tadgh. She owed him the truth. She apparated to his place in Ireland and told him the whole story about Sirius and then walked out of his life. She had never made any attempt to contact him since.

It was time to face the music. She didn't realise until that moment that she hadn't even told Sirius. After all it was only a short fling that went nowhere, but he deserved the truth. She took a deep breath in and went inside looking for Sirius. She couldn't see a sign of him. She did however catch sight of Sarah Fraser who beckoned her over.

Sarah Fraser was a dark-haired, medium sized woman. She had been in the year above Chrys at Hogwarts and very good friends with Lily. Chrys knew her quite well as she had been on the Gryffindor Quidditch team, although she hadn't seen her for quite a while. Actually if she were honest she hadn't seen her since the Potter's funeral.

'Sarah, it's been too long,' said Chrystal somewhat sincerely.

'Thank you for inviting us Chrystal,' she said. 'Do you remember John? He's my husband.' Chrys looked over to see John McDonald standing there. John had been a seventh year when Chrys was a first year. He had played for the Appleby Arrows as a Beater.

'I hadn't heard that you two were married,' said Chrys. 'However I do remember John. He's the guy who wouldn't let me on the Quidditch team in first year.' She realised now why Natalie McDonald had seemed so familiar. She had a lot of Sarah in her. 'John, are still around at Appleby?'

'Coaching the Beaters,' he replied. 'Doing a similar job to your old man.' They exchanged niceties for a few moments before Sarah indicated she wanted to be alone with Chrys for a few minutes. She led her out to the garden.

'How's Harry?' Sarah asked.

'You presume a lot Sarah,' replied Chrys.

'Well you are married to Sirius Black,' replied Sarah. 'And on top of being one of the most handsome men from Hogwarts I also believe he is Harry's godfather is he not?' Chrys laughed.

'We couldn't keep that one out of the papers,' she said. 'He's okay. His wife's pregnant actually. I think it's quite challenging for him.'

'His wife?' asked Sarah inquisitively.

'Hermione Granger, Head Girl last year' Chrys replied. 'I guess we kept that one quiet then.'

'Ah,' said Sarah. 'That's surprising given how much the press jumped on his during the European Cup. I actually feel quite sorry for him. It's not what Lily would have wanted. It's such a pity for Harry that they died so young and that he was left all alone.' Chrys bit her lip to keep from saying anything. Unfortunately Sarah noticed. 'What did I say Chryssy?'

'Nothing,' she replied quickly.

'You're not holding anything back are you?' asked Sarah. 'Lily was a good friend of mine as well you know.'

'Sarah, Harry is fine,' she said. 'I promise. I should probably go and locate my husband. Make sure he's not enjoying the party too much.' Sarah laughed, but given Sirius' reputation when they were at Hogwarts Chrystal was not entirely joking. She glanced around the ballroom unable to find him. She hoped that he was helping her father. She did however spy Severus doing his best to try and look inconspicuous. Chrys was happy that he had decided to come. She felt that he was almost too isolated. Also she thought the more members of the Covenant present the better. She headed towards him trying to think of the perfect person to introduce him to.

'Severus,' she said with a smile. 'I'm so glad you could make it. I've got someone here I think you should meet.' She took hold of his hand and led him over towards the McLachlans where Terri was standing on the fringe. Chrys caught Terri's eye and beckoned her to come over.

'Terri this is Severus,' she said. 'He's the Hogwarts potions professor. Terri was the jockey who did the work in the Shetlands for us.'

'I know Miss Hamber,' he said with a smile. 'She wasn't exactly the most attentive potions student, but I did hear that she excelled in Charms.' Chrys felt stupid. Of course Snape would have taught her. Snape had been at Hogwarts for years. She felt relieved when Terri spoke.

'Well I'm the first to admit that I went with my strengths,' she said. To Chrys' surprise Severus laughed. She remained with them for a few more minutes until the awkwardness passed. She then went to find Sirius. She sincerely hoped that he hadn't been listening to idle gossip. At last she spied him walking towards her.

'Your father wants to start now,' he said. His tone was cold and harsh. Her heart sunk. The past is never easy to explain.

\*~\*

Harry had only just made his way downstairs. He knew that it was going to take some time for everyone to arrive. He also knew that he would be expected to be there. As he descended the stairs he spied Hermione in the entrance to the ballroom standing underneath the mistletoe. The ballroom was extravagantly decorated with lots of greenery and Christmas decorations. He headed straight towards her and embraced her from behind. She jumped initially but smiled when she saw him.

'Welcome everyone.'

Harry heard Alasdair's voice boom from the ballroom. He led Hermione in. He saw Alasdair standing there with Chrys and Sirius at his side.

'Welcome to Dunvegan everyone,' he said once again. 'On behalf of my daughter Chrystal Black and myself, I'd like to wish you all a wonderful Christmas. Now I believe it is time for the dancing to begin.' He clapped his hands twice and the string quartet began to play.

Harry offered his hand to Hermione remembering that it was only a year ago since he had first kissed her beneath the mistletoe at Hogwarts.

'What are you thinking about Harry?' she asked with a smile. It was amazing how much their relationship had improved in the week since they had come to Dunvegan.

'I was thinking about last Christmas,' Harry said. 'But we can talk about that later. Why don't you tell me what's been happening while I've been dawdling.'

'Okay,' said Hermione with a smile. 'Over there,' she pointed towards Snape, 'Snape was been talking to that jockey of the McLachlan's for over an hour. His mother's over there,' she said pointing to a group of older women. 'Apparently she was friends with Chrystal's mother. She's already tried to offer Chrys advice and has been turned down. And speaking of Chrys did you know she dated that Puddlemere Chaser? The Irish one? Because apparently Sirius didn't and he's not too happy about it.'

'Really?' asked Harry. Tadgh didn't exactly seem the type of person to date Chrystal, or maybe she didn't seem the type to date him. There was just something funny about him that Harry didn't like.

'Apparently,' Hermione said. 'Anyway, all night people have been asking Rose who her parents are. So far she's been able to keep it quiet, but I feel sorry for her because she's been absolutely bombarded.'

The waltz ended. Harry had spied his sister and told Hermione that he was going to dance with her. He took her hand and led her out onto the dance floor.

'How's it going?' he asked.

'I've had better days,' she said with a smile. 'Happy Christmas by the way. They'll give up eventually when they realise that I'm not going to tell them.'

'Are you still having nightmares?' he asked gently.

'Only sometimes,' she replied. 'I feel better now that Crabbe's in Azkaban.'

Harry shook his head. Crabbe had been so stupid as to not go into hiding when Rose had escaped. He obviously didn't think that she would recognise him and even if she did that she would identify him.

'Have you worked out why he wanted you?' he asked.

'No,' she replied. 'I have no idea. It certainly wasn't because of you.' She stopped talking and there was a moment of awkward silence between the two. 'Why don't we go and get a drink?'

Harry could tell she wanted to change the subject so quietly agreed. Harry was more than a little worried when it came to his sister. She had said little about what had happened while she'd been kidnapped. She didn't even want to press charges until Ron had pushed her to. She didn't look like the happy girl that Harry recalled. She seemed to be wasting away and Harry didn't know what to do.

While they were sitting enjoying their drinks they were approached by a brown-haired woman. Harry thought she looked vaguely familiar.

'Hello Harry,' she said. 'I'm Sarah Fraser; I was at Hogwarts with your mother and father.' Harry must have recognised her from one of the photos of his parents and their friends. Harry saw the woman glance very carefully at Rose. 'You're Rose Heaney aren't you?' Rose nodded. 'Natalie's told me about you. Good Quidditch player.' She continued to speak to Harry. 'I just wanted to see how you're going and let you know that if you ever need anyone to talk to I'll be there. Your mother was a wonderful person.' She said goodbye and left them to it.

'Seems I've got loads of well-wishers,' he said. 'But she was rather abrupt.'

'I just don't like the way she was staring at me,' Rose said. 'It was like something was wrong with me.'

'I wouldn't worry about it,' said Harry. 'I'd say it was probably because of that article. Who do you think she meant when she said Natalie.'

'I only know one Natalie,' said Rose. 'That's Natalie McDonald. You know in fifth year.'

'That's right, she was going out with Neville a while back,' said Harry. 'Speaking of which I should probably catch up with him sometime.'

Hermione and Ron made their way over to find out what was going on. Hermione pointed out that Snape was still talking to Terri. Everyone had a laugh at the thought of Snape finding true love.

Harry was surprised at how quickly the night evolved. Before he knew it the majority of the guests were leaving. Ron was more than a little giggly and Hermione seemed so young. It was amazing what getting out of hiding had done for her. That and the small bulge that was beginning to show. Harry felt a surge of pride every time he saw it. He glanced over at his wife again.

But what was behind her was disturbing. He saw Tadgh carrying Chrys upstairs. Harry knew that she had a fair bit to drink that night but didn't think she was that drunk. He kept his eyes on the stairs and was silently relieved when he saw Tadgh come down them five minutes later. He walked over to Hermione and whispered in her ear that it was time to leave. She giggled as he led her upstairs.

'See you in the morning Ron,' he said with a smile on his face.

\*~\*

Harry awoke peacefully the next morning. Despite the events of last night he was looking forward to the special party Chrys had organised for them and his parents today. No one had quite worked out yet how to tell Alasdair MacLeod that the Potter's were alive. Somehow it seemed both necessary and extremely unnecessary. Nevertheless Alasdair and Heather Black were going to do the rounds of the Dunvegan tenants and the house would be free for Lily and James to be seen without danger.

He noticed Hermione was already awake, so he quickly went and had a shower before heading downstairs. He headed straight for the dining room and was surprised to see that everyone else had beaten him there. His parents came over and embraced him, wishing him a Happy Christmas and Ron just made cracks about him being a sleepy head.

'Gosh Ron,' replied Harry. 'Anyone would think you were still only thirteen?'

'Just enjoying my youth,' replied Ron casually. 'Never know when I'm going to have to act all grown up.' Ron had received a promotion as a result of his part in the rescue mission. Harry couldn't help but feel a little envious of Ron's good fortune. He was happy for his friend, but at the same time he was trying to get his life back on track.

They all sat down at the table and enjoyed a long leisurely breakfast before migrating to the family room. The Christmas tree was still sitting there in the corner and presents had appeared there over night. Sirius cleared his voice once everyone had settled.

'When I was at Hogwarts, all those years ago we had a Christmas tradition,' he said. 'I would play Father Christmas and hand out everyone's gifts. It made for some entertaining times in Gryffindor Tower let me tell you that. Anyway I would like to continue that tradition today. So if you don't mind.' He pulled out his wand and began summoning gifts. Present boxes were heading in all directions and didn't stop flying through the air until everyone had a gift in their hand. Harry glanced down at his gift. It was from his parents. He felt it carefully. It was soft. That meant it wasn't a book. He opened it to reveal brand new dress robes. They were black with a navy blue trim. He glanced at them very carefully and discovered that they were Puddlemere dress robes. Perfect.

'Fantastic,' he said. 'You saved me the trouble of buying them myself.'

His parents smiled.

'Glad you like them,' his father said with a smile on his face.

The present exchange continued. Harry marvelled at Sirius' knack of distributing the presents it was absolutely amazing. By the end of it he had received a book on the history of Puddlemere from Ron, new everyday robes from Sirius and Chrys and the best present of all was from Rose. It was a photograph of the two of them at Sirius and Chrys' wedding. It was the perfect gift.

'I thought that given that you're my brother you may as well have a photo of the two of us,' she said with a smile. Harry stared down at the two faces smiling back at him. They looked so alike. He handed the photo to Ron.

'Do we really look this alike in reality?' asked Harry.

Ron looked at him and then at Rose and then at the two of them again.

'Actually you do,' he said. 'I've never even noticed it before.'

Hermione had a good hard look at the two of them.

'You've got to be looking for it though,' she added.

'That may not be such a good thing,' said Harry. 'Last night I was speaking to a woman named Sarah Fraser. Rose was sitting next to me.'

'I could have sworn she was staring hard at me,' said Rose. 'Like she was trying to work me out.'

'Sarah was here last night?' Lily asked.

Chrys nodded.

'She was asking me about how Harry's going,' she replied.

'And Rose, you said she was staring at you?' asked Lily.

'That's right,' she replied.

'She will have worked it out,' she said to James. 'I know she would have.'

'Don't you think that you're rushing to an assumption there Lily?' asked Chrys. 'I mean she only looked at Rose for a few seconds.'

'Actually it was more like a couple of minutes,' said Rose.

'Listen,' said Lily. 'If anyone was going to work it out it would be Sarah. She's the most observant person I've ever met. If there was the slightest bit of resemblance she'd see it.'

'That's true,' said James. 'Sarah was always very observant. Listen Lily, is it such a bad thing that someone works out who Rose is? I mean the truth is going to come out eventually.'

'She'll become a target,' said Lily.

'I already have,' said Rose. 'I mean I was taken but V-voldemort came and spoke to me and said he had a use for me. And if it wasn't because of Harry then I can only think of one other reason. I'm sorry if I'm making a big assumption here but this is what I think it could be. Given that Crabbe is a Death Eater then it is highly probable that he was recruited while still at school. If that's the case then it's likely that there are other Death Eaters roaming the Hogwarts corridors. Now the way I see it, if he didn't use me to get at Harry then he must have used me to get at you.' She looked at Chrys with an apologetic look on her face. 'Think about it, a Death Eater tells his son, a Death Eater in training to keep an eye on you. This kid does, watches you and sees who you are friendly with. Maybe even follows you around. Realises that you're very friendly with me. Perhaps too friendly for a teacher-student relationship. Tells their father who tells the Dark Lord. I know you tried not to show me any special attention, but it was just against your nature. You couldn't help it.'

Harry was shocked at her suggestion. But the more he thought about it, the more plausible it sounded.

'I think you might be right,' said Hermione.

'So you're suggesting that Voldemort wants me and was using Rose as bait to get me because somebody noticed that we were very friendly?' asked Chrys.

'That's exactly what I'm suggesting,' said Rose. 'Think about it.'

'I still don't see any reason why Rose can't tell people who her parents are,' said James.

'Because they'll wonder what happened to us,' said Lily. 'Given that Rose wasn't born until after we were supposed to be dead.'

'Then let them know we're alive,' said James. 'Quite frankly I'm sick of all this secrecy.'

'But then Voldemort will come after you,' said Sirius who had been remarkably quiet throughout this whole exchange. 'He came after you before because he thought you were the Heir of Gryffindor.'

'Actually he came after James and Harry,' said Hermione. 'He came after James because of the Prophecy of Soaghal and he came after Harry because of the other prophecy. The one that Dumbledore told Harry about. Trelawney's prophecy. I'm not sure however why he thought that you were Gryffindor's heir James. But if you're alive then you're the heir, if the heir is indeed from your line.'

'But I'm the one with the lion tattoo,' said Harry. 'So I have to be the heir. And the whole Covenant thing, I was the heir.'

'Well perhaps you're the heir on Lily's side,' suggested Hermione. 'Or you could be from both sides.' The thought was mind blowing to Harry. He sincerely doubted that was a possibility. His mother after all had been Muggle-born.

'I don't think that's possible,' said Lily. 'But what is possible is that we need to come to a solution to the problem about Rose's identity. For the moment I don't think it's a good idea that James and I make ourselves known. For the moment that is.'

'Well,' said Chrys strewing over her thoughts carefully. 'As far as I can see there's only one solution. If Sarah is observant enough to notice any similarity between Harry and Rose she's going to confront me. And if it is implausible for you two to be alive then she's going to want an

explanation.' Everyone pondered that thought for a few moments. 'Would you say that I show you unexplainable favouritism Rose?'

'You show me favouritism,' said Rose. 'That is correct.'

'What are you getting at?' asked Lily.

'Well if you're dead and given Rose's age and known wizarding parentage as far as I can see there's only one option,' said Chrys. 'We tell her that she's my daughter.'



## **Chapter Twenty Business of the Order**

'What?' asked everyone in the room at the same time. Harry just couldn't believe the suggestion.

'That's implausible,' said James. 'It's absolutely ridiculous.'

'Well it would really be up to you three,' said Chrys. 'Rose, James and Lily that is.'

'But no one would believe you,' said Sirius. 'Of all of us, you were the only person around that people actually saw. And think of the scandal it would create.'

'It would not create as much of a scandal as James and Lily being alive would,' she said calmly.

'Now listen, you all know what happened when James and Lily died don't you? I mean besides Voldemort being defeated.' Everyone in the room nodded. 'Well basically I broke down. Everything that was happening was far too stressful. Mr Crouch didn't think that it was exactly a good idea for public relations to have an Auror trainee killing her mother, so he sent me on holidays for a while to get my act together. He gave me as much leave as I needed. And let's just say it took me quite a while. I had a lot of sort out. I went into isolation for a while. No one saw me. So it's possible that I had a child. And to the wizarding world it's totally plausible that I was so distraught that its father was in Azkaban that I had to give it up.'

To Harry it seemed that all pairs of eyes were on Chrys.

'Are you serious Chryssy? If you did this you would have to be prepared for the consequences,' said James. Harry noticed that his father's tone was not that of shock or anger. It was calm.

'Yes,' she said. 'Just think about it.'

'I agree,' said James.

'What?' asked Lily. 'What are you suggesting? Think about the scandal. This is my child you're talking about.'

'It's nothing compared to the scandal that will occur if it came out about us,' he replied.

'So we're going to live our lives in hiding?' asked Lily.

'Lily honestly I don't understand you sometimes,' said James. He sounded frustrated. 'You don't want us to come clean about being alive now you do? Because I seem to remember only a few weeks ago you didn't think it was such a good idea.'

'I understand where you're coming from Lily,' said Chrys. 'The thought is ludicrous and I wouldn't even suggest it if Rose hadn't already been put at risk. But she has already been targeted and people are asking questions. Questions that I simply cannot answer without incriminating you. As to the scandal well I'm washed up. My Quidditch days are over and I don't care if the Ministry sacks me. They can say whatever they like about me and it doesn't matter.'

'But she doesn't even look like you,' said Lily. 'She looks like Harry. I don't why I didn't see just how alike they actually look before.'

'But there are similarities between James and Sirius even though they aren't related,' said Hermione. 'If you stand the two of them next to each other its obvious they have similar hair and skin colouring.'

'Yes but that's the extent of it,' said Lily.

'And if you look at Rose's eyes, although they are obviously similar to yours they could also be similar to Alasdair's,' said James.

'Do I get a say in this?' asked Rose.

Everyone went quiet.

'Of course,' said Chrys. 'I wouldn't do this if you didn't want to.'

'I think it's a good idea,' she said. Everyone remained silent. 'I don't know how much longer I can keep quiet. Ever since, well, after what happened, I've been bombarded by the press. I don't want to lie, but if I tell the truth it's potentially disastrous. Just for the moment. But we don't tell anyone unless they ask.'

'Are you sure this is what you want to do?' asked Lily.

'Yes,' she said. 'My life's already crazy, we may as well make it into a circus.'

'That's not my intention,' said Chrys. 'In a sense I'd be protecting you.'

'But you do realise that you'd be destroying yourself don't you?' said Rose.

'Only in a sense,' said Chrys. 'Sirius was sent to Azkaban. The wizarding community knew that we were a couple. We had been photographed together. As to what they think, I really don't care. I've conformed to their standards far too long.'

'Besides people would believe anything of you,' said Sirius somewhat sarcastically.

'Not now Sirius,' said Chrys through her teeth. 'So Lily how's that research?'

Harry was silently relieved she had changed the topic.

'We're no closer than we were before,' she said. 'It's time consuming but hopefully will be rewarding.'

'What exactly are you researching?' asked Ron. 'And is Snape really helping you that much?'

'I'm not going to say what it is I'm trying to do,' said Lily. 'That way if we're unsuccessful then it's no skin off my nose. As to Severus' help mainly he just supplies the herbs! He's far too busy trying to teach uncooperative students.'

'Would you go back to it?' asked Ron. 'I mean being an Auror, completing your training when it's safe for you to be revealed. And you James, would you go back to Quidditch.'

'I couldn't go back to being an Auror, no,' said Lily. 'Not after not doing it for so long.'

'I feel the same about Quidditch,' said James. 'I would dearly love to be up there playing with Harry. However my body is so under conditioned that I think if I went flying now I wouldn't last ten minutes.'

Glancing at his father, Harry could see that while he had put on some weight since he had been found; however he had not yet reached the healthy weight that he had been in all of Harry's photos.

'Well, what will you do?' asked Rose.

'I shall explore my options,' said James. 'I had a good steady job besides playing Quidditch you know.'

'What was that?' asked Harry. 'I never got round to asking Sirius what that was.'

'Well apart from running around doing things for the Order you mean?' asked James.

Harry nodded.

'I used to work for the Daily Prophet,' said James. 'In the Transfiguration department. Nothing really important, but something that was able to keep me out of trouble. Put to use the skills I acquired through the experiments of four young boys.'

James winked at Sirius who promptly burst out laughing. Harry guessed it must have been another of their private jokes. He wasn't quite sure that his father was telling the truth.

The rest of the Christmas holidays passed very quickly. Soon enough Rose had headed back to Hogwarts on the Hogwarts express and Ron had headed to The Burrow and then to Number 12 Grimmauld Place, to take up a larger role in the operations of the Order. Lily and James were already there, keeping out of sight from everyone as usual. Sirius and Chrystal had apparated back to Hogwarts for the new term. Sirius had more and more responsibility, in fact he was teaching all the first and second year Transfiguration lessons due to McGonagall's workload.

Mid-January Harry picked up the Daily Prophet. The front page contained breaking news.

### ***Candidates for Minister of Magic***

*The retiring Minister for Magic, Cornelius Fudge would like it known that the following are nominated candidates for Minister of Magic. (In Alphabetical Order)*

#### ***Ludo Bagman***

*Ludo Bagman is a well known figure in the wizarding world. His enthusiasm in the area of magical games and sport has earned him yet another nomination for Minister. He was responsible for organising the highly successful Triwizard Tournament which was held at Hogwarts four years ago as well as the Quidditch World Cup held earlier that year. Always enthusiastic and ready to give it his best he is a fine candidate for Minister.*

#### ***Amelia Bones***

*Amelia has worked as Head of The Office of Magical Enforcement. She is a hard working woman who has spent hours trying to make the wizarding world a safer place. She has sat on the jury of the Wizengamot as part of her responsibilities and has always been known as a fair judge. She is an excellent candidate for Minister as she works tirelessly on ensuring equal opportunity for all members of the wizarding community.*

#### ***Amos Diggory***

*Amos Diggory has worked relentlessly in the Office of Magical Creatures. He has worked painstakingly on increasing the safety of the witches and wizards of Britain by analysing the safety of different creatures and worked tirelessly on the Ministry of Magic's classification system. He is a good candidate for Minister as he is hard working and willing to put in the effort to achieve a goal.*

#### ***Malfalda Hopkirk***

Malfalda has worked in the Improper Use of Magic Office for many years. She is a consistently hard worker who has spent many years trying to ensure the appropriate use of magic in all areas across the British Isles. She would make a good candidate for Minister as she is hard working and wants to ensure that magic is used appropriately to allow the wizarding community to exist for many years to come.

#### ***Remus Lupin***

Remus Lupin has worked in the offices of Werewolf Liaison and Support for the last five years, in addition to having worked as the Defence Against the Dark Arts Teacher at Hogwarts. Being a werewolf himself he understands the need for members of the community to be aware of the risks and dangers of being members of the wizarding community. He is an excellent candidate for Minister as he is willing to stand up for the rights of all members of the community.

#### ***Marcus Parkinson***

*Marcus Parkinson has been instrumental in maintaining the standards of the wizarding community. Over the past fifteen years Marcus has worked in various areas, ranging from Magical Law to being on staff at St Mungos. He has been instrumental in examining magical law and analysing the impact on society. Marcus is a fine candidate for Minister as he is willing to maintain the standards of the wizarding community.*

Arnold Peasgood

*Arnold Peasgood has worked as an Obliviator for the Accidental Magic Reversal Squad for thirty years. He had persistently been involved in important operations and has helped avert many compromising situations which may have revealed the wizarding world to Muggles. Always enthusiastic Arnold would make an excellent Minister as he understands the importance of maintaining the standards of the wizarding world.*

**Carlotta Pinkstone**

*The famous Carlotta Pinkstone is best known for her persistent efforts as a campaigner for lifting the International Confederation of Wizards' Statute of Secrecy. She has long believed that witches and wizards should be telling Muggles that wizards exist. If elected she promises to influence important international decisions regarding the laws created at the Confederation of Wizards.*

Kingsley Shacklebolt

*A fine Auror who has been instrumental in the search for wanted criminals since the early days of the eighties. Kingsley has been involved in many difficult operations and additionally has spent some time in command of a Hit Wizard squad. Kingsley understands the importance of co-operation and delegation and says that if he were elected he would work hard to ensure equal opportunity for all members of the community.*

Rita Skeeter

A journalist who has had the knack to uncover the deepest secrets of the wizarding community Rita Skeeter is an enthusiastic candidate for Minister. Rita has been disgusted with the way the Ministry have conducted themselves in the past and would like to be able to make an impact on the way things are run. If elected she promises that the dirty Ministry secrets will all be exposed.

Dolores Umbridge (Minister's Candidate)

*This amazing woman has had a stint as Headmistress and High Inquisitor at Hogwarts while Professor Albus Dumbledore was incapacitated. She revolutionised the way Defence Against the Dark Arts is taught and has forever left her imprint on the way the school is run today. Dolores is hard working and determined and if chosen as Minister would certainly have a positive impact on the British wizarding community.*

Seth Zabini

*Seth Zabini is well known in all circles for his effortless work in many areas of the Ministry. Zabini is perhaps best known for his work in international Quidditch relationships and the establishment of a working European Cup. A sports enthusiast Zabini would make an excellent Minister as he is always prepared to give a hundred and ten percent to every project he undertakes.*

*All candidates have worked at the Ministry for a time period.*

*Members of the Wizarding community who are of age please be aware; you may register your preference by owling the Ministry using the form provided on the back page of the paper for this entire week. These forms are enchanted so that only the person who has placed their name on the front can complete the form and owl it to the ministry. They must be owled for collection in the next week. The top six candidates preferred candidates will then go before a panel of selectors who will narrow the field down to three. These three will be put forward for election. The election will take place on the first day of April. All witches and wizards who are of age must vote or face a fine of fifty galleons.*

He turned to the back page.

**Minister of Magic Candidates**

Please state your name: \_\_\_\_\_

*Please rank the candidates in order of preference:*

q *Ludo Bagman*

q *Amelia Bones*

q *Amos Diggory*

q *Mafalda Hopkirk*

q *Remus Lupin*

q *Marcus Parkinson*

q *Arnold Peasgood*

q *Carlotta Pinkstone*

q *Kingsley Shacklebolt*

q *Rita Skeeter*

q *Dolores Umbridge*

q *Seth Zabini*

'Help us,' Harry said under his breath. Hermione looked at him strangely. He handed her the paper as he thought of the reference to Umbridge. "*She revolutionised the way Defence Against the Dark Arts is taught and has forever left her imprint on the way the school is run today.*" She certainly did. No one would ever contemplate running it that way ever again. Harry glanced at Hermione as an owl soared in the window.

*Harry and Hermione,*

*This evening 7 pm. You know where.*

'Is that fine Hermione?' asked Harry. She nodded her head and Harry went back to contemplating the candidates.

\*~\*

Harry and Hermione flooded to Number 12 Grimmauld Place for the meeting of the Order. They got there nice and early and Harry thought it was a good thing because he could catch up with Ron. More and more with every passing day Harry wondered how he had remained sane being so confined for so long.

Harry was wondering how this meeting was going to go. It was the first "proper" meeting of the Order that he had been to at Number 12 Grimmauld Place. He had of course attended the Hogwarts ones while he was in hiding, but now he was going to be a fully fledged member.

Tonks made an entrance to the room. Her hair was cropped and blonde and she had a small nose with tiny pale freckles over the top of it. She had a huge smile on her face. She looked carefully around the room.

'Is Snape here yet?' she asked. Harry shook his head. 'I can't believe she was kissing him.'

Harry looked at her in surprise.

'Who are you talking about Tonks?' he asked.

'Sweet little Terri,' she said. 'Surely you know Terri. She rides Sirius' sister's horses.'

'Terri Hamber?' he asked.

'And Snape?' added Ron.

'When?' asked Hermione.

'At the Leaky Cauldron,' replied Tonks. 'On New Years Eve. I mean of all the people in my group of friends to snog a teacher, Terri would have been last on the list.'

'You know Terri?' asked Harry.

'Sure,' said Tonks. 'We were in Hufflepuff together.'

'You were in Hufflepuff?' asked Ron in disbelief.

'Don't look so shocked,' said Tonks with a laugh. 'Not everyone can be in grand-old Gryffindor. Anyhow I'm extremely loyal and hardworking, although I was quite mischievous for a Hufflepuff that sometimes I wondered whether I'd been sorted into the right house.'

At that moment Dumbledore entered the room and the meeting began.

'Sorry for the short notice,' he began. 'We have a lot to get through today. There have been quite a few developments since our last gathering. The first is the status of the disappearing Muggle-borns. I shall allow Ron over here to fill you in on the latest developments.'

'Yes Sir,' Ron said quickly. 'As most of you may know, we undertook surveillance of the Shetland Islands after Professor Snape's intelligence of something strange going on. Malfoy had also heard about it. We discovered several camps of Muggle-born witches and wizards and an operation was led by myself, Malfoy and Dung to retrieve the prisoners. We retrieved about one hundred people, however there are still some that remain missing. We have not been able to locate their whereabouts as of yet.' Questions?'

'There was an explosion was there not?' asked a member whom Harry did not recognise.

'Yes,' replied Ron. 'I hadn't got to that yet. If there aren't anymore questions about the operation itself, shall I move on?' Ron paused for a few moments before he began. 'Yes there was an explosion. We have a feeling that someone tipped the Death Eaters off. For starters, apart from the two guards guarding the fortress there was a distinct lack of Death Eaters. Secondly, retrieving the people was far too easy and there are still people missing. There were few aware of the operation. My only thought is that it must have been one of the Hit Wizards that I briefed on Friday evening.'

A few people nodded in affirmation.

'Those that undertook surveillance were trustworthy,' added Dumbledore. 'However Professor MacLeod was injured as a result and whilst Professor Snape managed to cover the situation, this incident may have resulted in increased caution.'

'May I interrupt?' asked Harry. Dumbledore looked at him questioningly before nodding his head. Harry cleared his throat. 'The note I discovered said that the Order would attack on Saturday morning. Somebody had to have tipped them off for that one.'

'Right you are Harry,' said Dumbledore. 'I had forgotten about that one. Then someone had to know about the Order's operations. It however leaves us back where we started.'

'It has to be one of the Hit Wizards,' said Lupin. 'Someone who had perhaps an inkling that Ron was involved in the Order and thought it strange that he would be leading an operation at such an early stage in his career.'

'Well who would know that?' asked Sirius. 'The level of each member of the Hit Wizard Squad is usually kept quiet.'

'Moody of course,' said Ron, as Moody nodded in acknowledgement. 'And Terry Boot.'

'Terry Boot?' asked Tonks.

'Terry Boot is Ron's partner,' said Hermione. 'He was in Ravenclaw, in our year at Hogwarts.'

'But I don't think Terry would do that kind of thing,' said Ron. Harry glanced at him questioningly. 'Listen, I know I've complained about how he has been getting annoying but I don't think he's

exactly capable of doing something like that. I mean he was in the DA.'

'People change Ron,' said Hermione. 'Just because he was in the DA does not mean that he is inherently good.'

'No,' said Ron. 'But just because he knew what level I was does not mean that he necessarily was the tip off.'

'He's got a point Hermione,' said Sirius somewhat gently. 'But Ron, you should watch what you say around him in future.'

Ron nodded.

'Moving on,' said Dumbledore seeing that the conversation had come to a halt. 'We have searched for the remaining missing Muggle-borns without success so far. I move that we set up a task force responsible for searching for them.' He turned to Alec. 'I still think that the best surveillance is using jockeys who are seemingly training their horses. Would you be able to manage this without too many of your jockeys actually being aware of what they're doing?'

'We're always training in areas that are supposed to be secluded,' said Alec. 'But I don't know how many of our number can actually be trusted. Terri almost certainly can. She said nothing to anyone of what she had seen, although I don't know if she exactly wanted to talk about it. As for the rest of them, I trust them on my horses, however I don't know if I trust them with this kind of information. We need to be careful. What I can do is ensure that Terri is flying with them so that if anything is seen then she can report it directly to me.'

Harry had glanced over at Snape while Alec was talking about Terri to see if he could catch any signs of what Tonks had said, however if there was something going on, Snape certainly wasn't giving it away.

'Does anyone object?' asked Dumbledore shaking Harry out of his thoughts. Harry waited and seeing that nobody raised their hands Dumbledore moved onto the next item of business which Harry knew would be Rose. 'Obviously Voldemort has stepped up his operations. As most of you will know, a young witch of wizarding parentage was taken. Rose Heaney. The Order acted immediately. Firstly I wanted to thank Moira Wily for her quick work getting that article about Rose printed the next day. We are unsure the reason which she was taken, however at first we did believe that it was highly likely that she may have been taken because it was thought that she was Muggle-born. The hope was that if that were the case then the article would have resulted in her release. This however wasn't the case. Some of our operatives managed to track her and it seemed for the first forty hours the guard on her was increased. She managed to escape when she was unguarded, thankfully unharmed. It is important that we discover the reason she was taken. I am going to leave this in your capable hands Mr Malfoy.'

'Yes sir,' said Draco quickly.

'And while we are talking to you Draco; how is your work on the Prophecy going?' asked Dumbledore.

'Slowly,' he replied. 'Chrystal, may I ask when your birthday is?' She looked at him in surprise. 'For another interpretation of the prophecy I need your birthday. I have the other three birth dates.'

'Oh, sorry,' she said blushing. 'It's the tenth of November, 1961.'

'Thank you,' he said. 'I have to report my findings on the next meeting. I have no idea who the pairings are as of yet. I think the plan is to give him what I have found and hope against all odds that he doesn't get angry and kill me.' Harry was surprised at the blaze way Draco said that.

'And Severus what the latest on the list of Muggle-born students?' asked Dumbledore in a concerned voice.

'I have not been asked for it and will not complete it until asked,' he replied. 'It would be signing

their death warrants by doing so. However I think the Dark Lord's priorities may have shifted slightly recently. For instance the manner in which Miss Heaney was taken suggests that his target has changed. Additionally, since Miss Heaney has identified Crabbe he will have had to go into damage control. It's never any good when his Death Eaters make costly mistakes like that.'

'Can I ask if we know the real identity of Rose Heaney?' asked Moira Wily, a bespectacled, middle-aged lady who wore far too much makeup. Additionally her hair was bright blue. She was a writer for the Daily Prophet who whilst was a useful source of information was also always looking for a bit of scandal.

'That is my business for now Moira,' said Dumbledore. 'Now moving on, you had something Minerva?'

'Yes thank you Albus,' she said. 'Miss Brown came to me yesterday. She said that Seamus Finnegan had come to her and told her that he had overheard a conversation saying that she was to be taken. He also told her that the instructions had been that she was to be taken not from Hogwarts and was not under any circumstances to be harmed. Has anyone heard anything?' Nobody replied. This was the first Harry had heard of this. No wonder Lavender had been wasting her life away drinking. 'We are wondering if Voldemort wants her for her ability as a Seer or because he wants to control the Heir of Hufflepuff.'

'I don't think there's an answer to that one,' said Draco. 'If The Dark Lord wanted to control her, I doubt he would tell his subjects.'

'Shall we agree to keep an eye on her then?' asked Dumbledore. Almost everybody nodded in reply. 'Moving on then, I'm sure you've all seen the candidates. I think we should go through them one at a time and see the options. Who's first?'

'Bagman,' said Elphias Doge in his wheezy voice. He had just entered the room and was making an effort to look engrossed in the conversation.

'Yes Bagman,' laughed Sirius. 'Well I don't rate him getting past the independent interviews.'

'I thought he was in trouble with the goblins,' said Harry.

'Well he was,' said Bill. 'He did however manage to smooth things over. He paid off his debt, although we're not entirely sure how.'

'I don't think he is a problem,' said Dumbledore. 'Although he is popular, he is far too incompetent to fool the Wizengamot interviewers. Besides I highly doubt they would let someone who has been known to have passed information to Voldemort through. Who is next?'

'Amelia Bones,' said Dedalus Diggle dropping his velvet hat as he tried to place it on the table. 'It's the first time she's been nominated.'

'She's a fair and honest person,' said Sturgis Podmore. 'But I doubt she'd make a good Minister.'

'But she wouldn't let the Death Eaters take control,' said McGonagall. 'Again I don't think we need to worry about her. She probably won't be elected and if she is she wouldn't be the worst result.'

'Then there's Amos Diggory,' said Hestia Jones. 'He could be a problem.'

'I hardly think we need to worry about Amos,' said Arthur Weasley. 'I mean the man's harmless.'

'But he has thrown himself into work since his son died,' said Kingsley Shacklebolt. 'I've seen the poor guy at work. Since Cedric died it seems that all he does is work. He's lost his spark.'

'I think he'd be easily manipulated,' said Percy. 'If someone managed to get inside his head you wouldn't know if they were really his thoughts or not. He just hasn't been completely with it.'

'I don't think he'd get past the Wizengamot anyway,' said Dumbledore as Percy excused himself and left the room. 'Everyone is aware of Amos' situation and the panel will take that into consideration



when contemplating who they will let through. Who's next?

'Malfalda Hopkirk,' said Emmeline Vance. 'She's a surprise one.'

'She works for the Improper Use of Magic doesn't she?' asked Harry.

'Yes,' replied Arthur Weasley. 'She's been trying to get out of that office by any means possible. She hates it.'

'But she won't get through,' said Kingsley. 'She's not exactly the nicest person either and it will come across if she makes it through to the interview stage.'

'Then there's Remus,' said Sirius. 'We don't need to discuss him.'

'It's not as if I'll be elected anyway,' said Remus. 'The wizarding world will never accept werewolves.'

'Then why run?' asked Ron.

'To be in their face,' said Lupin. 'To say that I don't care what they think about me. It's a means to survival.'

'The next is Marcus Parkinson,' said Tonks. 'Total Death Eater of course.'

'Yes,' said Sirius. 'He hasn't exactly shown his best side in our limited past encounters. Somehow he's managed to keep out of trouble and that is of concern.'

'The Death Eaters spoke of a candidate,' said Hermione. 'Do you think that it's plausible that it's Marcus Parkinson?'

'I think it's something we have to consider,' said Snape. 'He is a Death Eater, I can confirm that for you, he hasn't had an assignment lately which makes me think he's the possible candidate, as they would want him to appear clean.'

'I think we should do our best to ensure that he doesn't get through,' said McGonagall. 'Use whatever contacts we have. I think he is the danger man.'

'I agree,' said Dumbledore. 'Who else should we consider?'

'Arnold Peasgood and Carlotta Pinkstone,' said Moody. 'Knowing our luck Peasgood will just obliviate others memories. I don't know what some people are thinking when they get themselves nominated for this kind of thing. They really just don't think.'

'Who's Carlotta Pinkstone?' asked Hermione.

'Carlotta's an advocate for telling Muggles that we exist,' said Chrys. 'She's about forty and has run every time the positions been vacant since she finished Hogwarts. We don't need to worry about her, she's Pro-Muggle, not Anti-Muggle.'

'Then there's Umbridge,' said Harry with a cough.

'There's too many people who were at Hogwarts with her to make it past the first round,' said Katie. 'Even the Slytherin's will vote for someone else.'

'I just get this feeling that if she gets through she will be Fudge's puppet,' said Lupin. 'It's already set up like that. The candidates Minister after her name clinches it.'

'We would need to keep an eye on her if she was elected,' said Hermione. 'Otherwise it would be like nothing has changed.'

'Why did Fudge resign anyway?' asked Harry.

'He essentially had to Harry,' said Hestia Jones. 'After it was discovered that he knew about Voldemort's return a year before he did anything well he's been under all kinds of pressure. And it didn't help that he deliberately set out to discredit both you and Dumbledore. The final straw was

the attack on the Three Broomsticks. He has essentially been forced out of office.'

'Oh,' said Harry. Given his isolation he hadn't really kept up to date with all the happenings of the wizarding world.

'The last one on the list is Seth Zabini?' said Katie. 'Does anyone know anything about him?'

'He's Blaise's father,' said Draco. 'She was a Slytherin in my year. Plays Quidditch now and does nothing else with her time.'

'Yeah,' said Fred. 'She and Lee are somewhat of an item at the moment. Lee met her while he was commentating and the rest is history.'

'I've never heard Zabini's name mentioned in Death Eater circles,' said Snape. 'From all accounts he appears to be clean.'

'Need we worry about him?' asked Emmeline Vance. 'He's a very public figure but he never seems to be involved in anything sinister.'

'Perhaps you should ask Lee Jordan to keep an eye on him,' suggested Dumbledore.

'I can only ask I guess,' said George. 'I haven't seen much of him lately. He's resigned from Weasley's Wizard Wheezes unfortunately.'

At that moment Percy re-entered the room.

'Ah, Mum, can I have a hand?' he said.

Molly looked up at him curiously and hurried outside. Fred and George snickered.

'Anyone would think he was having the baby himself with the way he's been scattering around all week,' said Fred. 'But I'd say that it might be time, if he's actually getting Mum out of the meeting.'

'Do we have anything else to discuss Dumbledore?' asked Arthur.

Dumbledore shook his head.

'Right then,' said Tonks. 'Given that Molly is busy why don't some of you help me with dinner?' Chrys stood up.

'No not you,' laughed Tonks. 'Harry and Ron why don't you give me a hand? Hermione you can help as well.'

They took the hint and stood up to give Tonks a hand. She was in a interesting mood and seemed to want to gossip to Hermione about Snape more than she was interested in finished preparing the dinner that Molly had started.

'Anyhow,' she began. 'I walked into The Leaky Cauldron because my school friends and I always meet there on New Years, it's kind of a tradition and I walked in and saw Terri immediately. She was sitting with Snape and so I was a little confused. I left her be and met up with the other people I was meeting, but Terri didn't come near us all night. Then at midnight she was snogging him.'

'They were talking all night at the Dunvegan Ball,' said Hermione. 'He looked happy. It was strange. I don't think I've ever seen Snape look happy before.'

Harry and Ron left the two women to gossip and headed back to the table where some small amounts of food were beginning to appear. Not many people had stayed for dinner; it had been reduced to the Weasleys minus Molly, Percy and Penelope; Tonks, Sirius, Lupin, Chrys, Harry and Hermione. He knew his parents would be down soon. As he sat down Sirius smiled at him.

'We're having a family dinner on Saturday night,' said Sirius with a twinkle in his eye. 'We're going to invite Sarah and her husband around. See what happens.'

'Rose will be there of course,' said Chrys. 'But you're more than welcome to come if you'd like Ron. We've warned my dad and Heather so they won't get any unexpected surprises.'

Lily and James entered the room.

'How did the meeting go?' asked James.

'We mainly talked about the candidates for Minister,' said Ron. 'They're bloody shocking if you ask me.'

'Well I don't see a decent one there,' said Lily. 'Well Kingsley's a nice guy but I don't think he'd make a good Minister. And Remus is only running to make a point.'

Sirius pulled Lily aside and Harry spoke with his father and Ron for a while before Hermione and Tonks brought out what was supposed to be dinner.

'Molly left this stewing,' said Tonks. 'Hermione thinks that it's done, so I'm taking her word for it.'

'Thanks for blaming me Tonks,' Hermione said with a smile on her face. 'If you want to blame anyone blame the little Weasley that I suspect is about to be born.'

Everyone tucked into the stew, which was neither undercooked nor overcooked. When they were finished Bill excused himself saying that he had to leave.

'What have you got mate?' called Charlie after him. 'A hot date? With a veela?'

Bill didn't answer but just closed the door behind him.

'So do we wait up?' asked Ron. 'I mean I haven't become an uncle before.'

'And are not likely to anytime soon again either,' added George. 'I've just got Katie to myself, I'm unlikely to share her.'

A head appeared in the fire. It was Rose. She looked exhausted.

'Oh, everyone's there,' she said. 'Hi everyone. I was after some advice.'

'If it's about Potions then don't ask me,' said Ron.

'Actually Hermione might be the best to answer it,' said Rose. 'After all she did do some Mediwizard training. It's just that I've got this headache I can't get rid of. Not with Charms or Potions. I'm not particularly stressed or anything, I was just wondering if there's any suggestions?'

'Have you tried taking a Sleeping Draught before you go to bed?' asked Lily. 'Sometimes that helps.'

'Are you eating properly Rose?' asked James. 'You look a little pale.'

'Yes I'm fine,' she said. 'I just can't shake this headache. Listen Ginny's here and wants to have a word. Hold on a minute.' Rose's head disappeared and Ginny's appeared.

'How was your meeting?' she asked.

'Have you seen the candidate list?' asked Sirius.

'Yes,' she said. 'It's not exactly inspiring. How's Penny? I can't see her.'

'We think the babies coming,' said Ron. 'We haven't seen Penny all day and Mum and Percy have been missing for the last four hours.'

'Well let me know when it's over,' she said as her head disappeared.

Later that night Percy made his way downstairs.

'It's a boy,' he said as he collapsed in the chair. 'Both Penny and the baby are fine. Best let them sleep now,' he said with a yawn.

Harry summoned a blanket and gently placed it over Hermione who was sleeping on the couch. He tucked it around her gently and kissed her softly on the cheek before heading upstairs to sleep in the spare bed in Ron's room.

The next morning was spent admiring baby Reade Arthur Weasley, who with little tufts of red hair and freckles was looking very much like a perfect fit into the Weasley family. Harry and Ron were amazed at how much time Hermione spent admiring the baby. Harry knew that it was about time for her to have a check up with Molly and Harry hoped that everything was going along smoothly because he didn't want to have to go through what he had witnessed with Sirius and Chrys. Every time he saw them together lately he sensed a little friction and he secretly hoped that whatever the cause was that they could work it out.

Later that afternoon, Hermione asked Molly for her check up, when the excitement of baby Reade had worn off slightly. She also asked Harry to come with her. She seemed almost a little apprehensive which Harry thought was quiet unusual.

Molly gave her a smile and asked her to lie down on the bed.

'I'll be right with you in a second,' she said as she rushed out to respond to Percy's calling.

Harry a curl out of Hermione's face.

'Is everything okay sweetie?' he asked her.

'I just don't know,' she said. 'I don't know if I should be feeling anything yet.'

'Why don't we wait for Molly and see what she says,' he said. 'I'm sure everything's fine.'

Molly entered the room only a few seconds later.

'I'm sorry,' she said. 'Percy's is just so anxious about everything. I honestly hope he doesn't drive Penelope mad. Now how's it all going?'

'I'm not sure,' she said.

'It's only natural to be a little nervous,' said Molly in a reassuring tone. 'Let me have a feel.'

Molly gently placed her hands on Hermione's exposed tummy.

'Well I'd say that you're a tad over twelve weeks,' she said. 'You may start feeling movement in another six weeks but you shouldn't worry if it takes a little longer. Are you in any pain?'

'No,' replied Hermione. 'Should I be?'

'No,' said Molly with a smile. 'Everyone's different.' She picked up her wand and quickly cast an incarnation. 'Don't worry everything's fine so far. Do you want to know whether it's a boy or girl?'

Hermione and Harry glanced at each other.

'We actually hadn't thought about it yet,' said Harry. 'How about we think about it for a while?'

Hermione gave Harry a smile and thanked Molly.

'We had better get going,' she said. 'Alasdair will have wondered what's happened to us.'

Harry helped her up and they farewelled everyone before flooing back to Dunvegan. Harry knew he had to get to work on discovering who was betraying them before anymore damage was done.

## **Chapter Twenty One Jealousy, Lies and Deceit**

"But jealous souls will not be answered so

*They are not ever jealous for the cause,  
But jealous for they're jealous. 'Tis a monster  
Begot upon itself, born on itself."*

*(Emilia, Act III Scene 4, Shakespeare's Othello)*

Saturday night arrived quickly and Harry approached the evening with a little bit of amusement. The thought of trying to trick someone who was very observant was an amusing one and quite frankly with everything else that was happening in the world Harry decided he needed some amusement.

Rose arrived from Hogwarts at about six o'clock. She came with Sirius and appeared to be very nervous. When she arrived Chrys looked her over from head to toe as if trying to discover the tiniest detail that might give the game away.

'You need to take your bracelet off, Sarah will notice it,' said Chrys. Harry had noticed from the moment she had arrived the night before she had been extremely nervous and flustered. Additionally when Harry had asked where Sirius was, she hadn't even given him a response.

'You look fine Rose,' Harry said to his sister as she glanced at her skinny reflection in the mirror. 'Just one thing, have you lost weight recently?'

'I don't think so,' she said. Harry glanced at his sister again. If she hadn't noticed the drop in her weight then something was wrong. She certainly didn't need to be dieting, if that's what she was doing. Although Harry hoped that that was the cause rather than something else. He knew she was still having nightmares and wished that he could say something that would console her.

Harry took Rose's arm and led her into the drawing room, where Ron and Alasdair were waiting. Harry thought it best if they stayed out of Sirius and Chrystal's way until it was dinner time.

'Hello Rose,' said Alasdair. 'I don't know quite what's going on here. Let me have a look at you.'

Rose walked over towards Alasdair allowing him to glance her up and down.

'Well you don't look like my daughter's child,' he said. 'And there's perhaps only an inkling of Sirius in you and that is stretching the imagination. Chrystal won't tell me who your real parents are, but I'm sure by the end of the night I will have figured it out. And when my daughters shenanigans are over, I'll ask her to fill me in completely. Don't worry sweetheart, I won't give away the secret. I just fail to understand why my daughter would want to pretend she has a child. Or maybe I understand too well.'

At that moment a house-elf walked in and announced the McDonalds. Harry took in a deep breath and hoped for the best.

As they entered the room Harry could hear Chrys talking to Sarah.

'Okay, Sarah and John, you remember my father Alasdair do you not?' she asked. Sarah greeted Alasdair. 'And this is Harry whom I think you met at the Dunvegan Ball and his wife Hermione.' Harry noticed Sarah glancing at Hermione's small bulge. 'Then this lovely young lady is our daughter Rose whom I believe you've already met, and her boyfriend Ron Weasley.'

The reaction that Chrystal got was the kind that you really need to be there to see. Sarah's mouth dropped open, and then she pulled it shut again. It was clear that she had absolutely no words to say and from what Harry had heard about her that was an achievement. Her husband looked amused. Harry almost wondered if he were in on it.

'Rose dear, it's lovely to meet you again,' said Sarah about five minutes after Chrys had spoken. 'And Ron, I've heard a lot about you from Natalie.'

Chrystal showed everyone to the table with some amusement over Sarah's reaction to her "news." Harry could see that Chrystal was enjoying this and it was good to see the smile on her face that he hadn't seen in quite a while.

When they were seated Sarah looked as if she had regained her composure.

'So why did you give her up?' asked Sarah. 'She's a very pretty girl and from what I've heard she's quite talented.'

'I had to Sarah,' said Chrys as she rang a little gold bell to signal that it was time for the entrance to be brought out. 'Whenever I looked at her I saw Sirius. I couldn't stop from crying. I was in no fit state to be a mother. I needed to move on from Sirius before I could be. I did the best thing for my child.'

Sarah glanced at Rose again as a few house-elves brought out bowls of roast pumpkin soup. Harry got stuck into his immediately trying to avoid the conversation.

'I don't understand why you didn't tell anyone,' said Sarah when she had finished her soup. 'I can understand why you wouldn't want to care for her yourself, but to send her to a Muggle orphanage that's just terrible. You had friends, we could have helped.'

'Don't take this the wrong way Sarah, but you guys were much more friends of Lily and Sirius than you were of mine,' said Chrys. 'I know you were upset that I didn't see you for years but I was trying to sort myself out. You're commenting on my actions in hindsight Sarah, and it's much easier to see the flaws in our actions when we've had time to reflect on them.'

Dinner was brought out during a lull in conversation.

'Was I too painful for you to see us?' asked Sarah when Harry was about halfway through eating his meal. 'Was it too difficult to see Claire and I? I know you were in contact with Remus.' *Who was Claire? thought Harry.*

'Remus was different,' replied Chrys. 'He forced his presence upon me. But with you two I had to make an effort and even though this might be wrong, it was too much of an effort. Somehow you two reminded me more of Lily than Remus did of Sirius and James. I have apologised Sarah.'

'I know,' she said. 'It was just so unlike you.'

Sarah turned her attention to Rose leaving Chrys to contemplate the events of the past seventeen years. Harry knew that some of Sarah's words had hit her hard. Chrys had told Hermione on several occasions how she had made quite a few mistakes when it came to her interactions with her old school friends. Harry knew she felt guilty about it. Sarah began asking Rose questions about her childhood. She continued it throughout the night. Harry was getting sick of it. The same questions over and over again. The first time it was interesting. It was good to hear about his sister's life that he didn't really know too much about. After a while it wore thin. He spent most of the time concentrating on his dessert. Finally Alasdair spoke.

'John, Sirius, would you like to join me for a fence? We should leave the ladies to their discussion,' said Alasdair. Harry looked up in curiosity. Ever since he had taken the sword from the founders' room he had wanted to know how to use it properly. Somehow he got the feeling that he was going to need to.

'Can I watch?' asked Harry.

'I'd like to as well,' said Ron.

'Why not,' said Alasdair with a smile. 'And if you wish, it would be my pleasure to teach you.'

Harry and Ron eagerly excused themselves from the table. Alasdair gave them a smile.

'I'm not surprised you want to distance yourselves from my daughter's antics,' he whispered to them. 'I really have no idea what she's playing at. Also I can see that Sirius is none too happy about it. Anyhow we shall fence now.'

Alasdair led the men to a room which Harry had not seen before. It was an open room of which the walls were only decorated with swords and shields. A shiver ran down Harry's spine as he realised that this must be the battle room that Sirius had talked about.

Alasdair invited John to draw a sword and they soon began their battle.

'First to draw blood wins,' he said.

Harry stood watching them in awe. For one thing they weren't fighting with the traditional clothing that Harry had seen the Olympic Fencers wear, when he had watched the Olympic Games at the Dursleys. And that they were not using the same swords. The way they swung the swords and moved was so graceful, Harry had never seen anything like it before. The battle continued for about half an hour before Alasdair finally won, by drawing blood from John's arm. Harry noticed that as soon as John placed the sword down the cut healed. When Alasdair saw the look on Harry's face he laughed.

'It's a bit different from Muggle fencing isn't it Harry?' he asked. 'If you are fighting competitively the swords are enchanted so that the wounds they inflict will not harm you once the battle has ended. He threw a sword at Harry and one at Ron. 'I know neither of you has any idea about fencing but why don't you give it a go while Sirius and John battle it out. I'll try and give you pointers along the way.'

Harry and Ron assumed the duelling position that they had learnt from Snape and Lockhart in their second year, and then with some amount of trepidation from both sides they began swing the swords wildly at each other. They continued on for a few moments before Alasdair stopped them.

'You look as if you're both afraid of hurting each other,' he said. 'I assure you that you don't have to be worried about hurting each other. And you need to get over that if you have any chance of successfully learning how to fence. Now try again.'

Harry took a deep breath in and tried again. He tried hard not to think that it was Ron that he was throwing a sword at and it became a little easier. So far he had done well for blocking Ron's swings however the sword was getting heavy and he was getting tired trying to block and then swing the sword. Then he felt a slither on his arm. He saw blood flowing from it.

He glanced up at Ron.

'It looks like you win,' he said placing his sword on the floor. He was amazed when his graze healed as soon as he had placed the sword on the floor. 'Next time I'll beat you.'

'I'll give you both a lesson next week,' said Alasdair. 'You could both use the practice. Now we ought to find the ladies. I'm sure they'll be in the sitting room.'

They followed Alasdair to the sitting room, where the women indeed were. He then poured them a glass of scotch. Harry glanced at it. He had never drunk anything other than wine before.

'Sip it slowly,' Sirius whispered into his ear. 'Just look like your enjoying it and Alasdair won't notice.'

Harry lifted the glass up to his lips slowly and took a sip of the amber coloured liquid. It tasted strange, almost burning. He stifled a cough. He took another sip, this time prepared for the worst. However he found it wasn't so bad. He walked over toward Hermione and spent the remainder of the evening talking to her, Ron and Rose, Sarah's fascination with Rose having weaned a little.

Later when they were in their room he told Hermione about the fencing experience. He asked her about what happened.

'Did I miss any fireworks sweetie?' he asked.

'You did indeed,' she said. 'Thanks for leaving me with them. It was hilarious. Sarah just kept putting her foot in it.'

'So what will happen next?' asked Harry.

'Only time will tell,' replied Hermione with a smile. 'But I think your sister's about to get some more unwanted attention.'

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Hermione was right when she had commented on time. It didn't take long for the news to get out after Chrys' dinner. Strangely enough it wasn't Sarah that told the paper. The Daily Prophet received an anonymous tip off from someone. Rose's photograph was plastered all over the papers and every time Harry saw Chrys she was commenting on how some reporter had wanted an interview. So far she had kept quiet and Rose had done the same. Yet all this had achieved so far was cause even more media speculation. Harry felt the entire thing was almost laughable. How this kept Rose out of danger he had no idea, but his parents and Rose had agreed to it and hence he would keep quiet about it.

January flew by and still Harry had no idea who the traitor was. All he could think was that it had to be one of the Hit Wizards. Somehow he had gotten a very bad feeling about Terry Boot the day they had undertaken the salvage mission. He had been missing earlier and then appeared to be very cagey later.

Harry had just finished Quidditch practice and was going to Number 12 Grimmauld Place to talk to Ron about it. Terry had been a prefect and that was really Harry's only association with him besides the DA. He didn't know what to think of him but deep down inside Harry didn't really feel that Terry would betray them like that. He couldn't give an explanation as to why though and the feeling he was getting about Terry was just getting worse.

Harry arrived at the house to find Molly Weasley cooking in the kitchen and Ron sitting at the kitchen table talking to her about the days events. His face lit up when he saw Harry.

'How was practice?' he asked.

'Pointless,' replied Harry. 'You probably haven't heard but the league has been put on hold again. Thomas Doyle broke the news to us today. No more games for the rest of the season or until the league is fully satisfied that the threat has past.'

'Which means we're on hold until the bloody war is over,' said Ron. 'Cancelling Quidditch. It's just wrong.'

'They need to be worried about everyone's safety Ron,' said Molly from behind a saucepan. 'At that match Marcus was killed and Rose was taken. Plus the Dark Mark was shot into the sky. That in itself causes enough terror.'

'Well it doesn't help that all I saw today was two corpses and Quidditch was the thing I looked forward to,' Ron retorted. 'It was the bright spark in my day and now I've got nothing.'

'They're going to continue training so it won't be that bad,' said Harry. 'Anyway Tadgh was really interesting today. He kept asking me all these questions about Chrys and Rose. He wanted to know who Rose's father really was. It was almost as if he didn't buy Chrys' story.'

'Well it is a load of dungbombs after all,' said Ron. 'He's sensible enough and can probably see right through it.'

An owl soared in the room and landed on Harry's shoulder. Although he did not know whose owl it was Harry felt somehow that it was slightly familiar. He removed the letter from the owl's beak and received a surprise when he opened it.



*Dear Harry,*

*Sorry I haven't written for a while, but you haven't sent me a letter so I've had no real way of contacting you. I've managed to borrow this owl from someone and will await your reply. I really need your advice on something, so I was wondering if you could come and meet me? I know where the Leaky Cauldron is, so I was wondering if we could meet there about three o'clock tomorrow afternoon? Please let me know either way.*

*Your cousin,*

*Dudley Dursley*

*P.S. Congratulations to you and Hermione for everything.*

Harry looked up from the letter to see Ron staring at him intently.

'You look shocked,' said Ron. 'Who's it from?'

'It's from Dudley,' said Harry. 'He wants my advice and wants to meet me at the Leaky Cauldron tomorrow.'

'How does he even know where The Leaky Cauldron is?' asked Ron with slight concern. 'I'm sorry, I know your Mum cast that spell and everything but it sounds fishy. You never told him about it did you?' Harry shook his head.

'I can't see why Dudley would need my help so much that he wants to see me,' said Harry. 'Usually when he asks for help it's for a love potion and he would just write that in a letter.'

'He's asked you for love potions?' asked Ron trying hard not to laugh.

'He's asked me several times,' replied Harry. 'It's been slightly amusing actually.'

'I don't know whether or not you should go,' said Ron. 'What if it's a trap?'

'I know but if Dudley actually needed my help and I didn't give it to him,' said Harry. 'If I go will you come and keep an eye on things? In the back ground that is.'

'If that's what you want Harry,' he replied.

Harry located a quill and scribbled a quick reply before going upstairs to locate his parents.

Lily and James were upstairs sitting and talking. His mother looked happy. Her eyes were sparkling and she had a flower in her hair. His father looked as if he had managed to put on some weight.

Harry tapped gently on the door before entering.

'Hi, how are you?' he asked.

'Fine Harry,' replied his mother. 'How was training?'

Harry quickly filled his mother in on the temporary cancellation of the League before telling them about the letter he had received from Dudley.

'I was just wondering what kind of charm it was that you cast on Dudley?' asked Harry. 'Because Ron thinks it could be a trap.'

'It was a memory modifier,' replied Lily. 'I know you shouldn't interfere like that but I couldn't stand the thought of the Dursley's mistreating you. Sometimes it's hard to believe that Dudley is Petunia's son and then I look at Vernon and everything makes sense. It wasn't too difficult to make Petunia forget the awful memories she had of me.'

'You cast charms on Petunia and Dudley?' asked James in surprise. 'When?'

'The summer before Harry started seventh year,' replied Lily.

'But you hadn't been revealed yet, had you?' asked James.

'So I went in my cat form,' replied Lily.

'But you would have needed a wand to do magic,' said James. 'How did you do it without a wand? Sirius and I tried for years without success.'

'How do you know I didn't have a wand?' asked Lily with a touch of amusement.

The wheels in Harry's head began to turn. For perhaps if his mother could do magic without a wand, that could be the reason Rose could.

'Do you know that Rose can do wandless magic?' asked Harry.

His parents looked at him in surprise.

'What are you talking about?' asked Lily. He noticed his mother's face was turning white.

'She healed Chrys,' said Harry. 'She did it without a wand. I watched her. Then Ron, Hermione and I questioned her about it and she said she'd always been able to do it.'

'I'm going to kill her,' his mother said heatedly. She stood up and stormed out of the room. 'I swear I'm going to kill her. I'll be back soon.'

'Who do you think she's going to kill?' his father asked him in amazement as they watched her rush out of the room.

'I have no idea however I think Rose would have to be high on the list of suspects,' replied Harry with a touch of cheek in his voice. 'Do you know what time Hermione's getting here?'

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Harry awoke early the next morning. He usually slept fairly well at Number 12 Grimmauld Place, however his sleep had been disturbed because he tossed and turned all night. He was seriously worried about what Dudley may potentially be up to.

He spent the morning watching Hermione and Penelope play with baby Reade. He had never considered that he wouldn't be around for his child. For some reason that morning he realised that there was a very real possibility that he wouldn't be. So many circumstances beyond his control were in force. There were times that he wished he wasn't entangled in prophecies about Voldemort's defeat. It was a difficult burden to bare. Yet at the same time, although there was suffering which he knew he could bring an end to, he felt that he was not yet ready. The time would come to defeat the Dark Lord and Harry knew that he would realise when the time came. It wasn't this afternoon, yet he was very suspicious of what Dudley wanted.

Harry made his way to The Leaky Cauldron somewhat nervously. He got there early on purpose so that he could try and assess if it were a trap. He knew that his questions would be answered fairly quickly once Dudley arrived. After all he had never been one to beat around the bush. But he did have quiet a few questions floating around in his head.

He sat down at a table and ordered a Butterbeer. It had been quite a while since he was in The Leaky Cauldron and he almost instinctively looked around to see who else was there. Out of the corner of his eye he spied Tadgh Moran. To put it nicely Tadgh had not been exactly happy yesterday when Thomas Doyle had told them about the cancellation of the rest of the league's games. Emma and Ebony had also not been happy, but it was Tadgh whose reaction was the most pronounced. He had thrown his broomstick at the ground with such force that it had snapped. As he was waiting for Dudley he spied Chrys entering the pub. Somehow he got a bad feeling about who she was meeting.

He was right.

She headed straight for Tadgh. She did not look very happy.

Harry reached into his bag and pulled out a pair of the twins latest design extendable ears. They

were a tiny set that could be tuned into any dimension provided the sound did not travel through walls. The good thing about them was that they were inconspicuous. He got a feeling he shouldn't be listening, but both Chrys and Sirius had not appeared to be very happy lately.

Tadgh lit up a cigarette as he watched her approach.

'You're late Chryssy,' he said.

'Well I might have made an effort if I was actually meeting someone important,' she retorted. 'Give me one of those.'

He handed her a cigarette. She lit it, inhaled and coughed.

'You haven't smoked in a while,' he remarked.

'It's bad for your health,' she said in a somewhat sarcastic voice inhaling another puff. 'It's a filthy Muggle habit. What do you want from me Tadgh?'

'What do I want from you?' he asked in an amused voice. 'You presume a lot.' He blew smoke in her face and she coughed again.

'Why did you turn up to Dunvegan on Christmas Day?' she asked angrily. 'I want the truth, not the you came with Meghan crap.'

'Well I did come with Meghan,' he said. 'We are a couple in case you hadn't noticed.'

'I swear to you if you hurt her I will kill you,' threatened Chrys. 'That girl is like a sister to me. I swear if you're using her to get to me,'

'And why would you assume that?' asked Tadgh cutting her off. 'Is it that hard to believe that I wouldn't be attracted to a smart, beautiful Quidditch player?'

'When it comes to you Tadgh I don't know what to believe,' she replied. 'You've shown that in the past and you're showing it again now. Why did you want to meet me today then? Given that you won't answer my question. I assume you had a reason.'

'You lied to me,' he hissed through his teeth. 'You've made me into a joke.'

'So what if I didn't tell you everything,' she said in a loud whisper. 'There are some things that just aren't your business.'

'You told me that the man you loved was dead,' accused Tadgh. 'That was a lie.'

'He was serving a life sentence in Azkaban,' she replied defensively. 'It wasn't like we could ever be together. And in a sense Tadgh he was dead. He was dead to me.'

'And as soon as he broke out you ran off with a pathetic excuse for an explanation,' he said. 'So obviously he wasn't dead to you. You were pining for him the entire time we were together.'

She didn't answer. She just sat there looking at him angrily.

'And what about the girl,' Tadgh said.

'I never lied to you about that,' she said. 'You never asked.'

'It's not the kind of question a guy thinks of asking,' he snapped. 'One would assume that you might mention something like that. Or your father would. Do you realise how many people have asked me if I knew about it? Or even if she's mine?'

Chrys tried to stifle a laugh.

'That's a joke,' she said. 'Some people simply can't count. Just deal with it Tadgh. Everyone has challenges that they have to deal with.'

'All I want to know is why you didn't tell me,' he said softly.

'It wasn't important Tadgh,' she said sighing. She looked as if she were about to cry. 'It was in the past. Over and done with it. It wasn't like I was going to see her again. I just couldn't do it. Every time I looked at her I saw Sirius. It was just too painful.'

'Don't lie to me Chrystal,' he said.

'I'm not lying,' she replied defensively.

'Well it's not like I exactly expect honesty from you,' he said. 'After the reaction I got from your husband on Christmas Day, it was obvious that you didn't exactly tell him the truth either. He was very surprised to hear about us.'

'What I tell my husband is none of your business,' she said raising her voice. 'That is my concern alone.'

'No I suppose not,' he said. 'Unless you've lied to him about being the child's father.'

'He is,' she hissed. 'Don't talk about things you don't understand.'

'You know what,' said Tadgh with a smile on his face that made chills run up and down Harry's spine. 'I think you were telling the truth when you said the man you loved was dead. But the father and that man wasn't Sirius Black. You were just using him as a front for a dark affair you were having.'

'Who was it then if you're so intelligent?' she asked sarcastically.

'James Potter,' replied Tadgh.

'Hi Harry,' a voice said. Harry jumped before looking up. It was Dudley. 'Thanks for agreeing to meet me.' Dudley had a huge smile on his face. Additionally he had lost even more weight than he had the last time Harry had seen him. Harry had always thought that Dudley had looked like Vernon, yet now he was seeing a lot more of Petunia in him.

'That's okay Dudley,' said Harry recomposing himself. 'Not a problem, do you want a drink?'

'Butterbeer,' replied Dudley quickly. Harry got up to get the drinks. *How did Dudley know what Butterbeer was?* As he moved to the bar he tried to get a bit more of an idea of what was happening in the Tadgh-Chrys exchange, but was unable to hear anything without the extendable ears. He bought two bottles of Butterbeer and made his way back to Dudley, surveying who was present in the pub. There weren't that many people. Harry could see Ron out of the corner of his eye. Ron gave him a slight nod. Harry did the same in acknowledgement.

Harry placed the beer on the table.

'What's up Dudley?' he asked wanting answers. 'How do you know where The Leaky Cauldron is? And how do you know what Butterbeer is?'

'Well any Muggle can see The Leaky Cauldron if they know it's there,' he said. 'They just need to be told it's there by a witch or wizard. But to answer your questions better, I'd best explain. You know I was studying at University right?' Harry nodded. 'Well there's a village nearby and I used to go and visit the village quite often on week nights. You know go to the local pub for a drink and a meal of an evening. Anyhow I kept bumping into this girl. She was there quite often. It took a while for me to get the guts up to speak to her but eventually I did. We started having dinner together, taking walks, that kind of thing and I noticed she was very secretive. Little things added up until I finally realised that she had to be a witch. So I asked her straight out. She was actually quite relieved to know that I knew about the wizarding world. She said she had been dreading working out a way to tell me and she had been worried that I would dump her as soon as I found out. I explained to her that my cousin was a wizard.'

'Did you tell her who I was?' asked Harry with a slight bit of alarm.

'No I didn't, strangely enough she didn't ask,' he said. 'But it would appear that you're quite famous

in your world from the number of things I've been reading about you in the paper, so I'm kind of glad I didn't tell her. Anyway I wanted your advice. You know my parents well. Probably better than most people. I'm really serious about this girl. How do I tell them?

Harry looked at his cousin with some amusement.

'You want me to give you advice on how to tell your parents that you're dating a witch?' he asked with some disbelief.

'There's no one else who knows my parents well enough that would believe me,' replied Dudley.

'I guess you have a point there,' replied Harry with a smile. He couldn't believe this Dudley that came to him. Sure, he knew his mother had cast a charm on him to make him friendlier, however Harry had to believe that some change had occurred. The old Dudley, under a charm or not would not have dated a witch.

'Can you come and cast a charm on them?' Dudley asked hopefully. 'I'd ask her to do it, but I don't want her to think I'm ashamed of her.'

'It's against the law,' replied Harry. 'Although sometimes people do stretch the law. Listen Dud, how serious are you about her?'

'Really serious,' he replied.

'Because your mum might be okay about it,' said Harry. 'Your dad however would hit the roof. I wouldn't tell them unless you were really serious. Your father will disown you. You know how he feels about magic.'

'That's the problem,' said Dudley wistfully. 'But I don't know if I really care if he disowns me. My entire life he's tried to bring me up to be someone that I don't think I want to be. The truth is I just don't know.' Dudley looked at his watch. 'I'm sorry Harry I've got to run. Can we catch up sometime soon?'

'Sure,' replied Harry as Dudley stood up to leave. 'By the way who is the girl?'

'Her name's Cho,' replied Dudley. 'Cho Chang.'

Dudley had turned around and headed toward the door. It was probably a good thing because he would have gotten an enormous shock when he saw Harry's jaw drop in surprise. *Dudley and Cho?* It was unthinkable and a match made in, well Harry wasn't entirely sure what it was a match made in however it certainly wasn't a match made in heaven. His jaw was still hanging in the air as Ron approached the table.

'So what happened?' asked Ron.

'He wanted my advice,' said Harry very slowly. 'He wanted to know whether or not I think he should tell his parents that he's seeing Cho.'

'He's seeing Cho?' said Ron in disbelief. 'That fat oaf of a Muggle cousin of yours is seeing Cho Chang, a very intelligent young woman who also happens to be a pretty good Seeker?'

'Apparently,' said Harry still reeling in shock.

'And that's what he needed to see you about?' asked Ron.

Harry nodded his head.

'Unbelievable,' said Ron. 'I thought Cho had more sense than that.'

'Evidently not,' said Harry. He burst out laughing. 'I'm sorry Ron but it seems so stupid.'

Ron glanced around the room.

'Well so far it doesn't seem to be a trap,' said Ron. 'But over there I think is one pretty upset woman.' He pointed in the direction where Chrys and Tadgh had been. Harry saw Chrys sitting

there alone. She looked fairly upset.

'She was here with Tadgh Moran,' said Harry. 'Perhaps we should see if she's okay.' Harry and Ron stood up and walked over toward her table. She raised her head slightly when she saw the two of them.

'Harry, Ron,' she said with some surprise. 'What are you doing here?'

'I was meeting Dudley,' said Harry. 'I'll explain later. Are you okay?'

'Why wouldn't I be?' she asked.

'You just look a little upset,' replied Ron.

'I didn't know you smoked,' said Harry glancing at her hand.

'I don't,' she replied. 'That is I don't anymore. I've just had a hard day.'

'Tadgh,' whispered Harry. He put his hand up to his mouth realising that perhaps he shouldn't have said anything.

'Yes I was meeting Tadgh, Harry,' she replied. 'Sirius told me you were observant. He's an old friend. There's nothing more too it anymore. He's upset I didn't tell him about Rose. I guess that's an understandable reaction after what he has read in the paper's lately.'

'Well I noticed him talking to you on Christmas Day,' said Harry. 'Then yesterday he was asking me a lot of questions about you and Rose. I noticed him here and I noticed you walking over toward him.' Harry omitted the fact he had eavesdropped on their conversation. He was unsettled by what he had heard. 'There was one thing, he was very curious to know who Rose's father was.'

Chrys looked around.

'We had better go and talk,' she said. 'Grimmauld in half an hour okay? I'll meet you in the lounge room. Find Prongs and Crookshanks.'

Harry and Ron nodded. Harry finished his drink and then apparated to Grimmauld Place. They approached the door, located his parents and went to the living room to wait for Chrys. He filled them in on what had happened with Dudley. His mother laughed.

'I'm sorry,' she said. 'I was just imagining the look on Petunia and Vernon's face if Dudley appeared and told them he was dating a witch. That would be one thing I would pay good money to see.'

'I think it would be entertaining to be there if you suddenly appeared out of thin air personally,' his father said with a laugh.

Chrys appeared a couple of seconds later. Her cheek certainly looked very red, but other than that she looked much better than she had at The Leaky Cauldron.

'What did you say to him?' she asked Harry.

'I told him that it was Sirius,' answered Harry honestly. He had told Tadgh that Sirius was Rose's father even though he knew it wasn't true.

'He didn't believe you,' said Chrys. 'He made a horrible accusation. He accused me of having an affair with you James.'

'Who are we talking about?' asked James.

'Tadgh Moran,' replied Harry.

'Who the hell is he?' asked Lily.

'A thorn in Sirius' side,' mumbled Chrys. Harry thought that he was possibly the only one who heard her. 'He's an Irish Quidditch player and he plays for Puddlemere as well.'

'Moran?' asked James. Harry nodded. 'The name's not familiar. Did he go to Hogwarts?'

'No,' said Chrys shaking her head. 'Not while you were there. He's Bill Weasley's year. He went to Beauxbaton's for three years before coming to Hogwarts because his parents were in Belgium.'

'Ah,' said James. 'How do you know him?'

'Quidditch,' replied Chrys. Harry bit his lip. From their conversation that he had overheard he knew that she was lying. He was a little surprised. He just didn't know what she had to achieve by lying. 'He says he's watched Rose flying and says she flies just like you did James. It's interesting, given that he plays for Puddlemere that he hasn't made any comment to Harry. At any rate the cat could be out of the bag. I'm not going to pretend to have had an affair with you James. If people comment there's no way I could pretend that.'

'Then we can only hope that Tadgh will shut up,' said Harry.

'We can but hope,' replied Chrys. 'My experience of Tadgh is that he will say what he wants to whenever he wants to. I made this choice, I'll just have to face the consequences.'

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'You have returned,' snarled his master in his high-pitched voice.

'Yes my Lord,' he said.

'What have you to tell me?' his master asked.

'The child is hers my Lord,' he replied. 'The evidence is overwhelming.'

'If that is the case then I am mistaken,' his master said in a contemplative manner. 'What is this evidence?'

'I watched the girl,' he said trembling. He did not want to infuriate his master. 'She is a natural flyer. She's intelligent. She has the MacLeod eyes. She has to be the Heir of Ravenclaw.'

'Is she a Celt?' his master asked.

'She performed wandless magic to escape,' he stuttered. 'She has to be a Celt. All other types of witches that could perform wandless magic have died out. They were targeted years before the Celts. Then Rowena Ravenclaw was that last of the Celts. It makes sense that her Heir should possess the trait.'

'I think you may be right,' his master said in a contemplative voice. 'Go, you shall be rewarded my servant.'

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Sirius came storming in the room.

'Where have you been?' he asked loudly. 'I've been worried sick. Couldn't you have told me you were going out for a couple of hours?'

Chrys turned around and Sirius' looked stunned.

'Who did that to you?' he asked.

Harry glanced at Chrys again and realised that while they had been talking a big purple bruise had come up on her cheek. He couldn't believe he had been so unobservant.

'It doesn't matter Sirius,' she said softly. 'I deserved it.'

'What's wrong with you lately?' he asked. 'Why couldn't you tell me where you were going?'

'You're not my keeper Sirius,' she yelled. 'You're my husband.'

'Yes,' he said angrily. 'I'm your husband. And that entitles me to know what on bloody earth is going on.'

'There's nothing going on,' she said. 'This is my problem and I'll sort it out.'

Harry turned around and walked out of the room. He had had enough of this. Every time he saw Sirius and Chrys together lately they were fighting. And he knew she wasn't being honest with him. He was seriously worried about what she had gotten herself into and Harry only hoped that she would find herself a way out before it became too late. He felt he should say something to Sirius. Except he felt that he would be betraying Chrys. It was a difficult situation to be in. He owed Sirius a lot, yet he felt some loyalty toward Chrys.

He walked upstairs to where he knew Hermione would be waiting for him. He needed to talk to her about it. She would give him some good advice. About Sirius and about Dudley. She had not been extremely happy about him going to meet Dudley, but she had learnt that Harry's curiosity needed to be satisfied or there could be hell to pay. As soon as she saw Harry she threw her arms around him and kissed him numerous times all over his face.

'You look happy to see me,' he said.

'I'm just glad that nothing happened to you,' she said. 'That would be terrible. What did Dudley want?'

Harry explained to her what Dudley had wanted. She too found it highly amusing.

'I can't believe Cho would fall for someone like Dudley,' she remarked. 'Are you sure there's nothing more sinister to it?'

'I'm inclined to think so,' said Harry. 'It just isn't like Dudley.'

At that moment an owl soared in and dropped a paper on Hermione's shoulder.

'It's the Prophet,' she said. 'Have a look at this Harry.'

Harry glanced at the paper.

### ***Minister of Magic Candidates***

*The following candidates have been selected for the next round.*

*Ludo Bagman*

*Amelia Bones*

*Marcus Parkinson*

*Kingsley Shacklebolt*

*Seth Zabini*

*The interviews will take place in February and the final three candidates will be announced in early March. Voting will take place on the first day of April.*

'Well I guess that's both good and bad,' remarked Harry. 'It's great that Umbridge and Rita Skeeter didn't make it through, but Marcus Parkinson and Bagman are still in the running.'

'We need to place our faith in the Wizengamot and hope for the best,' said Hermione with a grim look on her face.



## Chapter 22 *Petals in the Storm*

*"Once upon a year gone by  
she saw herself give in  
every time she closed her eyes  
she saw what could have been  
well nothing hurts and nothing bleeds  
when covers tucked in tight  
funny when the bottom drops  
how she forgets to fight"*

*(from Paradise, recorded by Vanessa Carlton, Album = Be Not Nobody)*

Lavender was sitting by the lake at Hogwarts. It had been a lonely month. Seamus had gone home for Christmas and then had gone on an extended business trip. She had no idea where he was going. She had been true to her word and not left the school grounds although she had been very tempted to. Her students had returned from their Christmas break with a renewed enthusiasm for Divination which made her job a little easier. She couldn't understand why students would take Divination when they really didn't have the aptitude for it. She was going to teach her third years about the Orb next week. Lavender had only gazed in her Orb once in the past month.

*She had gazed into the Orb one afternoon late in January. She had been taken only a few months forward in time. She knew this because Hermione was holding a newborn baby. Harry was looking on proudly. She was there also, however she didn't know why. Chrystal was there and for some reason Lavender felt a newfound surge of hatred for the woman. She didn't know why.*

She looked away immediately and stashed the Orb in the cupboard of Trelawney's classroom in the North Tower. She hadn't dared to touch it since.

Now, every night when she lay in bed waiting patiently for Seamus' return, she kept seeing Hermione holding Harry's baby. She didn't know why it bothered her. She was over Harry, the past couple of months had made her realise that the entire thing with Harry had all been one silly obsession. A simple girlhood infatuation. And one that was over now that she had rediscovered Seamus.

She sat gazing at the lake thinking of Seamus, not Harry. Suddenly she got a very bad feeling that made goosebumps appear on her rugged up arms. A premonition about Seamus.

*He was cold, shivering and all alone. He was in pain. And she had no idea where he was. He just wasn't safe.*

She immediately jumped up and ran toward the castle. If what she had seen was right Seamus was in a lot of trouble. Thinking about it she hadn't heard from him in over a week. He had been writing every day until now. She ran toward McGonagall's office, trying to hold herself together and asked McGonagall to locate Seamus' sister, Katie, a second year Gryffindor. McGonagall gave her a strange look but agreed. Lavender then ran up all of the winding stairways that eventually brought her to the North Tower. She ripped open the cupboard door and gently pulled her Orb out of the cupboard. She quickly wiped it with a cloth, tears cascading down her face and tried to concentrate on the Orb.

*Everything was swirling. Round and round. She couldn't see anything. Her vision was clouded.*

She heard someone calling her name softly. It was little Katie.

'What's wrong Lavender?' she said in a frightened voice. *Of course she would be worried. I've never summoned her here before.*

'When did you last here from Seamus Katie? It's really important,' she asked the brown-haired girl whose eyes were wide opened staring at Lavender.

'Um about a week ago,' she replied timidly. 'I was getting a letter every few days. Do you think something is wrong Lavender?'

'I hope not,' she said. 'Katie, can you go and get your letters from Seamus and then meet me in the Defence Against the Dark Arts classroom.' Katie nodded and Lavender headed straight for the Staff Quarters. She went towards her room and gathered her letters from Seamus, before knocking on the Black's door.

'Chrystal, Sirius can you please come and help me?' she asked when she spied the two of them in the sitting room. 'It's important. Can one of you find Dumbledore and bring him to the Defence Against the Dark Arts classroom and the other come with me?' Lavender was preoccupied she didn't see the intense look on their faces.

'Sure Lavender,' replied Sirius. '*Mo cridhe*, why don't you accompany Lavender and I'll find Dumbledore.'

Chrystal just nodded.

'What's wrong Lavender?' she asked.

'It's Seamus,' she replied. 'Look I need a favour from you. In a way I'm glad Sirius volunteered to find Dumbledore. I'm going to ask you to do something that I need.'

'What?' asked Chrystal as they entered the Dark Art's classroom.

'Listen I know you're a Celt,' she said bluntly. 'And I know what that means. Can you please use that to find Seamus for me?'

'Lavender I'm sorry but I can't,' she said. She looked as if she were in pain. 'I just can't. I don't want to use that kind of magic. It's dark magic. People could get really hurt if I start messing around with these kinds of things. I swore I would never use it and I haven't Lavender. You don't know just how difficult that has been for me.'

'Can you feel him now?' she asked. Lavender watched as Chrystal closed her eyes and concentrated hard.

'I'm sorry but I can't,' replied Chrystal. 'He's just not giving it off freely.'

'What's going on Professor Brown?' asked Dumbledore.

'I was sitting by the lake thinking about Seamus Finnegan,' she began. 'A picture of him became visible in my head. He was being tortured because of me. I've only had a premonition like this once before. It was of Harry and Hermione and it turned out to be true. I need to find him and warn him before it's too late.'

Katie Finnegan walked into the room at this moment.

'Here are those letters Lavender,' she said.

Lavender glanced at them.

'I haven't heard from Seamus in a week,' she said slowly. 'He was writing every day before that.' She pulled her letters out of her robes. 'I thought we might be able to find an answer here, if other methods aren't available.' She glanced pleadingly at Chrystal who simply shook her head.

'He was last in Seville in Spain,' said Lavender. 'Professor Dumbledore, could you please arrange for Firenze to take my classes. I need to find him.'

'What about the Death Eaters Lavender?' asked Professor McGonagall.

'I don't care, I need to find Seamus,' she said. She glanced at Katie who was looking more and more frightened. 'I'll owl you everyday Katie okay. Please tell someone if you don't hear from me.'

Katie nodded and Lavender headed towards the entrance hall, summoning things she needed as she

headed toward Hogsmeade. As soon as she was out of the castle grounds she apparated to London the tears still flowing.

~~~~~

Lee walked nervously up the stairs that led to George and Katie's house above the Hogsmeade WWW store. He had done what George had requested and now was willing to report on what he had found. Personally he was extremely insulted that the twins had asked him to spy on his girlfriend's father, however he had felt that it wasn't worth the hassle to argue with them about it.

Fred and George had changed. Lee put it down to The Order. He himself was not a member although he could see why the twins thought it important. Lee felt they had lost a little of their sparkle. He couldn't admit to himself that they might just be judging him for what he'd done to Alicia. He was going away now that he had completed his task. Going to leave his old life behind him and try and start anew where nobody was judging him.

Katie opened the door when he knocked. She embraced him like a long lost friend.

'Lee how have you been?' she asked. 'I feel like I haven't seen you in ages.'

'I guess I've been busy,' he said quickly.

'Preoccupied more like it,' joked Katie.

Lee went a little red. He wasn't altogether too sure what his friends thought of him and Blaise. It wasn't a subject he actually brought up either. He had tried to keep out of Alicia's way at George and Katie's wedding, and had stopped coming into work, asking somebody else to manage the London store. He didn't need to try and be polite to Alicia everyday.

'George will be here soon,' said Katie. 'He's just closing up. Would you like a cold drink or something?'

'I'd love a beer if you have any,' he said. No sooner had Katie brought him a beer, Fred and George appeared in the room.

'Hey mate,' said Fred. 'It's been a while. What have you got to tell us?'

'Straight to it eh?' asked Lee. 'I don't think Mr Zabini is up to anything. I've kept a close eye on him. Blaise and I are invited over there all the time. He's got money but he's not exactly into anything darker. Not in his own house.'

'If you see anything can you let us know?' asked George.

'I doubt I will but if I do,' he replied. 'There's something else I need to talk to you about. I need to resign from the business. Given that the league has been cancelled Blaise and I are going to go travelling for a while. I'm not sure when we'll be back.'

'You don't need to resign,' said Fred. 'You can just take leave.'

'But this way you won't be waiting for me to come back,' said Lee trying desperately to find an excuse to break all ties. 'If there's a job for me when I come back then I'll ask for it, but if you find someone better I don't want you to feel like you owe me a job.'

'Are you sure?' asked George.

'Positive,' said Lee. 'We're leaving tonight. I had better go and get ready.'

He apparated from the living room relieved to have finally told them what was going on. Now he felt obligation free ready to start his travelling.

~~~~~

February arrived and Harry began to really miss Quidditch. He was missing it more than he had in fifth year when Umbridge had banned him from playing Quidditch. True he was still attending

training, but he missed the excitement he used to get when a game began. Hermione was doing her best trying to fill his days, she had lots of books about pregnancy and childbirth that she wanted him to read in addition to him giving her a hand deciphering the prophecy. That evening he was wandering down Diagon Alley, keeping his eye on Terry Boot. He was wearing his Invisibility Cloak and was having to pay close attention to who was around so that he didn't accidentally bump into anybody.

It was the only way he could discover if Boot was the traitor.

Harry followed him down the main section of Diagon Alley. Constantly aware of his surroundings, Harry spied Madam Malkin out of the corner of his eye closing her store for the evening, Snape in the Apothecary stocking up on Potion supplies and [Bill and Fleur](#) outside the new French restaurant, standing there gazing at each other looking so much in love, yet with a vast distance still between them. His heart went out to them. Boot was still heading for The Leaky Cauldron. Harry followed him.

Terry entered the Leaky Cauldron and made his way towards an empty table. Harry scurried behind him and stood up against a post near the table. Harry waited around for a few hours while Boot caught up with some school friends, Anthony Goldstein and Padma Patil but there was nothing to report by about ten o'clock. Harry decided to call it a night and Apparated to Dunvegan where he knew Hermione would be waiting for him.

She was lying in bed when he arrived. He crept into the room softly so as not to disturb her. He gently lifted the covers and slid underneath them. Then he moved his body closer to Hermione's and began to kiss the back of her neck. After a while she let out a soft moan and turned around.

'How did you know it wasn't some stranger?' he asked her with a joking tone of anger.

'Because a stranger can't kiss me and give me the shivers like that,' she replied.

'Really?' he asked.

'That and the Dunvegan wards,' she said with a smile. 'Why don't you show me what else you can do?'

Harry was more than happy to take her up on the invitation.

~~~~~

Lavender arrived at the Madrid Floo exchange early the next morning. She had not slept at all that night. On entering the main street of the wizarding world in Madrid, she obtained a map that allowed her to see the safe apparition points and instantly apparated to the one in Seville.

Seamus had made mention of the hotel in which he was staying in his letter. Lavender had supposed that that would be the best place to start. She had no idea where he could be. She just hoped her intuition would guide her.

She made her way to the reception area of the Hotel San Gil. It was an impressive Muggle hotel that more than intimidated Lavender a little. She asked at the counter for Seamus Finnegan.

'I'm Seamus' girlfriend and I've come up to meet him as a surprise,' she said. 'Is he here?'

'He's still checked in,' said the lady at the counter. Lavender didn't like her at all. 'Hold on a moment.' She dialled a number, "654", Lavender committed it to memory. Seamus had once told her that telephone extensions were often the same as room numbers in hotels. 'Mr Finnegan is not here at the moment. Can I take a message?'

'I'll come back later,' she said. 'Do you have a restaurant where I can have a nice warm meal?'

'Our restaurant is on the first floor,' the lady said sharply.

'Could you point me to the stairs?' asked Lavender.

The lady looked at her questioningly.

'The stairs are for emergency use only,' said the lady. 'The elevators are over there.' She pointed at two metal doors. Lavender looked at them in a confused manner. Although Lavender's father was Muggle born, Lavender herself knew very little of the Muggle world. Her father's family had disowned him when he had discovered he was a wizard and her father ensured that Lavender saw as little of the cruelty that human beings could inflict upon each other.

She walked over to them and wondered how they opened. She gazed at them for a couple of seconds before she heard a noise that sounded like a ping and the doors opened.

'What floor S\_nora?' asked a man dressed in a smart uniform. Lavender thought of Seamus' room number.

'I'm in room 654,' she replied. The man nodded and pushed a button on the wall. Lavender felt a brief movement before the door opened again.

'You floor S\_nora,' he said. Lavender walked out the metal doors with amazement. *What was that things called? An elevator. Muggles had such strange contraptions.* She walked down the corridor until she came to room 654. She knocked on the door and waited for an answer. There was silence. She looked around pulled out her wand and pointed it at the door.

'*Alohamora,*' she whispered. The door opened. She quickly walked in and closed it behind her. Then on surveying the room she screamed.

~~~~~

Draco combed his hair nervously. He was nervous about his summons. He really had no idea what he was going to tell the Dark Lord. He had spent six months staring at the prophecy in his spare time and had really not gotten any closer. No two of them had the same name character. If used just first names Harry and Chrystal were both seven; but Draco knew that Arithmancy in prophecies rarely ran like that. To make things even more confusing, everyone's birth characters equalled two. He had spoken at length to Professor Vector about it and had spent some time talking to Hermione after the last meeting of the Order. The truth was he was no closer than he had been when he had been handed the task.

It was a very real possibility that the Dark Lord would kill him. He had failed.

Chrystal had told him to make it up. She had said that if the Dark Lord's Seers had not worked it out it wouldn't matter and if they had worked it out then he would never be asked. She had even told him to say that Harry and Lavender were paired together. The way she had said it had made Draco feel unsettled. It was as if she really believed it and if anyone told her otherwise she could not be convinced.

Draco appeared in the house at Little Hangleton. He shook as he heard the footsteps of his master approach.

'What do you have for me young Master Malfoy?' he said in his high pitched voice that made Draco shiver.

'The signs are difficult to interpret My Lord,' he said. 'The characters are all two, including yours. Hence all four characters are equal.'

'Is that all you have for me?' his master said raising his voice.

'No My Lord,' he said stammering. He would have to use Chrystal's information. 'I have looked into it in great detail. I have figured that because you and The Heir of Ravenclaw are related then you are paired with The Heir of Ravenclaw.'

'Because of blood Mr Malfoy?' asked the Dark Lord.

'Because of blood,' said Draco.

'How strange you should mention that,' he said in an amused voice. 'Blood you say?'

'Blood,' said Draco more than a little worried that the Dark Lord was making fun of him.

'I have another assignment for you,' his master said. The amused voice was gone. The Dark Lord was serious now. 'You are to keep your eye on this Heaney girl. I have heard about your girlfriend and her family.' The Dark Lord's voice was full of dislike. 'I am willing to overlook that if you are prepared to complete this task for me. You are to tell me where she goes, what she does and who her friends are. I shall be checking up on you Draco.' And with that he Disappeared.

*He had to keep an eye on Rose? How was he going to do that?* There was only one way, he would have to enlist Ginny's help. She would not be happy with that at all. Draco wandered around the house. He knew it had been the old Riddle House and that the Dark Lord had not ever spent a lot of time here when he was younger.

Draco wondered how he could have let himself get so entangled in this kind of mess. He glanced at the Dark mark on his arm. It was a constant reminder to him that he had chosen the path he had taken. He had allowed his body to be marked with a sign that showed he was the Dark Lord's servant. Only he wasn't. Nor did he want to be. He appreciated the fact that he had been allowed to work with the Order. The work he was doing for them seemed to matter. It was important and he was helping people. Ginny had made him see how much pleasure there was in helping people.

That was the reason he had chosen to study at St Mungos. It was the reason he had decided to become a Potions specialist. That and the encouragement of Snape. His mother thought he was training in Potions because he wanted to brew illegal and dangerous potions. He was inclined to let her believe this. She had a thing for Death Eaters, a thing for pure-blooded wizards. First his father and then Snape. Now she had taken up with another pureblood from somewhere. Former Slytherin of course. It made Draco sick.

He Disappeared from the house and returned to his house in Hogsmeade. He wondered if he could risk a midnight rendezvous. He would have to let Ginny know where to meet him and hope that she was up to it. He could really do with Potter's Invisibility Cloak now. He wondered if Rose still had it. He summoned his quill and a piece of parchment and wrote a quick note to Ginny.

*Ginny,*

*I need to meet you tonight. It's important. Shall we make it our normal meeting place?*

*Let me know if you can make it,*

*Draco.*

He sent his owl off hoping that she could.

~~~~~  
Ginny received the owl from Draco wondering what was so important that he had to meet her tonight.

Any meeting with Draco was a cause for celebration but the thought of a secret meeting in their little secret spot was always something that she secretly looked forward to. She thought that perhaps she should give him a little treat; after all it had been a while since they'd seen each other.

She smiled as she made her way to the Room of Requirement early in the evening. She didn't want to be caught out of bounds. Then she let out a squeal of delight when she saw what the room had to offer her.

There was a queen sized futon with a bright purple spread that Ginny spied in the corner of the room. Around it were tiny little candles. In fact the entire room was covered with candles. In another corner of the room there was a spa with tiny little bubbles floating on the surface.

She pulled out her wand and ignited all the candles with a single swish of her wand. She slipped off

her robes and banished them to a corner of the room. She wandered over to the spa and giggled as she stuck her toes in and found that the water was warm. She plunged her body into the warm water, it was certainly relaxing. She closed her eyes and waited patiently for Draco to arrive. She figured he wouldn't be much longer.

She began to doze off and was abruptly awoken when she felt someone run their finger down the back of her neck. She jumped slightly as it sent shivers down her spine and turned around and saw Draco standing there with a smile on his face.

'Wow Ginny I'm impressed,' he said. 'But this wasn't quite what I was expecting.'

'It wasn't?' asked Ginny going a little red in the face. *What had he been expecting then?*

Draco gave out a little laugh. A kind laugh, but a laugh all the same.

'No Ginny,' he said softly. 'However I am certainly impressed. But for now I need to talk to you. It's been a long day.'

'Okay,' she said slowly. You could almost detect a bit of trepidation in her voice. 'Listen Draco, why don't you hop in the spa and then you can talk to me. I will do nothing except sit and listen until you've finished. The warm water might help to relieve some tension. Did another person die at St Mungos today? Another one of the Muggle-borns?' Ginny had been paying more attention to what had happened to the Muggle-borns who were abducted since Rose had been taken. It was worrying her that many of them seemed to be dying from unexplained causes.

'No Gin,' said Draco as he slipped into the tub. 'I wasn't at St Mungos today. I had to visit someone. I think I've made a big mistake.'

Ginny gazed at the apologetic look he had on his face. He had had a bad day. She could see it in his eyes. They looked so sad.

'What is it Draco?' she asked softly.

'He summoned me today,' he said. 'The Dark Lord. He wanted to know the results of my work. I told him what at the moment appears to be the truth, yet to me just seems inconceivable. I've exhausted all the avenues using Arithmancy and there's still not a solution. So I told him that Harry and Lavender were paired together, simply due to the fact that Ravenclaw and Slytherin's houses were joined.'

Ginny understood the weight of what he had said. On one hand it put Lavender's life in danger if Voldemort ever got hold of her. On the other it suggested that their Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher would turn bad.

'If I thought anyone of the three would turn personally I would have to say it would be Lavender,' said Draco.

'Lavender?' asked Ginny in surprise. 'Why her? She's so sweet. I thought you were going to say Harry.'

'I say Lavender because she's deceptive,' said Draco bluntly. 'She comes across as sweet and innocent but deep down inside she's a very jealous personality. I've seen her when she's drunk.'

'Did you know that Seamus is missing?' asked Ginny carefully. 'It means Lavender will try and find him.'

'No, I didn't,' he replied. 'Listen Gin, that's not what I want to talk about.'

'What do you want to talk about then?' she asked. She was getting slightly confused.

'He knows about us Ginny.'

It was all he needed to say. One sentence that could drastically change the way her life panned out. The Dark Lord knew about her and Draco. And Draco was a spy. If he found out about Draco.

Ginny could feel the blood drain from her face.

'He knows?' she asked. Draco did not answer. He just nodded his head.

'How do you know this?' she asked. She looked into his face. 'He asked you to do something didn't he?'

Draco nodded.

'He wants detailed notes on what Rose does,' said Draco.

'And he wants you to use me as a source of information?' she said raising her voice. 'Well I won't do it.' She stood up and jumped out of the spa grabbing her towel and heading towards the door.

'Gin, I wouldn't walk out that door like that if I were you,' he said. She turned around and glanced at him.

'Why?' she asked.

'Because students don't normally walk around Hogwarts in fluffy pink towels, however incredibly sexy they may be,' he said. 'And second because even through the towel it's obvious you're cold so why don't you come back and warm up in the spa for a few minutes. You said you'd let me finish talking.' Ginny glanced down at her chest, slightly embarrassed. He was right as usual. She walked back to the spa, left the towel on the edge and slipped in. 'Now Ginny, you agreed to help me when I said I would spy. I need you to help me now.'

'But Draco you're suggesting I spy on one of my best friends,' she said. Her voice was pleading with him. She was not going to do it.

'No that's not what I'm suggesting, it's just what I've been asked to do,' he said. Ginny looked at him with surprise. 'You didn't let me finish. I suggest we tell Rose. She has a right to know that the Dark Lord has his eye on her. Then between you and her you come up with what to tell me. Some of it will have to be true. Able to be verified by any Death Eaters who happen to be roaming around the school. I can't not do it Ginny. It would mean death for both of us.'

Ginny realised what he was saying was true. She was involved in Voldemort's plans whether she liked it or not. She could conform or be killed. She only now fully understood why Draco had made the decision he made.

She gazed into his grey eyes. They were looking at her pleading with her. She felt her back shivering despite the warm water. She needed him more than she could imagine. She leant closer towards him and kissed his ear.

'If we must we must,' she whispered, before continuing to devour his neck. He was doing a good job trying to resist her advances. She moved behind him and began to massage his shoulders.

'We need to get rid of that tension don't we?' she asked. She pushed her fingers into his hard tense shoulders before she began to kiss the entire length of back with tiny little kisses until she reached his neck. Then he turned around. Ginny could tell he was aroused, no matter how much he was trying to pretend he wasn't.

'You shouldn't do this to me,' he said. 'You're such a tease.'

He moved on top of her and pushed her body against the wall of the spa.

'I'm going to have to teach you a lesson for being such a tease,' he said. He picked her up and carried her over to the futon where he lay her gently on the bed, before he continued his lesson. She continued to be an enthusiastic student. As the lesson continued she could feel the tension rising inside her until it reached a peak.

Later that night as she lay relaxing on the futon in the arms of her beloved she felt better. They had hard times to face, but if they had each other they might just make it through them.



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Harry and Hermione flooded to Grimmauld Place for the next meeting of the Order. Harry was no closer to completing his assignment; however he was fairly sure that the traitor wasn't Terry Boot. Harry had followed him round of an evening for over a week and Ron had kept an eye on him at work and neither of them had seen anything that would suggest that he was involved with the Death Eaters. Of course he could have just been overly cautious, but Harry felt that he simply wasn't the one.

It meant that they were back to the drawing board on that one however. His mind kept replaying the meeting over and over again. Who had been in the room?

Chrys had been sick, so she and Sirius had been sitting on her bed. Despite what he had overheard lately he didn't think it would have been one of them. Lupin and Tonks were on the floor. Dung was there also and his men had been involved in the mission. Despite the fact that Dung was a crook Harry simply couldn't see him having given away the operation. Especially given that his security guards, scrappy as they were, were in danger throughout the operation. Dumbledore, McGonagall and Snape were there. Again Harry couldn't see one of them being responsible. The next was Mad-Eye Moody. Again another unlikely candidate. And the Weasleys. That was it.

He reluctantly walked into the meeting room and sat down at the large oak table. Hermione gave him a concerned look as if she could sense his frustration. Harry didn't pay much attention to the words that were flying across the table. He gave his report and although nobody commented he felt that he had let everyone down. He tuned out as Draco was giving his report about his meeting with Voldemort. His eyes drooped and he was left to his thoughts.

*Again he was in some strange building that he did not recognise on features yet he knew it was Hogwarts. He spied the white haired man again. Slytherin. He was angry. Harry could tell by the look on his face. He stormed into a room that had the name "Professor Ravenclaw" inscribed on the door. He pulled the door open with force.*

*'Well Rowen you have your wish,' he said with a snarl. 'I am leaving Hogwarts. Tomorrow morning. Just as you requested.'*

*'Thank you Salazar,' she said nervously. 'I appreciate it.'*

*'About The Covenant Rowen,' he began. 'You know I did it for you don't you?'*

*'Why Salazar?' she asked.*

*'So I can take the boy,' he replied. 'Kearney will come with me, you may keep □ille.'*

*'Kearney is just a child,' she said. 'He needs his mother.'*

*'My son will come with me,' said Salazar. 'And I will leave as promised.'*

*She reluctantly agreed. Slytherin brought the boy in.*

*'Kearney, say goodbye to your mother,' he said sneering.*

*The little blonde-haired boy jumped up on the desk next to his mother.*

*'Where am I going Mummy?' he asked.*

*'You're going for a long trip with your father,' she said. She pulled off her necklace and placed it in her sons hands.*

*'Kearney, I want you to give this to your sister when you find her,' she said.*

*'What if I don't find her?' the little boy asked curiously.*

*'Then give it to your son so he can find □ille's daughter,' she said carefully.*

*'What if I forget?' he asked.*

*'The necklace is charmed my dear son,' she said. 'You won't forget and if you do it will remind you.'*  
Salazar looked at her with strong dislike.

*'You will be lucky if your Heir ever wear's that necklace Rowen,' he said. 'I swear this to you today.'*  
Salazar picked up the little boy who was now crying for his mother, while holding onto the Celtic necklace his mother had given him. He marched out the door, a Squib following him laden with bags and stormed out of the castle never to return again.

Harry awoke with a shake from Hermione.

'Have you heard from Seamus Harry?' she asked as he gradually stirred from his thoughts.

'What?' he asked looking around. The meeting was over. 'No, Seamus, no not for a while. Why?'

'You weren't listening were you?' she said with a disapproving look on her face.

'No, sorry,' he said.

'Seamus is missing and Lavender's run off to try and find him,' said Hermione.

'But she'll be captured by those Death Eaters who are after her,' said Harry with some alarm.

'Not only that, Malfoy has told Voldemort that she is paired with you,' she said. 'That means that they'll kill her if they find her.'

Harry gazed at Hermione blankly letting it set in.

'She's in a lot of trouble Hermione,' he said slowly. 'A lot of trouble.'

'I know,' said Ron. 'Seamus was telling me about what the Death eaters were saying they were going to do to her when they found her. Because she was such a pretty thing they said.'

Harry was stunned. He couldn't believe that someone would say something like that in public.

'Moody has sent me to go and find her,' said Ron. 'I'm taking Boot with me. That will at least keep him out of trouble. I'm going to head off now.'

Harry nodded in acknowledgement.

'I'll be back down in a moment Hermione,' he said leaving the room.

Harry couldn't believe that Seamus was missing of that Lavender would rush off to find him like that. He knew he had to write to Dean and find out what was going on. He made his way upstairs intending to send him an owl immediately. When he reached the top of the stairs he could hear his mother and Sirius talking.

'Sirius you've got to tell her,' his mother said. 'How long do you think you can keep this kind of thing a secret?'

Harry crept closer to the door. *What was it that Sirius was hiding?* Sirius had been conspicuously absent from the Order's meeting that afternoon and Harry had wondered why. He was determined to find out. He crept into the room where he and Hermione would be spending the night and located his Invisibility Cloak. He covered himself and crept into the room where his mother and Sirius were.

'Sirius I can't believe you even talked me into this in the first place,' his mother said. She sounded angry and almost as if she was exasperated.

'Well, Lily I couldn't let her do it,' he said in a desperate voice. 'She would have regretted it eventually. You cannot reverse the effects of that kind of Potion.'

'When she finds out that she didn't get the sterilising Potion,' said Lily.

'She won't find out,' Sirius pleaded.

'I had to switch it for a fertility potion,' she said. 'You do realise that don't you Sirius? It's the only thing that would taste remotely the same and given that she knew the ingredients,'

'I know all this Lily,' he said cutting her off. The desperation in his voice was increasing exponentially. 'But you can't tell her. If Chrys finds out that I swapped it for a fertility potion she'll kill me. And I had to do it. I just need to wait until the right time to tell her and then everything will be fine. She'll realise that swapping the sterility potion for a fertility one was a good idea in the long run.'

'You did what?' a voice came from the corner of the room. Harry glanced over and saw Chrystal standing in the doorway. 'Of all the stupid, foolish things that you've ever done Sirius Iain Black, this has to be one of the most.' She had a hurt and betrayed look on her face. 'How could you do this to me?'

## Chapter 23 Eruptions of Evil

*"I'm so tired of being here  
suppressed by all of my childish fears  
and if you have to leave  
I wish that you would just leave  
because your presence still lingers here  
and it won't leave me alone*

*these wounds won't seem to heal  
this pain is just too real  
there's just too much that time cannot erase*

*when you cried I'd wipe away all of your tears  
when you'd scream I'd fight away all of your fears  
and I've held your hand through all of these years  
but you still have all of me"*

*(from My Immortal, released by Evanescence on their Album, Fallen)*

Sirius couldn't believe she had walked into the room. He couldn't believe it. After all his careful planning hhe couldn't believe it had been unravelled by his stupidity. *How could he have been so stupid not to see if she were around?*

'Chrys,' he called out after her as he chased her down the hallway. 'Wait a minute, please let me explain.' He almost sounded as if he were begging. She really was infuriating sometimes.

He followed her downstairs and she did not look behind as she headed towards the lounge room. She disappeared out of the room. Sirius could only guess where she had gone. With Chrystal you just never knew. And that was the problem. Sirius turned around. Lily had followed him downstairs. She had a concerned look on her face.

'Is she okay?' asked Lily somewhat sympathetically.

'I wouldn't know,' replied Sirius. 'She disappeared. As per usual. She doesn't like confrontation.'

'Well I did warn you,' said Lily almost angrily. 'You really need to talk to her Sirius. Your marriage is suffering because you don't ever talk about things.'

'No Lily, it's suffering because she hasn't told me everything,' said Sirius. He was furious. *Why couldn't things be simple for a change?*

'What do you expect Sirius?' she asked.

He didn't answer.

He didn't know. That was the problem. They'd rushed things. Just like she hadn't wanted to. She was right. No surprise there. She was always right. In thirty-odd years nothing had changed.

Sirius ran to the fireplace and immediately flooded for Dunvegan. Alasdair was in the sitting room smoking his pipe. He looked surprised to see Sirius.

'What can I do for you Sirius?' Alasdair asked as he spied Sirius enter the room.

'Has Chrystal come here this afternoon?' he asked almost desperately.

'No,' replied Alasdair almost a little concerned. 'But I was expecting Harry and Hermione to arrive home sometime in the near future.'

'I'm rather afraid I've put my foot into it this time Alasdair,' he said. 'If she comes by can you ask her to come to our rooms at Hogwarts tonight?'

'I can ask Sirius,' he said. 'But she won't be as obliging as she would have when she was sixteen.'

Sirius turned and walked out of the room and headed towards what used to be Chrystal's room and was now theirs. Alasdair was right. She had changed significantly from the girl he had fallen for and it had taken marriage for him to realise. She just went ahead and did things without considering their impact. So similar to what he had been like, but now was no longer.

The room he sat in held many memories for him. This was the right place to think. He sat and tried to make sense of his thoughts.

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Lavender screamed.

She hadn't expected to be confronted with what she saw as she entered the room which Seamus had been staying in.

She could see directly in front of her Seamus, bound and gagged with magical bonds, tied to the bedpost of the king sized bed. He was naked. There were gashes all over his torso. Blood was splattered all over the walls of the room. He did not appear conscious.

A knife lay at her feet. A large knife that was covered in blood. Seamus' blood. What kind of person would do something like this?

Lavender felt cold. The air around her was freezing. The door slammed behind her. She tried to move and found that she was stuck to the floor. She heard a disconcerting laugh. A hooded figure appeared and the light in the room faded.

'Welcome to my house of horrors Miss Brown,' it said in a deep masculine voice that she could only partially recognise. 'Thank you so much for joining us.'

'What do you want?' she asked with trepidation. 'I'll give you anything you want if you release him alive.' Lavender knew she did not sound very convincing. She could hear his voice shake.

'I want you Miss Brown,' it said. By now Lavender was fairly sure it was a man. 'And I knew I could get you if I used this poor pathetic fool.'

'But I had a premonition,' she said.

'You saw what I made you see,' he said. Lavender glanced at the figure with a confused look on her face. 'I orchestrated this knowing you would see. You are a Seeress after all are you not?'

Lavender nodded. She couldn't make sense of why the man wanted her.

'Good,' he replied. 'You will come with me then.'

It wasn't as if she had a choice. She was glued to the spot and was not about to move anywhere even if she wanted to. The cloaked man came over and placed some kind of handcuff on her wrists and then placed a gag over her mouth. It was oily and smelly. It almost made her want to be sick. And it was making her sleepy. She was having trouble keeping her eyes open. She closed them for just a second before she drifted off to sleep.

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Sirius made his way downstairs. He had made the decision that he thought was the best for the both of them. It was going to be one of the hardest things that he ever had done. Alasdair was still sitting in his arm chair.

'Still here Sirius?' he asked.

'I'm about to leave Alasdair,' he said. 'Is Mum around?'

'She'll be back later,' he said. 'Is everything okay Sirius?' Sirius ignored the question. Nothing was okay. His life was falling apart at the seams.

'Listen Alasdair, I've been thinking about your proposal,' he said.

'Yes?' asked Alasdair with a little surprise.

'I'm willing to accept it,' he said. 'I can start tomorrow.'

'Fine,' said Alasdair. 'I'm glad. Can you meet me tomorrow morning? Five o'clock?'

Sirius nodded.

'I have to go and find your daughter,' said Sirius. 'I'm prepared for fireworks.'

With that he disappeared.

He arrived in the village of Hogsmeade and made his way towards the Hogwarts castle hoping against all hopes that Chrys would be there. He knew that it was probably unlikely. He made his way up to the Staff Quarters and gently opened the door to their sitting room.

Chrys was there. He felt his heart flutter as he saw her. She was lying on the bed glancing at a photograph and crying. It was of the two of them at James and Lily's wedding. As Sirius glanced at it he felt as if a hand had grabbed his heart and ripped it out of his chest. He felt awful for what he was about to do. He sat on the bed and placed his hands gently on her shoulder.

She turned around and looked at him. Her bright blue eyes were glazed over with tears.

'Can I talk to you about this Chrystal?' he asked softly. She nodded, still crying.

'I'm sorry about this whole mess Chryssy,' he said. 'I realise that I should have talked to you about it. But you were just so headstrong about it that I didn't know what to do. You've become so impulsive.'

'Impulsive?' she asked with disbelief. 'Me? Impulsive?'

'Like with what you've done about Rose,' he began trying to explain what he meant. 'I never agreed with that, yet you went on and did it without even consulting me. It implicated me as well Chrystal and you didn't even consider the impact it would have on me.'

'I didn't think,' she said defensively.

'No you didn't,' he said. 'Why did you do it Chrys?' He desperately wanted to know. It was something that she would never have suggested years ago.

'I have my reasons Sirius,' she said.

'Chrystal how could you have changed so much?' he asked. It made his gut retch to even think about what she had become.

'Changed?' she asked slightly confused.

'You're not the girl I fell in love with anymore,' he said. He had not been intending on saying anything remotely like that, yet when the words tumbled out of his mouth he realised it was the truth.

The look on her face was heartbreaking. Sirius could hardly stand what he was doing.

'Then who am I Sirius?' she asked. Her voice was shaking. 'What do I mean to you?'

'To be honest Chrys I just don't know anymore,' he said his heart heavy. 'You were right.' He hung his head in acknowledgement.

'I was right?' she asked. 'What was I right about?'

'You were right when you said to me a year and a half ago that you didn't want to rush things,' he said. 'Then three months later we were engaged and less than a year later we're married. We try to have a child and lose it and everything ends up like this. We rushed into things trying to make up for lost time. We didn't give ourselves time to get to know each other again. Please forgive me. It

was a mistake.'

'It takes two Sirius,' she said looking at him longingly. 'It takes two.'

'Evidently,' he said. 'You learnt that while I was away did you?' He hadn't meant to say that, yet he couldn't help but feel a large bout of jealousy every time he thought about Tadgh Moran.

'Sirius if this is about Tadgh I'm sorry,' she said softly. 'I should have told you. I was wrong.'

'It is but it isn't Chrys,' he said. 'You didn't tell me about Tadgh, yes that hurt. That's not the problem. It goes so much deeper than that. There are so many things you didn't tell me it's hard to know what to expect. You've changed so much and I don't know where that leaves me.'

'I love you Sirius,' she said desperately. 'I've loved you since I met you. Maybe I've changed. That could be true. But the fact that I love you hasn't changed. Yes you've hurt me. You've hurt me deeply. That doesn't change the fact that I love you.'

'I love you too,' he said sincerely. 'That's why I have to do this.'

'Do what?' she asked. Her voice sounded frightened.

'I have to leave,' he said. Tears were rolling down her face.

'Please don't,' she begged.

'I've got a job to do *mo grá dh*,' he said. 'I have to go away for about a month. I'm going to think about where we stand. Can you do the same for me please?'

'*Fan. Toilich. Ise liobh thu a Shirius,*' she begged him.

'*Na mo cridhe*,' he said. 'I have to go. To save us.'

'Why?'

'I told you I have a job to do,' he said. 'I will be back in a month. *Geall mise a Chrystal dhuit smuainich. Toilich.*'

'*Seadh mo Sirius*,' she replied.

'*Ise liobh thu mo Crystal,*' he said. She glanced at him with wide open eyes.

'Will you stay the night?' she asked tentatively. He nodded.

'If that's what you want,' he said. 'I'll be gone when you wake up.'

He sat down next to her on the bed. His hand reached towards her face and wiped away her tears. His touch, something she hadn't felt in a while was in some way comforting. He gently kissed her on the lips. Although she was mentally confused her body responded to his gentle caressing of her thigh. She moved her hands through his knotty hair as she tried to reach for his face. She moved her hand across his face and stared at his eyes. She could see his longing. His want and need for her. She moved her hands down towards his shoulders and hesitantly reached underneath his robe. He allowed her to gently slide his robes off. His soft skin was pale in the moonlight that crept in through the open window. She shivered as he ran his hand down the front of her chest. He moved his body on top of hers Chrystal felt herself give in completely to the man that she loved. Their bodies moved in perfect unison together until the two of them could no longer move. She collapsed with exhaustion and fell asleep.

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Chrystal awoke the next morning feeling empty. She reached over to find that Sirius was not there. She had hoped that the previous night had just been a bad dream. She turned over and saw a letter on his pillow.

*Mo Chrystal,*

*True to my word I am not here. I do not know how long I will be gone for but I am writing to my mother everyday in the event that something happens to me you will know. Please do not worry about me. I will be fine.*

*I have arranged for Remus to take your classes this week. I thought perhaps you and Lily might like to spend some time away from everything.*

*I love you,*

*Sirius.*

When she finished reading the letter she burst into tears. He was really gone. He had left. She sat in bed feeling empty. Once again she felt as if she were all alone. Her cat Maestro jumped up on the bed and started pawing at her hand gently as if she wanted a pat. Chrystal sighed as she tried to give the animal the attention it required.

She heard a knock on the door.

'Come in,' she said. Her voice was weak. She didn't even recognise it herself.

The door opened. It was Lily.

'I heard a rumour you might need some company,' she said. 'Did what I think happen, happen last night?'

Chrystal nodded her head and burst into tears.

'He left me Lil,' she said. 'I don't know if he's ever coming back.'

Lily said nothing but walked towards the bed, sat down next to Chrystal and held her while she cried.

She dried her eyes when she had no more tears left to cry.

'What do you want to do now?' Lily asked her.

'I need to go home,' said Chrys. 'I need to get away from everything. Will you come with me?'

Lily nodded and Chrystal began to summon a few things into a shoulder bag.

'I'll just let James know,' said Lily. 'I'll be back in a few minutes.'

It didn't take Chrystal long to throw everything she required into the bag and sat on the bed waiting for Lily to return. She glanced the photograph that she had been staring at the day before. They two of them had been so young then, yet they had already suffered a lot. *How much more would they have to suffer?*

The door opened and Lily re-entered.

'Shall we?' asked Lily. 'I assume when you say home you mean Dunvegan?'

Chrystal nodded. The house she had had in Portree had never been a place where she and Sirius had spent any time. It was the place she had mourned him last time he had been lost to her.

Lily transformed into Crookshanks as Chrystal located the Floo powder. They floored to Dunvegan arriving in the old deserted gardeners shed. Chrystal glanced at Lily and indicated that she should transform.

'What if people see me?' she asked hesitantly.

'I really am going to have to tell my father what's going on,' replied Chrystal. 'I'm just not sure how to explain it to him.'

'Why don't you let me?' asked Lily. 'It might be better however if you talk to him about what's going on between you and Sirius first. He's bound to ask questions anyhow.'



Chrystal nodded in reply. She really didn't care what other people thought at the moment. She just felt too numb.

They walked up to the castle, Chrystal not feeling the surge of pride that she normally felt on surveying the grand old castle. An elf opened the door for them and then they headed straight towards the sitting room. Chrystal scanned the room for her father vaguely. She didn't really notice Harry sitting there until he came towards them.

'What are you doing here Mum?' he asked with a touch of concern. 'Is Dad okay?'

'He's fine Harry,' replied Lily. Chrystal was secretly relieved that Lily had spoken. It saved her the trouble of trying. 'Chrys and I will just be staying here for a while. Why don't you help me take our things upstairs?'

Harry and Lily disappeared and Chrystal walked around the room. She collapsed into a chair in front of the burning fire. She was exhausted and had absolutely no idea what she was to do now. She felt awful and there was more than a little something on her mind. She felt that last night had been a dreadful mistake. She should have just let Sirius go. Now she had done something extremely stupid, having made love to him under the effects of a fertility potion. Now instead of knowing instantly that she was pregnant she would have to wait until the potion wore off in a week's time. She was slightly angry with herself. She didn't want to bring a child into the world in the state it was in at the moment.

Her father entered the room not long after. He looked exhausted from his day of work. She didn't want to burden him anymore than he was already burdened. Yet she could never hide anything from him. She never had been able to.

'I take it not everything went well with Sirius yesterday *mo leanabh*,' he said. 'Chrystal you look as if you haven't slept a bit.'

'He left,' she said shaking. She couldn't say anything more.

Her father came over towards her.

'I'm so sorry Chrystal,' he said. He gently held her closer before she jumped up and ran out of the room. She didn't stop until she reached the room that had been Sirius' bedroom when he was younger. She threw herself on the bed and thought about the night Sirius' father had died. Sirius had been so upset and all Chrystal had wanted to do was cheer him up. She had come in and told him that he could share her father. She had hated to see him suffering so much that she had been willing to sacrifice that for him. He had been angry and had yelled at her, yet he had fallen asleep in her arms that night. There was nothing she could do to stop his pain then, and there was nothing she could do now.

Then it hit her.

He was really gone this time. And this time it would be far worse. This time he would return and would not be returning to her. She had allowed him to infiltrate her soul and now he had wrenched himself from it. She knew Sirius. She knew him very well. He had decided that they were over. He had been right; they were no longer suited to each other and no matter how much you loved someone there came a point in time when you had to let them go. When you had to let them be free, no matter how much it hurt.

*Freedom.*

She longed to be free.

She longed to be released from the Covenant, to be released from the Prophecy and all her responsibilities. She wanted to be allowed to live. That was why she had loved Quidditch, it allowed her to soar away from everything that was bad and evil. Yet she had given it up. For Sirius. And for their future.

Chrystal glanced out the window. The winter snow was beginning to melt. The time had come for her to soar. For her to be free. She opened the large windows before she stepped out the window and allowed herself to fall towards the ground.

She felt alive for the first time in so long.

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Lavender came to. Her head ached and throbbed. She looked around. Everything seemed slightly blurry. She hoped that it was just due to her throbbing head.

The room she was in did not appear to have a door. The wall was circular and made her feel that if she even attempted to spin around to try and find a door she would instantly be sick.

The wall was white. So was the ceiling. And the floor. It was almost too much to cope with. She was certainly isolated and all alone. And she could almost guarantee that nobody decent would know where she was.

She couldn't believe that she had been so stupid. She should have listened to Seamus and stayed put. Somebody else could have searched for him.

It hurt her that Seamus had been taken because of her. She hated that there was so much evil in the world. It simply wasn't fair on the innocents of the world.

She hoped Seamus would be okay.

~~~~~

After they reached the top of the stairs Harry looked at his mother.

'What's going on?' he asked. 'Something's wrong. Is it Sirius? Because Chrystal looks as if she hasn't slept in weeks.'

'Sirius is fine,' his mother replied. 'He's not dead either. No one is dead and no one is injured.'

'Sirius and Chrystal had a fight didn't they?' he asked. 'About the potion. I overheard what happened yesterday.' Harry confessed to his mother how he had overheard their conversation without telling her about eavesdropping with the Invisibility Cloak.

'Well I guess you'll find out eventually,' his mother said reluctantly. 'Sirius left. It doesn't look like that he'll come back to her either.'

'Why?' asked Harry in surprise. 'Why would he leave her?'

'I think they've had their fair share of problems Harry,' said Lily. 'They had their problems before you were born and I guess they've never really addressed them. Listen Harry, perhaps it's best we talk about something else. Help me with these bags.'

His mother handed him a bag and lead him down the corridor. She opened a door to reveal one of the guestrooms.

'Is anybody staying in here Harry?' she asked.

'I don't think so,' he replied.

'This was the room I stayed in a few times when I came to visit,' she replied. 'I think I'll stay here if nobody else is. Are Heather and Madeleine around?'

'Maddie's not,' replied Harry. 'One of the horses is sick. Heather has been here a few times this week. She'll probably be around tonight.'

'What do you think of them?' she asked. 'Are they trustworthy?'

'I'm really the wrong person to be asking,' replied Harry.

'I always liked Madeleine,' his mother said. 'She was a sweetie. Heather was always lovely. The rest

of the Back's just were not worth knowing. Dark to the core. Did you know they killed Sirius' father when he refused to follow Voldemort?'

Harry glanced at his mother in disbelief. Sirius had never told him that.

'No,' replied Harry shaking his head.

'James' mother, Mary, told me once,' his mother said. 'I doubt that Sirius even knows. I think we've given Chrys and Alasdair enough time. We should head down. Heaven knows what Alasdair is going to say when he sees me.'

Slightly disconcerted by the conversation Harry obediently followed his mother downstairs. He saw Alasdair in the sitting room, Chrystal was no longer there. The two of them entered the room and his mother spoke.

'It's been a while Alasdair,' she said. Alasdair MacLeod turned around. His face was pale and white. Harry could see the blood draining from his face. He looked as if he had seen a ghost.

'Lily Potter?' he asked shaking. 'I must be dreaming. Harry can you call a Healer please?'

'I guess I've given you a shock,' she said. Harry remained still. 'Yes it's Lily.'

'But you're dead,' he said shaking.

'Chrystal didn't explain?' she asked. Harry made his way to the couch and sat as a spectator. 'It's thanks to Chrystal that I'm alive. She found a charm which protected me.' His mother didn't go into details. 'I was trapped as an Animagus for sixteen years and Chrystal has only just revealed me. I'm not dead but I've been keeping to myself. People would react the way you are right now.'

She wandered over toward a table and picked up a little gold bell. She rang it twice. A house-elf popped into the room.

'Alasdair would like some tea,' she said. 'So would I. Harry?' Harry nodded. 'Thank you.'

Alasdair eyed Lily from top to bottom.

'Did you see this Harry?' asked Alasdair sceptically trying to put together the pieces of the puzzle.

'Yes sir,' replied Harry. 'I watched Chrystal reveal her. She had been Hermione's cat.'

'Well you must be Lily Potter because the wards would not have allowed you here otherwise,' he said pondering. 'As far as I am aware the only people on the list that could come and go as they chose were you, James and the Blacks. I take it you are here to be with Chrystal? She can be a stupid girl sometimes.'

'Yes,' replied Lily.

'Things are strange,' said Alasdair as the house-elf appeared with the tea. 'When I saw Sirius yesterday he was so afraid that he had ruined everything.'

'I think he needs time to think things through,' said Lily softly. 'Things haven't been easy for either of them lately.'

'Perhaps he does,' Alasdair said as Harry walked over toward the window.

'Look at this,' Harry said. 'A horse is plummeting from the sky.'

Both his mother and Alasdair ran towards the window.

'That's Chrys,' said his mother with some alarm.

They all watched as the horse almost reached the ground before it spread its wings and soared into the sky.

'She hasn't changed has she?' said Alasdair with some amusement. 'Well Lily, Heather will be here for dinner. No doubt she'll be quite surprised to see you. I think I'd better warn her before you walk

in. Is Hermione joining us for dinner?'

'She wasn't feeling too well,' said Harry. 'I think I'll go up and check on her.'

'Be down for dinner at five then Harry,' he said. 'I believe that's less than an hour.'

Harry made his way upstairs and found Hermione lying in bed. She wasn't asleep, but she looked kind of drowsy. He gently kissed her on the forehead. She looked only slightly better than she had that morning.

'How you feeling honey?' he asked as he gently placed his hand on her forehead. 'You're still a little warm.'

'Slightly better Harry,' she replied. 'I'd feel much better if you'd come here and give me a hug.'

Harry gave her a smile before he sat down on the bed next to her and held her as he lay on his side.

'So I heard your Mum's voice,' she said. 'What's going on?'

'Sirius left Chrystal,' he said softly. 'He's gone away to think things over. Promise you'll never do that to me Hermione.'

She turned around and stared lovingly into his eyes.

'Are you worried I will Harry?' she said.

'Hermione I don't know what I'd do if I lost you,' he said honestly. 'It would tear me apart.'

'Just don't you leave me and we'll be okay,' she said. 'I know we're both young, but together we can face anything.'

Harry placed his hand on her growing stomach.

'Here's our next challenge right here,' he said as he felt something against his hand. Hermione looked at him with a smile.

'Did you feel that?' she asked with a smile on her face. 'There's certainly a personality waiting in there to come bustling out.'

'You coming down for dinner?' he asked softly glancing at his watch.

'No,' she replied. 'Although a little old remedy chicken soup would be nice.'

'I'll see what I can do,' he said kissing her gently on the nose before he made his way downstairs.

Everyone was already at the table when he arrived. He didn't know what to say to Chrystal. He just gave her a vague smile before he sat down. The atmosphere was tense throughout the entire meal. Harry could hardly wait until he had finished his main course, excused himself and headed towards the kitchen to organise some soup for Hermione.

He wandered slowly upstairs and opened the door of their bedroom to find Hermione lying there just as he had left her. She glanced up at him, as he opened the door.

'You're back early,' she said with a smile appearing on her face.

'It's kind of uncomfortable out there,' he said. 'And besides, Ron's coming over after work to practice and I have to be ready.'

'Boys and their games,' she said shaking her head as Harry quickly changed his clothes and headed out the door blowing her a soft kiss.

He walked towards the strange room where Alasdair had taught them to fence. To be honest neither of them were very good, but just the act of doing something at the same time every week brought a regularity to their life that certainly hadn't been there before.

Harry arrived in the room to find Ron there waiting for him. He gave Harry a grin before drawing a sword off the wall.

'Shall we?' he asked.

Harry didn't reply, he just nodded as he pulled the sword off the wall with a smile on his face.

The two of them began their weekly ritual of swinging swords at each other until they were both drenched in sweat. Harry fell to the ground with exhaustion.

'I don't think I need another work out this week then,' he said with a smile. Ron collapsed on the floor next to him.

'Me neither,' he said. 'Between this and running around Spain looking for Lavender and Seamus, I've had a long day.'

'Have you found either of them yet?' he asked.

Ron shook his head.

'Nah,' he said. 'No luck yet. I'm going to talk to Seamus' little sister Katie tomorrow. I'm hoping she has a hint in one of her letters.'

'How's Boot?' asked Harry. 'Keeping out of trouble?'

'He hasn't put a foot out of line,' said Ron. 'I think we might have been wrong in suspecting him.'

'It's just hard to imagine anybody else,' said Harry sighing as Hedwig soared through the window towards him. He reached up and retrieved the letter from her beak, before she soared off. Harry glanced at the letter.

'It's a reply from Dudley,' Harry said. 'I wonder if he's told his parents yet.'

Harry ripped open the letter to find a horridly scrawled mess.

*Dear Harry,*

*Haven't told them yet. Dad's sick. Can you please meet me tomorrow?*

*One o'clock, Leaky Cauldron. Send an owl if it's inconvenient.*

*Dudley.*

Harry handed the letter over to Ron looking slightly confused. Ron read over it carefully.

'The past couple of letters from Dudley seem a little strange Harry,' he said. 'You've got to admit that.'

'I know,' said Harry sighing. 'I just can't help but wonder if he does really need my help and I don't show then I will have let him down.'

'But if it's a trap,' Ron warned.

'Yeah I know,' Harry said a little angrily. 'Perhaps we should talk to Hermione about it. She's not feeling particularly well but I'm sure she'd like to see you anyway.'

'Is she okay?' asked Ron with some concern.

'She's just got a little bug,' said Harry. 'Nothing to be concerned about. She'll be fine in a few days.'

Ron nodded and followed Harry as he led Ron to their bedroom. Harry gently opened the door to check to see if Hermione was awake before allowing Ron in. Hermione gave Ron a smile as he entered the room.

'How's Spain?' she asked.

'The weather's a bit better than it is here, but so far no luck,' he said. 'I'm due to go back there tomorrow afternoon.'

'I can't believe Lavender would just run off like that,' said Hermione.

'It's a little thing called love,' said Harry with a smile. 'I'd only hope you'd do the same for me.'

'Of course,' replied Hermione as she pulled Harry closer towards her, bringing her lips close to his before Ron interrupted them.

'Excuse me, I am in the room,' he said. Harry looked up seeing his friend's face was a little red. 'I thought we were going to ask Hermione what she makes of Harry's letter.'

Harry handed Hermione the letter from Dudley. She read over it carefully before nodding her head.

'It does seem a little strange that you've received yet another letter from him asking you to meet him urgently,' she said. 'On the other hand it could be harmless.'

'Well what do you suggest I do then?' he asked somewhat frustrated.

'It's quite simple Harry,' she said. 'Meet him here. That way if it is a trap then the other people involved won't be able to get here.'

'That's all well and good Hermione,' said Ron with a touch of amusement in his voice. 'You seem to be forgetting that Dudley is a Muggle. He cannot Floo here, he cannot apparate here and he would have to leave now to arrive here by any other means.'

'Well get a portkey and bring him here,' she suggested. 'That way only he can come and you don't have to screw around with the arrangements. All you have to do is ask Alasdair for a portkey and ask him to allow Dudley to come here.'

'Sounds like a good idea to me Harry,' said Ron. 'And if he panics when you suggest that you go elsewhere you'll know he's a part of something.'

'Besides, you can get Chrystal to suss him out,' said Hermione. 'See whether or not he's trustworthy.'

'Fine, I can do that providing she's not plummeting off buildings again,' said Harry. 'I think you're both right. I'll ask Alasdair in the morning. Do you want to stay over Ron?'

'Why not,' he said. 'I take it that's a hint. Anyway, it's been a long day. Why don't you show me to the spare room?'

Harry blew Hermione a kiss before leading Ron into the hallway.

'Sorry mate,' he said to Ron.

'Nah, seriously I am tired,' he said. 'I'll go and see Katie Finnegan in the morning and then I'll return and help you suss out Dudley.'

'Thanks mate,' he said as he watched Ron walk into the spare room. As he wandered back to his he thought more about his last meeting with Dudley. He wasn't really that concerned about Vernon, although he wondered if there was something more sinister going on. He'd find out the next day at any rate.

He quietly snuck back into his and Hermione's bedroom and dimmed the light. He quietly slipped into bed.

'Is there anything I can do to make you feel better?' he asked. She gave him a soft smile.

'Maybe in the morning,' she said. 'For now I think I need some sleep.'

Hermione rolled over onto her side. Harry moved close to her and held her gently until he could hear her soft breathing as she slept. They were okay. They would survive this.

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Seamus felt weak. His head felt frail, his limbs felt weak. He felt as if he were paralysed from the neck down. He was lying in a bed. He wondered who had brought him here. All he could remember

was the cloaked man entering his room and stunning him. He wondered what had occurred since then.

He tried to pull himself up. It was really no use. There was no point in trying. There was no way he could move.

The door opened, but he couldn't turn his head to see who it was. He got a glance of some white cotton but that was about it.

'How's the patient today?' he heard a familiar voice say.

Patient?

The voice had sounded like Parvati's. He must be in St Mungos. Thank Merlin. He was saved!

'Hi Parvati,' he said weakly.

'You're not feeling too well are you,' she said. 'I've got a glass of water here for you. It's important you get your fluids up. Would you like me to help you?'

'Yes,' he said. Parvati helped him sit up in bed before she carefully fed him small sips of water.

'What happened to me?' he asked her.

'We're not entirely sure,' she said. 'Someone tried to cause you a lot of damage. You've been stabbed with a knife several times. You lost a hell of a lot of blood. That's why you feel so weak. But now we're just working slowly on getting you better. It will take time Seamus. Please don't get frustrated.'

'Is Lavender okay?' he asked her.

'I hate to tell you this Seamus,' she said. 'But Lavender's missing. No one's been able to find her.' Parvati covered him with a blanket before making her way to exit the room.

Seamus chest tightened. He hoped sincerely that Lavender was alright. He couldn't understand why she had left Hogwarts. He hoped she hadn't tried to save him.

He knew she would have realised he was missing. He had promised to write to her every day. He didn't know what day it was, but he figured he probably hadn't written for a while.

My love.

Stay, please. I love you Sirius.

No my love.

Please think about it. Promise me.

Yes my Sirius

I love you too, my Crystal

My child

## **Chapter 24 Blood Oaths**

Harry carefully made his way into The Leaky Cauldron. He was slightly nervous, once again about seeing Dudley. He still wasn't entirely sure he could trust his cousin; however he wasn't sure that he could forgive himself if he really was in trouble either.

Harry spied Dudley out of the corner of his eye. He strode over toward him confidently, trying to mask his true feelings.

'Hey Dudley,' he said. 'I think we should go somewhere else. Just trust me.' Harry touched the confused Dudley's hand and placed his hand against the portkey in his pocket. He swirled around and they landed in the tea room at Dunvegan.

'Where are we Harry?' asked Dudley. He looked completely bewildered.

'I'm sorry Dudley but I had to be sure it wasn't a trap,' said Harry calmly, now confident it wasn't given the look on Dudley's face. 'You just can't be too careful at the moment.'

'Oh,' said Dudley. 'Why would I be part of a trap?'

'Don't worry about it,' said Harry. 'You're my guest today and this is, um, well it's the house of a family friend.' Harry walked over the corner of the room and rang a bell for the House Elf to bring tea. He was fairly sure that Hermione and Ron would be down anytime soon. Dudley sat down on the couch and made himself comfortable.

'So what's up with your Dad Dudley?' asked Harry with only some slight concern.

'He's got cancer,' whispered Dudley. 'Bowel cancer.'

'I'm sorry Dudley,' said Harry sincerely. The House Elf made its way into the room. Dudley screamed immediately.

'What is that thing?' he asked.

'Oh, that?' said Harry. 'This is Mippy. He's a House Elf. You haven't seen a House Elf before?' Dudley shook his head slowly, the colour returning to his face. 'Well they take care of the castle. They won't harm you if you're nice to them. Thank you Mippy. Sorry Dudley, you were saying?'

'The doctors cut it out the other day' said Dudley still a little distracted. 'It's already spread. There's nothing they can do now. He waited too late to go to the doctor. He didn't even say anything until recently. I guess he just didn't want to admit the truth. I was wondering if you know anybody who can help?'

Harry felt for Dudley. He sincerely felt Dudley's pain. But there was really nothing he could do.

'I don't know anybody,' Harry said. 'Can't you ask Cho?'

'No,' said Dudley. 'I don't want to tell her about it. She'd just worry about me. She wouldn't know anyone anyway. She tries to stay out of the wizarding world. All the publicity she gets because she's a sports star or something is just a little too much sometimes.'

Harry tried to hide his surprise at that comment. Thankfully Hermione and Ron entered the room. Dudley took one glance at Hermione before opening his mouth.

'You move fast don't you Harry?' he said eyeing Hermione's bulge. Harry didn't quite know how to respond to that. He heard Chrystal's voice in the corridor outside the room they were in. 'Chrys, can you come in here?' Now he could get Chrystal to see what she thought of Dudley.

Harry didn't turn around as Chrys entered the room. Nor did Hermione or Ron. But Dudley was facing the door. Harry watched as Dudley's jaw dropped and his face turned white after the door opened. Harry glanced around behind him and couldn't understand the cause of Dudley's surprise. Dudley was just sitting there, with his mouth wide open staring.



'What's the matter Dudley?' asked Harry.

'A-aauntt L-lilly?' he stammered.

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Seamus woke up again. He felt awful. His head ached, his nose was runny and he must have been sweating because his sheets were absolutely drenched. Seamus had never felt so bad before in his life. He knew something had to be seriously wrong because he had never felt like this before. Sure, he had been sick before, with the stock standard cold and flu's that children normally get in addition to everything that could happen to you at a wizarding school. Yet he have never felt as he did now, completely drained of energy and unable to move.

He slowly moved his aching head to try and find a means of attracting some attention. His wet sheets were beginning to make him shiver. He couldn't see anything in his near vicinity. He found that strange. When his Mam had been sick he remembered the little gold bell that had been sitting next to her bed. He had only been little at the time and had been intrigued by it, so he picked it up and rang it. As sick as she had been, his mother had tried to discipline him and a nurse had come running. She had not been impressed when she had learnt that Seamus was the reason for the bell and not the fact that his mother needed some assistance.

Seamus placed his head back on the pillow as he heard the door open. Again he heard Parvati's voice.

'How are we today Seamus?' she asked cheerfully.

'I feel terrible Vati,' he said weakly. 'My sheets are soaking.'

Parvati pointed her wand at the sheets.

'*Desicato*,' she said. Seamus felt instant relief as the sheets dried up. Parvati came over and stuck a thermometer in his mouth. After a few minutes she pulled it out and frowned upon examining it. 'Your temperature is going up.' She placed a cold towel on his head before leaving the room.

After she left Seamus couldn't help but feel that there was something wrong. He closed his eyes and tried to sleep.

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The Dark Lord had called the man to his chambers. For once the man was pleased that he had good news for the Dark Lord. He felt that he would not have to endure the Cruciatu Curse on this encounter.

'Is it working?' the Dark Lord asked in his spine chilling high pitched voice.

'Yes my Lord,' the man replied.

'At least he was useful in some respects,' the Dark Lord replied. 'Get rid of him; place him somewhere where people will find him. Before he dies.'

'Yes my Lord,' the man replied.

'And the other project, is that underway yet?' the Dark Lord asked.

'Yes my Lord, everything is complete, just as you requested' the man replied. 'We spied one of the members of the Order nosing around. What would you like done with him?'

'Place him with the Muggle-borns for the time being,' said the Dark Lord. His servant sensed some delight in his master's voice. 'Torture him, but do not kill him. He could become useful. You may go.'

'Yes master,' said the man bowing. As he walked out the door his master called to him.

'Tell Mr Malfoy I would like to see him next week. Alone.'

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Harry looked behind him again. He saw Chrystal, whom he had seen before and behind her he saw his Mum. He glanced at Hermione.

*How do we explain this one?*

'Aunt Lily?' Dudley asked again. His voice was still shaking. Harry wondered how he knew that it was Lily, but glancing at the floor answered his question. In his fright, Dudley had dropped the envelope he was carrying. It contained photos. Photos of Lily and baby Harry.

Harry, Ron and Hermione remained standing there in silence.

'You must be Dudley,' Harry half heard his mother say. 'Harry's told me all about you.'

The room remained full of silence.

'I'm sorry Dudley, I seem to have given you a bit of a shock,' his mother continued with a touch of amusement in her voice. 'Yes Dudley, I am your Aunt Lily.'

'But you're dead,' Dudley stammered. 'You can't be Lily.'

'No, Dudley,' she said. 'Given that I am standing here in front of you it would seem that I'm not dead after all.'

'But that man,' said Dudley. 'That big man with the beard and the umbrella said that you were blown up.'

'Dudley,' said Lily in a soothing voice. 'Sometimes you can't believe everything you here in the magical world. All you need to know is that I am not in fact dead, but until recently everybody was under the impression that I was. The man told you only what he believed to be true.'

Dudley sat in the chair behind him, looking rather bewildered.

'Please don't tell your mother,' his mother said to Dudley. 'I'd like to surprise her. Now why did you need Harry's advice so quickly?'

To spare Dudley some pain Harry relayed to his mother what Dudley had said. Ron, Hermione, Chrys and Lily listened carefully.

'Dudley, I wish I could offer you my condolences,' his mother said. 'But I'm afraid I can't. I feel for you and even for your mother, but I have no sympathy for your father. I'm sorry.'

Dudley just stared at Lily Potter with his eyes wide open.

'I know he's not a nice person,' said Dudley to the surprise of almost everybody in the room. 'But can you help him?'

'I'm sorry Dudley,' she said. 'I don't know of anyone who could. It's not exactly easy magic. How long does he have?'

Harry was surprised that his mother sounded genuinely concerned given her previous statement.

'Not very long,' said Dudley. 'Perhaps a couple of months. It's already spread to his liver and the doctors think it has spread to his lung. They weren't very confident when we spoke to them last week. Mum's beside herself.'

'I'll see what can be done,' said Chrystal. Harry watched as Dudley glanced at the woman.

'Who are you?' he asked.

'I'm a friend of Lily's,' she said. 'But I guess you met my husband Sirius last year when he came to pick up Harry from your parents place. This is my home by the way, you're welcome to stay for dinner if you'd like. Harry can I have a word with you? You too Ron.'

Ron and Harry obliged, leaving Dudley alone with Hermione and Lily to absorb the shock.

'What is it Chrystal?' Harry asked.

'Seamus has been found,' she said. 'He was dumped on the steps of St Mungos late this afternoon. He's not conscious, but I thought you two may like to go and visit him. The Order is at a loss to discover what happened to him. Will you go?'

'Of course,' replied Harry. 'Seamus may have some answers for us and besides, he needs his friends at the moment. But why haven't you asked Hermione?'

'She hasn't been well Harry,' replied Chrystal quickly. 'I wouldn't want to place her or the baby in any unnecessary danger. Trust me Harry; you could never imagine what it's like to lose a child. I would never wish it upon anyone.'

Harry nodded in reply. He knew he could never comprehend how that felt. He knew that he didn't want to have to go through that kind of thing. He glanced at Ron, who nodded.

'We'll go now then shall we?' he said.

Chrystal nodded in reply.

'Please find out what you can without distressing him too much,' she said. 'We'll deal with Dudley.'

'Please don't memory charm him,' said Harry almost desperately. 'He needs to understand.'

Chrystal nodded before Harry glanced at Ron before apparating to St Mungos.

The two of them arrived at what was becoming a somewhat familiar sight. The entrance hall of St Mungos. Harry glanced at his friend Ron who had been almost uncharacteristically quiet. Ron had gained a new maturity through his work as a Hit Wizard, but this had not stopped him from voicing his opinion. Now it seemed as if Ron were holding back for some strange reason. Harry knew he would have to have a good heart to heart with Ron a little later.

Harry walked up to the front desk.

'We're here to see Mr Finnegan,' said Harry.

'I'm sorry,' the witch behind the counter said. She was the plump blonde witch that Harry recognised from his visit in fifth year. 'Mr Finnegan is not fit for visitors.'

Ron reached into his pocket and pulled out something Harry had never seen before. It was a badge identifying Ron as a Hit Wizard. Harry wondered why Ron had never shown it to him before.

'We need to see him urgently miss,' Ron said in the most aggressive voice he could muster. 'It's a matter of importance.'

The nurse winked at him as if she understood.

'Yes sir,' she said. 'Mr Finnegan is on the fourth floor in room 7. His nurse is Sister Patil. I'm sure that she'll make the necessary arrangements.'

Ron thanked the witch before they headed towards stairs that would lead them to the fourth floor. They reached the top of the stairs and asked for Sister Patil at the enquiry desk. The witch behind the desk rang a little bell and soon out of the corner of his eye Harry saw Parvati walking towards them.

'Harry, Ron,' she exclaimed. 'Thank you so much for coming to see him. He really needs a friend at the moment. Lavender is missing and I'm not quite sure how he's dealing with it.'

Harry glanced at her badge. It said Sister Patil but Harry wasn't quite sure that it was Parvati. Something was just telling him that it wasn't Parvati.

'Padma?' he asked.

She gave Harry a smile.

'Yes?' she asked. 'What is it Harry?'

'I thought Parvati was working here,' he said. 'I didn't realise you were and when the welcome witch said Sister Patil I was expecting Parvati.'

'Oh,' said Padma in surprise. 'Parvati used to work here, but when she realised she'd caught herself a Healer I think she quickly changed her mind. She quit a couple of months ago.'

'That's interesting,' said Ron. 'You've been nursing him the entire time? Has he called you Parvati?'

'No,' she said. 'But he only arrived here late this afternoon. He hasn't been awake since he got here. Nobody seems to know what's wrong with him.'

Padma looked really worried.

'Is it okay to see him?' asked Ron.

'It's not a problem,' she said. 'He just may not respond. But as I said he needs some friends. Maybe if you talk to him you can get him to respond.'

Padma showed them to his room. She opened the door to reveal Seamus lying there. He seriously looked like he was on his death bed. Harry gazed at the wounds which covered his face wondering how somebody could possibly do this to another human being

Ron walked over towards the bed. He placed his hands on Seamus'.

'Hey mate,' he said. 'It's us. It's Harry and Ron.' Ron shook Seamus gently. There was nothing. Ron looked up at Harry almost expectantly.

'He's barely breathing Ron,' said Harry. He glanced up at Padma. 'Do you know anything else?'

'He just arrived in the entrance hall,' she said. 'Apparently it was like he'd apparated here, but he couldn't have. He wasn't breathing. Harry I think he's going to die.'

Harry nodded. He didn't know much about Medical Magic, however it didn't look like there was going to be too much that could help Seamus. Harry reluctantly walked towards the door. Ron followed Harry as he slowly made his way down to the bottom floor.

'I'm going back to Spain,' said Ron. 'There's got to be something I've overlooked. I'll catch up with you and Hermione tomorrow.'

Harry watched Ron disappear. He was beginning to get more than a little worried about things. Something was up with Ron for starters. He didn't seem to talk about anything much unless it related to work. Equally his sister didn't seem very well. He'd spoken to her via the Floo network the other day and she seemed to have lost a lot of weight. She also looked like she hadn't slept in weeks. Then there was Hermione.

His wife wasn't very well at the moment. She had some virus on top of being four months pregnant. She didn't seem to have much motivation for anything lately. Harry didn't know if it was because she was tired or if it were because of something slightly more sinister. At least she was talking to him. That was a start. Harry apparated back to Dunvegan. As he headed towards the stairs he spied Chrystal out of the corner of his eye. She was sitting in a dark room crying over a photograph. Harry sighed. There didn't seem to be too much he could do to help anybody at the moment. He headed upstairs to his bedroom. Hermione was asleep in their bed. Trying not to disturb her, Harry pulled off his robe, threw on his pyjamas and slipped into bed. Everything could wait until the next day.

Harry arose early the next morning to affectionate nipping on his ear by Hedwig. She had a letter for him. He carefully opened it and groaned as he found a letter from Thomas Doyle requiring him to come a training session beginning at eight that morning. Harry reckoned that Puddlemere were the only team training during the hold on the league. He was finding it frustrating because he was putting himself through such rigorous training sessions for nothing.

He jumped out of bed a scribbled a note for Hermione. Then he located his training gear and apparated to the training ground.

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Ron thanked Padma for her help before he got ready to leave the hospital.

'I'm sorry Padma,' he said gently hugging the sobbing woman goodbye. 'Let me know when you've done the autopsy. I'm sure I'll be looking into it a little more.'

Padma nodded as Ron let go of her. He walked towards the stairs and reluctantly made his way down. He knew he had to go straight to Harry. This was just awful. As soon as he reached the bottom of the stairs he quickly apparated to Dunvegan Castle and ran straight upstairs. It was still early and he was fairly sure that Harry and Hermione would be upstairs. He knew that because Hermione had not been well Harry had taken to bringing her breakfast upstairs.

He knocked on the door.

'Come in,' he heard Hermione say.

He opened the door.

Only Hermione was there. She was sitting on the bed reading.

'Where's Harry?' he asked.

'He's not here Ron,' she said softly. 'He's at Quidditch practice.' Ron began to feel slightly uncomfortable. It had been a long time since he and Hermione had been in the same room together. Alone.

'You know you can talk to me,' she said. She must have noticed how embarrassed he was feeling. 'I thought we were friends too Ron.'

'We were,' he muttered. 'I mean we are. I mean sorry.'

'What are you sorry about Ron?' she asked. 'You don't have to be afraid of me. I mean I don't bite and I'm not really sick anymore, I'm just pregnant.' Ron had a think about it for a while. That was part of the problem. He sat down next to Hermione on the bed.

'I'm sorry Hermione,' he said honestly. 'I'm happy for you, for you both. I really am. I'm sorry that I've been acting a little weird. Things haven't been the same between us since I realised you had feelings for Harry. That's my fault.'

'It takes two,' she said. 'You're forgiven. Now can you tell me why you rushed in here so quickly?'

'Seamus is dead,' said Ron. 'He died earlier this morning from causes unknown. They're doing an autopsy this afternoon. I just thought the two of you would like to know.'

Hermione gazed at him. Ron watched as her eyes began to glisten with tears.

'Seamus is dead?' asked Hermione as she began to cry. 'He's really truly dead.'

'Yes,' said Ron. He moved over and placed his hands on Hermione's shoulders. 'It's alright Hermione. You can cry.'

'I can't believe it,' she said between sobs. 'He's the first one. The first one of us to die. He's so young.'

Ron allowed Hermione to cry on his shoulder. It seemed to mend the drift that had become evident between the two of them, although there was nothing they could do about the loss of a friend so young. Hermione looked up at him.

'Ron, do you think Harry and I made a mistake?' she asked sobbing.

Ron was slightly shocked.

'What do you mean honey?' he asked gently.

'I mean do you think Harry and I rushed into things,' she said. 'Like Chrystal and Sirius did.'

Ron bit his lip.

'I could see why you're worried,' he said. 'Things aren't good on that front. Listen Hermione, you and Harry are perfect for each other.'

'I'm worried about bringing a child into this world Ron,' she said. She said it softly. Ron almost didn't hear it.

'Why Hermione?' he asked. 'I thought you wanted a child.'

'I do,' she said. 'I want Harry's child. But there's so much evil in the world. I didn't think it would bother me, but lately it has been.'

'I think you should talk about this with Harry,' he said.

'I can't,' she confessed. 'I forced him into this whole situation. I doubt he'd be too happy if I told him I had doubts.'

'But you yourself said the most important thing in a relationship is sharing,' said Ron. 'You said that communication is the key. I remember the moment vividly.'

'I know Ron,' she said softly.

'Are you worried that Harry will leave you?' he asked almost impulsively.

'No,' she said softly. 'I'm worried that he will be taken from me.'

'Oh,' said Ron with realisation. 'We're doing our best to ensure that doesn't happen.' He held her again and allowed her to finish crying.

'Thanks for listening,' she said wiping away her tears. 'Now I guess we need to see if we can assist Seamus' mother at all in the arrangements.'

'Actually Hermione I'm taking care of the arrangements,' said Ron. 'Seamus' mother was killed recently. In a Death Eater raid. I told Padma Patil that I would take care of it for them. Perhaps it's time to start that. Can you give me a hand?'

'Sure,' she said standing up. 'Maybe we should go and ask Alasdair for help. I mean neither of us has ever had to organise a funeral before.'

'Sounds like a great idea Hermione,' he said with a smile appearing on his face. They made their way downstairs and found Chrystal conversing with her father. She seemed only slightly better than the day before.

'There's a grim look on your face Ron,' said Alasdair. 'What can I do to help?'

'Seamus Finnegan died this morning,' replied Ron. 'We need some help to organise his funeral.'

'Seamus is dead?' asked Chrystal with some surprise.

'Yes,' he replied rather sombrely.

'I have to go to St Mungos immediately,' she said. 'Be on standby for a meeting of the Order.'

The two of them nodded.

'Well please excuse my daughter's rudeness,' said Alasdair. 'I can give you a hand. The first thing you need to do is notify The Daily Prophet so they can place a Death Notice and alert people about the funeral. When is the funeral going to be?'

'As soon as St Mungos releases the body,' said Ron. 'People will need closure. Especially Seamus' sister.'

Alasdair sat down with them and went through what they would need to organise and how they should go about it. By the time they had finished, an owl descended and gave Ron a letter informing him of an emergency meeting of the Order. Alasdair glanced at them immediately upon Ron's receipt of the letter.

'Chrystal works fast when she has something to do,' he said. 'You both should go to the meeting immediately. I will join you later.'

Hermione gave Ron a glance as she moved towards the sitting room fireplace. He got the feeling that Hermione was getting a little sick of not being able to apparate anywhere. Ron waited for her to disappear before he apparated to Number Twelve, Grimmauld Place. The house was alive with chaos as he arrived; it seemed that much had happened since their last meeting only a few days ago.

Ron located Hermione before and they made their way to the meeting room. Ron immediately spied Neville Longbottom who had a very depressed look on his face. Ron had not seen Neville since Harry and Hermione's wedding.

'Hi Ron,' he said. 'I heard about Seamus. Funny really, I only got back from Spain this morning. To think we were both there and neither of us knew. Now he's dead.' Neville didn't quite look like he was going to cry, but he looked pretty upset.

'Why were you in Spain?' was all that Ron could manage to say.

'I was undertaking specialised Herbology training,' he said. 'St Mungos have accepted me as a Herbologist. My Gran's so proud. You should have seen the look on her face when I got the letter. I start at St Mungos next week, so I'm glad to be back and to be able to do something to try and help the Order. I don't know how much good I'll be though.'

'I'm sure you'll be great,' said Hermione in the encouraging voice that she always took on when she was speaking to Neville. Ron wondered sometimes how she could be so patient.

He turned his head back towards Neville. His eyes were wide open in shock. It took Ron a minute or two to work out that Neville probably wasn't expecting Hermione to be pregnant.

'I guess I've been out of circulation a while then,' he said. 'I can't believe you're pregnant Hermione.'

'Well I guess some things don't work out entirely the way you planned them,' she said with an air of knowing. 'I don't know how long Harry will be around. I just hope it's long enough to see this baby being born.'

Their conversation was cut short by Dumbledore's voice calling for everyone's attention.

'The war is well and truly under way,' he said with a sigh. 'We've reached a point where Voldemort appears to be attacking people in many different ways. Some of you may have heard of the death of Seamus Finnegan earlier this morning. It appears he has been poisoned with a magical toxin to which we have no defence to. Mr Finnegan was delirious by the time he reached St Mungos yesterday afternoon. At autopsy it was evident that this toxin undertook great destruction of his internal organs to the point to which he could no longer breathe. We have absolutely no way of identifying this toxin. The only clue we have is that it is similar to the toxin that Chrystal was infected with late last year.'

'So we're looking for someone who was present at the Potter's wedding then?' asked Snape. 'I am unaware of the presence of any Death Eaters there, however the Dark Lord seems to be more careful about making the identity of his servants widely known. He has appeared to have learnt something from his mistakes of the past.'

'The only person there who would have a lot of access to St Mungos would be Parvati Patil or Draco Malfoy,' Neville spoke up. 'And given that Malfoy is here, I think we're left with one option.'

'I thought Patil had quit St Mungos,' said McGonagall.

'She has,' spoke up Malfoy. 'She found herself a Healer who thought she was fantastic and married him. Poor fool.'

'Which Healer?' asked Tonks.

'One with long dark hair,' replied Malfoy. 'I don't know him because I never fill his requests.'

'Do you honestly think that Parvati Patil is responsible for this?' asked Lupin. 'I wouldn't have thought she was smart enough for this.'

'She's not,' muttered Snape. 'But she may not be acting under her own influence. Think about it. Patil would know where she could place Seamus without being seen. She had opportunity to try and poison Chrystal. And I'm sure if I think about it long enough I could even conjure motive for her to do it.'

'Listen we're not achieving anything by this,' said Harry. Ron glanced at him in surprise. 'It's important we ascertain what has happened here, however I don't think we will achieve that by just talking about it. I think the most important thing now is to find out what this toxin is and how it can be spread because it is the immediate danger we face. Judging by how quickly Seamus died, it's obvious that with this Voldemort could potentially wipe us out in a couple of weeks. I move that Malfoy and Neville be put to work on identifying the toxin. Perhaps with Snape's help.'

'Well put Harry,' said Dumbledore. 'If that is okay with you two,' he said glancing at Malfoy and Neville, 'I think we should adjourn this meeting. There are funeral arrangements and a little girl's future to consider. If anyone uncovers anything about this toxin an urgent meeting should be called.' With that he apparated from the room. Ron could tell he looked a little drained.

Harry made his way over to them.

'I'm sorry if I sounded upset,' he said. 'I can't believe that Seamus is actually dead.'

'You had a point,' said Ron. 'Did you notice that Sirius wasn't here?'

'Yes,' said Hermione. 'And I don't think it was entirely to do with Chrystal.'

Ron sighed as they Flooed back to Dunvegan. One thing was for sure. Nothing would ever be quite the same again.

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The messenger did as he was told. He left the letter on the steps of Black Manor in the middle of the night. He was not around the next morning to hear neither the screams of Madeleine McLachlan as she opened the letter the next morning, nor the screams of nine-year-old Kaylah as she saw the parchment it was written on.

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Snape made his way into the entrance hall of the castle after a somewhat hard day. He was stunned to see Terri there; she was obviously looking for someone. He didn't speak. He just stood there mesmerised by her fair hair blowing in the wind from the open door way.

'What do you want?' Snape asked much more harshly than he had wanted to sound.

'Oh, Severus,' she said. 'Would you be able to show me to the Defence Against the Dark Arts room? I'm afraid everything's a little different than it used to be.'

Snape agreed quickly but gave her a strange look.

'You're wondering what the hell I'm doing here, when if I want Chrystal, I could easily owl her,' she said smugly. 'Heather Black actually sent me to find Chrystal.'

He nodded. He knew that something strange was going on. Chrystal had been acting strange for a while and he felt he needed an explanation. He knocked on the door to Chrystal's office and opened it quickly.



He watched the look on her face drop as she saw Terri enter the room.

Something was very wrong.

'What's wrong Terri?' she said almost hysterically.

'I'm not exactly sure,' the blonde girl replied. 'Heather's asking for you, so Alec asked me to come and get you. Apparating's far quicker than owl post.'

'Oh,' she replied. 'Um, well I need to get there as soon as I can, but I can't apparate. I'll need to go and tell Dumbledore that I may be gone for a couple of days. Can you wait here?'

Without waiting for a response, she ran out of the room quickly. She hadn't even noticed that he was there. *And why couldn't she apparate?* She was an ex-Auror, she certainly knew how to.

'What exactly is going on Terri?' Snape asked the girl with concern.

'I'm not really sure,' she replied. 'Things are certainly strange. I've been invited around for dinner after training sessions quite frequently, but when Alec and I got back tonight, Madeleine was hysterical, and Heather was simply as white as a sheet. Alec went and spoke to her and then asked me to get Chrystal. She didn't mention Leigha or Troy. Look, be honest with me. Do you think it's to do with Sirius?'

He took a deep breath in.

'He has a dangerous job Terri,' he replied. 'His family know the risks. You'll get Chrystal there and back safely?'

She nodded.

'Come and see me when you return,' Snape said, as Chrystal returned.

'Ready to go Terri,' she said still not noticing him. Terri nodded. 'Okay lets go.'

Chrystal led Terri outside.

'Do you feel comfortably flying?' she asked the jockey.

'On a broom?' Terri asked.

'No, a horse,' Chrystal corrected her.

'Okay,' she said with a slight nervous giggle. 'Where's the horse?'

Chrystal transformed. Terri didn't show a look of surprise, but jumped on her back. Chrystal took a deep breath before she ascended into the air.

She flew quickly, used to the weight of a rider on her back, and quickly located the Black mansion, which was not too far away from Hogwarts in the heart of Scotland. Upon descent, her nerves grew. It was unlike Heather to send for her. In fact during the twelve years Sirius was in Azkaban Heather didn't send for her once.

She entered the house where Alec was waiting for her.

'Chryssy' he said. 'You took a while.'

'I'll explain later,' she replied curtly. 'Where's Heather?'

Alec led her into the Drawing room, where Heather Black was sitting dressed in black robes, white as a sheet.

'Chryssy,' she whispered. 'It's just like Iain.'

'What's like Iain?' Chrystal asked. Iain was Sirius' father, who had been killed when Sirius was young.

'He's missing,' she whispered. 'It's just like Iain. Missing for weeks before we found out he's dead.'

Chrystal's heart sunk. Heather was exaggerating. Iain had been missing for days before they found out he was missing.

'Sirius?' she asked.

Heather nodded slowly.

'Are you sure?' she asked. 'Because you know he left me don't you?'

He wasn't dead. She would sense something. He was just missing.

'I know all that,' replied Heather. 'But we got a letter telling us that he was gone and we would never see him again.' Heather produced the parchment. The writing was in blood. It sent shivers down Chrystal's spine. But she would not believe that he was dead.

'Heather,' Chrystal began. 'Sirius is not dead. I would know if he was, trust me. We just have to think positively and hope that he will be found. Okay?'

Chrystal could tell that Heather was shaken by the assertiveness of what she had said. Chrystal felt that she should stay. She walked out and found Alec.

'Can I stay tonight?' she said. Alec nodded. 'I'll fly back tomorrow, and I'll need Terri to come with me, just for my own piece of mind. I'll talk to the operatives soon and I'll let you know what I can.'

'You're probably right Chryssy,' he said. 'We need to shake Heather out of this. It's really got Maddie worried.'

'I'm not sure how,' she said. 'But it needs to be done. I take it you want me to tell Leigha and Troy.'

'If you could,' Alec said. 'If you don't mind, I'm going to try and calm Madeleine down.'

Chrystal walked up the stairs towards the room, which was hers and Sirius'. He just couldn't be dead. She would know. Somehow she felt that she would know. She sat on the bed wondering what was going to happen now. She had never felt so alone.

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She flooded back to Hogwarts the following morning. Terri went with her and then, Chrystal assumed, she went to report to Snape. Chrystal lost herself in thoughts.

There was a knock on the door a couple of hours later. Chrystal looked up. Severus was standing there.

'Well is he still alive?' he asked.

'How should I know?' asked Chrys. 'You're the Death Eater in this room.'

'I just thought that you might have found out,' he said.

'I don't do that kind of thing,' she said. 'I promised myself I wouldn't.'

He moved closer towards her, closing the door. He sat down on the edge of her desk.

'It's been far more difficult lately hasn't it?' he asked. She looked at him slightly confused. 'It's been harder to curb your will not to use it hasn't it? Since we formed the Covenant.' She knew it was true. She didn't want to acknowledge it. Severus picked up on it. 'Why won't you use it to find him?'

She turned to him.

'Don't you understand?' she asked. 'It's not a toy. It's a dangerous form of Dark Magic. I don't want to use it. Someone will end up getting hurt.'

'And Sirius will end up dead if you don't,' said Severus. 'He might already be dead. At least we'd know Chrystal. We wouldn't be wasting time and resources trying to find him.'

'I won't,' she said. 'You don't know what you're asking me to do.'

'You won't even do it for Sirius?' asked Severus.

'He left me,' she replied biting on her lip. 'Why should I care what happens to him?'

'Because you do,' said Severus softly. 'You have for years. It's not something you can just switch off.'

It was just too difficult. The tension just kept building up inside her. She felt as if she were going to go mad.

'Tell me honestly Chrystal,' he said. 'Wouldn't you be happier knowing where he was?'

She nodded. It was getting harder and harder to resist. 'Please find him.' Severus looked at her honestly. 'We need him more than a lot of people are willing to acknowledge.'

She was allowing herself to be manipulated by Severus Snape. Yet she trusted him.

'Okay.'

She closed her eyes and concentrated hard. She kept thinking about Sirius. Concentrated hard on him.

She could feel him. She focussed her energy on him.

She could see him.

He was cold and all alone.

She didn't know where he was but she could tell he had been tortured. She began to shake. She could feel the hot poker that was prodding him at that very moment.

'NOO,' she yelled.

'Chrystal what is it?' Severus asked with concern.

'He's alive, but he's being tortured,' she said. 'They're hurting him.' She was trembling.

'Do you know where he is?' asked Severus.

'No,' she said. 'But we don't have much time to find him. They're going to kill him.'

Chrystal watched as Severus surveyed her very carefully.

'Would you do anything to save him?' he asked her.

'Of course,' she said. 'He's my husband and I love him.'

'I have a suggestion,' he said hurriedly. 'It will take some explaining and may sound ludicrous, yet I think it might just work. Will you listen?' Chrystal didn't say anything. She just nodded in reply.

'My mother and your mother were friends at school. You know that, they were both in Slytherin. Your mother told mine about a prophecy that involved the houses of Ravenclaw and Slytherin. The prophecy stated that the two houses would be once again joined together. That's why he went after your mother, and that's why he'll go after you.'

'No that can't be true,' said Chrystal shaking her head in disbelief. 'I don't believe in silly prophecies like that.'

'You might not,' replied Severus. 'The Dark Lord does. He takes care to pay attention to any prophecy that is given about him. The prophecy suggests that the results could be something phenomenal. He wants you to come to him and accept your destiny.'

'Any you know this because?' she asked in disbelief.

'He has ordered me to convince you,' he said shamefully. 'In exchange for not providing him with a list of the Muggle-born students.'

Chrystal looked at Severus Snape in disbelief.

'He wants you to convince me to go and join our houses together?' she asked. 'In other words he wants you to convince me to go and shag him? And you think he will give me Sirius in exchange. What do you think I am? A common whore?'

'It is merely a suggestion,' he said. 'Trust me; the Dark Lord wants this prophecy to be fulfilled. And you can free Sirius by doing this.'

'And what is the outcome?' she asked. She knew the answer when she looked at his face. 'You won't tell me, will you?'

'You don't want to know,' he said. 'And even if you did, I still wouldn't tell you.'

It was almost too much to stand. Chrystal could feel the temptation of trying to manipulate Severus' emotions rising within her. She had to try and get away before she passed the point of no return. She turned away.

'This is crazy Severus,' she said. 'There's absolutely no guarantee he wouldn't just kill me.'

'I think there's almost a guarantee,' he said seriously as he turned her towards him by her shoulder. 'Mr Malfoy told him that Ravenclaw and Slytherin were paired together.'

She glared at him. It couldn't be true. She didn't want it to be true.

'Is that fact?' she asked him shaking. She didn't want it to be true, yet in her heart it was what she believed to be fact.

'Nobody knows except the Seer herself and we can't find her,' he said in a snarling voice. 'And you know all too well that she's not going to tell you anyway.'

Chrystal knew that was true. She also knew that given that Lavender was missing and the Dark Lord thought that killing her would bring around Harry's fall, Chrystal figured that she was probably dead too.

'The Dark Lord won't harm you,' he said again. 'Besides you can always unleash the power of Ravenclaw on him. Manipulate him so that you get exactly what you're after.'

She contemplated the thought. She had no idea where Sirius was. Absolutely no way of finding him before they killed him. She's already lost him; however she was prepared to do whatever it took to save him, even if it meant that he never spoke to her again.

'I'll do it,' she said softly. 'But I want you to do something for me. Two things in fact. I want you to put me under the Imperius to do whatever is necessary to save Sirius. I don't think I could bring myself to do this otherwise. I won't be able to fight it, because it's in my nature to try and save Sirius.' Severus began to protest. 'Hold on. And I want a blood oath. I want you to swear a blood oath that you'll never tell Sirius about this.'

'A blood oath?' asked Severus in surprise. His face was going white.

'A blood oath,' she said firmly knowing full well the consequences of what she was asking.

'But that's dark magic of an extremely advanced nature,' he said. 'How do you even know of such a thing?'

'You get to know a few things when you study the Dark Arts for eighteen years,' she said with a smile. 'You'd be surprised what I know Severus. I could kill you right here and now without anybody ever finding out. It's not a good idea to mess with me.'

'And what would you give as your part in the oath?' he asked. Chrystal let out a sigh of relief. He was actually considering it.

'I would give my word that I will never tell anybody that you placed me under the Imperius,' she said.

'Fine,' he said. 'You do realise that Veritaserum cannot force you to reveal information tied in with a

blood oath don't you?'

'I'm an Auror Severus,' she said. 'I'm well aware of the consequences.'

'Okay,' he said. 'Let's do this. We'll go down to the dungeons.'

Chrystal nodded and followed Severus to the dungeons almost in disbelief of what she had committed herself to do.

Snape opened the door to his private dungeon and with a swift wand movement ignited all the candles in the room. The room felt cold, as if it was signalling the upcoming end of her world. The two of them sat next to a cauldron in which something strange was boiling. Chrystal looked at Severus and pulled out her wand.

'Is there a cauldron ready here for us to use that doesn't have some foul smelling liquid in it?' she asked. Severus pointed at a cauldron, sitting over flame not even thirty centimetres from where they were sitting.

'I'll get the necessary ingredients then shall I?' he asked. Chrystal nodded and watched as he searched around for the potions ingredients. Her heart was pounding.

Severus sat back down at the bench. He glanced at her as she lifted her wand and pointed it at her wrist.

'*Lacerto*,' she whispered, ignoring the pain the curse brought as it ripped through her skin. '*Lacerto, Lacerto*.' Three slits appeared in her wrist from which blood began to pour. She watched as Severus did the same.

In the pale light that the candles provided they pushed their wrists together and placed their elbows into the empty cauldron allowing their blood to flow into the cauldron until the flow stopped. Chrystal felt light headed as she watched Severus carefully add the potion ingredients and stir the potion. Then he carefully ladled it into two goblets and then picked his up.

'By my blood and your blood, I swear that I will never inform Sirius Iain Black of the operation we are about to undertake,' he said. 'I am aware that doing so will result in the forfeit of my life.'

'By my blood and your blood, I swear that I will never reveal that Severus Snape placed me under the Imperius Curse,' she said lifting her goblet. 'I am aware that doing so will result in the forfeit of my life.' They both raised their goblets to their lips and drank the thick disgusting red liquid. Chrystal doubted that she had ever tasted something that bad in her entire life.

'It is done,' said Severus. 'And now my dear if you relax I shall do as you have requested.' Chrystal closed her eyes.

'*Imperio*,' whispered Severus. 'You will do whatever it takes to save Sirius Black.' He placed his wand on the counter.

'So how do I find him?' she asked.

'You can Floo there,' he said. 'To Slytherin Castle.'

Chrystal grabbed some Floo powder from the container above the fireplace and left the world she knew.

## **Chapter Twenty-five The Fall of Chrystal Black**

~\* February 20<sup>th</sup> \*~

The funeral for Seamus Finnegan was held that day.

Ron had somehow, with Alasdair's help managed to throw the funeral together in a little under forty-eight hours. It wasn't exactly easy. But somehow he'd done it. Harry was amazed at the courage Ron had shown. He himself was still in a state of disbelief following Seamus' death. It was always the innocent ones that suffered first. Horrendously and needlessly.

Harry's hate towards Voldemort soared. How could one man hate those people who were different so much? Harry felt that he could get worked up enough to successfully use the killing curse on Voldemort. The thought that he could get so angry worried him occasionally. He never let it on to anyone though. He knew his destiny was to destroy Voldemort and he would achieve this or die trying.

Harry glanced at Katie Finnegan, her brown hair pulled up on top of her head, her freckled face stained with tears. Very few Hogwarts students had been permitted to attend the funeral. Just Katie Finnegan and the few members of the Quidditch team that had played with Seamus the previous two years had been allowed to come. Perhaps there was fear that Voldemort may attack the funeral. Yet almost everybody who had been in seventh year the previous year had turned up. *In death we stand united*. Harry couldn't help but wonder how much time he had. Glancing at Hermione's bulging belly, he felt a strange feeling pass through him. He wondered if his child would be left alone like he was, like Rose had been and like Katie Finnegan now was. It was something he realised that he needed to discuss with Hermione. The reality was there, it needed to be faced. The likelihood that Harry would be around next year was not high. At least not if Voldemort kept reaping havoc so successfully.

Harry's thoughts drifted to Seamus. His earliest recollection of Seamus was at the welcome feast in first year with Seamus explaining that his "Mam" was a witch and his father was a Muggle. His thoughts drifted to Seamus' blowing up a feather in charms. Then his thoughts drifted to Defence Against the Dark Arts classes with Lupin, where they faced their greatest fears with each other. Harry had quite often wondered why Seamus' greatest fear was a banshee, yet he had never had a chance to ask him. Harry remembered Seamus at the Quidditch world cup encouraging them to support Ireland. It was this Seamus that he wanted to remember. Not the Seamus who he had fallen out with over the Daily Prophet articles that had almost prevented Seamus from returning for their fifth year. He would remember the Seamus who supported him by joined the DA, the one who had stepped up and joined the Quidditch team as a Beater when they really needed one and the one who sat by Lavender's side as she recovered from the terrible vision she had seen in their Divination NEWTs. Harry would never forget the look of concern that he had had on his face that day. It had made Harry aware of the extent that Seamus cared for her. That love was what had led him to this.

He took one more glance at Katie Finnegan before he knew he had to leave. The loss was so great for a child so young. Her mother and then her brother.

He gave Neville a quick glance before he turned and walked away. He had invited the Gryffindor's from their year around so that they could have their own private wake. Harry felt it was something they needed to do. He thanked the priest, a Father Malcolm, before he pulled Hermione away.

'Let's get out of here,' he whispered.

She nodded at him before he walked over to Ron. He knew Ron still had some business to take care of, so Harry was going to ensure that Rose made it back to Dunvegan safely. The three of them flooded to Dunvegan and Harry collapsed on the sofa in the sitting room.

'Did you notice who was there?' asked Rose trying to start conversation.

'I took notice of who wasn't there,' replied Harry somewhat sarcastically. Hermione gave him a quizzical look. 'Well take for instance Chrystal, she wasn't there and she should have been. Apparently she ran off from Hogwarts last night.'

'Perhaps she had other things to do Harry,' said Rose defensively. 'It was short notice after all.'

'And Professor Snape,' said Harry. 'As a member of the Order he should have been there to keep an eye on things.'

'He was probably working on the toxin,' said Hermione in her calming voice.

'Without Malfoy and Neville?' said Harry. His voice was rising, as was the anger inside him.

'Anything's possible,' said Hermione.

'And Sirius wasn't there,' said Harry. 'Even if he doesn't want to see Chrystal he should have at least made the effort. Seamus was one his students. Parvati wasn't there either. I'm not exactly sure about her anymore.'

'What's wrong with you toady Harry?' asked Rose. 'Why are you acting like this?'

Harry looked at her with surprise.

'Acting like what?' he asked.

'Like you're going to rip someone's head off,' replied Hermione.

'I'm sorry,' I've got a lot on my mind,' he said.

Alasdair MacLeod entered the room.

'I'm sorry to interrupt but I have to tell you that Sirius is missing,' he said. Harry felt the blood drain from his face. 'Heather received a letter written in blood yesterday. Testing has shown that it is Sirius' blood.'

'What can we do to help?' asked Hermione.

'I'm not sure,' he said. 'I'll keep you informed. Rose, Dumbledore has requested that you remain here for a few days. He thinks you could be the next target. For now I have to locate my impulsive daughter. She was supposedly headed for Hogwarts. If I'm not back in time for dinner please feel free to eat without me.'

He disappeared as Hermione stood up and came over and hugged Harry tightly.

'Sirius will be okay,' she said. 'He always has been.'

'They're using him,' said Harry. 'To get to Chrystal. Just like they used Seamus to get to Lavender. He's got Lavender and once he gets Chrystal he'll kill the both of them. Promise me Hermione; don't leave here until Voldemort's dead. Go to the Order meetings, they're safe but otherwise don't leave here.' There was an edge of desperation in his voice.

'Harry, I'm fine,' she said. 'I can take care of myself. You know that.'

'Hey guys,' interrupted Rose. 'I'm going to find Mum. When Ron gets here can you ask him to come and find me?'

'Sure Rose,' said Hermione with a smile. After she left Hermione spoke again. 'What are you really worried about Harry? Tell me the truth.'

'I don't want to lose you Hermione,' he said softly. 'And I don't want them to hurt you because of me.'

'I'm not going anywhere Harry,' she said. 'I love you.' She paused for a moment and Harry could feel her eyes burning a hole into his. 'Come and sit down.'

Harry did as Hermione asked.

'What is it?' he said.

'I had a talk to Ron the other day,' she said. 'I asked him if we were rushing things.'

'And what did he say?' asked Harry raising his eyebrows.

'He said I should talk to you about it,' she said with a smile. 'Perhaps we have Harry, but promise me that we'll always talk, no matter what else happens.'

'Of course Hermione,' he said softly. 'I'm sorry about before, the whole thing with Seamus has just got me thinking. We need to decide what to do if both of us die. Especially given that soon enough we'll have a child to consider.'

'You're probably right,' she said. 'How about we talk it over with your parents?'

'Sounds like a plan,' said Harry. 'But for now the others should be arriving soon. We had better get organised.'

Soon enough the guests arrived, and the five of them spent hours exchanging stories about Seamus. As the night became morning Harry felt better. He knew it would take a long time for the pain to disappear; however that's what happens when you lose a good friend like Seamus.

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Chrys sat on the bed. *It couldn't be true. Sirius couldn't be missing.* She knew he wasn't dead. She knew she would be able to feel it if he were. Ever since the awakening of the Covenant she had been more attune with the emotions of others. It sat in her mind haunting her. She only hoped it would be over soon.

She lay on the old wooden king-sized bed waiting. The canopy gave her a false sense of security. Somehow she knew he wouldn't be too much longer. She only hoped she had the guts to go through with it and did not try to fight the Imperius. She was still in some disbelief that she had allowed herself to be placed under the Imperius. She almost felt as if she were floating.

The room was not a warm one. It was a circular room, with one door and no windows. The walls were made of cold grey stone that had a chilling effect. Gas lights lit the room from the ceiling. There was no fireplace. The only piece of furniture was the bed. The grey canopy hung over the dark black wooden frame and the dirty grey sheets. She wondered how anyone could live in this kind of room.

He came through the door. The sight revolted her. It almost made her sick.

He no longer looked like the portrait of Tom Riddle. In fact he looked like no one Chrystal had ever seen before. He was tall and skinny. His face was pale and his cheeks were hollowed. His eyes were red; a piercing red that felt like it was penetrating her soul. Whatever he had become, it was clear that Voldemort was no longer anything that resembled a human. She suddenly felt naked without her wand, but maybe she could use that to her advantage.

'Well,' he said in his high-pitch voice. 'What have we here? Nathaira's daughter.'

Chrys said nothing. She just remained quietly mesmerised by the man who had caused so much suffering to so many people.

'Have you come, as your mother did before you, to bargain for the life of your daughter?' he asked.

Chrystal looked up at him in surprise. She wasn't expecting Voldemort to believe the rumour. And she wasn't quite sure what he was implying about her mother either.

'I have no daughter,' she said firmly. She was telling the truth. She only hoped that for Rose's sake that he believed her.

Voldemort laughed.

'That's not what I hear,' he said. 'I hear that your daughter is Rose Heaney. I've heard about her



ability to do wandless magic. That's a very rare Celtic gift.' He smiled at her. Chrystal had never seen a smile as something terrifying before.

'Who told you that?' she asked in surprise. She really couldn't think of anyone who would have known about Rose healing her that would have told him that. The only person who she could even think of was Snape. *Could she trust him?* She certainly hoped so; however she was quickly beginning to doubt.

'I cannot and will not reveal my sources to you,' he said in a chilling manner. 'I will tell you that they are reliable.'

'She can perform wandless magic,' said Chrystal conceding. No harm could be done if Voldemort was already sure of that. 'That is true and ironically that is my fault, however that does not make her my daughter. I cannot believe that somebody as clever as you are would fall for a stupid lie like that.' She was going to finish there however she felt that she should add something. 'My Lord.' There was an air of subservience in what she had said. She only hoped he would believe her.

'Your fault?' he asked slightly bewildered.

'Yes,' she said. 'There is an ancient spell that allows Celts to bestow the ability of wandless magic onto other witches. I used the charm on her.' Chrystal hoped he would believe her. What she had said wasn't quite the truth, but it was close enough in essence. 'It was a decoy.'

'Prove to me that you are Rowen's heir then my dear,' he said. His voice had an edge to it that gave Chrystal goosebumps. 'If you convince me I shall end my pursuit of the girl.' Thinking quickly Chrystal thought of only one way to convince him. She slowly pulled down her skirt to reveal the eagle tattoo that had been there for a little over a year now. He eyed the tattoo very carefully. He tried to remove it several times with various charms. Each time the eagle remained.

'Rowen's sign,' he said. 'Perhaps you are the Heir. There is one way to find out.' He turned away from her and performed the summoning charm. Chrystal couldn't think of anything that he would possibly summon that could prove she was the Heir of Ravenclaw. He showed her the trinket.

As Chrystal gazed at it she felt as if it were calling to her. The bright blue stone in the centre could only be a sapphire. It was as blue as her eyes. The gold and silver of the Celtic cross were intertwined together and in a way almost reminded her of a trinket she had seen in an old book. Her eyes lingered across the cross once more. The trinket that came to her mind was one that Gryffindor (gold) and Slytherin (silver) had had made for Rowena Ravenclaw. Somehow Chrystal thought that Voldemort's possession of this was more than just a coincidence.

'You know what this is don't you?' he asked playfully.

'It's Rowen's,' she said as the necklace called to her. 'It's mine.'

'Well if it is yours I should be able to place it around your neck,' he said with a smile. He leant over and placed the charm on her neck. She felt a little strange as she felt the cold metal against her skin.

'I guess you are Rowen's Heir then,' he said. 'So why have you come?'

'To fulfil my destiny,' she said. She was slightly shivering, the room offering not too much in the way of warmth. The little that was actually there seemed to have been drained by Voldemort.

'And what destiny is that?' he replied laughing.

'The one which Nathaira failed to fulfil because I killed her,' she snapped.

'You killed Nathaira,' he said almost shocked. Chrystal could feel the shock and pain that he was emitting. 'You killed my love.'

'You should be thankful I did,' she said softly. Her voice had a lilt to it. She knew she would have to manipulate him to get out of here alive. 'If I didn't she would have killed me and then you would be in a lot of trouble wouldn't you? The Prophecy of Soaghal would have ensured your death.'

'What you say is correct,' he said contemplating. 'However Nathaira would have spared you. She made a deal for your life and I am bound to keep it.'

Chrystal turned around instantly. *What is he talking about?*

'What deal?' she asked. 'My mother hated me. She hated me my entire life.'

'She made a blood oath with me,' he said with a smile on his face. 'That I would never kill you. In exchange she would ensure that you never knew what your destiny was.'

'But she told me,' said Chrystal. The words came out of her mouth before she even meant them to. *How could she have told me? To break a blood oath is death.*

'Then she brought about her own death,' he said. 'How did you kill her?'

Chrystal thought about it long and hard. She had felt her mother curse her. She used all her strength to overcome it. She certainly had heard the words Avada Kedavra in her head, but she couldn't be sure that she hadn't just thought them. At the time there had been no other explanation as to how her mother had died. No one had ever tested her wand. No one had ever told her that she hadn't killed her mother. Reality was quickly setting in. She had been living a lie for the past seventeen years because nobody had ever told her that she had not killed her mother. Her mother told her she was Ravenclaw's Heir knowing that she would die. Why would she have done this? Chrystal knew the answer. It hurt too much to admit it.

She was angry. The time had come to get what she wanted.

'I am here to give you what you want Tom,' she spat his name out. 'I am here to give you that child that you believe will rise to match your power. But I want something in return.'

'What?' he asked with curiosity.

'I want you to return my husband to me,' she said. 'Alive.'

'You want that worthless excuse for a wizard?' he asked. 'You honestly want Sirius Black returned to you. Trust me; you're better off without him.'

'Love can do strange things,' she said. She knew it would hit a nerve. She was right.

You say that, yet it is because of you that my love is no longer here,' he said. 'You profess to love Sirius Black then?'

'It is my tragic flaw,' she said. 'It is the reason that I have not stormed in here and killed you.'

'You kill me?' he asked laughing. 'I highly doubt that my dear. But I cannot kill you. I can however harm you.' Chrystal closed her eyes not wanting to think about what he was implying. 'I will agree to your bargain if you will agree to mine.' Chrystal felt the tension drop inside her. She could do anything for Sirius. Anything he requested. Just as long as she got him back safely. 'You will remain here tonight. I will prepare a potion for you that will ensure the conception of our child. The child that will ensure the survival of the line of Salazar. It is a very old potion that my ancestor himself invented for his poor eunuch slave. You will drink it. It tastes terrible, or so I have been told. Before you leave in the morning we shall conduct a charm to make sure conception has taken place. Before you drink this potion however I require two things.' Chrystal swallowed the saliva in her throat. 'First I must punish you for taking Nathaira. It will not hurt too much my dear, but it is a necessary price to pay. The second is I must charm to look like her. I have no reason for this except the torment it will bring you and your father. The charm will last until the child is born. If you find a way to break it then you are more powerful than I give you credit. After this is complete I will return your husband. In one piece. Do we have a deal?'

'Yes,' she said. 'I agree.'

'Then I must see to the potion,' he said leaving the room.

It was a better outcome than she could have hoped for. He had almost agreed too easily. She didn't know if she could have gone through with what Severus had suggested. The thought of his hands all over her body was enough to make her nauseas. She had heard of the potion he had suggested. It was an old one that required only a hair from each of the two people. She only hoped that the potion wouldn't have an adverse effect on the child she was already carrying.

She had only come to the realisation the night before. Sirius' fertility potion had worked, unfortunately a little late for him to know. It was why she would contemplate anything to get him back. He had to know about his child. It was why she would permit Voldemort's desire to torture her. It was for Sirius.

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Ron made his way up to Rose's bedroom once everybody had fallen asleep. He sat and watched as she looked so peaceful lying there asleep. Ron almost didn't want to disturb her. But deep down inside he knew he should wake her. He shook her gently until she woke.

'Ron,' she said groggily. 'What time is it?'

'It's about six in the morning,' he said.

'Why didn't you come up earlier?' she asked.

'We were talking about Seamus,' he replied. 'Reminiscing.'

'Oh,' she said. She looked a little defeated. Ron had a good hard look at her. She didn't look well. It was almost a year since they had started going out and yet they had barely seen each other.

Rose had had a difficult year, he was aware of that. However he felt he didn't have to be aware of that to realise it. Her eyes were lined by dark heavy shadows that appeared as if no amount of sleep could ever remove them. She was pale, making her freckles seem so much darker than they really were. Her arms were so thin that Ron thought they would break if she tried to pick up her broomstick.

'What's wrong Rose?' he asked.

'I just thought you would come up earlier,' she said. It wasn't the answer Ron was after.

'What's really wrong?' he asked. 'Why have you changed so much?'

'I have no idea what you're talking about,' she said. Again it wasn't the answer Ron was after.

'Rose, you've lost your spark,' he said. 'You look like you're about to die.'

'I'm fine, really Ron, I'm fine,' she replied. She looked at him with an expression that suggested she was hurt by his comments. He would understand that if he wasn't saying things that weren't true. Relationships were not exactly Ron's forte and this one wasn't making any great leaps of progress.

'No you're not Rose,' he said. 'You haven't been fine in a while. And if I can't make you see that, I hope someone else will.'

He turned around and walked out the door, resolved to find Harry and get him to try and talk to her. Ron didn't know what to do. He really cared about Rose, yet he obviously wasn't giving her the support she needed. She wouldn't even confide in him. He wondered if things would have been different if he had fallen for her after she had finished school. But then he thought about his sister and Malfoy whose relationship just kept on getting stronger and stronger. Ron knocked on the door and entered Harry and Hermione's room. Harry looked at him groggily.

'What's up?' he asked.

'I need to talk to you now,' replied Ron. 'It's about Rose.'

Harry gave him a curious look and then told Ron to meet him in the kitchen in ten minutes. Ron wandered down there and asked a House Elf to prepare him coffee. Ron never ever had any qualms

about getting House Elves to do chores for him, like Hermione did. He had tried valiantly to explain to her that if they're not mistreated they're very happy.

Harry made his way down not long after, scooped up his coffee cup and led Ron outside into the gardens. The sun had risen only about half an hour before and the morning was still awakening.

'It's over,' said Ron not wanting to look at his friend's face. 'I can't pretend anymore.'

'Pretend what?' asked Harry.

'That she's not destroying herself,' said Ron. 'Did you even notice how skinny she was yesterday? Did you notice the shadows under her eyes? She won't talk to me and tell me her problem, so I don't know what I can do to help her. She doesn't trust me enough Harry. At the moment I don't think she trusts anyone.'

Ron watched the look of disbelief on Harry's face.

'Listen mate, I'll be back at five tonight for fencing,' he said. 'Can you please talk to her? I'm really worried about her.'

Ron didn't wait for Harry's reply before apparating to London. He hoped that this would all be over soon.

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Lily left early that morning. She had something to do and if what Dudley had said earlier in the week gave any real indication she knew she had to act soon. Lily wasn't the sort of person who normally sought revenge, but this time she wanted to do something to ensure that Vernon Dursley would never forget that Lily Potter knew exactly how he had treated her son.

From what Dudley had told her, she knew that Vernon was getting home from hospital that day. She apparated into the Dursleys' house. It was spotless. That didn't really surprise Lily, it seemed appropriate that Petunia's house would be so. Lily wandered around the house, even examining the cupboard which had been Harry's bedroom for ten years. She was disgusted when she saw the cupboard's size. It confirmed to Lily what she had always thought, Vernon was evil. She and Petunia had had a good relationship before Lily found out that she was a witch. Then Petunia went kind of crazy for a few years and then she met Vernon. Petunia was so intent on impressing Vernon that anything that wasn't normal was wiped immediately out of her life. And that meant Lily.

Lily didn't hold any hopes for her relationship with Petunia. She would be too set in her ways that nothing would change after Vernon's death. But she knew that she didn't want to keep hidden from everybody anymore. And that meant starting with Petunia.

Lily glanced around the house. It was far too clean for her liking. Petunia must have gone all out for Vernon's return home. She wandered through the house taking note of the cupboard that had been Harry's bedroom for ten years. Looking at the size of it made her so angry. She couldn't believe that her sister could treat an innocent boy so badly. An innocent boy through whose veins the Evans blood did flow. She almost wanted to rip off Petunia's head, and yet she knew that would achieve nothing.

Lily heard the door open. She was standing in the living room. She took a deep breath as she heard Vernon grunting as he struggled to make his way into the room. Lily quickly found somewhere to hide herself until Vernon got settled. She really, even for all her dislike of the man, did not want him to keel over at the sight of her.

Petunia ensured that Vernon was settled before she headed off to the kitchen, presumably to make a cup of tea. Lily emerged from her hiding space and walked towards Vernon, who with his eyes shut one could only assume he was trying to sleep.

'Hello Vernon,' she said with an air of sarcasm in her voice.

Vernon opened his eyes and looked in the direction of the voice. Lily watched as the colour drained from his face as he saw her standing there.

'Are you a ghost?' he said quivering. He did look as if he had seen a ghost and this amused Lily.

'No Vernon,' she said with a smile. 'I'm not a ghost. I'm very much alive.'

'Whoever you are get out of my house,' he said. He was trying to be intimidating but he really didn't have the strength to be. 'Now.'

'I will not,' she said as she took a seat on the sofa. 'You and I need to have a little chat Vernon. About the way you treated my son.'

Vernon looked up towards the sky.

'Oh sweet Lord please stop tormenting me,' he begged. 'I've learnt my lesson. Please let me live in peace.' Lily didn't believe him.

'What's going on in there Vernon?' Lily heard Petunia's voice. Then she heard a scream of blasphemy as she spied Petunia walking into the room. She dropped the teapot.

'Hello Petunia,' said Lily with a smile. 'It's so nice to see you again. It's been an awfully long time, hasn't it? Let me fix that up for you.'

Lily withdrew her wand pointed at the spilt tea and reassembled Petunia's broken Royal Dolton teapot. Petunia remained frozen to the spot.

'We can't spoil your pristine carpet now can we?' she said as she mopped up the spilt tea. 'Take a seat Petunia. I won't hurt you. I was just saying to Vernon that it was about time we had a discussion about the way he treated Harry.' Lily watched with anticipation as the white face of Petunia became even paler.

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Chrystal was led into an even colder and darker room by two extremely tall men in hooded cloaks. She couldn't see their faces, however one of them had a strange odour, almost as if he was wearing a bad cologne. The two men had roughly bound her hands with magical binds and upon entering the room they tied her to the wall. The position was not the slightest bit comfortable. She had never felt so helpless before, she couldn't move at all. And she knew what was to come.

She watched with some fear as he entered the room. She wondered what pleasure the sadist would get out of this. He raised his wand and the curse hit her immediately in the face. Pain seared through her eye into the back of her head. The pain was quite different from any pain she had experienced before. It was sharp, intense and localised, before it radiated into a severe ache. He hit her again with another curse. This time it hit her arm. It caused a different type of pain.

The onslaught continued. She had no idea for how long for. Curse after curse hit her small body causing the most intense kinds of pain that Chrystal had ever felt. And the worst thing was that there was nothing she could do about it. She was almost completely helpless. She had no strength to even try and manipulate his feelings. She didn't know if she would have bothered if she had thought it would even work.

She moved the only part of her body that she could, her eyes. She glanced at Voldemort, almost begging him to stop. He seemed to have a look of pleasure on his face. Her level of fear was the highest it had been for a long time. She felt as if he were going to kill her even though she knew he still needed her. His hatred of her must be great for him to inflict this kind of pain on her.

The onslaught finally ended. Voldemort pointed his wand at her and levitated her. He gently levitated her into the room she had been in earlier and placed her on the bed.

'You need to sleep now,' he said as he gently pulled the blanket over her.

She tossed and turned, finding it difficult to get comfortable. She could feel bruises coming up all over her body. Magical bruises which in all probability could not be healed with magic. They would just have to run their course while she struggled to work out this man they called the Dark Lord.

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Not too far away Sirius was sitting in his cell contemplating.

They had left him alone today. For that he was grateful. His body cried with every movement his head throbbed with any kind of consciousness. He wondered how much longer they would torture him for before they killed him. He saw death as inevitable. There was no way he would give away information about the Order and without that information it was unlikely that they would release him.

He wasn't that scared of dying. He had cheated death twice already. He had escaped a Dementors kiss the night Harry and Hermione had saved him and he would never forget the day he was pushed into the veil. Both times he thought he was dead. Both times he wished that he had a chance to do things over. And both times he had made the same mistakes. History repeats itself.

He had accused Chrystal of being impulsive. Yet he had acted in such a manner by walking out on her. He had told her he needed space instead of telling her the truth. He was going to undertake a dangerous mission that had landed him here. She probably didn't even realise he was missing. Just that he hadn't come home to her.

He couldn't stand the thought of Chrystal hating him. They had been through too much together for him to allow her to think ill of him. She had not given up on him the entire time he had been in Azkaban. She couldn't give up on him now surely? He knew if he had a dying request it would be to have a chance to explain to her.

He saw the moon through the bars of his cell. A full moon and his thoughts drifted to Remus. One look at Remus and you could see that life wasn't fair.

He wasn't going to give up hope just yet. In the wizarding world you never knew what surprises might come your way.

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It took Vernon and Petunia quite a few minutes to recover from the shock of seeing Lily. In fact it took Petunia about five minutes to recover the colour in her face. Lily had poured everybody tea and was now sitting on the sofa facing her sister and her horrid brother-in-law. Finally Vernon spoke.

'If you've come here for revenge you're too late,' he said weakly. 'I've only got weeks to live.'

'I know,' she said. 'Dudley told me.'

If asked later there would be no way to describe the look on their faces.

'You've spoken with Dudley?' asked Petunia.

'Naturally,' replied Lily. 'When he came to see Harry for advice.' Petunia and Vernon had no reply. 'I have come to offer my condolences. I was angry with you both when I found out how Harry had been treated. I wanted to tear your heads off. But I realise now after seeing you that my forgiveness will be much harder for you to bear. So here you have it, I forgive you Vernon. I forgive you for judging me because I'm different. I forgive you for hating me because I am a witch. I forgive you for lying to my son for ten years. And I forgive you for the way you treated him.' The expression on Vernon's face was that of severe confusion. 'And now I would like to talk to you Petunia, privately.'

The scared Petunia obeyed. She stood up and walked Lily to the kitchen.

'What is it?' she asked through her teeth.

'Do you want me to heal him?' she asked.

Petunia's eyes were wide open.

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Chrystal awoke a few hours later to the sound of Voldemort opening the door to her room. She glanced up and saw the goblet of potion bubbling.

'Here is your potion my dear,' he said. 'It will be ready in a few minutes. So while we wait I will transform you.'

Chrystal braced herself as he started casting charms all over her body. Luckily it was a painless exercise. She was dying however to see what she looked like.

He handed her the goblet with the potion. She took a deep breath before trying to swallow the foul tasting liquid that made her want to vomit. After what seemed like a lifetime she had swallowed the entire goblet. Voldemort looked at her triumphantly.

'You may go now,' he said. 'Your husband will be returned to you within the week.'

Seeing a fireplace spring out of nowhere, Chrystal quickly took the opportunity to get out of there. She flooded back to her private rooms at Hogwarts and headed straight for the mirror.

As she glanced at her reflection it was unbelievable. She was the splitting image of dead mother.

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Ron arrived in Spain slightly exhausted from the day before. Someone had given him a tip off that he intended to follow before it was too late. He didn't want to risk another yet casualty. But Rose had been on his mind. He didn't really mean that it was over, when he had said that to Harry, however he wasn't exactly sure he wanted it to continue in its present state either. Ron didn't think that either of them realised the difficulty of trying to keep a relationship together while one of them was still at school. The truth of the matter was that he had freedom (in a sense) and she did not.

*He thought back to the beginning of their relationship. Rose had had a crush on him for quite a while and Ron had never noticed it. Ginny pointed it out to him one day, saying he was stupid to pine over someone else when there were plenty of girls lining up to be his girlfriend. Initially he thought Ginny was referring to Luna Lovegood, and while she was a very interesting and a good person, he little eccentricities were far too much for Ron.*

*Ron noticed at Quidditch training one afternoon how pretty Rose was. Whether or not others would agree with his description was debatable, however he loved the way her green eyes shone in the sun, the way her brown hair waved in the wind as she rode her broomstick and the way a little dimple appeared in her cheek when she smiled. They began meeting after training at a large tree behind the greenhouses. They would sit and talk for hours, about anything and everything. Their secret relationship was something special. Ron grew to cherish the hours they spent together. They were a break from the norm and from the evil that was penetrating their world. He grew to really care about her. Rose was an inherently good person. She genuinely cared about everything that she did. She didn't like hurting other people's feelings.*

*That Rose seemed to be all but gone. Ron didn't know whether or not it was the discovery of her family or her abduction that had changed her, yet something had done its seeming irreparable damage. The sweet girl was gone. A troubled woman had come to take her place.*

Ron sighed as he looked around the town of Granada. It wasn't difficult to find the building he was looking for, the Alhambra of Granada. He took in the sight before he set off to try and find Lavender. He knew his source was reliable, he just hoped however that he wouldn't be caught trying to find her.

Setting his sights on the building he apparated into the broom closet, standard Hit Wizard

procedure. It was always unlikely that there would actually be someone in there. Ron then threw Harry's invisibility cloak over him and exited the broom cupboard.

A few men entered the room. They were carrying an Orb and talking about Hufflepuff. Ron had hit the jackpot. He quietly followed them hoping they would lead him to Lavender.

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Lavender wondered where she was. She had not foreseen how long they would hold her prisoner for, however because she had seen them release her, she had no real concerns for her welfare. She was honestly far more concerned about Seamus. He had looked so awful the last time she saw him that she didn't really know if he was well enough to survive. Her only hope was that now that they had her they would let him go.

She felt drained.

The room they were holding her in was not doing very much for her ability to see the future. Lavender wondered if it were on purpose. She hoped they would bring her an Orb soon so that she could just get on with foreseeing the rubbish she was going to make up and then they would let her go.

Lavender had had a while to think. She had made some rash decisions and had not always been thinking properly when she made them. She had wasted almost a year of her life withering away at Hogwarts. She had spent a considerable amount of that time drunk so she wouldn't have to contemplate what the future held. She hadn't treated Seamus very well at all. She had come to see this recently. She had surprised herself just how badly she felt when she realised he was in trouble. It was only then that she really realised that she loved him. She loved Seamus with his sandy-brown hair and Irish accent. She loved the guy who cared about her so much. She was going to make it up to him. She was anxious to start. She was going to make Seamus the happiest man who ever lived. And she was going to tell him the truth.

*She had foreseen her death.*

She could not name the time place or date, she had however foreseen the manner and it scared her. It scared her so much that she didn't want to acknowledge it. The burden of knowing the future was hanging over her head constantly. That was why she couldn't tell anybody of the outcome of the final battle. The burden of the knowledge would be too much for them.

Suddenly she heard the door open. Two cloaked men made their way into the room. They were carrying an Orb. She breathed a sigh of relief as they placed it down before her. She focussed her eyes on the Orb, yet her vision was clouded. She concentrated and concentrated, yet she could see nothing. She knew what she would have to do.



## **Chapter Twenty Six The Cost of Freedom**

He slowly followed the men with the Orb, careful to remain a fair distance behind them. As he ascended the staircase he could hear voices. He watched as the men disappeared into a room and shut the door quickly behind them. Ron waited for a few minutes to ensure that nobody was around. He crept towards the door. He listened carefully and when he finally heard voices he breathed a sigh of relief, several of the voices were familiar and one of them was almost certainly Lavender's.

Quickly he withdrew the hipflask from his pocket and added a silver coloured hair to the mixture inside. It hadn't been easy to try and get that hair either. Knowing how besotted with Malfoy his sister was, Ron had figured that it was likely Ginny would have some of his hair. He had mixed feelings when he discovered he was right. Ginny had reluctantly parted with some of Draco's hair after she had grilled Ron thoroughly on why he wanted it. He just hoped that Draco wouldn't be around to mess things up.

As he proceeded to the door of the room at the top of the stairs he heard an eerie change in Lavender's voice.

*'The Dark Lord will triumph in his latest struggle and his power will be greater than that of the other Heirs. A young boy however born between January and July of this year will rise up and defeat the Dark Lord. Permanently this time. There will be no mercy spared. The Dark Lord will suffer the way he has made others suffer.'*

Ron shivered as he listened to her. Somehow he couldn't help but feel that this wasn't a real prophecy. Ron knocked on the door.

'I'm here to take her,' he said, imitating Draco's voice to the best of his ability. 'She has told us what she knows. It is perhaps best she be returned before anyone gets too worried about her.'

The others didn't flinch as Ron untied the bonds that held her hands together and led her out of the castle. As soon as they were outside, Lavender began to yell at him.

'I always knew you were bad Draco,' she said angrily. 'I knew that nobody should have trusted you.'

'It's not Draco,' Ron said, reverting back to his own voice. 'It's Ron. I've got to take you back to Hogwarts as soon as possible. I've got a Floo point set up. Hurry and pretend that you're not enjoying it.'

'That's not a problem,' Lavender replied. 'But to keep me going can you tell me how Seamus is?'

Ron didn't know what to say. He hadn't even contemplated the thought that Lavender didn't know about Seamus. He had figured that whoever was holding her would have told her, just to see her suffer. Ron saw the look of hope and expectation in her eyes. He just couldn't break it to her.

'We'll talk about it later,' he replied hastily hoping that she wouldn't push the subject any further until there was somebody else who would be able to explain it to her better.

'Are you hurt at all?' he asked.

'A little,' she nodded as they continued down the steep mountain. Ron noticed that she was also slightly short of breath. 'My chest hurts a little and I'm covered in bruises.'

'Do you have a temperature?' asked Ron hoping that the answer was no.

'Listen Ron,' she said slightly more confidently. 'I know when I'm going to die and it's not right now. I appreciate your concern but for now I'll be fine. Just get me home.'

They soon reached the cottage where Ron had established temporary Floo access and they Flooed to the central Floo in Madrid from which they would Floo to London and then to Hogwarts. Ron breathed a sigh of relief as they entered Dumbledore's office. He also breathed a sigh of relief when Dumbledore excused him from the room. He had to talk to Ginny or better yet to Malfoy as soon as

possible.

Ron began to scour the castle in search for Ginny. It was difficult to try to avoid the students however Ron knew it wouldn't be good for certain Slytherin's to see him there. That would almost certainly make it back to the Death Eaters.

Ron turned the corner and bumped into Ginny. He breathed a sigh of relief.

'We need to talk,' he said. 'It's important.'

Ginny gave him a questioning look but agreed. She led him into a classroom and slammed the door.

'Is Lavender okay?' she asked. 'I'm glad you're okay. What you did was pretty risky.'

'Lavender will be as fine as she could ever be,' he replied. 'I need to talk to you about Draco.'

'What's there to talk about Ron?' she replied. 'I know you don't like me going out with him, but I care about him. You just need to get over it.'

'Listen Ginny, I can accept that for some strange reason you've got it in your head that you like that dope,' he replied. 'I can also accept that he's actually been very useful to the Order. However I think you need to know a few things.'

Ginny looked at him with a certain reluctance that did not inspire too much confidence in Ron.

'Okay,' she said. 'I'm listening.'

'When I walked into that room as Draco,' he continued, 'my authority was absolute. Those Death Eaters were completely loyal to Draco. They just let me take Lavender. Draco needs to know about this because he may get questioned as to what he did with her. I need you to tell him. It's also important because we might be able to use it to curb Death Eaters from carrying out Voldemort's instructions. I'm still unsure about his loyalty though. Someone's betraying us. Please be very careful about anything he asks you to do Ginny. Buckle down for the next couple of months, do the best you possibly can in your NEWTs okay?'

'If the situation wasn't so serious I'd be in tears from laughing so hard,' she said with a smile.

'Imagine Ron telling me to do as well as possible in my exams. Look Ron, I appreciate your concern, but I can take care of myself. At least to a certain extent. I'll let you know if he asks me to do anything dodgy.'

'Thanks Gin,' he said as he gave her a goodbye hug. 'I've got to run.' He headed towards the door and made his way towards the secret passage that would lead him to Honeyduke's. He hoped that no one had seen him.

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Petunia looked at her sister carefully.

'Are you serious?' she said.

'Of course,' replied Lily. 'It's not the kind of thing I'd joke about.'

'Why on earth would I want you to do that?' replied Petunia.

Lily looked at her sister with some surprise.

'Because he's your husband,' she replied. 'Surely you want him to live?'

'I don't give a damn what he does,' replied Petunia. There was a coldness in her voice that made Lily feel awkward. She shouldn't have been too surprised; after all she barely knew her sister however she just had some intrinsic feeling inside that told her that her sister could not possibly be like this.

Lily just stood there. She didn't know what to say. And she didn't know how she should react to such a comment.

'Listen Lily, I'm not about to get all sisterly on you,' said Petunia sharply. 'It's not my style. But I will be glad to be rid of Vernon. I will finally be free. I don't know if you can even understand what I'm trying to get at. You haven't been trapped into being someone you're not for years on end, just because you were too proud to admit you made a mistake. Thank you for your offer to heal my husband. I'd like you to leave now.' Petunia remained standing there. 'Please.'

Lily apparated from the room extremely bewildered. The reaction from Petunia was quite unexpected. Lily began to get the feeling that she didn't know her sister at all. She wandered around the castle until she located Harry reading in the lounge room.

'Hi Harry,' she said with a smile as she sat down on a seat opposite him.

'Hi Mum,' he said giving her a smile.

'Can I ask you something?' she asked him. 'About Petunia?'

'Of course but I don't know if I can help you?' he said in reply.

'What was her relationship like with Vernon?' she asked. Harry remained silent for a while before he finally spoke.

'I can't say that I really know,' he said. 'To me they always just seemed to be an entity, the one person. Why do you ask?'

'I offered to heal him,' she said. 'I know I shouldn't have but Petunia will always be my sister no matter how she's treated the both of us. But she refused, telling me that when he's dead then she'll be free.'

'I guess there's more to Aunt Petunia than I originally thought,' Harry replied with a smile. 'She was always very worried about what people thought, perhaps she was more worried about what Uncle Vernon thought.'

'Thanks Harry,' she said. 'You might be right. I need to find your father, have you seen him?'

'He was out with the horses,' said Harry. 'About half an hour ago.'

Harry watched with a smile as his mother walked off. He was glad she had gone to see Aunt Petunia, however he wished he'd been there to see the look on their faces when they realised it was Lily. It would have been much better than Dudley's reaction.

Ron arrived in the fireplace not long afterwards. Harry had been waiting somewhat impatiently for Ron's return when his mother had found him not long earlier. He needed to know what had happened. He felt it was very important. He sensed that something had happened. He had a sense of his lion tattoo. It wasn't painful, he was just aware of its presence. He also had a dull ache in his scar, not painful enough to worry him but there all the same.

Harry could tell immediately that Ron was worried about something. His face was pale and washed out. He had big dark circles underneath his eyes.

'You've had a long day, haven't you?' he asked. 'How about we find Hermione and talk about it? We can fence some other time.'

Hermione wasn't too difficult to find. She was in the kitchen obviously looking for something. Harry figured that there has to be enough food in the kitchen to fill her up, but lately it seemed she was always asking someone to pick up something for her. He didn't understand the cravings that she was getting, not at all.

'Hi Hermione,' he said with a smile. 'What do you want this time?'

'Actually I was after some plain ordinary Muggle fruit,' she said. 'And as usual I can't find any. Hi Ron.'

'Hi Hermione,' he said. 'Got something important to tell you. Why don't we get the House Elf to get

us something to eat and we can talk. I need some dinner.'

Ron quickly spoke to the House Elf, before they made their way to the more informal dining room.

'Honestly Ron don't you ever think of anything but your stomach?' asked Hermione.

'Look who's talking,' replied Harry.

'That's not fair,' she winged. 'I'm sure I'm eating for more than two.'

'Yeah, you have an elephant inside you Hermione,' replied Ron. 'I found Lavender.'

Ron recounted everything that had occurred, stressing the absolute authority that Draco had carried. Harry listened carefully while they silently ate the roast beef the House Elf had provided.

'I think we need to consider placing Draco in hiding,' Harry responded.

'Think of the risk that will put Ginny in,' Ron said raising his voice. 'I will not put my sister in that position.'

'We can hide her when she finishes school,' said Hermione. 'She's fairly safe at Hogwarts, at least while Dumbledore's there. I agree with Harry, Ron. Draco is at risk because you did that. When Voldemort finds out...'

'Then he can say it must have been Polyjuice,' Ron interrupted.

'I know that it's the truth, but there's always the possibility that Voldemort won't believe him,' replied Harry. 'Think of how Ginny would feel if he was killed.'

Ron was silent. Harry knew he must agree with him on some level.

'Listen, why don't we talk to Draco and see what he thinks,' said Hermione. 'After all it has to be his decision. We can't force him to do it and I know how difficult it is. I do think it's the best idea though. For him and for Ginny.'

'What do you want me to bring over for you tomorrow Hermione?' Ron asked sounding somewhat defeated.

'You're wonderful Ron,' she said smiling. 'Can you bring me some plums and grapes?'

'Sure,' he said. 'Whatever you want. I'll be around tomorrow evening.'

Harry watched as his friend apparated away. He was sure that there was more that was unsettling Ron, although he couldn't be sure what it was.

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Snape finished his lesson and headed into his office surprised to see an ill looking Chrystal there. Something immediately put Snape on high alert. Instantly he knew something was terribly wrong. She looked almost ghostlike; her pale face splattered with bruises and her hair as pale as the sands he remembered from his childhood.

'Are you happy?' she spat at him.

'About what?' he snarled in reply.

'Look what he did to me?' she said raising her voice. 'Look what the bastard did to me.'

'Did he release your husband?' he asked with only a slight amount of concern in his voice.

'He said he would,' she answered. 'I believe he will. Why didn't you tell me the truth Severus? After everything we've been through how come you couldn't tell me the truth?'

'Would you have believed me?' he asked as he glimpsed the chain that hung around her neck.

Voldemort had a hold over her. He could see it in her eyes and hear it her voice. Snape had no idea what the Dark Lord had done to her. He watched as she walked out of the room, a defeated woman.

Damage control was important now. He had to find out exactly what had happened. His arm began to sear with burning pain. The Death Eaters were being summoned. No point going after Chrystal now. He could get the information he needed from the Death Eaters.

He walked over towards his fireplace, grabbed a handful of Floo powder and left Hogwarts behind him. Once he had left the abandoned building to which he always went on leaving Hogwarts he immediately apparated to the Riddle graveyard. His Lord was there waiting, along with many Death Eaters whom Snape had not seen for many years. Snape wandered to the back of the crowd where he had spied Draco Malfoy.

'We need to talk when this is over,' he told the young man. 'It's very important.'

Malfoy only nodded in acknowledgement before The Dark Lord began addressing his loyal servants.

'The time is drawing near,' he said. 'Soon I will have squashed the Potter boy and we will continue our work to rid the world of those unworthy to be in it. But first we have more pressing issues to deal with.' Snape watched as a pretty blonde-haired girl was brought in. He recognised her but it took a while to realise who she was.

Fleur Delacour.

The last time he had seen her had been at Grimmauld Place, with Bill Weasley the day of Reade's christening. She had been so happy then, smiling, laughing and obviously in love. Now she looked almost defeated. Snape knew that the Dark Lord was going to kill her.

'We appear to have succeeded with Finnegan,' his Master continued. 'Not only did we destroy him, but we have destroyed the Heir of Hufflepuff. Well done my loyal servants. Now we must continue our work. We must try one more person. Her.' He pointed at a petrified Fleur. 'She is the eldest Weasley's. I intend on bringing that family down one at a time, starting with the eldest. Administer the potion.'

Snape watched in horror as a vile smelling liquid was forced down the young woman's throat. She was trying to resist, trying not to swallow, however she was no match for the four wizards who had hold of her.

'Wipe her memory and leave her at Dumbledore's door,' he said with a laugh. 'With this letter.' The Dark Lord propelled a piece of parchment into the hands of one of his assistants. 'Anyone who brings me the Granger girl will be greatly rewarded.' On that remark he turned and then disappeared.

Snape walked over towards Malfoy.

'Meet me in the Potions Dungeons,' he said. 'Later this evening some time after eight.' Then he too, feeling as if his body had turned to ice, disappeared.

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Dumbledore sat Lavender down once Madam Pomfrey had tendered to her injuries. He had had to tell many people before that a loved one had been murdered. In fact there were many years where it was an extremely regular occurrence. But he had never had to tell someone who had actually seen them tortured. The scared young lady looked at him intensely.

'I know something's wrong Professor,' she said finally. "I just can't see what it is. Something is blinding me.'

'I hate to tell you this, but Seamus is dead,' replied Dumbledore. He studied the face in front of him. It was hard to tell if she even felt anything. 'Is there anything that can be done for you?'

'Someone needs to take care of Katie,' she said softly. 'I'll be alright.'

Dumbledore watched as she stood and walked out of the room. There was something not quite right

about Lavender. It would have to wait until later. There was more trouble coming. He could sense it. And somehow he knew that many lives would pay the price.

He walked out towards the Great Hall. He wanted to ensure that everything was ready for the next morning. He opened the door to find Fleur Delacour there.

Dumbledore had not seen Fleur for quite a while. She had been working on and off for the Order and had managed to bring some important information back from her travels overseas. She looked quite ill and Dumbledore couldn't help but feel this had something to do with Voldemort.

An exhausted Fleur dropped her hand to reveal a piece of parchment. Dumbledore knelt down beside her and cautiously examined the parchment. It looked harmless enough. He cautiously opened it and gazed upon the writing of Lord Voldemort.

*Here is a little gift for you Professor Dumbledore.*

He had always known that Voldemort had a sick sense of humour but this only confirmed it. Dumbledore ran to find Madam Pomfrey. Something must be done immediately to try and save the girl.

Madam Pomfrey followed immediately when she saw the look on his face.

'What is it Albus?' she asked.

'It's Fleur Delacour,' he replied. 'I can't wake her.'

Making a quick inspection of her, Madam Pomfrey cast a spell on her that allowed her to breathe.

'She needs to be taken to the hospital wing immediately,' she said.

Dumbledore levitated her to the hospital wing and watched over with worried eyes as Poppy cared to her. When she was done she turned to him with a grim look in her eyes.

'I've never seen anything like this before,' she said. 'It doesn't look good.'

'Let me know if there's any change,' he said. 'Anything at all.'

Dumbledore sighed as he made his way back towards his quarters.

The war had changed. This was personal. Voldemort was directly attacking the Order and himself. He sat down feeling old and tired. He couldn't let Voldemort get the better of him. Not just yet.

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He slowly crept into the room, unsure as to what would be waiting there. He was almost relieved to see the figure there, lying peacefully asleep, breathing in and out slowly. He walked over and sat down on the bed beside her watching her lie there. He watched as the pale moonlight lit her face. She was perfect except for the platinum hair that was falling from her head. There was something very unsettling about it. Sirius felt as if he had been whisked back in time.

As soon as he saw the hair he knew that not everything was well. There was no way in the world that Chrystal would have ever done that to herself by choice. As he gazed at her if he hadn't known better he would have thought he was staring at Nathaira  $\square$ ille.

For some reason Sirius could not explain, Chrystal's mother had always unsettled him. There was something odd about her that Sirius had picked up from an early age. The way she interacted with her family was strange and at times the way she treated Chrystal was just downright cruel. Seeing his wife appear the splitting image of her mother led Sirius to one conclusion and one conclusion alone.

He was free because of her.

He felt his heart constrict at the thought. He knew she must have gone to the Death Eaters to get him freed. If he ever doubted her feelings he certainly didn't now. Sirius just wondered at what cost

his freedom had come.

He reached out and pulled the eerie hairs out of her face. The sight of her bruised and battered face almost brought him to tears. He lay down beside her wishing he'd never left and held her closely. He could sleep now. He was home again.

She awoke to feel someone breathing lightly on her neck. She turned around hoping against hope that it was Sirius. She had to restrain herself from jumping for joy when she saw it was. He looked tired, exhausted, she didn't want to wake him. She was so glad that he was there and was okay. She watched him breathing softly until he woke up and gave her a smile.

'I'm sorry,' he said. 'I did the wrong thing.'

'So have I,' she said. 'Sirius, I need to tell you a few things.'

'I don't care Chrys,' he said. She almost couldn't bear the look on his face. It almost hurt. 'I love you and I should never have left. I trust you. We've lost so much.'

'I need to tell you something,' she said. 'Please just listen to me.'

Sirius agreed and Chrystal poured her heart out. She told him everything she should have told him earlier. And when she had finished he hugged her and said,

'I love you.'

## **Chapter 27 The Mistakes of Lavender Brown**

*"Where do we go from here?"*

*This isn't where we expected to be."*

*(From You Must Love Me, from Andrew Lloyd Webber's Evita)*

Draco waited in the Dungeon's for Snape to arrive. It had been quite a while since he had last been down here. He should have sent Ginny a message. It would be nice to see her. Nice to touch her smooth skin, kiss her lips, run his fingers through her soft red hair.....

'Draco,' Snape interrupted his thoughts. The Potions professor looked at him with an element of surprise in his face. 'Thank you for meeting me. Do you have any idea what's going on here?'

'None,' he replied quickly. 'I think I might be in trouble.' Draco related to Snape the fact that he had "lent" Ginny a piece of his hair. 'I'm not exactly sure what the Weasel was going to do with it, however I have a feeling it might have involved Lavender Brown.'

'So you need a legitimate reason for taking her away?' said Snape thoughtfully. He did not look very impressed at all. 'The Dark Lord will not accept the truth, if we assume that Polyjuice was used. You're in danger Malfoy. That was a stupid, stupid mistake you made. How could you be so stupid?'

Draco clutched at his arm. The pain was immense. He knew he was in great trouble.

'He's summoning me,' he said with a touch of fear in his voice. 'What should I do?'

'Deny it for now,' replied Snape with a snarl. 'If you're not back by tomorrow, I'll put everyone on alert. Make sure you watch your back.'

With great hesitancy Draco walked out of Hogwarts and apparated to his master, hoping it was not the last time anyone saw him.

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Dumbledore walked into the hospital wing. He spied a worried Bill Weasley sitting anxiously over an ill looking Fleur.

'Has there been any change?' he asked carefully. Bill shook his head.

'None for the better and none for the worse,' he replied. 'What do you think is wrong with her?'

'I have an idea Bill, but I'm just not sure yet,' he said. 'Poppy has never seen anything quite like it before, except for late last year when Chrystal Black was sick. Even then it wasn't quite the same as this.'

'We need to know what happened to her,' said Bill thoughtfully. 'It's very important.'

'It's difficult to tell if she hasn't woken,' replied Dumbledore.

'Could Chrystal do it?' asked Bill turning a little red in the cheeks. 'I recall my parents saying something about her family being Celtic. I may be wrong here.'

'No Bill, no you're not wrong,' replied Dumbledore. 'But as far as I am aware, Chrystal has never used her Celtic ability in that manner before. And even if she was willing, and that's a big if, I don't know if she could tell us anything about the past.'

'It's worth a shot though,' he said. 'Anything is if it will give us an answer.'

'For every action there's a price Bill,' said Dumbledore thoughtfully. 'If she were to use that kind of magic it would be like opening Pandora's box without any known way to close it. I can but hope it's a box that has remained closed throughout the recent events.' Dumbledore waited a few minutes before silently leaving the room.



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Harry received Dumbledore's summons later that day. Almost immediately he knew something was wrong. Dumbledore rarely called for a meeting when there was one scheduled for the next day. Knowing that Lavender was safe, Harry could only assume it meant the worst for Sirius. He couldn't help but get a dreadful feeling in his stomach that Sirius was dead.

He ran upstairs to find Hermione, still lying in bed although it was afternoon.

'Why are you still in bed?' he asked with an element of concern in his voice.

'I'm just not feeling very well,' she replied. 'I'm sure it's nothing but could you try and get Molly to come over anyway?'

Harry ran over towards the fireplace in their bedroom and grabbed some Floo powder. He quickly communicated with the Weasley household and was assured that Molly would be there as soon as possible. Hermione must have been able to sense his concern because she summoned him to sit next to her on the bed and she spoke to him in a soothing voice.

'I'm sure there's nothing wrong with the baby Harry,' she said reassuringly. 'I just feel a little off colour. I read about it, it can happen and it's nothing to worry about. I just want to check everything with Molly.'

'You promise me you'd let me know Hermione?' he asked her.

'Of course Harry,' she said with a smile forming on her face. 'But it's important that you trust me. Now did you come up here to see me, or was it something important? Because the way you stormed in here, I suspect that you have something else on your mind.'

'Dumbledore has organised a meeting for the Order tonight,' he said.

'But there's supposed to be one tomorrow,' replied Hermione.

'I know,' said Harry. 'It can only mean that something has happened. I'm hoping it's not Sirius.'

Hermione was quiet for a while. Harry watched her as she appeared to be thinking.

'I think if it were to do with Sirius, Dumbledore would tell you beforehand,' she said as she began to stroke his hair. 'I don't think he'd let you turn up to a meeting and just dump it on you in front of everyone else.'

'Maybe not,' Harry conceded. 'I guess I feel useless at the moment.'

'In more ways than one,' suggested Hermione. 'I know you have things on your mind.'

'I assume you mean Ron,' he said.

'I meant Rose,' replied Hermione knowingly.

'Isn't it the same thing?' asked Harry. 'Ron told me it was over yesterday morning.'

'You never have really talked about it,' she said. 'About how you feel about it. I can't imagine that it's exactly easy. And I'm not just talking about Ron and Rose being an item. I'm talking about Rose full stop.'

'It's overwhelming,' he said. 'I know everyone was so concerned about Rose and how this was affecting her but no one stopped to think how it was affecting me. Including me. I know that must sound selfish but that's how I feel at the moment. Rose always knew that there was a possibility that she had a family out there somewhere. I didn't. I'm not ungrateful either. It's fantastic that they're all alive and well, if not a bit confused however I'm just not sure how to fit in. I was on my own for so long. Now I have family responsibilities.'

'But you have people who love you and support you as well,' said Hermione.

'I know that,' he replied. 'And it's fantastic. Parents I can cope with. Parents I always wanted. I

wasn't expecting a sister. I wasn't expecting a sister who was going out with Ron to be dumped upon me.'

'Now you know how Ron felt when you and Ginny were together,' said Hermione. 'I can guarantee he didn't like that.'

'I guess he wouldn't,' Harry conceded. 'To be honest I didn't like it when they were together. I'm not sure it's any better now that they're not. You know Hermione it's weird; I don't think Ron can make her happy. I don't think he's the right guy for her, yet I think that he's perfect for her. Why?'

Hermione started to laugh. Harry was slightly offended.

'What?' he asked.

'I'm sorry Harry,' she said after she composed herself. 'It's just that Rose is your sister. It doesn't matter if Ron is your best friend; no man is ever going to be good enough for Rose.'

'I don't have a comeback to that one,' he said. 'I guess you must be right. Anyhow Ron asked me to talk to her. He's convinced there's something wrong. There's a Hogsmeade weekend this weekend. I thought I might try and catch up with her then.'

At that moment Molly Weasley appeared at the bedroom door.

'Sorry it took so long,' she said. 'It's just been flat out this afternoon. What's the problem Hermione?'

'I'm just very uncomfortable,' she replied. 'I thought I'd better make sure that everything was fine.'

Harry was pacing around the room. Molly laughed at him.

'Expectant father's are all the same,' she said. 'Always worried.' She turned her attention back to Hermione. 'Okay, so you're about eighteen weeks now?'

'That's right,' said Hermione.

'Are you getting much sleep?' asked Molly.

'No,' replied Hermione. 'It's quite difficult.'

'I know,' replied Molly, who pulled her wand out and cast a few incantations over Hermione. 'The baby's fine Hermione, however your blood pressure is up a little. It's nothing to worry about; we just need to keep an eye on it. Okay?'

Hermione nodded.

'Are you sure everything's okay?' asked Harry anxiously.

'I'm sure Harry,' she said with a smile. 'Oh Hermione, there's something I forgot to mention. It won't be in those Muggle pregnancy books I know you've been reading. Towards the end of your pregnancy, your magic might go a bit funny. A little unpredictable. It doesn't happen to everyone, but it's something to keep an eye on. Are you two going to this meeting?'

Harry glanced at his watch.

'Do we get a nice home cooked meal if we leave now?' asked Harry giving Molly a wink.

'Of course dears,' she replied.

They Flooed to Grimmauld Place. Harry and Hermione made their way towards kitchen and settled in while Mrs Weasley, having refused their offer of help, went about preparing dinner. They were not sitting there long before they were joined by Remus and Tonks. Harry couldn't help but smile when they walked in the room together.

'Harry, Hermione,' said Remus. 'It's so nice to see you. How are you?'

'I'd be better if I knew if Sirius was alright,' replied Harry in a friendly manner.

'He's okay,' replied Tonks. 'Dumbledore let Lupin know this afternoon. I'm sure he had a reason for not telling you. Sirius should be here this evening. What are you making Molly? It smells fantastic.'

'Irish stew with dumplings,' she replied. 'It's Percy's favourite. I think he misses my cooking a little bit!'

'How's Reade?' Asked Tonks. Remus came and sat down next to Harry while Tonks and Molly got into deep discussion about how the baby was.

'How's everything going?' he asked. 'Really? I know things have been hard the past couple of weeks.'

'I think I'd be lying if I said it hadn't been difficult but at the moment we're taking each day as it comes, aren't we Hermione?' he replied. Hermione nodded in confirmation.

'We've got important things to focus on,' she said. 'We just have to take it as it comes. The future is so uncertain at the moment that you can't live life worrying about the next day.'

'That's a good attitude there Hermione,' replied Remus. 'That's how we're taking it.'

'Something smells good in here,' cried out a voice that was either Fred or George Weasley.

'Fred dear,' said Molly. 'If you moved back home you could eat like this all the time.'

'I'll consider it Mum,' he said sounding a little uncomfortable as he entered the room with Angelina, George and Katie as well as Ron and Neville. 'We had a good days sales today. Leading up to the Hogsmeade weekend. Certainly have got the shelves stacked for this weekend.'

'You should see the number of Butterbeer kegs that The Three Broomsticks has gotten in,' added George. 'It's as if they're expecting a weekend like no other.'

'They'd be better off not letting the students off the grounds at the moment in my opinion,' said Molly. 'It's not exactly safe for the students just to wander off by themselves.'

'I'm sure Dumbledore wouldn't do it if he didn't think it was safe,' said Remus. 'He's being pretty cautious at the moment.'

'All the same I hope Ginny stays in the castle,' said Molly as Percy entered the room carrying baby Reade.

'Smells good Mum,' he said. 'It's my favourite.'

'I know dear,' she said. 'I wonder where everyone is, it's almost time for the meeting to begin.'

At that moment Dumbledore, Snape and McGonagall made their way in, in deep discussion, as well as Kingsley Shacklebolt, Emmeline Vance and Sturgis Podmore. Molly levitated the pots to the table. A fresh burst of steam fogged up Harry's glasses.

'Thank you for this wonderful dinner, Molly,' said Dumbledore as he sat down at the table. 'It's always nice to know that in these times you can always get a nice home cooked meal.' Harry began to dig into his dinner. Worrying about Hermione all afternoon had really taken it out of him

'Smells fantastic,' said Arthur Weasley as he walked into the room. 'Sorry we're a little late.'

'We're?' asked Molly looking at him

'Sirius and Chrystal were with me,' he said looking around. They came through the door not long after.

Sirius looked tired and exhausted. He looked almost as bad as he had that night Harry had first met him in the Shrieking Shack. Chrystal looked worse. Her hair was so pale and her face was covered in bruises. Sirius seemed to be supporting her as she walked. Sirius looked up and saw everyone staring at them.

'It's okay,' he said. 'We're fine, don't worry yourselves. Why don't we get this meeting underway?'

'Draco is not here,' said Snape observantly.

'There are a few people not here Severus,' said McGonagall. 'However I think we should get underway. We have a lot to discuss.'

'I agree Minerva,' said Dumbledore. 'The most important fact being Fleur Delacour. She was dropped at Hogwarts last night with a note saying that she was a present. The Dark Lord has made this war personal now. We have not located all of the missing Muggles. I fear that they are already dead. I fear Miss Delacour has been infected by whatever infected Mr Finnegan. It is important that we get to work on an antidote.'

'I can't believe I am going to suggest this,' said Neville Longbottom. 'If Malfoy and I worked on it, with his knowledge of Potions and mine of Herbology, especially medically related, we might actually get somewhere.'

'That would be good if Mr Malfoy would agree,' replied Snape. 'Any other suggestions given that he isn't here?'

'If this is the same thing as Seamus, we don't have a lot of time to work with,' said Hermione. 'Perhaps Professor Snape, you should assist Neville given your expert knowledge of potions. After all we're all in this together.'

Harry couldn't help but laugh when he saw the look on Snape's face.

'That's a wonderful idea,' said McGonagall with a big smile. 'That way you can use the facilities of Hogwarts and St Mungos. Now if only we had a Healer in the Order we could get an expert in that area.'

'Do we know how it's spread?' asked Ron.

'It was given to her in a potion,' said Snape softly. Harry noticed the defeatist sound in his voice. 'We were all witnesses to it at his last summons.'

'Why Fleur?' asked Arthur. 'She hasn't done anything.'

'Yes she has,' replied Snape. 'She got involved with your son.'

Silence filled the room. A door slammed and everyone turned their eyes towards the doorway to the kitchen.

Draco Malfoy entered the room at that moment. He looked pale and dishevelled. Harry had never seen Draco look so bad, so well ungroomed.

'I've been ordered to kill Rose,' he said flatly.

The room was silent for a minute before utter chaos ensued.

Ron had jumped up with his hands around Draco's neck. He was shaking him vigorously.

'You will not touch her,' he was yelling. Fred and George seemed to be helping Ron and Arthur, Sirius and Lupin were desperately trying to pull them apart, not before Ron had managed to land a punch on Draco's face and Draco had reciprocated.

'What do you take me for you idiot?' he yelled at Ron. 'Of course I'm not going to bloody kill her. I'm sure there are several people in this room who'd kill me if I even contemplated it.' Draco gave Harry a knowing look.

'Settle down everybody,' said Dumbledore in a way that only he could. 'Did he give you a reason why?'

'When the Dark Lord commands you don't ask why,' he replied sarcastically. 'You just do or be killed. If my father ever taught me anything that was it.'

'It would appear then that your usefulness as a spy has come to end of its lifespan,' said

Dumbledore. 'You'd best consider going into hiding.'

'If he goes into hiding that will put Ginny in danger,' George said after a few seconds of contemplation.

'She will still be at Hogwarts,' replied McGonagall.

'I don't think that necessarily means that she will be safe any longer,' said Chrystal. 'After all who knows what connections the Death Eaters have at Hogwarts.'

'I think it is reasonable to consider that Ginny will be safe until the end of the year,' said Dumbledore. 'After all it is only another few months. And her brother Charlie is there to keep an eye on her. After then she may consider her options. She will be of age by then.'

'Oh dear,' said Molly who began to pace the floor nervously.

'Mr Malfoy, I would suggest you go and make the arrangements,' said Dumbledore. 'I wish you the best of luck.' Malfoy made his way out of the room looking solemn. Neville followed him, which caused Harry to raise his eyebrows.

'We are not making progress,' said Lupin. 'We have not been able to find these Muggles, we have not been able to decipher Voldemort's plans and we have no idea what he is going to do next.'

'It's just like the old days,' said Sirius. 'It's just like the old days.'

'We need to campaign for Zabini,' said Kingsley Shakelbolt breaking the silence. 'Bagman would make a laughable leader and having a Death Eater in power would be unacceptable. Fred, George, have you heard anything from that friend of yours?'

'Lee?' asked George.

'We've heard nothing,' said Fred. 'We haven't seen him for months.'

'He went to Europe with Blaise,' said George. 'Haven't heard from him since.'

'Went to work on her father's business,' said Fred.

'Went to have a nice holiday with the girl if you ask me,' said George.

'That will be enough thank you George,' said Molly. 'You don't need to go around spreading people's dirt.'

'The Wizengamott had a very hard time,' said Dumbledore with a sigh. He looked old. Harry had never really noticed this before. 'They didn't follow my suggestions at all; otherwise we'd have Kingsley as a candidate.'

'Seth Zabini is a very well respected man,' said Ron, only a little calmer than he had been earlier. 'In all my digging I've found nothing and nor has Kingsley or Tonks.'

'I've found nothing either,' said Chrystal. 'I think he's clean.'

'Blasie was always a well spoken, polite girl,' said McGonagall. 'Very unusual for a Slytherin. It signifies good upbringing.'

'We had better begin campaigning for Zabini then,' said Dumbledore reluctantly. 'I must go and check on Fleur. Severus, if you could see to Mr Malfoy, it would be greatly appreciated. Try to make sure he doesn't do anything rash. I've been away from Hogwarts too long. I must go.' He stood up and left the room.

'I can't believe he went after Fleur,' said Arthur.

'I'd watch my family if I were you Arthur,' said Snape. 'He specifically referred to her as the eldest Weasley's. Your daughter may be in more trouble than even Dumbledore would like to acknowledge.'

'Thank you for the advice,' he said. 'I shall take it I think. Percy, don't let Reade out of your sight. I'd hate to lose my first grandchild.'

'I'll keep that in mind Dad,' said Percy as he picked up Reade and made his way upstairs. 'I'll warn Penny as well.'

The meeting quickly dissipated after that. Ron rushed off and Harry did not feel compelled to follow him. The world was changing quickly.

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Ginny walked silently into the room that Draco had led her to. She knew something was wrong. It was unlike Draco to turn up to Hogwarts unannounced. He was always so careful about covering his tracks. She watched as he hurriedly closed all the doors and windows. He turned and faced her. He looked so lost. She had never seen him like this before.

'I'm sorry,' he said softly.

'What for?' she asked innocently hoping against all hope that her world was not about to disintegrate.

'I've screwed up Ginny,' he said apologetically. 'I've made a huge mistake. I have to go. I'm sorry.' Ginny stood there dumbfounded for the next few minutes before Draco finally spoke again. 'He wants me to kill Rose. I can't do that and if I don't he'll kill me.' The words were beginning to form meaning for her. She knew he was going to leave. 'If I stay he will kill me. If I run he will find me. I'm going away Ginny. I can't tell you where. I know this endangers you honey, however I don't know what will happen. I don't know if they'll come after you. I can only hope that Dumbledore can protect you.'

'Please Draco,' Ginny began as tears began to roll down her face. She didn't know what to say. How could she make him stay?

'I'm sorry,' he said as he wiped the tears from her face. 'I just can't risk it. Think of me. Don't forget me. Remember that I will always love you Virginia Weasley, no matter what. I love you.'

'I love you too,' she stammered as he leant to kiss her goodbye. Then she watched tearfully as he vanished from the room. She had never felt so alone in her entire life.

Ginny slumped to the floor, in a ball and began to bawl her eyes out. *Damn him. Damn him to hell.* How could he do this to her? She had sacrificed so much for him, and yet she couldn't help but think of all he had sacrificed as well. Nothing was certain anymore. She had lost everything.

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Snape hurried after Draco who was creeping through the corridors at Hogwarts. He caught up with him finally in the Potions Dungeons at Hogwarts.

'I'm sorry for bringing you into this,' he said. 'I should never have encouraged you to spy like this.'

'If you hadn't I would have been forced to do this by my father anyway,' Draco replied hastily. 'I've said my goodbyes to Ginny. Don't feel too sorry for me.'

'You will need an appropriate Secret Keeper Draco,' said Snape. 'I would offer to do it however I would be one that they would suspect.'

'Never mind Severus,' replied Draco. 'I have a Secret Keeper they'll never suspect. Don't worry about me, I'll be fine. And do me a favour; tell Granger she's got the Arthimancy for the founders all wrong will you.'

Draco rushed out of the dungeon with a flask under his arm. Snape was so worried about the boy that he hadn't even noticed that he had called him Severus.

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Neville Longbottom ignited the lamp in the Greenhouse at St Mungos. He carefully selected a large variety of herbs from his large collection. He wanted to get to work on a remedy straight away. He had seen Seamus as he had lain in St Mungos. Neville couldn't help but feel that somehow he was suffering. It wasn't right for someone to suffer like that before they died. It was almost better in Neville's opinion to have no idea what had happened to you, although from experience he knew the toll that took on close relatives.

He collected his specimens and made his way into a closed laboratory, a little surprised to find Hermione's cat, Crookshanks following him. He leant over to give the cat a pat.

'There there Crookshanks,' he said. 'What are you doing here? Why don't we get inside and I'll let Hermione know where you are.'

Neville closed the door behind them and then stood in awe as Crookshanks transformed into Lily Potter.

'Hi Neville,' she said with a smile on her face. 'I know you're a bit shocked. I'm Harry's mother Lily. Professor Snape said you might need some help with a potion.'

'But you're,' began Neville.

'I know I'm supposed to be dead,' she said interrupting. 'But I'm not. We don't have time to get into it now. We have to work on an antidote. You know I was quite good at potions in my younger years.'

Neville watched in amazement as Lily got stuck into the herbs.

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Lavender sprinted out of the castle. She couldn't stand it any longer. She had accepted what she was going to do. She knew it was her fate. She just hadn't counted on the guilt that accompanied it. Why she had to feel so guilty she just couldn't understand. *It wasn't like she'd done anything terrible was it?* Her thoughts kept plaguing her as she made her way off the grounds of Hogwarts.

As soon as she was far enough away from Hogwarts she apparated to Parvati's new place of residence, Laugharne Castle, South West Wales, where she had resided since her marriage to Healer Augustus Pye earlier that year. Lavender didn't like the castle, it seemed far too pretentious for someone like Parvati and she had only visited once.

Lavender banged on the door and was not surprised when it was opened by a butler.

'How can I help you mam?' he asked in a stiff British accent.

'I need to speak with Parvati, I mean Madam Pye immediately,' she said quickly. 'Tell her that it's Lavender Brown.'

'Yes mam,' the butler said closing the door as the rain began to pour. The door opened quite a while later by a flustered Parvati wrapped in a delicate silk wrap with far too much makeup on.

'You picked a good night,' she said. 'Augustus is working the night shift. Come in, it's pouring out there.' Parvati lead her into a cosy sitting room and dried off her clothes. 'I was so sorry to hear about Seamus. Was his funeral nice?'

'I don't know Parvati,' she replied. 'They held it before I could get back.'

'Oh,' said Parvati. 'You should come around here more often. It gets quite lonely while Augustus is at work. But you should let me know first.'

'I made a mistake,' said Lavender.

'No you didn't,' replied Parvati. 'It's so lovely to see you.'

'I didn't mean that,' said Lavender. 'That's why I'm here. I made a big mistake. I gave a false prophecy to the Dark Lord, because I was jealous of Harry and Hermione and now I think that it

was a huge mistake. I've put their unborn child at risk.'

'You gave a false prophecy to my Lord,' Parvati said as she rose out of her chair in anger. Suddenly Lavender felt as if her life had never been in more danger.



## **Chapter Twenty Eight The Web Begins**

*"So I will turn her virtue into pitch,  
And out of her own goodness make the net  
That shall enmesh them all"*

*(Act 2, Scene 3, Shakespeare's Othello)*

She couldn't have heard right. It just wasn't possible.

'I'm sorry Vati,' she said. 'I didn't quite catch what you said.'

'I said,' began Parvati. 'That you have falsely prophesised to my Lord.'

'Your Lord?' asked Lavender trembling. Suddenly everything began to fall into place. Seamus having said he was nursed by Parvati, he must have been. In Spain. And Parvati's strange behaviour over the last couple of months. It all added up. Lavender felt as if she had been hit with a sledge hammer. But Parvati of all people.

'Yes,' replied Parvati. 'I have sense. I have been made to have sense. The Dark Lord is the only way. He will prevail over Potter. Don't get me wrong I like Harry, I shall be sad to see him go but Terry and I have seen the truth.'

'Boot?' asked Lavender. 'Terry Boot? What does he have to do with this?'

'He was looking for Padma and found me instead,' replied Parvati. 'That is all immaterial anyway. The question that remains is what I should do with you?'

'I had no choice,' said Lavender finding her inner strength and composure once more. 'I foresaw it a few months ago. I knew it was going to happen. I did what I was destined to do and now I feel incredibly guilty.' Lavender knew she sounded sarcastic but she couldn't help it. She was telling the truth and she didn't exactly like it.

'Give me a good reason why I should spare you,' said Parvati holding her wand at Lavender's throat.

'Because it's not my time yet,' she replied simply. 'I've foreseen my death and it's not now, it's not at your hand. My time has not come.'

'Any why should I believe you?' asked Parvati curiously.

'Because I wouldn't be pleading with you,' replied Lavender. 'You know me well enough to know that I accept my fate and know I can do nothing to change it.'

'*Expelliarmus*,' cried Parvati disarming Lavender.

Parvati lowered her wand.

'All the same I think I should keep you here,' she said in a strange tone. 'Just in case.'

Lavender watched in awe as Parvati transformed herself into a large black spider and couldn't believe what was happening when Parvati spun her into a cocoon. Despite having foreseen her won death Lavender was extremely worried about her fate, trapped in a silken cocoon without a wand.

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Chrystal and Sirius remained at Grimmauld Place to talk to Molly. She wanted a proper midwife this time, not just some school matron who had little to no experience in delivering babies. Molly was ecstatic when Chrystal gave her the news, but she was quick to keep her quiet on the subject.

'We don't want to tell anybody until we're sure that,' began Chrys.

'Until we're sure that it will happen this time,' finished Sirius.

'I understand completely,' said Molly. 'Mums' the word.' Molly led them upstairs to Sirius' old bedroom and summoned her midwife bag. She conducted a thorough examination using various charms. Chrystal watched in amazement as Molly worked.

'Well you two,' she began. 'It looks like you're having twins.'

A look of concern came over Chrystal's face. Twins was just what she needed. Her thoughts drifted back to the potion she had consumed.

'Can you tell if they're identical?' she asked anxiously.

Molly waved her wand over Chrystal one more time.

'Yes,' said Molly with a smile. 'I guess you're in for a dose of fun bringing them up. They'll be as much trouble as Fred and George I'll wager, with Sirius as their father.'

Chrystal breathed a sigh of relief. She knew the conception potion would have no effect on an already conceived baby or babies. Her heart jumped when she heard the word twin, but if they were identical then it was okay. She could allow herself to be happy now.

'Well I guess that makes up for the family we don't have up until now,' she said with a smile. Sirius swept her up off the bed and kissed her passionately.

'One baby made me happy enough,' he said ecstatically. 'But two is amazing. Thank you so much.'

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Ginny slowly made her way back towards the Gryffindor dormitories. It wasn't fair. She couldn't understand why he had to go, just as she was beginning to feel he was the only man who could ever make her inexplicably happy. She knew the reason. It was too dangerous for him to stay. She just didn't understand why it had to happen to her.

Her relationship with Draco was complex. It always had been right from the beginning. At first his eye would catch hers while she was working diligently on her Potions to ensure she got the OWL she so desperately needed. Ginny tried to avoid his glance; after all he was a Slytherin and not just any Slytherin at that. He was Draco Malfoy. If her brother had a nemesis then he was it. And her entire family hated the Malfoys who looked down upon their family as blood traitors. She started dating Harry because she had been confused and that ended in one big disaster. Strangely enough the entire time she and Harry has been dating Draco hadn't said a word to her about it. She had been upset although relieved when she had ended it with Harry and threw herself into her Potions work. Draco had been there to comfort her. He had gained her respect and gradually had stolen her heart. She had worked so hard to get her family to accept him as her boyfriend, however she had managed to do that and his participation in the Order must have had some bearing on it. Now she was uncertain as to their future. For all she knew that evening was the last time she would ever see him. She was not naive enough to doubt that if Voldemort found him he would kill him.

She wandered aimlessly into the Gryffindor common room. She bumped into Rose.

'What's wrong Ginny?' she asked. 'You look dreadful.' Ginny really didn't want to talk about it. Especially to Rose.

'Not now Rose,' said Ginny trying to push her friend away. Ginny walked over to a nice friendly chair by the fireplace. She had stopped crying a little while ago however now she had stopped moving she found she couldn't contain her tears any longer.

Rose sat next to her and held her hand until she finished sobbing. Ginny had no idea how much later it was but realised that the common room was empty.

'I know something's wrong,' she said. 'You don't have to talk to me if you don't want to, but I'm here for you Gin.'

Finally she spoke.

'Draco's gone,' she said in a whisper before she began crying again.

'Oh Gin,' said Rose embracing her. 'I'm so sorry.'

Ginny spoke up again later. After all even in her irrational state she could see that Rose needed to know the truth.

'There's more,' she said. 'He was ordered to kill you.'

Rose looked at her with big wide open eyes.

'You're joking,' she said. 'Don't try and be funny Ginny.'

'I'm dead serious,' she said.

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Rose didn't know whether or not it was particularly smart of her to go to Hogsmeade on Saturday. She had however promised Harry that she would and was very reluctant to tell him no. She needed to speak to him now particularly. She had had an absolutely awful week, but that comes with knowing that someone has ordered your death. People make mistakes. Rose knew that. But she couldn't help but think she had made a bad one when she let Chrystal tell people that she was her mother.

She walked with Ginny down to the new refurbished Three Broomsticks, hoping that Harry would be there waiting for her and that they wouldn't be there long. She breathed a sigh of relief when she saw him sitting there.

'Neither of you should have come at all you know,' he said and he muttered a charm. Rose felt as if cold water was running down her, from her head down to her knees.

'What was that for Harry?' asked Ginny.

'I've just disillusioned you,' he said. 'Now I'm throwing my Invisibility Cloak over you and am going to reverse the charm. I don't want to be followed.' He muttered a charm under his breath. 'Follow me and stay under the cloak.'

They both followed obediently underneath the cloak as Harry led them to George and Katie's place above the Hogsmeade branch of Weasleys' Wizarding Wheezes. Fred, George, Ron, Charlie and Bill were in the room.

'You could have just asked us to meet you here,' said Rose.

'I didn't want anyone to know where you were,' said Harry. 'It's just not safe at the moment. Charlie's here and he's going to take you back to Hogwarts when we're finished.'

'Draco was serious then,' said Rose softly. She was beginning to become very frightened and burst into tears.

'I'm afraid so,' replied Harry as he wrapped his arms around her. 'We just don't know why.'

'I do,' said Katie as she and Angelina entered the room. 'It's because you're Ron's girlfriend. And making Draco do it, imagine what that would do to him.'

'I don't even want to think about it,' said Ginny. 'Do you think this was a test? For Draco. To see if he was loyal?'

'It certainly seems like it,' said Fred. 'I'm sorry Gin. We all know how much he cared for you.'

'We've been talking about it and we think you should go into hiding as well at the end of the year Ginny,' said Bill carefully. 'Of course Gin, it's entirely your choice but the chance that someone could be after you because of Draco's disloyalty is high. We don't want to see you hurt anyway Gin. It's just something to think about.'

'We've got this for you,' said George handing Ginny a gold chain with a lion charm on it. 'It's the

best we could do. We've got one for you as well Rose. They're warning charms. You need to place them on you skin. They warm up if there's anyone following you and hopefully if you are ever in any danger.'

'We think you could be in a lot of danger Rose,' said Harry softly. 'It's highly likely that you could be killed to teach Draco a lesson.'

'It's likely that you could be killed to teach all Death Eaters a lesson,' said Ron as he sat down beside her and began to stroke her hair. 'I'm sorry,' he whispered into her ear.

'What about me then?' she asked. 'How safe am I?'

'Hogwarts is one of the safest places on earth,' said Bill. 'Dumbledore has the castle well protected in ways that even we don't know.'

'All the same I don't feel that comfortable there at the moment,' said Rose contemplatively. 'Can I come and stay with you for a few days Harry? I need to be with my family for the moment.'

'I'll talk to Dumbledore about it,' said Charlie. 'I'm sure he won't mind. It may be safer until we assess the situation fully. Ginny we should get you back to Hogwarts.'

Rose watched as Ginny and Charlie flooded to Hogwarts and then Harry grabbed her hand.

'We're next,' he said. Ron stood to get up. 'I'll be in touch mate. I know you're busy.'

Rose felt exhausted by the time they arrived at Dunvegan.

'Are Mum and Dad around?' she asked looking around the sitting room.

'No,' replied Harry. 'At the moment it's just Hermione and I. Sorry if that's not what you wanted.'

'Don't worry yourself Harry,' she said. 'I don't know what I want. I don't know how I should act. I'm finding it extremely difficult to believe that anyone would want to kill me. I'm not like you. I'm not part of any prophecy. I'm no one special. Until a year ago I was just the daughter of two Muggles. Why me Harry? Do you really think it's because of Ron?'

Harry sat down and rang the bell for a House Elf to bring them tea. He waited a while before he answered.

'I don't why those Death Eaters were after you last year Rose,' he said. 'I honestly don't. What I can tell you is that Voldemort appears to be targeting the Weasleys. I don't know why and I hope that it's not to get to me.' Rose sat and thought about that while the House Elf poured the tea.

'Do you think he knows?' asked Rose. 'Do you think he knows who I am?'

'Who would have told him?' asked Harry. 'He'd have to have an idea from somewhere.'

'After all,' interrupted Hermione as she entered the room. 'You look amazingly alike. But I had to know you were related before I actually saw it. Do you think the McDonald's are involved at all?'

'I think Sarah saw Mum's eyes,' said Rose. 'I'm sure that's why she looked at me strangely. I don't think she bought that story of Chrystal's.'

'Who do we know who could be a Death Eater?' asked Harry. Hermione looked at him strangely. 'Well let's think about this rationally. We know that it's not anybody in the Covenant. We know that someone poisoned Chrystal at our wedding. We also know that the poison was very similar if not the same as the one that killed Seamus and is probably going to kill Fleur.'

'How do you know that?' asked Rose.

'Lily told us,' replied Hermione quickly. 'She's been working with Neville Longbottom on trying to find an antidote.'

'Oh,' said Rose. 'That makes sense.'

'We also know that whoever took Seamus was someone he knew,' said Harry. 'Seamus had been very careful about who he was associating with. However we also know that almost nobody else except the members of the Covenant know who Rose really is. That puts us in a dilemma.'

'Who's in the Covenant again?' asked Hermione. 'I can't quite remember.'

'Well there's the Heirs,' began Harry. 'Me, Chrys and Lavender. Then there's the guardians, Dumbledore, McGonagall, Charlie and Lupin.'

'Then there's the spies,' continued Rose. 'That's Snape and Draco. And then there's us, Hermione, Mum and Dad, Sirius, Ron and Ginny. I'm still not quite clear as to why we were chosen.'

'Apparently time will tell us Rose,' replied Hermione. 'And who was at our wedding? I certainly don't remember that.'

'Well the same people again,' said Rose. 'All of the Weasleys and their partners, Neville, Seamus, Dean, Parvati, Professor Vector, Oliver Wood, Natalie McDonald, Alicia Spinnet. I think that's it.'

'So who of them would actually know about you?' asked Hermione.

'Neville,' said Harry. 'That doesn't fit. Neville wouldn't be responsible. He's someone I do trust. The Weasley's know, I suppose it could be one of them. But I just don't see it.'

'Maybe the two events are unrelated Harry,' said Hermione kindly. 'Oh the baby just kicked, hurry put your hand on my tummy.' Rose watched as her brother rushed to his wife's belly and exclaim with joy that he felt it as well. She laughed. 'Sorry about that Rose, but it's good to see you laughing. I think that whoever poisoned Chrys may be responsible for what happened with Seamus but not for what's happened with you.'

'I can't help but thinking Draco told,' said Rose. 'I just have this awful feeling that I can't shake. As for Ron's family I think they all care about me too much to do something like that.'

'Parvati and Dean weren't at the funeral,' said Hermione. 'Either of them a possibility?'

'Parvati married that Healer, Healer Pye,' said Harry. 'We didn't go Rose but it was supposed to be one of the most extravagant weddings ever. So Parvati. And Dean, well he is one of Seamus' closest friends.'

'Which is exactly why it would be so strange if it was one of them,' said Hermione with a sigh. 'I just can't see it.'

'It was Draco's old friends who took me,' said Rose. 'It just seems a little odd.' The three of them sat in silence for a little while.

'Can I ask you a personal question Rose?' asked Harry. She was a little taken aback.

'Sure,' she said reluctantly. 'What?'

'How do you honestly feel about Ron?' he said.

'I don't know,' she said. 'It's complicated.'

'Did Crabbe hurt you at all?' asked Harry. 'When he took you?'

'You mean did he take advantage of me?' asked Rose plainly. 'No, Harry he didn't. Apart from kidnapping me, taking my wand and tying me up, he was a perfect gentleman. And I'm not a child. You and Ron do not need to treat me like one.'

'There's one of the problems,' said Hermione softly. 'You think Ron treats you like a child.'

'Only sometimes,' said Rose blushing. 'He's owled me numerous time since he found out Voldemort was trying to kill me. I think he's overprotective. And so are you at times Harry.'

'Well that's because Harry treats you like Ron treats Ginny,' said Hermione knowingly. 'It's the only influence he has when it comes to dealing with sisters.'

'That's only partially true,' said Harry defensively. Rose and Hermione burst out laughing.

'Listen Harry,' said Rose after she managed to compose herself. 'I care about Ron. I really do. I like him. I might even love him. But it's so difficult to try and carry on a relationship with someone when they're out working and you're still at school. Ginny was finding it difficult enough, but I've got another year to go.'

'I guess I never thought about that,' said Harry. 'Ron doesn't talk a lot about his feelings. He said you were having problems. But that was it.'

'It's not Ron's fault Harry,' said Rose. 'Don't go blaming him. I've barely been eating, I feel sick all the time. I worry too much. I hate the kind of work he's doing. I know I can't ask him to quit, but I wish he would.'

'But it's the path he's chosen,' said Hermione sympathetically. 'I don't exactly feel comfortable with one of my best friends traipsing around doing things like that either. But if Ron's going to be part of your life you need to accept the path he has chosen.'

'And regardless however you feel about Ron,' began Harry. 'For whatever reason Voldemort has decided he wants you dead. I know just how difficult that is to grasp. Trust me, if anyone does, it's me.'

'I know that Harry,' said Rose softly. She didn't like all this talk of death. It was so unsettling, yet so real.

'So we need to work out what the best thing is to do to protect you,' said Hermione. '*Accio!*' Hermione summoned a book. Rose laughed.

'A book is not the answer to everything Hermione,' she said.

'I'm learning that,' she said with a smile. 'This is a book on Hiding Charms. When you back to Hogwarts I thought that both you and Ginny could have a look at it. It may be helpful, it may not be. But I don't know that much about protecting people. It would be awful to lose you now Rose, just after we've found you.'

'Thank you Hermione,' said Rose. She was touched. 'Thank you. It means a lot.'

'And Rose I don't think you're doing that badly,' said Hermione. 'After all, you've had an overwhelming year. Don't put yourself down too much.'

'Thanks,' she said. 'I need to sleep Harry. Can you tell Mum and Dad I'm here?'

'Sure Rose,' he said. 'Sleep well.'

Harry waited until after Rose had left the room.

'You put some sleeping potion in her tea didn't you Hermione,' he said.

'Of course I did,' replied Hermione. 'Anyone could see the poor girl needed to sleep. She'll appreciate it in the morning. The circles under her eyes should have halved.'

'As much as you shouldn't have done it; you've probably done the right thing,' he said reluctantly.

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Rose remained at Dunvegan for an entire week. Dumbledore had managed to reach them and let them know it wasn't urgent for her to return. Harry watched his sister carefully over the week. Hermione continued to give her sleeping potions to help her rest. There was a gradual improvement in how she looked and Harry saw some return of the sparkle in her eye that he had known when she had first joined the Gryffindor Quidditch team. He was surprised at how much it hurt him to see this girl suffer so much. He realised that Rose had won her way into his heart and the brotherly love he felt for her could never be taken away. He wished he could spare her from this suffering. Perhaps he could. But it would mean facing Voldemort and he just had this feeling inside that told him he

wasn't ready yet.

Harry walked out to the stables to find Rose. He had been quite surprised at her love for the stables. It had helped bring her back to life.

'Hi,' he said giving her a smile as she rode a chestnut mare into the stables. 'How's that waterfall today?'

'Gorgeous,' replied Rose. 'Do you want a walk?'

'Sure,' replied Harry. 'What's up?'

'How did you know?' she asked.

'I'm getting better at knowing what you're thinking,' he said with a smile. 'I hope I can get better at it.'

'Do you think that you and Hermione are safe here?' she asked. 'Really, truly safe?'

'I trust Sirius and Chrystal,' he said. 'I trust Alasdair McLeod and I trust Dumbledore. Perhaps my faith is misplaced but I do feel safe. Hermione wasn't so sure at first, however she's well and truly warmed to the idea.'

'I think I want to stay here for summer,' she said. 'If I'm going to be safe here. I know Mr McLeod doesn't have a lot of visitors and you are here. Ron can come and visit me whenever he wants and we can work stuff out. Then I can be around to help with the baby. It will be good to spend time with my new nephew or niece.' She began to laugh.

'What's so funny?' asked Harry.

'I'm sorry,' she said. 'It's just the thought of me having a nephew or niece. It's still a little foreign to me. Don't worry. I'm extremely happy for you.'

'Thanks Rose,' he said as he gave his sister a hug. 'So you think you're safe here? Seriously, how do you feel at Hogwarts?'

'Not that safe really,' she said. 'You have no idea how many times Draco has managed to sneak in and find Ginny. Trust me, they haven't been missing each other that much.'

Harry gave a little laugh.

'Well I guess that's good to know,' he said. 'Given that they won't see each other again for a long time.'

'Maybe forever,' said Rose. 'I know what Draco is doing is dangerous. I know what Ron's doing is dangerous. I know that you're frustrated at not really being able to help them. It really is taking each day as it happens isn't it?'

'That's the best we can,' he said. 'You're okay to go back to school tonight?'

'Sure Harry,' she said. 'I'll be fine. Try not to worry too much about me. After all there are far more important things to worry about. Thanks for the chat. I'll see you in June.'

Harry watched as she walked off. Saving his family was something which he felt the need to do. He didn't want his child to grow up in a similar way to his and Rose's childhoods. He knew he had to face Voldemort. It was unavoidable. Two prophecies told him as much. It was the only chance they had. He wasn't ready yet, but only he could help himself. He wasn't doing anything else; why not prepare himself for battle?

He ran up to the house and found the old trunk in which he had stashed Gryffindor's sword. He pulled it out from the trunk and blew the dust off it. It certainly was an amazing sword. He had held it once before, when he had pulled it out of the sorting hat in the chamber of secrets. It had helped him defeat Voldemort once before. It had been in the room of the founders. He felt that it was crucial to his triumph over Voldemort.

## *Triumph.*

Harry had never allowed himself to think of it that way before. He would triumph over the one whom the wizarding world feared. He had to. There was no choice. For the sake of the world as he knew it and for the sake of his family he had to triumph.

He ran to the fencing room and began to practice with a conviction he had never felt before. He would defeat Voldemort. And when the day came, he would be ready.

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Dumbledore stood over Fleur's bed.

'Still no change?' he asked.

'She's getting worse,' replied Bill. 'She has periods where she stops breathing entirely. She's an innocent in all of this Professor. She never did anything wrong.'

'Unfortunately life isn't fair Bill,' he replied.

Dumbledore watched silently as Fleur stopped breathing again. Bill called for Madam Pomfrey but this time there was nothing she could do. The heart wrenching scream of Bill Weasley could be heard for miles.

Another innocent was dead. He couldn't explain it, he couldn't understand it.

*How could someone do something like this?*

~~~~~  
Following Fleur's death and Lavender's disappearance, March passed by, the wizarding world was surprisingly quiet, except perhaps, for the incessant campaigning of the potential candidates for Minister of Magic.

Voting day arrived on the first day of April.

The entire wizarding community of Britain were crazy with the rush to ensure they elected the appropriate minister. Harry had never seen anything quite so busy as he walked down Diagon Alley towards the Daily Prophet to cast his vote. He didn't have to post it in person, but he felt that questions would be asked if he didn't. Hermione had already posted her vote by owl.

He felt that the Order had done a pretty good job of trying to convince people that they shouldn't vote for Marcus Parkinson. Harry didn't even want to imagine what it would be like if a Death Eater was in power. Voldemort would literally have free reign and the wizarding world would be a completely different place. Unfortunately that left only two other candidates, Ludo Bagman and Seth Zabini. Bagman was not an option. He couldn't even run his own life properly let alone that of people who would depend on him. That left Zabini. Harry didn't know too much about him. He knew Blaise from his year at school, not particularly well and had quizzed Malfoy about her. They had not been able to uncover anything sinister about the family and besides Marcus Parkinson was a known Death Eater. Snape had told them so. They must ensure that Parkinson was not elected. That left Zabini.

Harry felt confident casting his vote. He would be glad to see Fudge out of power given how useless he had proven himself. He apparated back to Dunvegan as soon as possible and ran to find Hermione. It didn't matter how long he was away from her for, he always seemed to miss her. He missed her smile, her laugh and her ability to always get him out of trouble. They were made for each other. A smile appeared on his face when he saw his beautiful wife. She had set up a picnic rug and what appeared to be a banquet of food just overlooking the river. He ran over to her and gave her a huge hug.

'I know I've only been gone an hour or so, but I missed you so much,' he said with a smile. 'I hope you're not too bored here.' She gave Harry a smile.



'I guess I'd be lying if I said that I was happy all the time,' she said. 'But there's a lot to keep me occupied and besides I'm trying to learn all about what we should do when this one arrives.' She pointed at her stomach.

'We need to start thinking about names,' he said. 'You're getting awfully big.' There was a bit of tongue in cheek with that comment and Hermione playfully hit him over the head.

'You're probably right,' she said. 'Molly said she could tell me if it was a boy or a girl. Do you want to know?'

Harry hadn't thought about it before. But somehow he knew what the right answer was.

'If it's okay with you Hermione, I think I'd rather wait,' he said. 'At least for the moment.'

'I feel the same Harry,' she replied with a smile. 'So we need to agree on two names. One for a boy and one for a girl.'

'Okay,' said Harry. *This might be fun.* 'How about Evan if it's a boy?'

'Where did you get that from?' asked Hermione and then almost without thinking she began speaking again. 'Oh from your Mum. Why don't we put it in the maybe list?' Harry could tell that she didn't really like the name and was only keeping it as a possible suggestion to keep him happy. 'How about Annabel if it's a girl?'

'Why do you like that?'

'It means free,' she said. 'I like the sound of freedom.'

'I like Caitlin,' said Harry. 'It's sweet, or Tara. I've heard it's beautiful place.'

'You want to name our baby after a beautiful place?' asked Hermione with an edge of disbelief in her voice.

'What about William, if it's a boy?' asked Harry.

'I can't see myself naming our child after the prince. We are never going to agree on anything,' said Hermione shaking her head. 'Just wait until our parents start giving us suggestions.'

'We don't have to decide right now,' he said as he began to kiss her neck. He still couldn't believe how beautiful she looked. 'We still have plenty of time before this baby makes its way out.'

'I like the sound of that,' said Hermione with a smile. She turned towards him and began to kiss him. 'I love you Harry.'

'Harry, Hermione,' he heard someone call out. Harry looked around. It was Sirius. 'Seth Zabini has been elected Minister of Magic. It's just been announced.'

'We were kind of busy here Sirius,' said Harry a little red in the face.

'Sorry Harry,' said Sirius. 'When you two finish up down there on the grass, we're having a celebratory party before we go to the Ministry for the official ceremony.'

'Official ceremony?' asked Hermione.

'There's always an official ceremony the night of the announcement,' explained Sirius. 'We have to go because Chrys' an Auror.'

'You sound so excited,' replied Harry, the moment having completely passed. 'Perhaps we'll come up now and we'll enjoy ourselves when you go out tonight.'

'Harry,' said Hermione in shock.

'What?' asked Harry with a teasing look in his eye.

Hermione shook her head.

'You are a worry Harry James Potter,' she said laughing.

~~~~~  
Sirius escorted his wife to the celebrations party at the Ministry. He himself was not too keen to be there and Chrystal did not appear comfortable until she spotted Tonks and Moody.

'Isn't this all for show and tell?' she said her platinum hair blowing in the artificial wind someone had cast. They had tried and tried to revert her hair colour and had so far been unsuccessful.

'It's rather extravagant,' replied Moody. 'If I were you Chryssy I'd stay clear of Zabini. He's been through all the Auror records today and is none too happy about you being at Hogwarts.'

'You should have heard him voice that opinion,' replied Tonks as she dropped her glass of champagne. 'How clumsy of me. I'd be surprised if the entire Ministry didn't hear him.'

'Great,' said Sirius. 'I don't suppose you managed to convince him otherwise?'

'Not exactly,' replied Moody. 'He was more than happy for an Auror to be stationed in Hogsmeade but not Hogwarts. Personally I think it would be foolish not to have someone at Hogwarts but there you go.'

'I hear there's going to be a rather large shake up in the stale departments,' said Lupin as he joined the conversation.

'What are you doing here Remus?' asked Sirius with some surprise.

'I'm here with Tonks,' he said. 'Why else would I be here?'

'Why else indeed?' replied Sirius raising his eyebrows.

At that moment the Minister walked over towards them.

'Good luck Chrystal,' said Tonks as she bumped into Moody.

'Hello everybody,' he said with a laugh. 'As you all know I'm Seth Zabini. Could you be so kind to introduce me to everyone Mr Moody.'

Mad eye obliged.

'This is Sirius Black and his wife Chrystal,' he said pointing to Sirius and Chrystal. 'And this is Nymphadora Tonks and Remus Lupin. As you would be aware Chrystal and Nymphadora are two of our finest Aurors.' Sirius tried not to alugh as he watched his cousin squirm at Moody's use of her first name.

'Ah yes,' replied the Minister. 'I was wondering why you were stationed at Hogwarts Mrs Black.'

'It's Professor,' she said firmly. 'And Alastor has been kind enough to place me at Hogwarts because I'm pregnant and given that fact I am not permitted to be on active duty. However I would be pleased to oblige the Minister's wish after I return from leave.'

'Yes of course,' he replied walking away.

'I thought we weren't telling people yet,' Sirius whispered in her ear.

'Sorry,' she said with a smile.

'Are you serious?' asked Remus. 'And don't give me your yes I'm Sirius line either.'

'Yes,' replied Sirius. 'Chrys and I are expecting our second child in November. Around her birthday in fact. Hopefully its fate will be better than the last one.'

Sirius didn't notice how uncomfortable his wife and Remus looked because Tonks was too busy bowling him over with a big hug.

'Congrats,' she said. 'It's about time.'

'And I think it's about time to go,' said Chrystal. 'I think I've made an interesting impression on the Minister. Let's see how long I keep my job for.' Moody began to say something but Chrystal interrupted. 'I've already said I don't care. I didn't like working for the last government and I'm not so sure this one will be any better. Now how about you come around to you know where for a celebratory drink. Sirius and I will have to meet you there, we're flying.'

A large number of the Order had assembled at Grimmauld Place to celebrate the election of Zabini. Glasses of champagne were overflowing people were talking loudly and it appeared as if everyone was letting their hair down for the first time in years.

Sirius handed Harry a glass of something. Harry could tell that he was more than a little drunk.

'Celebrate for the reign of Fudge is over,' he said.

'Yes Sirius,' replied Harry. 'It seems like you're celebrating enough for everybody.'

'We're having a baby Harry,' said Sirius in a loud whisper. 'Don't tell anybody.'

As he escorted Hermione away from Sirius, she remarked that they wouldn't have to keep it a secret for very long, given the state Sirius was in.

'I hope Ron's here,' said Harry as he bumped into a lady who looked kind of familiar. 'Sorry,' he mumbled. 'Are you in the Order?'

'Of course I'm in the Order,' she remarked. 'How else would I know how to get here?' The woman glanced at his forehead. 'I'm Claire, Claire Prewitt, or Claire Lloyd as your parents knew me. I've been away for quite some time. I only returned to Britain last week. It's lovely to see you again.'

'Hello,' said Harry. 'This is my wife Hermione. I've heard the name Prewitt somewhere before.'

'It was Molly's maiden name,' said Hermione. 'And Claire I recognise from one of those photos of your parents.'

'I was in the same year as your parents,' said Claire. 'Anyhow, I appear to be detaining you from your festivities. It was lovely to meet you Harry.'

'I know that name for another reason Hermione,' said Harry as he spied Ron. 'Hi Ron. Why would I know the name Prewitt? Besides the fact it was your mum's maiden name?'

'Nice greeting Harry,' said Ron with a smile. 'There's a few at Hogwarts. There's a boy in Rose's year. In Gryffindor. On the Quidditch Team.'

'Ah,' said Harry as he realised that he had paid little to no attention to the names of his players. 'How are you?'

'A little tired,' he replied as he led them to a couple of chairs in a dark secluded corner. 'Sorry I haven't been around lately. Lavender's missing again. That girl's a nightmare, honestly.'

'She's gone?' asked Hermione in disbelief.

'It's like she's vanished,' said Ron. 'We've got no idea where to. She didn't leave anything. No indications or anything. We're just about to give up.'

'What happens then?' asked Harry.

'They declare her missing,' said Ron. 'If she's not found within six years she's presumed dead.'

'Is that's what has happened with Draco?' asked Hermione.

'Yes,' said Ron. 'But I can guarantee although the Ministry's not looking for him there are plenty of Death Eaters who are.'

'I'm sure,' remarked Hermione. 'I'd be surprised if there weren't'

'Do we have any news of him?' asked Harry.

'I wouldn't have thought you'd particularly care,' remarked Ron. 'Neville saw him before he disappeared and he said to say that you had the prophecy wrong Hermione. He said it's in the arithmancy. The smart ass couldn't just give us the answer could he? He had to be vague. I wish he was around so I could have ago at him.'

'Ron,' said Hermione firmly. 'You promised Ginny. And anyway, we don't want to make enemies with Draco Malfoy. It's juts not advisable.'

'It's not like we could make enemies even if we wanted to,' said Harry. 'I hope that the three of them will be okay.'

'Rose was looking better when she left Dunvegan,' said Hermione. 'Have you heard from her Ron?'

'Yes,' he said blushing. 'We're going to be okay. I'm sorry if I made you angry mate.' He gave Harry a sincere look.

'It's okay Ron,' said Harry. 'I know relationships are difficult. Just don't intentionally hurt her, please. That's the blessing you get from me.'

'I'll promise not to intentionally hurt her,' said Ron sincerely. 'I care a lot about her.'

'Thanks mate,' said Harry. 'So how was the fancy party at the Ministry tonight?'

'Interesting,' said Ron.

'Did you meet the Minister?' asked Hermione.

'Yes,' said Ron going a little red. 'He offered me a promotion.'

'That's fantastic,' cried Hermione bowling him over with a hug.

'Congratulations Ron,' said Harry after shaking Ron's hand after he had recovered. 'That's amazing.'

'I know,' said Ron. 'I'm actually a little concerned about it.'

'Concerned?' asked Hermione raising her eyebrows.

'Well I accepted it at the time,' said Ron. 'But what if it's a plan to keep an eye on me?'

'Well just make sure you watch your back,' said Hermione. 'And don't do anything illegal at the Ministry.'

'I never do,' said Ron. 'I just don't know if Zabini is the right man for the job. For instance I get the impression it won't be long before Dad's department gets the flick.'

'I think the next few weeks will be very interesting,' said Harry. 'The Order's meeting frequently to carefully exam what's happening. Hermione and I are going to stay around for a few days.' Harry glanced over his shoulder. 'I think the party's winding down. I might go and help your father levitate a certain godfather of mine upstairs before he gets trampled on.'

'Do you think he's happy?' asked Ron. 'Or do you think it's just the Gillyweed setting in?'

'He didn't care much for Fudge,' said Hermione. 'I might go and help Molly clean up.'

Harry went and assisted levitating Sirius, Remus and Dung upstairs. Molly had earlier made all the beds up. The cleaning downstairs took a long time, despite the use of magic and after what seemed like hours the house began to look respectable again.

After the party had finished Harry carried Hermione upstairs to the room that used to be his and Ron's. He had unfinished business from earlier that day. He had meant to devour Hermione then and was more than ready to now.

## **Chapter Twenty Nine Birth of a Babe**

Harry arrived without Hermione for an unofficial meeting of the order. They had taken to meeting every evening since Zabini's election to monitor the preposterous changes occurring in the Ministry. Hermione was a little sick of Flooing everywhere, an unfortunate consequence of pregnancy and she wanted to take the opportunity to visit her family given that she hadn't seen them since the wedding. Harry initially was reluctant to let her go alone, however Alasdair had managed to organise a safe portkey for her.

Harry walked into the meeting room and immediately noticed the sour mood.

'Well it's confirmed,' said Arthur as Harry entered the room. 'Zabini is reaping havoc at the Ministry. My department's completely gone. We're to be reassigned. Perkins and I. Only Zabini knows where. I dread to think.'

'We knew it was going to happen,' said Tonks. 'It really was inevitable. Thanks to Chrys' mouthful he seems to have left the Aurors alone for now. Although I know eventually he'll get around to us.'

'Well I have been given no indication of what's happening,' said Percy. 'If I'm not lucky I think my jobs as good as gone. However it does make sense, a new Minister would want his own assistants. And he is getting rid of most of Fudge's useless lackeys. I would have thought you wanted that.'

'Well it all depends on who he's replacing them with,' said Remus. 'As for me I don't trust his policy on werewolves. It seems a little too much like control. I could understand Fudge's policy on having to disclose it to your employer but to have to register.'

'It's just like Hitler and the Jews,' said Harry thinking about the prospect of compulsory werewolf registration.

'Hitler?' asked Bill.

'Kind of like the Muggle version of Grindelwald,' explained Harry as he glanced at the shadow Bill was becoming. 'During his reign of power he made all the Jewish people wear a gold star to symbolise they were Jews. They were persecuted and many of them were killed purely because of their race.'

'I don't like the way the Ministry is heading,' said Molly shaking her head. 'It's a bad sign.'

'Well we've been told to stop looking for Lavender Brown,' spoke up Ron. 'That seems rather strange.'

The door to the meeting room opened. It was Terri Hamber. Harry hadn't seen her for quite a while. She looked dishevelled and exhausted. Harry hadn't known her all that long however had never seen her quite like this.

'I've found them,' she said sounding tired. 'At last. I've found the rest of the Muggle-borns. I think we might be too late. A lot of them are either dead or unconscious.'

'We need to get to them straight away,' said Chrystal speaking quickly. 'How soon until we can move out?'

'I don't think you're going anywhere,' said Sirius strongly. 'After last time I'm not taking that risk again.'

'Where are they Terri?' asked Snape anxiously. Harry could feel a sense of urgency rising quickly in the room.

'Well I was looking in the complete wrong place,' she said. 'That's why it's taken so long. They're in Wales. On Puffin Island. North east of the Isle of Anglesey.'

'We need to get moving straight away,' said Snape without hesitation. 'We don't have time for a

large operation. We need to use what we have.'

'We won't have much of a problem,' said Terri. 'There's no one guarding them. All I could see were the bodies of people lying on the ground. Here, look.' She pulled out her omnioculars and let everyone examine the images. They made Harry just as ill as the first lot had. Except this time many of the people were clearly already dead. He grimaced as he passed the omnioculars on.

'They've just been left there to die,' said Ron under his breath. 'How could someone do that?'

'Surely you would have noticed by now that his followers will do anything?' said Tonks. 'After what you, Harry and Hermione went through at school I would have thought you would understand.'

'I do,' said Ron somewhat defensively. 'I just can't help it sometimes when I see things like this. It's just horrible.'

'Can we apparate there?' asked Remus changing the subject as if not talking about it would lessen the reality of the appalling situation. 'That would make things much simpler.'

'I tried apparating on the island itself,' replied Terri. 'It seemed to work okay; after all I am in one piece still. If not, we can certainly apparate to Anglesey and make our way over somehow.'

'We may need them to get the wounded off the island,' said Arthur seriously. 'Most of them will be unable to apparate anyway. We need to find a safe spot, a wizard's pub or something where we can take the wounded. That would be much easier especially if somehow it was connected to the Floo network. I guess we can only hope.'

'Why don't you take care of that Chrys?' suggested Sirius. 'It might keep you safe for a change.'

Chrystal gave Sirius a look, but left the room obligingly.

'That's a bit harsh Sirius,' said Tonks. 'Anyone would think you were a little overprotective of your wife there.'

'Be quiet Tonks,' said Remus. A few seconds of awkward silence followed. 'I think we should notify Dumbledore. After all we may need his help.' Remus stood up and walked towards the lounge room.

Chrystal re-entered the room.

'There's an old abandoned wizarding pub on the island,' she said. 'It's still connected to the Floo network. We can use it to take the wounded straight to St Mungos.' She gave them exact instructions on how to get there. From what she had said and the pictures that Terri had shown them it didn't seem as if the island was very large. Hopefully this wouldn't take too long.

'Well you, Molly and Claire can go there straight away,' said Arthur. 'Prepare the pub to care for any sick people who can't be taken via the Floo network. The rest of us will go and make sure we get those people out of there. If any of them can apparate that's the best option, although if they could I'd have thought they'd have already tried that.'

'We need to be careful,' said Terri. 'If they've got this virus that seems to be going around, then I don't particularly want to catch it.'

'Dumbledore is on his way,' said Remus as he re-entered the room. 'He's bringing a protective potion that should stop us from getting sick. We drink that and then we're on our way. Chrystal, Claire, Molly, you should have it as soon as he gets here and then get going.'

'Are you sure there were no guards,' asked Kingsley Shacklebolt cautiously. 'I'd hate to think we're walking into a trap. It seems exactly like the kind of thing that he would do.'

'I'm certain,' replied Terri. 'I stayed there for a full day to make sure. It was much worse than last time. These people are dying. They're dying a slow torturous death and hopefully we'll manage to help a few of them.'

'We scout the entire area and take anyone who's alive first,' said Arthur. 'Then we deal with the dead.'

Dumbledore entered the room. He had a quick glance around the room.

'Is everything ready?' he asked. Harry could hear the note of concern in his voice.

'As ready as a quick operation like this can be,' said Tonks as they handed around the protective potion. 'We just have to hope we don't get caught.'

'Well everyone should cast the disillusionment charm until we're sure we're alone,' said Dumbledore. 'The inconvenience caused is worth the added protection.' He glanced around the room. 'No one is obliged to come with us. We could use your help if you wish to however. Shall we? Time is crucial.'

On Dumbledore's command everyone cast the charm and apparated to the island. Immediately Harry found himself in deep scrub. The forest was certainly thick and difficult to see through. He couldn't hear Dumbledore and hence decided to walk to his left. He was trying to be careful, wary of the fact that other people were wandering around the forest as well. Suddenly, he heard a noise behind him, causing him to jump a few feet in the air. He carefully glanced around and saw that nobody was there. Carefully he took a few more steps. Then he heard a laugh. It was Dung. Harry shook his head and continued to walk blindly through the scrub. He was both relieved and saddened when he reached the clearing. It looked like a huge graveyard, with bodies just piled on top of each other.

He heard Dumbledore telling them that they were alone and to lift the charm. As soon as he did, he was overwhelmed by the smell. It was a smell of rot, decay and sickness. There were bodies piled one on top of the other. Harry had to stop himself from throwing up. The nausea was almost overwhelming.

'Can anyone hear me?' called Harry who was desperately trying to hold his breath at the same time. A man who looked as if he used to be large answered very weakly. Harry ran towards him and lifted the hood from his face. It was Lavender's father. He'd been missing for months. 'Mr Brown are you okay?'

'I'm tired,' he said. 'So tired.' Harry levitated him towards the building he could see in the distance while he checked the people around where Mr Brown had lain to make sure there wasn't anyone else alive. No one replied and no one had a pulse as Harry leant to feel their necks. He continued to levitate Mr Brown to the old decrepit building that he could only assume was the wizarding pub. On opening the door all he could see were bodies piled one on top of each other.

'Are all these dead?' asked Harry.

'Unfortunately,' said Claire wiping her eyebrow. 'Is he alive?'

'Yes,' replied Harry. 'This is Mr Brown, Lavender's father. He needs to get to St Mungos immediately.'

'I'll take him,' said Molly. 'The emergency room is on standby, we've let them know what has happened.' Molly levitated him to the fireplace and flooed away.

'We're taking turns,' explained Claire. 'Have you ever seen anything like this before Harry?' He shook his head. 'It takes some getting used to. In the days of terror you could walk into a house and find entire families dead. It wasn't quite as bad as this. I have to say in all my days as a Healer I've never seen anything quite like it.'

'You're a Healer?' asked Harry.

'Yes,' she replied. 'And there's not a lot I can do for most of these people here. It's extremely frustrating.' Lupin entered the room carrying a body.

'Claire, can I have a hand over here?' he asked. Claire ran over towards the body with her wand drawn.

'It's Hermia,' said Claire with concern as she pushed her blonde hair back. 'Hermia, Hermia, can you tell me what happened?' Harry watched as she sounded hysterical. Chrystal immediately jumped up and ran to help.

'You-know-who,' she said coughing. Harry watched as Claire tried desperately with charms and potions to revive her to a state where she would be fit to travel.

'It's no good,' she said turning around about five minutes later. 'She's gone.' Claire collapsed on the floor. 'It's so much harder when you know them. Are there many more out there?'

'No,' said Remus. 'Most of them are already dead. It's just a matter of taking their bodies to St Mungos.'

'How many?' asked Harry.

'Just over a hundred,' said Remus. 'And less than twenty were still alive. Not great numbers there really. Harry can you give me a hand levitating the dead in here?'

'I can do that,' Harry said, almost to reassure himself that he could. He walked back outside and began the arduous task of levitating the bodies into the hut. It didn't take long with the number of people they had there. They then transported them all to St Mungos via the Floo network. Harry was thankful they didn't have the task of letting their families know they were dead. A flash came into his head.

*He saw his body lying cold and dead on the floor. The first person to find him was Ron. Hermione and their child followed not long after.*

He shook himself out of it. He couldn't allow himself to think like that. He was going to win this war despite Voldemort's recent advances. He knew it was dangerous. He understood the risks involved, but he had more to live for. He had a family, a child on the way and the love of another person, something he was certain that Voldemort did not have.

'Come on Harry,' said Ron. 'These are the last two to go to St Mungos. Give me a hand mate.' Harry jumped up and immediately helped Ron relieved to have completed the mission and arrived at St Mungos in one piece.

At St Mungos they were all thoroughly checked over by a single Healer. Harry took an immediate dislike to him. There was just something about him that made Harry feel extremely uncomfortable.

'You will all have to stay here overnight,' said Healer Pye. 'A few of those people you brought in have that weird virus. I can't take the risk.' Dumbledore tried to explain that he had carefully protected everybody with a protection potion however the Healer would not hear a word of it. 'You will remain here tonight or I'll have you arrested.' The Healer walked out the door and slammed it behind him.

'Where's Terri?' asked Snape with some concern.

'Relax,' said Sirius showing real concern for Snape's feelings. 'I think she fell off her horse. She's not sick.' Harry watched as Snape breathed a sigh of relief.

'I hope someone will let Hermione know where I am,' said Harry under his breath. 'She'll be worried sick.'

'I'm more worried about Hogwarts missing so many staff members,' said Dumbledore sounding more than a little concerned. 'They may have our wands but you can get us out of here can't you Chrystal?'

'I can try,' she said. 'It depends what is keeping the door closed.'



'It's just a simple locking charm,' said Claire. 'It works on the understanding that no one would be carrying two wands with them, which most wizards don't.'

'Fine,' she said. 'Then I can get some of us out of here. I think however most of us should remain, given that they haven't taken our names; they haven't even counted how many of us are here.'

'Or you could let all of us out and we can cast a memory charm on the Healer,' suggested Ron.

'That's not such a good idea Ron,' said his father. 'Think of the damage it could do.'

'I think it's a good idea,' said Snape. 'After all I don't think I trust Pye and if I'm seen here in the present company my cover could be severely compromised.'

'I agree,' said Dumbledore. 'Ordinarily Arthur I wouldn't agree, erasing people's memories can be extremely dangerous. But I need to get back to Hogwarts. Snape should not be seen with us. There are many reasons.'

'Fine,' said Claire. 'Chrystal get us out and then I'll page Healer Pye. I guarantee he won't be far away. And he won't have told anyone. He likes to keep things to himself.'

'Better yet, let Tonks go,' suggested Remus. 'She can make herself look like Healer Pye and move around without suspicion. Then she can cast the charm on Pye and come back and tell us its safe to go.'

Dumbledore quickly agreed and Harry watched with a little amusement as Tonks transformed herself to resemble Pye. Then he watched as Chrystal opened the door. A quick '*Alohamora*' and the door was open. Just the same way Rose had done late last year. There was something about it that made shivers run up and down Harry's spine. She shouldn't be able to do that. Harry glanced carefully around the room. Nobody else seemed concerned that she had done that. He glanced at Ron.

'I'll tell you later,' said Ron. 'For now it will be a miracle if Tonks pulls this off.'

The room remained rather quiet while Tonks was away. Remus was continually glancing at his watch. Snape was pacing the room. Even Dumbledore seemed more than a little worried. Harry began to realise just how much was at stake if Pye was a Death Eater. Snape would be betrayed, other members of the Order would be revealed and Hogwarts would be vulnerable for a good twenty-four hours. He was pondering this as Tonks returned.

'I think we ought to take Pye with us,' said Tonks. 'Just in case he is bad. Someone can impersonate him at work. Use Polyjuice.'

'That's ridiculous,' said Molly.

'I don't think so,' said Dumbledore carefully. 'I agree. It's not as if we'll mistreat him.'

'Good,' said Tonks revealing a tiny frozen Pye in her hand.

'What did you do to him?' cried Molly.

'*Petrificus Totalis*, a shrinking and then a memory modification,' she said. 'Here you are Dumbledore. Do with him what you will.'

Harry felt strange as he walked out of St Mungos. Suddenly the war was truly on. They were no longer playing games.

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## 80 Found Dead With Dreaded Virus

*Yesterday 80 Muggle-born witches and wizards were found dead on an island in Wales. It appears early into the investigation that they have suffered from this new so-called virus that has already claimed two victims in the past few months, an eighteen year old wizard Seamus Finnegan and a twenty-one year old witch, Fleur Delacour. With no way to cure this virus and survival unlikely it*

*would appear crucial to try and protect oneself from the virus.*

*Twenty survivors were found alive; however most seem to be also infected. They are unlikely to recover.....*

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## **20 VIRUS SUFFERS ALL DEAD**

*The remaining twenty witches and wizards found in Wales died over the weekend. The Ministry is seeking an explanation.....*

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Ginny Weasley did not know quite how she felt finally having come to the end of her schooling at Hogwarts. So much had happened since her first year. She certainly was a completely different person than when she had started school. She had been touched by evil in many ways and even now evil had a shadow hanging over her head. She had almost finished packing her trunk for the last time and just needed a final piece of advice. She wandered into the Defence Against the Dark Arts office.

'Chrystal do you have a minute?' she asked.

'Sure Ginny,' she replied. 'Take a seat and I'll get you some tea.'

Chrystal summoned some tea and placed it on the table in front of her.

'How can I help you Ginny?' she asked. 'I know you've got a lot on your mind.'

'I just want some advice,' she said. 'I want to know what you would do if you were in my situation.'

'It's difficult,' said Chrystal sympathetically. 'I won't pretend. There's been no direct threat on you and that in some ways is good. However, given what has already happened I think it would be unwise if you were not to take precautions. The answer really lies in the question what you really want out of life, because that's where you'll find your answer.'

'The problem is I don't know,' said Ginny.

'There must be something,' said Chrystal. Ginny glanced at her hands. 'I think you know your answer. Ginevra, you are a strong, powerful witch and no matter what you do with yourself you will have an amazing impact on the world if that is what you want. But if you want to be happy, I'm sure you know where your heart lies. No matter what happens, Hogwarts will always be here for you as a refuge or for help. The members of the Order will always be there for you. After all you've touched so many people. Go where your heart lies Ginny.'

'Thank you,' said Ginny standing up to leave. 'I believe we have a feast to go to now.'

'Yes, I think you're right,' said Chrystal standing a little awkwardly. 'Good luck Ginny.'

Ginny walked out the door and headed straight for the Great Hall feeling a little better. She spied Rose and walked over towards the vacant seat next to her. She knew what her heart wanted.

'Hi,' she said to Rose. 'Anything happened yet?'

'No,' she replied. Ginny noticed she was looking much better. But then the relief of not having to bury your head in books of Potions, Herbology, Transfiguration, Charms and Defence Against the Dark Arts books because you had to get an E to be a Healer would always make someone look better. 'Where were you?'

'Just having a chat,' replied Ginny. 'Having my feelings pointed out to me. The last couple of months have been almost unbearable. I need to be with Draco.'

'I know Gin,' said Rose. 'If I were you I'd shack up with Draco in Grimmauld Place. Then only the Order could find you.'

Ginny laughed.

'Whilst that would be nice could you imagine my mother's face?' said Ginny. 'She has enough trouble with Fred not living at home; she's convinced that Angelina sneaks over there and that they're living in sin. I mean she can't be naïve enough to not know what happens at Hogwarts can she?'

'I don't think naïve is the right word,' said Rose. 'She just doesn't want to believe that any of her children could possibly be involved.'

'Still I don't know if that is really the safest idea,' said Ginny. 'Although I am old enough to be in the Order, people in the Order have betrayed before.'

'Don't rush into anything,' said Rose. 'To tell you the truth I don't know if I'm even going to come back next year.'

'But you need to finish school to become a Healer,' said Ginny with a little astonishment.

'I know that,' said Rose. 'I've spoken long and hard to Professor McGonagall about it. I just don't know how safe I feel about it.'

'I understand,' said Ginny. 'But you can't hide away forever.'

'It's not just about hiding Ginny,' she said.

'I guess I understand,' said Ginny. 'You think it will be easier for you and Ron if you weren't here, don't you?'

'It would in some ways,' she said reluctantly. 'But I know it wouldn't stop me worrying about him.'

'Don't you rush into anything either,' said Ginny with a smile. 'How about I come and visit you next week?'

'Sure,' said Rose. 'It will give me a break from the books.'

'You're not going to study all holidays are you?' asked Ginny.

'Not all,' said Rose. 'I do want to spend some time with my new niece or nephew. And some time flying around the castle.'

'You're crazy,' said Ginny as she began to load food onto her plate. 'I better get a good feed now; I don't know when the next one will be.'

Ginny and Rose enjoyed the feast laid before them. They had just finished dessert when Ewan Prewett interrupted them.

'Are you going to be at The Burrow over summer?' he asked rather curiously.

'Why do you care Ewan?' asked Ginny said to the blue-eyed boy. 'You haven't been there for years.'

'It's homely,' he said. 'And your mum is a good cook. I was just wondering because my parents are back, we're staying in Britain for summer.'

'Look I honestly don't know Ewan,' said Ginny a little exasperated. 'It would be nice to see your family, I haven't seen your parents in years but we'll just have to wait and see.'

'Anyhow Ewan it's time to go,' said Rose. 'I hope you'll practice your Quidditch skills over the summer. See you next year.' Rose giggled as they walked out the door. 'Weren't you a touch harsh on him? After all he's not a bad guy.'

'Perhaps,' said Ginny as she waved at Luna Lovegood. 'He may be my cousin but I barely know him. And after all I don't even know where my family will be over summer and even if I did I'm not going to tell someone that I don't know if I can trust. I don't have time to waste energy on anyone anyhow. I've got enough to worry about. And I want to savour this last journey from Hogwarts.'

'Hi,' said Luna. 'How do you feel about leaving Ginny?'

'Mixed,' she replied. 'You?' It was hard to sum up how you felt about leaving somewhere that had been so important to you for the last seven years.

'The same,' she said. 'I'll miss this place. But I'm on to bigger and better things. The Quibbler here I come.'

'Your dad gave you a job then did he?' asked Rose.

'Yes,' replied Luna. 'Nothing big, just assistant to a junior editor. He wants me to learn the business the hard way. I think he's right. Anyhow at least I know what I'm doing with myself unlike you.' She glanced at Ginny.

'I'll work it out eventually Luna,' she said with a sigh. 'I'll work it out.'

The girls had a lovely train ride back to Kings Cross Station reminiscing, talking and laughing, however despite the mood Ginny couldn't shake from her head the awful feeling that her life was about to become far more complicated than it had already become.

She was pleased to see her mother waiting for her on the Platform and was happy to be whisked away to Grimmauld Place. She would be safe there for now.

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### **MINISTRY SHAKEUP - New Cabinet Announced.**

*The newly appointed Minister for Magic has undertaken a complete shake-up of the departments of the Ministry and completely replaced the former Minister's main staff in a move that has shocked the wizarding world. Not one of the original cabinet members remain. New members of the cabinet include:*

- *Assistant to the Minister - Delores Umbridge has been replaced by Narcissa Malfoy*
- *Junior Assistant to the Minister - Percy Weasley has been replaced by Millicent Bulstrode*
- *Head of Magical Law Enforcement - Amelia Bones has been replaced by Davy Gudgeon*
- *Head of the Department of International Magical Co-operation - acting head has been replaced by Araminta Meliflua*
- *Head of Department of Magical Games and Sport - acting head has been replaced by Tadgh Moran*

*Additionally several departments will no longer exist as of the first of June. These departments include:*

- *Missuse of Muggle Artefacts*
- *Magical Equipment Control*
- *Floo Network Authority*
- *Improper use of Magic*
- *Committee on Experimental Charms.*

*The department of Magical Law Enforcement Squad is stepping up its responsibilities, taking control over the above mentioned areas. Zabini is looking for new candidates to undertake Hit Wizard Training as he vows that the wizarding world will become a safer place.....*

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### **CORNELIUS FUDGE THE NEXT VICTIM**

*The former Minister for Magic Cornelius Fudge has been struck down by the dreaded virus which*

*is plaguing the British Wizarding world. Mr Fudge is dangerously ill in St Mungos and is not expected to last the weekend.*

*St Mungos staff have been working day and night to develop an antidote, however so far have had limited success. The crisis is expected to worsen before it improves.....*

~~~~~ June 21<sup>st</sup> ~~~~~

Those that had assembled at Grimmauld Place following Fudge's memorial service read and reread the Daily Prophet with some care.

'What do you suppose it means?' asked Molly.

'Vaccination is a Muggle concept,' explained Hermione who was vaguely listening to the conversation. She hadn't felt that well all day. 'The aim is to protect a child against diseases that it may acquire.'

'And they think that young babies are at risk of acquiring this so called virus that Voldemort has created,' asked Percy. 'Particularly boys only.'

'Evidently,' replied Harry somewhat sarcastically.

'Have we verified if this vaccine actually works?' asked Hermione with a little concern. 'After all it could be dangerous. Some of the old Muggle vaccines were extremely dangerous and wizards haven't been using this kind of medicine. It seems almost a bit primitive for Muggles.'

'I've acquired a few vials of it,' said Neville. 'It's horrid looking stuff. I'm getting someone to look at it. I don't like it. I don't like it at all.'

'Well I'll be damned before I let them put any of that stuff into Reade,' said Percy in a strong forceful voice. 'I'll make sure they don't stick that Potion in my son.'

'So would I if I were you,' said Snape who had just appeared in the doorway. 'I don't trust it at all. The Healer involved with its discovery is a Death Eater. Healer Pye. Remember him from St Mungos. After interregation, I'm almost certain of it. Anyway so far our plan is working. No one has suspected anything.'

'That's Parvati's husband,' remarked Ron almost out of the blue. 'Healer Pye. I've only just remembered. I remember Terry Boot saying something about it.'

'Personally I never trusted that girl very much,' remarked Snape. 'Then again I never trusted you either Potter; and that seemed to be a smart idea.'

'I don't believe Parvati could be bad,' said Hermione as she shifted uncomfortably in her chair. 'She wasn't particularly nice, but she was a member of the DA.'

'That doesn't stand for very much Hermione,' replied Arthur Weasley kindly. 'The last time you-know-who was around, well you simply didn't know who to trust. Look at what happened to the Potters.'

'Besides we know Lavender was on her way to Parvati's when she disappeared,' said Neville.

'Are you okay Hermione?' asked Molly.

'I'm sorry,' she said. 'I don't feel to well at all.'

'Let me help you upstairs,' said Molly. 'Maybe I should take a look at you.' Hermione observed as Harry, Molly and Arthur levitated her upstairs. The further they went the worse she felt. They gently placed her onto what had been her bed when she had spent summers there.

Molly looked worried as she cast a few charms over Hermione and Harry was pacing up and down the room which wasn't helping at all. Molly whispered a few words to Arthur and then calmly spoke to her. She knew something was wrong immediately.

'Hermione, what you've got is a condition called pre-eclampsia,' said Molly almost too calmly. 'I know you've probably read about it, but I don't want you to worry. What it means is we have to induce labour tonight. Arthur has gone to grab my bag. Now I don't want you to worry, I've been in this position many times before and I haven't lost a baby yet. I don't plan on it tonight.'

'But isn't it too early?' asked Harry with some concern. Hermione's head began spinning. It was all too much.

'It will be fine,' replied Molly. 'Please don't worry Harry. Now the best thing for you to do would be to find your mother. I believe as part of her Auror training she had to learn how to deliver babies and I may need some help. Besides she should be here for the birth of her first grandchild. You may like to let Hermione's parents know as well.'

'Okay,' nodded Harry as he ran off.

'Expectant father's are all the same,' said Molly shaking her head and chuckling a little. 'Now Hermione is there anything you want to ask me?'

Hermione was so bewildered she didn't know.

'I can't think of anything and yet I keep thinking I don't know everything,' she said as sweat began to form on her face. She noticed Arthur arriving. She felt as if she were about to cry. She had never felt as if things were more out of her control.

'Now Hermione we need to give you two potions,' explained Molly. 'One will stop you from having eclamptic seizures, the other will induce labour. Are you okay with this?'

She nodded.

'If it's what you think is best,' she said in an almost defeated voice. She looked at the vials and then looked at the rooms surrounds. She felt sad. This wasn't how this was supposed to be happening. 'Actually Molly, do you think it's possible for us to go to Dunvegan? I need my mother. She can't come here. She can at least come there.'

'Of course Hermione,' said Molly with what Hermione thought was a little pity. 'Of course you need your mother. We'll go straight away. But you need to drink the yellow potion first okay? Arthur can you find Harry for me?'

Hermione nodded and swallowed the potion quickly. It tasted awful but left her feeling at least a little better. Molly helped her to the fireplace and got her to Dunvegan as quickly as possible. It was the most uncomfortable Floo ride of her life and she was more than happy to arrive in the Dunvegan sitting room in one piece. Alasdair MacLeod arrived in a hurry to the loud bang and quickly responded to Molly's suggestion that he levitate Hermione upstairs. Arthur returned not long after with the news that Alasdair had apparated to Hermione's parents place and they were on their way. All the commotion was making Hermione dizzy.

'Where's Harry?' she asked.

'He won't be long,' said Arthur. 'He's just gone to find his mum.'

Harry ran in the door a few seconds later.

'Did I miss anything?' he asked.

Molly gave a little laugh.

'No Harry,' said Molly. 'I'm just about to give her the inducing potion, so you haven't missed a thing.' Molly handed Hermione a potion which she looked at and then forced herself to swallow it. It tasted absolutely awful.

'Now what do we do?' asked Hermione. She almost didn't recognise her voice.

'Now we wait,' said Molly. 'I might go and make everyone a cup of tea. I'll give you and Harry

some time to be alone together.'

Hermione glanced up at Harry.

'I'm scared,' she said. 'I'm so scared Harry. What if something goes wrong?'

'Then we'll deal with it,' said Harry. Hermione could tell that he was a little worried as well. 'We can get through this if we have each other Hermione. I promise you.' Hermione didn't want to comment on that. After all what if she didn't have Harry? What if he was defeated at Voldemort's hand? Now was not exactly the right time to be having doubts about having a baby.

She looked up at Harry, as the tears began to well in her eyes.

'I love you Harry,' she said as she felt something wet run down her legs. 'Oh, I think my water just broke. Do you think Molly will be long?'

'Should I go and find her?' asked Harry hurriedly.

'No,' said Hermione. 'I need you here. Especially when the contractions start. I want to be able to curse you for the pain you're putting me through. I can't believe this is happening. Do you think my parents will take long to get here?'

'Alasdair has gone to help them get here,' replied Harry. 'I think he was talking about a portkey or something as it would take them quite a while to drive here. And Rose and Ron are downstairs. Ron swears he's not going anywhere until the baby's born.'

'We still don't have a name Harry,' she said.

'When we see our child, I'm sure we'll know exactly what to call it,' said Harry.

Then it hit her. A sharp gripping pain across her pelvis. She reached and grabbed Harry's hand.

'Is it that painful Hermione?' he asked concerned. 'You're almost breaking my hand.'

The pain stopped and she released his hand.

'Sorry Harry,' she said trying to hold herself together.

Molly walked into the room with a tray in her hands.

'How are we going?' she asked.

'My water's broken and I think I had my first contraction,' said Hermione quickly. Molly waved her wand over Hermione. 'Well I guess we've begun. You're dilated 2cm. Do you want something to take the edge off the pain? I must admit I can't give you anything like they give you in those fancy Muggle hospitals, but it will help a little.'

'Well a little is better than nothing,' said Hermione still recalling the pain that had gripped her. 'I'll give it a try.'

'Have some tea,' said Molly. Hermione looked up at her in surprise. 'It will make you feel better. And witches do things a little differently to Muggles Hermione. You should know that by now. Do you want me to bring Ron and Rose up?' 'You'll be waiting a while.'

'Okay,' answered Harry as he paced the room. 'Molly knows what she's doing. It's going to be okay.' He leant over and kissed her forehead.

'I know Harry,' said Hermione. The door opened and Ron and Rose walked in with Molly.

'Hi,' said Rose. 'How's it going?'

'We've only had one contraction so far,' said Harry. Rose gave a little laugh.

'I'm sure you've had a contraction Harry,' she said with a smile. 'Mum and Dad are out. They'll be back later this afternoon. There's not any point rushing to go and get them is there Mrs Weasley?'

'No it will be a little while yet,' said Molly. 'And please dear call me Molly. Mrs Weasley seems a little too formal now all my children are grown up. Speaking of children; Ron when is Ginny getting here?'

'This afternoon,' said Ron as Alasdair McLeod raced into the room.

'The Grangers are here,' he said. 'Do you want me to bring them up?'

Hermione looked up at Harry.

'Can I have some time with my mother alone?' she asked.

'Of course,' he said. He leant over and gave her a peck on the lips. 'I know you need to see her. Besides I'm sure I can find something to talk about with those two.'

Harry shepherded everyone out of the room and not long after her mother appeared in the doorway.

'Mum,' said Hermione. 'I'm so glad you're here.'

'I get the impression you're a little worried,' she said.

'Harry has a big mouth,' said Hermione with a little smile.

'No Hermione,' her mother said. 'I'm your mother. I can tell some of these things. It's only natural after all. You're about to bring a new life into the world. I know exactly how you feel.' Her mother held her hand tightly. 'Don't worry too much Hermione; I think that you and Harry are going to make wonderful parents. And if you need help, your father and I will always be there for you. And from what I've seen of Harry's parents I'm sure they will be too.'

At the moment her mother's comforting words reached her, she was hit by another contraction.

'How long did it take?' she asked through gritted teeth. 'For me to be born?'

'You took about 30 hours Hermione,' her mother said. 'I'll ask you this once more and I respect your decision no matter what. Are you sure you want to have the baby here? I'm happy to take you to a normal hospital.'

'I trust Molly,' said Hermione. 'And besides I've got several potions in my bloodstream that may look a little strange if I were to go to a Muggle hospital. They're more than happy to take me to St Mungos, the wizard hospital if they think something is going wrong.'

'Okay sweetie,' her mother said. 'Just one more thing, Hermione. How long are you going to be almost unfindable for?'

'I know it hurts you,' said Hermione. 'I know it hurts you a lot. Unfortunately the answer is not until we're sure that we're going to be safe. Surely you prefer that to us being dead?' Hermione left her mother to ponder that. She knew the whole situation had not been easy at all for her mother especially.

'I'm proud of you no matter what Hermione,' her mother said finally. 'And I can't wait to see my grandchild. Do you want me to stay with you the whole time?'

'Would you?' asked Hermione gratefully. 'I would feel better knowing you were here.' Hermione glanced at her mother. She would understand, even though she wasn't a witch she would understand. 'Mum, I'm so worried that Harry's going to die. I don't know what I would do if he did.' She couldn't keep it inside anymore. She burst into tears. 'I was the one who wanted a baby. But now I don't think I could do it if Harry wasn't here.' Her mother walked over towards her and wrapped her arms around her.

'Hermione, I will always be here for you,' she said. 'Trust me Hermione if something awful was to happen to Harry or to you, your father and I would be there to help you. Or if the worst was to happen we'd be honoured to bring up your child Hermione. But it's not going to come to that.' Her mother was trying to soothe her by running her arm down her back. 'It's okay to cry Hermione, it's



okay to be scared. I understand.'

Her mother held her until she finished sobbing. Strangely enough she did feel better.

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Percy Weasley's head appeared in the fireplace of the sitting room.

'Is my mother around somewhere?' he asked looking at the large assembly of people gathered there.

'Percy,' she said hurriedly. 'Now is not the best time.'

'I won't be long,' he said. 'Listen, they've just said on the wireless that they're making that vaccination compulsory for all boys less than a year old. I strongly don't want Reade to have it until we've proven it's harmless. Penny is going to take him and visit some relatives overseas for a while. I figured you might want to Floo over quickly and say goodbye. We're at Grimmauld Place.' Molly looked over at Harry.

'I won't be long Harry,' she said. 'Let me know immediately if Hermione needs me.' Molly immediately disappeared from the room.

'Wow,' said a voice that Harry didn't recognise. He looked around. It was Hermione's sister. Harry hadn't seen her there when everyone had arrived. He'd only met her twice before.

'Hi,' said Harry. 'I didn't see you there.'

'We didn't want to leave her by herself,' said Hermione's father. 'I hope it's alright.'

'If it wasn't she wouldn't be able to get into the castle,' said Sirius entering the room with his arm around Chrystal. 'What's the occasion?'

'Hermione's having the baby,' explained Harry who was still pacing, just pacing around a different room. 'She's up with her mother at the moment.'

'Oh' replied Sirius. 'No wonder you're creating a pathway through the wooden floor with your pacing.' Chrys gave Sirius a look. 'Oh come on Chrystal, he needs to relax. I'll get him a potion.'

'You'll do no such thing,' said Chrys. 'Wait until it's your turn. I hope Harry will be there to make fun of you.'

Ron found the comment amusing, as did Hermione's father, but no one else seemed to.

'I've managed to organise dinner for everyone,' said Alasdair as he entered the room. 'I thought I heard Sirius and Chrissy.' They turned around at the sound of his voice and Harry watched with some amusement as Alasdair stared at his daughter. 'Have you put on some weight Chrystal or is there something that you haven't told me?'

Ron gave a rather inappropriate chuckle which made Harry feel a little more uncomfortable. Sirius and Chrystal both turned red and the explanations began to fly.

'We're so sorry,' began Sirius.

'We wanted to wait until we were sure that I wasn't going to lose it,' continued Chrys.

'You know like last time,' said Sirius. 'You have to admit Christmas day was rather uncomfortable.'

'And I guess we just forgot after that,' said Chrys.

'We're sorry,' said Sirius.

Alasdair gave out a rather loud laugh which thankfully seemed to break the tension in the room.

'Does Heather know?' he asked.

Sirius shook his head.

'No, I guess we forgot to tell her as well,' said Sirius.

'How many months?' he asked.

'Four,' replied Chrystal with a smile. 'They're due on my birthday.'

'They're?' her father asked.

'Yes,' said Sirius. 'We're having twins. Make up for that family we didn't have a chance to have.'

'You're having twins?' asked Harry. 'You didn't tell me that!'

There was a sense of extreme delight in the room, a nice change from the darkness of the world that surrounded them.

'I think I might check on Hermione,' said Harry with a smile. 'You can all continue your celebrations down here.'

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'How long has it been now Harry?' Hermione asked after the pain stopped. She was exhausted. The potion Molly had given her had worn off. She just wanted the baby to get out.

'Eighteen hours,' he replied as he wiped her forehead. He sounded a little calmer now than he had been earlier.

'How much longer can this possibly go on for?' she asked. 'It's getting worse.' She heard her mother give a little laugh.

'Just think yourself lucky that there's only one Hermione,' he said.

'How are we going now?' asked Molly as she entered the room with a tray of tea for their mothers.

'The contractions are coming about every minute or so,' said Harry.

'I think we're getting a tiny little bit frustrated,' said Lily as Molly waved her wand over Hermione. 'I would be too if I were you Hermione.'

'Well Hermione, I think it's time,' said Molly. 'On the next contraction we're going to try pushing. How does that sound?'

'The sooner we get this child out the better,' said Hermione. Molly positioned Hermione, as she instructed Lily to get ready her various potions and charms.

'I have a good feeling about this child Hermione,' said Molly.

'The contractions coming,' said Hermione grimacing.

'Let's try pushing,' said Molly. 'Ten seconds.' Hermione pushed as Molly counted backwards. She tried to push through the pain. 'Okay stop now.'

'Is it out yet?' asked Hermione with hope rather than belief.

'No not yet,' said Molly. 'Okay let's try again.' It was hard to describe what Hermione felt. The only thing that she was aware of was the searing pain that was tearing through her body. 'Okay stop pushing Hermione. I'm just going to guide the head through.'

'Our baby's coming Hermione,' said Harry excitedly. 'I can see the head and now the shoulders.'

'Why isn't it crying?' she asked anxiously. Surely her baby should be crying. That's what they did in all the movies.

'Don't worry,' said Molly. 'It's not quite ready to yet. You have a baby boy,' she said as she held up the baby so Hermione could see it. He gave a little cry.

'Oh,' said Hermione. She had a little boy. And he was crying. She felt so relieved. Tears began to slide down her cheeks. 'Can I hold him?'

'Harry can I have a hand over here,' said Molly. 'You can have him in a minute Hermione.' She

watched as Molly showed Harry the charm to cut the cord and then as Lily cleaned him up. Lily brought him over to Hermione.

'Here's your son,' she said with a smile. Hermione gently took her son and held him in her arms. The first thing she noticed was his eyes. He had Harry's beautiful green eyes.

'He's ours Harry,' she said looking up at her husband. 'And he's beautiful.' Harry turned and kissed her.

'Yes,' he said before he began to gently stroke their sons head. 'And he's so small.'

'I love you,' she said to her son. 'I love you so much already.'

Hermione didn't even notice her mother, Molly and Lily leaving the room. She was too much in awe of her son. His little fingers and toes. Everything perfect. She lay there staring at him as time slipped away.

'So what are we going to name him?' asked Harry eventually.



They all crowded into the room to gaze at the beautiful little baby with his mother's golden curls and his fathers green eyes.

'Everybody,' said Harry. 'Hermione and I want you to meet Matthew Thomas Potter.'

## **Chapter Thirty A Mother's Duty**

Harry gave everyone time to have a good look at Matthew before he asked them all to be quiet.

'I know this may sound strange,' he said. 'Hermione and I would appreciate it if you didn't tell anybody about Matthew. We don't want him to have to have this vaccine until we know whether or not it's safe. I know this is asking a lot however we can't risk it for now. If people ask you about him, we want you to tell them that Hermione lost the baby.' Harry glanced over at his worried mother-in-law. 'Unfortunately this has to extend to you as well. We don't want to put you at risk.'

Harry watched as everybody nodded in understanding.

'We're sorry to do this to you,' he said. 'However we wouldn't ask if we didn't think it was necessary.'

Harry heard a knock on the door.

'Harry, you have a visitor,' Harry heard Alasdair say. 'It's Dumbledore.'

Harry gave a little smile.

'It's okay,' said Harry. 'He's allowed in.'

'I think it might be time for lunch,' said Chrystal. 'Why don't we go downstairs and eat and give them some time with Dumbledore?'

Everyone piled out of the room as Dumbledore entered.

'It seems you have quite a crowd here,' he remarked.

'They've been sworn to silence, as will you,' said Harry. 'We don't think it's a good idea for anybody to know given what's happening.'

'That seems wise,' said Dumbledore. 'I actually came to speak to your sister; however I guess I am to give you my congratulations.'

'This is Matthew,' said Hermione as she handed him to Dumbledore. 'Matthew Thomas Potter.'

'Nice strong name,' said Dumbledore. Harry watched in awe as he handled the baby. He couldn't believe how natural he seemed. 'I wish you three the best,' he said handing Matty back to Dumbledore. 'I hope it works out better than my family did.' He walked out the door almost a little melancholic.

'His family?' asked Hermione.

Harry gave a little laugh.

'You can't learn everything from books you know,' he said.

'I know that,' she said. 'And you know what happened to his family don't you?'

'Not really,' replied Harry. 'I only know a little. He had a daughter. Voldemort took her, and his wife. He told me to take care of you. To make sure that didn't happen to me.'

'Poor man,' said Hermione. 'Don't worry Harry. I'm not going to do anything stupid. We've got Matty to take care of now.'

There was a knock on the door.

'Who is it?' asked Harry feeling almost as if he and Hermione hadn't had much of a chance to be alone with their son.

'It's Ron,' said a voice that sounded like Ron.

'Come in,' said Harry with a slight grin. It didn't take him long to work out something was bothering

Ron when he looked at his face. 'What's up?'

'I thought you guys would like to see the front page of today's Prophet,' said Ron as he handed it to Harry.

### ***QUIDDITCH IS BACK!***

*The new Minister for Magic, Seth Zabini has lifted the ban on league Quidditch games, effective immediately. The Minister sees no threat to the safety of the players and has ordered that games recommence as soon as is practically possible. Zabini views Quidditch as "something wizards of all ages can hold onto in these dark times."*

Harry glanced at Hermione.

'This is unbelievable,' said Hermione. 'After what happened to poor Flint, I cannot believe they would do this. Are they guaranteeing player safety?'

'I don't think so,' said Ron. 'I just received an owl from our trainer. We're starting back tomorrow.'

'I don't have much of a choice Hermione,' said Harry sensing what her reaction was going to be. 'I made a commitment to the team. You were fine with it remember.'

'I know,' she said. 'But we didn't have Matty then. And there was less danger then. Who knows what you could be exposed to?'

'Plenty of curses and hopefully not a virus,' said Harry. 'I haven't heard anything yet Hermione. Can you at least think about it? I will as well.'

'Okay,' said Hermione. 'I don't want to fight with you. I'm going to put Matthew in his crib. I need some fresh air. I think it might do me some good. Do you mind staying with him?'

'Of course not,' said Harry. 'Go and get some air. He'll be fine with his Daddy.'

Harry watched as Hermione walked out the door. He knew she wasn't one hundred percent happy.

'You have no idea how strange that sounded mate,' said Ron seriously. 'I can't believe you're a father.'

'It's amazing,' said Harry.

'Hermione's not happy,' said Ron. 'With Zabini.'

'Hermione's not happy about a lot of things at the moment Ron,' he said. 'And neither am I.'

'I think Zabini's crazy,' said Ron. 'Either that or he's extremely intelligent and dangerous.'

'I can't help but feel he's about to destroy the world as we know it,' said Harry.

'So what are you going to do?' asked Ron.

'I don't know,' said Harry. 'I just don't know. Either way I'm damned. By Hermione if I do and by the press if I don't. If I just disappear there'll be questions and questions.'

'Listen Harry, take this advice as a friend,' said Ron. 'Follow Percy's lead and don't let them give this vaccine thing to your son. I don't trust Zabini as far as I can throw him and that's not very far.'

Matthew gave out a little cry. Harry went and picked him up and tried to comfort him.

'There, there,' said Harry. 'I'm here.'

'Lee Jordan's back,' said Ron. 'With Blaise. And they're married. I was over at George's the other day. Alicia's in pieces. I don't know what Lee sees in Blaise when he could have had someone like Alicia.'

'Is he going to go back to work with your brothers?' asked Harry ignoring Ron's comment.

'Doubt it,' said Ron. 'Zabini's so rich he doesn't need to and anyhow Blaise is the only child. I'm sure

Lee will be expected to take over the family businesses.'

'Where's your Dad working now?' asked Harry changing the subject.

'He's not,' said Ron. 'Zabini reassigned him to filing duties.'

'I see,' said Harry. 'I'd quit too if I were him.'

'I don't know how he and Mum are going to survive,' said Ron. 'They won't take anything from us. Fred and George have been insisting, however they won't accept it.'

Harry sat in silence for a few seconds gazing out the window. A cool breeze entered the open window.

'There's a storm brewing,' he said. 'I better go and find Hermione.' Harry picked up Matty and walked outside. There was a storm brewing for sure. In more ways than one.

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Lavender wasn't uncomfortable in the room Parvati had placed her in. There was everything she could possibly need, except a wand. The room was lavishly furnished with a large king sized bed, an elaborate dressing table, a desk with numerous quills and ink bottles as well as a little round table which had a beautiful orb sitting on it. The room even had unbreakable windows. She had already tried to put her fist through the window with little success. The clothes Parvati had left for her were obviously Parvati's seconds, yet still were far too pretentious for Lavender's tastes.

Lavender felt the objective was for her to sit and gaze into the Orb, no doubt so that Parvati could pass on Lavender's predictions as her own. Lavender couldn't bring herself to do it. She doubted her ability for the first time for years. She just couldn't see how the stars had not told her that Parvati was a traitor. She was only thankful that she hadn't confided to Parvati about the Covenant. Perhaps there was still a chance for the fall of Voldemort, if only she knew where she had left Hufflepuff's sword. She had seen the sword's used in the final battle and knew that it would only be by the three of them that he could fall.

Lavender knew now that she was alone. She had no one at all now that Parvati had betrayed her. Her father, Seamus and there would be no one from the Order who would care about her now that she had essentially made it so Harry's son would receive that horrid vaccine and die all because she had been jealous of the fact that Harry and Hermione were going to have a beautiful baby boy. She almost couldn't believe she had done it, even though she had foreseen it. If only she had known that she wasn't going to be released, that she was rescued. Then she may not have acted so irrationally. Parvati was kind enough to fill her in on what had been happening in the wizarding world. Many baby boys were dead because of some virus. Interestingly enough Parvati hadn't mentioned anything about Harry's son. He must be born by now.

Parvati opened the door and placed a tray on a dining table which sat in the corner of the room.

'How are we today?' she asked. Lavender remained quiet. 'What have you seen in the Orb?'

'Nothing,' Lavender snapped. 'Has Harry's child died?' The curiosity got the better of her. She knew she shouldn't have spoken. She looked up at Parvati. A sadistic smile came across her face.

'You really haven't seen anything have you?' she said. 'The baby died in childbirth.' Parvati turned and slammed the door behind her. Lavender breathed a sigh of relief. At least Harry was smart enough to tell everyone the baby had died, after all Lavender had seen him alive in her vision.

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Dumbledore entered the drawing room, where Rose was sitting with Ginny. She was a little taken aback to see her headmaster enter the room.

'Hello Rose,' he said. 'Hello Ginny. I was wondering if I could have a few words with Rose? I shan't be long.'

'Of course,' said Ginny standing up and walking towards the door. 'I'll be upstairs when you're finished.'

'Have you made a decision about your final year of school yet?' he asked.

'No,' she said. 'It's not that easy, the more I think about it the more difficult it becomes.'

'I don't want to put any pressure on you to make a decision,' he said. 'However I need to know what you are thinking. I need to send out letters early next week. I want to offer you the position of Head Girl if you think you're up to it.'

'Me?' said Rose with some surprise. 'Why me?'

'Well, you've already demonstrated wonderful leadership skills,' said Dumbledore. 'Additionally if you look at the other prefects you're head and shoulders above the rest.'

'Thank you,' she said. 'I'm flattered. When do I need to let you know by?'

'As soon as possible,' he said. 'Realistically by a fortnight at the latest.'

'Okay,' she said. 'I'll talk to my parents about it. I'll get back to you as soon as possible.'

'Thank you,' he said. 'Don't rush your decision please.'

'I won't,' she said. 'Thank you for speaking with me.'

Rose watched as he left the room. This would make her decision even harder. Everyone had assured her that Hogwarts was one of the safest places she could be. She just wasn't sure. She had to speak with someone who had been in her situation before and had chosen to stay. She needed to speak with her father.

Rose wandered upstairs. She knew her father had been spending a lot of time up in the library trying to catch up on the years he had lost. Personally Rose felt it was a hopeless crusade, he could never be caught up to date but she felt she had to be supportive.

Rose reached the top of the staircase and slowly opened the heavy door. It was dark and musty. The room was colossal with bookshelves built into every wall and large desks interwoven with freestanding bookcases.

'Dad are you in here?' she called out.

Her father appeared from behind one of the bookcases.

'Hello,' he said with a smile. 'To what do I owe this pleasure?'

'How about a chat?' she said.

'Sure,' she said. 'Follow me, we won't be disturbed here.' She followed him as he lead her around what felt like a maze, to a comfortable looking couple of armchairs in what had to be the opposite corner of the room to where she entered.

'So you want to talk to me about Hogwarts?' he asked.

'How did you know?' she asked.

'Father's intuition,' he said. Rose glanced at him suspiciously.

'I put two and two together,' he said. 'Dumbledore was here. No doubt he said something to you.'

'He asked me to be Head Girl,' she said.

'Congratulations,' he said as he stood up to give her a big hug. 'I'm very proud of you.'

'Would you still be proud of me if I turned it down?' she asked.

'Of course,' he replied. 'If that was what you really thought was the best idea.'

'I'm just so unsure,' she said. 'I don't think I'll get the marks I need to become a Healer if I don't go

back to school. On the other hand I'd be so distracted that chances are I won't do that well at all.'

'I see,' he said. He looked to Rose as if he were almost in deep contemplation.

'Why did you go back?' she asked. 'After someone tried to kill you, I mean.'

'You know decisions are always complicated,' he said. 'I felt that I was safe at Hogwarts than I would have been at home. It was different Rose, I only had six months left at school and it was my parents who were threatened. Not really me.' He paused and glanced at her fidgeting hands. 'Then of course there was your mother. We may not have ended up together if I hadn't gone back.'

'That doesn't really help,' said Rose. 'After all there's no one at Hogwarts for me.'

'Well that's what you get for getting involved with someone older than you,' her father said with a slight smile. 'Listen Rose, I know it's a difficult decision. Why don't you talk it through with me? Tell me the good things about Hogwarts.'

'That's easy,' she said. 'There's the teachers, Quidditch, the possibility of being Head Girl. Chances are I'll get into Healer training if I finish out my study at school. Contrast that to the offer for you and Mum to teach me. Well I'm sure the NEWTs have changed since you finished. And I don't like the idea of being taught by my parents.'

'And the downside of Hogwarts?' asked her father without commenting on her answers.

'It's not as safe as here,' she said. 'It's easier for people to study me at school.'

'What about staying here?' he asked.

'No distractions,' she answered immediately. 'I won't have to worry about someone sneaking into the common room at night.'

'But there is a newborn baby,' her father said. 'Matthew will be more of a distraction than you realise.'

'You think I should go back to Hogwarts don't you?' she asked.

'I think you should do what your heart is telling you Rose,' he said. 'I think the main thing stopping you is Ron.'

'He hasn't said anything,' she said rushing to Ron's defence.

'I'm not suggesting he has,' her father replied. 'I'm suggesting that subconsciously you think that your relationship will be easier if you weren't at school.' Her father's comment hit her hard. She knew it was true almost as soon as he suggested it. And like that she knew what she had to do.

'I should go back to school,' she said. 'Too many distractions no matter which way I look at it. If I want any chance of Healer training I need to get good marks. That just won't happen here will it?'

'Probably not,' said her father.

'I need to go back to school,' she said. 'I can always leave if it isn't safe.'

'That's right,' he said. 'You've always got that option Rose. And if you find you're looking over your shoulder all the time we'll work something out. We want you to achieve your dreams Rose.'

She got up and sat down on her father's lap giving him a big hug.

'Thank you,' she said. 'I guess I better go and write a letter to Professor Dumbledore.'

'My pleasure,' he said. 'I'll show you out of this maze. I want to go and see my grandson again.'

As she followed her father out of the library, Rose felt calmer than she had in a long time.

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'You hungry sweetie?' asked Hermione as Matty gave out a little cry. She picked up her precious



child and sat down on what had become her feeding chair. Soon enough Matty was feeding eagerly. Hermione smiled as she watched her son.

'Hey sweetie,' said Harry as he entered the room. 'How's my boy?'

'Hungry,' said Hermione with a smile. 'What's up Harry?'

'How did you know?' he asked.

'There's a tone in your voice,' she said. 'You want to talk about something.'

'Quidditch,' said Harry.

'Thought so,' replied Hermione. 'You're going to play aren't you?'

'Yes,' he said. 'I need to live Hermione.'

'I know,' she said. 'I'm not upset about it Harry.' She wasn't really. 'You need to live. Please just promise me that if you think it's too dangerous you'll stop.'

'Of course Hermione,' he said. 'I wouldn't want you and Matty to be left alone. But Hermione I don't think we need to worry. Lavender said she saw the final battle of the heirs. I can't die before then can I?'

'If you believe in Divination Harry,' said Hermione. 'I'm not saying I don't but I wouldn't put all of my faith in it.'

'I'll be careful,' he said. 'I promise you.'

~~~~~ 1<sup>st</sup> August ~~~~~

Hermione glanced at Matty one more time. He had been irritable all afternoon. Something was wrong with him; Hermione just couldn't put her finger on it. She needed someone with medical experience. Harry wasn't around; he was at Quidditch practice and she couldn't get in touch with Molly. The castle was empty for the first time since they had moved there. She didn't really think she had much of a choice. She couldn't take Matty to St Mungos, she'd have to take him to Madam Pomfrey at Hogwarts. Carefully covering herself and Matty in a Harry's Invisibility Cloak she flooded to Hogsmeade, to George and Katie's place. It was evident that no one was home when she arrived. She was more than a little relieved, it meant that she didn't have to explain herself. She pulled out her wand, opened the door and then made her way towards Hogwarts thankful that dusk was approaching.

Hermione was cautious at every sound she heard. She jumped even though she knew nobody could see her. She was so worried that someone would see Matty and then they would have to let him be vaccinated. Already she knew that six baby boys had died from the vaccine and Neville's initial feedback was not positive. She couldn't reach Hogwarts quickly enough. She crept quietly through the empty corridors until she reached the hospital wing.

Hermione breathed a sigh of relief as she carefully closed the door of the hospital ward behind her. She pulled off the cloak. Seeing that it was empty she called out.

'Madam Pomfrey,' she called with an edge of hysteria to her voice. 'Are you around?'

A couple of minutes later Madam Pomfrey poked her head out of the office door.

'Hermione, it's lovely to see you. How can I help you?' asked Madam Pomfrey.

'It's Matthew,' said Hermione as she pulled him from underneath her other cloak. 'My son. There's something wrong with him.'

'Show me,' said Madam Pomfrey with her arms outstretched. 'Has he had a temperature?'

'No,' said Hermione. 'I've been very careful about that with that virus going around. He's been very irritable. It's really unusual.'

'How old is he?' asked Madam Pomfrey.

'He's about a month,' said Hermione.

She watched almost impatiently as Madam Pomfrey looked over her son.

'He's going to be fine Hermione,' said Madam Pomfrey. 'Don't worry; you did the right thing to be cautious.'

'What's wrong with him?' asked Hermione.

'He's been a little sick recently,' said Madam Pomfrey. 'Nothing to worry about, I promise you. Just a little cold. I want to give him a few potions and cast a protection charm on him. Is that okay?'

'Yes,' said Hermione. 'Anything to make sure he's okay.'

Hermione sat down in Madam Pomfrey's office while she took care of Matty. She felt the relief rush through her body. Too many people had died from this virus of Voldemort's lately. Muggles and Wizards. She didn't want Matty to be one of them.

'Listen Hermione,' said Madam Pomfrey. 'Your son is going to be fine. Why don't you leave him here with me so I can fix him up and go down to Hogsmeade for dinner with the Weasleys? After all you haven't had much adult company lately.' Madam Pomfrey must have sensed her hesitation. 'I promise he'll be fine. You can take him home with you when you get back.'

'I might go for a chat,' said Hermione reluctantly. She didn't really want to leave Matty. 'I won't be more than an hour.'

Hermione had to way up her thoughts as she made her way towards Hogsmeade. As much as she trusted Madam Pomfrey, she wasn't entirely sure she wanted to leave Matty with her, or with anyone except Harry for that matter. However, she did need some fresh air and a chat with Katie would probably do her some good.

She returned to George and Katie's Hogsmeade place and was pleased to see Katie there with Ginny.

'Hi,' said Hermione gently opening the door. 'Do you mind if I drop in for a while?'

'Well you're already here anyway,' said Katie with a smile. 'Come in, I was just about to show Ginny the dress robes I bought for George.' Hermione watched as Katie pulled out a dark blue dress robe.

'What's the occasion?' asked Hermione a little curiously.

'They've been asked to open a store in Dublin,' explained Katie. 'It seems that spending on joke related items has increased in the last few months.'

'Not surprising really,' said Ginny. Hermione was quick to notice the downcast look on her face.

'Have you heard from Draco?' she asked.

'No,' replied Ginny. 'Not that I've really been expecting to. He's well aware that people would be expecting him to contact me. He's going to be in a lot of trouble if a Death Eater finds him.'

'I wish I could tell you it will all work out,' said Katie. 'At least we know he cares about you.'

'Yes,' said Ginny. 'It doesn't make decisions any easier.'

'Do you know what you're going to do yet?' asked Hermione.

'No,' said Ginny. 'I'm waiting for it to dawn on me. Anyhow I'm staying at Grimmauld Place for the moment and I'll probably just end up staying there if I can't come up with anything better. What's Harry doing about Quidditch?'

'He's playing,' said Hermione. 'We can't really offer Thomas Doyle a good reason for him not too.'

And besides when it comes down to it, he may not have much time left. I want him to enjoy it rather than feeling imprisoned.'

'Besides you don't need to worry about it until Lavender's found,' said Ginny. 'Given what she saw in the Orb last year.'

'If you believe in that kind of thing,' replied Hermione.

'Even if you don't Hermione, Lavender seems to have a gift,' said Katie. 'Anyhow where's Matthew?'

'He's at Hogwarts with Madam Pomfrey,' explained Hermione. 'He hasn't been well and I couldn't take him to St Mungos. Actually I should be getting back. He should be awake by now and he'll probably cry if Harry or I aren't around. Besides I need to get home before Harry gets worried. I'll be back to Floo home okay?'

'Okay, Hermione,' said Katie. 'See you when you get back.'

Hermione stood up and hurriedly walked out the door. She hadn't stayed long however she had forgotten to take into account the time it took to walk to Hogsmeade and back. Given she was in a hurry she decided to use the boarded over tunnel which lay where the remains of the Shrieking Shack were. She tapped her wand on the boards three times and watched as they opened to reveal the passage that had once taken them to the truth about Wormtail and Sirius. She felt a little draught as she entered. It was cold down here, even for summer. She walked quickly through the tunnel so preoccupied with Matty that she didn't hear the footsteps behind her. She only turned as she heard someone speak.

*'Petrificus Totalis!'*

## **Chapter Thirty One The Rumbling of War**

Harry walked into the castle after Quidditch practice. Things seemed strangely quiet and very unsettling. He couldn't hear his son. That was strange. Over the past few months he had gotten used to the different sounds Matty would make. His little chuckles and even his different types of crying. Silence was slightly unusual.

'Hermione,' he called out.

'She went out,' said Sirius as he poked his head around the corner. 'I think she took Matty with her. She looked in rather a hurry.'

'But she promised she wouldn't leave the house,' said Harry slightly confused. 'Do you know where she was going?'

'Sorry mate,' replied Sirius. 'I have enough trouble keeping track of my own wife.'

Harry was quite unsure what he was supposed to do. Surely Hermione would have left a note or told someone where she was going. He wandered up to their bedroom. There was nothing. Nothing had been left in Matthew's room either. *What to do?* If he went to look for her, where would he start? Besides, she had probably just gone to her parents place and if she had done that she would be back by tea time. Harry walked back downstairs, still a little mystified.

Ginny appeared in the fireplace. She looked flustered and worried. She had Matty in her arms. Harry could feel his heart sinking. *No. Not Hermione. Please no.*

'Harry,' she said immediately. Ginny's voice sounded flustered and rushed. 'Harry, we can't find Hermione.' Harry just stood there. *No, no, no. She had to be okay.* He didn't know what to say. 'Harry she took Matty to see Madam Pomfrey because he was sick and she couldn't take him to St Mungos. Hermione spent sometime with Katie and me, at George and Katie's while Madam Pomfrey was taking care of Matty and she didn't make it back to Hogwarts.'

'Is Matty alright?' was all that he could say. He still couldn't grasp that Hermione was missing.

'Here,' said Ginny as she handed him to Harry. 'He's fine.'

Harry took his son and held him tightly. He was so precious. So vulnerable.

'We need to find your Mummy mate,' he whispered. Matty just lay quietly in Harry's arms, sleeping soundly despite the chaos that was surrounding him.

By this stage his parents, Rose, Sirius, Chrystal and Alasdair had all assembled in the sitting room.

'What we've done so far isn't much Harry,' said Ginny. 'Katie has gone to find Ron and bring him here. I went to Hogwarts and got Matty and brought him here.' She placed Harry's Invisibility Cloak on the table. 'She had it with her; we're just not sure why she didn't use it.'

'Where did she disappear?' asked Lily taking control. Harry was surprised at how authoritarian-like her voice sounded.

'Near the entrance to the Shrieking Shack tunnel,' replied Ginny. 'That's where I found the cloak.'

Ron, Katie and George made their entrance through the fireplace.

'So we need to start there then,' said Ron as he brushed the dust off his clothes. 'I'll have to let the Ministry know if we can't find her within 48 hours.' Chrystal and Lily nodded.

'We'll go to the tunnel,' said Lily. 'Chrys and I. That's what we're trained to do.'

'Lil, it's too dangerous for you to go,' said James. 'Someone might see you.'

'It would be selfish for me to stay,' she snapped. 'Harry needs me now. And besides it's you that Voldemort wants, not me. I will be fine.'

'I'll go to Hogwarts then,' said Ron trying not to sound worried. 'Harry you should come with me, after we talk to Ginny and Katie. We will find her mate. I promise.' Harry turned to Rose.

'Can you please take care of him?' he said gently handing her Matty.

'Of course,' said Rose. 'Why don't you give me a hand Ginny?'

'Sure,' she replied. 'If you don't need me elsewhere.'

'Okay then,' said Alasdair. 'Here is our base. You report in here before you go anywhere or with any new information.'

Harry kissed his son on the forehead.

'We'll find your Mummy,' he said. 'I promise you.'

Ron nodded at Ginny and Harry before grabbing the Floo powder. First stop George and Katie's.

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Hermione felt a little groggy as she opened her eyes. She couldn't remember much about what had happened, only that she had been cursed on her way back to Hogwarts.

*Where was she?*

She looked around the circular room and saw that she was surrounded by pale grey stone. She put her hand inside her cloak and found that her wand was gone. She placed her hand to her head. She had to get out if only for her son's sake. She had another look around the room. No windows and only one door. She ran over to it and tried to move it. Not only was it locked but it was heavy and unbreakable. She was well and truly trapped.

*How could she have been so stupid?* She should have stayed at Hogwarts or at least used the Invisibility Cloak. *What would happen to Matty if she didn't return? How would Harry cope?*

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Lily and Chrystal arrived at the tunnel. They quickly placed down their bags and began pulling out equipment. Lily gave Chrystal a smile.

'Do you remember when we used to do this all the time?' she asked. 'Just like the old days.'

'Yeah but there were usually a few bodies involved then,' replied Chrys as they tried various pieces of equipment. 'I hope that's not the case this time.'

'It won't be,' said Lily. 'Here we go. Such a simple charm. *Petrificus Totalis*. Well we know what's happened to her. Now the hard part will be finding where they took her and what they plan to do with her.'

'They've levitated her,' replied Chrys biting her lip. 'Perhaps we may be able to track that. We need Ron for that.'

'Well I guess we had better get back to Dunvegan then,' said Lily. 'And wait for him to get back.'

Their arrival at Dunvegan had been preceded by Harry and Ron by only a few minutes.

'We had no luck,' said Ron. 'Although I have to say I didn't really expect any. How did yo go?'

'She got hit with a *Petrificus Totalis* charm,' explained Lily. 'Then she's been levitated somewhere. We need your help to find her.'

'Sure,' said Ron. 'I'll go and get my tracking gear. It won't take long.' He apparated.

'Well if you're tracking, you're having polyjuice,' said James.

Lily shook her head.

'No James,' she said. 'I'm sick of hiding. It's not living. My son needs me at the moment. I am going

to help him and if I'm damned for it then let it be. I am going to find Hermione if it's the last thing I do. A child needs its mother. I don't want another child of my blood to grow up without their mother.' Lily walked out of the room without another sound. Sirius glanced at James.

'She's right you know,' said Sirius. 'I know you don't want to hear it, but it's not her Voldemort wants. She could be a real help here.'

'I know,' James conceded. 'She knows what she's doing when it comes to this kind of thing. I just don't want to lose her. You know what I mean.'

'Yes but I married a headstrong Scottish future Chieftainess,' said Sirius. 'You just married a redhead.'

James gave a small laugh.

'Will you go with them?' asked James.

'I don't know how much help I'll be but certainly,' said Sirius. 'I'll try and get Remus to come as well. As for you, I think you'll have your hands full trying to keep your son from accompanying us.'

'And again the wondrous Padfoot is correct,' said James. 'I had better find Harry now, I suppose. Take care Sirius and make sure you bring those women back for us.'

Sirius watched as James left the room to find Harry. He knew this task was not going to be an easy one. And if he was honest, the chances of finding Hermione alive were probably slim.

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They assembled in the sitting room at Dunvegan Castle an hour later. The solemnity in the air spoke of the seriousness of the situation. They looked at each other and one at a time apparated to the Hogwarts tunnel. Everyone silently went about their business as they quietly worked together trying to locate Hermione.

'Okay,' said Ron. 'The tracking gear is all set up. Now we wait and see.'

Everyone waited in silence as Ron's gadget's did their work. A few minutes passed before they got a result. It was like watching a kettle boil for Sirius.

'Okay,' said Remus. 'We have co-ordinates. Hopefully they didn't cast it more than once otherwise we may have a bit of trouble finding her. Let's get there and find out where it is and what we can do from there. Sirius do you have that picture of Hermione?'

'Yes,' said Sirius. 'Let's hope it's useful.' Remus handed around the co-ordinates.

'Make sure you get it right,' he said. 'We can't afford to be looking for other people as well tonight.'

Once again everybody apparated to the co-ordinates. When they arrived Sirius looked around. It was an old desolate wizarding pub that looked as if it were rarely frequented. Perhaps they might have some luck in here however Sirius doubted it.

Ron ran into the pub. Sirius followed him.

'Did you see a woman with long brown curly hair in here?' Ron asked. Sirius was right behind him. 'Here's her photograph.'

The wizard behind the bar took a good look at the photograph.

'No I don't remember seeing this lovely young lady,' he said. 'And I'm sure I would if I had, if you know what I mean.'

'Okay,' replied Sirius. 'Why don't you guys have a look outside? I think I might have a drink. What do you want?' he asked the barman as he got a few looks from Chrystal and Lily. Luckily Remus seemed to get the hint and dragged them out. Once they had all left the pub he sat down at the bar and began buying drinks for himself and the barman. The barman didn't even notice when Sirius

slipped a few drops from the vial in his cloak into the barman's drink.

Later in the evening the others piled back into the pub.

'Had enough yet Sirius?' asked Chrys.

'Yes,' he replied. 'And so has the barman. If Hermione was here, he didn't see her. He gave me a vague description of some men who were here earlier, but that's about it. He's given us permission to search. Or at least we have until he wakes up to search which gives us about half an hour.'

The pub itself was not too big. There were several rooms upstairs and although it was evident they had been recently used, there wasn't much left behind. A few hairs that looked like they could be Hermione's, but nothing else. At least that was a good start. No blood, no clothes and nothing else that was potentially worrying.

'What do we do now?' asked Ron. 'We've got no leads. We have nothing.'

They tried casting various charms to try and discover a charm that may have been used on Hermione. Many charms had been recently cast in the rooms making the task nearly impossible. Moreover it was very difficult to find one that could have been used on Hermione

'Then we take whatever we can find here and begin with that,' said Remus. 'We cannot do anything else Ron. They must have restrained her somehow and then carried her on foot. Maybe they even drugged her. We may have to face reality and report her disappearance to the Ministry. The way that they're heading anyway they probably already know.'

Crestfallen they looked at each other and realised they had no choice except to return to Dunvegan and tell Harry.

He was waiting by the fireplace when they returned. The look of despair had a temporary gleam of hope as he saw the arrival of everyone. Then the look that overcame his face when he saw Hermione was not there almost broke Sirius' heart. Sirius sat down next to Harry.

'We don't think she's dead,' he said. 'We found some of her hairs and that's about it. Nobody knows where they have taken her yet, but there's nothing else we can do tonight.'

'I think Harry,' began Lily, 'that you should go into the Ministry tomorrow and report her missing. There's not much else we can do without their help.'

'They won't care,' said Harry. The pain he must be feeling was evident in his voice. 'They probably arranged it.'

'I know you're upset Harry,' she said as he began to break down and wail. 'But you need strong for your son.'

Sirius pulled Chrys and Remus out of the room.

'We have a problem,' he said. 'I didn't say anything earlier but we have a lead. I just didn't want Harry to know about it. I think you can be of help here Chrys.'

'How?' she asked looking at her bulging stomach. 'I'm getting to be pretty useless.'

'The barman named one of the men,' he continued ignoring his wife's comment. 'He recognised a Quidditch player. Does the name Tadgh Moran mean anything Chrystal?'

'You think Tadgh's involved?' asked Remus.

'Well you two him better than anybody else in that room,' said Sirius. 'Do you think he's capable of this kind of thing? Chryssy, sweetie, is it possible he could be a Death Eater?'

'Until recently I wouldn't have thought so,' she replied. 'But from the way he behaved I think he might be capable of anything.'

'Do you think he'd talk to you?' asked Remus.

'It's important Chrys,' said Sirius. 'He may be our only chance of finding Hermione. Remus and I are going to find Dumbledore and try and find her as soon as possible. We have no guarantee that they will keep her alive.'

'Okay,' she said. 'I'll do my best.' She kissed him goodbye before promising to let him know where she was. He watched her walk up the stairs.

'Let's hope I haven't just sent her to the devil again,' said Sirius.

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The next morning Harry went to the Ministry. Ron went with him and took him straight to the Auror Headquarters on the second floor. Ron had arranged for Kingsley Shacklebolt to meet them.

He had barely slept the night before. Every time Matty had cried he had tried to comfort him, however the boy seemed to want his mother. He tossed and turned in bed when he wasn't trying to comfort his son. He kept thinking about Hermione and where she could be.

Harry barely said a word the entire time they were there. It seemed that Ron and Kingsley were doing all the talking and that Harry was simply a spectator. In fact he was merely existing.

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It had taken two days but Chrystal finally caught up with Tadgh after one of Puddlemere's practice sessions. Nervously she had approached him and questioned him about Hermione. He had claimed to know nothing; however Chrystal was sure that there was something he was hiding. She had hit a dead wall. If he knew anything it was unlikely he would tell her. She hoped for Hermione's sake that Sirius and Remus had more luck.

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Remus, Sirius and Dumbledore met at Hogwarts.

'We have confirmed that the hair is Hermione's,' said Sirius. 'I took some hair from Hermione's hairbrush to compare. She was definitely there.'

'I wonder how they restrained her,' said Remus. 'From what Sirius found out it sounds like they were having a rather good time in the bar. I doubt anyone would have guarded her.'

'If they knew what they were doing they would have taken her wand for starters,' said Dumbledore. 'After that they probably drugged her. Do we have anything else to go on?'

'Not much,' said Sirius. 'Kingsley has got a friend to have a look at the bits and pieces we found lying around but it's like trying to find a needle in a haystack. We can only go on what they find and hope that it's related to the people who took her.'

'Honestly Dumbledore, this isn't looking good,' said Remus. 'The chances of finding her alive are, well,'

'I know,' interrupted Dumbledore. 'Let's not say it. After all if we keep on looking maybe we'll find something. If we give up,'

'Yes,' said Sirius. 'We'll keep you up to date.'

~~~~~ 29<sup>th</sup> August ~~~~~

'Hi Ginny,' said Harry as he sat down beside her. 'Thank you so much for all your help.'

'It's not a problem Harry,' she replied. 'That's what friends do for each other.'

'I'm glad I have you as a friend Gin,' he said. 'I want to make you an offer.'

Ginny looked at him questioningly.

'Yes?' she asked.



'Well you've done a great job helping Rose with Matty over the last couple of weeks,' he started. 'But she's going back to school next week and I really need to keep looking for Hermione. I need her and this not knowing where she is is killing me. Would you take care of his for me? I'd pay you of course. And you could stay here. You'd be safe here. Even Draco can stay here if it would sway you.'

'You really think I wouldn't do this for you Harry?' she asked him. 'Of course I will. I know how much Hermione means to you. And you're right, it's not like I'm doing anything else. But offering for Draco to live here...'

'He'd be okay here you know Gin,' said Harry. 'And I will pay you. Because looking after my son is hard work.'

'I do know that Harry,' she replied. 'I care about him but I don't even know where he is or who his Secret Keeper is. It's not like he's even tried to see me even though I've been here almost all summer.'

'He can't come here Gin,' said Harry. 'Not at the moment anyway. He's not protected by the charm, even if he is in hiding. If he has been trying to get to you lets hope the fairies haven't got him.'

'What are you talking about?' asked Ginny.

'The fairies,' he said. 'They protect Dunvegan. It's an old tale. Sirius told me about it on his wedding day. Whether it's true or not, well you can only imagine.'

He left the room and Ginny sat wondering just how likely the fairy tale was. Then she laughed. The thought of Draco trapped by fairies was only slightly amusing. She'd have to investigate it a little further.

~~~~~ *1<sup>st</sup> September* ~~~~~

Rose entered the headmaster's office a little apprehensively.

'Hello Rose,' said Dumbledore with a small smile. 'I'd like to introduce you to a new student. She's just been sorted into Gryffindor. This is Guenevere Prewitt; she'll be in seventh year. I hope you'll be able to show her around.'

'Not a problem,' said Rose as she took a quick look at the girl with long black hair and bright blue eyes. Although she really wasn't in the mood to accommodate people she didn't know. She was worried enough about leaving Harry. He had looked so forlorn. She had another look at the girl. 'Come with me, I'll take you down to the Great Hall for the beginning to the feast.' The girl stood up obligingly and followed Rose down the stairs. 'It's a bit unusual for students to start in seventh year,' commented Rose a little louder than she had originally intended.

'I know,' said Guenevere. 'I was at Beauxbatons Academy up until last year. My parent's travel a lot but now they're back in England. My twin is already here. We were always quite competitive so they decided to send us to different schools.' Her manner was almost offhand. 'My brother told me there may be a spot on the Quidditch team, is that right?'

'Yes,' said Rose a little taken back. 'One of our Chasers left last year. Are you interested?'

'Perhaps,' she said. 'I played Seeker at Beauxbatons. I'd like to play, but I don't know if I'd be any good in that position.'

For some reason Rose felt a little sorry for her. She seemed a little lost and quite out of place.

'Listen,' she said. 'I'm Quidditch captain. How about I give you a try out tomorrow and see how you are? It mustn't be easy changing schools so late.'

She shrugged her shoulders.

'My parents were away a lot,' she said. 'Now they're back and with everything else that's happening

at the moment they don't want me too far away.' They had reached the Great Hall. Rose led her to the Gryffindor table, having to stop herself from instinctively looking out for Ginny.

'Welcome to your first and last Welcome feast at Hogwarts,' said Rose as Ewan Prewitt made his way up behind them.

'Good to see you keeping up the family tradition Guen,' said Ewan. Rose glanced around the Great Hall. It seemed very different to the previous year. People didn't look as happy. She felt there was an impending sense of doom. There was no doubt a turning point was approaching soon.

Rose showed the girl around the castle and then to Gryffindor Tower.

'This will be your bed, said Rose as she pointed to an empty bed next to hers. 'Hope you sleep well. I'm sorry to be antisocial but it's been a long summer.' Rose took one more look at the girl before she grabbed her shower things and left the bedroom. She got the feeling it was going to be a long term.

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She felt tired. It was strange. She had totally lost track of time, yet she knew she must have been here for quite a while already. Her heart hurt as she thought of her son growing up without her. It hurt as she thought of all the things she was missing while she was here.

She couldn't believe that nobody had even spoken to her. Once a day a plate of dry bread and a jug of water appeared in her cell but nobody had entered. At least that's what she thought, without a window it was difficult to tell what time of day it was. Her watch had been lost between Hogwarts and her getting here.

The door opened for the first time in what had to be months. A man walked in. Hermione wearily raised her head. She recognised him but she was having trouble placing him. In fact she couldn't be sure she wasn't hallucinating.

'I just thought I'd let you know that Harry is worried sick,' he said. 'He's having trouble concentrating on things, forgetting things. He's falling apart without you.'

Hermione looked at the man.

'Why are you telling me this?' she asked. 'Is this your sadistic way of torturing me?'

'I'm telling you this because he will fall,' he said. The man turned around and slammed the door closed. Hermione gathered all her strength and burst into tears. She knew she was slowly dying and there was nothing she could do about it. She would die alone in this small room while her husband fretted to death and their son suffered.

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Rose watched the girl soar around on her broomstick. She was good. Very good. She could definitely handle a broomstick very well. The only question now was what position to play her in. Although she handled the Quaffle very well it was evident she had never played as a Chaser before. She thought about her existing Seeker, Kirsty, she really didn't mind what position she played she just wanted to play Quidditch. Rose called Kirsty over.

'Do you want to play Seeker or would you rather play Chaser?' asked Rose. Kirsty looked at her questioningly. 'I'm giving you the option. It's not a request.'

The girl looked at the black-haired girl soaring through the sky.

'She's good isn't she,' said Kirsty.

'Yes,' said Rose.

'I don't mind,' said Kirsty. 'You know I'm not the best Seeker. You wouldn't have won so many games last year if you and Ginny hadn't been so good.'

'Okay,' said Rose. She called Guenevere over. 'You can play Seeker. Show me just how good you are.' She released the Snitch from her hand and watched as she retrieved it. 'She's almost as good as Harry,' murmured Rose under her breath.

~~~~~ 15<sup>th</sup> September ~~~~~

Ginny had given a little more thought to Harry's ludicrous suggestion about Draco being trapped by the Dunvegan fairies. As crazy as it sounded she really couldn't think of any other explanation as to where he could be. It was hard for her to believe that he wouldn't have at least tried to come and see her. And if he was still in hiding it wasn't like he could have met someone else.

The day before she had received an owl from Neville Longbottom that was quite perplexing.

*Could you get Draco to contact me if he needs me? Let him know the vaccine is almost finished.*

First of all she couldn't figure out any reason why Draco would need and Neville and on top of that why would Neville suggest that Draco should be with her. Mind you Neville probably didn't know where she was either. She knew Harry was out and would be for most of the day. She had to take care of Matty.

A thought came into her head. If she could try and meet Neville at Grimmauld Place, then she could take Matty without putting him in danger. She quickly scribbled out a message for Neville to meet her there as soon as he was able. She summoned all of Matty's things and flooded instantly to Grimmauld Place.

Ginny walked into the kitchen where wonderful aromas of her mothers home cooking were flowing.

'Hi Mum,' she said. 'Can I stay for lunch?'

'Of course Ginny dear,' said her mother as she threw her apron off to go and hug her daughter. 'What brings you here?'

'I need to talk to Neville, but Harry has training today,' she said indicating Matthew. 'I figured that here would be a safe enough spot.'

'How's everything going?' her mother asked.

'Well this little fellow's doing okay,' she said. 'There are times when I think he's looking for Hermione though, so I've tried to put lots of pictures of her around his room. I think it may be of some comfort to him. Harry's another story. He's a complete mess. And it doesn't help that he keeps getting harassed by reporters at Quidditch practice.'

'So there's no sign yet?' her mother asked.

'Nothing,' said Ginny. 'They lost the trace at an old wizard's pub in Edinburgh. They can't seem to get any further. Ron and Lily are working on it almost non-stop and Harry goes whenever he doesn't have Quidditch. I suggested he take a break from it but he said that and Matthew are the only things that keep him going. He's convinced she's still alive. He said he would be able to feel it if she wasn't.'

'That's probably true,' said her mother. 'Chrystal doesn't think she's dead and I think she has a pretty good idea about these kinds of things. She also thinks Lavender's still alive.'

The door opened and in walked Neville.

'What's the matter Ginny?' he asked.

'Why would I know where Draco was?' she asked handing him his letter. 'I haven't seen him since he came to say goodbye to me.'

'But I,' said Neville a little confused. 'I was his Secret Keeper. I revealed him near the grounds of Dunvegan so he could come and talk to you. In July, Ginny.'

'But that's two months ago,' she said. 'I haven't seen him. Why did you owl me?'

'Because his letters kept getting returned to me,' he said pessimistically. 'And it didn't want to believe he was dead.'

'Maybe he's not,' said Ginny. 'He couldn't get to Dunvegan. He wasn't protected by the charms.'

'What are you talking about?' asked Neville.

'Harry was right,' said Ginny as she felt her heart beating against her skin. 'Draco's been taken by the fairies. I've got to go. Mum I need you to look after Matthew for me.'

With that Ginny handed her mother the baby and sprinted towards the door.

Immediately she apparated back to the castle and began running through the castle and calling out for Chrystal's father.

'Ginevra,' she heard him call out. 'Is something wrong with the baby?'

'Mr McLeod, thank goodness,' she said trying to recapture her breath. 'Is it true what Harry told me about the fairies?'

'The fairies?' asked Mr McLeod

'Harry told me that fairies protect Dunvegan from unwanted visitors,' she said.

'Oh that,' he said. 'Yes that's true. Why are you worried about that? I assure you they won't touch you.'

'It's not me I'm worried about,' she said in a hurry. 'I think Draco came here to see me and well, I don't suppose he knew about the charm.'

'Then we must find him before the mating season,' he said with a look of concern coming over his face. 'Otherwise I fear your friend will be sacrificed for the feast at the beginning of the season. I believe the next season is due to start next week.'

'But I thought fairies were harmless,' said Ginny, suddenly very concerned for Draco's welfare.

'Not these one's I promise you,' said Mr McLeod. 'These ones have metamorphosed. Come with me.' He grabbed Ginny's hand and led her down corridors. She didn't know where they were but got the feeling they were descending awfully deep down underneath the castle. They finally reached an old solid oak door on which Mr McLeod knocked four times and then tapped it with his wand.

It creaked open. Ginny stood back as an empty room was there in front of them.

'It's okay Ginevra,' he said. 'I'll need your help to describe him.'

Ginny reluctantly entered the room. It seemed harmless enough; however there was a funny smell that made Ginny feel rather uncomfortable.

After a couple of minutes a creature entered. If this was a fairy it was unlike anyone she had ever seen before. For starters it was almost as tall as she was. Most fairies only reached a maximum of five inches according to Fantastic Beasts. It had wings but they were funny looking. They seemed more like bird wings rather than her vision of transparent fairy wings. She began to start shaking.

'It's been a while since you entered my domain,' the fairy began. 'What is it you want?'

'We were wondering if you had taken a human captive recently,' he began. 'Describe him Ginevra.'

'He's about this tall,' Ginny indicated. 'He has pale blonde hair, he's pale and he has grey eyes. He has a foul temper.'

'Ah yes,' said the fairy. 'I know the one you mean. His temper is awful.'

'It seems he was unaware of the protection,' explained Mr McLeod. 'He should not have been taken. What would you like in exchange for his return?'

'I shall have to consult the king,' said the fairy. 'If you will wait, I will return.'

After the fairy left Ginny let out the breath she was holding. So Draco was safe. At least for now.

'What will they want?' asked Ginny tentatively.

'I'm not sure,' said Mr McLeod. 'I've never really had this problem. People usually heed the signs and don't walk onto the land if they don't have protection. About one hundred years ago a clan tried to take our land and they all disappeared. My Grandfather wasn't about to free them either, so since then there hasn't really been a problem.'

'Oh,' said Ginny. 'I guess Draco wasn't thinking. He probably wanted to get out of sight as soon as possible.'

The door opened and in walked the fairy and a rather dishevelled looking Draco. His clothes had been torn to pieces; his face was covered in dirt and bruises. Beneath his eyes were dark lines, the telltale sign of little sleep. There were scratches all over his arms. If she hadn't been so worried about him, she probably would have laughed at the sight of him.

'Is this the one?' the fairy asked.

'Yes,' screamed Ginny in delight. 'Yes, that's Draco.' She ran over and wrapped her arms around him. 'Oh Draco I've been so worried.'

'The king would like an exchange,' said the fairy. 'He would like the land underneath Skinidin in which to lay our eggs.'

'Consider it yours,' said Mr McLeod. 'Just make sure that you let me know if you need help with any creatures that may be lurking there.' The fairy left gratefully. 'So you must be the infamous Draco. Welcome to Dunvegan. You look as if you need a good feed. I hope the fairies didn't mistreat you.'

Draco was speechless. Ginny couldn't help but laugh.

'I never thought I'd see the day where Draco Malfoy had nothing to say,' she said with a big smile. 'Come on; let's get some food into you. I hope you realise that you almost became a sacrifice for fairies.'



Later that evening after Draco had cleaned up and Ginny had gone and brought Matthew back, they sat down to have dinner together.

'I'm so sorry Draco,' she said. 'I've spent the last few months being mad at you for not contacting me and the entire time you've been tortured by fairies of all creatures.'

'I find it hard to believe that they were fairies,' he said bluntly. 'They were savages.'

'I hope they didn't damage you irreversibly,' said Ginny gazing at his black eye.

'I'll be fine,' he said. 'Anyhow they treated me much better than the Death Eaters would have if they had found me. I should be thankful.'

'So Neville,' she said. 'Not exactly my choice of a Secret Keeper for you.'

'That was supposed to be the point,' he said. 'Anyhow it served a purpose. Longbottom and I were working on a project together. It meant we could keep doing that without interruption. It gave me something to do rather than sitting around doing nothing.'

'Okay,' she said. 'I've missed you Draco. I've missed you a lot.'

'I've missed you too Ginny,' he said. 'Ginny I don't ever want you out of my sight again.'

'Then I won't leave it again Draco,' she said as she began to cry. 'You mean the world to me.'

Draco put his arms around her. She felt safe again. She knew where she belonged. Right here in Draco Malfoy's arms. Things began to make sense for the first time in a while.

~~~~~ 2<sup>nd</sup> October ~~~~~

The sky had frosted over. The ground below them was white. The air was bitter. Rain sleeted down and turned the snow into mush.

Rose soared through the sky as she passed the Quaffle to Natalie McDonald. She looked around for any sign of the Snitch. In the blisteringly cold weather neither team was having much luck scoring. You couldn't see far enough in front of you to do so. Their only hope of winning was if Guen was able to catch the Snitch. It was so awful that the screaming of the school seemed to be a little softer than usual but maybe Rose was just imaging things. What she wasn't imaging was snow in October. That seemed just more than a little strange.

Then she felt it. That awful cold feeling that nothing was ever going to be good again. That terrible feeling that had haunted her first year at Hogwarts.

*But where were they?*

She frantically looked around her but it was useless. She couldn't see. And the rain began to freeze. She had to get her feet on the ground. She flew in the direction she hoped was downwards as she felt a crash into her and then a whistle. She felt herself plummeting to the ground. She landed on the ground with a thump.

'Ow,' she said as she hit the ground. Pain extended up her leg. It was excruciating.

'I got the Snitch,' said the voice that had hit her. She looked around. It was Guen.

Rose froze. Out of the corner of her eye she saw the telltale black cloak flapping in the wind as it made its way towards them.

'We have to get out of here,' said Rose as she began to shake. 'I don't think I can walk. Are you okay?'

'Just a little sore,' said Guen. 'I think I broke my arm but I can walk. I can levitate you if you need to be.'

'No,' said Rose. 'That won't be necessary. It won't get us away quick enough.' She reached into her pocket and took out a charm.

'*Portus!*' She pointed her wand at the charm and transformed it into a Portkey.

'This will get us out of here.' Guen looked at her strangely through the snow. 'Trust me. Just hold onto it.'

As soon as Rose felt Guen's hand on the charm she too grabbed hold as it transported them safely to Grimmauld Place.

'Thank goodness,' said Guen as they landed on the floor in the drawing room. 'What was happening?'

'I have no idea,' replied Rose. 'All I know is that we need to tell someone so they can go and help. And I need someone to fix my leg or at least give me some painkillers. Listen can you look around the house and look for a lady called Molly Weasley.'

'You mean my aunt,' said Guen.

'Yes,' said Rose with a slight smile. 'Sorry. She should be here. She'll know what to do.' She watched Guen run off as the pain overcame her.

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Sirius stood up alarmed as the ice began to thicken. The rain began to turn into big icicles, some big

enough to do serious damage if they hit anyone. He glanced at the Headmaster.

'What's going on?' he asked.

'I have no idea,' replied the headmaster. 'I cannot see far enough in front of me to determine. I think we had better stop the game. Gather the teachers and we will go down onto the pitch. It may be the only way to discover what's happening. Our students cannot be safe in this weather.'

Sirius nodded and informed the teachers on his stand what they were going to do. It was then that a familiar chilling feeling came over him. He glanced at Chrystal.

'Dementors,' she whispered. 'But where?'

'I think the question is how many,' he said. 'Patronus, now. No time to waste.'

*'Expecto Patronum!'*

The other teachers followed suit and soon a layer of silver shields covered the Quidditch pitch, driving the Dementors away. There were other Patronus' coming from other directions as well. Sirius breathed a sigh of relief. He glanced down at the pitch. Dumbledore was standing in the centre glancing at the school stands. They looked seemingly empty.

'Check on your houses,' called Snape quickly. 'Most of them have probably just passed out.'

'Madam Pomfrey,' said Dumbledore as he appeared back in the stand. 'Go and prepare your hospital. Chrystal,' he whispered a little softer. 'Go and alert the Order.'

'Not necessary,' she said pointing down on the pitch. 'There already here.'

A mass of people had just arrived on the Quidditch pitch armed with wands.

'*Sonorus*' said Dumbledore, pointing to his throat. 'Thank for coming to our aid. If you could please assist the teachers in checking the students in the stands. Your help to carry them to the hospital wing would be greatly appreciated.'

*'Quietus!'*

Sirius immediately walked over to the Gryffindor stand. Many of the students were lying on the ground; Sirius hoped most of them were simply knocked out. He pulled the first child over. He was alive.

*'Mobilicorpus!'* The child's body was levitated in the air ready to be moved to the hospital wing. They went through the same routine. Checking the students were alive and then levitating them ready to be moved to the hospital wing. Those who had had their souls removed were left lying on the ground. Sirius couldn't describe the pain he felt each time he discovered one of the students had been kissed. It brought back memories of lying beside the lake at Hogwarts, himself having almost become a victim. It was unfair that this should happen to someone who still had so much life left to live. Yet Sirius knew all about the injustices of life.

Fortunately many of the older students had not suffered as badly as the younger ones and were able to help the staff and members of the Order in assessing the students and handing out chocolates to the ones who were conscious enough to eat it.

With the help of the Order, the task did not take too long. About an hour later all the unconscious students had been transported to the hospital wing, most having recovered as soon as they could eat chocolate. Looking around though, there was no house unscathed. Not many had been kissed, however Sirius estimated that it was about ten from each house. Not a large number but significant one.

'What should we do with them?' he asked McGonagall indicating to the remaining students. 'It's unlikely they'll recover.'

'I guess we should take them to the isolation wing of the hospital,' she replied. 'Most of them may

never wake up, but those who do should certainly go to St Mungos. It's the best chance they have.'

Slowly the remaining staff levitated one student each, as a mark of respect for what they had lost to the isolation wing. There was nothing they could do for them now. Silently they made their way towards the Great Hall where Dumbledore was waiting to address everyone.

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Guen returned to the room.

'It's okay Rose,' she said. 'Aunty Molly has organised everything. She cast a charm and suddenly heaps of people were here. They're going to apparate as close to Hogwarts as possible and do what ever they can to help. Are you okay?'

'Not really,' said Rose. 'I think I might have done a little more than just break my leg. I think I need to get to St Mungos immediately. Whatever I have done is far beyond my level of skill. Have you learnt to apparate?'

'Yes,' replied Guen. 'My mother thought I might need to know one day.'

'Likewise,' said Rose. 'I think I can so if we just apparate to the alley outside of St Mungos that should be fine.'

The two of them apparated to the alleyway. They glanced at the red brick, old-fashioned Purge and Dowse Ltd. Store with its closed for refurbishment sign relieved to see they had arrived in the right place.

'Wotcher,' said Rose. 'I need to see a Healer.'

The dummy in the window gave a tiny nod and beckoned their entry with its finger. Guen grabbed Rose's hand and they walked into the window. Guen looked at the directory.

'Artefact Injuries,' she said. 'Ah there it is. Broom crashes, Ground floor. Here place your arm around my shoulder. It will be easier.'

Rose obliged and slowly they edged towards the waiting area on the ground floor. Seeing the lines of benches Guen left Rose sitting on the closest one and went to explain to the nurse in charge what had happened.

It wasn't too long until a Healer came and saw her. He levitated her into a room and began to work on her leg. Rose felt a sense of relief now that she was really being looked after. She gratefully lay down on the bed and then fainted.

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'Today has become a tragedy for our school,' he began. 'Someone has breached the bounds of decency and attacked innocent school children. We cannot stand for this. We shall investigate who instigated this and come down upon them with our full wrath. For now however we need to know the status of every student. House prefects will please obtain a list of your house members from Professor McGonagall. You will write next to each person's name whether they are in the Great Hall, the hospital wing or the isolation wing. You are to tell your Head of House immediately when you have finished. If there is anybody unaccounted for you will report to me. No student is to leave the Great Hall except for the Prefects. A feast of chocolate treats will be here shortly. Students I would like you to thank the witches and wizards who have come to our aid.' Dumbledore began to clap and indicated that the students too should do so. 'We are lucky to have these people who would come to our aid. We are grateful for your assistance; however we must now ask you to leave the grounds for our students' safety. Thank you.' Dumbledore watched with a heavy heart as the members of the Order filed out of the Great Hall. He nodded at Mr Filch who would begin a full castle lockdown as soon as they had left. 'I would like all the teachers to come here please. Prefects begin finding your students.'



The staff soon assembled at the staff table.

'I am sure you all understand how serious this is,' said Dumbledore. 'It is important that we discover who is responsible for this. Until that time no one is to enter the grounds unauthorised or leave. No students are to go outside unescorted by a teacher. No teacher is to go outside without informing another member of staff, even you Charlie I'm afraid. All outdoor lessons will be cancelled. The Greenhouses may be reached by the tunnels only. I'm sorry to do this. However we must ensure the safety of our students. The line has been crossed. The war is near.'

He turned and gazed at the hall full of students. What would become to them now? What would become of all them?

## **Chapter Thirty Two Cogadh**

Rose remained unconscious. This made assessment very difficult.

'Did she complain of any pain?' the Healer asked her friend.

'Not that I can remember,' she replied.

'How did she land?' asked the Healer.

'I think she leg hit the ground first,' her friend replied. 'It was difficult to see though. I landed on top of her.'

The Healer immediately began to cast charms over Rose.

'She's lost a lot of blood,' he said. 'She must be bleeding internally.' He pressed a buzzer on the wall and soon a nurse arrived. It was Padma Patel. 'Where was she born?'

'I don't know,' replied her friend. 'I assume she was born in Britain.'

'Were her parents magical?' he asked the girl. She nodded. 'Then her blood should be on file. Padma could you please check and get me some Healers to help immediately.'

The Healer got back to his work as Padma went to find him some blood. He cast charm after charm to try and discover the source. No head injury. Well that was a good start. At least she should wake up with a little fluid. Next he moved onto her neck. He didn't really suspect a spinal injury after all the girl had walked in. Her chest was also fine. He moved on.

'It's her liver,' he said a few minutes later. '*Cruor desino iocineris!*' He cast another charm. Relief came over him. It had worked. She had stopped bleeding. Now all he needed dot do was restore her blood and fix her leg. He began mending her leg when Padma returned.

'She's not on file,' said Padma. 'You'll have to just use a restoration spell.'

'*Instauro!*'

He waited. Colour began to return to his patient's skin. She was going to be fine.

He turned to her friend and explained what had happened. He assured her that Rose would be fine before he left the room with Padma.

'Are you certain that her blood wasn't on there?' he asked.

'I don't make mistakes,' said Padma. 'She wasn't on Britain or Europe.'

'Yet her friend was convinced that her parents were magical,' he said. 'How strange.'

'The girl's name is familiar,' said Padma. 'I remember my sister saying something very strange about the girl. A bit of a scandal if I remember correctly.'

'Rose Heaney,' he said to himself. 'I know. Go and take a blood sample and meet me downstairs in the blood storage room a few minutes.'

Padma quietly obliged. He knew he could trust her. She was very discrete. He knew earlier that the girl's name had sounded familiar. Rose Heaney. He remembered Healer Pye saying something about her parents. It was all rumours at the time, but he couldn't help but think what a scandal it would be if he could prove it. He gazed around the room. A tube of blood for every witch and wizard born in Britain. Just in case anything should happen to them and they needed to quickly create blood. No matter where the child was born, law mandated that they be brought here. He looked around the dusty tubes and located the one he needed.

Padma met him about ten minutes later.

'Are you going to tell me what's going on?' she asked.

'I think this is Sirius Black's daughter,' he said. 'I remember another Healer saying something.'

'She doesn't look like Sirius Black,' remarked Padma.

'Well either way I intend to prove it,' he said. He took the tube of blood from Padma. And pulled out a flask of blue coloured fluid. He carefully poured a drop of blood from each flask.

'If it's true the fluid will turn yellow,' he said. 'If it's not it will turn black. We have to wait about three minutes.' He watched in anticipation as the flask began to change colour. It went black.

'Well you proved you were wrong,' said Padma.

'I guess so,' he said. 'I still need to find out who her parents are.'

'And how are you going to do that?' asked Padma. He led her over to another flask.

'If I pour a drop in here, if her parents have had any connections with St Mungos it should tell us,' he said. He sat and waited. The process could take hours depending on how recently any family had been at St Mungos. And if her parents were dead well the process could take weeks.

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A few staff members at Hogwarts had assembled into the Headmaster's office. It was extremely obvious that he was absolutely furious and with just cause. Sirius himself was trying to keep his emotions under control but that was difficult when you've just found your nephew unconscious. He knew however he had to concentrate on the task at hand. There was nothing he would be able to do for Troy at the moment and perhaps a great deal he could do for the other students. He began pacing the room while they waited for Snape to arrive. The Slytherin House master returned soon enough, once all his students had been accounted for.

'Did you know anything about this?' asked Dumbledore. His voice was raised and Sirius felt almost frightened.

'I swear I knew nothing,' said Snape. 'There is absolutely no way I would have allowed this to happen. I would have sacrificed myself before watching this attempt at massacre.'

'And how many have definitely been kissed then?' asked Dumbledore.

'One from Slytherin,' said Snape. 'Angus Smith. Muggle born. One of the very few in Slytherin.'

'Twelve from Hufflepuff,' said Professor Sprout. 'From first year Thomas Anderson, Michael McCormack, Elizabeth Etheridge and Sarah Grey. From second year Kristy Fenwick, David Stebbins and Andrew Summers. From third year Eve Summerby. From fourth year John Etheridge and from fifth year Elenor Branstone, Laura Madley and Owen Caldwell. Again all Muggle borns.'

'Fifteen from Ravenclaw,' said Professor Flitwick. 'First years Ella Quirke, Erin Turpin, and Samantha Turner. From second year Alison Hua, Colleen Doyle, Sinead Baker and Finian Thomas. From third year Mary Hudson, Liam Keane, Ryan Jones and Douglas Johnstone. Fourth years Alice Chambers, Alexander Hart and from fifth year Orla Quirke and Stewart Ackerley. Also all Muggle born and may I add the only Muggle borns in my house.'

'Ten from Gryffindor,' said Professor McGonagall. 'From first year Emily Cox, Theresa Donald and Jacob Wiliams. From second year Agatha Wilkinson and Simon Brown. From third year Nicholas Leewai, Christopher Gardiner and James Martyn. From fourth year Sean Abercrombie and from fifth year Denis Creevey. Need I say that they're Muggle born?'

'I think the pattern is fairly well established so far,' said Snape. 'How could he do this? It's a ploy to instil even more terror into the battered hearts of the remaining wizarding community. Most of them are so terrified that they are afraid to leave their houses.'

'We are certainly aware of that Severus,' said Dumbledore. 'By my count that is thirty-eight students. However forty students names are not accounted for on these rolls.'

'I apologise Professor,' said McGonagall. 'Molly Weasley told me that Rose Heaney and Guenevere Prewitt have gone to St Mungos. It was Rose that alerted the Order. We shall have to inform their parents.'

Sirius nodded.

'I'll get to it immediately,' he said.

'It may be safe to assume that those who are not Muggle born and who are still unconscious are unlikely to have been kissed,' said Chrystal. 'Given the pattern that is.'

'It seems likely,' said Dumbledore his voice rising. 'I want every stone unturned. Every corner searched. I want to know who was behind this. I specifically want to know who gave the order for this atrocity.' Dumbledore indicated that they should leave. Sirius grabbed Chrystal's hand as they left the room.

'Can you please go and tell my sister and then get in touch with Lily and Claire?' said Sirius. 'Troy is still unconscious. I'm extremely worried about him. I'm going to go and sit by his bed. Try to make up for all the times I wasn't there.' Chrystal hugged him.

'Troy will be fine,' she said. 'He's about as wizard as you can get. And I mean it in the nicest possible way.'

'All the same if he was hurt,' began Sirius as he walked off. 'Just go and find Madeleine please. Take Rechelleigha with you. My niece and nephew are going home. I don't know whether they will be safe there but it's evident that they're not safe here.'

Sirius sat beside his nephew's bed. He had never thought before of just how vulnerable a child was. In front of him was an innocent eleven year old boy who had only been cheering on his house in Quidditch. Sirius knew he hadn't been there for most of this child's life. He had either been in Azkaban, on the run, behind the veil or just preoccupied. He wasn't exactly what he would call family oriented. Yet that was something he wanted to be more than anything. It was time for Sirius to take responsibility for a change.

The boys eyes opened.

'Troy,' Sirius said. 'Tory can you hear me?'

'Yes Uncle Sirius,' he said softly.

'Are you okay?' asked Sirius.

'Yes,' he said. 'I'm sleepy.'

'It's okay Troy,' said Sirius. 'You can sleep as much as you want. I'm going to take you home.'

Sirius scooped up the boy and took him upstairs to his room in the staff quarters. He tossed some Floo powder into the fireplace and took Troy to his sisters.

'Maddie,' he called out. 'Maddie I've got Troy. He's okay.' The entire family came to greet him. Madeleine scooped up Troy and hugged him tightly. 'He just got knocked out.'

'Oh Troy I was so worried,' said Madeleine. 'Thank you Sirius. I was so worried when Chrystal brought Leigha home earlier. But he's okay. Thank you.'

'Perhaps you should put Troy to bed,' said Alec. 'He needs his rest now.'

Madeleine carried Tory off quickly.

'She's been going crazy,' said Alec. 'What do you think will happen now?'

'I think that unless the Dementors chose to attack all by themselves that Dumbledore is going to have to seriously think about shutting down Hogwarts,' said Sirius. 'At least temporarily anyhow.'

'That's a shame,' said Alec. 'Hogwarts is supposed to be one of the safest places in Britain. Where

are our children supposed to be safe if they aren't safe at school?'

'That's a question I don't need to think about,' said his mother. 'I already had to contemplate it once. I don't need to again.'

As Heather Black left the room, the others were left contemplating that thought. They had better find out who was responsible and fast.

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The members of the Order assembled at Grimmauld Place for an emergency meeting a week later. A lot of effort had been put into investigating where the source of the Dementor attack had been. So far they had come up with a lot of dead ends. However new evidence had come to light the evening before and Snape and Arthur Weasley had spent almost the entirety of the past twenty-four hours working on it.

'So it's definite then,' said McGonagall. 'The attack came from the Ministry.'

'Unfortunately,' said Arthur. 'It's was a direct Order from the Minister himself. He planned the attack and ordered it's execution.'

'I worry about this world that we're living in,' said Snape. 'There's no place that's safe from the Dark Lord anymore. Absolutely nowhere.'

'I cannot believe it has come to this,' said McGonagall.

'Then I am afraid the school must be closed,' said Dumbledore. 'The students must be sent home immediately.'

'There is no other choice,' agreed McGonagall. 'They must be sent home.'

'I shall leave immediately,' said Dumbledore. 'We should meet again tomorrow. Do whatever is possible to make sure that everybody is here.' He rushed out of the room and headed straight for Hogwarts.

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Rose awoke still at St Mungos. She slowly got out of the bed and placed her clothes on. She wanted to get out of there as soon as possible. She didn't feel too comfortable lying here while the outside world was falling into pieces. Guen had been in earlier and told her about what was happening at Hogwarts. She found it quite hard to believe. She felt as if he dreams were blowing up in smoke. One year was all she had left. One year in which she needed to excel so she could fulfil her dreams. She had always had a knack for healing. She wanted to make things better and early in her training at Hogwarts she discovered she had a knack for healing people. A knack that would go on unrecognised if she didn't achieve the minimum 5 E's in her NEWTs.

It had tormented her that she couldn't heal herself. Something that should have been so simple to fix if she had simply listened to what her body was telling her. It had been the Dementors. She had always thought Dementors made you live out your worst memories but all she could see was Crabbe's face when he took her from the Quidditch match just under a year ago. Sure she had been frightened when he took her, however he had not mistreated her or hurt her in anyway at all. It was what he represented she supposed. A loss of control like she had never experienced before.

Her Healer walked into the door.

'Well, young lady you had a close call but you're able to leave whenever you fell ready,' he said. He gave her a knowing look that made Rose feel more than a little uncomfortable.

'I'm ready to go now,' she said. 'Thank you for your help. I appreciate it.' The Healer gave her a funny look. 'Is that okay? Is there something that you're not telling me?'

'No,' he said averting his eyes. 'There's nothing wrong with you medically. It is fine for you to leave

whenever you are ready.'

Rose thanked the Healer once again and walked out the door. She looked around the foyer of the hospital and wondered if her dream of working here would ever be fulfilled. She didn't hold much hope now that Hogwarts had been closed.

As she walked out the door of the hospital the Healer's words ran through her head. *There's nothing wrong with you medically.* She wondered what exactly he had meant by that. It seemed a strange thing to say.

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Dumbledore called all the students into the Great Hall.

'Today is a sad day for Hogwarts,' he said. 'I will not drag this on. Unfortunately the school must be closed immediately. You students are no longer safe behind these walls. You will go to your dormitories and pack your things. The Hogwarts Express will be ready to take you back to London in the morning. Your parents have been notified by owl post. I am sorry that we have had to choose this course of action however we have been left without choice. Good luck my students.'

He watched sadly as the students filed slowly out the Great Hall. He had done the only thing he could and yet why did he feel so empty about it. Hogwarts had been his life for so long and yet lately something else had been consuming him. Strangely enough that someone had once been his student and now was his enemy. And this enemy would devour him unless he fought.

The mark had been overstepped. The only option left was war.

The battle outcome would depend on the fall of two people. The Dark Lord and his puppet, the current Minister. One would be achievable; although it would take more than a little bit of effort. The other depended on the strength of one person. A boy who was barely a man who was falling apart at the seams, seemingly without anyway of stitching him back together.

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Everybody was silent in the dining room of Number 12 Grimmauld Place. The past twenty-four hours had been filled with speculation about what would happen now that it was certain that Zabini was working for Voldemort. Now that the time of Dumbledore's announcement had drawn close no one seemed to have the courage to vocalise what they all feared.

War.

Nobody wanted to believe it was an actual possibility and yet it seemed the only course of action.

Dumbledore entered the room. His face and manner were solemn.

'Thank you for all coming,' he began. 'I think you know why we are all here tonight. The unthinkable has happened and we are no longer safe in this world. I have been with my thoughts for most of the day contemplating what the best course of action should be. There appears to be only one answer and as dangerous as it is we have no choice. We no longer live in a world of freedom. We ourselves will become his slaves unless we take action. I am afraid our only course of action is war. Against the Minister and the Ministry as well if necessary.' He paused. There was complete silence in the room. As if everybody was expecting this action. 'This of course is treason. Punishable by a Dementor's Kiss. Although I am willing to risk this consequence there may be others who are not. There is no shame in this. I assure you that it will never be held against you. It is a lot for me to ask from you. However if this is your choice it would be best for you to leave now. To better allow us to plan an appropriate course of action.' Again he paused and there was silence. Nobody stirred. 'Then to war we go.'

Harry tuned out as Dumbledore continued his strategy planning. He hadn't really been listening anyhow. It didn't seem to matter to him anymore. Everyday he was simply going through the motions. Getting up, feeding his son, going to Quidditch training and then returning to spend the

evening with his son. If it wasn't for Matthew he felt he would have given up by now. Any spare moment was spent thinking about Hermione. He kept thinking about the little things. Her touch on his skin, her kiss on his lips, the way she made him feel so amazing. The small little things she said, the way she simply understood everything about him. The way she knew if he'd had a tough day and how she could simply make it better just by being there.

He was useless without her. His thoughts were preoccupied with her. He made mistakes, silly little mistakes that he normally wouldn't make. He knew now after so long that she couldn't possibly be alive. The chances were slim. If she was anywhere near Voldemort the chances were that he would have killed her by now. He could only hope that she hadn't suffered. But knowing Hermione she would have fought back with every breath she had. Her spirit would not allow her to be beaten. It was one of the things that made him love her. She just couldn't be dead. It just wasn't right.

He felt a hand on his shoulder. It was Dumbledore. Everybody had already left.

'How are you holding up Harry?' he asked. Harry could only be honest to Dumbledore. There had never been any way to deceive the old school headmaster.

'I'm not,' he said. Suddenly he felt a lot better. He was no longer alone in his constant world of pain that had encircled him and seemed never ending and that nobody could possibly understand.

'I think she's alive,' said Dumbledore. 'I know it probably doesn't help, however I know how he works. If he had killed her you would know by now.'

'How do you know that?' he asked. It seemed too much to hope for. That Hermione was alive. That he would see her again, hold her again, make love to her without a care in the world. He didn't dare hope because he couldn't cope if she was truly dead.

'Because he's slowly trying to destroy you Harry,' said Dumbledore. 'So that you won't have the strength to fight him when the time comes. He fears you Harry. He knows that the best way to defeat you is to destroy you by using the most vulnerable part of human nature. Trust me Harry, you would know if she were dead. When he killed my wife I knew almost instantly. I could feel her dying. I've seen you and Hermione. You have the same chemistry. Do you think she is dead?'

'Logically, my brain is telling me that she has to be,' he replied, as tears began to pour down his face. 'My heart tells me she isn't and that I should be out there doing my best to try and find her. Instead I feel as if I am simply a shadow. Going through each day with no purpose. But I just can't believe she is dead.'

'Then I believe she is alive,' said Dumbledore. 'And I guarantee you that wherever she is she will be close to Voldemort. Don't let him destroy you Harry; don't let him destroy you the way he destroyed me. You are our hope. We can only do so much. The rest unfortunately is up to you.'

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They had crept into the Ministry late at night. They had made sure that all the staff on duty that evening were friendly to their cause. It had taken weeks to find a night when the exact combination had been on however the wait was essential. What they were doing was treason. They would pay for it with their lives if they were caught. Many of the people there already felt that they had no future if the wizarding world continued down its current path anyhow, nevertheless that did not lessen the adrenaline that was pumping through the veins of every single member on the operation.

It was hard to relax when you were acting on information provided by Cornelius Fudge and everybody in the operation knew that. The problem was only Fudge could possibly provide them with the information they required to complete this task. Fudge had obviously thought that an alliance with Dumbledore was his only chance of either reclaiming the position of Minister for himself or putting up someone who would be in all respects his puppet. There was no way Zabini would resign and hence the only way for him to no longer be Minister would be for him to die or to be overthrown. Secretly the Order were hoping for the opportunity to overthrow him. Hopefully

that would occur in the next few weeks.

All around the Ministry that evening members of the Order were changing the Ministry. Tomorrow, many wizards and witches would try to apparate to the Ministry and find they no longer could. The explanation would be simple however. The largest hiding spell that Dumbledore had ever performed in his life, a charm quite similar to that which hid the headquarters of the Order.

Meanwhile the group continued to move further up into the Ministry. Harry knew where they were going. The Prophecy Room in the Department of Mysteries. Harry had not been there since that fateful day with Voldemort in his fifth year. He didn't have to work too hard to push that out of his mind though. There were many other thoughts circling through there, mainly related to Hermione and their son. He had thought about what Dumbledore had said and was determined to fight the thoughts that were haunting him. He would be no use to either if he allowed his fears to consume him.

That's why he had volunteered for this mission. Dumbledore had asked him if he was sure he wanted to undertake it. He was absolutely certain. If they succeeded today they would be one step closer to ending the injustices of the world.

They reached the room and Sirius began to quietly move all the shelving away from the walls. Fudge had told them that behind one of the walls lay a secret office which revealed the location of the Minister at any given time. If it was still there and accessible they would have Zabini. It would only take time.

Sirius found a wall that opened and revealed a small dirt pathway.

*'Lumos!'*

Sirius' wand lit up and revealed little more than they had already seen. The others in the party followed Sirius' lead and moved slowly down the pathway. They kept walking slowly and slowly winding round in circles for what seemed like hours. Harry totally lost his bearings as they continued to wind down the passages. Finally they came to a door.

'Now we see if Fudge is helping or hindering,' said Ron.

Together Harry watched as Remus and Sirius cast a combined charm on the door which slowly creaked open to reveal its contents. The room was a small one. In the centre of the room was a single Orb, laid on a round table with a dark red cloth lying on top of it. Sirius glanced at the Orb. A big smile appeared on his face.

'We've got him,' he said with a smile.

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The next day the Puddlemere Players were at Quality Quidditch Supplies in Diagon Alley to promote their upcoming game but Harry felt that it was more amusement than a chore. There was absolute pandemonium on the street. It seemed as if every witch or wizard that had tried to get to the Ministry that morning had migrated to the Leaky Cauldron to try and figure out what was going on. People were in the street once again, when only a week ago it had been almost completely empty. It was if they could sense a shift in the balance of power.

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Chrystal had stormed around the castle all day. She wasn't very impressed whatsoever. Stay in the castle and wait. Wait for what exactly? For her to have the babies or for the war to end that's what. She picked up her dinner plate and launched at the wall.

Sirius had cast quite a frustrating charm on her. It prevented her from going anywhere that was not an ancestral home of her family. He had done it in such a way that only he could reverse the charm and that meant that she was stuck at Dunvegan until Sirius returned to reverse the charm. She didn't want to think about what would happen if he didn't. forced to remain in this castle until the end of



her days.

'What on earth is wrong?' her father asked.

'I just feel so helpless,' she said. 'It's so frustrating. I'm bored.'

'You could spend this time thinking about how you could stop being so selfish,' he said.

'Me, selfish?' she said her temper rising.

'Yes,' he said. 'Look Chrystal you're my daughter and I love you, but it's about time someone broke that little bubble around your head. Yes you're selfish. If you for a moment thought about others then your first consideration would be for your children. You didn't in the past and we all know what happened then. You lost them. And if you go out there on your high horse trying to save the day then the same thing will happen just as it has before.'

She just sat there staring at him.

'You could really help Chrystal,' he continued. 'That curse you complain about. That curse of your mother's could really help.'

'Don't you bring her into this,' said Chrystal as her eyes narrowed in on her father's gaze.

'Don't tell me you don't know where he is Chrystal,' he said. 'I can tell there's something wrong with you. That cross for starters, I've seen it once before. On your mother of all people. Chrystal, your mother gave her life for yours. She sacrificed everything for you so that that man would not, no could not kill you. And she died rather than to tell you this. I've tried to respect her wishes and not tell you that but I can't ignore your blindness anymore. Wake up to yourself and do something useful for a change. Use your Celtic magic to find Hermione for instance.'

She watched as he walked out of the room. No one ever likes things thrown in her face and she felt like a she had been hit with a slab of concrete. She replayed things in her mind over and over. She had been so stupid. She knew exactly where Hermione was and could have worked it out if only she had been thinking straight. Hermione was in the only place she could actually get to under Sirius' stupid curse. She would never forgive herself if Hermione was dead.

## **Chapter Thirty Three The Challenge of Gruffydd**

*"This may be our chance to ensnare our clever friend."*

*(Phantom of the Opera, Andrew Lloyd Webber)*

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Early in the morning Lavender was awoken by a contingent of wizard guards. They roughly forced her out of the room and into Parvati and her husband's sitting room.

"Where are you taking me?" Lavender finally asked. She didn't think she could cope with this much longer.

"It is no concern of yours," said Parvati's husband. Lavender looked at her old friend standing behind her husband.

"Parvati, please," she pleaded. "It's not like I'm going to tell anybody. What do you think I can do? You've left me virtually powerless."

"You're going to face your destiny me dear friend," said Parvati in a manner that Lavender had never heard her friend speak. "It is time. My master has sent for you." Lavender closed her eyes in surrender. The Dark Lord himself had summoned her and now all she could hope for was a miracle that would change the horrific world she had foreseen.

"I cannot foresee beyond my death Parvati," she said calmly as she watched Parvati rub her hand over her very pregnant stomach. "But I can guarantee you that before I die your family will fall. For the sake of your child you had better hope that my death does not come soon."

Parvati glanced at her for a while.

"You're bluffing," she whispered harshly into Lavender's ear. "You're hoping that it will get me to disobey my husband and my lord."

"You'll find out soon enough," said Lavender, knowing that she held only a slight upper hand. "Never underestimate the power of Hufflepuff."

"Take her away," said Parvati. "Quickly. Get her out of my sight."

Lavender did not resist as the guards led her away. She knew it would be of no use. She summoned all her bad will towards Parvati and prayed that what she had foreseen would come true.

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Hermione felt weak. Her body felt as if every single drop of life was being slowly drawn out, taking as long as it could until it eventually killed her. She was beginning to understand the true meaning of the word torture. Each day brought her closer to a nothingness she had never felt before. She tried not to think about what the future held for her. She knew what it was though. A slow, painful death without her husband and her son. It was inevitable now. If they were going to find her they would have by now. For all she knew, Voldemort had defeated Harry and nobody had told her to keep her existing in her state of nothingness.

Her heart had given up. *What was the point?* She was wasting her time here. She needed something to bring an end to the never-ending pain. She glanced around the room as she did everyday trying to find a way to end her miserable existence. And yet everyday there was nothing. Her meals consisted of old bread and water, served on a wooden plate and in a wooden cup. It was barely enough to keep her from hunger, but for many days now she had no longer been able to eat. Her body was wasting away slowly and it only added to her pain. Her breasts were no longer swollen and she felt immense pain at the thought that if Matty was here she would not be able to feed him.

She sat there staring at the wall. She hoped that it would end today, as she hoped every day. She

closed her eyes and thought of the times when she and Harry were innocent, in their first year at Hogwarts. If only they could go back to those times. There were so many things unsaid.

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They had gathered at a large stone eagle statue that appeared to be the gateway to a colossal estate hidden by unclimbable stone walls. Dressed in black robes and black clothing, most of them blended into the darkness that surrounded them.

Little had been said as they had headed to Zabini's secret refuge where he had spent most of his time since the Ministry had been overtaken. Everybody in the operation knew that this was the turning point for them and their family. If they were overpowered then they would be branded traitors and executed for their actions. But the world was no longer safe for them and many people viewed death as a better option to living in the current climate.

Harry didn't quite feel that way. His life had felt for months as if it lacked purpose however since Dumbledore's kind-hearted words the other night he felt more alive than he had felt for a while. His purpose in life was to bring Hermione home, and to do this he would need to defeat Voldemort. He was no longer afraid of the outcome of his inevitable battle with the most feared wizard of all ages. Any outcome would be better than the life many were living now.

The group assembled for this operation was the largest that the Order had ever assembled. There was some chance that this could be a simple matter. Zabini would be there alone, unguarded believing that he was safe with his magic traps that they had all the antidotes for. Or he could be heavily guarded and they could be overpowered. There were many people in the group that Harry cared a great deal for. So many people who had been extremely influential in his path as a wizard. They could be wiped out in one foul swoop if they were unlucky and the Order would fall. The last of the witches and wizards who stood for the good in the world.

"Attention everybody," called Arthur Weasley. "As soon as we disable the first trap we are potentially at risk. Everybody pay attention to your surroundings. Do not stop concentrating for a second."

Arthur Wesley chanted the first counter curse. Harry had his wand at the ready. The large stone eagle spread its wings to reveal an entrance into the surrounding gardens. Suddenly they were bombarded with curses. Harry began chanting counter curses as quickly as he could. The plan was to stun people or to freeze them rather than to injure them. He was concentrating hard on casting curses and hoping that he hit the guards. In the light it was difficult but most of Zabini's guards were dressed in green robes making it easier to distinguish between them. Thirty minutes later all the guards were stunned and they were ready to move onto the next trap.

"We can expect this many guards again," said Arthur Weasley. He pointed at Fred, George and Percy. "Round up all the stunned ones and tie them up. Make sure you remove their wands." He then pointed at Katie and Angelina. "Take care of our injured. Leave anyone who's dead. Rejoin us as soon as you can. We need as many people as we can get." He divided the group into halves. He pointed at the other one. "I want this half to remain here in case he tries to escape. The other half, come inside with me."

Remus chanted the incantation that opened the door to the house. Harry braced himself for a further onslaught but there was none. The members of the Order flooded into the house and began to tear it to pieces searching for Zabini. *Remember the incantations for the traps.* It kept running through Harry's mind. *Stay alert!* He grabbed Ron's shoulder.

"We'll look upstairs," he said.

"Right," said Ron. "Let's go."

Harry cast the incantation to unblock the stairs and found that it had already been performed. He thought it a little strange but they pressed on. They searched the first room. Nothing. They searched

the next. Again nothing. As they moved up the corridor the same pattern kept on recurring. Incantation to clean the room, open the door and then nothing. He and Ron moved onto the tenth door. He paused. He glanced at Ron. The noise coming from the room was loud enough that Harry was surprised the entire party couldn't hear it. He opened the door carefully to find Alicia there.

"Weren't you outside with us?" asked Ron rather forcefully.

"I crept in while the fighting was going on outside," she said. "I wanted to find this creep."

In the corner of the room was Lee. He looked as if he had been stunned.

"If he's stunned why are you screaming at him?" asked Ron.

"He can hear everything," said Alicia. "I've paralysed him from the neck down. I can't believe he left me for this." She sat down on the bed and began to cry. "Why Lee? Why did you do this?"

He said nothing.

"We'll leave you be Alicia," said Harry.

"Yeah," said Ron reluctantly. "Just don't kill him. I want to make sure he goes to trial."

Harry and Ron moved onto the next room. Again there was nothing. There was nothing in any room on the entire floor. They made their way back downstairs where Remus and Sirius were waiting along with some other people.

"Nothing down here," said Remus. "How about up there?"

"Alicia found Lee," said Harry.

"I pity Lee then," said Sirius. "There are still some people searching the basement. Other than that everybody else is helping to round up the stunned guards."

"Do you think he's gone?" asked Harry.

"Honestly Harry I don't know," said Sirius. "We made the surrounding wall impermeable, so he can't get out that way. There's no way to Floo in or out of here and we cast that anti-Apparition charm. There are hundreds of witches and wizards in the gardens so if he's anywhere there they're going to find him."

At that moment Arthur Weasley emerged with a stunned Zabini.

"I'm certainly not as young as I used to be," said Arthur breathing heavily. "Is the Wizengamot ready for him?"

"Dumbledore was setting up as we left," said Remus. "We can try him tonight."

"Good," said Arthur. "How are they going outside?"

"Almost done I think," said Sirius. "Come on; let's get Zabini to the Ministry. The others can finish up here. Harry and Ron, we will meet you there in about half an hour."

"Half an hour," said Ron. "What are we supposed to do until then?"

"Well I for one am going to check on my son," said Harry. "See how Ginny is as well and let her know what happened. You know she'll be worried sick."

"Fair point," said Ron. "Although I'm sure Matthew will have kept her busy."

"The poor kid knows his mother isn't there," said Harry.

"I know mate," said Ron. "We haven't given up on her yet."

They apparated to Dunvegan and were quickly embraced by Ginny.

"Thank goodness you're both okay," she said. "I've been worried sick. Did you get him?"

"Yes," said Ron. "We got Zabini and Lee Jordan. I don't know about Blaise. And before you ask

Draco is fine. Worse luck there."

"Well Harry Matty has slept really well," she said. "He seems a bit more settled tonight. Maybe he knows things are finally looking up for us."

"Maybe," said Harry. "We're going to sit on the Wizengamot. Do you want to come?"

"What about Matty?" asked Ginny.

"Let's take him with us," said Harry. "I can always take him out if he starts to cry."

"Okay," said Ginny. "We can Floo in then."

They flooded into the Ministry and made their way down to the Wizengamot court room. Sirius was waiting there for them.

"You sure this is the right place for a baby Harry?" asked Sirius.

"He's got to learn sometime," said Ron.

"I guess so," said Sirius with a smile. "I guess so."

They took seats towards the back of the room and near the door in case Matty started fussing. There was a strange kind of electricity in the air. The room was full of people and Harry couldn't help but wonder how Dumbledore had arranged all of this for the middle of the night. Harry hoped that the members of the Wizengamot would be reasonable and ensure that Zabini paid for his crimes. After all he had conspired with Voldemort and from what they found in his office at the Ministry and in his hideaway there was sufficient evidence for him to be kissed.

There was a hush as the members of the Wizengamot entered the courtroom. There was absolute silence as the unstunned Zabini was brought in.

Harry didn't take in that much of the trial itself. He sat in amazement as witness after witness presented testimony against Zabini. He wondered how they could have found out all this information.

The Wizengamot filed out and filed back in within minutes.

A wizard Harry didn't recognise stood up.

"Seth Zabini," he began. "On all the charges brought before you this court finds you guilty. You are sentenced to death. This sentence will be carried out first thing in the morning." An unnerving silence came over the entire room.

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Members of the public had crowded the square. In all his days he had never seen anything like it before. So many people had gathered in this public execution square that yesterday he hadn't even known of its existence. Entire families were there. He couldn't believe people had brought their children. This was something they didn't need to see. He would never have contemplated bringing his son. The drums began to beat. The loud pounding sent shivers down his spine. Lee was brought out before his father in law. He was cloaked in a long black robe. On his face he wore the look of a doomed man. He couldn't help but recall the innocent boy he once was before evil had claimed his soul. He was led to the chopping block. He did not struggle as they tied him down. The executioner was brought in, a hooded man in a black robe, carrying his axe on his shoulder. He wasted no time. Within seconds Lee was no more.

The Minister was brought out next. He did not have the same look of defeat as his son-in-law. In fact he almost looked triumphant. Again the crowd watched again as the axeman swung. The crowd erupted into cheers. The witch hunt had begun. He would look back on this day as the day the world changed.

The Dark Lord was furious as he watched from a distance. His puppet king had made a mockery of

him. First the Ministry being overthrown and now this. He couldn't believe the stupid fool had gone and gotten himself executed. He knew this would bring hope back into the stupid fools hearts. He would have to act fast before they began to believe they could overthrow him. He had waited far too long to have his victory. He quickly left the area and headed for his castle. He headed quickly for his library. The text he needed was quickly found and consulted the necessary pages. There it was. The challenge of Gruffydd. It was an ancient challenge but one they would be familiar with. He only hoped that he could rely on his supporters. Once issued the challenge meant imminent war. The only way it could be avoided would be if the wizard challenged refused. Historically this was unlikely. The challenge was never refused. It was a bold move but he had limited options. His time to win this war was running out.

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The sound at the door did not startle Hermione. When she recognised the face behind the door she almost couldn't contain her joy.

"Shh," said Chrys putting her finger to her lips. "You don't want anyone to hear." Hermione watched as Chrystal sealed the door behind them. "I have to get you out of here carefully."

"How did you find me?" asked Hermione. "I feel like I've been here for months."

"Actually I hate to tell you that you have," said Chrys. "Don't worry, Harry and Matty are fine. Harry has been looking for you for ages. Ginny has been helping him with Matty. She's been great with him." Hermione didn't like the sound of that. She had been missing for months and as much as she liked Ginny, she did not like the sound of Ginny being great with her son. Chrystal's voice interrupted her thoughts.

"Now you'll have plenty of time to talk to him later, for now we need to concentrate on getting you out of here. It's not going to be easy. I can't apparate and quite frankly Hermione you don't look like you have the strength to."

"I doubt I'll be able to move too much," said Hermione. "I've barely eaten anything. I must look shocking."

"You need a good feed," said Chrys with a pained look on her face. "I'm sure that can be arranged when we get out of here."

Hermione gave a small smile.

"Are you alright?" she asked as the pain grew on Chrystal's face.

"I'll be better when we get somewhere a little more secure," she said grimacing. "Come on, we only have a small window of time in which to get out of here." She pulled out Harry's Invisibility Cloak. "This has come to be quite handy hasn't it? He can see through it Hermione, he isn't here at the moment so we have to hurry. We need to be careful; I have no idea what we will encounter out there."

Hermione quickly joined Chrystal under the coat and soon enough they were out of the prison that had held her for so long. They slowly made their way down the numerous staircases of the castle. It was difficult and took a long time because they were both weak and trying to stay covered by the cloak. When they finally reached the bottom of the staircases Hermione felt as if she had walked down a hundred staircases. But she could see sunlight. That was something she hadn't seen for such a long time. It was exhilarating.

"Okay Hermione," whispered Chrystal. "There are usually a few guards at the door. We can't curse them because we don't want anyone to know I've come and taken you. Voldemort mustn't know. It gives us an advantage. We'll have to sneak past them okay? That means waiting for someone to open the door."

"Okay," Hermione whispered.

They slowly made their way towards the door from which the sunbeams were streaming. Hermione saw the door and wished she could open it and run far, far away from this awful place. But she patiently waited. It was one of the most difficult things she'd ever done. Finally after what seemed like ages someone opened the door. Hermione held onto Chrys tightly as they snuck through the door.

Suddenly Hermione's hand brushed against the door resulting in a large knocking sound. She silently cursed herself unable to believe she had been so stupid. The guard looked towards them. Hermione remained very still.

"Must be hearing things," he said shaking his head as he walked back to his post. Hermione breathed a sigh of relief. She and Chrys continued to creep out and barely made it out before the guard returned and closed the door. They hurried towards the bushes.

"Keep walking," said Chrystal. "Don't look back but try and remember where we are."

Hermione obliged and kept on walking. They walked for hours and Hermione was becoming bewildered. She had absolutely no idea where they were going or where they had been. Finally Chrystal took the cloak off.

"We should be safe now," she said with a strained voice. "I just hope they haven't realised that you're gone. We'll stay here for now. Just over there, in that hut." Hermione saw the hut that Chrystal was pointing at. It looked worn down and not like a safe place to hide at all. Nonetheless Hermione followed into the hut, which did not appear so bad on the inside. Chrystal walked into the hut and collapsed onto the bed. Hermione followed. She glanced at Chrystal. She wasn't well. She looked pale and there was something about the expression on her face that was quite disturbing.

"We need to get you to a Healer Chrys," she said. "You don't look very good."

"I'm fine, Hermione," she said. "I'm just in labour."

"I need to get someone then," said Hermione. She was beginning to panic.

"There is no one Hermione," said Chrystal. "I'm sorry, but things are a mess. It could take you hours to find someone to help, even longer given the state you're in. There's a war on Hermione. You're going to have to help me. I'm sorry."

"But I don't know what to do," she said. "I haven't got the slightest idea."

"Listen Hermione, I know this is difficult," said Chrystal through her deep breathing. "You've had a baby, you at least know a little. So have I." Hermione glanced at her in surprise. "Don't ask any questions Hermione. Please. There are some things that are better left in the past. If you really need to know I'll explain later. Right now I need you here to help me." She pulled out her wand from underneath her cloak. "Use it to summon whatever you need. Why don't you summon yourself a book on midwifery or something? It may help. And please summon yourself some food."

Hermione took a few deep breaths. She was not liking this situation at all. But she could handle it. If she could handle months of solitude she knew she could handle this.

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They had surrounded Laugharne Castle. There was no way in or out of here now. So far the siege had lasted three days. Everyone was exhausted but their efforts were going to pay off. They were sure that Pye was in there. It had not been easy finding Dementors who would swear loyalty to the new Ministry however it had been necessary. The Ministry had learnt from their past mistakes. The Dark Lord's followers must be dealt with harshly. He would not be allowed to rise again.

Ron and Tonks led two parties into the castle. There had been enough evidence at Zabini's secret hide away to put both Parvati and her husband away for numerous life sentences. The castle felt eerily empty to Ron as they carefully made their way through the dark castle. They had drained the castle of magic over the past few days using extremely complex magic. It had appeared to work

quite successfully.

"I guess we better try upstairs," said Tonks. "I'll try Pye's rooms. Are you okay to search Parvati's?"

"Yes," said Ron. "It's fine."

It didn't take too long for Ron to find the bolted door of Parvati's bedroom. The map they had given had been quite accurate. He blasted the door open and found Parvati sitting on her bed crying. She screamed as the door exploded.

Ron had not seen her for quite a while and was momentarily stunned when he saw that she was pregnant. He glanced at the Dementors and sent them in.

"Parvati Pye, you are under arrest for crimes committed against the British wizard community," said Ron. "You will be taken to Ministry cells immediately where you will remain until trial."

"Please Ron," she pleaded. "It wasn't my fault. They made me. Please Ron."

"Take her away, immediately," he replied his voice shaking. "You will have no sympathy from me Parvati. You made your bed. Now lie in it." Arresting his own classmate was one of the hardest things he'd ever had to do. But it had been her doing and now was not the time to show sympathy.

Ron followed the Dementors as they escorted Parvati out of her home. He met Tonks at the entrance with Pye in hand. She sent the Dementors away with some guards and their captives.

"You okay Ron?" she asked. "It's always harder when it's someone you know."

"I hadn't seen her in a while," he said. "I didn't even know she was pregnant. How could everyone have drifted so far apart so quickly?"

"It's sad isn't it," she said genuinely. "Come on, we had better report in. This is only the start of this. We have a lot of work yet to do."

Ron could not face the square the next day when they hanged the pregnant Parvati and her husband. The reality of the world they lived in was getting a little to close for comfort for Ron. He went back to Dunvegan for a few hours rest and lay in the fields contemplating how his life had suddenly changed so much.

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They carefully read the terms of the challenge.

"We can only assume this means he's afraid of losing," said Dumbledore. "A challenge such as this is never to be taken lightly."

"We have no choice but to accept," said Lily. Everyone turned and stared at her. "I know that if we accept people will die. But I also know that a great deal more will die if we don't accept. If this were not a binding challenge I would just ignore it, however this may our chance."

"Victory will not be easy," said Sirius. "However the timing could not be better. People are beginning to forget how powerful Voldemort is. Executing Zabini has gone a long way towards that. The Death Eaters are getting worried and there's no guarantee that Voldemort can rely on his supporters."

"This is a battle we can win," said Arthur Weasley. "It's just whether or not it will win us the war. I fear only Harry can win that for us."

"Who shall we send then?" asked James. "To accept the challenge."

"I'll go," said Lily. "It will throw him off guard. Don't look at me like that James. He can't harm me; it's in the terms of the challenge."

"Are you sure this is what you want Lily?" asked Dumbledore.

"I can't hide forever," she said. "It's time to take a risk."



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Hermione had summoned everything she thought she would need. Clean sheets, towels and wood. She had located an old kettle and had put some water in to boil. She knew she would need to sterilise the scissors to cut the cords. That was about all she knew about birthing. She hoped that when the time came that everything would run as smoothly as possible. Realistically she knew that was unlikely. She collected everything she thought she would need and made her way back to the bedroom. She had to keep telling herself to breathe calmly. Chrys was lying on the bed looking wretched.

"Sorry it took so long," she said. "I was trying to make sure I had everything. I think we're right."

"That's fine," she said. "I appreciate everything you're doing." There was silence as she tended to the necessary things. "You want to ask me something don't you?"

"Surely I'm not that transparent am I?" she asked.

"You're forgetting that I'm a Celt," replied Chrys. "It was a long time ago. Just after Sirius went to Azkaban. He didn't know. I was going to tell him the night that Lily and James were killed. Everything was such a mess. I was young and scared and didn't know what I was doing. Besides everyone would have known who the father was. My poor child would have been hated from the moment it was born. That would hardly have been fair. I made the choice to go and have the baby in secret and give it up. I needed to get my head straight anyway. I shouldn't have been so worried in the end. The baby died during labour and I nearly ended up dead myself. Maybe it was for the best. I don't know how I would have handled never seeing my child or giving it up."

Hermione sat there in silence.

"Is this the best thing now then?" she asked. "Shouldn't I get help?"

"I knew I was in very early labour when I worked out where you were," replied Chrys. "There's always a chance something might happen, however I had to know you were safe. I'm ready to die Hermione. I've been preparing myself for it for a while now. I'd just like to leave something of myself for Sirius. He always wanted children. Please, make sure they're fine. Don't worry about me."

The two women sat in periods of silence and conversation. It was not too long before both Hermione and Chrystal realised it wouldn't be long before the children were born.

"Okay Chrys," said Hermione. "It's time to try pushing. We'll try on the next one." She nodded. Hermione was really starting to get worried. She could only guess what would happen next.

"Okay," said Chrys. Hermione felt almost helpless as she watched Chrystal trying to push the child out from inside of her.

Hermione wasn't much use. She felt extremely uncomfortable and way out of her depth. It wasn't until she could see the head crowning that she actually began to start breathing normally again. She delivered the first baby somewhat awkwardly. She gently cut the first cord and wrapped the baby up tightly.

"Chrys," she said. "You've got a little girl." Hermione brought her over for Chrystal to have a look at. "I'll just put her on the bed over there and come back and help you with the other one." She carried the baby over to the other bed and gently placed her in amongst the blankets. She made her way back to Chrystal who was not looking very well. "Let me just feel where the second one is." Hermione laid her hands on Chrys' stomach and gently palpated her belly. She gave Chrys a smile. "Okay, the baby's in the right position. Whenever you're ready."

"Could you get me some water first?" asked Chrys. Hermione summoned a glass of water from the kitchen.

Hermione did her best to deliver the second baby as quickly as possible. There was a lot of bleeding

and having never seen a birth before she didn't know if that was normal. In what felt like an hour but was only five minutes later, Hermione pulled the second baby out.

"It's another girl Chrys," she said. "They're beautiful."

"Are they identical?" Chrys asked.

"It's hard to tell but I think so," she replied as she tried to deliver the placenta.

"Thank God," said Chrys as she rested her head back on the pillow.

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Lily went into the open clearing at the nominated time. She glanced around thinking how appropriate this place was for the Dark Lord to choose. It was dark, despite being the middle of the day, the trees over grew the clearing so that the sky was not visible. There were no leaves; just thick, curly entwined branches that made Lily feel like she was in a fairy tale.

She heard a noise on the dirt behind her. It was him. Seeing the man who had caused her family so much pain and suffering made her heart pound. She could kill him now and it would be over. She hadn't expected to feel like this. She could kill him. The hate was rising up inside of her. Of course the consequence would be her own death, but if she could end it.

He was still staring at her.

"Llillyy Pppotter?" he stuttered.

"What?" she asked calmly. "Surprised to see me?"

"How?" he asked. Lily noticed that his already unnaturally pale skin had turned white. "Why would Dumbledore torment me like this? Why would he send me a ghost?"

"But I am not a ghost," she replied. "Surely a wizard of your powers would know that."

"Does Dumbledore accept the challenge?" asked Voldemort, still visibly shaken.

"Yes," she said. "We shall meet your army on the designated date." She immediately apparated from the clearing. She felt the sense of power run through her. She had unsettled the Dark Lord. It was evident he had lost his concentration the minute he saw her. They held the advantage. Now all they had to do was use it.

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Hermione walked back into the bedroom. Chrys looked as if she were resting finally. Now was the time. Hermione had spent months in solitude and the riddle of the heirs had become apparent to her. She was willing to do whatever it took to save Harry, no matter what the consequences. She raised her wand and cast the incantation. She walked over to fix the sheets up and ensure Chrys was warm enough. She pulled the sheet up and noticed a huge pool of blood. She closed her eyes.

*Help me Rose!*

## Chapter Thirty Four The Sacrifice

*"Please, please forgive me,  
But I won't be home again.  
Maybe someday you'll look up,  
And, barely conscious, you'll say to no one:  
"Isn't something missing?"*

*You won't cry for my absence, I know -  
You forgot me long ago.  
Am I that unimportant...?  
Am I so insignificant...?  
Isn't something missing?  
Isn't someone missing me?*

*Even though I'm the sacrifice,  
You won't try for me, not now.  
Though I'd die to know you love me,  
I'm all alone.  
Isn't someone missing me?"*

*(Missing, Evanesence, Anywhere But Home)*

Rose surveyed the field. Many witches and wizards had made their way here for what everyone hoped would be the final chapter in the war on Voldemort. She knew that many would be lost in the days to come, yet she felt a calmness that she had not felt in a while.

She had volunteered to help in the medical tent. There were many healers, nurses and mediwizards with far more training than her that had volunteered, however she wanted to be of some help. She knew this was the best she could do. Even if her parents would allow her to help in the fight, she knew that it would do little good. The least she could do would be help save a few lives. She knew she could do that.

The rules had been explained and explained. They were pinned to the wall. Rose went over to read the notice again, to ensure she had everything straight.

1. Duelling may only occur during the hours between the trumpet sounding. Any fighting outside this time will result in disqualification.
2. No unforgivable curses may be used. The casting of an unforgivable will result in the death of the wizard or witch which casts it.
3. Prisoners of war may be dealt with however the captor sees fit.

She made her way back to her tent. She gave a little smile as she opened the flap and saw Ron inside waiting for her.

"My father better not see you here," she said.

"I'll take him on," replied Ron. "What's one more wizard after me anyway?"

She lay down on the bed next to him.

"You nervous?" she asked him. "About what's going to happen next I mean. I've never ever seen one of these challenges before."

"You know what" said Ron. "I'm not. Not really. It's strange. I'm here on the eve of a battle. I know a great number of people are going to die. But the end is in sight. I don't know how I know this, but I know that if we fall he won't let anyone leave here alive. I almost think I'd prefer death to the kind

of world the Dark Lord has created for us."

Rose snuggled into Ron's shoulder.

"I know what you mean," she said. "I just don't want to lose you. You mean the world to me."

"There is no world if we don't win," he replied. "But I know how you feel."

They lay together in silence for a while.

"Things will be better when this is over Rose," said Ron. "I promise you that."

"How do you mean?" she asked.

"I promise to take better care of you," he said simply.

"That's not your job, Ron," replied Rose.

"I wouldn't mind if it was," said Ron. "I felt terrible after that Quidditch match."

"You couldn't have done anything even if you were there," replied Rose. "It wasn't your fault. You shouldn't beat yourself up over it." He brushed her brown hair away from her freckled cheek.

"I can't help the way I feel," he said. "I just want to hold you, take care of you. I want to win this war for you Rose."

"What are you trying to say Ron?" she asked him.

"I don't know Rose," he replied. "I just never want to leave you again."

"You don't have to," she said seriously. "Just don't get yourself killed."

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Early in the morning the trumpet sounded. The camp was alive and full of excitement. Harry himself could not understand why there was so much excitement around. He couldn't believe that people seemed to have forgotten the power they were up against. People actually believed that they were going to defeat Voldemort. Mind you given how many Death Eaters had recently been executed, it was hardly a surprise that the confidence levels were up.

Harry made his way towards his assigned area and was pleased to see Ron was already there.

"How'd you sleep?" he asked Ron.

"Fine," replied Ron. "Hope you're not too nervous Harry. After all it's just one big wizard's duel. Just don't lose your temper and cast a charm that'll get yourself killed."

"People will die Ron," replied Harry quickly.

"I'm not dismissing that," said Ron. "But if we beat the remaining Death Eaters then a great many more will be saved. Think about that."

"It won't be long before we have them all," said Ron. "And once they're captured and taken away from here they're all going to be executed. The world will be a better place Harry."

"Sure mate," said Harry. "If you find Voldemort's secret hiding place, you might want to try and find Hermione for me." Harry instantly regretted his tone. "Sorry Ron. Didn't mean to snap. I just get frustrated sometimes."

"Don't worry about it," said Ron. "Just concentrate on the task at hand. The last thing we need is for you to go and get yourself killed."

"I'll do my best," said Harry with a small laugh.

The trumpet sounded again. The duel had begun. He glanced at Ron.

"For Hermione?" asked Ron.

"For Hermione," said Harry with determination. "We're coming Hermione."

Harry felt little fear as he rushed into the open field. The phrase "constant vigilance" kept running through his mind. He knew he had to be aware of everything that was going on around him. He and Ron had a simple tactic. Dispel any charms and use *Petrificus Totalis* to temporarily petrify their attackers.

They stormed forward into the fray unaware of what lay ahead of them. Wizard after wizard and the occasional witch engaged with him. Some he recognised, some he did. Each duel felt as if it got harder and harder. Like some preparation for bigger battle.

As they stunned the wizard who had attacked them, they both looked up and saw a creature that looked like a monkey with fish scales instead of fur.

"What's that?" asked Ron.

"It's a bloody Kappa," said Harry. "No one said anything about any creatures in this battle."

"It's coming for me," said Ron. "What should I do?"

"Get it to bow," said Harry. Seeing that Ron wasn't getting very far, Harry remembered an old curse and sent it flying towards the Kappa. Immediately the Kappa bowed, allowing the water stored in the hollow of its head.

"Now it's yours Ron," said Harry with a slight smile. Ron quickly disposed of the Kappa, now drained of its power as they made their way further towards Voldemort's camp. Harry looked up and saw very few wizards, just herds of magical creatures and a solid stone castle.

*What had they gotten themselves into?*

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The number of injured had jumped in the last hour. Rose wiped her forehead as the heat started to get to her. She had learnt a lot from the Healer's that morning. There was nothing like on-the-job training. She looked down at the next stretcher.

"Remus," she cried when she saw who it was. "What happened?"

"Not much," he said. "I just got hit in the stomach. Only a little bleeding." He pulled her closer towards him. He began to whisper. "You have to fix me. It's a full moon tonight and while I've had the Wolfsbane potion, I don't think people will be too happy to have a werewolf sleeping soundly in the corner." He opened his cloak to reveal a nasty looking wound lying over his belly button. There was a fair bit of blood and the wound was deep, but luckily for Lupin none of his internal organs had been damaged.

"Right," she said calmly. "I can do it." She placed her hands over Remus' wound and chanted a rather simple incantation that she knew would heal his bleeding.

"Thank you Rose," he said standing up to leave. She wished she could help him. She placed her hand on his arm, the desire running through her mind.

"Wait," she said. She walked over towards the supply shelf and got some herbs. "You'll need this to keep up your strength. You don't want to get it infected. You had a pretty nasty wound there. Take some of these in the morning for the next few days."

She watched him with empathy as he walked out of the tent. If only someone could take away his pain. She went to sit down and rest her feet for a few minutes. Then a voice entered her head.

*Help me Rose.*

It was Hermione. She knew it immediately and yet she didn't know how she knew it. Immediately she ran to the Healer in charge of her area.

"I'm so sorry," she said in a hurry. "I have to go. There's a family emergency. I promise I will be

back as soon as possible." The Healer pulled her aside. It was the Healer who had cared for her in St Mungos.

"That's fine Rose," he said in a whisper. "We're not holding you here. Is Harry okay?"

"What?" she said with shock. *How did this Healer know that Harry was family?*

"It's okay Rose," he continued. "I haven't told anybody and I'm not planning on it. We needed to find blood for you, just in case. I just need to know if it's Harry. Otherwise the war may not be worth fighting anymore."

"Harry's son is sick," she said quickly. "I'm sure it's just a childhood illness. I'll be back shortly."

As Rose made her way to the Apparition point she congratulated herself on coming up with a reason rather quickly that did not mention Hermione. Even though she knew that would not be an issue for too much longer, she'd prefer no questions to be asked.

She instinctively knew where Hermione was. She didn't even stop to think how.

After apparating she found herself outside a small hut in the middle of a forest.

"Hermione," she called. "Where are you?"

"In here," came the reply. It was from the other room. Rose came rushing in.

Glancing around the bedroom, she almost didn't know what to make of the scene. Chrystal was covered in blood and amniotic fluid. She had to have lost a litre of blood.

"What happened?" she asked quickly.

"She just started bleeding," replied Hermione somewhat hysterically. "About ten minutes after I got the placentas out."

"Where are they?" asked Rose immediately.

"Over there," said Hermione indicating with her head. "I'm trying to stop it by compressing."

Rose immediately went over towards the placentas and made sure they were complete.

"Okay Hermione, calm down," said Rose. "Can you please go and check on the babies? I don't here any crying." Hermione quickly obliged.

Rose took a deep breath and walked over to Chrys. She placed her hands on Chrys' pelvis and concentrated.

"Come on," she said. "Don't die on me now."

She stood there for what seemed like ages, but could only have been a short time before Chrys stopped bleeding. Rose closed her eyes and took a deep breath. She rubbed Chrys on the sternum.

"Wake up," she said. "It's okay."

Chrys opened her eyes.

"Rose?" she asked.

"Yes," replied Rose. "I'm here now. You can rest."

Hermione came back in.

"They're both fine," said Hermione. "Both asleep. Thank you." Hermione walked over and hugged her. "It's so good to see you Rose. How did you know what to do?"

"It's a long story," she replied. "Let's just say there's a lot you can learn from books. We need to get out of here. I wonder if that chimney is connected to the Floo network."

"I doubt it," replied Hermione. "We were lucky enough to find this hut I think. I got the feeling Chrys had thought out rescuing me but hadn't thought much further than that."

"Could we Floo from where you were being held?" asked Rose. "I know it's risky, however we need to get out of here."

"I can't even remember which way we came," said Hermione. "Why don't you apparate and get some Floo powder from somewhere and then we'll just give this chimney a shot. It's worth a try."

"Okay," agreed Rose. "I'll give it a shot. Be back soon." She quickly hurried and grabbed some Floo powder before apparating back.

"Let's give it a shot," said Rose. "Can you grab both the babies? I'll get Chrys."

"Okay," said Hermione. Rose watched as she juggled the Floo powder and the two babies. She stepped in the fire, threw the powder into it and spoke, "Dunvegan Castle."

Suddenly the fire came to life and Hermione and the babies disappeared. Rose went back to the bedroom and helped Chrys to her feet.

"I'm taking you home," she explained. Chrys did not say anything, as Rose helped her to the fireplace and helped her to Floo home.

They arrived in the living room at Dunvegan.

"I know you're anxious to see your son Hermione," said Rose. "Can you please help me first and then you can see him?"

"What do you need?" asked Hermione with a sigh.

"We just need to put her to bed," said Rose with a slight smile.

Hermione obligingly helped take Chrys to bed and placed the twins in their cradles. It was surprising how well set up the bedroom was. As soon as Chrys was settled Hermione sprinted out towards her bedroom calling for her son.

"Matty," she called. "Matty."

Almost immediately a cry was heard. Hermione heart jumped when she heard him. She and Rose immediately hurried towards the cry. Matthew was lying in his cradle with Ginny watching over him.

"Hermione," she said with a smile. "Is that really you?"

"Yes," said Hermione joyfully as she cuddled her son. "It's okay sweetie, Mummy's home now. It's okay Matty. I won't leave you like that again. I'll never be that stupid."

After Hermione had cuddled Matthew until her heart was content they made their way down to the dining room and ordered dinner. Rose insisted that both Hermione and Chrystal needed a good meal; Hermione could eat now, while Matty was sleeping and Chrystal could have hers when she woke up. While they were waiting Rose and Ginny began filling Hermione in on everything that had happened during her absence. Hermione's face showed how surprised she was.

"So this challenge has been accepted and now they're actually fighting?" asked Hermione.

"It's like a big wizard's duel out there," replied Rose. "The number of casualties so far has been small, but the number injured is climbing."

"Any Death Eater that is captured is killed immediately," added Ginny. "The Ministry is coming down hard. They've learnt their lesson."

"That's the other thing you should know," said Rose. "Parvati and her husband were hanged last week. Along with a whole heap of Death Eaters. Apparently they had been holding her prisoner for months. There was lots of evidence that they had tortured her. "

Hermione felt bad. It was hard to believe that one of their own housemates could have done something so dreadful. And to the person who had been their closest friend.

Chrys entered the room and broke the uncomfortable silence that had arisen.

"Thank you for your help," she said. "I appreciate it."

"Thank you as well," said Hermione. "I feel much better now I have my son and some proper food in me. I only wish that I could feed Matty myself."

"I'm sure there's a charm for that in one of my midwifery books," replied Rose. "They're on my desk somewhere."

"As you can see Rose has not had any problems occupying herself since Hogwarts was closed," said Ginny with a bit of cheek.

"And I'm thankful for it," said Chrys.

"So what are their names?" asked Hermione. "They certainly are beautiful."

"I think I may need to discuss that one with Sirius first," said Chrys. "If you see him when you go back Rose, could you tell him about his girls? I think he might want to see them."

"I'll make a special effort," replied Rose. "And speaking of that, I had better be going."

"If you don't need me, I'll go as well," said Ginny. "I'd like to be there."

"Go ahead," said Hermione. "I can take care of Matty now."

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Harry had made his way back to his tent as the trumpet sounded. He sincerely felt they were getting closer to victory. After just one day of battle there were less wizards and witches in Voldemort's army now, most of the creatures that were fighting now Harry had only ever read about. He reflected on the day he had had. It had been tiring that was for sure. Fighting the Erkling had certainly taken a lot out of him. The silly gnome like creature had tried to bite his leg, before Harry had transformed into a lion and bitten the Erkling's head off. Rather aggressive but he did not take too kindly to being bitten in the leg. Harry glanced down at his leg. There was quite a significant wound there. He sighed as he stood up to go to the hospital tent. He'd better get it looked at before it got worse. After all who knew what germs an Erkling's teeth contained?

It didn't take long to reach the medical tent and when he arrived there he saw that his sister's services were already being used by Ron. *He's probably telling her about the Graphorn.* He glanced around the tent looking for a Healer, not wanting to disturb the laughing interaction he was witnessing, however given the number of injured that day he didn't have much luck. He sighed. At least he made her happy. He walked up to them.

"Bragging again are you Ron?" he asked jokingly.

"Bragging?" asked Ron. "I think you should show a bit more gratitude. Your hide would be supper for the Griffin's if I hadn't taken care of the Graphorn."

"The Griffin's are still feeding on the dead," explained Rose. "We haven't been able to stop them. It's the biggest supply of raw meat they've had in a while. Anyhow Harry, tell me what happened with the Graphorn while I attend to what looks like a nasty cut on your leg. What caused that anyway?"

"An Erkling," he replied. Rose gave him a look, then went and got some potions and herbs.

"The Graphorn Harry," she said when she returned. "Ron won't tell me."

"Well Ron and I were out there fighting and unfortunately I didn't see the thing," said Harry.

"Anyhow, I quickly changed into a lion, hoping that it might confuse him for a while so I could get myself out of the messy situation." Rose was bathing his leg in some weird smelling liquid.

"What is that?" asked Ron before Harry got the chance. "That's foul smelling."



"It's a special mix just for Erklings bites," explained Rose. "They're awful creatures. Why you had to get bitten by one of these by all creatures? Get back to the Graphorn."

"Anyhow," continued Harry with a small smile on his face. "Ron managed to get underneath it. I don't know how he did it without killing himself but he did. He placed his dragon's horn through the Graphorn's skin and placed a Dungbomb of all things into the hole."

"The Dungbomb was an accident," explained Ron. "But it did the trick. The thing fell over and died. Mustn't have liked the Dungbomb too much."

Everyone laughed.

"All done Harry," she said. "Nothing to worry about now." She glanced over at Ron. "Ron, I need to have a word with Harry for a second. I'll see you in the meal tent in a few minutes."

"What's up Rose?" asked Harry. "You must have had a pretty good reason to send Ron away."

"Hermione's been found," she said quickly. "I thought you'd want to know before I told anybody else." Harry immediately turned to head straight for the apparition point. "Before you run off Harry, she's not very well. She's lost a lot of weight. Be careful with her okay."

"Of course," he said and ran off immediately. Hermione was safe. His beautiful wife had been found. He couldn't wait to be with her. He apparated to Dunvegan and saw Chrystal sitting in the lounge room when he arrived.

"Where's Hermione?" he asked hurriedly.

"She's resting Harry," said Chrys with a smile. "I'm sure she won't mind you waking her up."

Harry was so impatient to see Hermione that he apparated upstairs to their bedroom. He got there and saw his beautiful wife lying peacefully asleep in their bed. He had to restrain himself from waking her up immediately. He slowly sat down on the bed and gazed at her. Her hair had fallen on the pillows perfectly framing her head. Her face looked gaunt, and yet still beautiful. He loved her so much. He could not believe that they had spent so long apart. He brushed one of her curls from her forehead.

She stirred.

A smile appeared on her face as she opened her eyes.

"Harry," she said. "I'd hoped you'd be here when I woke up."

"I'm here," he said holding her as close as he'd ever held her before. "I'm so sorry. I won't ever let this happen again. I should have been there Hermione. I'm so sorry."

"It's over Harry," she said as tears began to fall from her eyes. "And I'm alive. We're safe here and there's nothing to worry about. We can be a family again."

"I love you so much," he said.

The next morning as he woke by her side he felt a strange sense of calmness that he had not felt since she had gone.

"You have to go back to the battle," said Hermione when she saw he was awake. "They need you."

"I want to stay," he said. "I don't ever want to leave you again."

"It's fine," she replied. "You have things you have to do. You cannot protect me every little moment. I need some rest. You'll be back tonight. I'm certain of it."

"I love you Hermione," he said as he kissed her goodbye. "I'll be back soon. I promise."

He left the castle hoping that the battle would soon be over.

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The next evening Sirius was gazing at his daughters. He couldn't believe how lucky he was. They were absolutely beautiful. They had beautiful blue eyes, vibrant and strong. Their hair fell in soft gold ringlets. He was in awe of his two beautiful girls. Chrys entered their bedroom, refreshed from her ride.

"So are we decided then?" she asked with a smile.

"I guess so," he replied. "I can't think of any other names that would suit them better."

"The question remains which one gets which?" said Chrys.

"I think this one has to be Isobel," said Sirius. "She's just got that look about her."

"Then this must be Anabel," said Chrys with a smile. "Do you think you're honestly going to be able to tell them apart?"

"I'm sure I'll learn," he said.

"Do you think Alec will mind?" asked Chrys.

"You mean about Isobhail?" he asked.

"It's only the way she died, Sirius," said Chrys.

"I know," said Sirius. "I occasionally still have nightmares about that. To be honest Chryssy, I don't know. I spoke to Maddie a while ago when we first thought came up with the idea. She thought Alec would be happy. If he asks we'll tell him. If he assumes we'll let him assume."

"So Issy for Alec's sister, and Ana for my grandmother," said Chrys.

"Anabel Nathaira?" asked Sirius.

"A few months ago I would have cringed at that," she replied. "But I think it's fitting. A girl for the Aille's." Sirius felt his wife shiver as she said that. "And may the celtic curse be done with forever."

"It's okay Chrys," he said. "The Celt died. Seventeen years ago. There's nothing to worry about."

"I know," she answered. Sirius watched as she gently placed Anabel in her cradle. There was a tenderness he'd never before seen in his wife.

"You're not so prepared to die anymore are you?" asked Sirius.

"Does that make me a bad person?" asked Chrys in reply.

"No," said Sirius. "It just makes you a mother." He went around behind her and began to hug her. Something felt strange. She felt as if she were disappearing. "What's happening?"

"My eagle is burning," she said with a frightened tone to her voice. "I'm being summoned. Sirius is I don't return; please take care of my girls."

And with that his wife disappeared.

Sirius couldn't believe it. She was gone and he knew she had no control over it. He suddenly felt very afraid. Afraid for his wife and his Godson.

"Hermione," he called hurriedly. "Are you around anywhere?"

"What's the matter?" she called. "I'm in Matty's room."

"Hermione I think the battle of the heirs has begun," he said. "Chrys just disappeared from my arms. She told me she was being summoned."

"We need to go and find them," said Hermione.

"I know," said Sirius "And, yet..."

"This is not our war to fight," said Hermione finishing his sentence. "And yet..."

"We cannot help ourselves," said Sirius. "We have to go quickly. I'm sure they've gone wherever it is that they were holding you."

"Okay," said Hermione. "I'll find someone to look after the children. I won't be long."

Hermione returned and soon they were off to find a non-existent castle. Sirius only hoped that they reached it soon enough.

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The front had reached the outskirts of the castle and now had it completely surrounded.

The door of the castle was guarded by a Chimaera. Lily's heart sank as she gazed at the enraged lion headed, goat bodied and dragon tailed creature.

*How the hell had Voldemort managed to gather up these creatures?*

Lily tried not to think about the one successful slaying of a Chimaera where the unfortunate wizard himself had died. She did remember however that it was easier to slay one from the air rather than on land. She sent a message to Alec and hoped the team of wizards with their flying horses would arrive soon. She wasn't quite sure how long they could hold off the creature for. She and Dumbledore kept casting charms at the creature hoping for some relief, while the rest of the group tried to trap the creature from behind.

The Chimaera kept becoming angrier and angrier. Lily looked up and saw the sun setting. This would be their only chance of victory, the small time between day and night was the time when the creature was at its weakest.

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The creature turned on them suddenly as the sunset hit its eye. James managed to get clear of it before it reached him, however all he could do was look on in agony as Remus was trapped between its tail and the castle wall.

Remus cried out as the creature's tail hit him right across the torso. James knew immediately that he had been badly hurt. He ran to him immediately.

"We better get you out of here," said James. "That doesn't look so good."

"You have to stay here," said Remus. "Help them until they beat that creature. It won't take much longer. There's nothing you can do for me anyway."

"Sod that," said James. He picked up Remus and ran with him towards the medical tent, across the acres of bodies of wizards and creatures.

He reached the tent to find everyone extremely busy trying to save the few badly injured who had managed to drag their way to the tent. There was not a free Healer in sight.

"Please help me," he yelled. "I've got a Chimaera tail injury here."

Immediately a nurse came running.

"I'm sorry," she said. "All of the Healer's are busy. I'll do the best I can until one of them is free. We've sustained so many injuries. I work on the Dangerous Creatures Ward normally."

The nurse levitated Remus to a stretcher. She pulled off his robes and had a good look at the wound.

"I've never seen one this bad before," she whispered to James. "I'll need to sedate him to get to work. You should see if there's anything he wants done, see if his affairs are in order."

James took the nurses hint. He knew she was telling him that Remus was going to die. The pain he felt was overwhelming. This was Remus. This was one of his nearest and dearest friends. He was like a member of the family.

"Hey Remus," he said sitting down next to his old friend's head. "They'll do their best. You know

that."

"That's all I can ask," said Remus. "James. James I need you to do something for me. If I don't wake up tell Sirius the baby didn't die. He'll know what I'm talking about. Tell him I gave the baby to....."

And with that Remus was unconscious.

"I need some help here," screamed James. "I need a Healer NOW!" He couldn't let Remus die. Not now when they were so close to ending this cloud that had hung above them since they were children.

~~~~~

Harry had left the battle behind him. He had hoped to reach the apparition point and get back to Hermione and Matthew. He was going to check in and return to the battle. He found himself in a clearing he hadn't seen before.

"And so I've found you at least, Harry."

Harry turned around and saw a confident Voldemort standing there behind him. He felt his lion tattoo flare up and before he could react he found himself feeling as if he was being called somewhere. He was pulled from the clearing and dumped into a room.

Harry glanced around the room he had found himself in. It all seemed so strange, so unreal, like no scene he had ever seen before. In the centre of the room lay his sword. He didn't even know how it had found its way there. He knew he was inside Voldemort's castle. The stone had the same, cold impersonal feeling on the inside as it did on the outside. You could hear the muffled sounds of the battle going on outside, but not enough to discern who was winning. All he knew was that now was the time. His time had come.

He felt his pockets for his wand. It was missing. Just what he needed.

Harry walked towards the centre of the room and reached out for his sword. As soon as he touched it he was transported into another room. Again it had to be in Voldemort's castle. Before him were Voldemort and Chrys. Voldemort was yelling at her, however everything was sounding fuzzy. Lavender soon appeared by his side.

"This is it Harry," she said shaking. "Hope you're ready."

"The time has come Harry," said Voldemort. He immediately drew his sword and lunged towards Harry. Luckily Harry's reflexes were up to the task. He drew his sword and immediately engaged with Voldemort. For the first time in his life, he was thankful he had been taught how to use an old fashioned weapon.

Voldemort was a skilled fencer. He moved with speed and confidence. Harry kept Alasdair MacLeod's teachings in his head as he did everything to avoid the sharp edge of Voldemort's sword. Harry's sword moved fluently as he blocked Voldemort's blows. His skills had grown over the past year, however were still only mediocre.

Harry soon began to tire as he endlessly blocked Voldemort's advances. Eventually he lost his balance and fell to the floor. Luckily, his fast, Quidditch reflexes helped him to quickly roll out of the way to avoid Voldemort's sword and quickly regain his composure on his feet. The blows continued to come and Harry kept moving quickly to block them. He just did not seem to get a chance to get in a blow of his own.

A smile appeared on Voldemort's face.

"You have been taught well Harry," he said. "But your skills are not great."

"Don't count on that," replied Harry as he swung his sword with effort. "I might have a trick up my sleeve." He spoke more hoping rather than knowing that he could win this battle.

The sword hit Harry's arm. It hurt far more than he expected. He grimaced with pain. He swung his sword at Voldemort trying to drive the pain out of his mind. He almost managed to make contact with Voldemort's neck but the Dark Lord was too quick for him. He laughed as Harry's obvious exasperation must have shown. *Why wasn't anybody helping him?*

Harry looked away to see what the others were doing. He saw that they seemed as if they were paralysed. They weren't moving.

"Can you help me here?" he screamed at them.

"They won't be much help to you until one of us falls," said Voldemort with a smile. "I engineered it that way. Clever don't you think."

Harry glanced back at the women in disbelief, taking his mind off the task at hand. While he was distracted Voldemort made a few quick moves, effectively knocking Harry's sword out of his hand. It skidded across the floor leaving Harry defenceless.

Voldemort had Harry in a corner. There was no way out for him now. For a brief second Harry thought he was going to die right then and there or at the very least have some serious damage caused to his limbs. Thinking quickly, Harry waited for Voldemort to swing his sword before he transformed into a lion. The sword passed over his head, hitting the wall instead. Voldemort was taken off guard and Harry took the opportunity to pounce. He slammed Voldemort to the ground and sunk his lion teeth into him. Voldemort's sword skimmed across the floor towards the door. Harry could feel Voldemort underneath him. He could no longer feel him breathing.

Harry transformed and somehow managed to find his wand in his pocket. It certainly hadn't been there before. He glanced down at the great and powerful Dark Lord as he lay there in the corner of the room crumpled and small.

"Is he dead?" asked Chrystal in hope.

"I don't know," said Harry catching his breath. "I hope so." He glanced at the man who had caused so much pain and suffering.

"Make sure of it Harry," said Lavender. "Do it for everybody."

He couldn't.

It was ludicrous. This man was the most evil wizard in the world. All he had to do was raise his wand and cast the spell. Or even better, stick his sword into the wizard's chest and pierce his heart. Or cut off his head. All equally doable and all invariably fatal. Yet he couldn't do it. The words of the prophecy kept running through his head. "*.....either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives....*" Was this really his destiny? Was he really born for the purpose of destroying this wizard? He struggled to believe this. Chrystal put her hand on his shoulder.

"We'll do it together," she suggested. "With Slytherin's sword."

"Right," said Harry. "I'll get it."

Exhausted and covered in sweat he turned from the man they all feared and walked towards the fallen sword. The sword disappeared as he heard Lavender scream.

"HARRY," screamed Lavender. "WATCH OUT."

Harry turned and saw Voldemort flying across the room straight towards him. Lavender suddenly through herself in front of Harry and took the full blow of his sword across her neck.

"NOOO," screamed Harry.

She landed in Chrystal's arms. Almost immediately she began coughing up blood. Harry rushed to her side.

"Lavender," he said. "Are you okay? I'm sorry."

"It's okay Harry," she whispered with her last breath. "It's not as I had foreseen. I love you Harry."

He turned around. Voldemort was not there. Harry had no idea where he had disappeared to.

"Why'd you kill her?" he screamed searching for an answer. "She was innocent in all of this."

"She was killed because it as it should be," said Voldemort. "It is as was foreseen. Pity she had to waste her life to save yours."

Harry was exhausted. He just wanted it to end. He collapsed on the floor.

He could feel Voldemort above him. Slytherin's sword was pointing at his face. He looked up the sword to see the eerie smile of the Dark Lord. The wizard stood tall although obviously haemorrhaging from the lion's bite. The blood was dripping all over Harry and spilling into his mouth. Harry could not stop himself from coughing, however could not move with out getting himself killed.

Harry looked on in disbelief. Voldemort didn't look like he could still be alive. He looked as if he should be dead.

"Now that she is gone, there is no use for you," he snarled. He withdrew his wand still keeping the sword pointed at Harry, who was desperately trying to reach his wand.

*"Avada Kedavra!"*

Harry froze as he heard the words. He had forgotten to cast the protective charm. He watched, paralysed as the blast hit him.

*I'm sorry Hermione!*

## **Chapter Thirty Five Past Sins Revisited**

"I don't know how much longer we can hold out here," said Lily as she continued to cast charms. "A lot of people have been hurt already."

"We're here Dumbledore," called out Alec from his horse. "What's the plan of attack?"

"Try to hot it from above," replied Dumbledore as he cast another stunning spell at the Chimaera. "Stun it and then do whatever is necessary to kill it."

"Watch out for the tail," warned Lily. "It's dangerous."

"On to it," called Terri. She turned her horse around and immediately cast a spell at the creature's eyes. "I've just blinded it. Be careful down there."

"Okay," replied Dumbledore. "Everyone on the ground get away from the creature."

Lily was happy to oblige and get as far away from the creature as possible. She ran backwards and watched the flock of flying horses descend upon the Chimaera. It didn't seem to take them long to slay the creature, however that was compared to the amount of time she had spent trying to keep the creature at bay. As the creature fell to the ground Lily gathered her breath knowing she would have to conserve it for whatever would be in store.

After the Chimaera had fallen Lily looked at Dumbledore through the black of the night.

"Shall we?" he asked.

"Who knows what's in store for us in there?" replied Lily. "*Lumos!*"

~~~~~

Rose rushed into the tent searching frantically for her father.

"Help me, please," called James among the crowded hospital tent.

"What's wrong Dad?" called Rose as she rushed to her father, using only his voice as a guide.

"It's Remus," he said. "He was hit by a Chimaera's tail. Then he just passed out."

"Uncle Remus?" asked Rose as she rushed towards the stretcher. As she glanced over his body her eyes kept being drawn towards his abdomen, seeing the slashing wound of the Chimaera. "Okay," she said calmly. "I can do this. Dad, there's a basket of antidotes over there in that basket. Can you please get me the Chimaera one?"

Her father nodded and rushed towards the basket. Rose stripped off his robes and had a good look at his body. The tail had only struck him over the abdomen, however not only was he bleeding but it would be certain that the Chimaera's poison would be spreading throughout his body quickly. The first thing she had to do was get him to start breathing. She quickly blew a few breaths into his mouth and then cast a breathing charm hoping that it would work for the time being. She reached towards his neck and felt for his carotid pulse. It was barely there, it was weak and thready, but it was there. She summoned a bag of fluid and started running it into his arm. She then placed her hands on Remus' abdomen and used all her strength to close the wound made by the creature's tail. Slowly but surely, the wound began to heal and Rose felt as if her energy was being completely drained from her. Her father returned with the antidote.

"Inject it into that bag of fluid," she instructed him. "Use the entire bottle." The wound healed over and Rose, exhausted by her efforts fell to the floor.

She was caught by a hysterical Tonks who had run to the hospital tent upon finding that Remus was injured.

"Is he going to be okay?" screamed Tonks.

"I don't know," said James. "Is my daughter okay?"

Tonks brushed Rose's hair from her face.

"She's breathing," said Tonks. "She's probably just exhausted. I'll levitate her to a bed."

A little more composed Tonks levitated Rose to the bed and covered her with a blanket. "James, we need to get Remus out of here. The sun is setting and it's a full moon tonight."

"Has he had the potion?" asked James.

"No," said Tonks pulling the bottle from her gown. "If he kills anyone they'll shoot him. It won't matter that he's a hero. All they will see is a werewolf."

"Okay, let's get him out of here quickly and then I'll manage him after that," said James.

"One stag may not be enough to protect him," said Tonks. "There's an enclosure not too far away. We'll have to lock him in there and hope for the best."

They hurriedly carried Remus out of the hospital and into the forest. When they were out of site James transformed into Prongs.

"Put him on my back," said James. "It will be quicker."

Tonks apparated to the enclosure as James sprinted into the forest. James reached the enclosure just as the moon began to come up. Tonks helped him get Remus off his back and then left the enclosure and locked the gate as tightly as possible. She also cast several charms on the fence to make sure it was werewolf proof. Then she sat outside and waited.

The moon rose and nothing happened. Remus lay there still asleep. She was scared that Remus must be dead given that he hadn't transformed.

She waited outside for half an hour. Then she let herself into the enclosure. She ran to Remus. He was awake. He wasn't dead.

"Tonks," he said softly. "It was Rose. She did it. I don't know how. But I didn't transform last night. I haven't transformed tonight either." Tonks hugged him with joy. Not only was he going to be okay, he was more than okay.

"I love you Remus," she said. "It doesn't matter you know. I love you anyway."

"I know," he said. "I love you too."

~~~~~  
Lily glanced at the photograph once more. The likeness was unmistakable. She just couldn't understand what it was doing here, in Voldemort's castle of all places. She was certain it was her mother. It was the same face, same features that Lily had seen everyday of her childhood.

Dumbledore walked over toward her.

"What's the matter Lily?" he asked her quietly. "What has upset you so much?" He placed his hand on her shoulder and glanced at the photograph.

"Where did you find that?" he asked. He was shaking. Lily had never seen Dumbledore so unsettled before.

"It was here on this ledge," she said. "Do you know who this is?"

"It's my daughter," said Dumbledore.

"No it's not," said Lily looking at him strangely. "It's my mother."

"Are you sure?" he asked her gently.

"I know my own mother," replied Lily. "I'm certain."



"Because I am certain that is my daughter," he said pulling out an old crumpled photograph from his pocket. Lily glanced at it. The faces were identical.

"She never said anything," said Lily. She felt bewildered, almost as if she had been betrayed by her own mother. "Not even when I got into Hogwarts. Never once did she say anything."

"She was a Squib," said Dumbledore softly. "She was probably ashamed about it. I haven't ever seen her, when Grindelwald took her mother from me and I thought my life was over. All I ever saw were her pictures. And now I find the same pictures in this castle of all places."

Lily's thoughts were interrupted by a scream. She glanced at Dumbledore.

"That sounded like Chrystal," she said.

"Hurry," said Dumbledore heading straight for the door. "I sense we don't have much time."

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"NOOOO," screamed Chrystal as Harry fell to the floor. "How could you do that?" She looked up and saw that Voldemort did not appear as he had before. He appeared more supernatural than he had ever looked before. He had an eerie smile on his face. Chrystal had never felt this scared before in her entire life.

"Well my dear the battle is over and I am more powerful than ever," he said. He bound Chrystal in a full body bind and then as he snapped his fingers and Tadgh appeared in the room.

"Tadgh," she screamed. "Please help me."

Tadgh walked over towards her and spat in her face.

"As much as I'd like to my dear, I think I shall keep my allegiance with my master," he said. The smile on Voldemort's face grew. She glanced at Tadgh and again wondered how she could be so stupid as to not realise that Tadgh had changed.

"How could you do this Tadgh?" she asked as tears ran down her face. Tears for Harry, tears for Lavender and tears for the man she had once known who no longer existed.

"You could say you drove me to it," replied Tadgh sarcastically. "Actions of the past come back to haunt us Chrystal Rowena. You of all people should know that."

"Tadgh," commanded Voldemort. "You will take her to retrieve my child, wherever he may be and then return here."

Chrystal took a deep breath in amongst her tears. She knew that now was the time to do what she had decided to do months ago, when she first went to Tom.

"What are you talking about?" she asked almost innocently.

"I want my child," said Tom. "I assume it didn't die in childbirth. You would have said something by now if it had and it's evident that you are no longer pregnant."

"You mean my child?" she said firmly.

"Our child," he hissed.

"I'm afraid you're mistaken," she said regaining her confidence. "You mean my child, mine and my husband Sirius Black's child?" He looked at her with disbelief. "It really was easy, deceiving you. You place too much faith in prophecies. I can guarantee you that as long as I live; the house of Slytherin will not be once more joined with the house of Ravenclaw. Not if it involves me."

Tom began to laugh. His laugh had an almost terrifying ring to it. Chrystal's confidence quickly began to fade.

"You think you're so clever don't you?" he asked. "You think you have it all worked out don't you? Well maybe you managed to buy yourself a few months however the outcome will eventually be the

same.”

“I’ll tell you something else then,” she spat. “That child you bargained for. The one you bargained for with my mother. I was the one that killed it.” She could see his temper rising.

“Well you have placed me in a dilemma then haven’t you?” he yelled at her. His eyes began to turn yellow with his fury. “I can’t kill you myself thanks to your precious mother who turned on me just as you have. But I can get someone else to. Tadgh, kill her. Now.”

Chrystal watched with tears in her eyes as Tadgh raised his wand and cast the curse.

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“It has to be this room,” said Hermione as they reached the top of the stairs. “It’s the last room left in the castle.” She blasted the door open with her wand ready.

When she opened the door she saw the flash of the Avada Kedavra curse hit Chrystal. Sirius screamed in a way Hermione had never heard before. She looked up and saw Voldemort disappearing before her eyes. She gritted her teeth and cast a spell she had never cast before.

“*Avada Kedavra!*” she said with all her energy. She then stunned Tadgh Moran who had run towards the corner of the room.

“Is she alive Sirius?” she asked. Sirius shook his head. She walked over towards him to comfort him. It was only then she saw the bodies of Harry and Lavender lying on the floor.

“HARRY,” she screamed. “No Harry. No. Please no.” She ran over toward Harry and held him in her arms. He wasn’t breathing. “Please wake up Harry.” Tears began to plummet down her face. “Why now? Why Harry?” At that moment her world stopped. *How could it have come to this? After all they had struggled for and after all they had sacrificed.* She didn’t know how long she sat there for. She didn’t even notice when Lily and Dumbledore entered the room.

“Do we know what happened?” asked Dumbledore. His voice startled her.

“Hermione killed Voldemort,” said Sirius. “Apart from that we have no idea.”

“The prophecy only said two would die,” said Lily in disbelief. “How can they all be dead?”

“The prophecy must be wrong,” screamed Hermione. “I worked out the character stuff. It was the only thing I had to do while I was locked up as Voldemort’s prisoner. Chrystal and Harry had the same character. Lavender and Tom had the same character. If you look at Arithmancy and character it all makes sense. Now it’s too late.”

Hermione felt Lily’s hands upon her shoulders.

“What did you see?” asked Dumbledore kindly.

“Enough to know my wife is dead,” said Sirius his voice full of pain and hate. “Enough to see that thing over there put the killing curse on my wife.”

“Killing curse?” asked Hermione

“Yes,” said Sirius. “Didn’t you hear it?”

“No,” said Hermione. She glanced over at Chrystal. “I don’t think she’s dead Sirius.”

“What are you trying to do Hermione?” he asked. “Give me false hope?”

“No,” said Hermione. “I cast the protective charm on her. I knew she was intent on getting Voldemort to kill her. She said so in her delirium after the babies were born. I don’t know why she wanted Voldemort to kill her. But I knew she was linked to Harry so I couldn’t let that happen.”

“That means there’s hope for Harry,” said Lily cheerfully. “Look Lavender is clearly dead, she has almost been decapitated. Hermione killed Voldemort. That leaves Harry and Chrystal.”

“But we don't know how he was killed,” said Hermione trying not to get her hopes up.

“But we have hope,” said Lily. “Was he protected by the Animagus charm?”

“Yes,” she replied. “I cast it this morning.”

“Sirius, how did James and I appear when we `died'?” she asked softly.

“You were dead Lily,” said Sirius. “It would have saved me a lot of trouble if you hadn't been quite so dead.”

“Then we have hope,” said Lily. “Lavender and Voldemort go to St Mungos morgue. For now Harry and Chrystal come with us. We have a waiting and hoping game to play.”

They took Chrystal and Harry back to Dunvegan and then informed Kingsley Shaklebolt of the bodies of Lavender and Voldemort. He assured them that he would deal with it discreetly so that Hermione would not face charges for casting an unforgivable curse, even though, if made public, she would probably be praised for it.

After everything was in order Lily spoke to Dumbledore.

“I need to speak to Petunia,” she said. “There are some things that might help us.”

Lily apparated to Privet Drive and found her sister sitting in an armchair.

“I had a feeling I would see you tonight Lily,” said Petunia as she entered the room.

“You did, did you?” replied Lily with a smile. Ironically since Vernon's death she had Petunia had become closer than they had ever been before. Not that they were best friends now or anything of the sort, but they could spend time together without wanting to rip each other's heads off.

“Something important has happened hasn't it?” asked Petunia. Lily nodded.

“Where's all that old stuff of Mum's?” asked Lily. “Do you still have it in the attic?”

“Yes,” replied Petunia. “Somehow I just couldn't bring myself to throw it out. I knew it might be important one day.”

Lily explained what had happened. The two of them set to work immediately to sort through all of it to try and find something that might confirm or refute what Lily could not bring herself to believe. It took hours to go through all of her mother's old clothes, photographs, books and other possessions. As the rays of sunlight began to shine through the window of the attic they were no closer to the truth than they had been when they had started that night.

“I'll go and put the kettle on shall I?” asked Petunia as she stood up and stretched.

“I'll be down in a minute,” said Lily. “I'll just finish sorting through this box.” There wasn't that much to go.

When she reached the bottom of the cardboard box she found a wooden jewellery box made from red mahogany with flowers engraved on the lid. Lily gently lifted the lid and found an old book inside it. The first page read:

*Within the pages of this book I have written my memoirs for my daughter Lily Evans so that she may know the truth.....*

Lily sat down and read. The answers to all her questions and so many more which had never been asked were written there for her. She stumbled downstairs a few hours later and found Petunia downstairs where Petunia was making another cup of tea.

“I thought you must have found something important,” said Petunia. “I thought I'd leave you alone for a few hours.” Lily handed Petunia the book. She opened and flicked through the pages. “It's empty.” Petunia stood there astonished. She understood the meaning all too well.

“Mum made it clear that I was not to let anybody ever know the contents,” said Lily. “I am going to

do that. It's not my secret to tell.”

“You're not going to tell Harry?” asked Petunia.

“No,” said Lily as she raised her wand and obliterated the memory from Petunia's brain. She could deal with Dumbledore later. He deserved to know the truth. On the other hand Lily would ensure her mother's wishes were kept. She had specifically requested that Harry never be told.

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Sirius went to the Ministry himself the next day. He had spent the night alternating between holding his cold wife and caring for his two beautiful girls.

“I want that bastard dead,” he yelled to anybody who would listen. “I want him to look in my eyes the moment he dies and know that he's dead because of me.”

“Calm down Sirius,” said Arthur Weasley. “Moran will be taken care of.”

“I need to see it,” said Sirius. “He killed her.”

“She's not dead though, is she?” asked Arthur.

“He cast the curse,” replied James. “He cast the killing curse. It's essentially the same is it not?”

“I know that Sirius,” said Arthur patiently. “All the same I can't just let you kill him. You would have to pay the same penalty then.”

“What's going to happen?” asked Sirius forcefully.

“He'll be hanged like the rest of the Death Eaters in the Ministry cell,” said Arthur.

“Can it be done now?” said Sirius. “It's not like he's not guilty. I saw him kill her.”

“It can be done as soon as we have a confession,” said Arthur. “You of all people should know the consequences of wrongfully condemning a man.”

“Is not enough for you that we saw him?” asked Sirius.

“I'll check on what's happening,” said Arthur. “Don't do anything rash Sirius. Now's not the time.”

Sirius paced the office floor as he waited for Arthur to return. The door opened and James walked in.

“I know what's going on,” said James quickly. “But I need to fill you in on what else has happened. Remus got hit by a Chimaera tail. He's battling for his life as we speak, but is probably going to make it. Rose passed out taking care of him. She'll be fine; the poor girl is just exhausted. The thing is Remus told me something before he became unconscious. He told me to tell you the baby didn't die. Do you know what he's talking about?”

Sirius felt like he'd been run over by a truck. He'd had enough shock for one day.

“Are you sure?” asked Sirius.

“That's all he said,” replied James. “He was about to say more when he passed out.”

“I can't believe it,” said Sirius. “I don't understand how he could do that to Chrystal. She has beaten herself up for years over that.”

“I'm a little lost here,” said James. “Would you mind filling me in?”

“Chrys was pregnant when I went to Azkaban,” explained Sirius. “Let's just say things were complicated and Chrys decided to hide while she was pregnant and give the baby up when it was born. Remus told her the baby died. She always thought if she had had proper care it wouldn't have died.”

“I'm sorry,” said James. “I had no idea.”

"We need to find it," said Sirius. "I need your daughter's help for that one. Rose is about the right age."

Arthur walked back in.

"He's just confessed," said Arthur. "If you want to watch now's the time."

Arthur led Sirius and James to the public square where executions had been taking place. Sirius could feel his blood begin to boil as he watched Tadgh being led to the noose. He hated this man more than he had hated anybody before in his life, even more than Peter Pettigrew.

The judge read out his sentence. Sirius was fixated on Moran's face. He didn't even appear to be remorseful. First he was kissed by a Dementor. Following that the hangman wasted no time placing the noose around his head. After a few minutes it was over. The hangman made sure of it.

"Can I make sure he's dead?" Sirius asked Arthur as they carted the body off.

"You won't sleep if we don't," replied Arthur. "They'll take the body to the morgue and you can view it there. I'll accompany you."

Sirius didn't spend too long looking at the withered body of the once unstoppable Quidditch player. He was clearly dead. He thanked Arthur for his kindness.

"My forty-eight hours is almost up," he said. "I had better get back to my wife."

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Hermione had placed Harry on their bed. She placed Matthew next to him. Hermione couldn't help but laugh as Matty tried to reach out for his father. He began to cry when Harry didn't respond. The poor child did not understand. How could he? He was only months old.

"He's just asleep Matty," she said as she picked him up to comfort him. "He'll wake up soon." She didn't know if she believed it herself. He looked dead to her. Stone cold dead. And yet she hoped against all hopes that he wasn't.

She gently placed Matty in his cradle and lay down next to Harry. She felt his cold arms, his stiff trunk. She stroked his lifeless hair away from his face. She held him as tightly as she could. It seemed the hours would never pass. She fell asleep as she lay there watching the clock tick over.

She was awoken not long after by the soft nudging of a lion who took up the entire bed. Her heart filled with joy as she saw him there. He was alive! He had come back to her and they had won the war. She quickly withdrew her wand.

"*Revealo!*"

The lion transformed into Harry and she threw herself at him.

"I'm so grateful you're safe Harry," she said as he wrapped his arms around her.

"What happened?" he asked as he stroked Hermione's hair. "I honestly don't remember. All I can assume is that I've been hit by the killing curse."

"All you need to know is that I killed Voldemort," replied Hermione with a smile. "Believe it or not, everything's alright. We're alright. We can start our lives again."

"What about Chrystal and Lavender?" he asked. "What about them?"

"Lavender's dead," replied Hermione softly. "And Chrystal, well we're waiting. She should almost be awake by now, if she is going to ever wake up. Come on."

She ran into the corridor outside their rooms and bellowed.

"Harry's okay," she said. "Come and see." She heard Sirius' voice not long afterward.

"So is Chrys," he said. Dunvegan was filled with joy.

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They were sitting in the sitting room after having put Rose to bed. Everybody was exhausted after the events of the past few days and although it was time to celebrate they found little energy within themselves to partake in the massive spectacles taking place all over the wizarding communities.

“Shall I get the elves to bring us a drink?” asked Alasdair.

“Something strong,” said Sirius. “Stronger than scotch if you've got it.”

“Anything for my favourite son-in-law,” replied Alasdair.

“Hey,” said Sirius as Alasdair summoned the house elf. “I'm your only son-in-law.”

As they were joking around Guenevere appeared in the fireplace. Chrystal glanced at her father.

“Did you?” she asked raising her eyebrows.

“No,” replied Alasdair. “What are you doing here Guenevere?”

“I'm here to see Rose,” she replied. “Is there a problem?”

“You shouldn't have been able to get here by Floo,” said Chrys. “You've never been here before have you?” Guenevere shook her head. “Ron, will you please show Guenevere to Rose's bedroom. Dad, I'm going to see the fairies.”

“I'll come with you,” he said. “I can't see why the sudden breach of the truce.”

They quickly navigated the winding underground tunnels that led to the fairies lair.

“Have you stopped protecting our borders?” asked Alasdair in a rush.

“No,” replied the fairy king. “We have stopped a great many wizards and witches lately.” He pointed to the corner of the room where Rita Skeeter lay. “It has been a busy time for us.”

“You let a young girl in today?” said Chrys. “Guenevere Prewitt.”

“The only people we have let in today were of MacLeod blood,” replied the fairy king. Chrystal felt her father pull on her hand.

“Thank you,” he said. “I am sorry for disturbing your tranquillity. We will not intrude on you like this again.”

“We are content Alasdair,” he said waving them out.

“What's going on?” asked Chrystal. “How could she be a MacLeod? I know her parents.”

“I'll explain it all in a few minutes,” he said. “Just come with me.” Chrystal obediently followed her father as he led her to a part of the Dunvegan forest where he used to teach her to fly when she had been a little girl.

“Sit down Chrystal,” he said kindly. “I think what the fairies said about Guenevere is correct. Have you ever noticed her eyes?”

Chrystal thought hard. She had noticed Guenevere's hair, the dark black locks that curled down her back. She had noticed the way the girl handled a broomstick, but had assumed that she had taken after her father. She couldn't honestly say that she had ever noticed her eyes.

“No,” she said shaking her head.

“They were the first thing I noticed when I met her,” her father said. “The same eyes have stared at me nearly everyday for the past thirty something years.” It took a while for what her father was saying to sink in.

“That's impossible,” said Chrystal.

“She's the right age,” her father said.

“My child died,” said Chrystal. “I don't need to be reminded of it.”

“I have to tell you the truth Chrystal,” her father said. “Remus confided in me in case anything ever happened to him. He couldn't do what you asked of him Chrystal. It was impossible for him and would have been too difficult for you. He asked Claire to help. She was pregnant with Ewan at the time and the solution seemed the best for everybody. Claire wanted a big family, you weren't in a position to bring up the child and this was the best way he could think of to help you. Claire knew the child was Sirius' but she believed in Sirius' innocence. She never looked down upon Guenevere. She treated her like her own child. It was the best thing at the time Chrystal. I would never have agreed to it if I didn't think that was the case.”

“I can't believe it,” said Chrystal.

“I'll leave you alone for a while,” he said. “I won't say anything to Sirius or Guenevere until you get back.”

“Thank you,” she said. After her father had left she ran from the woods to the stables and jumped on her favourite horse.

“Take me up into the air,” she whispered into his ear.

As her horse soared into the air she tried to free her mind of all the thoughts running through her head.

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Claire Prewitt immediately knew from the look on Chrystal's face that she knew the truth.

“I'm sorry,” said Claire. “I hope that one day you and Sirius can forgive me. We did what we thought was the best thing.”

“I know,” replied Chrystal with tears in her eyes. “But how to we tell Guenevere?”

“She knows she's not my child,” Claire said. “She's very intuitive. She just doesn't know who her parents are. She will have a lot of questions for you I imagine. Eventually she will understand. It will probably take some time though. How did you find out?”

“She came to Dunvegan to see Rose,” replied Chrystal. “We thought the protection had been lifted.”

“I can see how your father would have reacted,” said Claire. “Guen's not stupid she'll already know something's up. I will speak to her when she comes home tonight and then we'll come over if that's fine with you.”

“Thank you,” said Chrystal. “In more ways than one.”

She apparated back to Dunvegan and was immediately greeted by Sirius.

“She's our child isn't she?” he asked as soon as he saw her.

“How did you know?” asked Chrystal.

“Remus told James that she didn't die,” explained Sirius. “When Guen came here and your father returned without you I assumed.”

“Claire is going to talk to her tonight and then bring her over here,” said Chrystal.

They both busied themselves with the twins while waiting for Claire to return with Guenevere. Both were extremely nervous and had little idea of what to expect.

Later that night when Claire and Guenevere arrived few words were exchanged. It was eventually decided that Guenevere should stay there for a few days to get to know Sirius and Chrystal before anything further was decided. She was set up in a quiet wing of the house. After she went to bed Sirius and Chrystal were left wondering how things would work out.

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Harry awoke the next morning to the Daily Prophet landing on his head. The front page stared at him.

### ***DARK LORD DESTROYED BY POTTERS!***

*The feared Dark Lord was destroyed yesterday by the combined efforts of Harry and Hermione Potter, Chrystal Black and Lavender Brown. Although the details of what unfolded are not clear, it appears during the war a battle began in the Dark Lord's castle shortly before the invasion reached the guarding Chimaera. The Dark Lord's body was taken to St Mungos yesterday and was confirmed to be dead. The world is free once again of his reign. The only other casualty was Lavender Brown who was found dead on arrival. She will be awarded the Order of Merlin First Class posthumously. The Potter's and Black will also be awarded the Order of Merlin First Class in next week's ceremony, with other heroes of the Great War.*

Harry rolled over and woke Hermione and showed her the article.

“An Order of Merlin?” she said. “But they don't even know what happened.”

“I guess it doesn't matter,” replied Harry. “We were there when Voldemort was defeated. I can smell breakfast. Let's go downstairs and find out what's happening.”

In the dining room the table was surrounded with people. The first person's eye he caught was Ron's. He ran to embrace his friend who he hadn't seen for days.

“They're giving me and Order of Merlin Harry,” he said. “For services preformed in the Great War! Can you believe it? Mum was so pleased that she cried herself to sleep last night.”

Harry gave Ron a laugh.

“From what I read in yesterdays Daily Prophet you certainly deserve it,” replied Harry. It was time to let Ron have his moment. He certainly had deserved it.

Harry sat down next to Hermione at the table. He glanced around the table pleased to see so many people there. He glanced at Arthur Weasley who seemed to have more joy in his face than he had had in a long time.

“The Wizengamott has appointed Dad as Acting Minister of Magic for the next year,” said Ron to Harry. “They've even asked him to run for Minister after the way he handled everything after Zabini was overthrown.”

A few minutes later the frivolities were interrupted by Tonks helping a limping Remus to the table.

“Remus, thank goodness,” said James with joy. “We were all worried.”

“I'm sure you had a great deal of other things to worry about,” said Remus. He looked to Guenevere who was sitting in the corner of the room. “I'm sorry Guenevere.” She gave him a nod and said nothing in reply.

Breakfast continued but the atmosphere was a little more strained. After he had finished his breakfast Harry stood up to leave.

“Harry,” said Alasdair. “Before you run off could I see you for a few minutes?”

“Sure,” replied Harry a little puzzled. He followed Alasdair into his study. Alasdair indicated that he should have a seat.

“What are you going to do with yourself now Harry?” he asked.

“I hadn't given it much thought,” replied Harry. “I wanted to be an Auror. I intended to do that when this was all behind me.”

“I want to offer you a job,” said Alasdair. “I take it Sirius has never told you what I do for a living?”



“No,” said Harry. He tried to think, what did he actually know about Alasdair? He used to play Quidditch for the Prides. That was about it. “Chrystal said...”

“Chrystal has no idea what I do,” interrupted Alasdair. “I work for the Department of Mysteries. You might say I'm in charge of it.” He paused to let Harry think for a while.

“And you would offer me a job?” asked Harry. “Without any experience?”

“You have proved your worth time and again Harry,” replied Alasdair. “Your job would be similar to begin with as that of an Auror, you require the same skills, the same courage. I think you could be very valuable Harry.”

“I would need to think about it,” said Harry.

“Of course,” replied Alasdair. “You should discuss it with Hermione and Sirius as well, but I would not advise you to talk to anyone else. You can continue playing Quidditch, in fact you should. It gives you a legitimate career as well as keeps you physically fit. Apart from that there's only one more thing you should consider. I won't lie to you Harry. It is dangerous work; there are times when your life could be in danger.”

“That's something I've been living with for a large chunk of my life,” replied Harry,

“Yes but you do have a family,” replied Alasdair. “Please consider it. Let me know before the ceremony next week.”

Harry exited the study and went to find Hermione. She was with Ron and Matty in the garden having morning tea.

“Hey,” said Harry joining them on the lawn.

“What did Alasdair want?” asked Hermione.

“He wanted to offer me a job,” replied Harry. “We can talk about it later.”

“I get the hint,” said Ron. “You're not that subtle mate. I'll go find Rose and see if she's finished counselling Guenevere.” Harry gave a small laugh as Ron walked off. Ron was certainly a reliable friend, one who without he would not have survived the past eight or so years.

Harry explained to Hermione the nature of the job he had been offered. She appeared to be carefully contemplating it.

“I think you should do what your heart tells you Harry,” she replied. “When it comes down to the bottom line, it's really not much more dangerous than being an Auror.”

Harry knew then that he had Hermione's blessing. He just needed to consider whether or not he had his own.

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Alasdair MacLeod threw the biggest party the wizarding world had seen for many years after the awards ceremony. Everyone who was anything in the wizarding world was there plus some. The sense of joy that had engulfed the castle was like nothing Harry had ever experienced before. It was truly amazing.

After the party the remaining few collapsed in the sitting room. Harry looked around the room, it felt in some ways very family-like. There were his parents, Hermione and Matty, Rose and Ron, Sirius, Chrystal and the babies, Chrystal's father, Guenevere, Remus and Tonks.

Tonks gave Harry a smile.

“So have you decided what you're going to do with yourself now?” she asked.

“I'm going to work for Alasdair here,” said Harry. “He's offered me a pretty good job.”

“No Auror training then?” said Tonks with a smile.

"I think Harry's training will be quite intensive," replied Alasdair. "Hopefully he'll do better than Sirius."

"That's hardly fair," said Sirius. "Circumstances were different when you trained me."

"Perhaps," said Alasdair. "Perhaps you were just sloppy."

"If you really believed that you wouldn't let me help train him," replied Sirius.

"Probably not," replied Alasdair with a laugh.

"Besides I need something that isn't too taxing," said Sirius. "I need a lot of free time to create my empire."

"Your empire?" asked James raising his eyebrows.

"Well a month ago I had no children, now I have three," said Sirius. "I don't have a son yet. I guess I'd better get to work."

"Not now you won't," said Chrys with a laugh. "I have my hands full with these two and I want to get to know Guen better before we go down that track."

Harry knew Guenevere's transition into the Black family was not an easy process however so far she seemed to be doing reasonably well. She was holding Isobel now. It was evident that she had already fallen in love with her two new sisters to anyone who saw their interaction, even if she hadn't quite come to terms with who she was yet.

"Bad luck, I need a son," said Sirius. "And my dear Chrys, you're not getting any younger."

"What about Quidditch?" asked Chrystal. "The Prides have taken me back."

"You're not stopping Quidditch?" asked James with some surprise.

"Well, I'll be playing for a living," she replied. "And then I'll be coaching when I am unable to play. It will be a kind of transition. I wasn't the best teacher, I'm not cut out for that and my Auror days are well behind me. Too many people to prosecute at the moment!"

"They're certainly behind me as well," said Lily. "I'm going to continue working on potions with Snape." Harry saw the face his father made. "Come on James you know that I'm good at it."

"It just reminds me of our Hogwarts days," replied James. "I guess that means I need to find some work then."

"Eventually," replied Lily. "You don't expect me to support you forever do you?" The room filled with laughter.

"Hermione got some good news today didn't you sweetheart?" Harry said.

"I got offered a job at the new Ministry," replied Hermione. "In the Department of Experimental Charms. It's part time and I can start whenever I want. I'm going to wait until Matthew is one and then start working again. It's nothing special, but it's a starting place and I think I could learn some important things there. And I think we might put the family on hold for a little while."

"Good for you," said Ron jokingly. "Personally I can't see the appeal, but each to their own. Hey Rose, when do you go back to school?"

"I'm not going back," said Rose. A hush came over the room. "The Healer I was working with on the battlefield said I more than proved myself and offered me a training position, starting after Christmas."

"Good for you Rose," said Harry. "Congratulations."

The conversation drifted into the night and Harry was thankful that he had so many family and friends who gave him so much love and support. He knew that he had found his purpose. He was a father, a husband, a son, a brother and a friend.

He was no longer “The Boy Who Lived.”