

# **Extracurricular activities**

By

Sloth

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## **Chapter 1**

Harry and Sirius emerged from the fireplace into the main hall of Veganos Castle; Harry's new home. This was Harry's first view of it, but Sirius had been here once before for the burial of R.J. Veganos, the vampire Harry had fallen in love with at school but who had died fighting Voldemort. Looking around wide-eyed, Harry said, "I can't believe I'll be living here." The first floor common area had very high ceilings with a lot of artwork on the walls. Not like the pictures at Hogwarts, these didn't move. There were some sculptures and vases setting in various spots in the room. The fireplace was huge with a stone front.

"It's no Hogwarts but it is a fine castle Harry. R.J. had good taste," Sirius responded. He had been here for her funeral.

Harry dropped his trunk and said, "Where is she buried? I want to see that first."

Sirius let Harry outside to a spot on the hill, overlooking a lake. There was a rock mound with a headstone that read.

*Rebecca Jane Veganos*

*1832 - 1985*

Harry reached in his pocket and pulled out the necklace he had given her. He lifted one of the stones and placed the necklace beneath it. He said something to himself and then began crying again. Sirius just stood back and let Harry deal with it himself. After a few minutes, Harry stood up and he and Sirius went back inside. The castle was quite large. It had been kept up very well. There was very nice artwork on the walls and the furnishings were all in good condition. Somehow, Harry couldn't picture R.J. living here. He had known her as a person helping out with the extra security for Hogwarts, living in Hogsmeade and spending her evenings in the dark forest. He just couldn't picture her here in this place.

"Are you going to be able to stay here with me Sirius?" Harry finally asked.

"Maybe some of the time Harry. Right now there is still much for us to do. Voldemort is hurt, but not beaten yet. If we can press our cause and get enough information, maybe we can stop him before he tries anything else. Dumbledore has placed some security on this place. No one can Apparate in or out, and the floo is setup to only allow certain people in or out. He's going to speak to a friend of yours about getting the floo even more secure, and then about allowing apparitions for specific people. That will take some time."

Harry and Sirius tried to get used to the place. They were figuring out what all the rooms were and how everything worked when they heard a loud knock on the door. Sirius made Harry stay back and went to answer it. He opened the door and found an elderly gentleman. "Can I help you?" Sirius asked.

"Ah sir, my name is Thomas Wilkins. I keep up the grounds. I have known Miss Veganos for a long time and I understand she died recently. You must be Mr. Potter. Her letter told me many things about you. It's a pleasure to meet you."

"I'm sorry Mr. Wilkins, but I'm not Mr. Potter. I happen to be his Godfather. He's right here."

Harry stepped forward toward the old man. "Hello Mr. Wilkins, I'm Harry Potter, pleased to meet you. I understand you were a good friend to R.J."

The man did a slight double-take at seeing Harry and said, "Miss Veganos' letters made you seem older. Forgive me. I'm terribly saddened by her passing. I've known her for a long time."

"I wish I had known her longer Mr. Wilkins, please come in," Harry said, motioning the old man to come in.

"You've met my Godfather, Mr... Blackenshire." Harry looked at Sirius, unsure how to introduce Sirius to new people.

The man seemed to notice Harry's misstep and said, "Miss Veganos informed me that any of your friends could be fully trusted no matter what others may say. Mr. Blakenshire will be fine for me." He nodded at Sirius who did the same back.

"R.J. said you made the sword she gave me. That's amazing workmanship, you are truly an artist," Harry said remembering the workmanship on the sword R.J. had given him as a Christmas present.

"A hobby Mr. Potter. My father's profession but not much calling for it these days."

"Please call me Harry sir. R.J. mentioned that you might be interested in continuing to care for the grounds. I would appreciate it since I doubt I could do it myself."

"My family would be honored to continue support of the grounds. We know all about Miss Veganos and have admired her as a person for man years."

"Would you mind me asking how it is you know all about R.J.?" Harry asked.

"She saved my life in my youth. I was in the wrong place at the wrong time and she prevented me from experiencing a terrible ordeal. I owe her more than I could ever repay." Harry and Sirius both could hear the pain losing R.J. had caused the man.

"She died trying to save my life. Obviously she was successful. I owe her more than I could ever repay as well. You mentioned that your family tends to the grounds. How many will be here? I'm not used to people around much."

"Of course sir, Miss Veganos told me about it being important that you were kept safe. I have two granddaughters who help me. My wife rarely comes up."

"Thank you Mr. Wilkins. Can I ask you what R.J. told you about me?" Harry wondered if they knew about him being a wizard. Living with the Dursley's gave Harry practice acting like a Muggle, but if Sirius and his other friends were ever around, he wanted to make sure that Mr. Wilkins wouldn't be too surprised.

"She said you were a surprisingly powerful person with compassion. Said I could trust you with anything and count on you for anything as well. She did say there may be things I found unusual about you but to not be concerned and that she would trust you with her life. That's all I needed to hear Harry."

"Thank you Mr. Wilkins. I will attempt to live up to those comments."

"Goodbye Harry, Mr. Blackenshire," the old man said, rising and going back to the door.

"Very well handled Harry. Any thought of politics?" Sirius asked with a smile.

"Oh no, the further away from Ministry bureaucrats, the better. What do you think of Mr. Wilkins?"

"If they kept the secret of her being a vampire for so long, even if they find out about us being wizards, I don't think it would matter. I realize more and more how special she was Harry. I do have one question though. How are you going to take care of the inside of the castle? This seems like a bit of work. Are you going to cook and clean all of this for yourself?" Sirius wasn't being critical, just practical.

Harry hadn't really thought of that. He could make basic stuff. He cooked breakfast at the Dursley's often enough. He also did the laundry, but doing it in a castle was a different story. Then a thought hit him. "Sirius, would it be wrong to try and hire Dobby to work for me?"

"You're house-elf friend at Hogwarts? I don't see why not, that's what they do. You should see what assets R.J. left you. Keeping up a castle with groundskeepers can't be cheap."

"And, I'll have to pay Dobby if he agrees. I'll write Dumbledore and ask his permission first."

"I'm supposed to meet him tomorrow; you could come along and ask him then. It would be quicker than using Hedwig."

Harry thought of Hedwig. She was going to be so much happier being loose here than stuck in her cage at Privet Drive. This was a totally different feeling. Even though this was his home now, Harry felt there was so much to do. He had always dreamed of being away from the Dursleys, and being able to do whatever he wanted, but here it just seemed like something was missing. Still, the Dursleys weren't any part of it.

Harry spent the rest of the day trying to get used to where everything was in the castle. He had been so mentally worn out that he slept well in his new bedroom. In the morning Harry and Sirius traveled by floo back to Hogsmeade and then on to Hogwarts to meet with Dumbledore. "Harry, this is a surprise. I thought only Sirius would come today."

"I wanted to ask you something sir. The castle we live in now is quite large and I'm not totally comfortable taking care of everything. There is a family that takes care of the grounds so I'm not worried about that but I've never lived on my own before. I was wondering if you thought it would be appropriate and acceptable to you if I offered Dobby a job? Can you spare him and do you think it would offend him if I offered?"

"I think that would be a wonderful idea Harry. He is quite fond to you and asks about you all the time. You know he would want a salary now, correct? The thing you may not know is that he is also attached to Winky. Would it be within your means to offer them both a position? I doubt Winky would accept payment but the offer would mean a lot to Dobby."

"Yes sir, I think I could do that. I haven't been to Gringotts to see what R.J. was talking about when she said assets but I'm sure I had enough to pay both Dobby and Winky if they want."

Would it be ok if they came back here to work at the school when term starts? I wouldn't want them at home all alone." Harry couldn't imagine either of them being happy at his home when no one else was there.

"That would work out perfectly Harry. You can go down and ask them if you'd like. When you're done, come back up. Sirius and I should be done by then."

Harry went down to the kitchen to find Dobby. Upon entering the area, he was mobbed by house-elves asking if he needed anything. He thought they must hate it when no students are around, there didn't seem like enough work for them to do. Harry felt something thump into him and heard, "Harry Potter sir. What are you doing at Hogwarts? It is good to have you here."

"Hello Dobby, I came to ask you a favor," Harry said prying the enthusiastic house-elf off of his leg.

"Ah, anything sir. Dobby would do anything for Harry Potter."

"Dobby, I've already asked Professor Dumbledore for permission and he said it was ok. Would you like to come and work for me? I can't take care of my new home by myself."

Dobby's eyes got huge and his ears started twitching with delight. "REALLY! Harry Potter wants Dobby to work for him? Such an honor sir. Dobby working for the great wizard Harry Potter." Suddenly Dobby's eyes and ears fell. "Sir, no offense but Dobby wouldn't want to leave Winky. She still needs Dobby sir. She is not yet comfortable with how things ended with Master Crouch."

"That's ok Dobby; I asked if Winky could come also. If she would want to that is. I can pay you both if that's what it takes."

"Harry Potter will give both Dobby and Winky positions! One moment sir, let Dobby get Winky." Dobby ran away and came by a moment later with Winky.

"Hi Winky, good to see you again."

The female house-elf appeared calm. "Hello Harry Potter sir. Dobby said you had something to ask."

Winky was much more business like than Dobby; Harry noticed. She was still dressed in a tattered rag for clothing. "I don't know if you heard, but my friend R.J. left me her home. I can't take care of it myself. I really need some help. Would you and Dobby please come and work for me? I've asked Professor Dumbledore for permission already. When I'm at school, you could come back here and work if you want to," Harry said almost pleadingly.

"You want Winky and Dobby to work for you? Truly sir? Winky would be honored. Telling the truth sir, there are too many house-elves here. Winky would enjoy serving one wizard much more," Winky said getting about as excited as Harry had ever seen her.

"I told Dobby already. If you want, I can pay you and give you time off. I just want you to be happy," Harry said, kind of uncomfortably.

The elf looked offended. "Oh no sir! Winky will not accept payment. She is a traditional house-elf. She let's Dobby to his own accords but will not follow his path."

"Ok. Whatever you want. There is one thing that is important to me. Would you please accept some new clothes from me? Something that you would like. I just want you to work for me, not be enslaved. "

Winky look like the thought of real clothes made her ill, but she said; "If it is important to you sir, Winky will accept clothes but *no* paying."

"Thank you Winky. This is all new to me, so if I do something I shouldn't, please tell me. I wouldn't want to offend either of you."

"Offend us! Harry Potter offend us. Never sir," Dobby started ranting

"Ok, one thing. Dobby we need to work on something. I'm your friend; you don't need to call me great or anything. Remember, you're my friend and I'm you're friend, we're the same. Ok?" Harry didn't want Dobby acting like Harry was some amazing wizard every time he was around.

Dobby was jumping around excitedly but tried to calm down and say, "Dobby will try sir."

"Winky, please try to help him. Sirius and I are going back in a little bit. Home is called Veganos Castle. Can you find it?"

"Of course we can find it sir. You do have a lot to learn about house-elves," Winky said. Dobby was still beaming.

"I'll see you later then. Thank you for coming with me, I really need the help." Harry left the kitchen, half-wondering what he had gotten himself into. Walking back to Professor Dumbledore's office he ran into Professor Snape. He hadn't seen Snape since answering questions about what happened in the forest a few weeks ago.

"Potter. What are you doing back here?" the professor asked with noticeably less hate in his voice than Harry was used to.

"Hello Professor. I'm trying to talk Dobby into coming to work for me. I don't think I can handle a castle by myself."

"You don't worry about handling Voldemort but worry about running a castle? A bit odd to me."

"Professor, would you mind me asking how you knew R.J. and why you seemed to respect her? Every day I seem to find out something else about her." Harry had wondered about this ever since finding out that Professor Snape respected R.J. and she thought highly of him as well.

Snape looked at him for a minute and said, "Back before I chose the correct side, she had the opportunity to take away my choice so to speak. She asked if I was comfortable with the path I had chosen in life and when I hesitated she said she would give me an opportunity to choose again. She didn't judge me and she didn't hold anything against me later. She was unlike

anyone I had ever met before. She had the power to kill me and yet decided to give me another chance. I'll never forget that." Snape said without any emotion at all.

"That's what she said about me sir. When I was with Hagrid and we met her in the forest, I didn't know she was good and I had planned on running a branch through her but I didn't. She said that was rare and that she wouldn't forget how I treated her. I really miss her." Harry fumbled for a moment and said, "Sorry sir, I didn't mean to bother you with that."

"Not a problem Mr. Potter. In this instance I can fully relate. Could I possibly ask you a personal question?"

Now Harry couldn't hide being stunned. He couldn't imagine what Snape could be curious about. "Me? Of course sir."

"Would you mind telling me how you throw off the Cruciatus Curse? Between you and me only, that is one thing I fear the most." The professor was looking straight into Harry's eyes, and Harry could tell this was hard for him to ask.

Harry was stunned. "Yes sir. The way it was explained to me was that it is very different than throwing the Imperius curse. Throwing the Imperius curse is about strength of will. Throwing the Cruciatus curse is about channeling anger to block the pain. I had been really mad at myself, Wormtail, Voldemort and Draco after last year so I was able to first block the pain when I focused on something Draco said on the train ride back. It became easier after the first time."

"If you don't mind me asking, what would Draco have said that made you madder at him than the Dark Lord?"

"He came into our compartment telling me I chose the wrong side. Then he said, 'Mudbloods and Muggles would be first... No second... Cedric was first'. We all blasted him but I kept hearing him say that over the summer and it just made me really angry."

"That's cold, even for Draco. But, it did prove useful. Can you explain the technique again?" Snape's tone was not like he was talking to another teacher, not like he normally spoke to Harry at all.

"When you first feel the pain, try to get angry. Picture the person casting the spell as someone you hate more than anything in the world. You can't be afraid of them; you have to just hate them. It was hard for me to do this at first because I liked the person teaching me but after having him curse me a few times, it became easier to feel like I hated him. It wasn't fun to learn this but it did come in useful."

"Thank you Potter. I'm sure I can find someone willing to put that curse on me so I could try this out." Snape almost seemed to get a smirk on his face with this comment.

"Sir, if you are able to block it, I can show you another surprise about that technique. I don't want to say anything until you can fully block the curse though. I'll just say that sometimes it is useful to not block it all."

"Really? I hope I'll get to that point."



Harry continued on to Dumbledore's office still amazed about his discussion with Professor Snape. Snape was actually asking him about magic. He got to the office and knocked. "Come in Harry," Dumbledore said. "Sirius and I were just finishing up. He said you met the groundskeepers and that they seem very trustworthy. I wouldn't have expected anything less from Miss R.J. though. How did it go with Dobby?"

"Dobby didn't want to go without Winky, just as you thought. Winky liked the idea; she thinks there are too many elves here. I told them to tell me if I don't do something correctly since I'm new to this. And, I asked Winky to help Dobby tone down the great wizard act. Thank you for letting me ask them sir. It will help me out a bunch."

"One thing Harry. What should we tell your friends now? I've told them you were back up and around and I would imagine they are anxious to hear from you." Dumbledore gave him an appraising look. Harry imagined that Dumbledore wanted him to resume acting normally around his friends as soon as possible.

Harry didn't really want to be receiving daily owls at home, not yet. "Would it be too much trouble for them to send me letters here? I would like to just live a quiet life for a while. Either Sirius or I could come and get them occasionally."

"That's no trouble at all Harry. I do have a bit of news for you. Voldemort is still alive but not as fully recovered as you. We don't know where he is but we do know he is not pleased at the way things worked out. I don't expect him to follow the same tactics the next time. It sounds like he is going to start with many smaller attacks to reinforce to the Death Eaters that he is still powerful. It looks like your decision to not show your animagus form during the year was a very wise one. That is something that he won't have prior knowledge of and you can still use it when the time is right."

Harry thought for a second and said, "I would like to work more with the Unspeakables, but truthfully right now I just want to be left alone with nothing to do. I hope that doesn't sound selfish but I just don't feel like dealing with anything right now. Do you think that's wrong?"

"Not at all. Even though it may not seem like it to you, remember you're only fifteen years old. Do what you enjoy for a while. It's only a life if you really live it."

"I'm ready to go whenever you are Harry," Sirius said.

They were standing in the kitchen of the castle grabbing a bite to eat when they heard 'Pop..Pop' and saw Dobby and Winky standing near them.

Sirius kind of jumped. "Sirius, you've never met my friends. Sirius, this is Dobby. He saved my life with gillyweed a while back."

"Ah, Harry Potter's Godfather. An honor sir," Dobby said bowing very low.

"And this is another good friend Winky. She is a very traditional house-elf".

The female house-elf stepped up to Sirius showing a very confident attitude. "Sirius Black sir. A pleasure to meet you. We are not concerned about your escape from Azkaban sir."

Sirius smiled. "Nice to meet you both. Please take good care of Harry when I'm not around."

"Yes sir, we will take excellent care of Harry Potter sir. He is the greatest friend of house-elves," Dobby said sounding very serious.

"Dobby, Winky. I don't know much about the castle yet so you pick where you want to stay and tell me if anything needs to be done. Just yell at me if you need me to do anything."

"Yes sir Harry Potter sir. We will help you with all you need. Come Dobby," and then they were off.

Sirius just laughed, "What's there story, really?"

"Dobby was Lucius Malfoy's elf until I tricked him into freeing Dobby. Winky was Barty Crouch's elf until he dismissed her for not keeping his Death Eater son controlled. Dobby tried to save me in my second year and nearly killed me, but he made up for it with the gillyweed in the Triwizard Tournament. I think they really love each other."

"What do you think about living here, honestly?" Sirius asked with a strange look on his face.

"It's weird. Almost nothing I've seen so far reminds me of the R.J. I knew. Everything so far seems to fit 'Princess Veganos' but not R.J. In some ways that's a relief, but in other's I would be happier learning more about the R.J. I knew. My parents were in love and as terrible as it is what happened to them, they went together. They came out of Voldemort's wand together. R.J. went and I didn't. We weren't together. I know it's weird. The first girl I really cared about. Look at Fred or George Weasley. They go out with girls all the time and can easily forget about one and go to another. I don't see how they do it. I want to be with that one special person. I thought R.J. was it. Even with the obvious issues, she's whom I wanted to be with. It feels strange being here and it not reminding me more of her."

"I'd say you're handling it better than I would. But I don't think I could have fallen for a vampire. Even though I admired her and she really impressed me when met her. I just didn't see her that way."

"I think that's what all my friends thought as well. I think Dumbledore understood though."

Over the next few days, Harry saw Mr. Wilkins and two teenage girls doing work in the grounds. Harry was watching one day when Winky came up holding a tray with a pitcher and some glasses. "It would be polite to take them some tea sir."

"Thank you Winky, that's an excellent idea." Harry took the tray and went outside. "Mr. Wilkins. Would you and your grand-daughters like some tea?"

He came over and said, "Thank you Harry. I don't believe you've met my granddaughters. This is Katie, and this is Angie." Harry looked at them. Katie was obviously older, with blonde hair and a confident stance. Angie had darker hair and was a bit less confident.

"Hi, I'm Harry. Thank you all for continuing to help out with the grounds. I couldn't imagine taking care of it. Please, have some tea," Harry said trying to be polite. He sat the tray down on the table and Mr. Wilkins and the girls each took a glass.

"Katie here is getting ready for college in London. Quite an adventure, that's for sure. Angie is going to turn sixteen and is still in the local school, but tops in her class," Mr. Wilkins said proudly.

"I bet your parents are proud," Harry said, trying to sound encouraging. It had the wrong effect. Their expressions became quite hardened. "I'm sorry, did I say something wrong. That happens to me a lot."

"Their parents were killed Harry. A little over fifteen years ago," Mr. Wilkins informed him.

Harry felt like he could kick himself for saying something wrong the first time he met the girls. "I'm sorry, I didn't know. That's about the time my parents were killed also."

They looked at him differently now. Like someone they could relate to. Angie said hesitantly, "How did yours die?"

"Angie! Don't ask people questions like that," Katie said.

"No, it's ok," Harry responded. "My big mouth brought this up. My parents were killed by a very evil person who also tried to kill me, but I was lucky enough to survive."

"Our parents were also killed by a very evil person. Someone who didn't like people like us. They just happened to be in his way at the time," Katie said bitterly.

"What do you mean people like you? If you don't mind me asking. You don't have to tell me if you don't want to. I get people trying to pry into my life a lot, so I know what its like."

Katie looked at Mr. Wilkins who just nodded, and then she said, "Well, this person was a...I don't know if you believe in them or not, but he was an evil wizard and he hated anyone who wasn't a true wizard. We were just common folk and our parents tried to stop him from hurting our neighbor who had a daughter that had some strange talents. He just killed our parents for trying to help. We didn't believe in wizards until that day and saw how evil they can be."

Harry's heart sank wondering what they would think of him if they found out he was a wizard. "Do you think all wizards are like that? I mean that evil?"

"You believe in them too? Not many people do." Katie seemed surprised but continued. "I don't think they're all like that. One old man with a long white beard came around after it happened saying how sorry he was that one of his kind could do something so terrible. He made us feel better but it didn't bring our parents back."

Harry decided to come kind of clean. "My parents were killed by an evil wizard as well." They turned and stared at him. "I was about a year old when it happened. The wizard tried to kill me but failed. Some very nice people took me to live with my Aunt and Uncle for a while. They hated anything to do with wizards. This is the first time I've lived on my own."

"A year old, and you said you were coming up on sixteen now. That would be about the time the talk of wizards killing people stopped. The rumors said a baby stopped the evil wizard from hurting anyone else. Have you ever heard that before?" Mr. Wilkins asked, looking at Harry intently.

"Yes Mr. Wilkins, I have heard that," Harry said without further comment.

Angie spoke up quickly, "Seems we have a lot in common." Harry smiled and thought that maybe his poor choice of a question had somehow worked itself out.

That evening Harry decided he should find out if he had enough money to keep this place up. He decided to write to Gringotts and ask.

*Head Goblin*

*Gringotts, Diagon Alley*

*A short while back Miss R.J. Veganos transferred her assets to my account. You wrote me saying that the contents of my old vault were move into hers. As I now responsible for the upkeep of the home she left me, I am not clear whether those assets will allow me to do so. Could you tell me the current value of my vault please?*

*Thank you*

*Harry Potter*

Harry had gotten a response the next evening;

*Mr. Harry Potter.*

*I'm afraid I cannot give you the information you requested except in person. I can at least tell you that you have no need to worry about being able to keep up the property. Miss Veganos had been very prudent with her assets over the many years she had been a client.*

*Please ask for me personally when you next come in. I have met you once a few years ago but would like to personally give you this information.*

*Head Goblin*

*Gringotts, Diagon Alley.*

Strange, but at least the main question was answered. He had enough to keep the castle.

The next few weeks went by normally. Harry would take tea to the Wilkins's occasionally, and Sirius would be gone for a days at a time. Harry was getting used to the free time he had to do school work and help out in the grounds. One evening, Sirius came back and looked like he was in a very good mood. "Snape asked me today Harry."

"So, what did you tell him?" Harry knew that Snape must have asked Sirius to try putting the Cruciatus curse on him so that he could practice throwing it.

"I jumped at the chance to curse him!" Sirius said with a big smile

"That's what I expected. Really though, I hope he can learn to throw the curse. He's probably had it applied to him more than I have. Not counting training that is."

Sirius flinched at the thought of the curse being cast on Harry. "Can you tell me about this training?"

"Can't Sirius, sorry. The Unspeakables trusted me with it and I'm seriously considering going to work for them one day so I can't. They're good though, very good. When are you going to start with Professor Snape?"

"First thing next week. I can't wait." There was an evil smile on his face.

There was a knock at the door and when Harry answered it, he saw Mr. Wilkins and an attractive older woman with him. "Hello Mr. Wilkins."

"Hello Harry. I'd like you to meet my wife Mary. She's been anxious to meet you."

"Nice to meet you Mrs. Wilkins. I'm Harry Potter," she said shaking his hand.

"Nice to meet you as well Mr. Potter," she said with an accent that Harry recognized.

"No, just Harry, please. You're French aren't you?" Harry remembered the students from Beauxbatons and how they sounded when they were speaking English.

"Yes, very good. I'm originally from Paris and still have family there."

Harry thought of something and then panicked. He should invite them in but what if they saw Dobby or Winky. Or what if Sirius came out of the fireplace? He couldn't be rude so he said, "Would you like to come in?"

"Yes, thanks," she replied as they stepped inside.

"There is something I should tell you though. I hope you don't mind but..." and then Harry was cut off.

"You're a wizard, aren't you?" Mrs. Wilkins asked bluntly.

Harry was startled. "Um...yes. How did you know? Does it bother you?" Harry was starting to panic inside since a wizard had killed their children.

"We knew R.J. was protecting a wizard school. Then she asked for a special sword to be made for someone she met. In her letter, I got the feeling she was happy. Then we got the letter after she died talking about you and that she had left her home to you so we just put two and two together. And, no you being a wizard is not a problem at all. No matter what you are, you seem like a good person and R.J. held you in the highest regard which is all I need to know," Mr. Wilkins spoke up.

Harry turned looked at Mrs. Wilkins hoping for an answer from her.

"It doesn't bother me either Harry. Even without R.J.'s note talking about you, I would have guessed there was something different. You don't have any means of transportation here and yet you always have tea for Tom and our granddaughters. Your godfather seems to come and go without transport as well. And, I can't imagine a young man keeping up the inside of this place so well by himself without doing something special."

Harry felt relief and smiled. "Actually I have excellent help taking care of the castle. Would you like to meet them? They are -different- than us."

Mr. and Mrs. Wilkins looked at each other and nodded.

Harry said in a slightly louder voice, "Dobby, Winky would you like to meet our neighbors?"

'Pop', 'Pop' and the two house-elves appeared. Mrs. Wilkins gave a slight scream and Mr. Wilkins sat back in his seat more.

"Sorry to startle you mam," Winky said looking sad. Dobby stood slightly to the side of Winky but kept quiet; he obviously knew who was in charge.

"These are the Wilkins, Winky. This is Winky and this is Dobby. They are my friends and also take care of me," Harry said looking at his neighbors, wondering what they would think.

"Pleased to meet you Mrs. Wilkins, Mr. Wilkins. We see you working in the grounds on some days." Winky spoke up in her soft squeaky voice.

The Wilkins had recovered but their eyes still showed wonderment when they shook the house-elves' hands.

Speaking to Winky and Dobby, Harry said, "I wanted them to meet you in case they come over more they wouldn't be startled. They had already figured out I was a wizard."

"Ah, very good. Harry Potter has good neighbors," Dobby squeaked. Winky looked at him and then they both 'popped' away.

Mrs. Wilkins asked many questions about the house-elves. Harry told her they basically did everything inside the castle. How he couldn't live here without them.

"Um.. I'd like to tell you something about how R.J. died if you don't mind. Remember the wizard who killed my parents and tried to kill me when I was a baby. He's the one who killed R.J. and tried to kill me again a few weeks ago. I tried to stop him but he's still out there. I thought you should know before you decide on liking me being around or not. She was protecting the school and me but didn't make it."

"That sounds like her," Mr. Wilkins said.

"Do your grand children know about me? I don't want to say anything if they don't know."

"Katie and Angie know something's special and have commented on how you get around and how strange it is that you go in to make tea and come back out in less time than it should take to make the tea. I think we're going to tell them though. Better than being surprised by something," Mrs. Wilkins said with a smile. "Do you have friends who are French Harry?"

"Kind of. There was a school competition a couple years ago and some students came from France. I kind of bonded with one student and her little sister. Ever since then, I wished I could speak the language."

"I could teach you if you'd like!" she said eagerly

"Oh, I wouldn't want to trouble you," Harry said, he hadn't meant for her to do this.

"It would be no trouble. With Tom and the girls are up here anyway, it would really give me something to do. I was a teacher a long time ago and it would be fun to do it again. And it will give me an excuse to use my native language on more than just my family."

"I'd really like to learn. If it's really no trouble, that would be great."

## Chapter 2

Harry sent Hedwig to Hogwarts to pick up any mail. He was getting in a much better mood and the thought of talking to his friends seemed enjoyable again. Hedwig and another owl came back with many letters. They were all pretty much the same. How are you feeling? When are you going to write? Then Ron's was; where are you staying? Want to come and stay with us? Cho's actually made him miss his friends the most.

*Harry*

*I hope you're back feeling well. We were all very worried. I want to thank you for saving me. I was so mad at you when you didn't run away with me, but now that you're ok it doesn't matter.*

*Please write back, I really miss hearing from you.*

*Cho*

He missed her too. Was this bad he wondered? Here he is living in R.J.'s home thinking about missing Cho. He really missed R.J. also, but he would never be able to see her again. He decided to write all of his friends. They were all about the same.

*Thanks for your notes, they've helped a bunch. Sorry it took me so long to write back, I shouldn't have waited so long.*

*I'm really glad you came to see me when I was hurt, I'm sure it helped a bunch.*

*I can't wait to see you again.*

*Harry*

Cho's had a little extra

*I really miss seeing you as well. I was so glad to hear that Firenze got you out ok. Dumbledore told me you spent a lot of time with me before term ended. I really appreciate that. I'm glad to hear you're not still mad at me either.*

Harry started sending Hedwig to Hogwarts every few days to collect letters. He still didn't want to tell them how their owl could find him. It was going to be strange when they found out R.J. had owned a castle and now he lived there.

The French lessons with Mrs. Wilkins were going better than he expected. He thought it was going to be really hard learning it. Mrs. Wilkins was happy with his progress and told her grand daughters to try speaking French to Harry whenever they could.

Harry's birthday was a nice quiet one with only Sirius with him. He had gotten some good sweets and books as presents. The one thing that surprised him was a card from Cho. How did she even know?

*Happy Birthday Harry.*



*I wouldn't know what to get you but I really wanted to send you a card to let you know I'm thinking about you and can't wait to hear from you again.*

*Bye.*

*P.S. Ron sent me an owl telling me when your birthday is. Do you know what that's about?*

Harry smiled. Ron had always thought Harry should be with Cho. Now he's trying to push it along just like Harry had done with Ron and Hermione. What are friends for, he thought.

The next day, Mr. and Mr. Wilkins came over looking more serious than normal. "Harry, can we speak to you for a moment?"

"Sure, sit down," Harry said.

Sirius got up to leave but Mr. Wilkins stopped him. "Mr. Blackenshire, you're a wizard also so we'd like your opinion on this as well." Sirius came and sat next to Harry before Mr. Wilkins continued, "My granddaughters are comfortable seeing both of you and knowing you are wizards but would it be possible for them to meet any of your friends? I would like the girls to see more people, and especially some other girls who are magical. They had put the ordeal of their parents being killed out of their minds, but now they talk about magical people often and I want them to see that you can be just like us."

Harry thought of something. "I have an idea. I'd like to invite my friends here to thank them for helping me when I was hurt. I'm not sure the non-magical families will come due to the distance, but the wizard family probably will. You could bring your granddaughters up to meet everyone."

"You'd do that? It would probably help seeing another family with children going there," Mrs. Wilkins said excitedly.

Now Harry was excited. He had a real excuse to see his friends again. He prepared the letters.

*Hermione.*

*Would you please come to a meal I am having? There are two big reasons for having this. The first is I really want to see you all. The second is that my neighbor's granddaughter's parents were killed by a wizard and they found out I was one. They actually seem ok with this, but they would like to meet other people, and especially a witch.*

*I know your parents can't travel by floo but if they want to come, I'd really like having them. The date is the Saturday, one week before term starts. We can meet in Diagon Alley the next day if you want.*

*Harry*

*Ron*

*Would you and your family please come to a meal I'm having at my home? There are three big reasons for having this. The first is I really want to see you all. The second is that I really*

*want to start paying your family back for all they've done for me (and to make up for skimming out on Holiday last year). The third is that my neighbor's granddaughter's parents were killed by a wizard and they found out I was one. They actually seem ok with this, but they would like to meet other people and I thought meeting your family would be great. Your dad could quiz Mr. Wilkins about Muggle things.*

*You can travel by floo and I'll tell you the name later. The date is the Saturday, one week before term starts. We can meet in Diagon Alley the next day if you want.*

*Harry*

Harry knew from previous asking that since Cho was at home right now he should ask her father first. He would have to make sure this letter was done right.

*Mr. Chang*

*My name is Harry Potter. I attend school with your daughter Cho. She recently visited me when I was hurt at the end of term and it helped me get better. I am having a meal for my friends who helped me and for their families. I would be honored if you and Mrs. Chang as well as Cho could attend. I now live in Southingham and since I don't know where you live, I don't know how far this is for you. If you would like to come, I can send directions. If you cannot come but would still allow me to ask Cho, I would be grateful. She could travel by floo. There will be about five students and some parents. I haven't asked Cho yet as I wanted to get your permission. If you do not think this is a good idea, I will not mention to her that I sent you this letter. The date is the Saturday, one week before term starts.*

*I have asked my owl to wait for a reply. If you wish to discuss this and to let me know at a later date, please give my owl that note to return otherwise she will wait there.*

*Thank you*

*Harry Potter*

Harry was anxiously awaiting their responses. He was also trying really hard when working with Mrs. Wilkins on French. She wanted to know many things about Hogwarts, but asked the questions and made him try to answer in French. This really helped him get better. Right after one of these sessions, Hedwig flew in and dropped a note. Mrs. Wilkins looked startled. "This is my owl mam. It's how we send mail."

"Is this the only way you send post?" she asked.

"I think normal post would work. I just don't know the addresses. Hedwig can find anyone, she's amazing." Harry read the note

*Mr. Potter*

*My daughter has talked about you for a few years now and has told us how you saved her last year. I am personally in your debt for getting her out unharmed. Even if I weren't indebted to you, I would give my permission for you to invite Cho. If she agrees, my wife and I would also like to attend to thank you personally. Your home is not very close but it will be a nice family*

*trip. When you ask Cho, please tell her I have already given my permission. This will save her the stress of wondering if you followed custom correctly. Also, please give her the address.*

*I look forward to meeting you in person.*

*X. Chang*

YES! Harry thought. He re-read the last of the note about him looking forward to meeting me. He hoped that meant that Mr. Chang thought Cho would accept the invitation. Quickly Harry made another note.

*Cho*

*I'd like to invite you and your parents to a meal at my new home. I really want to see you and to thank you for seeing me in the hospital. Also my neighbor's granddaughter's parents were killed by a wizard and they found out I was one. They actually seem ok with this, but they would like to meet other people and I thought if they met your family it would be perfect since your parents aren't magical.*

*I have already received permission from your father to invite you. I hope I asked him correctly. I told him the date is the Saturday, one week before term starts.*

*Let me know soon.*

*Harry*

Harry went to Dobby and Winky to tell them about the meal and to see if they needed any help. They had both acted offended and told him that a single house-elf could handle a party the size he was planning and they would have no problems at all. He had received owls from Ron saying he and his family would come and that his mom was very interested in seeing how he was getting along. He said it was almost as bad as when Charlie first moved out. His mom had worried that he wouldn't be able to take care of himself. Harry still hadn't told them where his home was or that Dobby and Winky were there to help him. Hermione's letter sounded just like he expected.

*Harry*

*I'd love to come and see where you are staying. Why didn't you tell me where it is or how to get there? My parents won't be able to come. They said to tell you thanks for asking and they hope to see you again some other time.*

*Please write back and tell me about where you are staying. I want to read up on the area.*

*Love Hermione*

Harry wasn't going to tell them how to get here until right before the party to keep the questions he had to answer by owl down. He would have to tell Cho how to get here since her parents would probably be driving here. He hoped Cho would agree to come.

The next time Mrs. Wilkins came up for his French lesson, she brought Katie with her since she knew French as well. After the lesson, Harry was telling them a bit about the people

coming. "There should be eight other magical people at the party. One entire family is magical. Two of my friends are girls who are witches and neither of their parents are magical at all, so you can meet one of those families as well. Do you think it will be interesting?"

She looked him in the face and said, "I'm a bit nervous actually. I mean you and Sirius seem normal enough. Do all magical people seem so normal?"

"Most magical people are just like anyone else you meet except they have special talents." Harry thought for a moment and added, "Oh, and they dress differently and have some strange habits. I have a good friend who dreams of having a dragon as a pet!"

"Dragon? There's no such thing," Katie said matter-of-fact.

Harry chuckled and said, "You'd be amazed at how many things really exist. In a competition a couple years ago, I had to steal a fake egg away from a dragon so I know they exist. Did your grandparents tell you about house-elves?"

She looked at Mrs. Wilkins confused and said, "What's a house elf?"

Harry introduced Dobby and Winky to her and then tried to explain more about things that were different in the magical world. He thought everything went well. Katie really started asking more and more questions and he could tell she was warming up to the idea of meeting more magical people. They both thanked him and left. Harry decided he should invite one more person. He felt bad for not thinking about inviting him right off.

*Hagrid*

*How have you been? Any new pets yet?*

*I'm having some friends come to my home and would really like it if you could come as well. I didn't get to spend as much time with you last year since I was with R.J. so much. Also, there will be a Muggle family coming who found out I was a wizard. This is the family that took care of R.J. grounds..*

*The date is the Saturday, one week before term starts; I hope you can make it.*

*Harry*

Harry could hardly concentrate he was so excited about seeing his friends. When he got his next post from Hogwarts Cho had sent her reply.

*Harry*

*What all did you say in the note to my father? He had been acting strangely, saying things about us going on a little trip and wouldn't tell me anything. I figured it out once I received your letter and saw you had asked him for permission. He was very impressed that you wrote to him first. He takes traditional customs very seriously. Even if I hadn't wanted to come, he would have probably forced me to. I think he wants to meet you as much as I want to see you again.*

*I'm really looking forward to seeing where you are staying. Send the address soon.*

*Cho*

Harry was relieved that she was coming but also nervous about meeting her father. He didn't understand why this made him so nervous. He had met very important people in the Ministry and not felt this nervous. He quickly wrote a note back

*Cho*

*I'm really glad you are coming. I was worried that you may not want to. I'm nervous about meeting your parents; I want them to like me.*

*I live outside of Southingham. Just go straight through the town and there will be a nice white house about 5km further. Turn at the lane by this house. That is where the Wilkins family lives. Down this lane about 1km is where I'm staying. If you need to stop and ask someone, ask for the Veganos house. People in the area will know how to get here.*

*Thanks for coming.*

*Harry*

Harry hadn't wanted to mention that it was a castle yet. He hoped they wouldn't need to ask anyone in town but if they did he was sure asking for the Veganos house would be enough. Now his only real worry was how Cho and her parents would react to seeing Sirius Black since most everyone, even Muggles had heard he was an escaped prisoner.

The French lessons were going well and Mrs. Wilkins brought Angie up most days. She also spoke some French so Mrs. Wilkins made her ask any question in French to make her practice as well. Two days before the meal, Harry had sent Hedwig with notes to Hagrid, Ron and Hermione telling them how to get to his floo. It was a short note that he knew would cause confusion and many questions.

*To get to my house by floo, just say 'Veganos Castle'.*

*Harry*

He could picture Hermione running to the closest library trying to find out where it was and what the history of it is. He imagined Ron thinking that's a stupid name for a house, not believing it was a real castle. Harry had told the Wilkins that Sirius' last name wasn't Blackenshire, it was just Black. They seemed to understand that Harry was just trying to keep questions down when they first met Sirius.

The day of the party had finally arrived. Dobby and Winky had done an amazing job. Harry was very impressed. There were fresh flowers in various locations and the dining table was already set for the eighteen people who would be there. This was going to be the first time that the Wilkins would see him someone different except for the house-elves. Harry wondered if anyone would wear a robe since both he and Sirius wore Muggle clothes when they were at the castle. Harry heard the sound of someone arriving by floo and knew it should be Hagrid.

"Hagrid!" Harry yelled and then went to hug him. "I'm glad you could come."

"Arry. How ya doing? You're looking good. You seem to have grown over the summer."

"I'm ok Hagrid. I've been working in the yard with Mr. Wilkins. It got me really sore at first, but now it's ok. Let me show you around."

"This is some place 'Arry. Good thing those house-elves came with you. Couldn't believe it when Professor Dumbledore told me about R.J. being a princess and leaving her stuff to you. Never would have thought it."

"That's what I said as well. She sure didn't act like a princess. I still don't think of her that way. I really miss her though."

"Onestly, I didn't like that she was doing security at first. Never been a fan of vampires. But she changed my mind. Oh, not supposed to tell anything but we may be having visitors at the school this year. Friends I met last summer if you know what I mean."

It took Harry a second to realize what Hagrid was talking about. "Really? Where would they stay?" Hagrid's friends were giants.

"They would setup a camp in the forest. No one's supposed to know yet," Hagrid said.

Harry gave Hagrid a quick tour and then Sirius joined them to talk about the school and what they each thought Voldemort was going to do. Hagrid let it slip that there were more rumors of small attacks planned.

"Why haven't you been telling me this?" Harry asked Sirius, sounding angry.

"Because they're just rumors right now. We hear all kinds of rumors about what he's planning, but nothing for certain yet. Remember what Dumbledore said, you are supposed to have some fun."

Before Harry could argue back, he heard someone else arriving by floo. It was a little before he thought anyone else would get here. It was one of his best friends. It seemed that every year Hermione changed so much in the couple months of summer break and this year was no exception. She had really filled out as a girl and Harry was struck by just how pretty she had become. He quickly felt a twinge of jealousy at Ron since the two were beginning to date. Harry knew she spoke some French so he decided to try it out. "<pretend it's French. The author has no clue>Hi Hermione. I'm really glad you came." Harry met her and gave her a hug.

She was looking around shocked. "What?? You spoke French! When did you learn that? Why didn't you tell me the name of this place earlier? I didn't have time to read anything about the area. And, why are you staying here?" Harry always laughed when Hermione would get excited and asked many questions in a row.

"Good to see you too Hermione," he answered with a laugh then went back to English. "I didn't want you to go off reading anything about it. For once, I'd like to be able to tell you something that you didn't already know. Mrs. Wilkins is originally from Paris and she's been teaching me. You'll meet her later. You're early, you know that?"

"I couldn't wait until it was time, you made me so curious. I can't believe you learned French. Was there any reason you did? Not going to transfer to that French school are you? You didn't say why you're staying here either."

"I have wanted to learn French since those Beauxbatons students came to Hogwarts. It just sounds like a really neat language. I want to wait until Ron is here before I tell you anything about the castle. He'd get mad if you knew anything before him. Cho and her parents are coming."

"Cho? And her parents? Is there something else you're not telling me?" she said with a sly grin.

"No. Remember, part of the reason for this was to thank you all for staying with me when I was hurt and I heard she stayed sometimes too. I had to ask her parents for permission to invite her and knew I should invite them as well. You know how formal some parents can be."

"Of course I knew. I didn't know that you knew. C'mon show me around." They walked into the other room and she saw Hagrid. "Hagrid! I didn't know you'd be here. Hi Sirius."

"Didn't think Harry would invite me did ya?" Hagrid joked.

"So, why *is* Harry staying here?" she asked hoping to get some info from Hagrid.

"Well he.." Hagrid started but Sirius interrupted quickly. "He will tell you when he gets around to it. That's for him to tell."

"Thanks Sirius," Harry said. Hermione looked disappointed, it had almost worked. Harry showed her around. She was admiring some of the paintings and portraits. She seemed to be trying to figure something out. Back downstairs she asked to see the sword R.J. had given him and she studied it closely before giving it back.

"What's with the sword Hermione? You've seen it before," Harry asked.

"Just refreshing my memory. How are you going to handle serving a meal? I can't see you doing anything like that," she joked.

"Oh, I've got a surprise for you. C'mon to the kitchen." When they entered the room, Hermione saw the house-elves with their backs turned. She looked horrified and said, "There are house-elves here? Who's are they?"

Both Dobby and Winky turned around and then Winky squeaked, "We are free elves Miss Granger." Then Hermione recognized them. "Winky. Dobby! You're both wearing normal clothes. What are you doing here?"

Dobby came over all excited and said, "Dobby and Winky is working for Harry Potter mam. He is needing our help with the castle and we is working for him. It is most wonderful working here."

"Why is she wearing normal clothes? Why are you staying with Harry?" Hermione was totally confused.

Winky spoke up, "Winky is a free elf. Harry Potter asks Winky to wear clothes like these and Winky does what she is asked. Winky is liking them now. We are staying here to take care of the castle. Dobby, we have much to do."

"Dobby must get back to work miss. Thank you for coming to see us."

Hermione turned to Harry still looking like something was really strange. "Ok, why are they here? Do they get paid? Who's castle is this really?"

"Um... They told you why they're here, to take care of the castle and me. Dobby gets paid, Winky won't take any. I'll tell you about the castle later. C'mon let's go back to Hagrid and wait for the others."

Hermione spent most of the time trying to get more information but Hagrid would just smile proudly and say, "Harry'll tell ya when he wants." Harry could still tell she was working things out in her head. She got a satisfied look on her face and asked, "This is her castle isn't it?"

Hagrid looked shocked but both Sirius and Harry had expected her to figure it out. "I expected you to get it sooner than you did Hermione," Sirius said smiling.

"I wondered about it earlier. Some of the portraits had people that reminded me of R.J. But when I saw Dobby and Winky, they just didn't fit. Everything else does. I mean Harry's sword has R.J.V. on one side. This is Veganos Castle. This is her family's castle. But why is Harry staying here and why are Dobby and Winky here?"

She had figured most of it out so Harry couldn't keep it from her anymore. "You're not exactly right. This is her home but she didn't have any family. She left the castle to me when she died. Dobby and Winky are working here taking care of it. They'll go back to work at the school during term."

"R.J. left this castle to you? No way. How did she get a castle? Why was she at Hogwarts if this was hers?"

Answering any question from Hermione just brought on more so Harry said, "She really left it to me, I can't believe it either. It's not a place I would picture R.J. living in. But, let me wait to tell the details when everybody else gets here."

There was a knock at the door. "Either Cho or the Wilkins," Harry said heading to the door.

It was the Wilkins looking somewhat nervous. "We're a bit early. We thought it would be better than coming in once everyone was here," Mr. Wilkins said.

Then Mrs. Wilkins added, "And this is for you." The woman handed Harry a bottle of wine.

"Thank you. I'm glad you're early. Come in. Hi Katie. Hi Angie. My friend who has non-magic parents is already here. She's anxious to meet you."

"I'm a little nervous," Angie admitted.

"Oh, don't be. I think you'll like everyone. Come and meet Hermione."

They walked to the other room. The people already there stood up when they came in and there was a collective scream from the Wilkins when Hagrid stood up.



"That's Hagrid! He's a teacher at Hogwarts and our really good friend," Harry said and Hagrid beamed.

"Everybody, this is Mr. and Mrs. Wilkins. And these are their granddaughters, Katie and Angie. They knew R.J. well."

Harry introduced his friends to all of the Wilkins'. They still seemed unsure about Hagrid. When he got to introduce Hermione to the girls he said, "This is Hermione. She's my best friend and the top student in school. Her parents aren't magical at all."

Hermione was blushing from the praise Harry had given her. "Nice to meet you two. Harry said you hadn't been around magical people at all. Harry and I can't do magic outside of school until we turn seventeen."

"You're really a witch?" Angie asked. Hermione and the girls went on with their own conversations.

It looked like Mr. and Mrs. Wilkins were still a bit afraid of Hagrid. "Mr. Wilkins, Hagrid was the keeper of the grounds at Hogwarts until he started teaching. Hagrid, Mr. Wilkins and his granddaughters keep the grounds here." This got the two of them talking and Sirius was doing a good job of keeping Mrs. Wilkins involved in conversation. Then there was another knock at the door. Harry suddenly became nervous; this must be the Changs.

Harry nervously opened the door and saw Cho with her parents. "Hello Mr. Potter. We are Cho's parents. Thank you for inviting us."

"Please come in Mr. and Mrs. Chang. I'm glad you chose to come with her. Hi Cho," Harry said. Cho looked as nervous as Harry felt. Harry turned back to Mr. Chang. "Please call me Harry. Were the directions ok? I've never actually come here from the road."

"Your directions were fine. Vegasos house doesn't do this place justice. How is it that you are staying here?" Mr. Chang asked.

"Father. Harry, you don't have to answer that," Cho said.

"It's ok Cho. I'm going to explain why I'm here Mr. Chang, but if you don't mind I'd like to do it when everyone is here. There are only a couple people who know the story already."

"Of course Harry. A sensible way to handle it."

Cho smiled at Harry and then they went into the common room. They already knew Hermione and Hagrid. When Cho saw his godfather she said, "Sirius Black! You escaped Azkaban! Harry, what's he doing here?" Her parents stepped back and the Wilkins family all looked at Sirius.

"Cho, he's my godfather." She looked stunned. "He didn't commit the crime that he was sent away for; it was Peter Pettigrew or Wormtail. Sirius wasn't trying to hurt me that year; he was trying to protect me. Wormtail was at Hogwarts and he was trying to get me. Dumbledore knows all of this and trusts Sirius."

Sirius stepped forward and said, "I'm sorry if I frightened you. Technically, I am still wanted and probably will be until we can catch Wormtail. Mr. & Mrs. Wilkins, I hope this doesn't change anything."

Mr. Wilkins spoke up quickly, "Of course not. I told you before that R.J. said any friend of Harry's could be trusted completely and I believe her."

"Mr. & Mrs. Chang, Cho if my being here makes any of you uncomfortable, I can leave and come back tomorrow. I don't want this to ruin Harry's party," Sirius said warmly.

"We wouldn't have it Mr. Black. I've been in business for a long time and like to think I am a good judge of character. Both yours and Harry's are fine with me," Mr. Chang said. Harry could see the look of confusion on Cho's face.

"I couldn't talk about it Cho. You understand don't you?" Harry asked.

"Sure. Hermione, you knew?" Cho asked.

"Of course. Harry and I helped him escape when he was caught at Hogwarts. Don't ever talk about that though." Hermione said seriously. Hermione brought the Angie over and said, "Angie, this is Cho. Her parents aren't magical either."

Harry went on with Mr. and Mrs. Chang. "This is Mr. and Mrs. Wilkins. They live down the lane and take care of the grounds. They aren't magical either. They were very anxious to meet you." The two couples began talking and Harry went back to Cho.

"I'm really glad you could come Cho. Can I show you around?" Harry said, feeling happy to be around Cho.

"Sure. Why are you staying here Harry?" Cho replied still trying to figure everything out.

Harry stopped and looked at her then said, "Ok, I'll tell you as much as Hermione figured out so you'll be even with her. Then I'll tell everything when Ron gets here. This was R.J.'s home. When she was killed, she left it to me."

Cho wasn't buying it. "Right Harry. If you can't tell me, just say you can't. Don't lie to me."

"Cho, I promise I wouldn't lie to you. This is really my home now. Mr. Wilkins takes care of the grounds. Honestly."

"You're serious? How did R.J. have this place?" she started to ask another question but Harry stopped her. "Please wait until the others are here. You know as much as Hermione does now."

They were walking back from the quick tour when Cho stopped him and asked, "Do you still miss her?"

She had the look of caring in her eyes. "Yes. I mean I know she's gone and I'm glad I knew her but miss seeing her. You know how it is."

Cho looked down and said, "Yeah, but Cedric and I weren't as close as you two were. It was still hard though."

"It's getting easier. I'm lucky to have good friends. It kind of makes up for not having a family," Harry replied, hanging his head.

"But you have a family, they just happen to be centaurs. And your friends are spiders," she said with a smile. "I couldn't figure out why you wanted me to tell that to Dumbledore. Even Snape was confused. Dumbledore explained the reason. I would be dead if you hadn't come after me. I can't believe you did it and made it back." She had moved in close to him when she said this.

Harry got a worried look at said, "I'm glad you weren't hurt. Until I heard the spiders, I didn't know how to get you out. Want to thank them yourself sometime this year?"

"What, the spiders? Maybe. How do you know how to do all of that stuff? I think You-Know-Who was kind of afraid of you sometimes. And how did you do that to the man you called Lucius? Where did you learn it?"

Harry really wanted to tell her but he knew he shouldn't. "Can't tell you yet Cho. I got some extra training before term last year and that's all I can say." Harry looked at her for a second, trying to decide if he was going to say something but then continued, "You know that was Lucius Malfoy, right? Draco's father."

"How could it be? That would mean he's a Death Eater." Cho looked like she didn't believe this for a second.

"That's right. C'mon. Ron should be here any time." They came back and found everyone talking. He was glad everyone was getting along. He heard the sound of the floo and saw Mr. Weasley come out followed by his wife. She came running to him. "Harry my dear we're so glad you've recovered." She was hugging him tightly. Mrs. Weasley was the closest thing he would ever have to a mother. "We wish you would have come to our house for the summer. Thank you for saving Ginny from that fall. I can't even think what would have happened if you didn't help her." By the time she let go, the other Weasley's had arrived. Fred and George spoke up first.

"Staying in a castle for the summer. Man you have all the luck. Look at this place. Care if we look around?" George asked.

Harry told them to go ahead and then Ginny gave him a hug. "I'm glad you're feeling better Harry." She had grown a lot over the summer. The change in her was even more drastic than the one in Hermione. He really liked being hugged by her. "Thanks for staying with me back at school. I really appreciate it."

She smiled and said, "Well you did save my life again. It's the least I could do."

Ron pushed her out of the way and said, "It's a real castle! I thought you were just being stupid. What're you doing staying here? Why didn't you tell us earlier? Whose place is this?"

"Good to see you too. C'mon, Hermione's already here. I'll answer questions later." Harry went through all of the introductions. When he was introducing Mrs. Weasley to Cho, Mrs. Weasley looked at her for a minute and said, "I've been hoping to meet you Cho. I've heard a

lot about you." There was something in her voice. It was friendly but not as warm as it had been. "You were the one kidnapped when dear Harry nearly died saving you."

Cho looked hurt, but Harry spoke up, "Um. Mrs. Weasley, I didn't get hurt helping Cho get back. Cho wanted me to come back with her on the centaur. I knew I had to stay and try to stop Voldemort. Cho was mad at me for not coming with her. If I had listened to her, I wouldn't have gotten hurt."

Mrs. Weasley thought for a second and then said, "She obviously has a good head on her shoulders Harry. You should listen to her from now on. I'm very glad you weren't hurt dear." She sounded more normal now.

Ginny just said, "Hi Cho," and then went to the next person.

All the children were talking together when George asked, "How do I get something to drink around here?"

Katie spoke before Harry could and said, "You just ask! Watch. 'May I have a glass of juice please?'" and then suddenly a glass of juice appeared at the table next to her. Cho and the Weasley's looked confused.

"Is that another of your new special talents Harry?" Ron asked.

Angie answered, "No, it was the house-elf."

"House elf? This castle has a house-elf? That would be great," Ron said.

"It has two Ron," Hermione said, "and you know them. Dobby and Winky work here."

"Really? Why? What are they doing here? They work at Hogwarts," Ron said.

"I'll tell you after the meal," Harry said and noticed Cho had a questioning look on her face.

Then Ron asked with a smile, "Dobby's not trying to protect you again is he? He nearly killed you last time!" Harry, Hermione and Ron started laughing. Everybody else asked "What's so funny?" So Ron told the story.

"No special candy guys?" Harry asked the twins.

"Nah not since there were going to be Muggles here. Mum searched us before we left. Tried to sneak some new stuff but got caught."

Katie heard this and said, "What's a Muggle?" and Hermione explained everything. Ginny was getting along with the Wilkins girls really well. The twins were off looking around so Harry, Ron, Hermione and Cho were talking together.

"Um Harry. I slipped up on the train ride back and mentioned about you...um...being an animagus. Sorry," Ron said looking really ashamed.

"Who heard?" Harry asked seriously.

"Just Cho," Hermione said quickly.

"Oh," Harry said sounding relieved, "that's not a problem. I don't mind her knowing. Better than finding out by seeing me."

Cho was smiling. "Thanks Harry. I'm glad you don't mind me knowing. They didn't tell me what your form is."

"Let me show you sometime instead of telling you. Speaking of that form, did you hear what happened when I woke up?"

They all said no and got closer so he could tell them about waking up in that form and trashing the hospital wing. "Dumbledore said they were all out in the hall afraid to come in. Then Dumbledore came in by himself and tried talking to me but I just jumped out the window and flew to the forest."

"You can fly? I really want to know what you are," Cho said.

Harry smiled at her and went on to say that Dumbledore found him in the forest and he changed back. "Dumbledore thinks that internally I had changed and that's the only reason I didn't die. You know they are supposed to be really hard to kill."

It came time for the meal and they all moved to the dining hall. Harry was impressed with how it looked. He really liked having Dobby and Winky around. During the meal Mr. Chang asked, "Harry, would it be possible for us to meet the elves that have done all this work? My wife and I have never met one before."

Katie spoke up, "They're really neat, you'll like them."

Harry spoke up just a bit, "Dobby, Winky would you like to meet our guests?" 'Pop'Pop' and they both appeared near Harry. Everyone this is Dobby and this is Winky. They have really saved me this summer. I couldn't get along here without them. The elves greet each person, with Winky leading and Dobby behaving right behind her.

After they left Ron said, "I've never seen Dobby act so well behaved. What have you done to him?"

"I think he's in love with Winky," Harry said with a smile. "He wouldn't come to work for me without Winky."

"He works for you?" Ron asked loudly and now everyone was looking. "How does he work for you? What about Winky?"

Harry decided this was as good time as any. "I may as well tell everything now. First of all I wanted you all here to tell you how much it meant to me when I heard you spent so much time with me when I was hurt. I'm lucky to have you as friends." His friends were blushing. "Second and the thing I've been getting questioned on all night is that this castle belonged to R.J. Her full name was Rebecca Jane Veganos and this is Veganos Castle. For those of you who may not have met her, she was a vampire and was doing security work at the school. She died trying to save me." He stopped for a moment looking at Sirius. Sirius gave him a nod and he went on "Her official title at one time was Princess Veganos. Once she became a vampire,

the title was taken away but she was heir to this castle. The Wilkins have known her for a long time and they knew this story already. R.J. didn't have any family when she died and she left all of her assets, which include this castle to me. So, this is my home now and I've asked Dobby and Winky to work for me. They are free elves as some of you could tell by their clothes. They can leave anytime they want. I'm not their master or anything; they are my friends and happen to work for me. Mr. Wilkins and his granddaughters have taken care of the grounds for a long time and have thankfully agreed to continue. That's about it. Now that you know, you can send me letters straight here and not to Hogwarts."

There was talking back and forth and some simple questions and then Mr. Chang asked, "May I ask what you intend to do now that you have inherited such a place?"

Cho protested but Harry stopped her. He thought for minute and said, "I don't think anything has changed other than I don't have to live with the Dursley's over the summer. I hope there will be a time soon when Sirius can stay here more of the time but I don't think anything will change."

"How was it that you became so close to a vampire that she would leave this to you?" Mr. Chang asked.

"Father!" Cho exclaimed.

"It's ok Cho. He's not the only one who never knew R.J. They wouldn't know the kind of person she was. I was spending some evenings in the dark forest at the start of the term."

"I thought you had detention," Cho said.

"Yeah so many weeks right of the bat, you're our hero," Fred said laughing.

"Hate to admit it but that wasn't real detention. McGonagall just said that so no one would ask me what I was doing every night. At first I was doing some special training with Professor McGonagall each night. Then, one of the centaurs said I needed to learn more about the forest so Hagrid and I were going to explore each night. We came across R.J. one night and she seemed really arrogant."

Hagrid jumped in, "Should have seen Harry. He got in front to protect me and yelled at me to run and he would handle the vampire. R.J. couldn't believe it and just laughed at him asking how could he possibly handle it. Then she turns around and Harry had a wood stick ready to run her through. He could have killed her right then. She was really impressed that he was able to handle her and that he gave her the chance to see her true intentions before doing something. Said most wizards would have went ahead and killed her."

Mrs. Weasley was breathing heavy, concerned about Harry being in the forest. Mr. Chang was showing admiration though.

"After that R.J. and I explored the forest at night and became really good friends. She even went to the Halloween ball with me."

"So you didn't have detention but you spent every night alone in the forest with a beautiful vampire. That's even better," George exclaimed.

"Know what Harry said right before he rescued me?" Cho spoke up. "He said tell Dumbledore that he had family and friends with him. I didn't understand what he was talking about. Then the spiders attacked and we ran. Harry put me on the centaur but wouldn't come back with me. He stayed to fight."

Mr. Weasley asked, "What did you mean by family and friends Harry?"

Cho spoke though, "Family was the centaurs. They have kind of adopted Harry into their clan. Strange since they don't care for humans much. The friends were the giant spiders. They told Harry they would help protect him in the forest."

"Told you Aragog wasn't so bad," Hagrid piped in.

"He wanted to feed Harry and me to his children a few years ago. The ford saved us that time," Ron added.

"Well, now he won't hurt ya. Long as you're with Harry that is," Hagrid said.

"Is this school always like that?" Katie asked.

Cho answered again, "Oh no. Only for Harry and his friends. School is normally routine for everyone else. The only reason I was kidnapped was to get Harry to come after me. The rest of us hear rumors about things that happen and really we don't usually believe them but since I've been getting to be better friends with the three of them, I've heard the real stores."

"And we've never been seriously hurt," Hermione added

"You were petrified Hermione, and Ginny almost died last year," Fred said.

"But Harry dove off his broom and saved me," Ginny added

"How did you really do that? You both should have died from a fall like that and Ginny only broke her arm," Cho asked.

"Harry was in the hospital for a few days. I was there with him every day," Ginny said kind of coldly again.

Harry wanted the subject changed. "Mr. Chang, did any of that give you what you wanted to know?"

Mr. Chang looked at him warmly and said, "Yes it did, thank you Harry."

They talked a bit more and Hermione was the first to leave. "I'll meet you in Diagon Alley tomorrow. We've got a lot of books to get," Harry said bye and left Ron alone with Hermione to see her off. Mr. Chang caught Harry before he got back to the other guests and asked if he could talk for a minute.

"I want to personally thank you for saving Cho. She has spoken of you for a few years about your flying ability and that she wanted to beat you at least once so we knew something about you. I appreciate you answering my sometimes-personal questions so candidly. I think that shows something about your character. In the future, if you ever decide to invite Cho out or

anything, you have my permission. I'm not saying she would go or that I think you are planning to do this. If you ever do, it would be with my blessing."

"Thank you sir. I did try to invite her to the Triwizard ball but she had already been asked."

"Yes, I know. Let's get back to the others."

How did he know Harry wondered? Cho saw them walk back together and gave him a worried look. He was able to talk to her privately, "What did my father ask you now? I'm sorry he was doing that?" Cho seemed really worried about what her father may have asked.

"It's really ok Cho. It didn't bother me. He didn't ask me anything this time. He said that if I ever wanted to ask you on a date that I had his blessings." She looked shocked. "But then he said that he doubted you would accept if I ever did ask."

"He said what? Harry, I told him I wanted you to ask...um..." She hadn't meant to say this.

Harry laughed. "I was joking Cho. He did say I had his blessing but he didn't say you wouldn't go. He said he wasn't saying if you would or wouldn't go, only that I had his blessing. Sorry for kidding." Harry hesitated and looked at her slyly "So, you want me to ask you out?"

Cho was blushing badly. "That was mean Harry. I'm just saying that if you are ever thinking about asking me out that you should go ahead and ask. That's all I'm saying." They laughed and talked to the others until Mr. Chang announced they had to leave. Harry walked them to the door. Mrs. Chang spoke to him. It was the first time she had talked to him directly. "Thank you for having us in your home. Most of all thank you for saving our daughter. I can never repay you for that."

"You're welcome Mrs. Chang. Thank you for making the long trip and coming. See you at school Cho."

"Bye Harry."

Harry saw the Wilkins girls talking to Hagrid and he went over. "So, what did you think of my friends? Did you like them?"

Angie spoke up quickly, "Oh yes. This has been great. I wish I was going to your school." Then Mr. Wilkins came over saying they were going. Hagrid left as well. It was only the Weasley's left.

"Mrs. Weasley, I wanted to apologize for not coming to holiday last year. I hadn't been able to spend time with R.J. and hoped to see her a lot during the break."

"I understood Harry. I have six boys you know. We missed having you. And we missed having you over the summer but after coming tonight, I can understand that also. I had kind of hoped that Professor Dumbledore would have let you come and live with us so that you didn't have to go back to Privet Drive but it doesn't look like that is necessary any more."

"Professor Dumbledore put some protection on the castle so I'm probably ok here. Now that I have access to the floo network, maybe I can visit more often. I'll have to ask." He leaned



over to Ron and asked, "Ron, think your parents would let you stay here tonight and meet up tomorrow in Diagon Alley?"

Ron asked his mom and surprisingly she agreed. The Ginny protested and said she wanted to stay as well. Harry said he didn't mind and the fact that Sirius was staying that night so an adult would be there helped ease her concerns. He also told her Dobby and Winky could take care of anything they needed. Mr. Weasley said it would be good to have a quiet evening at home with his wife so she finally agreed.

They stayed up late talking about everything that happened at the Weasley's over the summer. Percy had moved out and was working his way up the ladder at the Ministry of Magic.

### Chapter 3

One of the house-elves must have gotten everyone a change of clothes during the evening. They finally all were up and waiting to go to Diagon Alley.

When they went through the back of the Leaky Cauldron and opened the magical entrance to Diagon Alley, Mr. And Mrs. Weasley were already there with Hermione. "You all stayed at Harry's? That's not fair," Hermione protested

Mrs. Weasley said, "You're late. Did anything go wrong?"

"Of course not mum. We're not babies," Ginny replied.

"I need to go to Gringotts. Harry, do you want me to get some money for you?" Mrs. Weasley asked.

Harry remembered the Head Goblin wanting to meet him and he wanted to see his new vault. "Thanks Mrs. Weasley but I need to check on some of R.J.'s things. I'll meet you guys back at *Floean Fortescue's*."

Harry walked into Gringotts with Mrs. Weasley. Mrs. Weasley went to one of the goblins to get some money and Harry went to the Head Goblin counter.

"Excuse me sir. I'm Harry Potter and you asked me to come to you the next time I came in. I'm returning my key since my things were moved to Miss Veganos' vault."

The goblin peered over the desk with a menacing look at first but warmed up quickly. "Yes Mr. Potter. I remember meeting you when you came in the first time. That seems like only yesterday. Allow me to accompany you to your new vault." They took the little carts into the caverns. Harry couldn't tell how deep they were. When they got to the vault, the goblin opened it the same as they had when Hagrid got the Sorcerer's Stone out of Hogwarts vault. When the door opened, Harry couldn't believe how large the room was. He saw a stack of coins near the front left corner and then a huge stack toward the back. In addition, there were many boxes and bags that were holding items. There were other paintings leaning against the wall and two big piles of parchment. Harry looked confused.

"This is your money from your old vault Mr. Potter," the goblin said pointing to the smaller pile. "The rest are the assets of Miss Veganos. She had a long life and has been doing business with Gringotts for many years. These parchments represent various partnerships and investments she made with us. We managed these investments and the businesses for her. We would be honored if we could continue to do the same for you. There are fees of course, but none would change due to you taking these over. Miss Veganos was a very astute investor. One thing I must tell you is that some of these investments are not completely honorable. Miss Veganos was concerned about maximizing return. She did not bother with most of the details as long as they were making money. If you wish to divest yourself from any of these it can be arranged but may take some time."

Harry stared at her pile of coins and wondered how much was there. He also had no idea how much was invested with the goblins. He just filled up his bag from his old pile and said, "I'll

just leave things as she had them for now. I have a lot to learn so I don't make any big mistakes."

"Wise choice Mr. Potter. Let me just say that Miss Veganos was very wealthy. You have a great many assets at your disposal now."

Harry met up with the Ron and Hermione at the ice cream parlor. They made sure to let Ginny know that she was welcome with their group. Harry felt more comfortable being back with his friends in the wizarding world. Even though he was feeling better at the castle, he just felt better here. Before heading off Hermione said, "**Harry. Did you tell Ron you are learning French?**"

"**Not yet, but I'm sure he'll ask now,**" Harry said smiling

"What was that all about? I got Harry, Ron and French?" Ron asked annoyed.

"Mrs. Wilkins has been teaching me French. Hermione asked me if I had told you yet."

"Why would you want to learn French? At least it doesn't sound as creepy as that snake language."

"It was something to do where I didn't have to think about magic. C'mon. Let's get our stuff."

Everything had gone perfectly. They had gotten almost everything and only had a couple books left to get. When they heard the annoying voice of Draco Malfoy say, "Finally woke up Potter? Always have to be the center of attention don't you?"

"Malfoy. I knew they day was going too good," Harry said back.

"Good, you're back to Malfoy. I'm going to say something that may shock you all. Don't get used to this happening." Harry, Ron and Hermione looked confused when Draco continued, "I was sorry to hear about R.J. It may surprise you to know this but I really liked her classes. Doesn't mean anything changes with us Potter, I just wanted you to know that."

"Um...Thanks. I miss her as well. And don't expect to hear me say thanks to you again either," Harry said and then Draco left the store.

"Now that's weird. Don't go adding him to our group Harry. You're lucky we're letting Cho hang around us," Ron said.

"Speaking of Cho, what caused you to tell her when my birthday was?" Harry asked.

"Well... um Hermione and I thought it would be a good idea if..." Ron started.

Turning to Hermione, "You were in on that too? Actually I'm glad you did," Harry said smiling.

"You pushed Ron into asking me out so you don't have much room to talk," Hermione said.

"Hey, he didn't push me. I'd say a slight nudge in the right direction was all," Ron quickly added.

They were all back at the Leaky Cauldron mainly listening to other people talk when Mrs. Weasley asked, "Did you find out everything you needed from the Head Goblin?"

"Not really. He showed me R.J.'s vault. She has a bunch of parchments that the goblin said were partnerships and investments she had made with them. He didn't say what they were or anything. I guess I'll need to go through all of that sometime."

"Partnerships with goblins? I wonder what they could be," Hermione asked.

"If you're interested, you can help me when I go through them. Maybe you can explain it to me," Harry said. Hermione looked pleased with this thought.

Harry went to Ron's so he could ride with them to the train station. They had arrived at the station before Hermione, found an empty compartment and waited for her to arrive. The door to the compartment opened and Cho stepped in. "Mind if I ride with you guys?" she asked

"Not at all!" Harry said excitedly. "Won't your friends be mad?"

"Oh, they understand. They suggested it," Cho responded and sat next to Harry.

Soon Hermione had joined them. "I can't wait to get started this year. We have to start thinking about N.E.W.T.s," Hermione said.

"That's not until next year for you," Cho stated.

"Well we have to start preparing this year to do well. You'll be taking them this year. Are you ready?"

Cho looked a little concerned and said, "I hope so. They're supposed to be really hard. I can't believe this is my last year."

That hit Harry hard. He had forgotten that Cho was in her seventh and final year at school. He didn't want to think about her not being there any more. Ron finally showed up with Ginny along side. The ride started off good with everyone telling stores of their summer activities. Harry spent the time listening since everyone had asked him questions at the party. After a bit, Harry saw Ron leaning into Hermione's shoulder with his eyes closed. He caught her eye and smiled. She looked at Ron and just rolled her eyes. Harry turned and started talking quietly to Cho, "Cho, what did your parents think of the other night? Was it ok?"

She smiled broadly and said, "I haven't seen my father so impressed with anyone. I think he really likes you. Mom likes you too, but it's just strange hearing my father talking about how much of a fine young man you are."

"Why, don't you agree with him?" Harry asked with a sly smile. She pinched his arm and just smiled.

Harry waved at Hagrid and headed on up to the Great Hall to wait on the sorting. Cho left them at the door to go to the Ravenclaw table and the rest of them were at the Gryffindor table talking to the other house members when the first years came in. Then Harry noticed a familiar face setting at the teacher's table.

"Hermione. What do you think Fleur is doing up there? I don't see Mrs. Figg either. You don't think Fleur is doing Defense Against the Dark Arts?" Harry asked.

Ron jumped in, "There's no way someone who looks like that could do the Defense class."

Hermione glared at him and snapped "What do her looks have to do with anything Ron?" she then turned to Harry and said, "That's the only teacher I see missing Harry, maybe she is."

Harry was looking at Fleur when she caught his eye and she waved openly to him. He smiled and waved back. They didn't really pay much attention to the sorting. Since they never had much interaction with the new students, after their third year they just did the polite clapping and greeted the new arrivals to the Gryffindor table.

Professor McGonagall got everyone's attention, and then Professor Dumbledore spoke. "I'm anxious to get another year started. A couple quick announcements if you don't mind. For the benefit of our first year students hearing this, the Dark Forest is strictly off limits. Now some of you may hear rumors about a student being rescued by a centaur but I do assure you that there are more things that would do you harm in there than would help you. At least to most of you. Second, at the Ministry's request, Mrs. Figg has returned to her previous career as an Auror. In her place, I'm happy to announce that one of our most distinguished teachers, Professor Snape will be taking over Defense Against the Dark arts. He has been convinced to give up potions to help with our current need. Taking his position as potions instruction, some of you may remember a Fleur Delacour from the Triwizard Tournament a few years ago. She has graciously agreed to join our staff. Make sure you welcome her to her new position and congratulate Professor Snape on his. Let the feast begin."

After the meal they didn't get a chance to talk to many of their other friends so they just went up to the common room. Even though Harry liked his new home, he still felt like Hogwarts was his real home. It was the place he felt most comfortable.

"Ron. We need to find two new Quidditch players," Harry said.

"I know. I really want to win again. I want to go undefeated in my reign as captain. Harry, maybe you can practice your French on Fleur," Ron said with a smirk.

The next morning everyone was at breakfast when mail came. As usual, there was a package for Neville, something he probably forgot again. Hermione got her Daily Prophet. Ron and Harry both got letters. Ron's was from his mom but Harry didn't recognize his own. He opened the letter:

*Mr. Potter*

*My name is Francois Gialli, I am the coach of the French National Quidditch team. Due to a fairly recent accident, we are holding tryouts for a new seeker. A common acquaintance of ours; Viktor Krum suggested I invite you. Normally I would not consider someone of your age but Viktor assures me you both act and fly like someone older. Coming from Viktor this is high praise.*

*If you are interested, please come to our practice pitch outside of Paris this Saturday at 8:00am. You will not need to bring your broom. The team uses a newer model and one will be available for your tryout.*

*The league is familiar with the restrictions for having a student as a player since Viktor was doing the same thing a couple years ago. The only rule you may not be aware of is that if you make the team, you cannot play on your house team. This shouldn't be an issue since playing on our National Team would be much more challenging.*

*The tryouts will be hard and there will be other seekers competing for that position. Professional Quidditch is much rougher than school level. I imagine that you all play as good sports and try not to hurt each other. At the professional level, they play to win and to push the rules as far as they can to do that.*

*Francois Gialli*

Harry just stared at the letter. He re-read it a couple times. He was being offered a chance to tryout for a professional Quidditch team, his dream. But if he made it he had to give up playing on the Gryffindor team with all of his friends. Hermione noticed his face and asked what was wrong. He handed her the letter to read. She quickly read it and said, "Harry, this is sounds too rough for a student to do."

"What's rough? Give me the letter," Ron demanded. Harry asked them to keep their voices down and when Ron was done reading he said, "This is just wicked. Just think if you made it, you'd be playing for a National Team. This is your dream."

"What about the Gryffindor team? If I was to get picked, I'd have to quit our team."

"To heck with our team Harry, this is serious Quidditch." Harry was surprised by Ron's reaction. He expected Ron to want him to keep playing on the house team. "You're going to the tryout even if I have to stun you and take you myself. Then when you get picked you can worry about telling the rest of our team."

That seemed like a reasonable thing to Harry. "That's a good idea Ron. At least I could go meet the team. Then when they laugh me off the field I can still say I met them and come back here and play."

"Viktor wouldn't have recommended you unless he thought you could do it. You know how he takes his Quidditch," Hermione said.

"When have you been talking to Viktor?" Ron asked with more than a hint of jealousy.

"Not since the summer after I met him, you know that. But you know how serious he is about his flying too."

"I guess it would be interesting to go. I should talk to McGonagall before class."

Harry got to Transfiguration early. "Professor McGonagall, may I speak to you for a moment?"

"Of course Mr. Potter. Is something wrong already this year?"

"No Professor. I got this letter and wanted to get your thoughts." He handed her the letter and waited while she read it. She looked very excited.

"What opinions would you like Mr. Potter? I hope you intend to go to this tryout. I would be very disappointed if you passed up an opportunity like this."

"That's what Ron said. How would I get there?"

"For once I agree with Mr. Weasley. I'll speak to the headmaster about getting you there this Saturday and for someone to accompany you. We can't have a student going off to Paris by themselves." Other students started coming in so the Professor said, "I'll speak to the headmaster directly. Plan on going."

He went back to his seat near Ron and told him and Hermione about the conversation. "See, McGonagall had the same idea I did Hermione," Ron said smugly.

They weren't going to have Potions or Defense Against the Dark Arts for a couple days so everything was pretty normal. Harry was really worrying about the tryout and spent a lot of time just sitting and thinking. This worked out well because Ron and Hermione were spending more time together. Harry was glad things were still working out well between his friends. Before evening meal Harry was sitting on the front steps and didn't notice someone come up and put her hands over his eyes and say, "Guess who?"

"Cho! You startled me."

"Good answer Harry," she said smiling. "Anything wrong, you looked lost in thought?"

He hadn't talked to her since term started. "Don't tell anyone, but I got invited to tryout for the French National Quidditch team on Saturday. I probably just make a total git of myself but I'm going to go to the tryout."

"Really? Would the school let you do that? What if you do get picked?" She didn't look happy for him.

"I think they would let me. Remember Viktor Krum played for Bulgaria when he was going to Durmstrang. If I get picked I won't be able to play for Gryffindor anymore."

"So, this is your plan to keep me from beating you this year?" she said with a smile. "Do your best Harry. If you're not sure you want to play, you can always say no if they do pick you. It's probably going to be a really tough tryout."

The day came for their first Defense Against the Dark Arts class with Professor Snape as the instructor. Luckily the schedule had them with Ravenclaw and not Slytherin like it had been for the last five years. Snape was a very good teacher for this subject and unlike potions which Harry didn't do very well in; this class was one of his best so Snape had fewer chances to take points away. Snape mentioned that he would be starting out showing them more subtle ways that Dark Wizards intimidated people other than using the unforgivable curses. He had ended the class by saying, "Those of you who think that the unforgivable curses are all you have to fear from Dark Wizards will soon learn that there are much simpler ways to cause pain and terror."

Next they had potions with Fleur. Harry hurried to get there early to try out his French. She was alone in the classroom when he entered. She saw him and smiled brightly coming to greet

him, "Arry! 'Ow are you?" she said and then quickly kissed him on each cheek causing Harry to blush.

**"Hello Fleur, it's good to see you again,"** Harry said trying hard to get it right.

**"Harry! You have learned to speak French! What made you learn my language?"**

**"A neighbor is from Paris and she taught me over the summer. I have much to learn yet. I just wanted to try it out on you."**

Some of the Ravenclaws came in and were listening to their conversation. **"Wait 'til I tell Gabrielle. She still thinks you are her hero. She is going to Beauxbatons this year. "**

**"You mean when I was the only one stupid enough to believe she would actually be hurt? I should have known better."**

**"We'll talk more later. Class is getting full."**

The Ravenclaw girls glared at him while he found a seat and waited for Ron and Hermione. Potions was so much more interesting with Fleur teaching. Harry; and most of the other boys hung on every word she said. Before long, even the girls realized she knew what she was talking about and warmed up to her.

During the next Defense class Snape said, "I need a volunteer who won't mind having some new curses put on him." He waited and when no hand immediately went up he continued, "Miss Granger is something wrong? Normally you start waving before I finish the request. No. Ok, Mr. Potter front and center."

Harry tentatively walked up to the desk. Snape said, "When I curse you, try to stand it as long as you can. Say stop and I will. Then I want you to describe to the class how the curse felt. Whenever you can't stand anymore, you can sit down and I'll find someone else."

Well, this wasn't Potions but Snape was going still to make it hard on Harry. "Can I block the spells or use a shield charm?"

"Where would be the lesson in that Mr. Potter? Request denied. Ready?"

Snape said the first spell and Harry felt like his feet had caught fire. He started jumping around trying to stand the pain. He knew from training that this wasn't real pain; he just needed to figure out how to throw it. In just a couple seconds the pain was getting tolerable and then it was gone completely. He was able to stand still in front of Professor Snape now. One of the Ravenclaw girls asked, "Why did you stop Professor?"

Snape glared at her and then pulled his wand up. Harry knew the professor hadn't stopped the spell. "Describe it Potter, and then explain why you stopped jumping around."

"It felt like my feet were on fire. If I couldn't see them, I would have sworn they were burning. But, I knew it wasn't real. The pain was just in my head and could be blocked, so I blocked it. Kind of like the Imperius Curse."



"Potter is correct Miss Kraemer. That is the key flaw with Dark Wizards using curses like this. If a wizard has a strong will and fully believes the pain isn't real, he can block the curse. Let's try a few more so the rest of the class will know what to expect before they get their turn up here." Snape spent the rest of the time doing various spells on Harry, who had been able to block them all after a few tries. Harry really had trouble with one spell that made him feel like he was falling, but after about ten tries, he finally blocked it as well.

"I can't believe he cursed you so much. I don't think I'm going to like this class with him teaching," Hermione said.

"Yeah, he just took the position to have an excuse to hex us," Ron added.

"Better from him in school than from a real Dark Wizard," Harry said quickly drawing strange looks from his friends. "I bet you'll both be able to block the spells with some practice. Then when the Slytherins hex you, you can just turn and hex them back."

They were walking down the corridor when Cho came over not looking too happy. "So, I hear you were getting friendly with the new Potions instructor Harry? Since when did you learn to speak French?"

"Good to see you too Cho," Harry said smiling at her. "I learned this summer. Mrs. Wilkins is from Paris and she taught me. I just wanted to try it out. You remember Fleur don't you?"

"Of course I remember her. Every boy in school was falling over themselves when she came by," Cho replied with an annoyed look on her face.

"C'mon Ron, let's go on," Hermione said pulling Ron.

"Wait, this'll be good," Ron was exclaiming as Hermione was dragging him down the hall.

Harry leaned in and whispered, "I was falling over myself when you came by back then if you really remember," then he smiled at her.

"Oh...Why can't I be mad at you? I do remember Harry," she said and was warm to him again. "Are you excited about the tryouts?"

"Scared mostly. I don't want to make a fool of myself"

Professor McGonagall walked by and said, "Mr. Potter. 7:30am Saturday morning in my office."

"Yes Professor, thank you."

"What was that about?" Cho asked.

"Sounds like she's coming with me to the tryouts. Great, even more pressure."

"Let's take a walk. It'll get your mind off of it."

On the way back from a nice quiet walk, Harry said, "Thanks Cho, this has been really nice." Harry was thinking back to a couple years ago and how nervous he felt around Cho back then. Now it just felt comfortable and he was happy that she had been the one to suggest the walk.

"Well, I can't take you on midnight walks in the forest so this will have to do," she said smiling.

They walked back inside and went to where Cho's friends were talking, "So, where have you two been?" Cho's friend Sandy said slyly.

"Trying to teach her French Harry?" another friend joked.

"Man, you girls are tough," Harry quipped.

"Don't forget it," Cho added. Harry had a nice time talking to her friends. This was the first time he really had talked to the other Ravenclaw girls much. It wasn't the same as talking to Ron and Hermione, but he did enjoy being around them.

Harry got to Professor McGonagall's office a little before 7:30am. He hadn't been able to sleep much so had gotten up extra early and went for breakfast. "I hope you don't mind that I'm the one accompanying you Harry?" She had called him Harry. He took that to mean that she considered this a non-school activity.

"Not at all Professor. I'm really nervous."

"Just do your best. You know they'll be playing harder than the school teams do. Well maybe not rougher than the Slytherins but rough," she smiled.

"Yes Professor. I remember how it was at the Quidditch World Cup. That's where I saw Viktor Krum the first time." Harry was picturing how fast everything happened when he was watching Viktor play and was worried about keeping up with the French team.

They traveled by floo to the practice pitch outside of Paris. The weather was about the same as Hogwarts. It was a nice clear day. There were two men waiting to greet them.

"Welcome. You must be Harry Potter, and you Professor McGonagall. It is a pleasure to meet you both. My name is Francois Gialli. This is another coach Michael Tilman."

Professor McGonagall stepped and shook their hands saying, "Yes, it's a pleasure to meet you both. Thank you for greeting us."

Harry stepped up and said, "**Hello. It is nice to meet you. I really appreciate you giving me the opportunity to tryout for the team.**"

McGonagall looked surprised since she didn't know Harry had learned a bit of French. Mr. Gialli said, "**Ah, you speak French. Don't tell me you learned that after finding out about the tryouts,**" then chuckled.

"**No sir. Over the summer a neighbor began teaching me. I have much to learn yet.** But I'm sure Professor McGonagall would rather know what I'm saying if you don't mind."

They all laughed and headed to the field. There were three people standing around looking kind of nervous. They noticed Harry come out and began mumbling to themselves. Mr. Gialli said, "Here's a broom Harry. Take a couple minutes to get used to it. It's the latest model so you may not be comfortable with it."

Harry looked at it closely. It was straighter than his Firebolt and the twigs were pulled together much tighter. It didn't look comfortable being so straight. On the side it had 'XANDARI MK 1'. He mounted the broom and rose up a bit. Then he felt the broom mold itself to fit him comfortably. Within a few seconds, it felt much better than his broom. He took off down the field and quickly realized this broom accelerated much faster than his broom as well. He tried some quick breaking and then some tight turns to get a feel for it. It felt like the broom just knew what to do; it was so easy to fly. Harry really wanted one of these and reluctantly returned to the ground.

"Nice warm-up flying Harry. Didn't look like you had too much trouble with the broom, excellent. Here's how the tryouts will go. We will have you compete against each other. There will be no chasers or keepers, only seekers and beaters. This means that the beaters will have no one else to target except you. Whoever catches the snitch first moves on. Simple. Let's go."

Harry was glad he didn't get picked to go in the first pairing. He wanted to at least get an idea how good the other seekers were. Harry watched the two seekers spend most of their time dodging bludgers. They seemed ok, but nothing like Krum had been. There were a couple good moves but nothing spectacular. Then the taller man got the snitch and they sent the other one home. Harry started to think he may actually have a chance. If the guy he was going against wasn't much better than those other two he may be able to win.

"Ok, you other two. Harry, there is one thing I think you should know. You're going up against Marcus Yuergen, the ex-seeker from Wales. He was recently replaced on their team and is trying to make ours." Harry looked at the guy and his optimism faded. Marcus looked like a more solid Draco Malfoy as the man glared at Harry. Now Harry was worried again.

They took off and Harry realized immediately that Marcus was much better than those first two. Now he wished he had gone first just so he could make it to the second round. He heard the whistle and then the sound of bludgers rushing around. He was making good moves dodging bludgers and feeling more comfortable when Marcus made a dive for the ground. Had he seen the snitch? Harry dove after him, scanning ahead trying to see if it really was the snitch. He didn't see it and decided it was just a feint so he pulled out of the dive to continue searching. Marcus pulled out and when he saw that Harry hadn't followed gave him a dirty look. After a couple minutes, Harry really did see the snitch. Diving down he leveled off and headed straight for the box seat area. The snitch was right near the wall. Harry didn't know where Marcus was and thought he would win when all of a sudden the other seeker crashed into him sending him out of control. Harry barely regained control in time to miss the tower. Marcus knew Harry would get to the snitch first but wanted to stop Harry from being able to grab it. The other seeker played rough. Harry didn't want to lose sight of Marcus to prevent that from happening again. The next time, they both saw the snitch and headed toward it. It was flying toward the box seats again. Harry just got a feeling the snitch was going to curve down so he went into a dive and left Marcus heading straight for the snitch. Right above the ground, Harry leveled off and headed toward the box seats. Looking up, he saw Marcus go into a dive and then saw that he saw where the snitch was also. If he guessed right, he would get there before Marcus. The other seeker stretched out his arm to grab the snitch and then

was surprised to find his arm knocked away and Harry streaking by grabbing the snitch as he went. Harry had beaten him.

Back on the ground, he could see the pride in Professor McGonagall's eyes. Mr. Gialli said, "Impressive Harry. It looks like Krum was telling the truth." The coach shook Harry's hand and continued, "I wasn't exactly honest with you earlier. Marcus here *is* the ex-seeker from Wales, but he's not looking for work. He's here as a favor to an old friend to help us try out new seekers. We've been holding tryouts all week and this was the last one. The first two were going for the reserve spot."

"Nice flying Harry," Marcus said, "You kept your head when I fouled you and didn't automatically go for my feint. You have good instincts."

"Harry, let me talk to the other coach and Marcus for a minute will you?" Mr. Gialli said and the men walked a few meters away.

Harry went back to where Professor McGonagall was standing. "That was excellent flying Harry. Even if they don't pick you, I think you impressed them."

Mr. Gialli came back over. "Well Harry, we want to thank you for coming. You came on short notice and flew on an unfamiliar broom against a world class seeker." The man extended his hand to Harry.

Harry shook the man's hand and spoke anxiously, "Thank you Mr. Gialli. I really enjoyed the experience. I'm glad I came, even though I didn't make it."

Calmly Mr. Gialli said, "Who said you didn't make it Harry?" The coach looked calm but Harry's eyes started to get huge. "You'll need to learn that Quidditch players are big practical jokers. Here," he handed Harry a contract.

"You meant it? I really got picked! I can play for France?" Harry was excited beyond words.

"We had hoped Viktor's comments about you were true and had the contract prepared already. We wouldn't have offered you the reserve spot, it was all or nothing. We'll give you a week to decide. This is a standard rookie contract. The only special item is that as your signing bonus, we'll give you a Xandari of your own. Have that contract back by next Saturday and you're on our team. Congratulations." He shook Harry's hand.

"Thank you sir. I can't believe it," Harry was saying still not believing what had just happened.

"Remember Harry. No school Quidditch if you come with us. We don't want people seeing you play for free if you're under contract to us. That won't be a problem will it?"

"Um... No sir. Thanks again," Harry said, still trying to contain his excitement. "Professor. I can't believe I made it."

"I could tell by their comments here on the ground that they were pleased," McGonagall said. "You're going to accept aren't you? This is the chance of a lifetime."

"I think so, but I want to think for a couple days," Harry said and then got a concerned look, "Could you look over the contract also? I've never dealt with this kind of stuff." Harry asked, realizing he had no clue what to look for in the contract.

"I'd be glad to help. If you want, I can take it and read it when we get back. You should let them know soon, that will let them know you're anxious to get going."

## **Chapter 4**

When they got back to the school, Professor McGonagall noticed Ron, Hermione and Cho sitting in the corner down the hall, obviously waiting for him to get back.

Harry walked down to them trying to look like he was disappointed. Thinking about not playing for Gryffindor did make him feel that way so he concentrated on that. Ron saw him first and they all jumped up. "So, how'd it go?" He could see the anxious looks on both Cho and Hermione's faces.

"It went pretty good. I didn't do anything stupid," Harry answered still trying to hide his emotions.

"Well you did your best. We're proud of you Harry." Hermione hugged him, having assumed he didn't get picked.

"You can still play here. That still gives me a chance to beat you," Cho said and gave him a hug also. This was the first time she ever hugged him.

Ron just looked at him for a minute and then exclaimed. "Wait a minute, you got picked! You bloody well did it!"

Harry just smiled and then nodded his head. Both Hermione and Cho hit him and said, "You prat!"

He told them about flying against Marcus Yuergen.

"He's an amazing seeker, carried Wales for a few years. Decided to retire while he was still healthy," Ron explained.

"So, did you tell them yes already?" Hermione asked, still acting very excited for her friend.

"I have until Saturday to tell them. McGonagall is looking over the contract."

"Oh man, you're playing for France and getting paid!" Ron moaned.

"Don't tell anyone yet, I want to keep it quiet," Harry pleaded. "Can I at least help you pick the new players for the house team?"

They spent all afternoon talking about Quidditch. Hermione was kind of left out since Harry, Ron and Cho were all on the school teams and she didn't care about the sport much. But she stayed right with them pretending to be interested.

On Sunday, Ron, Hermione and Harry decided to visit Hagrid. They didn't tell Hagrid about the French team because they knew he'd leak the news. The students wanted to know about the giants. "Should be 'ere in a few weeks. Thing are getting strange in their area. You-Know-Who's been stirring up trouble."

"Can we meet them when they get here?" Hermione pleaded.

"Not officially but maybe we can arrange something unofficially," Hagrid replied.

"Hagrid. She's a prefect; you can't say things like that around her. Wait until Harry and I are alone." Ron joked drawing another evil look from Hermione.

"Ron. It would be a learning experience to meet them. I can take off the badge for one night," Hermione huffed.

Saying goodbye, Harry added, "We may have some news for you by next week. That's all I'm saying," and they left.

They were walking back to the castle talking about giants when Fleur came bursting out of the castle, nearly knocking Cho and her friends off the steps. She was yelling, "'Arry! 'Arry! Is it true? For my team?"

How did she know? Harry madly started motioning her to be quiet. When she finally got to him, she hugged him tightly and said, "You're going to be seeker for the French National Team. I'm so proud of you. After seeing you with that dragon, I know you'll be great."

"How did you know? I haven't even told them officially yet. I just had the tryout yesterday." Harry said trying to make sure no one was around to hear.

"Well of course my family has connections 'Arry! Soon as my father found out, he got a message to me. Can't wait until we play England. Oh, Gabrielle is going to be so happy for you." She hugged Harry again which made him blush. Ron was fighting to hold back a laugh.

Just then Cho walked over not looking happy. "Hey Harry, did you forget about me waiting for you?" She gave a quick glance at Fleur.

"Ah 'Arry, I won't talk about it anymore now," Fleur said, not knowing Cho already knew.

"Cho knew yesterday Fleur," Harry quickly said, "she was waiting for me to come back from the tryouts." Fleur seemed surprised but Cho perked up at hearing Harry state this.

"Well good, she should be very proud. It is an amazing honor to play on a national team. I just can't believe it." Fleur headed back to the castle.

"Sorry Cho, I didn't tell her. Ask them, they were here," Harry said trying to make sure Cho wasn't mad at him.

"He's telling the truth, but we're leaving," Hermione added while pulling Ron away. Ron kept straining, hoping to hear Harry get yelled at.

"I believe you Harry. She's just so 'touchy', and she's a teacher," Cho said angrily.

"She's part Veela too," Harry added.

"You know she's kissed you way more than I have," Cho almost spat out.

Harry stopped and stared at Cho. "You've never kissed me Cho. Unless I was asleep and didn't know about it."

"Then you'll never know Harry. But I can't have her that far ahead," she said and kissed him on the cheek.

"If you're going to keep trying to catch her, maybe I should call her back over so you have a lot more work to do?" Cho hit him at this comment. However, Harry caught her smiling as she turned her head.

That afternoon Ron put up a sign in the Gryffindor common room about needing three players for the house team. Ginny came over to them and asked, "Why do we need three? Only the twins are gone?"

"Ginny, come closer, I want to ask you something," Ginny leaned in. "How would you like to play seeker this year?" Harry whispered.

"C'mon Harry, what do you really want to say? You're our seeker," the redhead said, clearly not believing Harry.

"I'm not playing this year. I can't. We think you should be the seeker."

The girl looked between Ron and Harry. "What do you mean you're not playing this year? You have to. Is something wrong?"

"He's playing this year, just not for Gryffindor," Ron said with a knowing smile.

Harry told her about playing for the French National Team. She didn't believe him at first but he promised he wasn't lying and she finally believed him. She was really happy for him but also a bit sad that he wouldn't be playing with them. "Who's going to catch me when I fall?" she asked.

"If I'm there watching, I'll still catch you," Harry said and hugged her shoulder.

Dean and Seamus had seen the notice and came over. "Ok, why do we need three players? We've already got you three?"

"I can't play this year. There's a special condition that's going to keep me from playing. I'm really sorry," Harry replied. Once again it took a while before anyone believed him.

"You're not playing? But you've never missed the snitch. We wanted to win one more time before our final year," Dean moaned.

"If Ginny plays seeker, you'll never know I was gone. She's at least as good as I am," Harry said and Ginny blushed.

They all tried to get the details of why Harry wasn't playing but he and his friends did really good about not revealing the true reason. Some of the Gryffindors were actually mad at him.



He knew that if they could get another good chaser that Ginny would do an excellent job as seeker.

Harry saw Professor McGonagall early the next morning and when she assured him the contract was fine, he signed it and sent it back. Now it was official. He was playing professional Quidditch for France. He decided to write a note for Sirius:

*Sirius*

*Hope you are doing well. I'm glad to be back at school with my friends. Viktor Krum arranged for me to have a tryout for the French National Quidditch team last weekend. Professor McGonagall came with me. It was pretty hard but the coach seemed nice. It looks like I'm going to be playing for them this year. I'll have to quit the Gryffindor team but I'm really excited about this.*

*Any news out there? It's been quiet here.*

*Harry*

*P.S. Ginny's going to be the new seeker, she's really good.*

He also decided to write a note thanking Viktor.

*Viktor*

*Thanks for getting me the tryout for the French team. I can't believe you did that. Somehow I was able to make the team and am looking forward to playing. I really appreciate you arranging this, it really surprised me. I really owe you one. If you can think of anything I can do for you, just ask.*

*I hope you are doing well*

*Harry Potter*

He ran up to the owlery and gave Sirius' note to Hedwig and Viktor's note to a school owl.

The word spread quickly about Harry not playing Quidditch for Gryffindor any more. At breakfast, Draco Malfoy came walking by and asked, "Is it true Potter? Did you really quit the team?"

"Yep Malfoy it's true. I didn't think I could handle you any more and had to turn it over to someone better than me. Ginny's the new seeker."

"Her. She can't even stay on her broom," Malfoy sneered and then realized he shouldn't have said that. Ron and Harry were up with Hermione not far behind.

Malfoy walked away quickly. The Gryffindor students headed off to Potions. Harry didn't want to be early so Fleur wouldn't get a chance to talk to him alone. He was afraid she'd say something too loudly about the French team. Most of the Ravenclaws were already in the room when the trio got there. The professor was going over various antidotes to poisons. Fleur did do one thing the same as Snape, she made the students try their antidotes out on each

other. Harry was glad to be working with Ron and Hermione instead of Neville or a few of the others. Class went well and Fleur let everyone out early, but called Harry over, "'Arry. May I speak with you for a minute please?" The Ravenclaw girls gave him a dirty look on their way out. Harry went up to Fleur's desk.

"'Arry. I have a surprise for you. This is still a secret but I wanted to share it with you. We are arranging two balls this year. One 'ere at 'ogwarts and one at Beauxbatons. Students from each school will go to both. Don't you think that's a splendid idea?" Fleur couldn't contain her excitement.

Harry didn't share her excitement at this news. He had a good time at the Halloween ball last year but still worried about his dancing. "All the students will go to both balls?" Harry asked not sounding too excited.

"Only fifth years and up 'Arry. You don't seem too excited."

"I'm not a very good dancer so they make me uncomfortable," Harry said feeling a bit embarrassed.

Fleur's eyes got big and she said, "I can teach you! You'll make quite an impression at Beauxbatons if you speak French and can dance. It would only take a few lessons. How about starting after classes today? It'll be fun. I love to dance and don't get to do it much being here."

Harry would like to dance better and spending time with Fleur was always enjoyable. The thought of Ron finding out didn't make him feel good. He left and went to catch up with Ron and Hermione but saw them sitting talking together so he didn't want to interrupt them. He knew they didn't mind him around but he also felt they liked their time together without him around. He walked on out to talk to Hagrid who was sitting on his steps. "Hi Hagrid am I bothering you?"

"Never botherin' me Harry. What're you doin' alone? Not on the outs with the other two are ya?"

"No, everything's fine. I think they could use some alone time."

"Reckon they might at that. Think that'll be a problem for ya?"

"No. I've been expecting it ever since they got together. I'm happy for them. Any news on when your friends will be here?"

"Not sure Harry. I can't wait though. It'll be good to see them again. I think you'll really like them."

After a while, Harry saw Cho and her friend walking toward the castle from the greenhouses and hurried over to them. "Hi ladies can I walk up with you?" he greeted the group.

They all smiled and said sure, making small talk. When they got to where they would be going in different directions Harry said, "Cho, can I talk to you for just a second?"

She stopped and he nervously said, "Cho, I want to tell you that I'm planning on doing something and it's kind of for you so don't be mad." She looked really confused but he went on, "I'm going to get some dancing lessons just in case you know there's a ball and you actually go with me."

She smiled and said, "Just in case huh? You must know something. And you seem confident I'll be going with you," she hesitated and then added, "Wait a minute, who's teaching these lessons?"

"Um... well Fleur volunteered to teach me. I'm doing it to not embarrass you though," Harry said trying to make Cho see the up side of the arrangement.

Cho eyed him and said, "I can't say I'm really happy about that, but it would be nice if you knew how to dance well. The thought of her touching you so much doesn't make me happy, but I'll try to deal with it. Thanks for telling me upfront instead of trying to sneak around. You would have been in real trouble if I found out from someone else."

Now he was glad he told her. He had thought about just trying to keep it a secret but had learned his lessons over the years. Thinking about his conversation with Cho got him confused. Were they a couple? They had never been on a date or anything and yet Cho had kissed him on the cheek. It felt like they were a couple when they were together.

He went on and met up with Ron and Hermione outside of Defense class. "Where have you been? We expected you to come find us," Ron said.

"I saw you and you looked like you were enjoying your time alone so I went to talk with Hagrid. You deserve to spend more time without me hanging around."

Hermione blushed a bit and said, "You're welcome around us any time. You know that."

"Yeah, but if you really want to go do things without the prefect finding out, now you have a good excuse," Ron added and was quickly hit by Hermione.

Class was fun for Harry because he got to see how everyone else handled the pain spells. Toward the end, Hermione had been able to make good progress at reducing the pain. This made Ron feel bad. "Great, before long you'll both be able to hex me and I won't be able to do anything about it."

After classes, he told Ron and Hermione that he needed to talk to McGonagall about something. This was a lie, but Harry wasn't ready for them to find out about the dance lessons yet. They didn't protest much, probably wanting the time alone. If they weren't together, Harry would have a much harder time sneaking away. He knocked on Fleur's office and she said come in. "Arry! I was hoping you didn't cheekin out," she said smiling. "Don't worry; I won't use my veela charm much. Let's go to the classroom where there is more room. We must be able to move around." They walked out and Harry was hoping no one noticed him going into the classroom with her. She quickly magicked the desks out of the way and tried to find some good music on the Wireless Wizard Network. She finally found some that sounded somewhat like the music from the school balls he had been to. "Ok. You have danced before. Let's see what you know." She stepped up to him and he took her hand and placed the other one on her

waist. His arms were a little stiff and there was a decent gap between them. She quickly said, "I won't break, hold me like you mean it," she pulled on his shoulders and he was nearly rubbing against her now. His lower arm was more on the small of her back. They began moving to the music with Fleur leading the motions. Harry was feeling a little more comfortable but still moved rather stiffly. They stopped after the song ended and she said, "That's not too bad already. You need to relax more. When you dance with a girl, you must feel like you are enjoying every second of being near her. Make her feel like she is the most important thing at that time. Remember you may not want to be dancing with a person but during the dance you need to make her feel special. If you do that, the exact movements you make won't be so important. Let's try again."

Harry held her close like she showed and tried to look her in the eyes often and smile. She was still leading the motions but he felt a bit more comfortable being this close to her. She smiled back at him warmly. As the song went on, he felt like he was floating with her. When it ended she said, "Now, how did you feel that time? You danced very well."

"That was great Fleur. I felt like we were floating."

Fleur giggled a bit. "Ok, remember that feeling. This time I'll keep the veela charm to myself," she said with a sly smile.

"You cheated!" Harry exclaimed.

"True, but when you are dancing with someone you really want to be dancing with, it will feel the same. Trust me." By the end of their first session, Harry really was enjoying just dancing. He had been able to talk a little while still moving around. He had thought of Cho most of the time but it was just nice being close to a pretty girl like that.

"Thanks Fleur, this has been great. I really enjoyed it. Will we be able to do it again?"

"Of course 'Arry. Dancing is a passion of mine. You made good progress. A few more times and you'll be the hit of the Beauxbaton ball. See you after next class."

Harry was walking down back to the common room, almost skipping from the good time he had when he turned the corner and saw Cho standing there. "You look a little too happy Harry."

Harry just grabbed her hand and danced a little circle with her and said, "Yes, but I was only thinking of you."

"What did you say to me?" Cho demanded but didn't seem as mad.

"I said 'Yes, but I was only thinking of you.' That's the truth Cho. I was picturing dancing with you all the time."

Cho blushed as she said, "Well... um...That's the way it better have been. I kind of liked it when you spoke French. Will you do it again? And while I'm asking for things, when will you show me your form?"

"I'll speak French to you again when the time is right. And, I'll show you my form when you quit worrying about me and Fleur," Harry said with a chuckle and they went to study together for a little bit before going back to their common rooms. Harry went over to his friends and Ginny asked why he was in such a good mood. "It's just been a good evening Ginny," was all he would say.

Ginny smiled and said, "It's nice to see you so happy." Ginny looked a bit worried and when Harry asked about this, she replied, "I'm nervous about taking your place on the team though."

"I've seen you fly, you'll have no problem. I'll be jealous when you win the cup this year and I won't be a part of it," Harry said.

"You'll always be a part of our team. We'll be jealous when you win the European Cup and forget all about us."

"How could I forget my best friends? I'm going up to bed." Harry said with a smile and went up to bed. He lay awake for a long time thinking about his dances with Fleur and wondering about his relationship with Cho. He didn't see anything bad with either one.

The next morning they were sitting at breakfast when the mail came. Harry wasn't paying much attention and luckily Ron saw a large package drop toward Harry. Ron grabbed it and handed it to his friend. "What could I be getting?"

"C'mon let's get to opening it." Ron demanded and the three of them ripped the package open and saw it was a broom. Harry recognized it immediately. XANDARI MK 1 - H.Potter was engraved into the front part of the handle.

"Harry? Why did you get another broom? I've never seen this model before," Ron said confused.

"It's my signing bonus. This is what they fly, brand new models. It's way faster than my Firebolt. Want to try it later?" Harry said and Ron immediately perked up. Ron forgot about everything except for examining the new broom. Harry also received a couple of notes; the first was from Coach Gialli.

*Harry*

*Glad to see you chose to accept our offer. I think with hard work and the right training, the team we have now can do well this year. Since you returned the letter so early, you can join us for the first team practice this Saturday morning at 8:00am. You should be able to return by 1:00pm. We work hard during our practices and will expect you to keep up. Viktor assures me you me that I should have no worries about us picking you.*

*We are delivering your signing bonus as well, in case you have an opportunity to try it out.*

*Looking forward to our first practice.*

*F. Gialli.*

Dean and Seamus came over when they saw the broom so Harry put the first note away quickly. "What did you get a new broom for if you can't play this year? Something's going on here; you know you can't keep it from us for long."

"Ron, keep them busy looking at the broom while I read my other letter," Harry whispered to his friend.

*Harry*

*Congratulations on making the team. I had confidence you could do it. I want to give you some advice I learned the hard way. The crowd and your teammates will love you when you catch the snitch and win. They will both hate you when you miss the snitch and lose. Your teammates may like you and the crowd may not hate you if you catch the snitch and still lose. One more thing. Getting a penalty called on you is much better than not catching the snitch. This is very important to remember.*

*Tell everyone I said hello.*

*Will see you soon*

*Viktor*

He smiled and handed the note to Hermione to read. Ginny was reading Hermione's Daily Prophet while Hermione was looking at the broom. Ginny said, "I don't think it's a secret any more," and showed Harry the front page.

*Triwizard Champion joins French National Team*

*Will this be their missing piece?*

*Harry Potter the co-winner of the last Triwizard Championship had just signed a contract to play seeker for the French National Team. According to Coach Gialli 'We had week long tryouts and he came out on top of our candidates. We're very excited about the team we will be fielding this year. Our current players have come together well this last year and we think adding this final piece will give us the final spark we need.'*

*Harry Potter is only in his sixth year at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. When asked about his age and experience, Coach Gialli noted 'We don't see his age as much of an issue. He conducted himself as well as any other competitor and we see no reason that would change. As far as his experience is concerned, I dare say he has accomplished more than most wizards that have already left school.'*

*This reporter is anxious to see how a young boy holds up in the rough world of professional Quidditch. Harry Potter may wish he were back facing You-Know-Who instead of the English National Team.*

Harry heard the mumbling get louder and looked up to see Fleur beaming at him. She was holding the Prophet and pointing at the cover. He could see McGonagall fighting to hold back a large smile next to her. His face had turned red and he really just wanted to get away from all the people.

"This is why you can't play for us? You'd rather have international fame and glory than play with your housemates! Blimey Harry," Dean laughed.

"I need to get out of here," Harry told Ron and Hermione. He grabbed his broom and started to make his way out when Dumbledore got everyone's attention. "For those of you who don't read the paper and haven't understood all the yelling, let me explain." Harry turned toward Dumbledore with a pleading look, but Dumbledore was having none of it. "Hogwarts now has the distinction of being the home of the current seeker on the French National Quidditch team. Harry Potter." Almost all the students were clapping loudly. He glanced over and saw no one at the Slytherin table clapping at all. Draco looked like he had been hit with a brick.

Harry tried pushing through all of the people congratulating him and asking him how he did it. Finally, he got out the door and was relieved to find Professor McGonagall waiting for him. "Mr. Potter, a word if you don't mind. Will the rest of you please let him get on with his school day?" He followed her to her office where she said, "It's out in the open now."

"I wish it wasn't Professor. I had been really careful to make sure only select people found out. I didn't think about this happening."

"I doubt you'll find it getting much better. If you do well, even more people will want to talk to you. If you do poorly, many people will want to rub that in as well. I suggest you remember who your real friends are and work through things with them. You have one advantage; you were already famous in our world. Now it will be for reason you can control."

"Thank you Professor. They are having practices starting Saturday. Are you going to come with me each time?"

"You didn't like my company?" Harry suddenly became aware of what he said but then saw a slight smile on her face. "No Mr. Potter. You can travel by floo directly to the practice area. For the first few times, I would prefer if you took Dobby or Winky with you. They can be back here in a flash if anything was to happen or you needed anything. They will cause you less concern with your teammates than I would by joining you every week. Make sure you keep your grades up so we don't regret allowing you to play. And, don't be offended when I root for England when you play us. Every other time, I'll be pulling for France."

"Thanks again Professor. I still can't believe this is happening." Harry tried to get to his classes early to keep from talking to people in the halls. During break Harry snuck down to the kitchen. He hadn't been down to see Dobby and Winky since term started. Entering the room he was bombarded by squeaks of "Congratulations Harry Potter sir. Is there anything we can get for you?"

Then he heard a familiar squeaky voice, "If Harry Potter needs anything Winky will see to him." The other house-elves quickly scurried away. "What can Winky do for you sir?"

"Hi Winky. How are you and Dobby doing back here?"

"We is doing fine sir. Winky likes the quiet of the castle better, but Dobby is liking the excitement of the school."

"Where is Dobby?"

"Oh, doing a favor for Professor Dumbledore. Dobby should be back soon sir."

"Winky. Since I made the French team, Professor McGonagall suggested I asked either you or Dobby to come with me to practices on the weekends. I have to travel by floo but either you or Dobby could just pop there. Would you rather I ask Dobby or would you like to go?"

"Oh sir, Dobby would be offended if you asked Winky instead of him. Please sir, take Dobby. Dobby would enjoy the trip very much and Winky will make sure he behaves himself. I will tell Dobby you asked when he returns. Is there anything we can get for you?"

"No thanks Winky. I may come just to sit down here. Now that the school found out I'm playing for France, I haven't gotten much peace and quiet."

"Sir could always go to the place Dobby setup for Sir and Miss R.J. No one ever goes there. Winky will make sure it is in condition."

Harry flashed back to the time he and R.J. spent in the tower room and it made him smile. "That's a good idea Winky, thanks. Bye."

Harry left and snuck back out to head to the next class. Right after class Harry went back to the common room so all he had to deal with were Gryffindors asking him questions. When he asked them firmly to please just treat him normally they kind of toned it down. A little later, Ron came in and said, "Cho's out here looking for you."

Harry left the Gryffindor house and found Cho out in the hall. "How are you handling it Harry? Seems like a crowd around all the time." Even while she was saying this, students came by and starting whispering and giggling around him. "We'll never have any quiet time now," she added with a little frown.

Harry thought about Winky's idea. "Cho would you like to go someplace quiet and private? Just to talk. We could even take some books and study if you want. I just want it to be private."

She looked at him and said, "No studying, let's just talk."

"Ok, I need to grab something out of my room. I'll be right back." He ran up and got his invisibility cloak and they headed off. Harry led her through some corridors and near where the hidden stairs were to get to the tower. "Ok, when no one is around, let's put this on."

"What is this?" Cho asked looking at the bundle under Harry's arm.

"Oh, it's my invisibility cloak. I thought you knew. I just assume my friends know."

Cho just shook her head and said, "No wonder you were in trouble so often." They got under the cloak and went up the stairs to the door. Harry pushed the right place to open the door and they walked in removing the cloak. It looked different than the last time he came up here.



Winky must have made it brighter. Dobby must have arranged things last time. "How do you know about this place?" Cho asked in amazement.

"You know, a little house-elf told me," Harry joked. "Are you ok being here? We can go someplace else if you're not," unsure if she was comfortable being alone with him.

"No, I'm fine here. I just can't believe you know so much about the castle. I don't know anything very special and I've been here an extra year."

"C'mon, you've had to find out secret places. There are tunnels to Hogsmeade and one that comes up near the Whomping Willow. Have you seen the kitchen and all the house-elves there?"

Cho shook her head, "Really, I don't know about any secret place. My time here was really very normal until last year. You three don't know how much different you are than other students. Seeing how much you know and how good of friends you are really makes me jealous."

"You have good friends too Cho. And, I found out about the kitchens and the tunnels from other Gryffindors. You should see this map I have. It shows me a bunch of secret passages and plots out where all the teachers are so I can keep from getting caught. Professor Lupin and Professor Moody both found out and took it away from me but gave it back when they weren't teachers any more. Professor Lupin, Sirius and my dad made the map when they were here."

They sat on the floor for over an hour talking when Cho said she should be going, "Do you promise to bring me here again? I'd never find it by myself."

"I promise. It's the only place I'll get any peace if people don't go back to treating me normally." They put the cloak on until they were in a normal corridor with no one around.

Harry walked her to the Ravenclaw house hallway. Cho got an excited look and said, "You want to see someplace you've never seen before?" Harry nodded. "How about coming to the Ravenclaw common room tomorrow evening?"

"Really? You don't think they'll mind? Sometimes they don't seem to like me much."

"They won't mind. Besides, I'm a seventh year, they can't stop me. My friends probably act like they don't like you when they see you talking to Fleur or other girls. Some of the others don't like that you're always getting into trouble. Ravenclaws don't cause much trouble as you've probably learned."

"That would be great. I've only been inside the Slytherin house before. That's not a cheerful place."

"What would you be doing in their house? They hate you," Cho looked stunned.

"Oh, they didn't know Ron and I were there. Hermione was supposed to join us but she had a mishap."

"Let me guess, the invisibility cloak?"

"Nope, polyjuice potion and that's all I can say. Night Cho."

"Goodnight Harry" she said and gave him a quick kiss on the lips. That was the first time she'd ever done that. Harry got back to the common room still thinking about the kiss and found Ron, Hermione and Ginny in the corner reading. "Glad you're here Ginny. That means I can come and interrupt them."

"Funny Harry. Where have you been?" Ron asked.

"Trying to find a quiet place to talk. People are acting weird."

Ginny laughed and said, "Harry. You're going to be an international Quidditch player; they're going to act weird around you."

"Well you're not. You're just the way I like it, nice and normal," Harry responded and it made Ginny smile. They were talking about classes when 'pop' Dobby appeared. Ginny gave a little scream and the other Gryffindors looked over in surprise.

"Harry Potter asks Dobby to accompany him to training. 'Tis such an honor sir."

"So I guess you want to go? You'll behave yourself, right?" Harry said.

"Of course sir, Dobby will be a proper house-elf. 'Tis such an honor to accompany Harry Potter sir."

"Oh, Dobby, can I ask for a favor?"

"No favor sir. You ask and Dobby and Winky will do it."

"No, this is a favor, for a friend. Can you get me some really nice sweets for tomorrow? I need a small plate with a couple of sweets and then a larger tray with about twenty. Is this too much trouble? Can you bring them to Fleur Delacour's office about an hour after classes?"

"Of course sir. Dobby will make them special. Goodbye Misses and Sirs" 'pop' and he was gone.

"They're still weird to me. So he's going to practice with you. Hope he doesn't try to protect you or anything," Ron laughed.

"McGonagall said someone should go with me and since a house-elf could just pop back here if something happens, she suggested one of them. It'll be kind of embarrassing though."

"I think that's a smart choice. By the way Harry, why are you getting two trays of sweets delivered to Fleur's office tomorrow?" Hermione asked.

"A little French connection Harry?" Ron said raising his eyebrows.

"No! I didn't want to tell you guys because you'll all make fun of me but I'm getting dancing lessons from Fleur."

"No way! You spend time after classes dancing with a veela teacher? Why do you have all the luck?" Ron said and then ducked out of the way of Hermione's punch.

"What does Cho think of this? You *have* told her haven't you?" Ginny asked, sounding somewhat like Hermione.

"Yes Ginny I have told her. Thanks for making sure I'm honest though. She's not that happy about it but realizes if there's another ball she'd rather have me able to dance."

"Ok, that's the small plate, but Fleur's not going to eat twenty sweets. What's the full story?" Hermione asked again. She wasn't going to let it go.

"I've been invited up to the Ravenclaw common room tomorrow evening. I'd like to make a good impression and sweets always seemed to work for Fred and George."

"Yeah, until their sweets turned someone into a canary," Ron said laughing. "It has got to be better than the Slytherin house was," Ron added with a shiver.

"How did you ever see the Slytherin house?" Ginny asked.

Harry laughed, "Cho just asked the same thing."

## **Chapter 5**

Harry skipped breakfast the next morning and stayed in the common room and left for Potions a little early to beat the crowds of students in the halls. He was first to class and found Fleur already there. "Ah. There's our seeker. Another lesson tonight? They'll be an announcement next week about the balls 'Arry. I'm so excited," Fleur said and then came closer. "Your name came up when the teachers were talking about the ball. May I ask you about something?" Fleur's face looked serious.

Having never seen Fleur look serious since she came to Hogwarts, Harry was a bit concerned. "Of course, anything you want."

Fleur wasn't looking at Harry when she asked, "Did you really bring a vampire to the ball last year?"

"Yes, I really did," Harry replied breathing a sigh of relief. "I took a potion to make me look like a vampire also so that the other student's wouldn't know she was real. We dated until the end of the term."

"That is what I heard. Did you love this vampire?"

Harry got a sad look and answered, "Yes, I loved her."

"You didn't mind that most people are afraid of them?" she asked hesitantly.

"That didn't matter to me at all," said Harry so quickly that Fleur kind of snapped back. "I knew what she was like and she was one of the best people I've ever known. I learned so much from her."

"I'm impressed someone so young could see people for what they are inside. You are full of surprises."

Other students finally started coming in. As usual, Fleur's class was interesting and she made the time go by quickly. At lunch, Cho called Harry over to make sure he was still coming to the Ravenclaw house that evening.

Harry was looking forward to Defense class but this time Snape was in rare form. "So Mr. Potter. The fame of being Co-Tri-Wizard Champion wasn't enough. You had to become an international Quidditch celebrity as well. We're just not challenging you enough here I see. Why don't you come up here so I can demonstrate a few other spells we will be working on?" The smirk on the Professor's face made Harry start to worry.

"Since you don't seem to have trouble with the little pain spells so we'll try something different." Snape pointed his wand at Harry and said a curse. Suddenly, Harry felt a familiar feeling. One that brought back very bad memories. He was bending in the middle, bowing to Snape.

When Snape released the spell, Harry snapped, "What did you do? That's exactly what Voldemort did to me." Harry's mind was flashing back to being forced to bow to Voldemort after the Tri-Wizard Tournament.

The class gasped, especially the Ravenclaws. Snape just smiled a little and said, "It's actually a simple spell, with an easy way to block it. Most people would never have the reason to block it though since it is used for medical rehabilitation, for people who have lost some mobility. It causes the muscles to contract, in this case simulating a bow. I imagine the Dark Lord had a good laugh using it on you."

Harry spoke up intently, "How can I block that? Umm... Sir," hoping the Professor would teach him.

"Simple Mr. Potter," Snape said slowly making Harry wait. "Whatever you feel your muscles wanting to do, try to make them do it yourself. If you feel them trying to make you bow, attempt to bow. If your arm tries to go up, try to raise your arm. The signals from the brain get cancelled out that way. Would you like to try again?"

"Yes sir, please." Harry was very eager to see if he could block it.

It took two times before he really let go and attempted to do what the spell was forcing him to do. Strangely enough, that caused the spell to be broken. After that, Snape tried it on most of the rest of the class. Both Ron and Hermione were able to block it quickly.

After class Snape said, "A word Mr. Potter. I've been making acceptable progress with the technique you mentioned. I'm to the point where the pain is tolerable. You mentioned something about a surprise."

Harry still hadn't fully become comfortable with Snape treating him as a human being, but was very grateful for the Professor teaching him how to block that last curse. "Oh, yes sir. The spell is '*Totilla Desissa*'. The trick is you can't be blocking all the pain to use it. The more pain you let through, the more powerful the offensive spell will be. Be careful sir, the first time I was able to do it, I destroyed a wall. That's what I did to Voldemort in the forest. I don't know how he lived."

Snape again looked at Harry like he couldn't quite figure him out. "Thank you Potter. I'll have to arrange someplace to practice."

"Professor, thank you for teaching me how to block that one spell. I never really got over having to bow to him," Harry said honestly. All Snape did was nod back.

Harry met Fleur for his dancing lesson. "Good, you're here. I am anxious to begin dancing. Please, try something. Try picturing me as your friend from the ball last year. I know you're getting friendly with another now, but try to think back if you can. Think about how you felt about her when you were alone. Close your eyes and don't talk this time, just dance with her."

This seemed strange but Harry closed his eyes and really tried to think back. Fleur came to him and he started dancing, picturing himself with R.J. and remembering how good she felt. After a few moments, he instinctively pulled Fleur tighter than he had been and they moved perfectly together. He was able to picture exactly how R.J. felt in his arms and even how she smelled.

After the song, Harry stepped back with a tear in his eye. Fleur smiled warmly at him and said, "That is the way to dance Harry. Now, can you do that picturing me? Or your new

friend? The memories of the ones we've loved never leave. They can either torment us or strengthen us. Ready?"

More music came on and Harry began dancing again. He held Fleur like before but he still pictured her as Fleur, enjoying her company and the movements. The couple talked, laughed and danced for quite a few songs in a row until Fleur said, "You are really getting good Harry. I would be happy dancing with you anytime. Do not worry about dancing with anyone at the ball." They were just finishing talking when 'pop Dobby appeared. Fleur seemed startled and exclaimed, "What are you doing here?"

"Forgive me Professor. I am Harry Potter's house-elf and have brought him something he requested. I'm sorry Harry Potter sir if I came at a bad time."

"No, of course not Dobby. And remember, you're not my house-elf. You're my friend who happens to work for me. There's a difference. Thank you for bringing me the sweets. See you Saturday." Dobby left without another word.

"You have a house-elf?" Fleur asked surprised.

"First, these are for you," he gave her the small plate of sweets, "to thank you for teaching me how to dance. Dobby and Winky work for me but come to the school when I'm here instead of staying at my home alone. They're both free elves, they can leave any time."

"Free house-elves? I've never heard such a thing," the young Professor again shook her head at how much she didn't know about her friend and student. "My family has a house-elf. I've never given them much thought."

"Dobby is really my friend. He tried to protect me a few times. When I got my home last year I asked them to work for me. I live alone and don't know how to do many things."

"You live alone? With two house-elves? I have much to learn about you," Fleur said amused and noticed the other tray. "What is this other tray of sweets for?"

"I'm invited to the Ravenclaw common room and wanted to make a good impression. This always worked for friends of mine."

"You will visit their house? That is good. You will make a good impression. See you next week."

Harry took the tray and went to the hall where the Ravenclaw house was. Cho was there waiting. "You're later than I thought. Let me guess, dance lessons went long," the dark haired girl said and then noticed the tray Harry was carrying. "Hey, what have you got there?"

"Well, they were going to be sweets for your house but I don't know with the greeting you just gave me." He smiled and she came over and gave him a kiss. She gave the password and their portrait swung open.

Inside Cho announced, "We have a guest tonight so everyone be on your best behavior." Harry looked around. There were quite a few students in the common area and they were mostly girls. The Ravenclaw common room seemed so much nicer and more formal than the Gryffindor room. Their furniture was in better shape and it was just decorated better.

"This is really nice," Harry said after taking it in. They walked over to a group of chairs where Harry recognized some of Cho's friends were sitting.

"For those of you who haven't met him, this is Harry Potter, a Gryffindor," Cho said and there were a few 'boos' in jest.

The girls all greeted him and then Harry presented the sweets. "I didn't want to come empty-handed so a friend arranged these for me to bring to you." He sat the tray down on the table. The girls really seemed to appreciate this gesture. The group just talked about school and the differences in the houses. Harry told them the Gryffindor common room wasn't as nice and was almost never this quiet. "Remember we used to have Fred and George Weasley in ours. It's was not uncommon for one of us to turn into some weird animal for a while after eating one of their inventions."

Harry was grateful that no one mentioned his new Quidditch position. He assumed Cho made them promise not to talk about it. The only comment that came close was when another girl on the Ravenclaw team said, "I wish you were still playing this year so when we beat you we could have said we beat Harry Potter."

"You know, that's the real reason I quit the team. Your team was getting so good last year that I knew we wouldn't win anymore. I think Ginny Weasley will be as good a seeker as I ever was. Cho you'll have to have a really good game to beat her."

"Harry, would you mind me asking for a favor?" A girl named Kelly asked.

Cho quickly spoke up and said, "Kelly, you promised!"

"It's ok Cho. What is it Kelly?" Harry said wondering what the girl wanted.

"It's just most of us weren't there when you spoke to that snake in the dueling club. It would be really interesting for us to actually see you do that. I'm thinking of writing a paper for my N.E.W.Ts which covers the history of Parslemouths. A fourth-year student has a snake as a pet. Kind of creeps me out actually, but if he would bring it down would you mind talking to it?"

"You don't have to if it bothers you Harry," Cho said still angry.

"Not at all. Just don't get freaked out when I do it. Ron and Hermione say it sounds really creepy. To me, it's just like I'm speaking English. I can't even tell I'm doing it."

Kelly ran up the stairs and came back a minute later with a boy carrying a box about the size of two shoe boxes. "This is Bill."

"Hi Bill, I'm Harry. I've heard you have a snake. Would you mind if I talked to it?"

Bill was kind of nervous and protective of his snake. "You won't hurt her or anything will you? Most people don't like me having her here."

"Not at all. I can talk to snakes and want to try with yours. What's her name?"

Kelly asked quickly, "It has a name?"

"It has to have a name now doesn't it?" Harry smiled thinking of Hagrid saying the same thing.

"Her name's Sally. You have to be careful; she has bitten some people who are too rough with her. It doesn't hurt, she has really small teeth," Bill said.

"That's ok; I've been bitten by a really big snake before. I would have died if it hadn't been for Fawkes."

"Who's Fawkes?" Cho asked.

"Dumbledore's Phoenix. Amazing bird." Harry turned back to the boy. "Is it ok if I see her now Bill?" Bill opened the box and Harry saw the snake curled up in the corner. It looked like a common garden snake and he could tell it was kind of scared.

*"Don't hurt me please. Stay back,"* the snake was saying.

Harry said, *"Don't worry Sally, I wouldn't hurt you. I like snakes, really."* The snake's posture changed immediately; she straightened out towards the end closest to Harry.

*"How are you talking to me? I've never talked to a human before?"* The snake hissed

*"Just a little gift I have. Is it ok if I hold you so that these girls can see you are really friendly? I'll put you back if you just ask. You know Bill really likes you and tries to protect you."*

*"You can hold me. Please don't let them hurt me. The boy is my friend but he has friends who scare me."*

Harry picked up the snake gently and she coiled around his fingers with her head resting on the back of his hand. He held her out so the girls could get a look. "Sally said she is afraid of you girls and is worried you would hurt her. She's just really scared of people. Not you Bill, she likes you."

"She really talked to you? All I heard was hissing," Bill said excitedly.

Harry thought for a second and then turned back to the snake. *"Sally, what kind of pajamas does Bill wear?"*

*"Blue ones with stars."*

"Bill, do you wear blue pajamas with stars on them?"

"She told you that!" Bill blushed bright red. The girls laughed and then had Harry ask the snake some questions and then he put her back. *"Thanks for letting me hold you Sally. I don't think the girls are so afraid of you now."*

*"And I'm not so afraid of them either. Thank you."*

Harry put the snake back and told Bill. "Bill, she's really afraid of some of your friends. I'll tell you what. You tell them that I'm going to come back and talk to Sally sometimes and if I find out they've been mean to her, I'll hex them. Ok."



Bill seemed really happy and said, "Ok" and ran back upstairs.

Cho was beaming at him. "That was really nice of you."

"Thanks Harry, that was really interesting," Kelly commented, "kind of creepy, but interesting."

Cho walked Harry out. "Thanks for coming Harry. My friends really seem to like you."

"It was fun. I liked being around all of you. See you later." Harry turned to walk away.

Cho quickly said, "Um Harry, aren't you forgetting something?" He looked confused but she stepped to him and gave him a nice kiss on the lips.

"Oh, how could I forget that?" Harry said afterwards.

That Saturday, Harry arrived at Professor McGonagall's office with his new broom, ready to go to his first practice. "Where's Dobby?" Harry asked.

"He's gone ahead Harry. Do your best and we'll see you back here this afternoon." His Professor looked nervous. "Good luck," she added.

Harry threw the powder into the fire and stepped in. Within seconds he was coming out of the fireplace at the team's practice facilities. Winky and a man Harry had never seen were standing there. "Harry Potter? I'm Tom, the trainer. Let's get you some your practice robes and out to the field. You're right on time. Your house-elf friend gave me quite a start earlier."

"Hello sir. Sorry about Dobby. I didn't know he would be coming before me. The school thinks it's necessary," Harry said getting a little embarrassed. "Dobby, would you mind helping Tom if he needs anything while I'm practicing? That would give you something to do and could maybe help Tom out. Would that be ok with you Tom?"

"I may need some things fetched from containers and such. It would be fine by me."

"Dobby is liking helping out sir. Please sir, just ask when sir wants Dobby to help."

Harry got some practice robes and went out. He wasn't the last one to show up. "Harry. Good, you made it. Not all of the team is here but let me introduce you to those who are. This is Tim Williams, he is the keeper and team captain. This is Keith Timms and Kevin Shively, beaters. This is Kristi Belig, chaser. Our other chaser isn't here yet." Kristi was a tall, slender, powerful looking girl with platinum hair and a cold set of eyes that seemed to bore into him.

Harry said hello to all of them and got the feeling they weren't excited about him being there. He took the opportunity to fly around the pitch since he hadn't been on the broom after it was delivered to him. He was still really amazed with how quickly it accelerated and turned. After a few minutes he noticed another player had arrived and went back to the group.

"This is our final team member, Harry. Jacque Dubois, chaser," Coach announced.

"Somehow, I thought you'd be bigger," Jacque said in a heavy French accent.

"Decent flying up there. Can you do it in front of a crowd while dodging bludgers?" Kristi asked rather coldly.

They started practicing and Harry quickly realized how much he didn't know. They moved so well together and they were expecting him to do more than just wait around to catch the snitch. "Potter! You need to consider yourself a bludger until you see the snitch. Do anything you can to disrupt the other team, or to distract the other seeker without getting penalties or missing the snitch. If you can intimidate one of the other players, that will be a huge advantage for us. We play fair, but not nice. Let's go again."

This time Harry really tried to figure out what to do. He was able to break up some scoring runs by flying close in front of them. He seemed to be spending most of the time dodging bludgers though. A few had come really close to hitting him and only by rolling or looping had he been able to avoid them. He got the feeling that the beaters weren't trying to protect him at all. He felt better towards the end of practice. He felt more comfortable heading straight into an oncoming chaser to disrupt him and it even seemed the beaters started watching out a little for him. Back on the ground with the team Jacque spoke up first, "Think you'll hold up for a full season? Real teams won't be as nice as our practice squad."

"Get off it Jacque. He's already better than Martin was," Kristi snapped. Jacque gave her a really evil look.

"Come on now. It's fair to say this was one of our better early season practices," the coach interrupted before an argument broke out. "There is still a lot to work on and Harry has a long way to go before we face Wales in the opener. That's my job to make sure he's ready. Everybody work out as much as you can and I'll see you next week. Harry can you stay a moment please."

Most of the other members patted Harry on the back telling him he did a good job today. Kristi said, "Don't let Jacque get to you, you did ok."

"Harry, you did pretty good today, better than I expected for your first day. You need to get comfortable being part of the action for the entire match instead of just the run for the snitch, but I think you're seeing that. Also, I think you could stand some training on seeker diversionary techniques. Luckily our trainer Tom is a technical expert. Doesn't really want to play or fly much, but he really knows techniques. He can explain and diagram what he's saying, but he won't show you. Why don't you work with him another hour before heading back?"

Harry was already really tired but wanted to learn as much as he could so he went over to Tom. "Good flying today Harry. You're really a natural," the trainer said walking over to his chest. "Coach wants me to show you some technical moves that come in very handy. The first is a difficult move to pull off, but if done correctly can really cause the other seeker some problems. It's called the Wronski Feint."

"I saw Krum do that. I think I can already do it but would still like to see it drawn out." Harry said excitedly. Tom drew out maneuvers in the air with his wand. They were also being written down by a magic pen so that Harry could study them later.

After the time was up Tom seemed pleased by how quick Harry picked up the technical parts of the maneuvers. "Oh, and Harry. You can bring Dobby back any time. He was really helpful today."

Dobby was beaming when Harry said, "Dobby. Obviously you made a good impression today. Do you want to keep coming back with me?"

"Oh yes sir! Dobby is liking this very much. Being treated as a friend of Harry Potter is even greater than Dobby imagined."

They headed inside to the fireplace. "I'll see you back at Hogwarts. Thanks for coming with me," Harry said before stepping into the fire.

Professor McGonagall was there waiting when he got back. "A little later than we expected Mr. Potter. Did everything go well?"

"Yes professor. I had to stay after to learn some seeker technical moves. It is very different than playing here. I'm not sure the rest of the team likes me much though."

"It's good you're learning those moves. Natural talent is fine here, but can't compensate for everything." She looked at him differently. "Does it surprise you that they don't act like they like you? Here you've had years to build up friendships and respect. There, they probably see you as a schoolboy who thinks he can play at their professional level. You just have to work extra hard and show them you are dedicated and can play at their level. I doubt they will be friendly to you until you've earned their respect. This is their job and until they realize you can help them and not hurt them, they will have their doubts."

"Thanks Professor. I'm going to go lie down and rest for a while." Harry walked slowly along the corridor. He hadn't been paying attention to where he was going or walking and almost walked right into Malfoy, Crabbe and Goyle.

"Watch where you're going Potter! Where's your fan club? You're never alone," Malfoy spat. Crabbe and Goyle laughed, but they would laugh at anything Draco said.

"Not in the mood today Malfoy," said Harry, turning to go back in the correct direction.

"Potter. I want to talk a minute," Malfoy said with less hate. He came over and left his two bodyguards standing alone. "Over here," Malfoy motioned and the two walked to a corner away from anyone.

"For the next few minutes, I'd like to call a truce. Something's been bothering me since last year and I want to ask you about it," Malfoy asked almost sheepishly.

"Why should I want to talk to you about your problems?" Harry said not believing Malfoy.

"You don't have to, but I'm asking you to."

"What is it Malfoy?" Harry wanted him to get on with it.

"I want to know what really happened between you and my father at the end of last year. He just acted strangely over the summer and said I should make sure I'm never alone with you," Malfoy said softly. Harry really got the impression Draco was telling the truth.

"If you really want, I'll tell you the truth but I'm not going to leave anything out. You'll hear everything that had to do with him that day," Harry said. Malfoy nodded. Harry went on to tell him everything about how Lucius had asked Voldemort if he could take care of me instead of letting Voldemort do it. Then he told Draco about cursing his father and Voldemort just laughing at him. Then about Voldemort using the Cruciatus curse on Lucius. Harry mentioned that he thought Lucius was in the cave that he collapsed and Harry didn't know if Lucius had lived or not.

"That kind of fits with the little pieces I've heard him mention. What's this spell you put on him. What would have stopped him like that if it wasn't an unforgivable curse?" Draco asked.

"You really want to know?" Harry raised his wand and did the constriction curse on Draco's throat. Suddenly Malfoy started gasping and clutching his throat. Harry quickly released the spell and saw Malfoy stop his friends from coming over.

"What was that? You could have killed my dad with that?"

"I'm not telling what it was and I didn't kill your father with it. I just stopped him from attacking Cho or me. Remember, they were going to kill her, and they *did* kill R.J."

Draco looked at him for a minute and said, "I meant what I said about being sorry about R.J. We can go back to normal now."

"Thanks for the comments about R.J." Harry replied and then headed to his common room still in shock about that conversation. So, Lucius Malfoy is afraid of him. He wondered if any of the Death Eaters felt this way. Maybe they were having doubts about Voldemort. He was able to get up to his bed without any of his good friends spotting him and lied down before falling asleep quickly.

He could have slept more but woke up with Ron shaking him. "Wake up, get down here and tell us what happened. When did you get back?"

Harry put on his glasses, rolled out of bed and went down to the common room to sit with Ron and Hermione. Before he started the story about practice he asked, "So, how did tryouts go, did you find good players?"

"Yeah, they went really well. A couple of the ones who tried out last year made it. Then your fan Colin Creevy made it. He's gotten really good. We should have a pretty good team this year. No offense Harry," Ron replied hoping he hadn't hurt Harry's feelings.

"None taken Ron," Harry replied honestly happy for the team. "My practice was hard. I'm not very good compared to them. I'll probably get booted before the first match and then I won't be playing at all this year. Wait, I forgot to tell you something. You should hear what Malfoy said to me." Harry went on to tell them the story.

"So old Malfoy's afraid of you. Should be too," Ron said relishing the thought.

"Even so, it's strange Draco asked Harry about it," Hermione said. Just then Hedwig came in. She had been gone for a long time.

*Harry*

*I don't like the idea of you playing professional Quidditch right now. You're a big enough target at school and now you'll be going to places we can't protect you. Knowing you I imagine you've already accepted and started so what I want won't make much difference. I'll have to talk to Dumbledore to find out how you can be protected. Things are starting to happen out here. Nothing major but things aren't quiet. Make sure you tell me if anything seems strange to you, no matter how small. I can't come back for a while and notes don't get to me very quickly.*

*Why can't you just be happy being a student? I already know the answer to that so I wasn't really asking.*

*Tell Ron and Hermione I'm expecting them to keep an eye on you.*

*S.*

"Oh, he doesn't think I should be playing does he. How often have I been attacked here where I'm being protected? It can't be much worse out in the real world," Harry said angrily.

"Harry. You know he's just worried about you. I'm sure he's really proud that you made the team but he'd rather have you safe," Hermione added making sure Harry realized Sirius' point of view.

"They'll be people around all the time Hermione. At practice there's the rest of the team and staff and then at matches they'll be thousands. Nobody's going to try anything there," Ron added.

"Ron's right and you know it," Harry said finally.

"Hogsmeade tomorrow Harry, you coming?" Ron asked changing the subject.

"Can't Ron," Harry said sounding depressed. "I really need to practice some moves. I'm going to go to the pitch and try them out."

"That's the right thing to do Harry. We'll bring you back some stuff," Hermione offered.

Harry was sitting quietly at the end of the Gryffindor table eating and going over the parchments of seeker maneuvers he needed to learn. He didn't notice a group of four girls around until Cho said, "Earth to Harry. What's so interesting?"

"Oh, Hi. Sorry, I'm just trying to learn some stuff. What are you four doing?" Harry asked.

"Wondering if you want to go to Hogsmeade with us tomorrow?" Cho said.

Harry looked suddenly unhappy. "I'd really like to but I have to learn these seeker moves before next week's practice. I'm really behind the rest of the team."

"So, finally you have to work at Quidditch," Kelly said with a smile.

"I understand Harry. I'll try to find you when we get back. Bye," Cho said and they left. Harry really wanted to spend time with her but was worried about being good enough for the team. He just went back up to the common room to do some schoolwork and study the parchments.

He got up early and went down to the Quidditch pitch ready to try out what he had been studying. Fundamentally, they all involved either heading for something really fast and veering away at the last minute trying to make the other seeker think you were after the snitch, or some rolling/looping maneuver to dodge a bludger. He had been going over them until early afternoon. He felt pleased with his feinting moves now. He could dive toward the ground full speed and swerve off in almost any direction and feel the grass blades beneath him. That had to be good enough, any lower and he would be in the dirt. Going toward an object that wasn't the ground was harder at first to get close to before veering off. After more practice, he had gotten really good at his favorite which was going full speed toward the tower of the stands and pulling straight up feeling his toes brush the banners hanging down. Racing back and forth from one end of the pitch to the other either he practiced feinting into the tower or diving down to the ground and heading back over and over. He was getting really tired and decided to quit for the day when he saw Cho and her friends standing in the entrance to the field. He flew over to them and dismounted his broom.

"That was really amazing flying Harry! Teach Cho some of that," Kelly said.

"That was really good. How do you think it is going?" Cho asked.

"I'm better than this morning, but it's hard to tell without seeing if the other seeker is following you. How was Hogsmeade?"

"It was fun but Cho would have been happier if you were there," Kelly joked.

"And, what's wrong with that?" Cho asked. "Want to come up to eat with us?"

"I really need to go clean up, but I'll hurry and meet you there. Don't wait on me; I don't want to sit with a bunch of hungry girls," he joked and they headed toward the castle.

After cleaning up, Harry came into the dining hall and saw Ron and Hermione calling him over. He quickly went over but just said, "I'm going to go eat with Cho. That's ok isn't it?"

Ron seemed a bit hurt but Hermione said quickly, "Of course, we understand. We'll talk later."

Harry hurried over to the Ravenclaw table and found that Cho had saved him a spot next to her. The girls had eaten almost everything when Harry got his food so he just listened to them talking while he ate. They were discussing their N.E.W.Ts coming up and sometimes their plans after school. Hearing these discussions made Harry nervous about what would happen between him and Cho after this year since she wouldn't be coming back. He didn't want to think about that now.

When he finished eating, one of the girls asked him if he thought about what he was going to do after school but Kelly jumped in, "Well he's already doing it. Professional Quidditch. Why would he do anything else?"

"If it works out, that's what I'll probably do. Otherwise, I'm going to be an Unspeakable." He saw the look of confusion on their faces. He thought all wizards knew about them.

"What's an Unspeakable?" Kelly asked obviously never having heard of them.

"Well, it's a special department in the Ministry of Magic, the official name is Department of Mysteries. They don't really report to the Minister and no one really knows what all they do. They even have special entrances with security floo's to get into their department." Harry thought that with Ron knowing all of this, it was public knowledge.

"How do you know so much about them?" One of the other girls asked.

Now he was getting trapped. He hadn't told Cho about the training so he wasn't going to bring it up in front of all her friends. "Oh, you know. I got a tour once and hear things. It just seemed like an interesting place to work, that's all."

Cho gave him an interesting look but Kelly said, "Oh yeah, like you'd pick working for the Ministry over playing Quidditch." They all went on talking and Harry found out that Cho was either going to work with her father's business or work in the Ministry in the financial department since she was so good with numbers.

That evening Harry thought about the Unspeakables and what Fletch had said about coming to work for them. In their sixth years, the students needed to start thinking about their career path so they could choose seventh-year classes correctly. Harry decided to write to Fletch to thank him for the previous training and to ask him his opinion on classes.

*Fletch*

*I wanted to finally write and thank you again for training me the previous summer. Without that training, I wouldn't have survived the end of last term. I hope you were able to quickly figure out who the unspeakable was that was with Voldemort and that he didn't get too much information. I really thought about asking if I could come back this last summer but for most of it, I really wasn't in the mood to even think about magic. I don't know how much you heard but I lost someone close to me and it took a while to get over.*

*I have another question. We're supposed to be picking our career paths and if Quidditch doesn't work out, I would really like to work in your department. What classes would you suggest I take that could help my chance for getting in?*

*Thanks again, and tell everyone that without their help, I wouldn't have made it.*

*Harry Potter.*

He went up and gave the note to Hedwig to deliver. Walking back, he saw some Slytherin girls coming down the corridor towards him. This was something he didn't want to deal with so he slipped down a side corridor and ended up running into Professor Snape. "Watch where you're going Potter."

"Sorry sir, I was trying to avoid someone."

"Who could you be trying to avoid? A crazed group of fans?"

"Not even close sir. Slytherins."

"Well not everyone likes seeing how easy things come for you Potter. And I do know some people in my house who try to blame all their problems on you."

The next week was going well. He had another dance lesson with Fleur and she was happy with his progress and told him again about the announcement this week. At the end of the week during meal time, Professor Dumbledore got everyone's attention and stated, "I have an announcement to make that I'm sure will be of interest to you all. Some of you will remember after the Tri-Wizard Tournament that I invited the students from the other schools back anytime. Finally we have made some progress in getting more interaction between the schools. We are going to hold two balls this year, one here at Hogwarts and the other at Beauxbatons. Unfortunately Durmstrang wasn't able to participate in this but perhaps in the future. Our ball will be held the second Saturday in November and the Beauxbatons will be held the first Saturday in February. Now for the bad part. Only fifth-year students will be traveling from one school to the other. All students may participate in their own school's ball. I hope everyone eligible will take part in this wonderful opportunity to interact with our friends at Beauxbatons."

Everyone started talking about this and Harry saw Cho looking at him with a smile. She realized he had known this was going to be announced. He just smiled back at her. Hermione leaned over, "You knew didn't you? You knew and didn't tell us."

"Well yes, I kind of found out. That's why I've been learning to dance," he said. "You two can practice with each other, I needed to learn."

Hermione was really excited. "Oh, it'll be wonderful to see their school. I can't wait. Ron, aren't you excited about going?"

"Does this mean you're asking me to the ball?" Ron said with a laugh.

"It really means I'm telling you that we're going," Hermione said confidently.

"I have to do something, I'll be right back." Harry got up and went to the Ravenclaw table. He greeted them all and leaned into Cho. "Cho, before someone beats me too it and I'm left out in the cold, would you please be my date for both of the balls?"

She smiled up at him and said, "This time, I would have waited until the last day. I'd love to go. Good thing for me you're learning how to dance, huh?"



## Chapter 6

Quidditch practice went pretty well on Saturday. Harry spent most of the time working with Tom, demonstrating the moves he had been practicing and getting some more tips. Tom seemed quite pleased with the progress. Finally the coach called him over for some full team practice. Harry played with more confidence and was able to use some of the moves Tom had taught him. One time the other seeker ploughed right into one of the stands following Harry's feint. Even the beaters seemed to be trying much harder to keep the bludgers away from him. When it was over, everyone but Jacque seemed happy.

"Make sure you can do that when it counts," Jacque said before leaving for the day.

Kristi came by mused up his hair and said, "Not bad schoolboy." Even though she only ever said a few words to Harry, and those weren't in a nice tone of voice, he felt some kind of connection to the chaser. And, he had to admit that she was dead gorgeous as well.

Tom had given him a few more things to work on before Harry and Dobby went back to Hogwarts. He had gotten a letter while he was at practice.

*Harry*

*Good to hear from you. We were all worried about you when Mrs. Figg filled us in on what she knew at the end of term. She hadn't heard the story from you, only from that student you saved. We really appreciate you having her inform Dumbledore that an unspeakable was there. It was an easy process to track down who it was since we found out so quickly. Luckily it wasn't a current member, but one who had left but still had some contacts. We think that he found out you were here that summer and had informed Voldemort. Dumbledore filled us in after you woke up. We would all like to hear it from you at some point.*

*You would have been welcome to come back over the summer. We were hoping that you would actually. I can understand wanting some time alone after losing a good friend like you did. Maybe this coming summer will be a more appropriate time; just let me know.*

*I saw in the paper that you are playing seeker for France. Too bad for us it couldn't be England, but that's quite an accomplishment. I couldn't suggest anything for you to concentrate on that would help you fit in our department. As I've said before, you can be assured of a spot with us if you want it. More than schooling, we base our choices on meeting the person and finding out their special talents. We know enough of yours already to be confident that you would fit in.*

*I'll tell everyone you said hello, and if some free time comes up, we should try to get together so you can tell us the real story from last year.*

*Fletch*

So, what was he to suggest when asked about his career path. "Well, I'm playing professional Quidditch now, but if something happens there, I'm assured a job in a secret Ministry department." That would go over well with his professors.

Back in the common room, Harry remembered he had wanted a way to send messages to Cho since he couldn't get into her common room at any time. Remembering something Dumbledore had done once, he needed some information. He quickly went outside and found Ron and Hermione studying on the steps. "Hermione, can I ask you something? Have you ever read of a way that I could get a quick message to someone without using an owl? Say that Ron was down here and I was up in my room. What's the quickest way to get a short message to him?"

She thought for a minute and said, "I don't know Harry. That doesn't seem like something I've come across before. Why do you want to know?"

"To send messages to Cho of course," Ron added smugly. "I mean he just can't go walking into the Ravenclaw room looking for her. At least I don't think you can, can you?"

"No Ron I can't. I'm going to ask Professor McGonagall," Harry said and headed back into the castle, but before he got there he saw Cho and her friends coming down the stairs and then heard "Harry, a moment please." It was Professor Dumbledore coming out of one of the side rooms. Cho and her friends stopped before reaching Harry.

"I haven't congratulated you on your seeker position. Quite an accomplishment. I understand from Professor McGonagall that you did well in the tryouts. She's a very big fan of the game you know. She also informs me that you haven't had any points taken away, haven't broken any rules, and haven't visited Madame Pomfrey this year. Is everything all right? This seems out of character for you," the Headmaster said with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Everything is fine sir. I've been really busy with learning new techniques and classes."

"Not to mention trying to get some time alone with Miss Chang, correct?" he said with his eyes twinkling again. "I approve of the priorities you've set for yourself this year more so than I did last year. However if you had followed my wishes last year you may not be here now," the Headmaster said and looked lost in thought.

"Sir. May I ask you something? Is there a way to get a message to someone without using normal post or an owl?" Harry thought the Headmaster looked a bit confused so he explained. "Say someone like Ron was down here and I was in my room, is there any way to get a short message to him. I seem to remember you shooting something silvery out of your wand to get Hagrid after Krum was attacked."

"Very good memory Harry. Yes, there is a way. Although it is not really something that we teach, however I will give you a quick lesson if you'd like. Concentrate on a thought. Not actually a message, a thought. For instance, when I wanted Hagrid, I thought of Hagrid coming to where we were. While concentrating, say 'Fliari Memeori'. Once you master it, a type of bird will deliver the thought. The exact type of bird is specific to the person casting the spell. Kind of like the Patrons. Excuse me a moment Harry." Dumbledore raised his voice and said, "Miss Chang. You and your friends are welcome to join us. No sense waiting over there for me to leave."

Harry looked over at the group of girls and they seemed embarrassed but walked over to where Harry and Professor Dumbledore were.

"It warms my heart to see students from rival houses becoming friends. I've always felt that is one thing this school needed more of. I appreciate that you ladies have seen fit to keep Harry here firmly grounded. Make sure you put that spell to good use Harry. Good day students," Dumbledore said and then left.

"Why didn't you guys just come on over? We were just talking," Harry asked.

"We don't just talk to the headmaster," Kelly said. "I don't think any of us other than Cho have talked to him personally."

"Really?" Harry asked confused. He thought it was natural to speak to the Headmaster. "You should see his office, it's really nice. Why don't you talk to him more?"

"Harry. Like I told you before, you and your friends aren't normal students. Just going up and talking to the headmaster isn't something most students would do," said Cho giving him a stern look.

"Oh," was all Harry could say, having never given it a thought before. "I imagine he would like talking to you. If you ask him a question, you usually end up answering your own questions by the time he's done."

"What were you two talking about?" Kelly asked.

"Kelly!" Cho complained, "Don't ask him things like that?"

"Why not, I don't mind," Harry replied which caused Kelly to smile, "We were just talking about me being a seeker." Then Harry laughed a bit. "He said that he was surprised that I hadn't had any points taken away or been in any trouble so far this year and wondered if everything was all right with me."

"He did not!" Kelly said not thinking the Headmaster would say things like that to a student.

"Really he did. I told you we weren't talking about anything important and you should have come on over. If you're coming to see me and I'm ever talking to him, just come on over. He would like talking to you." Harry remembered the real reason he was talking to Dumbledore. "Then I asked him how to do a spell I've been wondering about."

"You just asked the headmaster how to do a spell? How did he take that request?" Kelly asked.

"He told me how to do it. I asked Hermione earlier but she didn't know."

"So, what's this spell?" Cho asked.

"I'll surprise you with it once I've learned it well. Did you want something earlier?" asked Harry, remembering the girls had come over to him.

"We just wanted to see how practice went. You seem in a better mood than last time," said Cho.

"It went pretty good. I've got some new things to learn but it went good. This one chaser who's been really cold to me said 'Good job schoolboy'. That's the nicest thing she's said to me so far. Jacque still doesn't like me though." Harry thought for a minute and said, "Cho, want to have a picnic near the lake tomorrow afternoon? I can probably nick some food and a basket from the kitchen."

"That sounds nice. Are you inviting my friends too?"

"They are welcome to come if you really don't want to be alone with me," Harry said trying to sound hurt.

"How about lunch with friends and us alone later? I'm sure you can find someplace private," she said with a knowing smile.

"Deal. Is that ok with the rest of you?" said Harry turning to the rest of Cho's friends.

"Sure. We can live on candy for lunch once in a while," one of the other girls said.

"Hey, I can do more than sweets," Harry protested, "I think," he added the last part as a joke.

Harry went back to the common room in a very good mood and found Ginny studying.

"Ginny. Can I practice a spell with you?" She looked at him warily but he quickly added, "It won't hurt. You shouldn't feel a thing."

Seeing Harry with the pleading look in his eyes, Ginny would have given him anything. "Ok Harry, I'll trust you. What do you want me to do?"

"If the spell works, you'll know. I'm going over here to try it." He went to the far side of the room, leaving Ginny still feeling a bit confused. Concentrating on 'Ginny smiling' he said 'Fliari Memeori'. There was a small puff from his wand but nothing. He tried again taking extra care in the pronunciation. Something that looked like a bird popped out and quickly vanished. He could see Ginny's eyes getting wide, obviously wondering what was going to happen.

This time Harry concentrated really hard and thought of 'Ginny smiling' and carefully said 'Fliari Memeori'. A vision of a phoenix came out of his wand and flew right threw Ginny and then disappeared. Ginny looked at him and then changed her shocked expression into a big smile. Harry held up one finger to signal one more time. He concentrated on another thought and said the spell. The phoenix went to Ginny again. She looked at him, shaking her head and stuck out her tongue at him. It had worked exactly like he wanted.

"What was that spell? That was really neat," Ginny exclaimed. Harry explained it to her and told her how to do it. He asked that she not show anyone because he wanted it to be special. "How far will the spell go?" she asked. Harry didn't know since he just learned it.

As an experiment he ran up to his room and tried it from there. Running back down she was holding up two fingers, which is what he had thought of.

"Let me try something," Harry said. He concentrated on 'Hermione coming to the common room' and said the spell. The phoenix vanished into the wall. "I wonder if it will work," he said.

Ginny was able to get a dove to come out of her wand but it quickly evaporated. Before she could try again Hermione and Ron came bursting into the room. "What was that thing? It made me think you were asking me to come up here," Hermione was asking confused.

"It worked Harry!" Ginny exclaimed.

"It's the spell I was asking you about Hermione. The one about getting a message to someone. Obviously there is a way," Harry said happy to find something that Hermione didn't know about.

"You figured it out. Did you find it in the library?" Hermione asked proudly.

Harry rolled his eyes and glanced at Ginny. "Yeah, right, me look it up in the library? I asked Dumbledore," Harry said laughing at the thought of him actually looking something up.

"Show us how to do it," Ron demanded.

"Ok, but this stays between us. It's a neat spell but not if everybody knows it." Harry went on to explain how to do it. By the time they were ready for bed, Ginny had mastered it and Hermione and Ron were getting small puffs out of their wands. Hermione was upset that Ginny could do it and she couldn't. Harry concentrated on 'Harry kissing Cho,' and said the spell. The phoenix dashed off through the walls. Harry hoped it delivered the message.

Harry got up extra early and snuck down to the kitchens to work on his lunch plans. "Harry Potter sir, what can Dobby do for you?" the house-elf said upon seeing Harry.

"I need a favor again Dobby. I want to have lunch near the lake with Cho and her friends. Can you please make us a basket for the four of them and me with something nice for lunch and some juice please?"

"Of course sir. Dobby is having no problem with this. Dobby will bring it to Harry Potter when he is by the lake with his friends. Don't worry sir."

"Thanks Dobby," Harry said thinking it was really nice having a house-elf for a friend. Harry left and met Ron and Hermione in the common room and together they all went down to breakfast. The trio was sitting down eating when Harry saw Cho and her friends trying to get his attention and realized they were calling him over. Quickly finishing his toast, Harry went to their table.

"Ok, what did you do last night?" Cho demanded while they were all smiling.

"What do you mean Cho? I was either in my common room or bed all night," said Harry trying to make them think he didn't know what she was talking about.

"C'mon Harry we know it was you. This silvery bird flew right into Cho last night. We all screamed, but she got this happy look on her face and started blushing. She said that she had the thought of you kissing her."

"Dreaming of me kissing you are you Cho? That's good to know," Harry teased.

"Tell us what you did? Please?" Cho pleaded.

After a bit more teasing, Harry said, "That was the spell I asked Professor Dumbledore about. I wanted to be able to send you little messages sometimes. I didn't know if it would work with you so far away. I guess it did."

"You asked the headmaster how to send love notes? No way!" Kelly exclaimed.

"Who said anything about love notes? What if I was lying hurt somewhere and needed help. Now I can try to get help even if I can't get up," Harry said trying to sound very serious. "See, there's a very practical reason for asking," he smiled while saying this. "Are we still on for lunch? I need to go find some candy or bread so you don't starve."

"We're still on. See you down here at noon," Cho said.

Harry went and got his broom to go practice. Working on his turns and going around in circles, he tried not to get dizzy. He was about done and just caught site of a silvery dove before it went into him. The feeling of Ginny asking him to smile suddenly came to him, so he obliged and looked around to see her waving from the grounds near the castle. This was a good spell he thought.

It was time to head back to the castle to clean up and get ready for lunch. He was waiting by the door when Cho and her friends came down. "Where's lunch, in your pockets?" Kelly asked noticing he wasn't carrying anything. "Maybe we should eat first."

"Have some faith in me! C'mon, down to the lake," Harry said. They walked down to the lake and Harry led them around to the far side closest to the forest. This is where he felt the most comfortable.

"We don't normally get near this side," one of the girls said, unsure about being so close to the forest.

"Technically we're not out of bounds. We're not *in* the forest so we won't get into trouble," Harry said trying to reassure the group.

"So, where's lunch? If you make us walk all the way back without eating, you're in trouble," Cho said trying to look angry.

Just as she finished saying this, there was a 'pop' and Dobby appeared with a large blanket and picnic basket. "Dobby, you have perfect timing," said Harry still amazed at how house-elves seemed so efficient.

"Thank you sir. Dobby was watching for the right time. Hello Miss Cho. It is good to see you again. Dobby hasn't seen you since the summer."

"Thank you Dobby, I really appreciate this," Harry leaned in and whispered to him. "Can you tell Winky that I'm going to try and spend some time alone with Cho this evening?"

Dobby looked like he blushed and said, "Dobby will tell Winky sir." 'pop' and he was gone.

"What was that?" one of the girls asked.

"That was Dobby. Harry's house-elf friend," Cho said knowing all about Dobby. They opened the baskets and saw that there were salads, fruit, a few slices of cake and juice. "Now, this is a picnic," added Cho

They were all eating when Kelly said, "Cho. That house-elf said he saw you this summer. What haven't you told us?"

"Yeah Cho," came from another girl.

Cho blushed but said, "Harry sent my father a letter inviting us to a diner party he had over the summer. I met Dobby at Harry's house."

"You went to Harry's house this summer?" another girl asked hoping for some information.

"Long story, for another time," Cho said, wanting to change the subject.

Noticing some ripples in the water and Harry said, "Watch this." He took out his wand and dispatched a rock from the beach to near where the ripples were. The rock splashed in and within a couple seconds, a tentacle came out and threw the rock back toward the group. Harry stopped the rock with magic and threw it back. The tentacle came up again and threw it back. Harry dropped the rock on the shore. "That's the giant squid. Sometimes I come here to think and play catch with it."

"You need more real friends," Kelly said with some honesty.

Suddenly they heard a rustle from behind them in the forest. Harry jumped up and pulled out his wand. Out of the path came a head and then a body he recognized. "Firenze! It's good to see you."

"Harry Potter. I can't tell you how good it is to see you as well."

"Firenze, I can't thank you enough for getting Cho out of the forest last year."

"I did as you asked. We never thought we would see you again Harry. You have proven the stars wrong yet again."

"Cho, do you remember Firenze? He's the one who brought you out of the forest."

"Of course I remember Harry. I don't think I ever thanked you Firenze. I really appreciate you saving me."

"I thought it was the last request of a member of my clan miss. Normally we don't get involved in such things."

"Firenze, these are friends of Cho's"

"Yes I see. I should go now."

"Thanks again Firenze. Bye," Harry yelled. He went back to the girls who were standing in shock of what just happened. "Um... Girls are you ok?"

"That's what brought you out of the forest?" Kelly asked Cho. "I would have died of fright."

"Kelly! Firenze was very nice. He saved me," Cho said surprised at Kelly's comments.

"What did he mean about that being the last request of a member of his clan? Who was he talking about?" Another girl asked.

"He was talking about Harry. Those centaurs kind of adopted him last year," Cho said.

"So, now you have all met my family. I say they're better than the Dursley's," Harry joked and then added, "Let's get back to lunch."

"I'd like to know more about this," Kelly asked wanting to hear the whole story.

Harry really didn't want to get into it. "Cho knows the story, she can tell you sometime."

"Slowly they got back to talking about unimportant things, but Harry could tell the girls kept looking toward the forest once in a while. Harry packed up the basket and carried it back to the castle with them. When they got to the castle, Harry said, "Thanks for having lunch with me. I hope Firenze didn't scare you too much. He's really nice."

"Thank you for lunch. Tell your friend Dobby that it was great. Firenze didn't scare us, just shocked us." Kelly said sounding happy about the lunch.

"They'll get used to your strange friends," Cho said and then added, "I'm looking forward to tonight."

Harry went to the common room and studied with Ron and Hermione for a while. Ron was talking about their first Quidditch match coming up in a few weeks and was happy with their team and thought they would do well. This made Harry kind of jealous of his friend since Harry couldn't play with them anymore. After a while, Harry went up to his room to get his invisibility cloak and came back down to tell Ron and Hermione he was going to meet Cho.

Hermione looked at him skeptically. "If you're just going to meet Cho, why do you need the cloak?" Hermione asked in her head girl voice.

"I'm not leaving the castle, I promise. No need to worry about me losing points," Harry assured his friends. He concentrated on a thought of meeting Cho outside her room and sent a message.

As he was starting to walk away, he heard Ron say, "Good idea taking the cloak, you can't see what's happening under it at all," then "Ow" as Hermione hit him.

Harry hurried to the Ravenclaw hall and got there just as Cho was coming out of the common room and said, "That message spell is really weird. It's like I get a picture in my mind all of a sudden. Will you teach it to me?"

"As long as you promise not to tell anyone else. Ready to go?" They walked down the corridor until they got to the area where the secret stairs were. When no one else was around they quickly pulled on the cloak and started up the stairs. The room was setup just like last



time with a pitcher of water and some glasses. The couple sat on the floor in front of the fireplace talking.

Cho seemed to hesitate and then said, "My friends said they were sorry about how they reacted to Firenze today. They're not used to things like that. Tell the truth, neither am I."

Harry felt bad because he didn't want Cho to be uncomfortable. "Is it something you want to get used to or do you think it's going to cause us problems?"

"I think I can get used to it. We just won't let it cause us any problems. You know by now, Ravenclaws are just more..."

"Normal," Harry finished for her. "I'll try to be more normal. This year's already way more normal than last year so I'm making progress."

Cho laughed and leaned over to kiss him. This was the longest kiss yet. Harry looked at her and went to kiss her again but she backed up smiling. "Tell me how to do the message spell first."

"Blackmail!" Harry said sitting up straight. "Let's see, keeping the spell to myself or being able to kiss you, hum, which one should I choose?" Harry said acting like he was weighing the choices in each hand. Cho hit him quite hard on the arm and gave him an evil look. "Just kidding, I'd give up any spell."

Harry explained how to do it and she tried it a few times until an indistinct falcon came out of her wand and lasted for a second. Cho seemed pleased so Harry said, "There, you've got it, now you just have to concentrate more and practice. Now for my payment," said Harry and raised one eyebrow.

Cho pushed him down on the couch and gave him the best kiss yet. Harry held her tight during the kiss and when she pulled back, she looked at him and said, "You're pretty good at this. The question is: Just a natural or practice?"

"Cho! I would have to say that you probably just bring out the best in me," Harry whispered back.

"Good answer to keep me quiet. I'll leave it at that for now. We should get back."

When Harry got to the common, he thought it would be empty but when he walked in, he saw Ron and Hermione acting strangely and looking guilty. Harry realized had interrupted them. "Sorry, I should have stayed out later," he said upset with himself for interrupting his friends.

"Um... We were just practicing spells," Ron said hastily.

"Really. Then I'd like to learn those spells," Harry said with a smile.

Hermione was blushing badly when she said, "I'm going up to bed. Goodnight you two."

"Ron, I'm really sorry. If I would have known, I could have stayed out later." Harry felt bad.

"No problem. Better you than McGonagall or Ginny walking in," said his friend less upset than Harry expected

"So, things seem to be going ok with you two. We should come up with a signal when you can tell me to leave or stay away," Harry said while they were walking to their room.

"If I ever master that message spell, I can use that," Ron suggested.

Things went well over the next couple weeks. Harry saw Cho as much as he could and continued with dancing lessons from Fleur. Dancing with Fleur seemed to help more than his dancing. He was just feeling more comfortable being close to really pretty girls. Fleur also seemed to enjoy the dancing so she wasn't in any hurry to end the lessons. Practice with the French team was going good also. During the training they weren't treating him like a little kid; only after practice was over did they ever tease him. Jacque didn't talk to him much and Kristi just gave him a hard time about being young but she didn't seem mean about it. The rest of the team treated him pretty normally, even the captain.

Harry wanted to hurry back to Hogwarts after practice on the third week to watch Cho play in her first Quidditch match. He cleaned up and went to sit on the Ravenclaw side. Ron came to scout out how any weaknesses they had. Hermione decided to come with them as well. Harry hadn't seen Cho before the match but while she was flying around before the whistle started he was able to get her attention and wave to her so that she would know he was there rooting for her. Cho wasn't a risk-taking seeker but she flew very smart. The Ravenclaw team was better than Harry remembered. He hadn't ever really gone to watch them before and noticed they were dominating the Hufflepuff team. Suddenly he saw Cho dart off and he knew she saw the snitch. Straining, he saw what she was chasing and also noticed she had a good head start over the other seeker. He thought she missed a couple opportunities to grab it but ended up getting it a few seconds later.

Harry stood up clapping and yelling for her and heard Ron say, "They're pretty good. You're not going to give her any pointers are you Harry?"

"Of course not Ron. You should know that," Harry replied forcefully.

"Well you know girls can get you to do all kinds of things," Ron said looking at Hermione who just smiled slyly.

Harry headed down to congratulate the team. They were all coming out together and Harry told them all how well he thought they played. The team members said things like it was too bad Harry wasn't playing this year since they were going to beat Gryffindor. The Ravenclaw's even asked Harry if he wanted to come to Hogsmeade the next day to celebrate. Harry told them he would like to but needed to practice since his first match was the next weekend as well. Cho had seemed disappointed but said she understood.

They met later that night for some private time. "You flew really well today Cho. I liked coming to watch you. I had never come to just watch you play before."

"I liked having you there; it made me feel more confident. I can't believe that next week you'll be playing in a professional Quidditch match," she said snuggled into his side.

"Oh, don't talk about it. I'm really worried about making a fool of myself."

"Haven't you realized by now that's not going to happen? You said yourself the team is treating you better, they must have confidence in you," Cho said pulling back to look at him.

"No more talk about my match. Did I tell you how good you looked today?"

"I think you did, but I wouldn't mind hearing it again," Cho said leaning into Harry. They spent more time kissing than they had before. Their hair was quite messy by the time they decided to go back to their rooms. When Harry was saying goodnight, Cho said, "I'm really glad you know about that place."

Harry told Fleur that he was going to skip their second lesson this week, saying he was just too nervous to think about dance lessons. "I understand 'Arry. Did I tell you that I would be at your match?"

Harry was surprised for a second and then realized that Fleur would probably have gone to any French National match. "Great, both you and Professor McGonagall can see me make a stupid mistake."

"'Arry! Don't ever talk like that. When you get there, no matter how you feel you have to act like you are certain that you will win. You can't let your teammates and especially the other team think you have any doubts. Like dancing, even if you don't like the person you are dancing with, you need to make them feel special. Even if you have doubts about your ability, you need to make sure everyone else thinks you intend to do anything necessary to win. Getting them to have doubts is a big part of the battle."

Harry thought about that for a moment and understood what she meant. The times he stood up to Lucius Malfoy and Voldemort, he was worried inside but he focused on trying to stand up to them and it did seem to have an impact. "Thanks Fleur. That's some of the best advice I've gotten yet."

Fleur seemed please with his thanks. "One more thing. If you ever talk to a French reporter, make sure you speak as much French as you can. They will appreciate it and you want the French press to be on your side."

Harry tried to avoid everyone the night before his match and had gone to bed really early, which caused him to wake up really early. Once awake, he went to sit in Professor McGonagall's classroom to make sure he would be close to her office when it was time to go. The Professor was coming back from breakfast and noticed him. "Mr. Potter. What are you doing in my classroom? I didn't see you at breakfast."

"I've been here all morning Professor. I didn't want to talk to anyone. I'll be here whenever you're ready to go," said Harry trying to hide his nervousness.

Professor McGonagall came in a while later to say it was time to go. The two of them went to a different location this time. Harry had never seen the real French stadium before. They arrived in the setting area for the team. Professor McGonagall left him at this point to go find her seat. The match was against Wales so Harry didn't feel bad that he had gotten her a seat on the French side. She was given a pass to be able to return back here after the match. Only Tim the captain and Kristi were in the team area right now. Tim spoke first, "How are you feeling Harry?"

Harry remembered what Fleur said and tried to sound confident, "Kind of like my first match at school; nervous but really ready to get going."

"Well, how did that match turn out?" Tim asked.

"We won. I caught the snitch. Just about swallowed it but still caught it."

Kristi laughed, "Sit over here schoolboy. I don't care how you catch it today as long as you get it before they do."

The rest of the team showed up soon. They all had different ways of passing the time. The beaters paced around not looking happy. Jacques seemed to complain about everything. Tim just stood against a wall watching the others. Kristi sat next to him twirling a bracelet. "Do you mind me asking what that is?" Harry asked noticing the bracelet.

She looked at him and said, "Just my good luck charm. A really good friend of mine gave it to me."

Harry pulled out the necklace he wore all the time and said, "This is mine. A centaur gave it to me."

Kristi looked at him differently and said, "Centaur warriors. It says a lot that one would give you a gift. I hope it brings you luck today."

The time came for them to head to the entrance ramp. Wales would be announced and come out first. Harry listened to the crowd clapping for their team members and remembered back to when he watched the announcements at the World Cup. This was no where close to as big but would be the most ever people watching him play. "Here we go!" Coach announced.

"And now for our French National Team." The crowd was very loud. "Team Captain and keeper Tim Williams." The announcer had to wait between each name for the crowd to die down. "Beater Keith Timms", "Beater Kevin Shively", "Chaser Jacques Dubois". Harry noticed there wasn't as much noise when Jacques was announced. "Chaser Kristi Belig". The noise was very loud again. "And our newest member seeker Harry Potter." The crowd seemed better than for Jacques but not as loud as for the rest. Ok, Harry was feeling better now. This was just another match, the crowd doesn't matter, only the match. Harry tried to think about everything he was supposed to do. Break up scoring runs, confuse their seeker, and catch the snitch!

The whistle blew and instantly things started moving really fast. It didn't seem as bad as watching from the stands at the World Cup but still fast. Harry tried to follow the quaffle while keeping an eye on the other seeker and trying to watch for the snitch. He heard a rushing and quickly rolled, barely missing being hit by a snitch. He saw his chasers making a scoring run and their chasers coming in to block them. Harry dove toward them, narrowly missing their chaser's broom causing him to swerve off. Kristi was able to score a clean goal.

France was up by twenty and Harry had been playing a good match so far. He had broken up some runs and not been fooled by any move from the other seeker. That other seeker was marking him a bit too close so Harry decided to try a feint. Starting out he tried to look like he was going to block a run and knew the other seeker was close. Suddenly, he dove toward the ground, aiming for the corner of the stands. He only hoped the other seeker was close. If he

turned around to look, the other seeker would know it was a feint. Just at the last second, he pulled up enough to level off and heard a loud THUD followed by many groans from the crowd. It had worked! Wales called time out.

Harry was to the ground first. "Amazing feint Harry!" the trainer said. "He'll think twice about marking you so close. You've just got to see the snitch before him now."

"Ok, we're playing well. Don't make any mistakes anyone. Potter! Catch the damn snitch. Get going," Coach yelled.

Harry was back up and saw the dirty looks the other seeker was giving him. Harry could tell he was in pain and that his head was bloody. When play restarted Harry quickly saw that the Wales' beaters were trying to get him back. They were sending everything his way. This made France's chasers have a little easier time of scoring and now France was up by sixty.

Harry was making another dive for a blocking run when he saw the flash directly below his own chaser. He dove straight toward Kristi who actually looked terrified and veered off at the last second, which was exactly what Harry had hoped. When she swerved, he grabbed the snitch. France won! Harry heard the crowd go wild and the rest of the team came over celebrating.

The team got back on the ground and into the private team area. He could still hear the crowd celebrating from here. "Excellent teamwork. You all played fantastic. I couldn't ask for more," Coach was saying still ecstatic from the win. "This is going to shock people. No one gave us much chance against Wales."

Kristi was the first one to Harry, "You scared the hell out of me schoolboy. What would you have done if I didn't swerve?" She didn't really seem mad.

"I hadn't figured that out yet. I'm glad you were smart enough to move," Harry said not able to hide his happiness.

Kristi just laughed. Harry thought this was just like winning his first ever Quidditch match and never wanted it to end. The team went in to clean up and suddenly Harry realized that there was only one set of showers. When he had come in before the match, Kristi was already in her playing robes. His confusion changed quickly to nervousness when he saw Kristi remove her clothes, wrap a towel around her and head straight for the showers as if this was perfectly normal. Harry had only seen R.J. naked before so he didn't really know what to think.

The other players didn't seem bothered by this as he saw them go into the showers as well. Harry didn't feel comfortable about this but didn't want to seem even more different from the rest of the team so he undressed and wrapped the towel tightly around his waist. Entering the large shower area, he felt better when he could get a shower a few away from the others. He couldn't help but glance over at Kristi a few times. She was in one a few away from the other teammates as well and not talking to anyone. Harry quickly washed up and left the area.

After they had all dressed, Coach caught up to Harry. "Harry. Great flying today. Looks like I won't get fired yet for picking you. The team is going out here to talk to the press for a minute."

Suddenly all Harry could picture was Rita Skeeter and the horrible lies she printed. "Sir, I've had bad experiences with the press. Do I have to do this?"

"Of course you do Potter. You have to do at least one. Jacque will stay around and talk to them all but Kristi is kind of like you, she does her one and then leaves."

The team walked out of the locker room area and there was a lot of clapping. Harry saw Professor McGonagall and Fleur standing off to the side. Their passes had gotten them back here to wait. Many reporters were yelling all of their names, trying to get an interview. Harry saw Fleur pointing at one female reporter so Harry made his way over to her ignoring the rest.

"Ah 'Aarry Potter. I'm Maxime Mishmas from the Daily Gazette. May I have a quick interview?" Harry thought she seemed nice, but then again so did Rita at first

"Of course Ms. Mishmas. I am not very good with your language but I will do my best," Harry replied in the best French he could muster.

The reporter's face beamed. "You speak French! Excellent. How does it feel to be the star of our National Team?"

She still asks leading questions, Harry thought. "I'm not the star of the team. I was just lucky enough to get to the snitch before the other seeker. If our beaters hadn't done such a good job keeping the bludgers away from me, I may not have had the chance. And, in a little while longer, our chasers and the great defensive work of our keeper would have given us the win even if I hadn't got the snitch."

Harry could see some of the other reporters listening in, writing down his comments. "You are too modest Harry. Is it ok if I call you Harry? How do you think your age comes into play, and how do you think your schoolmates will react to the win?"

"I don't think my age matters at all. The team just treats me like a player and wouldn't cut me any slack just because I'm young. My schoolmates will be like normal. They've got their own things to worry about. I really must go Ms. Mishmas."

Harry got over to where Fleur and Professor McGonagall were standing, both with big smiles on their faces. "You won 'Arry! You won for France," Fleur said and gave him a big hug. Harry enjoyed being hugged by Fleur but felt uncomfortable with all the other people around and he could tell Professor McGonagall wasn't sure about a teacher hugging a student like this either. Harry started to say something and then heard.

"Nice job today schoolboy." Turning around he saw Kristi standing behind him looking as confident as ever.

"Hi Kristi. Let me introduce my friends. This is Professor McGonagall, the headmistress of my house at Hogwarts. And this is Professor Delacour my charms teacher."

"And dance instructor," Fleur added drawing a strange look from Professor McGonagall. "Nice to meet you Miss. Belig. I am a big fan of the team."

Kristi nodded at the two women. "Kind of friendly with you teacher aren't you?" she said basically ignoring the two Professors. "There's a big celebration at a club in town tonight. Are you going to make it?" Kristi directed this question only to Harry.

"I have to get back to the school. I have lots of work to do. Thanks for telling me about it though," Harry answered and Kristi left with a wave over her shoulder.

"I didn't like the way she called you schoolboy," McGonagall said sharply.

"She is not a nice person. Great chaser but not nice," Fleur added.

"That's just Kristi. She's nice enough to me. C'mon let's go home." Harry said still on a high from winning.

"That reporter I pointed out isn't as bad as most. She'll still try to trap you into saying something you don't want to, but she won't lie like some others will," Fleur said.

"I didn't realize I'd have to talk to reporters. Ever since that Rita Skeeter, I don't trust them at all," Harry said coldly.

"You really played well today Harry. I'm proud of you," McGonagall said, which from her was very high praise. "Now, what's this about dance instructor?"

## Chapter 7

Fleur explained being Harry's dance instructor to the older professor once they were back at Hogwarts after the Quidditch match. Harry really tried to watch his emotions now that he was back in the castle. He wanted his friends to think that he had lost the first match. Leaving McGonagall's office, Harry turned the corner and saw Cho sitting against the wall reading a book. "Cho. What are you doing setting in the hall?"

"Waiting on you of course. So, how did it go?" she asked sounding very anxious.

"Oh, it was a close game. It was harder than the practices had been. Wales is really..."

Cho interrupted him. "You won didn't you? You really won!"

"How did you know, I was trying to make you think we lost," said Harry throwing up his arms.

"I think I know you pretty well now Harry. How was it? Were there a lot of people?"

Harry told her the highlights and that he was glad to have a weekend off without practice. "I should go find Ron and Hermione and tell them. Want to come with me?"

"To your common room? Sure, I've never seen another common room," Cho said sounding anxious.

"You won't be impressed. Yours is so much nicer," Harry told her.

When they got to the fat lady portrait, Harry gave her the password and she said, "You're bringing a Ravenclaw into the common room? I hope you have cleaned it up." Harry and Cho went in. The room wasn't in too bad of shape, most things were picked up. Still, the furniture was much more worn and it seemed darker than the Ravenclaw room.

"This isn't so bad Harry. You had me thinking the worst."

Not seeing Ron or Hermione, he ran up and put his broom in his room and came back. "Well, they're not here. What do you want to do for the rest of the day?"

Cho thought for a minute and said, "How about thanking that spider? I can't go without permission though."

"Great idea. Let's go back to McGonagall's office," Harry said and they hurried back up to Professor McGonagall's office.

Luckily McGonagall was still there. "Haven't you had enough of me for one day Mr. Potter? Hello Miss Chang. What can I do for you two?"

"Professor, we'd like to go thank someone who helped us last year. But to go thank him, we need to go into the forest for a little bit. We would come directly out and should be out well before dark. Also, I've learned the Fliari Memeori spell so I could send a message if anything happens."



McGonagall studied him. "Miss Chang, is this something Mr. Potter is dragging you into?"

"No Professor. Actually it was my idea."

McGonagall looked surprised but said, "You seem to have made a valid case for going in and have reasonable precautions. Do what you have to and come straight out. No exploring!"

"Yes Professor, thank you." They hurried back downstairs and out the door. Once they got near Hagrid's hut, Cho slowed down. "I'm kind of nervous about this."

"Why? Aragog won't hurt you?"

"I've never gone into the forest on purpose before," said Cho not hiding her nervousness very well.

"Don't worry, it's not that far and we'll come right back." They walked along the lake to the path and went in. Every little sound made Cho jump and grab onto Harry's arm. He took her hand and they walked along the path. Harry heard the clicking sounds and knew they were close. They entered a clearing and could see the webbing all around.

The clicking was getting faster and then Aragog appeared, "Harry and friend. It is good to see you. We were glad you awoke from your battle. We were most worried."

"Thank you Aragog How did you know when I awoke? Did Hagrid tell you?"

"We knew before Hagrid came to tell me. There are many spiders in the castle Harry. We hear a great deal of what goes on. Why have you come?"

Harry looked at Cho and she stepped forward and said, "I wanted to come and thank you for helping save me. If you hadn't attacked those dementors, I may not have made it out."

"You are Harry's friend and were with Harry. We tried to help you both but Harry didn't take the opportunity we provided. Looking back, we think you made the correct choice."

"Thanks Aragog We have to get back, they weren't happy about us coming in to thank you." Harry and Cho headed back down the path. "That wasn't so bad was it?" Harry asked.

"No, not really. I can't imagine being used to things like that," Cho added. They walked on hand-in-hand until Harry stopped them.

He had heard something unusual. "Get behind me Cho," he said forcefully and pulled out his wand. It was a deep growl, but it sounded like only one. He whispered to Cho. "Don't be scared when I do something." They heard the growl and rustling just off the path. Suddenly, Harry changed into the Griffin and gave a loud roar. Birds started flying away and then the source of the growling and rustling became clear. A large black dog came out of the brush teeth bared, growling and snarling. The griffin walked straight up to it and gave a growl and snarl of its own. Then, the next second both Harry and Sirius were standing in their places.

"What are you doing in the forest?" Sirius asked sounding irritated.

"What are you doing scaring Cho and me?" Harry asked angrily.

"Sorry Cho, I didn't mean to scare you. And, I doubt you were scared Harry," Sirius replied.

"You're a lion! You're form is a lion!" Cho exclaimed.

"Not quite Cho. I had wings but I just didn't unfold them. I'm a griffin. Not exactly how I wanted you to find out." Turning back to his godfather, Harry said, "So, what brings you here Sirius?"

"First question, really why were you in the forest?"

"We went to thank Aragog for helping save us. We were being polite and we had permission to come in for that," Harry said.

"Oh. Well, OK. I just came to see how Quidditch was going and to see my godson."

"He won today! They beat Wales," Cho exclaimed proudly.

"Excellent. So, nothing strange?"

"Nope. No one trying to kill me or anything. Only strange thing is a big dog sneaking up on us." They talked for a few more minutes before Sirius had to leave to talk to Professor Dumbledore. Harry and Cho left the forest and walked back toward the castle.

"Harry, your form is amazing. I can't believe you can fly too. I'm glad Sirius came just so I could find this out."

"I wanted to show you as some big nice surprise, not while you were in fear for your life," Harry said sadly, but then realized that since Cho knew, there were advantages. "Want to come flying sometime? I can easily take you on my back."

"Maybe, riding around on your back sounds interesting."

"Well if that's all that sounds interesting, we can do that the next time we're alone," Harry joked and Cho pinched him.

They were about to the castle, walking hand-in-hand when Ron and Hermione came running toward them. Hermione didn't look happy. "I have to report this you know. You two were in the forest," Hermione said sternly.

"You wouldn't do that Hermione," Harry said surprised and still thinking Hermione was joking.

"I have to Harry, I'm a prefect. Cho, you're head girl, you should know better." Hermione added sounding exasperated.

"I do know better Hermione. That's why we got permission *before* we went in. I'll see you later Harry," Cho kissed him on the cheek and quickly went inside.

Hermione started blushing. "Well...um... Why didn't you just say that Harry?"

"Because you didn't ask. The first words out of your mouth were 'I have to report this.' Not 'were you two supposed to be in the forest?' I'm going after Cho," Harry said and left. He hadn't planned on going after Cho, he just wanted to go lie down and think about the match. After a while, he thought about going for something to eat but he really didn't want to see Hermione. Not that he was mad at her but it just disappointed him that she would have really taken points from Gryffindor and had thought the worst of him. Harry got out the Marauder's Map and looked until he found H. Granger. She was in the dining hall. Harry wiped the map and decided to sneak into the kitchen and eat.

Walking toward the painting that hid the entrance he ran into Fleur. "'Arry. Why aren't you down eating? You don't seem as happy as you should be."

"I was heading to the kitchen to get something to eat. I had a little run-in with a friend who immediately thought the worst of me and was going to get me into trouble. No big deal, it'll blow over."

"Want some company? I've never been to the kitchens."

"Um... It's a secret way; you won't get me into trouble will you?"

"Of course not 'Arry! I don't care about trivial things."

Waiting for a clear moment, Harry tickled the pear and they stepped inside. They walked down some steps and ended up in the kitchen. Many house-elves came running over squeaking 'May we get you something sir', and then realizing it was Harry 'Oh, Sir wants Winky.'

A couple of the elves left and Winky came over a minute later. "Does sir need something?"

"Hi Winky. This is Professor Delacour. Could we please have something to eat, we'd rather eat down here, if that's ok with you."

"Of course sir. Winky will take care of it." The house-elf popped away leaving Harry and Fleur to sit down. Soon, Dobby came over and asked what they wanted and within seconds they had plates and drinks in front of them.

"You played very well today. You will be a big hit in my country," Fleur said smiling.

"Until I miss my first snitch maybe. Who is the most popular?" Harry asked

"Either Tim or Kristi. Tim is pretty nice and easy to like. Kristi seems to be really popular. I don't understand why. "

"Not Jacque? He's the one who isn't nice to me."

"No! Not Jacque. He thinks he's the most popular but only stupid girls like him at all. On to better subjects. Are you excited about the ball?"

"At first I wasn't, but now since you've taught me to dance a little, I really am getting excited. I'm anxious to see the school."

"Oh, it is beautiful Harry. You will love it. And, you are a very good dancer now."

Suddenly a silver dove came through the wall and went right into Harry. Fleur let out a small gasp. "Don't worry Fleur. That's just a friend of mine sending me a note. Basically the friend who irritated me wants to talk but I don't think I feel like it tonight."

Harry concentrated on himself sleeping and uttered the spell. The phoenix went shooting out of his wand and disappeared through the wall.

"I never heard about such a spell," Fleur said.

"Not many people have. I'm going to stay here until it gets late so I don't have to talk tonight. Don't worry about staying with me or anything," Harry said.

"Yes, I should be going. It was nice sharing a meal with you," Fleur said leaving.

Harry was left sitting alone while the house-elves were cleaning up from the meal. Deciding he really didn't want to talk, and didn't want to just sit there bored, Harry found Winky. "Winky. Can I do something to help? I don't want to go up to my room yet."

"Oh no sir! This is house-elf work," she looked shocked.

"You would be doing me a favor if you let me help with the dishes."

Winky looked nervous but took Harry to the end of the sinks and left him with some large pots to clean. Every minute or so another house-elf would come by and ask to do the work for Harry. The elf would have just used magic to make it quicker but Harry wanted something to do so he continued. After a while of cleaning, Harry was startled when someone spoke, "I see Winky has even gotten you working Harry." Dumbledore was standing behind him smiling.

"I just wanted something to pass the time professor," Harry said wiping his hands.

"Wouldn't your common room be a more enjoyable place to do that?"

"Um... Yes but I had a little issue with a friend and didn't feel like talking about it tonight sir. I was going to go back up before long."

"Don't let issues go unresolved too long Harry. They seem to have a way of growing when ignored. I understand you won your first match today. Congratulations. Minerva was quite impressed with your play."

"It was a lot of fun sir. I really appreciate being allowed to do that."

"Of course. I understand you aren't letting classes slip so it is no problem at all. On another matter. Later this year, we will be hosting some special guests," Dumbledore started but Harry jumped in

"Giants sir?"

Dumbledore smiled and continued, "Yes Harry, as I was going to say. These guests will need to remain a secret until they have arrived and are settled in. There have been some attacks near their home and ones who have chosen our side are no longer safe there. We have decided to have two student envoys to interact with them. Normally I would choose the head-boy and head-girl. However for these particular guests, they don't place the same high regard on grades and order for their males. Giants, and especially the males are warriors. They wouldn't relate well to our current head-boy."

Harry thought of Marcus Timms, the Hufflepuff who was head-boy. He had never broken any rules, was always in the library and come to think of it had always attended the balls alone. Dumbledore's voice brought Harry out of his thoughts. "Would you be interested in being one of the envoys? You could select the female envoy yourself. The female can be anyone you would choose."

"You want me to meet the giants sir? That would be great. I would like Cho to be the other. This would work out since she's head-girl anyway, but I'm worried. I wonder how she would feel about giants? Could I ask her and then let you know?"

"Of course. I wouldn't imagine you wouldn't want to commit her to something without talking to her. She probably wouldn't take that as a compliment."

"Thank you sir. I'm really looking forward to meeting them."

"One thing Harry. It is customary to present their leader with a gift when first meeting them. One from you and your other envoy will give one to his companion. They are from the Gulas clan of giants. You may want to do some research and come up with a gift you think would fit them. They won't be here until after holiday. Don't stay up too late."

"Um sir, I do have one more question that's been bothering me since last year. Normally, I would have nightmares about Voldemort and my scar would burn really bad. If he was so close last year, why didn't I have any dreams and why didn't my scar hurt?"

Dumbledore thought for a minute and asked, "How did you feel when you met Voldemort the last time?"

"Sir?" Harry was confused.

"Where you mad, scared, confused? What did you feel?"

"I guess I was angry. I wasn't going to let him hurt Cho and then when she was gone, I really wanted to hurt him."

"That's what I thought. So then you weren't afraid of him?"

"No sir, I'm not really afraid of him."

"Then why would you have nightmares about him anymore? My guess is that once you no longer feared him, that particular link between you two vanished. This has deprived us of an excellent source of information, but was really inevitable. We still don't know if he had any knowledge of this link or got anything out of it. It may be a very good thing it is gone. Goodnight Harry."

"Goodnight sir, thank you," Harry said now really excited about meeting giants, but worried about what kind of gift he could provide. He really didn't know if Cho would want to do this or not. He stayed in the kitchen for a little while longer and made his way quietly back up to the common room, hoping Hermione had gone to bed already. Entering as quietly as he could, he was relieved that no one was up and he made his way unseen up to bed.

Harry didn't sleep well wondering what Cho would think. He was up before Ron and went to wait for Cho in the hallway near their room. After a little while, Cho and her friends came out. "Harry! What are you doing down here? Couldn't wait to see Cho huh?" Kelly joked.

"I don't see anything wrong with that," Cho added hugging her boyfriend.

"Well of course that's the main reason, but I really need to talk to Cho for a minute before breakfast. Is that ok?" Harry pleaded.

Harry and Cho went to a corner away from everyone. "Cho. Professor Dumbledore has asked me to be an envoy to some special guests that will be coming here after holiday. He wanted me to pick the girl envoy and I'd like it to be you."

Cho looked excited and happy that Harry would pick her but then got a strange look on her face. "Ok, so what's the catch? You don't look sure about this."

"Let me give you the plusses for doing this first. It would be an honor. If you decide to work in the Ministry, this would be a big boost for you. It would be nice doing this with you."

"And the negatives?" Cho asked.

"The guests will be giants. It doesn't seem that you like Hagrid and I didn't know how you would feel."

Cho thought for a second. "I know Hagrid's your friend, but he just kind of scares me. I don't really know why. I'd really like to do this with you. It would be interesting to meet them."

"I have to come up with a gift for their leader and you need to come up with one for his companion. Professor Dumbledore gave me their clan name so we can try to look up some information. I'll tell him you agreed then?"

"Yes, I agree. Thanks for asking Harry," Cho took his hand and then they went down to breakfast. They both told her friends that they couldn't talk about this yet but they would find out soon. Harry walked into the dining hall with Cho and her friends and noticed Ron and Hermione sitting at the Gryffindor table already. He continued on and sat with the Ravenclaws to eat.

They were all eating and talking when the mail came. Harry didn't think much of it and kept talking to Cho. He heard louder mumbling and saw other people looking at him. Kelly said, "So, it looks like you did pretty good yesterday," she said showing him the Daily Prophet.

*Hogwarts Student becomes sparkplug for France*

*France managed an amazing upset of highly favored Wales yesterday, led by a flawless performance from their new seeker; Hogwarts student Harry Potter. Playing in his first*

*professional match, Potter dominated in his position with a beautiful feint that caused his opponent to have a dreadful plough. After the match, Potter ignored repeated requests for an interview and instead decided to speak exclusively to France's Daily Gazette in French no less.*

*This reporter overheard Fem-Fatale Chaser Kristi Belig telling a fellow reporter 'Our little schoolboy pulled his weight today.' Which is high praise coming from her. Potter should watch out as she has chewed up and spit out many male players before. Potter somehow had the willpower to turn down her request to join her at the celebration party in Paris.*

*Potter was later seen hugging and talking to a beautiful woman who was said to be his teacher at Hogwarts. This reporter is wondering what they teach at that school.*

Harry turned bright red and wanted to hide. He lowered his head and tried to continue eating. Cho was looking at him sternly. "Want to tell me about this Kristi? And, did you have to hug Fleur?"

"Fleur hugged me! You know how she is. McGonagall was there, you can ask her." Harry quickly answered, not wanting to be in hot water with Cho.

"Better behave on these things Harry. We don't want to have to hurt you," one of Cho's friends joked.

"Now, about this Kristi?" Cho said, obviously serious.

"She's the chaser on the team. I don't know much about her except she's very quiet and looks like she's ready to tear your head off all the time. You'd have to find out more info from someone else. She didn't ask me to the party either, she just asked if I was going. You know, to be polite and make sure I knew about it."

"You really need to learn more about women Harry," Kelly joked.

"I think he knows all he needs to, thank you," Cho said back.

Some Gryffindors came over to give Harry a hard time, "Are you even a Gryffindor any more? Why didn't you tell us about your win yesterday? Man, you get a living girlfriend and forget about the rest of us."

"I just got busy yesterday, sorry," Harry apologized.

After eating, Harry wanted to go somewhere quiet so he told Cho and her friends he was going to the library to study. They all asked if he was feeling ok since Harry never voluntarily went to the library. He was actually going to research the Gulas clan of giants. While he was heading up the stairs he heard Hermione call after him, "Harry, wait a minute. Where are you going?" she said in a not-too-friendly tone of voice.

"I need to research something in the library," Harry said truthfully.

"Right Harry. If you don't want to talk, just say so. You don't have to lie to me," Hermione said sounding hurt.

Harry turned and was hurt by Hermione's comment. "When did you completely lose all faith in me? The first thing that comes into your mind about me is the worst any more. You know I haven't broken any more rules than you have this year." Now Harry was the one sounding hurt. He and Hermione had never really fought before.

Hermione looked thoughtful for a minute and said, "I'm sorry Harry. It's just that things seem so different. I mean last year you were seeing R.J. and sneaking around all the time but during the days we were all together. Then you didn't write much over the summer and now we don't spend hardly any time together. It seems like you've changed."

"And because you think I've changed, that makes it ok to try and get me into trouble and to assume I'd just lie to you? Are you sure it's me that's changed? How would you have handled things over the summer if Ron had been hurt? Now that you and Ron are getting close, I'm sure you like spending time with him. Why is it a problem that I like spending time with Cho? You know I wasn't really mad about you saying you'd take points from Cho and me, it just embarrassed me in front of her. But listening to what you're saying now makes me think it's something bigger."

Hermione quickly said, "I don't know what it is. I just miss you being around. I want things to be like they were."

"I miss you too. But I don't think you really want them back like they were. That would mean that you and Ron were only friends."

"No, you're right. How about we spend time together now?" she added giving him a half-hearted smile.

"As long as you come to the library with me, fine. I really need to figure something out. Let me ask you a question though. Where's Ron?"

"He has Quidditch practice."

"Would you want to spend time with me if he didn't have anything to do?" Harry asked giving her a questioning look.

Hermione looked at him again and said, "He'd want to come with us."

"Maybe. C'mon let's go anyway," Harry said but really didn't believe it. Hermione and Ron would rather be alone and he understood that.

"By the way, congratulations on your match. You should have told us yesterday."

"I planned to tell you when you saw Cho and me. That's why she left."

"Oh, ok. What do you need to lookup in the library? It's not your favorite place," Hermione said.

"I need to find out information about the Gulas clan of giants."

"Is that who's coming this year?" Hermione asked, already knowing that some giants were coming.



"Officially, I don't know what you're talking about. Unofficially yep, that's who's coming, sometime after the holiday break. I want to find out as much as I can about them before they get here."

They got to the library and Harry was glad Hermione was there since she knew much better than him where to look for things. They had about five big books about giants open on the table.

"Harry, they're all really violent. I don't think I realized how barbaric they were. I'm not sure it's a good idea for them to be so close to the school."

"Better them being here on our side than coming after us from Voldemort's side. They can't be that bad if they chose to not go with him," Harry said but noticed the books did make it sound like they were ruthless and not to be trusted. Hermione finally found something about the Gulas clan. They were one of the largest clans, which meant they were the ones who won the most battles. The clans got larger with each battle won. The survivors of the other clan joined up with the winning one. The stories about how they killed wizards, Muggles and other giants were gruesome. Harry found some of what he was looking for. 'For the females of the clan, they were most pleased when the men returned from plundering villages and returned with Sioni Oil. The female giants use it as a perfume but to non-giants the odor is quite repulsive.' Harry copied this down onto his parchment.

"Why is that so important?" Hermione asked confused.

"I'm looking for gifts to give them," Harry replied honestly and then noticed the drawing of the male giant who was presenting the oil to the female had a large sword with an ornate carved handle. The design looked familiar and he flipped back a few pages that showed the crest of the clan and it was the same design. It didn't remind Harry of anything but it was definitely the same design. He carefully traced this design onto the parchment as well.

"What makes you so sure you'll be able to give them something? There's something you're not telling me," said Hermione, confident she knew Harry well enough to tell when he was hiding something.

"I'm one of the student envoy's to the giants. I'm expected to give the leader a gift."

"That's great. Oh, that would be so interesting to meet them. You said one of the envoys. How many are there? Do you know who the others are going to be?"

"There are two. Cho is the other one." Harry saw her face drop. "I'm sure you and Ron will be able to meet them. Even if I weren't an envoy, Hagrid would set something up. But then you'd probably have to break a rule to see them though."

"Ok, I said I was sorry. I'd really like to meet them. How did you and Cho get picked?"

"I don't know for sure why I got picked. Dumbledore said normally it would be the head boy and girl but that giants didn't care much for brains and following rules. So, he picked me. Kind of irritating actually since I have been following rules this year."

"Ok, but what about Cho? She's really smart and follows rules."

"I don't think following rules is a bad thing for the female giants. But, I got to pick who I wanted to be the other envoy and I picked her."

Hermione really looked sad now. "Hermione, think about it. If you had been picked and had to pick one boy to go with you who would it have been? Ron of course. There's no question you two would have shared this together. If you weren't dating Ron and I wasn't dating Cho, I promise I would have wanted you to do this with me."

"I believe you. It's just another example of how things have changed so much. It used to be the three of us doing everything. We all had our strengths and made a great team. It doesn't feel like a team any more."

"I agree it doesn't feel that way any more. Before, you and I did things, you and Ron did things and Ron and I did things. Now, you would pick Ron for everything and he would pick you for everything. I don't even have Quidditch with him any more. I knew that you two getting together would leave me out but I'm really happy for you."

"It's nice being with him but I think Ron would agree that we don't have as much fun as we used to."

"Well, since you helped, I'm all done in the library. What do you want to do until your husband gets done with practice?"

"Funny Harry. Let's go to the common room."

"Let me write a note first and then take it up to Hedwig."

*Mr. Wilkins*

*I hope you and your family are doing well.*

*I have a favor to ask. I really was impressed with the sword you made for me and would like to see how much you would charge to make a very special one for a very special guest of the school. I am enclosing a drawing I would want on one side of the handle, and I would like the Hogwarts seal on the other side. The truly different thing about this sword is that it needs to be about three and a half times the size of a normal sword. The person this is for will be a little over six meters tall. And, if you can and are willing to do this, what is a timeframe for having it completed? If you don't feel like you want to do this, it's no problem, I can find another gift. I just know they would be really impressed with your work.*

*I've asked Hedwig to wait for a response. You can send her back if you want to think about it for a while.*

*Tell Mrs. Wilkins that my speaking French has come in very handy this year.*

*Harry Potter.*

Harry and Hermione went up to give the note to Hedwig. Then they went back to the Gryffindor common room. A little while later, the Quidditch team came in. Ron and Ginny came over and sat down near them. "So, why didn't you tell us about the Quidditch match yesterday?" Ron asked.

Hermione answered quickly, "Because I didn't give him a chance Ron. He was coming over to do it when we saw them yesterday."

"Oh... So everything's ok then?" Ron asked confused.

"Things are ok Ron. How was practice? Ready for next weekend?" Harry asked.

"Harry, Ron's a slave driver this year. He's working us way too hard. I wish you were there." Ginny announced dropping onto the couch.

"Sure, wish I was there to get worked so hard too. I bet you'll be even better than last year," Harry said.

"Where were you at last night when I sent the message? Eating with Cho?" Ginny asked rolling her eyes.

"No. I was eating with Fleur. And, before you say anything about that, I wasn't in the mood to be around people so we went to the kitchen to eat. Speaking of Fleur, are you all ready for the first ball?"

"I hate these things. The Halloween ball wasn't so bad because the costumes made it fun. This is just going to be a pain," Ron complained drawing a dirty look from Hermione.

"I'm looking forward to them. It will be nice to see all the students from there. I'm really looking forward to going to their school. That should be interesting," Hermione said.

"Me too," said Ginny. "I think going to their school will be great. I'm going to go get cleaned up before supper. You should do the same Ron. Any chance you'll eat with your own house tonight Harry?"

"Wouldn't have it any other way," said Harry having already decided to do just that.

After Ginny and Ron left, Hermione said, "See that's back to where it should be."

"That's because it was the four of us just being friends. It is nice though." By the time Ron and Ginny were ready; it was time to eat so they all went down to the Great Hall and had a nice meal. After the meal, they were all sitting back in the common room studying. Ginny was off studying with her classmate. The three sixth year's finished pretty early and just sat around and talked for the rest of the evening.

The next few weeks kind of flew by. Gryffindor beat Slytherin in Quidditch due to Ginny's fantastic grab of the snitch right out from Draco Malfoy's nose. There was a huge celebration in the common room that night. Cho had even come over for some of it but left when she remembered how much studying she had to do.

Harry's Quidditch practice had continued after the week break and he was getting more private direction from Tom about unusual seeker moves. Harry also continued dance lessons with Fleur even though he felt comfortable enough to dance now; he really enjoyed dancing with her. He asked if she knew some modern dance like the kind they did in popular clubs in the city. She wasn't a big fan of that kind of dancing but she did try to show him some.

Harry had also received a response from Mr. Wilkins:

*Harry*

*Thanks for your letter; it is good to hear from you. We are all doing well here.*

*I would be honored to make a sword for you to give as a gift. Sirius explained the conversion from wizard money to normal money and it would cost about 100 galleons for something that size. I won't ask right now who this is for, but would be very interested to hear the story sometime. A 6 meter person would be something. Knowing that Miss R.J. had some significant assets, I will go on the assumption that you do want it made. If you don't want me to go ahead, please send a note soon. Something this size will take me about a month to complete.*

*My wife is pleased you are finding opportunities to use the French you learned.*

*Take care and say hello to your friends.*

*Tom*

Great, now Harry didn't need to worry about a gift for the giants. He had told Cho about the Sioni Oil but also said she could pick anything she wanted. Harry also told her that he would pay the reasonable costs and the school would reimburse him. He had no intention of making the school pay but he didn't want Cho to think he was paying for this out of his own money. Cho kept asking what his gift was going to be but Harry wouldn't tell.

He and Cho were trying to spend a couple nights a week in their secret location, making Harry happy with the way things were going between them. They were in the room one night before Harry's next Quidditch match when Cho asked, "Any chance you could keep Fleur from hugging you if you win?"

"She really likes the French Team Cho. I doubt she could be stopped," Harry said smiling.

"Not like you really would try anyway," Cho said tickling Harry. "I think this Kristi worries me more anyway."

"Kristi? Why?" Harry looked confused.

"I've been reading about her. It seems she's always out with some famous wizard and always breaking their hearts."

"So, why should that bother you? I just want to come back here after the matches."

"At least you know the right things to say. When Fleur hugs you after you win, just remember coming back to this," Cho pushed him onto his back and gave him a really long kiss. Harry held her tight and eagerly returned the kiss. He softly nibbled along her neck to her shoulder and back up to her ear. Hearing her breathing get deeper he was pleased when he heard an occasional moan. After a bit of this, Cho pushed up and looked at him but then said, "We should probably get going."

She didn't look like she wanted to but Harry said, "Is it time already?"

"It's time or I won't be able to keep my hands off of you," Cho said slyly.

"And what's the problem with that? You wouldn't hear me complaining," Harry said trying to sound like it was a joke. He started bringing the Marauder's Map so they would be less likely to get caught coming out of the secret stairs.

When they were saying goodnight at her common room he was kissing her goodnight when Kelly came out and said, "Get a room you two." They both looked at each other and started laughing since that is basically what they just left. Kelly looked confused while Harry walked away.

## **Chapter 8**

Back in the Gryffindor common room Harry saw Ron sitting alone by the fire. This behavior wasn't unusual for Harry, but Ron rarely liked to sit alone and just think. "Hey Ron, where's Hermione? Late at night, you two are never apart."

"You know how it goes; minor annoyance causes snotty remark and one of us walks away. You've been through it," Ron said not sounding too happy. "So, ready for your next match?"

"I hope so. Practices have been going pretty good. Still like Gryffindor's chances?"

"Yeah, we should do ok. Ravenclaw looks like they could be tough."

They both headed up to bed after a little while. Things went fine the next day but Ron and Hermione didn't talk as much as usual. Harry went to bed before them that night. He slept in the next day and went down for breakfast after most of the students had left. He was just having some toast and juice when Fleur came over. "Eat well 'Arry. Must have your strength to win for us today. I will be coming with you and Professor McGonagall. I'm not going to miss a match this year."

Harry went up and found Fleur already in Professor McGonagall's office ready to go. "Off to Spain," Fleur said. Using floo powder, they stated the location and stepped into the fire. They came out near the training room in the guest locker area of the Spanish stadium. Fleur and Professor McGonagall got back area passes and went to find their seats.

Tim was the only one in the locker room when Harry got there so he quickly got changed into his team robes. "I hope you can do as well this match Harry. You had a really good first game, much better than my first."

"Thank you. I really want to win."

Before long, the beaters came, followed by Kristi. "Ready to do it again schoolboy?" she asked while changing into her game robes.

"I'm ready... You?" Harry asked, trying to sound confident.

"Of course. Ok, when we win this time. Here's how we celebrate," she said coming to stand directly in front of Harry. "Make a fist. Put out your arm and we hit fist to fist. There are no handshakes in Quidditch. Try it," Kristi demanded.

Harry made a fist and he and Kristi hit fist to fist. "Now, if you miss the snitch, I may aim for your head so make sure you catch it," she said and he hoped she was kidding.

Finally Jacque showed up and didn't talk much as usual. Coach came in and said a few words and then the team headed for the field. They were announced first since they were the visiting team. There were many boos from the crowd, which was mainly from Spain. Harry got glimpses out of the stadium and the countryside looked nice. He hoped to come back some day.

There was a loud roar and the Spanish team started being introduced. Harry just hovered and waited for the announcements to stop. When the other seeker was introduced, he flew around and then came straight toward Harry very fast. Harry knew that the seeker was trying to intimidate him so he held his ground. At the last second, the other seeker turned slightly and flew by Harry's left side. Kristi was giving the other seeker a dirty look but Harry just ignored everything.

Play started and Harry could tell the difference between them and Wales quickly. The Spanish Chasers weren't as good as France's but the beaters seemed better than Wales' had been. Harry began dodging bludgers almost immediately. France was playing really well and when Spain called a timeout, France was up 110 to 40. Still, if Spain got the snitch before Harry, France would lose.

Right after the timeout, Spain's plan became clear; their beaters were trying to hit France's chasers. Spain broke up a couple scoring runs and ended up scoring themselves enough to make it 110 to 70. Then Harry saw it happen, Spain hit a bludger and it got by France's beater and barely hit Jacque in the right leg. The chaser winced in pain, dropped the quaffle, Spain picked it up and scored.

Tim called a timeout as quick as he could. Down on the ground Jacque said he was in too much pain to play. Coach was screaming at him that his legs didn't matter that much and he should fly but Jacque refused. Coach told Kristi to do her best and came to Harry and yelled "Catch the damn snitch before they get too far ahead!"

Play started again and their beaters were using the same technique of trying to take France's remaining chaser out. Kristi barely dodged a couple bludgers but hadn't scored. Spain was now closing fast; it was 110 to 100. Harry was trying to find the snitch and to not let any bludgers hit him when he saw Spain's beater hit the bludger and watched it head directly for Kristi. Harry knew she didn't see it and it would collide with the back of her head. Putting his broom into a dive, Harry was just able to get across Kristi so the bludger hit him in the ribs instead. Harry flew out of control and into the stand column. Tim quickly called a timeout. The trainer and coach came over and helped Harry up. He was spitting up a little blood. "What hurts?" the trainer yelled.

"My side," Harry replied.

By this time the other team members except Jacque had come over. "Looks like broken ribs," the trainer said. "Can't fix it here."

Coach looked around and groaned, "We have to call it. One chaser and no seeker. Can't win."

Harry was stunned and yelled, "You can't quit! I can still fly! I just need a drink of water. We can't quit!"

The trainer handed him the water and said, "I can't fix your ribs here, there's nothing I can do."

"It doesn't end until someone catches the snitch," Harry exclaimed.

Kristi jumped in and yelled at him, "Don't try to protect me again. Do your job and catch the damn snitch."

Harry got back on his broom and lifted off. He had trouble breathing and could tell he was spitting up some blood. He wasn't focusing too well at first. He really didn't think the match would last long and then he remembered last year when he was able to transform just his senses into the griffin. Play started and he concentrated really hard and after a moment, everything seemed to be happening in slow motion. He could see things much more clearly. Even though his side hurt really badly, he was able to dodge the bludgers that kept coming his way. Kristi hadn't been able to score and now Spain was up 130 to 110. Suddenly Harry saw a flash of gold heading into the field. He took off and was half way down the field before the other seeker noticed he had moved. Finally he saw the snitch come from behind the goal post and he was able to easily grab it. France had still won!

Back on the ground, Harry could hear many cheers, which he didn't expect since they just beat the home team. He stumbled to his knees since it was hard to breathe. The trainer came over and said, "Let's get you inside. I can't believe you were able to do that."

The next few minutes were blurry but when things became clear, he was lying on a table in the trainer's room right outside the locker room with Fleur and Professor McGonagall next to the table. McGonagall looked really worried but Fleur looked ecstatic. "You won it for us again 'Arry! I can't believe you did it."

"We're going to take you back to the school Harry. The medics here can't do any better than Madame Pomfrey. Can you walk?" Professor McGonagall asked.

"I can walk, but I have to wait for the rest of the team before we go out there," Harry demanded. Luckily it was just a minute before the rest of the team came out. He was already sitting up and ready to walk out with the team. Harry followed Tim the captain out being helped a little by Fleur. There was thunderous applause for the French team and the press started yelling out the player's names to try and get an interview. Harry saw the reporter from last match over to the side and tried to get to her. It was hard with all the people and his side was hurting.

"A quick word Harry if you don't mind. I know you're injured and are going to get attention so I won't be long. What is your take on a veteran player like Jacques Dubois getting grazed by a bludger on the leg and refusing to play and yet the youngest player in the league having his ribs broken and demanding to continue?"

"No one except Jacques knows how badly he was injured Ms. Mishmas. Being hit by any bludger is not fun and it may have seemed minor to people in the stands but only he knows how bad it really was."

"But you were hit much harder and were spitting up blood and yet when the coach suggested calling the game, you could be heard yelling at him that quote 'it's not over until someone catches the snitch.'"

"That's just the way I feel. If I'm still conscious, I want to play until the end."

"What are your thoughts about the terrible play of the beaters today that allowed both of the bludgers through that caused injuries?"



"No beater can stop them all. It was my own fault I was hit. I should have been able to dodge it. The only reason I was only hit by one was because our beaters did a great job. I really need to get to our medical wing now Ms. Mishmas."

Fleur and Professor McGonagall were helping him toward the fireplace when he heard, "I take it you're going to miss the celebration again."

He turned and saw Kristi coming towards him. "Will that school of yours be able to handle this?" Kristi asked sounding slightly concerned.

Before Harry could answer, Professor McGonagall spoke up, "Miss Belig, broken ribs aren't even in the top ten injuries for Mr. Potter. He is quite the regular in our hospital wing. I assure you we have repaired him from far worse than this."

Kristi looked at him with a strange and appraising look and said, "Good job again schoolboy." And then she made a fist and stuck out her arm.

He responded by making a fist and hitting hers, then he said, "Better there than on my face." He saw her smile at this and then his teachers got him to the fireplace.

Back at Hogwarts, the teachers were helping Harry out of Professor McGonagall's office and as soon as they turned the corner, Cho was sitting there waiting. "Harry! Are you all right?"

"He's fine Miss Chang," Fleur said coldly.

"Broken ribs Cho. No problem. Want to come up?" Harry groaned.

"Madame Pomfrey. will probably kick you out but you're welcome to try." McGonagall said.

"What happened to him?" Cho asked concerned.

"You should have seen it," Fleur said unable to control her excitement. "He was hit in the side by a bludger and crashed. The coach called timeout and then wanted to call the match. You could see 'Arry yelling at him that he could still fly. He was spitting blood. He got back on his broom, barely able to breathe and beat the other seeker to the snitch! It was amazing."

"We won Cho!" Harry choked out. They arrived at the hospital wing and Madame Pomfrey. came out quickly.

"Mr. Potter. I was wondering when you'd finally be up here. This must be the longest you've gone without visiting me. What happened?" Madame Pomfrey. asked.

"Bludger to the ribs," Professor McGonagall said calmly.

"I won't have to stay the night will I?" Harry asked.

"Not if you promise to take it easy after you leave. You can go in a couple hours. Everyone else out, now," she demanded.

"I'll wait for you in my common room Harry. I'm glad you're ok," Cho said and then walked out.

Outside, Professor McGonagall said to Cho and Fleur. "That boy's something, but I don't think he has an ounce of self-preservation in him. Miss Chang, you would have been very proud of him today."

A couple hours later, Harry was able to leave the hospital wing. He was still sorer than he expected to be so he walked slowly down to the Ravenclaw area. Kelly happened to be coming out and saw him, "Harry. Heard you were hurt. Cho's waiting in here, come on in."

Harry went through their opening and saw Cho waiting with her other friends. She came running over and tried to hug him. He backed away groaning in pain. "Sorry Harry, I guess you're not healed."

"It was almost worth it though," Harry joked. He sat with her and her friends for a little while, but didn't want to talk about the match. He was remembering advice he had been given and was trying to be as normal as he could be. After a while, they decided to go down for a meal. When they entered the dining hall, Harry saw Ron and Hermione already at the Gryffindor table. He turned to Cho and said, "I'm going to eat with the Gryffindors. Want to get together after supper?"

She smiled at him and said, "If you're sure I won't hurt you."

"I'm sure it will be worth any pain," he replied and then went over to his house table. Ginny jumped up first. "Harry! Professor McGonagall told us you were back but were in the hospital. Are you all right?"

"I'm fine Ginny, don't worry. I just had some broken ribs," Harry said and sat down next to her.

"She also told us the important part that you won again!" Ron exclaimed.

"It was close but we ended up winning. So, what did you guys do today?" Harry asked. He had a hard time eating, but enjoyed talking to his friends. It still seemed that something was up between Ron and Hermione. Harry asked, "Hermione, are you feeling ok? You seem more quiet than usual. Please don't tell me I've done something wrong again?" Harry asked worried.

"Of course you haven't. You seem to be the perfect gentleman anymore," she said looking at him, and then added. "That is when you're around. I just have a lot of schoolwork to do." Hermione replied. Harry knew his friend well enough to know something was wrong.

A little later, Ron was talking to Dean. Harry moved around to sit next to Hermione and asked. "Hermione, what's really wrong? Is there anything I can do?"

Hermione looked at him closely and said, "Ron and I are just annoying each other right now. It'll pass. Thanks for noticing and asking, it means a lot. Are you sure you're ok?"

"Ribs still hurt, but they won't for much longer. The three of us should try to do something fun tomorrow, maybe that'll get this back on track." Harry suggested. "How about Hogsmeade?"

"Well it can't hurt. I need to get some things for the ball anyway. You ask Ron." Hermione said.

"Ron. Let's go to Hogsmeade tomorrow. I'll buy you a butterbeer," Harry said loudly.

"In that case, heck yes." Ron replied and then went back talking to Dean.

After they had been in the common room for a while, Harry went up and got the map, cloak and then came back down. "I'll see you all later," he said and headed up to get Cho. While standing in the hall near the Ravenclaw corridor, he sent the message spell to her thinking of him waiting on her. She came out in just a few minutes. They quickly snuck up to their secret area. "Are you really ok?" Cho asked concerned.

"I don't know, I think it'll take a few kisses until I'm really ok," Harry said, smiling at her.

She leaned in and kissed him but pulled back and said, "I don't want to hurt you."

"If it ever hurts more than I'm enjoying it, I'll let you know. Until then, don't worry about hurting me," he said and pulled her closer. It did hurt but not as much as he was enjoying kissing her. Harry had learned that Cho really seemed to enjoy having her neck nibbled on. He also found out that she loved having her back rubbed and the back of her neck kissed.

At one point, he was lying on top of her, kissing her neck when he knew what he wanted to do next but didn't know if she was ready, or if he was in too much pain so he stopped, "What's the matter?" Cho asked.

"Nothing at all. It's just about time we should be getting back. It wouldn't look good for head-girl to be in trouble for being out too late," he said trying to convince himself that leaving was the right thing to do.

She gave a disappointed look but agreed and they snuck back out. When leaving her for the night she said, "We should go up earlier next time so we have more time alone. Want to go to Hogsmeade tomorrow with us?"

"I'm already going with Ron and Hermione. Maybe we'll see each other in the Three Broomsticks. Thanks for coming to the hospital with me today." He kissed her and headed back to his room.

By the next morning, his ribs were feeling pretty good and he went to the common room to find Ginny and Hermione waiting on him and Ron. "Ron's right behind me." Harry announced. They all went to breakfast and were talking about things they needed in Hogsmeade today when mail came. "I think I should leave," Harry said to them.

"Why?" Hermione asked confused.

"You remember last time we won. The kind of stuff embarrasses me."

"We'll protect you." Ginny said smiling.

Hermione got her paper and Harry was watching her intently. She looked at him and then turned the paper around.

*France's rookie out-hearts the veteran*

*In a match that will be talked about for some time due to the determination to win shown by the youngest player in the league, one of its veterans displayed the exact opposite, absolutely no heart for the game. Jacque Dubois, chaser for the French National Team begged to be taken out of the game after suffering a bruise on his leg from a bludger. With Spain catching up quickly, France's rookie seeker used his own body to block a bludger that would have surely knocked their other chaser out of the game, instead receiving broken ribs himself. In a scene visible to the crowd, Harry Potter, clutching his ribs and spitting up blood yelled at the coach to not call the game and that he could keep flying while they had a chance to win. Somehow, Potter was able to concentrate enough and actually caught the snitch with Spain's seeker almost half a field away. This was one of the best examples of desire to win that this reporter has ever seen. Jacque Dubois should be ashamed of himself for disgracing the French team like that.*

*After the match, Potter was still gracious enough to give an exclusive interview to the French Daily Gazette before being taken for medical treatment. This reporter overheard Kristi Belig telling another reporter. 'Our little schoolboy showed more heart than the rest of the team today.' Sounds like Kristi has her sights set on a certain seeker. Potter was whisked away by the same beautiful woman as last time. The one he calls her his teacher.*

"Oh man. This isn't going to be good," Harry said and then hung his head. Hermione, Ron and Ginny tried to keep the other students away and to keep them from teasing him about the article. It was too much for them to handle. They left together and went to the common room until it was time to go to Hogsmeade.

They were walking into stores they had been into many times before and other adult wizards were pointing and mumbling at them. "What's up today?" Ron asked, "Do we all have stuff on our faces?"

"It's Harry," Ginny said, "I overheard some of them talking about him being the seeker in all the papers."

"Oh great. I can't even come to Hogsmeade anymore," Harry said sounding dejected.

"So what!" Ron said, "You're doing great as a professional seeker."

"It gets old Ron. First it was 'Oooh, there's scar head, the boy who lived'. Then, that pretty much passed and now this. I'm really tired of it," Harry said angrily, "Maybe I'll just head back to the castle."

"No, c'mon let's go to the Three Broomsticks," Hermione said. "We can find a table in the corner and just watch people."

"Yeah, we haven't been here together in a long time," Ginny added.

They walked in and it seemed people started talking and mumbling. Hermione directed them to a table in the corner. Madame Rosmerta came over, "Harry. Can't tell you how proud we are of you. Heard the match on the wireless. What do you all want, on the house it is?"

"Rosmerta, you don't have to do that, I'll buy this one," Harry exclaimed.

"Nonsense, I'll have none of that. I said it's on the house so that's that," she insisted. They all had butterbeers and she delivered them quickly.

"See use your celebrity to our advantage," Ron joked. They talked and joked for a while. It was really nice being there with his friends, even with the occasional person staring at them. He saw Cho and her friends walk in after a while and he waved them over.

They came over and sat down at Harry's end of the table. Kelly said with a smirk, "Hi little schoolboy."

"Cho, can't you control them?" Harry asked.

"I want to know more about this Kristi, and why she calls you little schoolboy. And, why did you stop a bludger with your body?" Cho said, not sounding entirely happy.

Ron spoke up, "I know all about her." Harry looked worried. "She's played seeker for France for two years now. The papers say she's dated a lot of famous wizards and has always broken their hearts when another comes along. She's really aggressive and goes after what she wants. Oh, and she's dead gorgeous!"

"Sounds like you keep track of her Ron," Hermione said coldly.

"Well, you know, only since Harry started playing for France. Got to watch out for my friends don't I?" Ron paused and then asked, "I do have a question though. Do they have separate showers for her?" Ron replied and Harry felt a sudden weight on his shoulders.

Harry tried to ignore Ron's question and hoped it went away, "That's just what she's always called me Cho, it doesn't bother me. The chasers are the ones who score. You have to protect the chasers; I did what I was supposed to do," Harry said.

"Oh, team player is that it little schoolboy?" Kelly joked.

"What about the separate showers?" Cho demanded.

"Hey, it's ok for Kristi to call me little schoolboy, but no body else! And *no*, she does *not* have separate showers," Harry exclaimed. Everyone's eyes were wide. Then he turned to Cho and said in French, "Cho. If you only knew how much I cared for you, you would never worry about such things again."

"Harry!" Hermione exclaimed.

"What? What did he say? Harry, what did you just say to me?" Cho demanded. The others were all silent, wondering what he had said.

"Hermione, please tell me what he said," Cho pleaded.

Hermione looked at Harry who shrugged his shoulders. Then she said, "Harry said; 'Cho. If you only knew how much I cared for you, you would never worry about such things again.'"

"Oh man. What's gotten into you?" Ron exclaimed.

Cho grabbed Harry and hugged him, "I can't believe you said that. That was the nicest thing I've ever heard."

Kelly joked, "Are you sure you don't have a brother hidden somewhere?"

Cho looked at Hermione and said, "Thank you for translating Hermione, I owe you one."

"No Cho, just forgive me for saying I'd get you into trouble." Hermione replied.

"Deal, it's totally forgotten," Cho agreed.

"Ok, since the first round was on the house, the next round is on me. Remember, I'm actually getting paid to play Quidditch! Amazing since I'd play for free," Harry said.

"Sure you would since Kristi gets naked after every match," Ron joked and was promptly hit by Hermione, Ginny and Cho.

They all sat around and talked for a while and Ron kept mentioning Kristi naked and both Cho and Hermione said, "Can we not talk about Kristi being naked please."

The next week went great. Saturday was Ravenclaw vs. Slytherin and the first ball where the Beauxbatons students were coming to Hogwarts. Harry, Ron, Hermione and Ginny all went to cheer for Cho and her team. Ron and Ginny were surprised at how easily Ravenclaw beat Slytherin. Harry had really watched Ravenclaw's first match so he knew they were pretty good. They all went down to the field to congratulate them after the match. Harry hugged Cho and said, "You flew great. I'm glad I'm not playing against you this year."

Even Ron agreed, "You were better than I expected. I'll have to make some adjustments now."

The girls headed straight up to get ready, but Ron and Harry went to visit Hagrid before going to get ready.

"Hey Hagrid!" Ron yelled.

"Bout time you two. Been too long since you've been here." Hagrid said loudly.

"Coming to the ball tonight Hagrid?" Harry asked.

"Course I am 'Arry. Maxime needs a date doesn she?" Hagrid replied.

"Excited about meeting the chief of the giants 'Arry?" Hagrid asked.

"How are you meeting the giants?" Ron asked.

"Just the right place at the right time," Harry said, "I'm really excited. I've already decided on a present. I hope it's a good one. We'll be able to arrange it so that Ron and Hermione can meet them too won't we?"

Hagrid looked worried. "I'm sure we can figure somethin' out. May have to bend a few rules but if that's no problem, we should be able to."

"That's no problem for Ron, Hermione may be another story," Harry said.

"Yeah Hagrid. She's turned into a real prefect. Can't even joke about breaking rules around her anymore."

"We need to go get ready. See you tonight Hagrid." Harry said. He and Ron headed up to their rooms to get ready. It didn't take them long; they just showered and got dressed quickly.

When it was about time, Harry left the Gryffindor room and headed to the Ravenclaw area. One of the Ravenclaw boys let Harry in to wait on Cho. Harry wondered which of the other boys were waiting on Cho's friends. A few minutes later Cho and her three friends came into view. Cho looked stunning in a deep red robe with oriental designs. Her hair was pulled back and it just accented her light skin. When they got down, she came straight to him and all he could say was; "Wow!"

She beamed and said, "You do have a way with words."

Harry noticed Kelly going to one of the other Ravenclaw boys and caught himself thinking she could do much better. Her two other friends didn't seem to have dates. He whispered to Cho, "What about your two friends, didn't they find dates?"

Cho looked at Harry and smiled, "You do need to learn a lot. They are dating each other."

Harry's eyes got really big but he held back any comments. He said that he was glad to be walking into the ball with the best looking group of women in the school. They walked into the great hall and it had been arranged with many round tables. Even by the time they got to the ball, there were many couples that Harry assumed had come from Beauxbatons since he had never seen them before. Harry picked a table with Cho and all of her friends. This left about four seats open at their table. Harry was sitting talking with Cho's friends when a group of about six students he had never seen before came over and started talking in French, "You're Harry Potter, seeker for our National Team. It's a pleasure to meet you. You have brought our team new life. May we have your autograph?"

Harry responded, "Please, this is a ball to celebrate our two schools. I am just a student here. Thank you for your comments though."

He told Cho what they said and she just squeezed his arm and said, "My little schoolboy."

Harry whispered, "Call me that one more time and I'll start describing Kristi naked," Cho pinched his arm hard enough for him to yelp. After a short while, it seemed there were quite a few students and adults Harry had never seen before. After a delicious meal, Harry asked Cho if she wanted to dance, "I promise to be better than last year."

"I would be happy if you were the same," Cho said. Harry pulled her close and looked into her eyes. He led her around the dance floor, not taking his eyes off of her. She was the only thing that mattered to him right now and wanted her to know it. During the second song, they talked and laughed a little during the dance but were still holding each other tightly. When that song ended and they were walking back to the table, noticing many of the students watching them she said, "Ok, it was worth knowing you were dancing with Fleur for those weeks."

"You just bring out the best in me Cho," Harry said and kissed her on the cheek.

As soon as they got back to the table, Kelly stood up and said, "Cho, I know you won't mind if I borrow your date for a dance or two" and then pulled Harry out to the floor. Harry remembered what Fleur said about making sure you made each partner feel like she was the most beautiful woman in the room when you dance with them. He didn't hold Kelly quite as close, but he paid as much attention to what she said and looked at her as much.

After the second dance and they went back to the table, Harry was sure he heard Kelly say, "If you ever mess it up with him, he's mine."

The music changed from dance to listening and Harry felt a tap on his shoulder, "Harry. May I take and introduce you to some Beauxbatons instructors?"

Harry grabbed Cho and said, "That would be nice Fleur, thank you." Fleur didn't seem to have planned on Cho coming but didn't say anything. Harry and Cho followed Fleur up to the table where the professors were. Fleur went down the line of the Beauxbatons instructors introducing him and telling them he played for the French National team. Harry greeted them all in French and answered any questions they had. At the end, they got to the Hogwarts professors.

Dumbledore leaned up and said, "It seems you are a hit with our sister school Harry."

Harry whispered back, "Until I miss my first snitch sir."

Dumbledore said back, "Would you and Miss Chang please come to my office tomorrow before lunch to talk about our guests. I will be making an announcement tonight."

They agreed and he and Cho went back to their table.

Professor Dumbledore got everyone's attention and began speaking, "I can't tell you how much it pleases me to see our two schools together enjoying and evening like this. I only wish our brother school could have joined us. I know that our students are looking forward to visiting the Beauxbatons school after the new year. I have one announcement to make tonight that is of interest to the current struggle we are in. As some of you may be aware, there have been disturbances high in the mountains. This is where the giants happen to live. Currently the Gulas clan of giants is on its way to Hogwarts to join our cause and to help us prepare for what may come to be. Giants are not accustomed to being around a large number of humans, so we have decided on two students to be envoys to their clan. I would like to announce tonight that the envoys from Hogwarts will be Mr. Harry Potter and Miss Cho Chang." He let the clapping die down. "There are certain responsibilities that they will be required to perform and we are confident they will perform them superbly. The Gulas clan is well respected within the giant community and if our envoys make a good impression, we can be assured of a long and lasting partnership with them. During the rest of your enjoyment tonight, if you happen to see Mr. Potter or Miss Chang, please wish them the best of luck. By the way, they are here together, so if you see one, you will probably see the other. Enjoy the rest of the evening."

Harry looked over and saw Ron and Hermione not looking like they were really enjoying the evening. He told Cho he was going to talk to them for a minute. When he got there he said, "Ron, would you be good enough to let me dance with your beautiful date tonight?"



"C'mon Harry its Hermione, go ahead," Ron replied.

Harry turned to Hermione and said in French, "Hermione. Would you do me the honor of being my partner for this dance?"

Hermione replied, "I'd love to Harry."

They heard, "Mental those two."

Harry and Hermione danced the next couple songs, talking and enjoying each other's company. Harry returned Hermione to Ron and went back to Cho. Harry and Cho talked to many people that night. While sitting at the table with Cho's friends, Harry felt a tap. "Miss Chang, may I borrow 'Arry for a few minutes please?"

Fleur pulled Harry to the dance floor. "Think you can pretend that you are wanting to dance with me 'Arry?"

"I won't have to pretend Fleur," Harry answered in French and began to dance with her. Since they had been practicing for so long, they knew each other's moves. During some moves, Harry could tell that many people were just watching them. Harry really felt like he and Fleur moved better than any person Harry had ever dance with.

"So, envoy to the giants. Quite an exciting year for you 'Arry," Fleur said smiling.

"I can't wait to meet them. This has been a great year so far."

At the end of the second dance, Harry kissed Fleur on both cheeks and walked back to Cho who said, "If I didn't know better, I would swear that you two were in love."

"But, the good thing is that you do know better, it was just a dance," Harry said and then kissed her. Harry had been asked to dance by a few of the Beauxbatons teachers and some of the older students. Cho had been very understanding about this and not given Harry a hard time at all. During the entire ball, Harry had only seen and spoken to Ron or Hermione for a few minutes. He felt a little guilty about this but tonight had to be about his date.

When the ball was really winding down, Harry was taking his time walking Cho back to her common room when she stopped, looked into his eyes for a second and calmly said, "Want to break a rule and stay out all night?"

## Chapter 9

"What ever would you have in mind Miss Chang?" Harry asked with a smile, hoping it was what he was thinking about.

"Well, if you could think of somewhere we could go to be alone, maybe we could dance a little more?" Cho said without any embarrassment.

"I can probably think of someplace, but I can't promise music. You know, I think you're being a bad influence on me miss head-girl."

"If you're complaining, we can keep going to my common room," Cho said slyly.

"Forget I ever said anything," Harry said quickly. They maneuvered to the hidden staircase and when no one was looking, went through. Surprisingly, the fire was going and everything seemed setup as if the couple had been expected to come here. Harry was really going to have to thank Dobby or Winky for this.

"This was a great night Harry. Seeing how you danced with other people made me realize how lucky I am. I really can't believe that you want to be with me," Cho said sounding very honest.

"Cho!" said Harry totally amazed at what she had said. "I wake up every day wondering why you want to be with me. You've had to know for a long time that I was crazy about you. I mean I couldn't even talk straight at first when I was near you."

"I always thought you were cute and special, but have come to realize just how special you are." She pushed him onto the couch and started kissing him. Before long, they were on the soft rug in front of the fire, still holding each other tightly. Harry couldn't believe how happy he was and then Cho lifted herself off of him and said, "You don't have to answer but I want you to know that I think I love you Harry Potter," she said kissing him right after saying this.

Harry's mind raced. He remembered how he felt with R.J. and what he was feeling for Cho was good but somehow different. R.J. had a deep connection with Harry but he never had the chance to tell her that he loved her. In R.J.'s note, she had confessed that she did in fact love Harry and he realized that he too had been in love with her. The connection with Cho didn't seem that deep yet, even though Harry knew he cared greatly for Cho and had a crush on her for over two years. He thought that the feelings he had for her must be love and didn't want to regret not telling her so if something were to happen. Harry let the kiss go on for a minute and then pushed her up and said, "I think you would need to be blind to not know that I love you too Cho Chang."

She fell back into him and the next time he saw her face, there were a few tears on it. She sat up on him and looked into his eyes for a moment and then removed her robe. She then pulled the top off over her head and lay back onto him. He kissed her deeply and slowly rubbed her back. He didn't want this to happen too fast. While she was still lying on top of him, he undid her bra and slipped it over her shoulders. She kissed his forehead and sat up, letting the bra fall down. Looking up into her eyes, he said, "My god you're beautiful," and then pulled her back down.

Harry rolled Cho over and held her hands above her head while he kissed the side of her neck and her shoulders. Then, while kissing her deeply, he slid her skirt off until she was left with only her panties. He sat up and removed his robe and shirt while looking into her eyes. Lying back down, he pulled her close and enjoyed the feeling of her skin next to his. She rolled over on top of him and was kissing him deeply. She sat up on him and smiled and then stood up, pulling him up with her. She grasped her panties and pulled them down and he quickly removed his pants and underwear.

They stood smiling at each other for a minute before lying back down keeping their bodies in contact with one another. Harry rolled her on top of him and continued to kiss her deeply, really enjoying rubbing the bare skin of her back and holding her close to him. He felt her take him in her hands and guide him to where she wanted him to be. Before moving much at all Harry asked quietly, "Cho, do you have protection?"

"Of course Harry. Madame Pomfrey is good for other things than just fixing you up," Cho replied.

It really didn't take long before Cho was breathing heavily and pulling him to her tightly. Harry felt her clutch him and he held her as tight as he could. When she started to let up, he rolled her over and continued to move. Harry propped himself up and looked deep into her eyes. When she opened her eyes to look at him, he smiled and said he loved her. This went on for quite some time that night. Harry could remember her moaning and clutching at him a few times before he felt that familiar feeling building within him.

They lay next to each other with Harry stroking her hair when Cho said, "That was amazing Harry. I don't even care where you learned that."

He kissed her forehead and said, "I told you earlier, you bring out the best in me."

They decided to try and get back to their rooms before other students started getting up. Harry was walking Cho to her common room and thought they had made it when they saw Professor Thielson, the headmistress of Ravenclaw near the Ravenclaw portrait.

"Would you like to tell me where you have been Miss Chang?" The professor asked.

Before Cho could answer, Harry said, "Forgive me Professor Thielson, it was totally my fault. I convinced Cho to stay out late with me. We were having such a good time at the ball I really didn't want her to leave. It is my fault and I accept full responsibility."

Cho spoke up next, "That's not true professor. I asked Harry if we could spend some time alone and he gave in to me. He's not to blame here, it was me."

Harry stepped in next, "Professor, please look at each of our histories. I have been in trouble for rule breaking more times than I care to count and Cho has been a model student. It is obvious who's to blame here."

Cho started to speak, but the professor stopped her. "Enough you two. I know all about your indiscretions Mr. Potter. And, I know that Miss Chang has been a model student. However, I also know some of the non-public things you have done Mr. Potter and can see the relationship you two have formed. If you assure me that you are heading directly to your room

I will allow Miss Chang to go directly to hers and we will never speak of this incident again. Do either of you have any issue with that?"

They both said, "No Professor," And headed to their rooms.

Harry didn't bother with going to bed and instead went and stood in the shower a while, amazed at how this evening had turned out.

The next morning at breakfast, Harry felt really tired but also really happy and was setting with Ron and Hermione who again didn't seem to be getting along great when Cho and her friends walked in. Harry said he would be right back and hurried over to their table. He came up behind Cho and whispered, "I'm sorry if you got into any trouble. I should have been more careful."

She turned and kissed him and said, "No trouble at all, it was worth anything that could have happened."

Cho's friends were giggling and one of them said, "Have a good night's sleep Harry?" and they giggled even more.

"You told them!" Harry gasped at Cho realizing she must have told them what happened.

"Of course I told them Harry; they're my friends," Cho said, "Just like you told yours."

"I haven't told them anything. Maybe I will now," Harry threatened, but not intending to do it.

"Fine by me. I don't care if your friends know." She kissed him on the cheek and said, "Go finish your breakfast. Remember, we have to see Professor Dumbledore before lunch."

Harry walked back to his seat totally confused but very happy. When he got back, Hermione asked, "Is everything ok?"

"Hermione, everything is just great." Harry replied feeling embarrassed but very happy. "Ron, do you know that you and Hermione are the best friends a guy could ever have?"

Ron looked at him strangely and said, "Man, you have really lost it."

"Hermione, do you know that you and Ron are the best friends a guy could have?"

"We love you too, thanks Harry," Hermione said with a smile. "Why are you acting so weird today?"

"Probably because he was out all night," Ron said smugly.

"Harry! Where were you at all night? Did anyone see you?" Hermione asked.

"I was with Cho, but we were in the castle the whole time. And yes, we got caught right outside of her common room. Her headmistress saw us. But, we didn't get into any trouble so my record is still clean this year." Harry said proudly.

"Where were you two at all night? What do you know about this Ron?" Hermione demanded.

"We were in the castle, spending time alone," Harry said, not wanting to just come out and say it.

"All I know is that he came sneaking up not too long before it was time to get up and rummaged around through his chest for a change of clothes and then left again," Ron said smiling that he knew a little more than Hermione.

"So, you were alone with Cho all night and this morning you're eyes look really tired and yet you're in a really good mood," Hermione's eyes got wide and Harry knew she figured out exactly what he and Cho were doing.

"Yes Hermione, I was alone with Cho, my eyes do feel tired and I'm in a great mood." Harry confirmed.

"Well I um... I'm glad you were safe. You were safe weren't you?" She asked again

"Yes we were safe, but thanks for asking."

"Wouldn't it have just been easier to say 'Harry were you shagging Cho all last night?'" Ron asked and was quickly hit by Hermione.

After first class, Harry met Cho and they went to the statue that led to Dumbledore's office. "Now what?" Cho asked not knowing how to get by the statue.

'Sizzling snails' Harry said to the statue and it moved, revealing the spiral staircase. At the top, they knocked on the door and heard "Please come in" from the other side. Cho had never been in here before and stood nervously looking at all the pictures on the walls.

"Please, sit down." Dumbledore said.

Cho still looked nervous and then Harry heard a rustling and felt Fawkes land on his knee. "Hello Fawkes!" Harry said and started stroking the great birds back.

"Fawkes has become quite attached to Harry Miss Chang. I can count on one hand the number of people he would come to like that. You both look tired. Nothing wrong I trust." Dumbledore asked.

Both Harry and Cho said, "No Professor," At the same time and then Cho continued. "Just tired from the dancing."

Dumbledore's eyes went between the two and they felt like he was reading them, but quickly they were twinkling again and he said, "Ah yes dancing. I am glad to see you two enjoying dancing." He paused for a moment and went on. "Now, about your duties as envoys. Have you both decided on your gifts yet?"

Cho answered first. "Yes Professor. My father has located what I wanted and I'll get it over the holiday."

Harry spoke up. "A friend is making my gift sir. I'm staying here over the holiday as usual but I'll need to go home one day to pick it. I don't think Hedwig could carry it." Cho looked confused.

"There won't be too many required duties for you to perform. Depending on how curious they are about the students, they may request some of your time to answer questions. I hope you will be available as much as your schedule allows. Miss Chang. As a small token of my gratitude for you accepting this responsibility, would you care to accompany Professor McGonagall and Harry to his next match, which is in Greece? Assuming that is acceptable to you Harry."

Harry nodded and Cho said, "I'd love to, thank you Professor."

"I have to go now Fawkes, see you later," Harry said to the bird and it flew back to his perch. They walked back down to the corridor. "Do you really want to come to my match Cho?" Harry asked.

"I'd love to. I've never seen a professional match before. Maybe I can keep Fleur from hugging you after the win." Cho said.

Over the next few days all the students talked about was how much they were looking forward to going to the next ball. Ron didn't seem excited about it though. "There should be a rule. One ball a year is all that should be allowed." Ron kept saying.

"Ron, if you really don't want to go say so. I'll tell you how it was when I get back." Hermione replied, making it clear SHE was going.

Harry went to Fleur's office on the night of his normal dancing lesson but for a different reason. "Arry. I didn't expect you any more. You don't need more lessons."

"Thanks Fleur. Actually I came to ask you another favor. I'm looking for a special Christmas gift. You're the only one I think could help me find something."

Fleur beamed at him. "Of course I will help. I said dancing was my passion, but shopping is my other passion. What did you have in mind?"

Harry described a piece of jewelry he had thought of. He wanted a red dragon brooch, but he didn't know where to look.

"Good choice 'Arry. Something with meaning for her. I will have some catalogs we can look through by our next meeting. But you will owe me a dance after that," Fleur said

By their next scheduled meeting, Fleur had four catalogs of jewelry mainly with oriental themes. After looking at designs for a while, Harry turned to one that almost seemed alive. He tried looking at others but kept coming back to that special one. If he hadn't been getting money from his Quidditch contract, he may have decided on something else since he didn't want to spend any of R.J.'s money and knew he needed the money his parents had left him. But he hadn't really spent much of his Quidditch money except on the sword and he really wanted this. "I want this one Fleur." Harry said.

"That is stunning 'Arry. You have good taste. Is the price ok for you?" Fleur asked unsure about his financial situation.

"I'll use my Quidditch money. I've only used it for my gift to the giants so far." Harry said.

"You don't need that money?" Fleur asked.

"No, I'm ok without it. I'm just playing because I love to play, not for any money." Harry said.

"Don't let the coach hear you say that or they will cheat you on your next contract. You know that if you play well, the next contract will be considerably more than a rookie contract." Fleur said.

Harry hadn't really thought of that before. That would be good but he would be fine with whatever they offered. "You should get someone to help you with those business things before contract time comes up. The teams will try to cheat the players so they can keep the money for themselves. You write a letter to Gringotts authorizing the transfer and I'll get this ordered for you. She will love it 'Arry."

"Thanks Fleur. What about that dance now?" They had a quick dance and then Harry returned to the common room to find Ron and Hermione talking in the corner. "Am I interrupting you two?"

"Course not," Ron said, "More dance lessons?"

"No. Fleur was helping me order something for Cho for Christmas. What are you two doing over the holiday?"

"I'm going to visit my parents like usual," Hermione said.

"My parents are going back to visit Charlie so I'm staying here. And you?" Ron said.

"Staying here of course. Have I ever done anything else?" Harry thought of a possibility. "Ron, I need to make a quick trip home over the holiday to pick up my present for the giants. Maybe you can come along if you want," Harry asked, getting excited.

"Yeah, that'd be great. Sure it has to be a quick trip? We should just go there for the holiday. No teachers, no rules. It'd be great."

"There's no way they'll let you go there for the break," Hermione said. "You'll be lucky to go pick up the present."

"She's right of course," Harry said. "You and I don't have a good history of behaving ourselves."

The date of Harry's next match came and Cho met up with him in Professor McGonagall's office. Fleur was already there. "Is she coming with us?" Fleur asked.

"Yes. Professor Dumbledore suggested it. I hope we win. Let's go," Harry said and they all stepped into the floo to go to the stadium. This lobby area didn't look as modern as the others Harry had been in. Tom the trainer met them and gave them their passes. "I have to go to the locker room now Cho. You'll come back here after the match. Bye."

"Good luck Harry. See you later." Cho said and watched him go through the door. She caught a glimpse of a tall girl with white hair and wondered if that was the Kristi she had been hearing about.

There was never much talking before a match. Everyone kept to themselves and the coach gave a few last minute instructions before they went to be announced. Harry was surprised with how many cheers there were for the French team and especially when his name was called. The last time they played away from France, there were more boos than cheers. Still, the crowd was much louder for the Greek team. Play started and they quickly fell into a routine. Harry was able to break up a couple sure scoring runs Greece had been able to form and the French chasers were playing great. Quickly, the score was 60 to 10 France. During one dive when Harry was going to break up a scoring run, he saw the snitch out of the corner of his eye and headed toward it. He thought he was just about to grab it and suddenly heard a bludger. He was able to dodge the bludger but the snitch had vanished. Greece called a timeout so Harry went to the ground near the coach.

"Ok, you are all playing great. If you beaters had been able to stop that bludger we would have won just then." Coach said.

Tom came running up saying "Harry. I just saw their coach screaming at their seeker about letting you get so close to the snitch while he was no where close. I think he's going to try and mark you this time. After a couple minutes, try a feint into one of the stand columns. If he's concentrating on staying close, he may not realize what you're doing."

Play started again and France scored a couple quick goals. It was now 140 to 20. Still close enough that if Greece got the snitch, they would win. Harry knew the other seeker was right on him, following his every move so he decided to try Tom's advice. He got into position and then glanced in the direction of the stands and took off toward it. The other seeker saw him glance and was holding right with him. Harry was going full speed with the other seeker next to him and at just the last second, pulled out to the left. He heard a loud thump followed by many gasps from the crowd and realized it had worked. Greece called a quick timeout to check on their seeker. Harry waited with his team near the coach. "Fantastic feint Harry. I didn't think you were going to be able to pull out." Tom exclaimed. The medics came out and stretchered their seeker away. He had a bad concussion and a broken arm. "Ok. Beaters keep the damn bludgers away from everyone, especially Harry. Harry don't get hit by a bludger. Let's go."

It didn't last that much longer. The Greek team was demoralized by the loss of their seeker. The score was 220 to 30 by the time Harry caught the snitch, so it ended 370 to 30. There were still quite a few cheers from the stands for the win. They went in to get cleaned up and Harry felt a little more comfortable when Kristi stripped down and came into the shower. Harry still washed up quickly and got dressed. While he was waiting for the rest of the team, Tim the captain came over. "3-0. I never thought this team would be 3-0. That's how many matches we won the entire last year. I had my doubts about you Potter but not any more. Not after that last match. I'm glad we have you."

"Thanks Tim. I really like playing for the team," Harry said feeling extremely happy that the captain of the team was glad Harry was playing. The rest of the team got ready and they walked out together. There was an even larger group of reporters yelling for them in the lobby area. Harry saw his friends standing near the side and saw the reporter he usually talked to in their same area. He made his way to them ignoring all the other calls for him.

"Hello Harry. Thanks for coming over," the reporter said.

"Hello Ms. Mishmas," Harry responded.



The interview lasted for just a couple minutes and then Harry pushed over to them. Fleur was closest so she hugged him first. "You won for France again! Undefeated." She kissed him on each cheek before Cho came over.

She stepped in front of Fleur and gave him a big hug and kiss on the lips. "You played great Harry. That was an amazing feint. The whole crowd thought you both were going to hit the stand."

"Hey Schoolboy who's your new friend?" Harry heard Kristi say as she came up behind him and mussed up his hair.

"Hi Kristi. This is my girlfriend Cho, she's a seeker on a team at school and she's really good. Cho this is Kristi Belig our best chaser." The two girls didn't say anything.

"Any chance you'll make the celebration tonight. You really should see the club sometime," Kristi asked Harry.

"Can't this time. I need to get back to school," Harry said.

"Way to plough that seeker today," Kristi said holding out her fist.

Harry hit her fist with his and said, "See you at practice." Then he turned and hugged Cho again and said, "Let's go home."

"Fleur. What has that reporter been writing about me? I've never seen the paper she writes for and couldn't read it anyway."

"Only good things 'Arry. I follow her articles to make sure she doesn't make things up. Sometime I'll read them to you," Fleur said.

"As long as she's not making things up or twisting my words, that's all I care about. Thanks."

"You would be surprised how famous you are in France now, especially in Paris. You would be mobbed going to that club Kristi talked about. It is one of the most popular places to go since the team hangs out there. Most people wait hours to get in, but you could just walk right by them." Fleur told him.

He and Cho left them and she walked with him to put his stuff in his room. "You really played great today Harry. I liked it when the crowd was calling your name and yelling for you."

"I don't hear any of that really. Mostly I just hear noise. I really try to block them out." Harry said.

"It was weird hearing all those reporters calling your name when you came out. Is it hard to ignore them?" She asked.

"Not at all. I really don't like reporters ever since those articles by Rita Skeeter. She made so much stuff up. Fleur pointed me to the one that I do talk to."

"I don't like that Kristi calling you schoolboy and messing with your hair. She doesn't seem like a nice person."

"Kristi's ok. She'd stop calling me that if I asked but it doesn't bother me."

"She wants you to go to that club with her you know. I still don't like thinking about her being naked around you."

"If I go to that club, I want you with me. And, I'd much rather see you naked," Harry said and kissed Cho before going into the common room. His friends were in there and Ron quickly asked. "So, did you win again?"

Cho answered. "Yep, you should have seen this feint he did. The other seeker ploughed into the stands and they had to carry him away. Then it was just a matter of time until the snitch came out again."

"You tell them, I'm going to put my stuff up." Harry said and went up to his room.

"You were there?" Hermione asked

"Yes. Professor Dumbledore suggested it," Cho said proudly, "You should have seen it after the match. All of these reporters were yelling at Harry, trying to get an interview. He just ignored them and walked to this one reporter who was waiting quietly and gave the whole interview in French."

Harry had come back down and said, "Then she met Kristi."

Ron's eyes lit up. "So, was there a fight?"

"No. I introduced them, but they didn't really talk."

"She just calls him 'schoolboy' and messes up his hair. Then she invited him to a club in Paris with me standing right there. I don't like her." Cho said angrily.

"I don't think I like her either Harry," Hermione said.

"Did she get naked?" Ron asked and both girls gave him a look that should have killed.

"I think I should walk Cho back to her house. I'll be back in a bit," Harry said and led Cho out. They got to the Ravenclaw common room and Cho found her friends and told the same story about the match and about Kristi. Harry wanted to leave since they were teasing him about Kristi and Cho wasn't getting happier. "Cho, I'm going to give you your present to take with you on holiday. I should have it in a couple days."

"I promise I won't open it until Christmas," Cho said.

"What are you doing for holiday Harry?" Kelly asked.

"Staying here of course. Same as every other year," he answered.

"You never went back to your Aunt and Uncle's?" She asked confused.

This shocked Harry until he realized they didn't know how much the Dursley's hated him. "No. I hope I never go back there. Let me just say that until I first came to Hogwarts. I was

locked in a cupboard beneath the stairs except when I was doing chores or going to school. They hate me. I'm not exaggerating at all. I would have stayed here the entire year if Dumbledore had let me." They all had a slight look of pity but Harry didn't care. "I'm going to head back down. Thanks for coming today Cho. See you all later."

At Harry's next scheduled time with Fleur, she had received the brooch. She had already taken it out and looked at it so when Harry got there she was very excited about it. "Harry! This is even better than I thought. She will love it. Look, if you stroke the dragon it will change color. You can match many outfits. Look at the eyes! They almost seem alive."

Fleur was right, Harry was really happy they had found this piece. Fleur helped him wrap it and then asked. "What did she think of Kristi?"

"I don't think Cho liked her at all. I think everyone's too hard on Kristi. She's not so bad. You know, when you came here for the tournament, most of the girls here didn't like you because all the guys fell all over themselves when you were around," Harry said.

"Really? I didn't notice the girls not liking me. I do remember that you didn't fall all over yourself around me."

"I was mad at you for calling me a little boy."

"Oh really! Look how it turned out. The little boy saved my little sister and has become my friend." Fleur said.

"I really appreciate your help with this gift. See you later." Harry went back to the common room and put the gift into his trunk. He had to remember to give it to Cho before she left on Friday.

Cho came over to the Gryffindor table Thursday morning and after saying hello to everyone, she whispered to Harry, "Want to you know -dance- before I leave tomorrow? I won't see you for over a week."

Harry looked at her and whispered back, "It's been so long, I don't know if I remember how to dance but I'll try if you want."

"Make sure you try hard. See you tonight," Cho whispered and left.

Ron and Hermione were looking at him. "What?" He asked.

"Ron and I were saying the other day that you and Cho just seem to be a good couple. It's like you just belong together," Hermione said.

"Maybe you think that but Ron keeps telling me I'm mental," Harry joked.

"I may think you're mental but I agree with Hermione." Ron said.

"Well thanks, but I've always thought you two were meant for each other. C'mon, we have to get to class." Harry got up and didn't notice the look Ron and Hermione gave each other.

Classes went by quickly and the three of them were having a nice time talking over supper when Cho came over and said, "Would you two mind if I drug Harry away so I can tell him a proper goodbye?" Harry blushed but both Ron and Hermione said that was no problem.

"Did you have to ask like that? I bet they know what we're going to do," Harry said.

"So? I told you I don't care if our friends know what we do." Cho replied. They stopped by the Gryffindor tower to get the cloak and her present. There were still a lot of students in the hall so it took them a while to find a place close enough to the stairs to slip under the cloak. Then they had to be careful not to run into anyone getting to the stairs. Once they reached the secret room and removed the cloak, Cho hugged him and said, "Oh, that was exciting. I'm going to miss you."

"I'll miss you too Cho. Are you going to tell your parents that we're dating? If you do, do you think it will bother your father?"

Cho smiled at him. "They've known for a while now. I'm pretty close to my family. As for my dad," she hesitated and Harry got a little worried. He really wanted Cho's father to like him. "I couldn't imagine my father being happier about me dating anyone. I have their full blessing."

"That's great. I was really worried about what they would think."

"Now we forget about everybody else for a while," Cho demanded and pulled Harry to the floor. They kissed and flirted around for a little bit but both knew they didn't have that much time so things progressed rather quickly. Harry really wanted this to last as long as he could so when he was on top of Cho and she really started to moan and breathe deeply, he tried to hold back and pulled her to him tightly. When he felt her relax, he slowly started to move again. Lightly he brushed the hair from her face and kissed her forehead and down to her lips. When he felt her move with him again he rolled her over so she was sitting on him.

Cho sat straight up and Harry was still amazed at how perfect she was. He ran his hands down her body and told her she was beautiful. It wasn't much longer until Cho started making the familiar sound that Harry wanted to hear. He sat up into her and gripped her tight. This time when she relaxed, he rolled back on top and when he felt like he couldn't last any longer, she once again began moaning. Harry lay on his side next to Cho who was on her back and he kept running a finger from her neck to her navel very lightly. He liked the way she trembled when it tickled her.

"I just can't believe how much I enjoy dancing with you. I will miss you while I'm gone," Cho said looking disappointed.

Harry kissed her and said, "I'll miss you too and will be waiting for you when you get back."

They dressed slowly and snuck back down the stairs. Harry said goodnight at her common room and snuck back to his own. He saw Ron and Hermione talking in the corner but didn't want to interrupt them so he headed for the stairs. His two friends saw him and called him over. "I don't want to bother you guys. I know Hermione's leaving tomorrow; you probably want to be alone."

"We'd tell you if we wanted to be alone right now," Ron said.

Harry looked at Hermione and she said, "I promise we would. How was your goodbye from Cho?"

Harry started blushing brightly and said, "It was very nice. She told me that she's already told her parents about dating me and her father actually likes the idea. Imagine somebody who's ok with their daughter dating me."

"What's she going to do after Hogwarts?" Ron asked. This subject bothered Harry since he would rarely see her after she was gone.

"She doesn't know for sure. Either work for her father's import/export business or work for the Ministry in the finance area. Have you two finally decided on your plan?"

"I think I'm going to take Moody's advice and become an Auror. They're not all scarred up like him," Ron said.

"I'm going to either be a teacher or researcher," Hermione said.

"What subjects Hermione? I mean you know everything," Harry said.

Hermione looked proud and answered. "Probably potions or charms. And you'll be an international Quidditch star."

"Maybe. I still haven't decided for sure. I like playing but that's not much of a career. I'm leaning toward being an unspeakable. I think I'd really like that. I may even see if I can do both since Quidditch doesn't take all that much time. I hope we can all stay close enough to get together a lot. We've only got one more year here. I don't know what will happen when Cho leaves. I hope we can make it work out." He thought for a minute and said, "You know Hermione, the more I write in that journal you gave me the more I really appreciate it. That was an excellent gift." Harry noticed Hermione get a very pleased look on her face.

The next morning Ron and Harry walked down to the train to see Hermione and Cho off onto the train. Cho gave Harry a big kiss and a hug but Harry didn't notice Hermione just give Ron a quick hug. Harry got over in time to say goodbye to Hermione. "All right, now we need to figure out how to have some fun." Harry said and Ron agreed.

When they got back to the castle, they saw Professor McGonagall talking to Professor Dumbledore. They walked up and Dumbledore said, "Ah, Harry just the person I wanted to speak to. Did you and Mr. Weasley get your friends onto the train?" They nodded and Dumbledore went on "Would tomorrow be ok for you to go home and get the present? I'd like to get it over with so we know where you should be each day."

"That's fine sir. Sir, I don't know exactly how big this is going to be or how much it will weigh. Would it be possible for Ron to come with me in case I need help carrying it? We would go directly there and pick it up and come directly back. If you are concerned, Dobby or Winky could come with us." Harry saw McGonagall give a little smile.

"As fate would have it Harry, Professor McGonagall and I were discussing that you have become quite responsible over the past year. You've had opportunities to attempt to go to clubs with your teammates and didn't even try. You also have so far avoided acting at all like the growing celebrity you are becoming. And, even when you stay out too late with Miss

Chang you attempt to take the blame. I think we can safely allow you and Mr. Weasley to retrieve the present. Please don't make me regret it."

"Thank you sir. I would like to thank Mr. Wilkins personally while I'm there. The gift may still be at his house anyway."

"That will be acceptable as well. You may leave tomorrow after 9:00am and make sure you are back by 3:00pm. And, try to stay out of trouble for the remainder of the holidays," Dumbledore said with a smile.

"Oh sir. Do you think it would be possible, if there is someone here to teach us that we try to get a head start on learning to Apparate?" Harry asked quickly.

"I will be here Mr. Potter and with the headmaster's permission would enjoy having a task to do," Professor McGonagall said.

"Of course, how could I refuse students wanting to learn?" Dumbledore agreed getting a familiar smile across his face.

"You know Fred and George will be upset if they hear that Dumbledore thinks your getting responsible," Ron joked, but then got a questioning look. "What made you ask about learning to Apparate?"

"I want to learn and I'd like to beat Hermione at something other than Defense. Are you in?" Harry asked hopefully.

"Sure. I'd like to get my license on the first try."

## Chapter 10

The next morning they were outside of McGonagall's office right at 9:00 waiting to go. She let them in and they quickly went to Veganos Castle. Stepping out into a large room in his home Harry said, "It seems strange being here again. I got used to it over the summer but after being gone for a few months it seems weird."

"I could get used to living here really quick," Ron said.

"Wonder if your parents would let you stay over the summer? If we learn to Apparate, you could go back easily. I think they'll keep my floo pretty restrictive until I graduate. You know, this place is big enough that you and Hermione could both stay here after graduate," Harry said.

"Who knows where Hermione will end up? She may decide to teach in America or something. But, I'll work on the parents about staying for a bit over the summer," Ron said. They looked out back and found a large object wrapped in heavy burlap. It had a note attached.

*Harry*

*If I'm not around when you come for this, it's here. It was a real challenge making it but enjoyable as well. After you present it to the recipient, I'd like to hear what they thought of it.*

*If you have time, come down and say hello before you head back to school.*

*Tom.*

"What's in the package?" Ron asked.

"Don't want to tell. I haven't told anyone, not even Cho. Let's walk down to the Wilkin's."

They walked down the long lane and came to the nice two-story home. Harry knocked on the door and their oldest granddaughter Katie answered. "Harry! What are you doing here? It's good to see you. C'mon in." They went in and Katie said, "Dad. Harry and his friend are here." The other daughters came out and said hello. Ron kind of blushed when Angie said hi.

"Harry. Glad you came down. It was Ron wasn't it?" Mr. Wilkins said and shook Ron's hand. "Would you like something to drink?"

"Just some water please. I just wanted to personally thank you for making the gift. It is going to be a surprise to everyone. I haven't told anybody about it yet. Not even Ron. Did Hedwig deliver the payment correctly?"

"Oh yes, I'd probably do work like that for free since I love it so much, but it will help out with supplies."

"Harry. Good to see you. Have you been practicing your French?" Mrs. Wilkins came in speaking French.

"Pleasure to see you Mrs. Wilkins. Yes I have been practicing. Some of the students are going to a ball at a French school and I'm sure it will be very useful there. I should have learned to read and write in French also."

"Well that's something for us to do this summer."

"Well, we are on a timetable to get back. Thanks again and it was good to see all of you."  
Harry and Ron both said goodbye and walked back to the castle

Back at the castle, Harry tried to lift the sword. He was able to, but if it had been down at the Wilkins, there is no way he could have carried it all the way back. They took a look around and traveled back to school.

"I didn't expect you two until just before 3:00," McGonagall said.

"It's more fun to explore here Professor," Harry joked, "May I leave the present in your office. If I take it up to my room, someone may open it."

"Of course Mr. Potter. You may set it in the corner. Are you giving any hints on what it is?"  
McGonagall asked.

"It's heavy Professor, that's what it is," Harry said smiling at her. "When would you be available for our tutoring?"

"How about 3:00? That will give us some time before supper."

Harry and Ron left and found Ginny in the common room. "Man, this should just be the Weasley tower and not Gryffindor tower," Harry joked.

She threw things and asked where he and Ron had been. "We went to Harry's house to pick something up," Ron said.

"Who went with you?" Ginny asked.

"No one, they let us go by ourselves. Said we were responsible enough," Ron replied.

"Fred and George won't like hearing that," Ginny joked.

"What are the twin's plans for the joke shop?" Harry asked.

"They've been researching new items and hope to open a shop over the summer. I don't know if it will be in Hogsmeade or Diagon Alley?"

"I would think Diagon Alley. Hogsmeade could be ok during term but Diagon Alley would get more traffic. They should ask Cho, she knows all about finance and stuff like that."

"Maybe they could get your girlfriend to work for them," Ron said.

"How hard was it for the twins to learn to Apparate?" Harry asked.



"It wasn't as bad as they thought it would be. You know for how smart Percy was, it took him two times to pass the test. Fred and George did it first time. Hopefully I won't take after Percy," Ron said.

Harry and Ron sat around the common room talking to Ginny until a little before three. Then they made their way to Professor McGonagall's office. "In a normal class, we would begin with reading some background and learning the fundamentals of Apparation. But I dare say you two wouldn't pay much attention to that part of the lesson to begin with. So, we can skip past that part and hopefully you will find it beneficial when it does come up in your lessons. First of all Apparation. is not normal magic. This is why some people just can't do it at all, and why we require a license to be able to do it. Imagine all the things that could go wrong when you are essentially moving your body in and out of time and space. The key to Apparation. is to concentrate on where you want to be and on yourself. In some ways it is like being an animagus Mr. Potter. You concentrate on how you want your body to be. Apparation. is concentration on where you want your body to be."

"Professor. That sounds kind of like 'Fliari Memeori', the message spell. You concentrate on a thought and who you want to receive that thought."

"Well yes Mr. Potter it is very similar."

"Yeah, but mine haven't quite worked yet, and I haven't practiced much," Ron added.

"Well Mr. Weasley, I would suggest you should work on that spell. It could help you with Apparation. Apparation. is not a verbal spell, it is strictly a thought."

"Professor, I have another question. I know people have apparated to places they've never been. How can they concentrate on a place if they've never been there?"

"Good question Mr. Potter. Since I have never been to your house, I couldn't Apparate by concentrating on Harry's house. However since I do know you live at Veganos Castle, I can Apparate to that location. If you wanted to Apparate to the Italian National Quidditch Stadium, you could even though you've never been there. If you were at home, you could even Apparate to say next to the tree behind the Three Broomsticks, since you do know that exact location. The other tricky part about Apparation. is confidence. When you try to Apparate and concentrate on the destination, you must be confident you can do it. It is called splinching when you have doubt that you will succeed."

"But, since we can't Apparate on Hogwarts grounds, how could we even attempt to practice?"

"Because, we establish one classroom where you still cannot Apparate in or out, but you can Apparate within. You could go from one corner to another, but not from the hall into the room. We maintain our security that way but do allow practice."

Ron asked. "How do you keep from Apparating on top of someone?"

"Excellent question. The spell will take care of that. It will either delay your arrival, which means you hang in limbo until the spot is clear, or it will adjust your arrival spot to prevent landing on someone or inside a wall. Mr. Potter could you please go to the other side of the room and demonstrate the 'Fliari Memeori' spell for me. Make it something pleasant please."

Harry went across the room and thought of Ron in bright green pajamas and issued the spell. A large silvery phoenix erupted from his wand and flew into Professor McGonagall who stifled a laugh. "Mr. Weasley, I hope that you do not really wear bright green pajamas."

"No Professor I don't. Harry, quit messing around," Ron yelled.

"That is a good sign Mr. Potter. What distance has that spell covered for you?"

"I'm not sure Professor. I have been outside the castle and sent a message to Cho who was in her common room before. I've never tried any further," Harry said.

"That's quite good. I would be interested in doing a test to see how far that spell would go for you. And, I would ask you don't tell many people about it. We don't want message spells flying around the school all day. Ok, we can begin some practice tomorrow. I will have my classroom setup for practice. Madame Pomfrey has been notified what we are doing in case either of you get splinched, she can repair the situation. I will see you both in my classroom at 3:00 tomorrow."

"Um. Professor. I have Quidditch Practice tomorrow, do you think It would be ok if Ron came along?" Harry asked and saw Ron's eye light up.

"As long as Dobby still goes and you return straight here. Remember, one misstep and it's back to no special treatment," McGonagall said in a tone where they knew she meant it.

On the way back to the common room Ron couldn't stop thanking Harry, "This will be great. I can't wait to watch practice. Can you introduce me to the team?"

"I'll try. Sometimes they don't talk to me much but we'll see. Wouldn't it be great if we can get this figured out before holiday is over. Hermione would be really disappointed she didn't stay with us."

"Maybe you'll be able to but not me. I can't even do that message spell. Ginny picked it up really quick but not me. But who cares, I'm going to see the French National Team practice."

"Don't get too excited, it's not much different than your practice. We just get yelled at more."

Once in the common room Ron went up to the dorm and Harry sat down next to Ginny. "Ginny can I ask you something? Do you get the feeling things aren't great between Ron and Hermione?"

She looked at him and said, "Yeah, I think something's wrong. Hermione hasn't said anything and I don't think they're mad at each other, but something just doesn't seem right."

"I don't want to ask Ron about it. If he wanted to talk, he would make some hints about issues or something. You know a while back, Hermione and I kind of got into it. I got irritated at something she said and then it got worse. We got over it, but it was the first time her and I had ever been upset at each other. She said she wished things could be back like they used to be. You know that Hermione, Cho and Cho's friends have all said I have a lot to learn about girls and I totally agree. I don't understand you girls at all. You don't know what I'd give to be able to know the things I'm supposed to do or say."

"I'd agree with them Harry. The only thing that saves you is that you always try to do what you really believe is right. Maybe from our point of view it isn't the right thing but we believe that you really think it is so we give you a break."

"If you and Hermione hadn't been such good of friends to me over these years, I don't know how things would have turned out."

Harry and Ron arrived at the practice pitch the next morning. The trainer came walking over. "Hello Harry. Who's this you've brought with you?"

"Hi Tom. This is my best friend Ron. He's the captain of the Quidditch team I was on at school. Most of the students are gone for the holiday and Ron's parents took a trip so I asked him to come with me. Is that going to be ok?"

"Since your house-elf friend has helped me out so much, I guess we can let you friend hang around. Just don't talk to the players or the coach. Ron, you can hang around my area until practice is done."

"Thanks Tom. If there's anything I can do to help, just let me know," Ron said and then followed Tom to the training area.

"So, did your little girlfriend leave you alone too?" Kristi asked, obviously overhearing Harry talking to Tom.

"Hi Kristi. Yeah, she went to her parents."

"And you're not going to see your family?" she asked.

"I don't have any family. I always stay at the school." Harry replied not bothered by the talk of family.

She looked at him for a second and said, "You really should come to Paris. You're getting to be very popular here. They would treat you well."

"I hope to be able to sometime. I come here all the time for practice and I've never seen the city," Harry said and the coach yelled for them to listen up.

Practice was shorter than normal. Coach wanted to let them out early for the holiday. He reminded them that their next match was against the league's best team; Bulgaria. That meant Harry would be playing against Viktor Krum. He looked forward to the match but couldn't see how they would win. Ron met him half way back and when Harry was telling Ron about Bulgaria, he could see Ron's eyes getting bigger looking at something behind Harry.

"Schoolboy. Aren't you going to introduce me to your friend?" Kristi said.

"I didn't want to bother you Kristi. This is my best friend Ron. He's captain of the Quidditch team I was on. He's a big fan of yours."

Ron stammered, "Nnnice to mmeet you."

"So, your parents are traveling and schoolboy here doesn't have a home to go to for the holidays. You should really come to Paris," Kristi said but Ron interrupted.

"Harry has a home, it's a castle."

Kristi looked at Harry strangely and he said, "I said I didn't have a family."

"My mistake. When you come to Paris, bring your friend along," Kristi said.

"Have a nice holiday." Harry called as she was walking away. She just raised her hand and kept walking.

"Man she's sexy!" Ron said. "When are we going to Paris?"

"C'mon we need to get back to the school."

Back at school, Ron couldn't stop talking about practice and about Kristi. Harry just sat with Ginny listening to Ron. "She invited us to Paris!" Ron kept saying and headed up to their dorm room for a minute.

Ginny asked Harry, "Why aren't you so excited about her inviting you to Paris?"

"She's just being friendly. Besides, if I go I want Cho to come with me, I wouldn't go without her."

Ginny smiled and said, "That's what I thought. Then why isn't Ron feeling the same way about Hermione?"

"You know, that's just Ron. He's always been like that. I think it annoys Hermione. He wouldn't want to go without her though." Harry yelled up the stairs, "Ron, we have that 3:00 appointment, remember?"

Ron quickly came down and they arrived at McGonagall's classroom on time. The desks had been move out of the way. She described the technique once again and then demonstrated Apparating across the room. Harry suddenly had a question, "Professor. You didn't use a wand. Why do people not believe in wandless magic and yet so many of them do it when they Apparate?"

"Because they're used to it. If they had been brought up with people doing wandless magic all the time, then it would be no big deal. However, they've been brought up that it is a myth and can't be done so they would be shocked to see it actually performed. It's all in their beliefs."

They did some small practice techniques and then tried to go across the room. On the second try, Ron actually vanished and reappeared in the exact same spot. "Excellent Mr. Weasley. You nearly had it." Ron looked extremely proud. It took Harry until the last try of the day to accomplish the same thing. Ron could do it consistently by then.

"Ron, you're going to get this way before me," Harry said.

"Finally something I may be better at," Ron sounded happy.

"There's already chess and anything to do with strategy," Harry added. Ron looked very satisfied.

By the third day of Apparation lessons, Ron could consistently go across the room ending up close to where he wanted. Harry had finally caught up to Ron. Once he got the technique down, he made up ground so they were both at the same level now.

The next morning was Christmas and Ron woke Harry up early to open presents. Ginny was waiting in the common room for them. The first thing Harry thought of was whether Cho was going to like her gift or not. Harry opened a large package and found a painting that looked very old. It was of his mother and father. He grabbed the card and read it.

*Harry.*

*I had this made from a picture of your parents. This style seems to fit with your new home and hopefully you can find a location to hang it. I'm sure R.J. would have approved.*

*S.*

Harry nearly cried. He sat there for a long time just looking at the painting. It looked like it could be very old. He opened the ones from Ron and Hermione and they were both very nice. He then saw a small rectangle package and opened it up. It looked like a large old coin. It was about three times the size of a galleon. On one side was a pressed outline of a dragon and on the other was a falcon. It had some oriental inscriptions but he couldn't read it. He read the note.

*Harry*

*This is a Chinese good luck charm. My father located it for me. I then had a charm put on it. Actually, you gave me the idea for the charm. You and your message spell. Hold the charm between your fingers and thumb and rub it in one hand.*

Harry did what the note said and at first there was nothing and then Harry had the mental picture of him and Cho kissing. He kept rubbing it and was just filled with the same feeling he had when he was actually kissing her.

*I have a few of my favorite memories charmed into it. When we can't be together, I hope you use it to remember how I feel about you.*

*Love*

*Cho*

*p.s. This won't work for anyone else so don't worry if Ron takes it from you.*

"What is that Harry?" Ron asked.

"It's a Chinese good luck charm from Cho." Harry said but didn't tell them any more. There was a card that he had missed. When he opened it, it was a magical picture of Paris with snow falling. It was really pretty. The writing on the bottom was very short.

*Schoolboy*

*You really need to see Paris in the winter.*

*Kristi*

Ron saw the picture over his shoulder and grabbed the card, "Cho's not going to like this!"

Ginny got the card from Ron and said, "He's right, she's not. You're going to tell her aren't you?"

"Wouldn't it be better if I just threw this away and forgot all about it?" Harry asked not knowing what to do.

"What are the chances of Ron keeping his mouth shut? If she found out from someone else, you'd be in big trouble," Ginny said knowing how her brother would be.

Harry looked at the picture. Paris was really pretty with the snow falling. He wished he and Cho could go there.

Harry grabbed a couple of presents he needed to deliver and headed to the kitchens. He found Dobby and Winky working. "I've got presents for you two." Harry announced. Dobby looked excited but Winky looked a little worried.

Dobby opened his and found two sets of really colorful socks that didn't match. His ears were twitching and he hugged Harry. "Sir, these are Dobby's favorite! How do you find such good ones?"

"I just keep my eye out for them Dobby," Harry said and watched Winky open hers. It was a scarf in the same color as the dress she usually wore. She didn't seem as excited as Dobby. "Is it the wrong color Winky? I could get something else?"

"Oh no sir. Winky is just not used to getting clothes. It is normally a bad thing for us to get clothes. Winky is liking the color very much sir."

"Just remember, you're both free elves. If I give you clothes, it's just a gift. If you tell me something else you like, next year I can get that instead," Harry said.

Winky perked up a bit and wrapped the scarf around her. "No sir, clothes will be fine with Winky. Thank you." The other elves didn't look as shocked as they had in the past when clothes were mentioned. Harry sat there for a minute watching them talk to each other. He pulled out the charm and rubbed it. He had the vision of Cho lying with him saying she loved him. This was the memory of the first time she said that. Harry vowed to keep the charm with him all the time.

At the next Apparation test, McGonagall announced that since they were doing so well, the next lesson would be in Hogsmeade so they could cover greater distances. Harry and Ron were really excited about this. "Oh, this is going to irritate Hermione so much!" Harry said and then thought of a question, "Ron, what did Hermione get you? I didn't see it."

"Oh, the usual. She got me a book of historic battles," Ron answered not overly excited.

"And... What did you get her?" Harry felt like he was fishing.

"Ginny helped me pick out a sweater for her. I think she'll like it. I can't wait to try Apparating in Hogsmeade," Ron went on.

The next day they traveled to Hogsmeade with Professor McGonagall. They were at the far end, near the cave where Snuffles stayed sometimes. "Ok, try to Apparate in front of the Three Broomsticks. At this time of day there won't be many people around."

Ron went first and disappeared. Harry went next hoping to get close. He ended up right next to Ron, standing in front of the pub. They gave each other a high five and saw McGonagall appear next to them. She was very pleased and made them go back and forth a few times before stating, "You are both doing exceptionally well. I think tomorrow we will do an even further test. You should be proud of yourselves. Let's meet here tomorrow."

They went back to the school and were talking about where they would have to do it next time. "Maybe into the next town, it's over 20km away," Ron said.

"Maybe, that would be a good test since I've never been there," Harry added.

When they rounded the corner of the Three Broomsticks, they were surprised to find not Professor McGonagall, but Professor Dumbledore waiting. "Right on time I see," he said.

"Hello Professor, we weren't expecting to see you?" Harry said.

"Professor McGonagall and I decided to give you the official Apparation test today. If you successfully complete this, you will be licensed to Apparate as of today. I dare say you won't be able to use the new ability since you will be returning to Hogwarts, but you will be licensed."

Ron and Harry looked at each other very excitedly. Dumbledore went on. "Professor McGonagall is already at the destination just in case there are any complications. You both know of the location but we are going to be very specific about where you need to end up. The destination is Veganos Castle." Ron and Harry looked even more shocked. "We have removed certain protections on the location for the duration of this test. I want Mr. Weasley to arrive in the kitchen, in front of the oven. Harry, I want you to arrive next to the table. Do you both understand?" They nodded. "After you have both gone, I will follow you. Mr. Weasley you may go first."

Ron looked nervous but concentrated and fully disappeared. "Harry. I took the liberty of sending the painting Sirius gave you ahead with Professor McGonagall. She has good taste and could suggest a location. Whenever you are ready." Harry felt really nervous but tried to calm down and concentrate. The next thing he knew, he was standing next to his kitchen table looking at a very happy Ron and Professor McGonagall.

Dumbledore appeared a few seconds later. "Congratulations both of you. You are now licensed to Apparate Since the remaining term in your Charms class was teaching this skill, you can both have that as a free period."

"All right!" Ron exclaimed.

Professor McGonagall suggested hanging the painting above the large fireplace they used to travel by floo. There was already a picture there, but it was a landscape painting so Harry didn't feel bad moving that one. He didn't want to re-arrange much of R.J.'s stuff. Winky had come and fixed them all a meal before they headed back. Ron and Harry ended up back in Hogsmeade exactly where they had planned and went back to the school with Dumbledore and McGonagall.

"Harry. We will come up with some new protections for your home that will allow you to let specific people Apparate in and out. We still cannot let it be fully accessible, I hope you understand. I have spoken to a friend of yours, a Mr. Fletcher and he is going to help arrange security on the floo network," Dumbledore said.

Harry and Ron didn't tell Ginny because they didn't want Hermione to find out until Charms started. They just goofed around for the remaining couple of days, spending time with Hagrid and Ginny. On the day the train was due back, they went down to meet it. Harry couldn't wait to see Cho. Harry was standing next to Ron when Hermione came running over. She gave Harry a quick hug and then gave Ron only a slightly longer one. "Did you two behave yourselves?" she asked Ron.

"Even better than that Hermione," Ron answered making Hermione get a confused look.

Then Cho came running up giving Harry a long tight hug and a kiss. This is how a greeting should be Harry thought. "Harry! That brooch was amazing. I don't know how you found something like that. I love it."

"It couldn't be better than the charm you gave me. I'm never going anywhere without it." Harry responded.

"C'mon you two, let's get up to the school," Ron said.

"So, what did you two do all the time? How many points did Gryffindor lose?" Cho joked.

"We didn't get into any trouble at all. In fact, both Professor McGonagall and Professor Dumbledore said they were proud of us. They even let Ron come with me to pick up the present for the giants and to practice," Harry said smugly.

"They let you two go off by yourselves? What were they thinking?" Hermione asked, seriously.

"They were thinking we would be responsible and not get into any trouble. And they were right. Even when Kristi tried to get us to come to Paris," Ron said and then wished he hadn't said the last part.

"She did, did she?" Cho said immediately getting an attitude.

"And we came straight back to the school. Ginny can vouch for us. I really missed you Cho," Harry said and squeezed her hand. Harry went off with Cho to her common room and listened to everyone's stories. Harry felt a bit jealous at all the good times the other student's had with



their families. He heard Cho tell everyone about the brooch and about how her father kept showing it to his extended family.

He decided to let them all talk and to go back to his common room. He went over to Ron, Hermione and Ginny. Hermione said, "Let's see this good luck charm Harry." He handed it to her.

She looked at it closely and said, "Do you think it works?"

"I know it works. She had it charmed so that when I rub it, I can picture certain memories she has. Said the message spell gave her the idea. I can see us kissing and things like that. It's really amazing. She put a lot of thought into it," Harry said. Hermione looked a little sad. "You should see what Sirius got me. He had a picture of my parents made into a large painting. It looks really old and fits perfect above my fireplace."

"How do you know it fits there? You wouldn't have had the present when you and Ron went to your home," Hermione looked confused.

"That's... um a surprise. Ron and I can't say anything. You'll find out Monday," Harry stated.

"They've been acting weird, went off to some appointment every day at 3:00," Ginny told Hermione.

"Perfectly within the rules. We were model students," Ron spoke up.

"I can't stand talk like this from a Weasley. What would the twins think?" Dean said, overhearing Ron's comments.

Harry sat with the Ravenclaws at lunch the next day. "Want to go for a walk after lunch?" Cho asked him.

"Sure. Um, I forgot to tell you something. Kristi sent me a Christmas card. I can show it to you later if you want. I didn't want to keep it from you," Harry said dreading her reaction.

Cho's friend Kelly overheard this, "See Cho. I told you not to worry about him. Harry's one of the good ones. So, did the card tell you all the things she wanted to do to you?"

"Kelly!" Cho said, "I want to see this card."

"Me too, go get it," Kelly demanded.

Cho nodded so Harry ran up to his room and brought the card back. They were sitting in the great hall when he got back. He handed the card to Cho who looked at it with Kelly. "She's trying to be subtle with you," Kelly said, "What she really means is why don't you come to my place and show me your broomstick."

Harry was shocked but Cho didn't yell at her, "Kelly's right, she's trying to make you think she just wants to be friendly. Paris is really pretty though." Cho said and then continued. "You're throwing this away now aren't you?" Cho said more as a statement than a question. "I heard Hermione saying that you start Apparation tomorrow. Are you excited? I was really glad to pass the test."

"I'm not taking the class," Harry said flatly.

"What? You don't want to learn?" Cho asked disappointed. "It would be easier for us to get to each other."

"I didn't say I didn't want to learn, I only said I'm not taking the class," Harry replied slyly.

"Spit it out schoolboy," Kelly said.

"I told you that Ron and I had been model students over the holiday. We got private lessons from McGonagall. We've already passed our test. McGonagall and Dumbledore went with us to my home for a meal and then came back to Hogsmeade. We have a free period while the others are learning. Don't tell Hermione, she's going to be jealous that she didn't stay."

"Maybe staying around over the holidays wouldn't be such a bad thing," Kelly said.

"That's great Harry, I'm really proud of you. I say a little dancing is in order. Don't you agree?" Cho said with a grin.

Before Harry could say anything, Kelly said, "I definitely agree."

Harry just started blushing. He met Cho that night and they made love and were talking afterwards. "Cho. What do you think will happen after you graduate?"

"What do you mean Harry? We'll see each other as much as we can."

"But, you'll be out in the real world with new and exciting things to do. I'll still be in school. Why would you want to wait around for some schoolboy?"

"Harry. You can't really think that. I'd wait forever. Besides, why would you want to be with someone like me when you're an international Quidditch star? You could be with models and celebrities."

Harry didn't think that was true. "I just worry about not being able to see you much. I missed you enough over the holiday."

"We have a while before we even have to think about it. I have confidence we can figure something out." Cho said, and Harry really hoped so.

## **Chapter 11**

At breakfast, when Hermione asked if they were excited about Apparation lessons, Ron said, "Not really. I think I'm going to skip out. How about you Harry?"

"I'm with Ron. I don't feel like going either," he added.

"You two can't be serious. We've been waiting years for this. There's no way you're going to miss this, I know you both too well," Hermione said exasperated.

They started walking Hermione to class and then Ron said, "This way to the common room Harry. How about some Wizard Chess?"

"I'm right behind you Ron. Tell us how the lesson went Hermione," Harry said and they ran off down the corridor. Hermione stood there dumbstruck and went on to class really mad at the two of them.

Other students noticed Ron and Harry missing and asked Hermione about it. She just said she didn't know where they were. Professor Binns made a quick announcement, "I see a couple Gryffindors are missing. It came as quite a surprise to me when I found out this morning that Mr. Weasley and Mr. Potter have already passed their Apparation test and won't be attending the classes this term." The Professor then went on and started the lesson. Hermione's mind was racing and she couldn't wait until class ended to find out more. She found Ron and Harry playing chess in the common room.

"When did you two learn to Apparate? Why didn't you tell me?"

"We learned over the holiday. It was either find some way to get into trouble or learn something. I guess you're rubbing off on us," Ron said smugly.

"You told us to behave and study Hermione. We were just taking your advice," Harry added.

"Now I have to go through this without you two. I hate classes when you aren't there. I should have stayed here," she said sounding really sad.

"Don't worry Hermione; it was easier than we thought. Ron caught on really quick but I finally caught up to him."

After the next Quidditch practice, Harry quickly caught up to the coach. "Coach. I have some friends who know Viktor Krum and would be surprised if they could come to the match. Would I be able to get six passes this time instead of two?"

"Sorry Harry. All I can get you is four. This match is a big draw," Coach said.

Harry was unhappy and trying to think of which of his friends he would have to disappoint when he heard, "You can have two of mine schoolboy." It was Kristi.

"Really? Are you sure? Won't you need them?" Harry said.

"I don't invite many people. You're the reason the match is a big draw anyway. Here," she said handing him two passes.

"Thanks Kristi, I owe you. I don't believe I'm the reason for the draw though."

"That's because you stay locked inside that school of yours and only read that little Daily Prophet. You have no idea how France has taken to you. You really should let me show you sometime. You could even bring that little girlfriend of yours."

"I may take you up on that. The picture of Paris you sent me looked beautiful."

"Didn't get you into any trouble did it?"

"No, of course not. Thanks again for the passes. See you at the match," Harry left feeling happy again. He knew Kristi was nicer than she let on. Harry asked Professor McGonagall if it was ok he invited some friends to the Bulgaria match since she would be there too. She agreed when he told her it who it would be.

Harry found Cho with her friends and asked her to talk for a minute. "Cho would you and Kelly like to come to the match against Bulgaria this week? They're the best team in the league so we might not win but it'll be the biggest match of the year."

"That would be great. I know you'll do well. I'll ask Kelly but I'm sure she'll come," Cho said.

Harry headed back to the common room and went over to ask the rest. "If you guys aren't doing anything important this weekend, and if Ron could cancel early morning Quidditch practice, do you want to come to my match with Bulgaria? I've got enough passes for you three."

Ron lit up. "Really? That's one of the biggest matches of the year. To heck with practice."

Hermione and Ginny really liked the idea also. "Is Cho coming?" Hermione asked.

"Of course she is. And her friend Kelly," Harry responded.

"How did you get so many passes?" Ginny asked. "Do they just give you how ever many you want?"

"No, I only get four but Kristi gave me two of hers. So, Ron you and Hermione are going as Kristi's guests," Harry said.

"I have no problem with that." Ron joked.

During the week, Professor Dumbledore called Cho and Harry to his office. "We would like you to meet the giants this Sunday. They have been here for a few weeks and are now settled in."

"They've been here for weeks? I should have been spending more time with Hagrid," Harry exclaimed.

Cho seemed shocked but Dumbledore just smiled and said, "Yes, now I'm sure you wish you had. I would imagine you would be on first name basis with them by now. However, I am glad it worked out this way. The first meeting is important and we want it to go well. The leader's name is Duram and his partner is Belissa. They have settled into an area of the forest that I'm sorry to say you both know of. If you would like, Hagrid can escort you but I think you know the way Harry. That choice is up to you two. Harry, I have a couple of comments aimed mainly at you. Miss Chang, please don't think I am being sexist with my comments but it is the way of the giants. Harry there has been an increasing number of attacks involving giants. Some were giants against giants and some were against small wizarding communities. We think Voldemort is directing these. Duram may well ask you what your thoughts are on these and what you would like to do. Be honest. Tell him truthfully what you think if this subject comes up. You won't be able to hide your true feelings from him. Miss Chang, in these conversations, please do not try to stop Harry from saying something. Duram would take it as an insult. Now, on a lighter note, this week is Bulgaria isn't it? What do you think your chances are?"

"Not very good sir. They are the best in the league right now and Viktor is an amazing seeker."

"True. But, when has it mattered to you that your chances weren't very good?" Dumbledore said.

Harry and Cho left. "I'm glad we finally get to meet them," Harry said sounding excited.

"I'm a bit nervous. What if I say something wrong?" she said.

"Then you say something wrong. Who cares? They will be able to tell what kind of person you are and everything will be fine. I say if you want to interrupt me, then interrupt me. The giants should know that your opinion is as important as mine. Oh yeah. Ron, Hermione and Ginny are coming to the match Saturday as well."

"That's good, then I'll have more than Fleur to talk to. If you had found out the giants were already here, would you really have tried to meet them already?" Cho asked.

"Probably. It's my own fault for not going to see Hagrid more over holiday."

Saturday came and everyone was excited about going to the match. Harry was more nervous than normal because he expected to lose his first match. They arrived in the lobby and Cho gave Harry a hug before going out to their seats. They had nice front row seats in one of the towers.

Coach immediately started talking to him, "Now Harry, Krum's a really aggressive player. You need to stay close but don't fall for his feints, he's the best at that. Don't let him rattle you either." He was still talking when Tom announced that someone was here to see Harry.

In walked a man Harry recognized from the world cup. It was the Bulgarian Minister. The one Ludo Bagman thought didn't speak English. "Harry Potter, we met at the last World Cup."

"Yes Minister, I remember. It's good to see you again sir," Harry said shaking his hand.

"I wanted to wish you good luck today. You'll need it of course since we seem to be having a record year," the minister said loudly.

"Yes sir you are. I'm sure you realize we are going to try our best to put a dent in that record," Harry said.

The minister laughed loudly and said, "I'm sure you will and wouldn't expect anything less. I must be going. Good Luck to you all."

They went out and waited for Bulgaria to be announced. There were many boos until Viktor Krum was announced and everyone clapped for him. Then it was their turn and the crowd was very loud for all of them. After Harry was announced, he went to the middle of the pitch to wait. He turned and saw Viktor coming over. Viktor pulled up next to Harry and said, "Good Luck today Harry. You have been playing very well."

"Good luck today too Viktor. I wish we were playing as well as your team. You've been amazing."

"See you after the match," Viktor said and extended his fist. Harry hit Viktor's fist with his own and went to the rest of his team.

"What was that all about Potter?" The coach yelled.

"Just wishing each other good luck sir. I know Viktor, remember," Harry said.

"Of course, just be friends *after* the match, right now he's the enemy," Coach yelled and told everyone to get into position. The match wasn't close for very long. France was really outplayed by Bulgaria. Harry had managed to break up some runs, but Viktor broke up far more. By the time the first timeout was called, it was 90-20 Bulgaria.

"Damn they're good," one of the French beaters said. "They're like a machine," the other one added.

"Come on, we're still in it. We need the snitch to come out quick and for Potter to get to it first," Coach yelled. Play started again and it continued looking bad. It was 150-30 when Krum made a sudden dive. Harry was right with him but couldn't see any snitch. At the last second, both Viktor and Harry pulled out of the dive together. It had been a feint but at least Harry didn't crash. At 180-30, Harry did see the snitch and went after it. Viktor had been a bit off to the side so Harry couldn't tell if he had seen it as well. Harry got right behind the snitch and was ready to grab it when he felt someone collide with his broom. Viktor had fouled him to keep him from grabbing the snitch. Harry could hear many boos from the crowd. He looked at Viktor who just nodded at him and Harry understood. A ten point penalty is better than a 150 point catch. It was a smart move.

Soon after play resumed, it got to be 210-40 when Harry knew he had to do something. He darted off toward the stand column and felt Viktor right beside him. He was going full speed and just before hitting the stand, pulled straight up. He heard gasps from the crowd and didn't see his friends start to lean over to see what happened. They jumped back when Harry came streaking straight up in front of them. Viktor had pulled out to the side and was coming back towards Harry. As soon as they were near each other, Viktor went into a dive. He was aiming at the ground right in front of the opposite stands. Harry was matching him and once again

pulled out at the last second with Viktor going in the opposite direction. They he saw the snitch again and darted toward it. Viktor had seen it too and was also racing for it from the opposite direction. It was going to be close; a turn by the snitch one way or the other would be the difference. Harry concentrated only on the snitch, reached out to grab it and felt a terrible pain when Viktor collided with him. They were both thrown from their brooms and hit the ground hard. Harry could tell that at least his arm was broken, but he felt something in his other hand and opened it to see the snitch. The crowd was cheering and he heard someone call 'Medics'. Soon, he was being stretchered but before they took him off, he yelled at them to take him over to Viktor who was also on a stretcher. "Ok Viktor?" Harry yelled.

"Sure. Broken wrist and leg. You?" Krum responded.

"At least arm. Good game, you were just too good for us," Harry said.

"We'll meet again in the playoffs," Viktor said and stuck out his fist which Harry hit with his own before being hauled off.

Harry's feelings were mixed. He was happy about catching the snitch but upset they had lost the match. The medics finished with him quickly. His collar bone and arm were broken but they set them and had him taped up with his arm in a sling when they took him into the locker room. He expected everyone to be really upset. Coach immediately said, "I've never seen flying like that before. You were every bit as good as Krum."

"What does it matter, we lost," Harry said, sounding dejected.

"Yes we lost, but by 30 points to the best team in the league. We were expected to lose by two hundred. If we had only scored four more times, we would have beaten them. What did you say to Krum when you were on the stretcher?"

"I asked if he was ok. He said we'll meet again in the playoffs," Harry said and the rest of the team added, "Damn straight we will." Harry didn't change since he was so taped up and just waited for the rest of the team to get ready. They seemed too happy to Harry. When they opened the door, Harry couldn't believe how loud things got. Everyone was cheering and yelling out various names, mostly his. He couldn't see the reporter he usually talked to so was just heading to the side where he saw Ron waving his arms. Then he saw the reporter standing near the wall. He walked over to her.

"Hello again Harry. Thanks for coming over. How's your arm?"

"My arm's fine, thanks."

"How does it feel to come so close to beating the number one team in the league?"

"All I know is that it feels bad to lose. I would rather be in Viktor's place and have missed the snitch but won the match."

"What was that with you and Viktor? What was said before and after the match?"

"We just said hello and good luck to each other before the match. Afterwards we just made sure the other was ok and he said we'll meet again in the playoffs. Viktor's an amazing seeker."

"Well, today you were every bit his equal. France would have tied if Viktor hadn't fouled you when you were about to catch the snitch. You still talk to him after that dirty play?"

"That wasn't dirty, it was smart. A ten point penalty is better than me catching the snitch. He could have fouled me really hard but didn't. He only hit my broom hard enough to keep me from catching the snitch. It was a very smart move. I need to remember it. I need to go to my friends now. Thank you."

He got close to his friends and Cho came up giving him a big hug asking if he was ok. "I'm fine Cho. I just want to go home."

They were all saying how great he played, but all Harry said back was, "We lost! I really want to go home." Then he heard.

"Don't be so down schoolboy. You were amazing today."

"Hey Kristi. I just wish we would have won," Harry said.

"You act like you've never lost before," she said.

"He hasn't!" Ginny added quickly.

"I did that once," Harry corrected her.

"You were unconscious, that doesn't count. Remember the Dementors came," Ginny replied back.

Kristi looked between Ginny and Harry taking in their little argument and continued, "You gave Krum all he could handle. I was worried you wouldn't try hard after that little greeting at the beginning. Guess I was wrong. See you at practice," she said hitting her fist to his and leaving.

Fleur hugged him next and saying how proud she was of his playing. "If it hadn't been for your catch, we would have lost 370-40. You saved our honor."

They were all trying to cheer him up but he said he was just tired and sore and wanted to clean up and rest. He did clean up and try to rest but couldn't. He went out of the common room and outside without his friends noticing and went to the side of the lake to his favorite spot. It had been sunny, so the snow had mostly melted. He had to get used to losing, it was going to happen a lot. Playing in this league was going to cause him more than this one loss. He was happy about catching the snitch and about Viktor being such a good sport. Viktor has managed to handle things well, hopefully he could.

He started playing catch with the squid, but he wasn't using his wand. Absently minded, he started sending multiple stones into the water and the squid responded with multiple tentacles sending them right back. Harry didn't know that Cho had gone looking for him and when Ron said he wasn't in his room she started checking other places and had finally found him. He was just lost in the actions of keeping six stones in the air with the squid that he didn't hear her come up. She had been standing there for a few minutes watching in confusion as the stones kept flying around. A couple of the stones were very large, looking more like small cars. "I thought I might find you here," Cho said. Harry was startled and almost didn't stop a



couple of the stones. He managed to get them all on the ground while Cho was saying, "Sorry, I didn't mean to startle you."

"That's ok Cho, I'm glad you're here. I just wanted to be alone at first, but I'd rather be with you," Harry said and she came over.

"What were you doing just then?" She asked.

"Playing catch with the squid, you've seen me do that."

"Not without your wand I hadn't. I hadn't seen you do anything without your wand since early last year, and you didn't talk to me about it." Cho hesitated but realized Harry wasn't going to talk about it. "I couldn't believe how you flew today. We all thought you were going to get ploughed a few times. That once when you came shooting up in front scared all of us. It's so weird hearing all those people call your name."

"I don't care as long as you're the one calling my name."

"Cheer up, remember tomorrow we go meet the giants. C'mon let's go back up," Cho said. Remembering the giants lifted his spirits.

He and Cho went back to the Gryffindor common room and listened to Ron, Ginny and Hermione tell their versions of the match. Harry had to laugh hearing the different versions. Ron started, "I think Viktor was just trying to mess with Harry by being nice at the beginning. Did you see him foul Harry."

Hermione countered, "He didn't foul Harry that hard. And, they talked after the match so it must not have been a big deal."

"Well Harry didn't fall for his feint like that git at the world cup did," Ron said.

Harry whispered to Cho and she quietly got up and walked out and up to her common room. He hung out with her and even ate at their table that night. He was feeling tired so went to bed right after supper.

He woke up and noticed Ron had already gone. His arm was still sore. He quickly had a shower and went to see Professor McGonagall. "Professor, I don't think I can carry the present to the giants. My arm is still pretty sore. Should I use magic?"

"No Mr. Potter, I don't think that would be a good idea. Giants resent us using magic. However," She thought for a moment, "I might suggest using wandless magic. Giants place a great deal of importance on history and legend. If you aren't using your wand, I don't think they would be offended at all. It may help with a good impression. Have you had breakfast?"

"No professor, I slept late and haven't gone down."

"Then it's safe to say you haven't seen this," she handed him the Daily Prophet.

*The Best of the Best*

*Those who were fortunate enough to have been at the France and Bulgaria Quidditch match yesterday will not soon forget the performance put on by obviously the best two seekers in the game. Viktor Krum and Harry Potter surprised everyone by greeting each other before the match. (There was a moving picture of them hitting fists) And then proceeding to put on an amazing demonstration of flying techniques. They each initiated feints that would have ploughed most other seekers but didn't cause each other much problem. Krum did commit a foul to keep Potter from grabbing the snitch that would have tied the match. Both seekers had nothing but determination when going after the snitch. Neither of them slowed down and ended up in a tremendous crash that had them both on the ground injured. Somehow Potter managed to keep hold of the snitch and the 150 points went to France. Even after such a hard fought match, these two competitors congratulated each other from their stretchers. (There was the second picture of them hitting fists from the stretchers)*

*I can't imagine seeing a better battle between seekers. France has obviously silenced the critics who didn't approve of selecting Potter as their seeker. Why couldn't England have gotten him instead?*

*This reporter overheard Potter telling a fellow reporter that he would rather have been the one to miss the snitch if France had won. Why can't all the other Quidditch players look to Krum and Potter and play with as much heart and sportsmanship?*

"I got lucky, that's all. If the snitch had swerved towards him, he would have caught it." Harry said.

"Everything comes down to little things Mr. Potter. A wrong choice here or there can change everything. Ah, here comes Miss Chang and Professor Dumbledore."

Harry turned around to see Cho carrying a medium sized box. He smiled at her. "Are you ready Harry?" Dumbledore asked.

"Yes sir, but I don't think I can carry the present. Professor McGonagall suggested I use wandless magic to get it there."

"That sounds like an excellent idea to me. We won't mention to the other students how it is following you though will we?"

## **Chapter 12**

Harry and Cho both said, "No sir." They headed downstairs with the package hovering just behind Harry. When they got to the edge of the forest Harry said, "Hagrid, if it's ok with you, I'd like us to do this alone. I don't want them to think we need to be led somewhere."

Hagrid beamed at him and said, "Knew you'd say that I did."

Harry and Cho headed into the forest. "Are you nervous?" Harry asked Cho.

"Not as much as I thought I'd be," she replied.

"Ok, before we get there I want you to know that I love you." Harry said and kept walking.

"Well then stop and kiss me," she demanded. Harry followed directions and kissed her. She quickly said, "I love you to Harry." And they continued through the forest. They turned the final corner and came to face a Giant for the first time.

If Harry thought Hagrid was big, he was not even half the size of a full giant. It had to be at least six meters tall and built solid. In a loud voice Harry heard. "What do you want human?"

"We are envoys from Hogwarts with presents for Duram and Belissa sir," Harry said confidently. "I believe they are expecting us."

"Where is your guide, the one named Hagrid?" The giant asked.

"He is at the school sir. We don't require him to travel in the forest," Harry replied.

"Follow me." The giant turned and strode down the path. Harry and Cho had to walk briskly to even keep up. They had enlarged the clearing near the caves and there were very large huts setup all around. There were a few fires going and it looked like a nice little village except that everything was three times the normal size. The giant led them to the front of the largest hut and told them to wait. Looking around, Harry saw at least ten other giants watching them. None of them looked friendly at all. He remembered the books showing how ruthless the giants were. The giant who came out of the hut was even bigger than the one who led them to it.

"My name is Duram, and this is my clan."

"My name is Harry Potter sir and this is Cho Chang we come bringing presents for you and your companion."

"Why are you not carrying your present Harry Potter? Is it too difficult for you?"

"Yes and no sir. It is quite heavy but I would have managed only I injured my arm yesterday in a sporting competition. I am not completely healed."

"Must be your Quidditch. I am a fan even though we can never see a match. What position?"

"I play seeker for the French team. Cho plays seeker for the Ravenclaw school team."

"Good. Very good. And you were injured in the match. Did you win or lose?"

"We lost sir but I did catch the Snitch."

"And the other seeker?"

"Broken wrist and leg. He is a friend of mine."

"So, you can be injured in competition with your friend and remain a friend. Good. Please come in." Harry followed him through the huge door. Everything was of enormous proportions but he did notice two chairs set to the side that were sized for he and Cho to sit in. This Duram wasn't all bad Harry thought.

Another giant came out, somewhat smaller and definitely female. She touched Duram on the shoulder and approached Cho. "I am Belissa, companion of Duram."

"I am Cho Chang and this is Harry Potter. We have brought gifts." Cho handed the box to Belissa and Harry dispatched his package to the table near Duram who stood there watching Harry.

"Do they teach you that in this school Harry Potter?" Duram asked.

"No sir. I can't say exactly how I can do it. It is unusual in the wizard world."

Belissa had been opening the box and said loudly, "Duram! It's Sioni Oil. Thank you Cho Chang. I have not had this in quite some time. Duram will be pleased."

"You're welcome. Actually Harry gave me the idea for it and I couldn't think of anything better. My father located it for me," Cho said.

Duram opened his package and stared at it for a minute. He held the handle up close to his face and examined both sides carefully. Then he grabbed it by the handle and felt the weight in his hands. This was the first time Cho had seen the sword as well and she looked shocked that Harry would give him such a weapon.

"And whose idea was this?" Duram asked loudly.

"Mine sir. I had to ask a friend of mine to make it since I don't have the talent. I hope it meets with your approval. That is the correct seal on the handle isn't it?" Harry said.

"It is exactly correct Harry Potter. And the seal on the other side?" Duram asked.

"Hogwarts sir. Hoping to signify a connection between the two," Harry replied trying to sound confident.

The giant studied him for a moment and then said something to Belissa that neither Harry nor Cho understood. Belissa left the room. "I am honored by your gifts, both of them. You have made Belissa happy and have honored me beyond words with this sword." Belissa came back in the room with a carved box and a parchment. She gave the box to Cho and the parchment

to Duram. The box was exquisitely carved and when Cho opened it, it started playing music that Harry had never heard before.

"This is my favorite song," Belissa said. "This box is not magical of course; you must wind the handle when it stops."

"Thank you," Cho said still looking at the box.

"I would like to ask you some questions Harry Potter. What are your opinions of giants?" Duram asked.

Harry thought for a second and remembered Dumbledore telling him to answer any questions honestly. "Well, until a few years ago, I didn't know giants existed. I didn't grow up in the wizard world. Hagrid became my friend and I only found out a few years ago that he was half-giant. So by the time I knew that giants existed, I had a good friend who was half-giant. When other students found out about Hagrid, they didn't seem happy. That's when I started hearing stories of how ruthless giants were. In doing research to find your gift, many of those stories also portrayed giants as ruthless. But I know men wrote the stories. I have had stories written about me that were false so I wouldn't form opinions from stories."

"I wonder if you can truly not judge a race based on perceptions," Duram said still giving Harry an appraising look.

Cho spoke up, "Duram sir, please forgive me for interrupting but I can offer some evidence to this. Just last year, Harry met a vampire in this forest and became involved in a relationship with her. Most wizards do not like or trust vampires at all but Harry judged her on how she acted and not on what our world thinks of them." Harry smiled at Cho for speaking up even though Dumbledore suggested she let Harry do the talking.

The giant thought for a moment and said, "And yet now, you two have a relationship. What happened to the vampire?"

"She was killed in this very spot Duram. By the same dark wizards that have convinced other giants to join with them. Cho was here as well but escaped and I barely survived," Harry said.

"Why didn't you let Hagrid escort you to our camp?" Duram asked.

"We didn't think it was necessary. We aren't afraid of anything in the forest sir," Harry said.

Cho spoke up quickly, "To be honest, Harry isn't afraid of anything and I'm not either when I'm with him."

Duram seemed to smile, "We have seen some of the creatures in the forest are you fully aware of what is in here?"

"The giant spider Aaragog is a friend and helped Cho escape. The centaurs are also friends and were the ones who carried Cho out. Either one could vouch for what we are saying," Harry said.

"They both already have Harry Potter. I just wanted to hear it from you. This is my gift to you. You honored me by giving me a weapon that could easily be used against you or your

kind. I feel confident in doing the same. Giants are not troubled much by magic however there are some ancient spells that do affect us. Two are on this parchment. You will have a spell that can cause us pain and another that can kill us. I hope that if it becomes necessary, you will choose the correct one. These spells are for you alone. Do not share them with anyone."

"Thank you sir. I hope they will never be necessary as well and I will keep them private."

"You both are welcome in our camp at any time. Other giants may wish to ask you questions and I would consider it a personal favor if you answer them honestly, even if they are uncomfortable. Let me show you around."

"Sir, I do have a favor to ask. I have two friends that have been able to experience a great deal with me that are extremely disappointed to not meet you. Would it be possible if I could bring them with me sometime? They would both be excited for the opportunity to meet a giant."

"Of course. We should know more than one or two humans," Duram said. The giant took Cho and Harry around and introduced them to many other giants.

When the couple were back saying goodbye to Belissa and Duram, Harry asked a question. "Sir. Earlier you mentioned that Cho and I were in a relationship now. How did you know?"

Duram smiled. "Even giants can tell love when we see it," and Belissa squeezed Duram's arm.

Harry and Cho walked quickly out of the forest without talking much. Once out, Harry said, "Wasn't that great? They weren't so bad. Belissa really liked the oil."

Cho pulled on Harry's arm and kissed him. "What was that for?" he asked.

"Just because I do love you. That was an amazing experience. I can't believe they gave me this music box. It's beautiful," Cho said.

They went back to Dumbledore's office and told the Headmaster about the meeting but Harry didn't mention the contents of his parchment and the Headmaster didn't ask. "Sir, I asked Duram if I could take Ron and Hermione down sometime. He said it wouldn't be a problem. Would that be ok with you? I want to ask before I tell them."

"That's fine Harry, just make sure Professor McGonagall knows when you are going."

"I'm going to go tell Ron and Hermione about this," Harry said, letting Cho go to her common room. His two friends were waiting for him to come back. "They aren't so bad but man they're big!" Harry said.

"I wish we could meet them," Hermione said sadly.

"How bad do you want it Hermione?" Harry asked with a smile.

"What do you mean?" she quickly responded.

"Just what I said. What would you do for me if I can arrange it?" Harry loved this.

"She'd do about anything. You'll set me up won't you?" Ron asked.

"Will you both promise to come visit me over the summer?" Harry asked.

"Of course," Ron answered quickly.

"That's it? That's all you want?" Hermione asked.

"I want to make sure we never go long without seeing each other," Harry said. "I can take you to meet the giants pretty much anytime McGonagall says its ok."

Harry took Ron to meet the giants during their free period. Hermione was really jealous of this so Harry made a special trip with her after classes the next day. "So this is where it happened last year?" Hermione asked when she realized they were at the spot where R.J. was killed.

"Yeah. Weird they chose the same spot," Harry said. The meeting with the giants went well. Hermione seemed to get along with one certain female giant the most. The two females kept asking each other questions and Harry had to remind Hermione they needed to be going back.

"They're really interesting. I could learn a lot from them," she kept saying. "Thanks Harry, I really appreciate you bringing me down here."

"You knew I wouldn't let you miss this. I want you guys to experience all the good things that happen to me. We've been through so much."

"But now you're experiencing more things with Cho," she said.

"And you with Ron," he added quickly.

"It's not the same."

"Only because you, Ron and I have been friends for so long."

"Maybe," she said and went back to talking about giants.

"Are you excited about the ball this weekend?" Harry asked.

"Yes, I really am. I don't think Ron really wants to go but I think it will be interesting." Hermione said.

"Ever since Fleur gave me dance lessons, I kind of like it. I used to be so nervous about these things but now I enjoy them. I better not let Ron hear me say that. I wish we had won the Quidditch match. I hate the thought of going there after a loss," Harry joked.

Harry spent his next free period practicing the two spells the giant had given him. The first one 'Agriva Chocle' had a drawing of giants clutching their heads. It didn't look pleasant. The second one 'Agriva Fiola' showed them just lying down, it was the one that killed them. When Harry performed them, the 'Chocle' one caused a ring of white light to form from his wand. He didn't feel anything but assumed it only worked on giants. The 'Fiola' was a targeted spell and sent a flash of blue light toward a target. Harry practiced for the entire free period.

Saturday the group of friends went to Hogsmeade to get final things for the ball that night. Harry and Ron didn't need anything so they spent a lot of time waiting around for the girls to finish shopping. The people pointing and mumbling around Harry was worse than the last time they were in town. Ron kept trying to shoo them off which helped Harry's attitude. The girls took so long shopping that the group didn't have time to go into Three Broomsticks for a butterbeer. "I should have stayed at the school," Ron said, causing Hermione to give him a dirty look.

Walking back, Harry whispered to Cho, "Need some help getting ready?" She hit him and said, "Harry!"

Ron and Hermione looked confused but Kelly spoke up, "They're probably talking about dancing later," and gave an evil smile. At least Ron and Hermione were still confused.

Ron and Harry played chess for a while before heading to their room to get ready. Harry left to wait on Cho in her common room. Luckily there was a Ravenclaw boy who let him in to wait. He talked with a couple of the other boys waiting on their dates.

Cho and her friends came down together again. Cho had a different robe, but it was still deep red with oriental designs. The brooch looked good pinned to her chest. He told her that she looked amazing and saw Kelly go to the same boy as the last ball. They all headed to the great hall to leave. There would be portkeys setup for them to use. They stood around and talked until most of the other students had already gone. Hermione and Ron went and it was just Cho's friends and their dates left to go. "If they start throwing things at me since I lost the match, I won't be mad if you all move away," Harry only half-joked.

Harry touched the portkey with Cho and could tell the difference in the surroundings, even without looking. It smelled so much better here. Looking around, it seemed more colorful and there were flowers all around. They were in a strikingly pretty hall.

Suddenly he heard. "Harry! Finally you are here." Fleur had come over. "Please, let me introduce you to the headmistress. Come." Fleur was dragging Harry, so Harry was dragging Cho.

The trio stopped in front of a very elegant older lady. "Headmistress Lebon, this is my friend Harry Potter and his date Miss Chang."

Harry stepped forward and took her hand lightly saying, "Headmistress Lebon, it is a pleasure. If you had a hand in teaching Fleur, let me congratulate you on a marvelous job. Your hall is quite stunning."

The lady beamed with pride and said, "Welcome Mr. Potter. Fleur has talked non-stop about you. After your performance in the match last week and meeting you now, I see it was deserved."

"Thank you Headmistress. In respect to my date, I'd prefer to speak English so she can know when I am complimenting her. I am surprised you haven't thrown things at me since we lost that match," Harry said.

"You have nothing to be ashamed of Mr. Potter. That was one of the finest performances I have ever seen. No one in France would dare say a bad thing about your efforts. We are very



proud of our team," she said. The Headmistress quickly gave an amused smile and said, "I have a little surprise for you later."

"I am looking forward to it. I should get Cho over to her friends now. It was nice meeting you," Harry said and he and Cho walked toward the table where her friends had saved a seat. French students kept coming up asking if he was Harry Potter and then giggling away.

When they got to the table, Kelly poked his arm and asked jokingly, "Are you Harry Potter?"

"Cho. I'm going to have to hurt your friend," Harry joked back. Then he leaned closer and said, "Have I told you that you look amazing?" She just smiled and kissed him on the cheek. Harry noticed others at the table ordering wine and champagne. Cho wanted a wine so Harry decided to try one as well.

Cho told him to make sure he sipped it and go slowly. She whispered, "I want you to be useful back at the castle," and then squeezed his arm.

The first song started playing and before Harry could say anything, Fleur was over asking him to dance. He looked at Cho and she just nodded. Fleur took him to the floor, which only had a few people at first, and they began to dance. "What do you think of Beauxbatons so far?" Fleur asked.

"The colors and smell are great. It is much more brilliant than Hogwarts."

"I like it when you speak my language. There are so many people who wish to meet you. The headmistress asked the students to provide you privacy and to not ask about Quidditch."

"I'll remember to thank her for that. I'm still surprised they're not mad at me. Where's Gabrielle?"

"Oh, she will make an entrance later. I'm sure she will make herself known to you."

They danced and talked for a couple songs and it just felt easy and comfortable dancing with Fleur. He then went back to the table but Cho stood up before he could sit down. "I have a feeling you won't be spending much time with me tonight so we should dance while we have the chance."

"Cho, I don't mind telling anyone no if they want to pull me away from you. All I care about is you having a good time," Harry said honestly.

"That's the right answer but I wouldn't have it. You are a celebrity here and I can live with that as long as everybody knows who you came with."

"Then, let's make that obvious right now," Harry said and gave her a nice kiss while dancing. The more they danced, the more they seemed to know how each other would move. They had kissed a couple more times before the songs were over and they went to sit back down.

"Can you two be anymore obvious?" Kelly said.

"Mission accomplished," Harry said to Cho who just smiled at him.

Harry had danced with another French student and had just sat down when Cho pointed to the door and said, "Someone special?" Harry turned and stared at a stunningly pretty girl walking in with a beautiful flowing white dress. She really looked like an angel. Harry could tell the girl was young, but didn't have a good guess which year. Cho guessed third and one of her friends guessed fourth. She cut a path directly across the dance floor toward their table. When the girl got closer, Harry recognized her as Gabrielle, Fleur's little sister. She was a first-year. Harry told Cho this and she didn't believe him.

Gabrielle walked right up to Harry smiling and said, "I'm so glad you came tonight. I wanted to thank you for saving me ever since the competition. "

"You really didn't need saving Gabrielle, I should have known better. You really look nice tonight. Where's your date?"

"I didn't want a date tonight," she said with an air of confidence.

Switching to English, Harry said, "Gabrielle Delacour, this is my girlfriend Cho Chang and these are our friends." Harry introduced everyone. "Everyone, this is Gabrielle, Fleur's sister." Gabrielle stood there for a second and Cho elbowed Harry, "Oh, Gabrielle, would you please dance with me?"

The little girl's eyes lit up and she said, "Of course Harry, I'd love to."

Harry went to the dance floor with her and was glad she was tall for her age. That didn't make the age difference seem as obvious. Gabrielle kept steering them around to the edges of the dance floor, making sure everyone saw them. She was a very good dancer, just like Fleur. After a couple of dances, she said, "Would you like to meet some of my friends?"

"I'd love to," Harry answered, not wanting to offend her. She even introduced him to a couple of her teachers who seemed quite proud of her. Harry could tell, she would grow up to be a woman just like Fleur who could use her beauty and charm to get anything. Thankfully, Fleur caught up to them and told Gabrielle to let Harry go back to his date. He promised to dance with her again before he left and rejoined Cho.

Cho smiled and kissed him but Kelly said, "My gosh that girl's got it bad." They all started laughing at him and then the headmistress made an announcement in both French and English.

"I want to welcome everyone here. It gives me pleasure to see so many students from Hogwarts enjoying the Beauxbaton hospitality. I want to say a special thanks to Professor Dumbledore and Fleur Delacour for arranging all of this. As all of the Beauxbaton students are aware, we have one of our very own French National team members here tonight. But, as you all will not be aware, we have more than one. Here as a special guest of mine is another outstanding member of the team. Please welcome Kristi Belig, chaser for our team." There was thundering applause and cheers from the men. Kristi walked out in a black dress robe that just seemed to glow. A diamond necklace hung low on her chest. She really looked stunning. "As a special favor to me, I would like to request that our two team members dance the next set of songs. Harry Potter, would you please come up here?" Harry looked pleadingly at Cho who didn't seem happy but pushed him up. There was loud clapping as Harry walked up to Kristi who extended her hand.

Harry took it and went to the center of the dance floor and began to dance when the music started. "You clean up well schoolboy," Kristi said. She was a very good dancer.

"You look amazing Kristi. What brought you here?" Harry asked while trying to concentrate on dancing as well as he could. He didn't know why but he wanted to impress her.

"The Headmistress is an old friend but I was also curious how you acted in your world. From what I saw you fit in nicely in both," she said. It felt like she held him a little tighter. "Don't worry; I won't be too rough with you," she said with a smile.

Harry smiled back and said, "Rough. I'm not worried at all. You didn't know that my girlfriend last year was a vampire. Now, she could be rough." Kristi looked kind of stunned but Harry held her gaze.

"Is your little friend going to be upset with you for dancing?" Kristi asked.

"Of course not, she trusts me," he replied and continued holding Kristi quite close.

"As well she should," Kristi said with an evil smile. Near the end of the second song Kristi said, "I don't want that to be our last dance of the evening. I expect another for coming all this way to see you."

"I'm looking forward to it. And, you do look amazing," Harry said as the song ended and many people clapped. Kristi went back to the Headmaster's table and Harry went back to Cho.

She didn't look happy and then Kelly said, "Thought we were going to have to hose you two down."

"You did seem a little friendly with her," Cho said obviously not happy.

"I would rather be dancing with you. Want to go again to make sure everyone knows you're what I want," Harry said and Cho agreed.

Harry made sure to show her that she was the most important thing in the room. They smiled, talked and kissed during the three songs they were up for. The evening had been going well; Harry managed to avoid dancing much except with Cho. He had danced with Hermione and Ginny but Cho didn't mind that. Harry remembered that he said he would dance with Kristi again. He was talking to Cho when he heard. "Miss Chang. Would you mind terribly if I had one more dance with your date before I leave?" It was Kristi.

"Of course not Miss Belig, because I know Harry will be leaving with me tonight," Cho said confidently. Harry was worried.

He started dancing with Kristi, trying to not look like he was enjoying it so much. "You're in a bit of trouble aren't you schoolboy?" Kristi asked, obviously enjoying Harry's discomfort.

"A bit. I'm going to have to work to get out of it," he said giving her a sly smile.

"You know, I did some checking this evening and turns out you really did have a heated relationship with a gorgeous vampire last year. I wouldn't have guessed it."

"I don't lie Kristi. If you ask me a question and I answer, it will be the truth."

"I'm beginning to realize that. What's with the little Delacour girl? Do you know her family is very wealthy and influential? The older one fits you better."

"I pulled Gabrielle from the bottom of a lake a few years ago and she thinks I'm her hero now, that's it. I didn't know they were wealthy, I've never heard of the family before."

"For some reason, I believe you. You've got another year left at school. How do you think your friend will handle being out in the real world with you still there?" she asked and this thought hit a nerve with Harry.

"I hope she handles it well. Honestly I'm worried about that. I love her," and with that the second song was over. Kristi walked back to the Harry's table.

Kristi looked at Cho and said, "You handled yourself better than I would have in your place tonight. Harry's lucky to have you. Goodnight," and then the chaser walked out.

Cho and the rest of the table looked stunned. "What did you say to her?" Cho asked looking thoroughly confused.

"I told her I loved you," Harry answered honestly. And, just like that, he was out of trouble. Harry danced with Fleur and Gabrielle each one more time and again with Cho before they headed back to the portkeys. A few older students came over and asked for Harry's autograph which he reluctantly gave them before leaving.

When Harry was walking Cho back, she stopped and said, "I have a surprise. I begged Professor Thielson to let me stay out all night again. Interested in staying with me?"

Harry's eyes lit up and they sneaked up to the room. "I'm sorry I acted mad when you danced with Kristi? She's just so confident and beautiful," Cho said letting her head droop a little.

"And so are you Cho." Maybe it was the wine they had or maybe it was seeing Harry dancing with Kristi but Cho was much more aggressive tonight. The love making session lasted quite a while before the two resting and ended up going at it again. While getting dressed Harry said, "I don't know what got into tonight but you were amazing. I'll be dreaming about this night for a long time."

They were both able to make it to their rooms without getting caught. Harry lay on his bed for a while just thinking about this evening. It had been a strange and exciting night.

Harry stayed in bed all through breakfast and didn't get up until just before lunch. He showered and found his friends sitting in the great hall reading. "So, you finally decided to get up," Ron joked while half heartedly flipping through his book.

"How much trouble are you in?" Hermione asked looking worried.

"Trouble? What did I do to be in trouble for?" Harry replied with a smile.

"Dancing with Kristi of course."

"Why would I be in trouble for dancing with her when Cho said it was ok? Besides, I made it up to her last night," Harry said raising one eyebrow at Hermione. Owls starting flying in and Harry said, "Bit late for mail isn't it?"

"You did seem to enjoy dancing with Kristi," Ron said, trying to get Harry to talk about her more.

Harry started to respond when Hermione said with a very serious tone, "Look at this."

*Is it starting again?*

*The Dark Mark was seen over two homes in small wizarding villages in Spain yesterday. In both cases the families had been the victims of the killing curse. In what is probably a related instance, giants attacked a small village in northern Turkey killing seven.*

*Even the ministry is beginning to admit that this resembles the rise to power of You-Know-Who. Families who remember the times over sixteen years ago are beginning to demand to know what the ministry is going to do to stop it this time. Ministry spokesmen had no comments as of yet.*

"Not surprising really," Harry said calmly. "We knew he was back and if the giants are picking sides, they know what's going on. I had a chance last year to stop him and couldn't do it." Harry hung his head sadly.

"Think you'll still be able to play for France?" Ron asked having already decided his own priorities in life.

Harry hadn't even considered stopping. "I'm still playing. I'm under contract to play and that's what I'm going to do."

"Harry. It may be too dangerous to continue," Hermione said clearly worried for his safety.

"Hermione. No one's come after me since last year. They've hurt people far away. I'm no more at risk than any other person." Harry said having made up his mind already.

Everyone was a little more on edge at the school once the news spread. People paid a little more attention in classes and just didn't seem as happy. Professor McGonagall wanted to speak to Harry before class one day. "Are you sure about continuing to play Quidditch Mr. Potter?"

"Of course Professor. Things have happened far away. Maybe they'll happen closer but I don't really intend to change my plans because of them now. I'm having the best times of my life. Look what happened last year at the school with extra security and everything. It can't be stopped if it's coming."

"That's what Professor Dumbledore told me you'd say. I would like to limit your guests to Miss Chang only. Miss Delacour and I will also continue to attend but we don't want other students there."

"I understand. I'm going to make sure Cho still wants to come. Don't worry Professor, I'll be ok. I'm not scared at all."

"That's what worries me Mr. Potter. You should be scared; it will make you be more careful."

The next time Harry saw Fleur she was very excited. "'Arry. You have made Gabrielle's year special. She is the talk of the school about how she just walked up and talked to you and how you came with her to meet her friends. I really thank you for being so kind to her." Fleur kissed him on both cheeks which always made him turn bright red.

"It was fun Fleur. She's going to turn out just like you; confident, smart and beautiful."

"Young 'Arry is learning what we want to hear," the Professor said smiling.

At practice Saturday, Coach told them that there may be extra security around but other than that, nothing was said. Harry liked being around people who didn't assume he was the target anytime something bad happened. They had a good practice and were preparing for Romania. After practice Kristi came up, "So you're still walking. She must not have been too hard on you."

"It wasn't too bad. I've been through worse. Thanks for saying that to her when you left. That's probably why she let me off easy," said Harry.

"No problem. I didn't want to get you into real trouble. Not yet anyway," Kristi said before giving a slight smile and walking off.

Harry went back to the school to watch Gryffindor take on Slytherin. He sat with Cho and the rest of her team for the match. It ended up being a real close match and Ginny saved the day with a great grab of the Snitch out from in front of Draco Malfoy. "So, Gryffindor and Ravenclaw going for the Quidditch cup this year," Harry said to the Ravenclaw team.

He and Cho went down to congratulate the Gryffindor team. "I hope you guys make more mistakes against us than you did today. You played really well," Cho said.

"I hope you make more than Slytherin did so we can beat you," Ron said still worn out from the match.

Harry and Cho went to see the giants after the Quidditch match. They had heard about the attacks and were not happy about them. Harry and Cho didn't stay long and went back to the castle early. "Cho do you still want to come to my matches? It may be safer for you here since there have been some attacks," Harry asked.

"Of course I want to come. If you're going, I want to be there," she quickly said, leaving no doubt what she wanted.

"I was hoping you'd say that. Besides, I have the good luck charm so we'll be ok," he added. "I'm getting a pass for Charlie Weasley. He's still working with dragons there."

## Chapter 13

Before Harry knew it, it was the day of the Romania match and Harry, Cho, Fleur and Professor McGonagall left for the stadium. It was a modern stadium, built near a small wizarding village on the edge of a forest. It was very pretty area and easy to keep hidden from prying Muggle eyes. His friends went to find their seats and find Charlie Weasley. The coach gave a speech about playing hard and not letting the last loss get to them. France was to be announced first and once the team was on the pitch, they waited for Romania to all get out. The match was actually pretty easy for France and not that exciting. France ended up winning 250 to 50.

During the brief celebration after the match. Loud screams started coming from the village. One of the Romanian players flew by screaming, "Giants! Giants are attacking the village."

The coach yelled for the team to get inside. Harry wanted to go to his friends but kept hearing the screams coming from outside the stadium. "Potter, get inside," the coach yelled again.

Harry made up his mind and concentrated on how much he loved Cho and performed the message spell toward her. He then yelled back at the coach, "Make sure my friends are ok!" as he quickly flew off over the stadium wall.

Once over the wall, he closed in on the village and saw a group of about ten giants smashing the small buildings of the village. A number of homes had already been destroyed and were laying in ruin. Harry flew right by the face of one of the giants who looked up and yelled something. Harry stopped just out of reach and yelled, "I don't want to hurt you. If you stop, I won't."

The giant just laughed and said, "What could you possibly do to us?"

Harry raised his wand and yelled 'Agriva Chocle' and a large white circle stretched out over the area. The giants started yelling and covering their ears. After a moment, Harry stopped the spell and yelled at them, "I was given this spell buy Duram, leader of the Gulas clan. I don't want to hurt you. If you stop this destruction and sit down until the ministry arrives I won't hurt you."

The giant who had spoken earlier said, "Another wizard who uses that spell will hurt our families if we don't do as he says."

Harry could clearly tell that most of the giants in the group were not fully behind the destruction. "I believe you. You have to choose. I will try to stop you if you hurt these people. Duram knows that most of you are not doing this by choice, only out of fear for your family."

One of the giants in the rear yelled, "No! I want this to happen." That giant immediately started bashing on another house.

Harry raised his wand and said the Chocle spell again. All of the giants hand their hands to their heads in pain, even the ones who hadn't started attacking again.

"Don't attack any more," Harry yelled after stopping the spell. Almost instantly the one giant started to attack the house again, clearly ignoring Harry's warning.

Harry raised his wand and pointed it at that giant. "Stop now or I have to stop you!" The giant continued and Harry yelled, 'Agriva Fiola' and a sudden flash of blue light struck the giant and it just crumbled to the ground. The other giants started yelling and turned toward Harry as if to attack. Harry yelled back, "I'll do whatever I need to do to stop you."

The giant in front yelled something that Harry didn't understand and the rest of the group stopped coming toward Harry and sat down.

Harry held there for only a few moments until ministry wizards and Aurors appeared. He quickly explained what had happened and then went to the giant that had spoken to him. "Is there anything that Duram or I can do to help? I do understand about wanting to protect your family," Harry asked, trying to stay out of reach of the giant in case he attacked.

The giant thought and said, "Tell Duram that Miocle made an unwise choice and is sorry."

Harry flew back inside the stadium once Aurors had huge metal shackles on the giants. The coach and a few of the players were standing near the entrance to the team area. The coach started screaming as soon as Harry got close, "Potter. What did you think you were doing? I told you to get in here."

This was quickly followed by, "Mr. Potter. What did you think you were doing?" from Professor McGonagall. She sounded scarier than the coach did.

All Harry cared about was one thing. "Where's Cho? Is she OK?"

Harry saw Cho push by the coach and run to him. He hugged her tight and asked, "Still glad you came?" Cho didn't answer and continued to squeeze him. Harry continued saying, "Good thing Duram gave me those spells. I wouldn't have had any idea what to do without them."

When he got over to the others, Professor McGonagall started again, "Mr. Potter. You can't go off trying to take on everything by yourself. I know you're not afraid and fully expect to win but one of these times you won't be so lucky. What exactly were those spells you used?"

"The giants gave them to me professor. When I gave Duram the sword, he gave me spells that could be used to stop them. Harry got a very remorseful look and pleadingly said, "I asked them to stop. I didn't want to have to kill that one." Harry looked to see the coach and teammates looking at him very strangely. He just wanted to go home.

"Can we just go now professor? I don't want to talk about it here," Harry pleaded.

Before leaving, Harry went over to the coach and said, "I couldn't just let them hurt those people. Thanks for getting my friends."

Harry turned to walk to the floo and heard the coach say, "See you at practice Potter."

As soon as they got back, they all went to Professor Dumbledore's office to tell their versions of the story. After sitting down, Fawkes came to Harry's knee and he sat there stroking it. Harry remained quiet while the others told their story. "Harry. I asked if you agreed with their story," Professor Dumbledore repeated.

"Um... Yes sir," Harry said absent-mindedly.



"Are you all right Harry?" Dumbledore asked sounding concerned.

"I shouldn't have killed that giant. I should have used the other spell again," Harry said sounding defeated.

"Wouldn't the other spell have hurt all the giants?" Dumbledore asked without emotion.

"Yes but maybe it would have got that one to stop."

"Did you believe totally that the giant was going to continue attacking the house?" asked Dumbledore.

Harry thought for a moment before answering, "Yes sir."

"Then you did the right thing. From the accounts of what happened, you gave them all and opportunity to stop. Only one chose to continue and you did what you had to do."

"Sir, I should tell Duram what I've done. One of the giants gave me a message to give to him as well," Harry said slowly.

"Of course Harry, you can go now. It is lucky you were there Harry. From the accounts of the other attacks, they didn't stop until most of the villages have been destroyed."

Harry got up to leave and heard Cho say, "I want to come with you."

They walked down the path to the giants and Harry didn't say anything the entire way. The giant guarding the camp let them pass and Harry knocked on the large door to Duram's hut. Belissa opened the door and invited them in. Immediately Duram knew something was wrong. "What has happened Harry Potter?"

"Sir, we were in Romania for a Quidditch match and right after the match the small village near the stadium was attacked by ten giants. Some homes were destroyed and a few families killed. I went to confront them and told them to stop. When they wouldn't, I used the Chocle spell, which caused them to pause. I told them that you had told me of this spell and another spell that could stop them. One of the giants said they were being forced to do this because their families were being threatened. I told him the same dark wizards had killed my family. Another of the giants said that he was doing this because he wanted to and attacked again. I used the Chocle spell one more time and it caused pain to all of the giants. As soon as I stopped, the one started attacking again. The others weren't attacking anymore. I then used the Fiola spell on the giant that was attacking," Harry paused and then admitted, "I'm sorry sir but I killed the one."

"Why are you so troubled?" Duram asked not sounding upset with him.

"I should have tried to stop the one again without killing him. I shouldn't have been so quick."

"But, you would have caused great pain to all the others, just because of the poor choice of one. I think you made the wise choice. You showed him more mercy than other giants would have. I don't hold you at fault for that. I say we are fortunate to have met each other so you were prepared for that situation."

"Sir, one of the giants gave me a message for you. He said to tell you Miocle made an unwise choice and is sorry."

Duram thought for a moment and said, "Miocle was a friend and didn't want to stand up to the dark wizards in the beginning but was concerned for his family. Thank you for coming to tell me this. Don't be troubled by what happened. You said it yourself, we can be ruthless. That giant wasn't showing any mercy to the families in those homes. He had to be stopped."

"Thank you sir," Harry said and then left.

They walked back in silence until they left the forest. Cho stopped Harry and said, "Harry. He's right you know. That giant was going to kill more people. They're lucky Duram gave you those spells and that you were there. Your coach seemed really mad that you went after them. I don't know who was madder, the coach or Professor McGonagall."

"What about you? Are you mad at me?" Harry asked her looking deep into her eyes.

"Not mad, worried. I knew that Duram had given you those spells and I just hoped you had practiced them already. I don't think you're stupid or anything. I just don't want to think about you getting hurt," she said hugging him tightly.

"How could I get hurt? I have your good luck charm," he said trying to smile and kissed her. They walked back to the castle and went to his common room to sit with his friends. He had asked her not to mention the giants and to only talk about the match so all his friends knew was that France had won.

The Daily Prophet had a story the next day.

### *France's Seeker Saves Village*

*A small Romanian village is lucky that Romania was hosting France at a new stadium just outside the village. After France easily beat the Romanian team, a group of giants attacked the village. While everyone else was running for cover, France's Seeker flew off over the objections of his coach to confront the attackers.*

*After casting some spells that no one could identify, Harry Potter convinced all but one of the giants to surrender. When one giant continued attacking, Potter cast another unfamiliar spell that caused the giant to crumple to the ground dead. No one has yet been able to identify the spells used. This reporter thinks the highest priority should be in determining the exact spells and in getting that information into local authorities' hands.*

*Witnesses say Potter then talked to the leader of the giant's group and to ministry officials who had finally arrived. Potter then returned to the stadium and left quickly before reporters could talk to him.*

His and Cho's friends had been really good about not bringing up the attack or asking to talk about the spells and it was really helping Harry's mood. Harry felt better over the next couple days but got called to Professor Dumbledore's office one afternoon. Inside were Cornelius Fudge and Percy Weasley. "Hello Harry," Mr. Fudge said sounding very official.

"Hello sir. Hi Percy," Harry said, but Percy just gave a quick, "Hello."

"Harry. Mr. Fudge and Mr. Weasley are here to ask a couple questions about the attack," Dumbledore stated.

"Harry, we would like to know about these spells you used to stop the giants. They aren't something we've come across before," Mr. Fudge asked.

"Yes sir. I know two of them. One causes a great deal of pain to all giants within an area. The other is a targeted spell and actually kills them," Harry explained.

"Yes, that would fit with the accounts of what happened. How did you come to know of these spells?" Fudge continued asking.

Harry looked at Dumbledore who nodded. "Duram, the leader of the giants who are staying in the forest told me about them. My present to him was a sword and he said since I gave him a weapon that could be used to kill me, he would return the honor. Then he told me about the spells."

"Well I hope you can understand how useful these spells could be considering the recent attacks. We would like for you to tell us how to do them," Fudge went on.

"I'm sorry sir. Duram insisted that I not tell anyone, not even Professor Dumbledore. I can ask Duram if he would approve, but I can't talk about them without his permission," Harry said looking to Dumbledore for any signs as to what his Headmaster was thinking.

"Harry. You have to see the difference us having these spells would make. We could stop these attacks before so many people get hurt next time. If the villagers knew the spells themselves, they could keep the giants away," Percy jumped in.

"Villagers could also use the spells even when giants weren't attacking. They could even attack the giants with them. I would gladly tell you the spells if Duram approves. If he hadn't told me the spells, I couldn't have stopped the giants. I promised him," Harry firmly stated.

"Professor Dumbledore, can you please talk to about this? We are fighting for lives here," Fudge pleaded.

Dumbledore looked at Harry for a minute and said, "I support Harry in this. Giants are wary of trusting us as it is. We are fortunate that a large number have sided with us. If we betray their trust now, we risk losing any of their help. It is a decision for Duram and Harry."

"I would have expected more support from you Dumbledore. This is not going to sit well at the ministry," Fudge said angrily.

"Excuse me sir but we told you almost two years ago Voldemort was back and to start planning then. Professor Dumbledore asked you to make contacts with the giants at that time. You didn't believe us or provide support then," Harry said loudly, kind of surprising himself by speaking to the Minister of Magic like this.

"Harry! Don't speak to the minister like that," Percy yelled. Percy and the Minister both stormed out.

"Sorry sir, I shouldn't have said that. I was mad when he didn't believe me before and now that it's obvious Voldemort is behind the attacks he comes making me feel like I'm to blame," Harry said trying to get better control of his emotions.

"Politics Harry. You may ask Duram for permission to give the spells to the ministry but I doubt he will agree. Giants have good reason not to trust many wizards."

"Thank you, I'd like to go right now," Harry got up and left.

Before going to see Duram, Harry had an urge to get the parchment he had been given. He went up to his room and got the parchment out of his trunk. Thinking about Percy really got him angry. He wondered what Ron thought about Percy anymore. Harry grabbed his Firebolt so he could get to the camp quicker. Duram spoke up when Belissa let him in. "Feeling better about your actions Harry?" The giant had a fairly contented look on his face.

"Yes sir a bit," said Harry before continuing. "Sir, the Minister of Magic just asked me to tell him the spells I used to stop the attacks so that he could give them to the Aurors"

"I expected he would Harry," Duram said, still not looking worried.

"I wouldn't tell him without your permission. So that is why I'm here," Harry said, still not sure how to proceed.

"Are you here asking my permission Harry?" Duram asked looking intently at Harry.

Harry thought for a minute and said, "I did tell the Minister I would ask your permission."

"Hhhmm. What would you advise me to do in this situation?" Duram asked, sounding a bit like Dumbledore.

Harry was kind of confused. Before Duram seemed very opinionated and wouldn't need any advice. "I wouldn't give the permission sir. I'm afraid the spells would not be used only for defending against attacks. I don't trust politicians sir. In fact, I would like to give the parchment back to you for safekeeping. I just have a feeling it would be safer with you," Harry handed the parchment back to Duram.

Duram turned to Belissa and said, "Didn't I tell you?" Harry looked confused but Duram continued. "Harry. Giants often believe in fate and a controlling hand. Somewhat like the centaurs believe the stars tell them things. Many, in fact most in my clan thought I made a mistake giving you these spells. We have seen signs that say a wizard will betray us all. Most thought you would be that wizard. We would never be sure that we could trust any wizards if we didn't take a big enough risk to be proved wrong or right. I will keep the parchment safe and am happy that you made this choice. I think we will be able to convince other giants who had not totally chosen the other side to commit to us. I'm afraid I can't do anything about any discomfort the Ministry may cause you."

"That's ok sir. I'm not too worried about the Ministry. I don't think Professor Dumbledore would let anything too bad happen to me."

Harry went back to the castle and found Ron and Hermione who had just come out of the Defense class that Harry had missed to meet Dumbledore. "So, what was it about?" Ron asked. Harry told them about Percy and Fudge wanting the spells.

"If it would stop further attacks why didn't you give them up?" Ron asked sounding like he would have just handed the spells over.

"Because Ron! You know how most wizards are; they hate giants and just think they're ruthless. If every wizard who hates them knew the spells, they wouldn't just sit back and wait to use them in defense," Hermione said not waiting for Harry to respond. He was glad she said this because it was exactly what Harry thought.

"That's exactly what I told Fudge! Not all giants are like that," Harry said and Hermione looked really smug.

"Still, you're going to let villages get trampled because you're worried about someone torturing a giant?" Ron said seriously.

"You met Duram and Belissa. Would you want them tortured or killed?" Harry asked, still not believing his best friend was acting this way.

"Well no, unless they were attacking," Ron answered.

"Exactly. But if someone who knew the spells just hated giants they could torture them and even kill them without any reason. That's what you-know-who is doing to them now," Hermione exclaimed.

"I still don't know. Can't say that's the choice I would have made. You saw the books and heard the stories, they're really ruthless," Ron stated.

The trio hadn't discussed the giants anymore. A couple days later they were sitting at breakfast when Harry heard a lot of mumbling and turned to see Professor Dumbledore, Mr. Fudge, Percy and another ministry official standing behind him. "Harry, could you come with us for a minute? These men want to ask you some questions," Dumbledore asked, not sounding happy at all.

Harry followed them out and heard everyone mumbling behind him. They kept walking and went into the Gryffindor common room and up to the sixth-year boy's room. Then Fudge spoke, "We understand that Duram did not give permission for you to give the spells to us. Therefore, the Ministry feels we need to take the following action. We are exercising our authority over the security of this school and request that you give us the parchment that the giant gave you."

"I can't do that sir," Harry stated, almost in shock at what was happening.

"You really don't have a choice at this point Mr. Potter. Either you hand it over or we will search your belongings until we find it," Fudge demanded.

"You are welcome to search my belongings sir but the parchment isn't there. I gave it back to Duram for safekeeping," Harry said calmly but didn't catch the slight grin that came to Dumbledore's face.

Fudge looked angry but Percy looked like he would go into a rage and said, "How did you know we were coming? Did those Unspeakable friends of your find out and warn you?"

"Mr. Weasley, I'm sure that no one contacted Harry about your visit. Harry, when did you return the parchment to Duram?" Dumbledore asked calmly.

"The same day that Mr. Fudge and Percy came asking about the spells. When I went to ask permission to reveal the spells, I just had a feeling that the parchment wasn't safe anymore," Harry replied looking his Headmaster in the eye.

"I don't believe you," Percy spat. "I know you found out we were coming."

Mr. Fudge spoke up, "Now, now, Mr. Weasley. I don't see how Harry could have been warned. He also has to know that his story could easily be verified. Harry, I would like to ask you again to reveal the spells. It is in the interest of wizard safety."

"I can't tell you sir. I think giants would be much less important than identifying all the Death Eaters and also than locating Voldemort before he fully recovers. If he was hurt worse than I was last year, I think we missed a perfect opportunity to track him down," Harry said back as confidently as he could.

This seemed to sting the Minister. Fudge knew Harry was right but was still upset that Harry wouldn't reveal the spells. The Ministry officials left but Dumbledore remained behind. "What's going to happen now Professor?" Harry asked sounding worried.

"Hard to say Harry. They have no legal way to force you to reveal the spells. If it was just Cornelius, I'd guess he would let it drop. Mr. Weasley's actions surprise me though. He doesn't seem like he will give up easily."

"Percy doesn't surprise me that much. He's always been really aggressive about impressing people in the Ministry. And, he's never liked that people in the Ministry have known me just because of my scar. But he does seem to have gone off a bit on me." The two left and Harry caught up to his friends in the class that had already started. After class Harry told Ron and Hermione about what happened.

"They wanted to search your stuff? That's not right!" Hermione said in total disbelief.

"They wouldn't have wanted to search it if Harry had just told them," Ron added. This attitude was beginning to irritate Harry.

"So, you'd just turn on your friends anytime if the Ministry asks?" Hermione asked angrily.

"Not my friends, but giants, sure," Ron responded.

"What about Hagrid?" Hermione replied.

"Umm. Hagrid's not full-giant."

"I bet the spells would affect him as well."

"Let's change the subject you two. I'm not telling, I promised Duram," Harry said and they went to lunch.

Cho came over to sit with him asking about what happened. Harry filled her in and she felt the same way he and Hermione did. "You can't trust the ministry to do what they say," Cho admitted.

"But you're thinking about working there," Harry questioned.

Cho hit him and said, "I don't know what I'll do yet."

A few days later it became clear that the ministry wasn't going to let it drop when the Daily Prophet came.

*Who's Side is He On?*

*The loyalties of the-boy-who-lived have come into question again after he refused Ministry requests to reveal the spells used to stop the giants in the Romania attack. Potter said he promised the leader of one of the largest clans of giants that he wouldn't tell anyone the spells. It seems Potter thinks more of the leader of the giants than he does the Minister. When the Ministry finally made a move to search for the parchment the spells were written on, they found out Potter had been one step ahead. Somehow Potter had found out about the search and had given the parchment back to the giants, supposedly for 'safekeeping'. This reporter would think that Potter should be doing all he could for the Ministry to keep the wizarding world safe from these ruthless giants.*

*When you add this latest relationship to Potter's long list of questionable friends and abilities:*

- *Was in a serious relationship with a vampire just last year*
- *Rumored to have been befriended by a dementor last year as well*
- *Was present when the co-winner of the Triwizard cup died mysteriously*
- *Is good friends with werewolves, half-giants (and now full giants) and is rumored to be friends with a giant spider living in a dark forest*
- *Is a Parselmouth which was the notable trait of You-Know-Who*

*With so many questions about his character, why he continues to be given special treatment should be looked into. This reporter hopes France is fully aware of the background of their seeker.*

"Ron. Tell Percy 'thanks' next time you see him. This is going to help me out a lot," Harry said angrily.

"Why would you think Percy had anything to do with this?" Ron snapped back.

"Because he called me a liar and said in front of everyone that he bet I knew they were coming to search my stuff."

"I wouldn't be surprised if you did. You do seem to have the inside track down there you know," Ron spat back.

This totally stunned Harry. Percy didn't surprise him much but Ron he couldn't believe. Hermione jumped in, "Ron. What are you saying? You know Percy wants to move up as fast as he can. You said it yourself, many times."

"I can say it, he's my brother," Ron replied hatefully.

"And, at one time, I thought I was your friend," Harry said firmly and walked out.

Harry stayed away from them both for a while. He was looking forward to practice and was glad to get out of the castle. His teammates kept glancing at him strangely then the coach spoke up, "Ok, we played well and beat Romania. I don't *ever* want to see you leave the field like that again Potter. You're a Quidditch player, that's all. You could have been hurt and that would have impacted the team."

"So, I should have just let more people get hurt? How can you say that?" Harry asked.

"Ministry officials can handle things like that. And, now there will be more security. You're here to play Quidditch, nothing more," Coach said.

Harry was really trying to hold his tongue. If the same thing happened again, he would do the same thing over. But, he really liked playing Quidditch and didn't want to risk that by getting into an argument with the coach.

Harry didn't have a very good practice since he was still thinking about what the coach said. He couldn't wait for it to be over and while walking back inside he heard, "Schoolboy. You're not going to do what he says are you?"

"Hey Kristi. No, I couldn't do that. No reason to tell him that though. What's the chance of something like that happening when we're around again anyway?" Harry said still sounding depressed.

"From what I hear, the chances are pretty good. You're like a magnet for stuff like that," Kristi said and pulled the Daily Prophet out of her pocket. "Good thing people in France don't care what they say about you over there. Is all this true?"

"Yes, but I am on the right side. And, they don't know or don't print the half of it." Harry looked at her seriously and said, "So, what do you think about my loyalties?"

She obviously didn't expect that question but replied, "I think you're ok. This stuff doesn't fit looking at you. Don't worry about the coach. You should have heard him and your Professor in the locker room. They were both worried but your Professor told him not to worry that you had handled much worse than giants before. Your little friend knew you'd be ok too."

This made Harry feel better. Especially hearing the Professor McGonagall had confidence in him. He went back to school in a better mood. He saw Hermione coming toward him and she walked him back, "So, how was practice?"

"It was ok. Coach yelled at me for going after the giants so I didn't play very well today. How were things here?"

"The usual. Any chance of you talking to Ron?" she asked giving him a half-glance



"So, that's the real reason you came to walk with me." Harry saw her lower her head. "That's ok, I'm still glad you're here. No, no chance."

"I think he feels really bad about saying that. He felt he had to stick up for his brother."

"I can kind of understand that. But, as long as Percy is causing me problems, I don't see things getting better with Ron."

"You know he kept asking me today if you told me the spells. He doesn't seem to believe that you hadn't."

"Did he happen to get an owl this morning? If so, I bet it was from Percy. You know Ron wouldn't mind the spells becoming public even without Percy."

"He did get an owl, but I didn't ask from whom. How do you think we can fix this?"

"I don't know. This one involves family. Imagine how it would have been if I had dated Ginny and then did something to mess it up. The whole family would hate me."

They went to sit outside on the steps and talked for a while. Harry was always amazed at how much Hermione knew. Cho and her friends came out after a while. "So, this is where you've been, hanging out with another woman," Kelly said, trying to sound mad.

Hermione grabbed his arm and said, "That's right." Cho sat on the other side of him and they all talked for a while. Cho and her friends were going to Hogsmeade the next day and asked Harry and Hermione if they wanted to go. Harry quickly agreed but Hermione said, "I don't think Ron will want to come so I'll stay."

Kelly said, "Don't let him spoil your fun. Come with us."

Hermione seemed tempted but said, "Not this time, thanks."

They were all surprised with how Harry got treated in Hogsmeade. He had been treated like a celebrity with people pointing and giggling. Today, people were still pointing, but they weren't giggling. It looked like they were all mad at him for not giving the Ministry the spells to use on the giants. Even Rosmerta wasn't as friendly as normal when serving them. "Turned on you pretty quick," Kelly said noticing the difference.

"That's ok; I agree that you shouldn't tell them the spells," Cho said and surprisingly all of her friends agreed. Harry told them about Percy and then about Ron. One of Cho's friends said, "We can all be kind of nutty when it comes to family. It'll work out." But, all of her other friends couldn't believe Ron would act that way to his best friend.

The next week, Dumbledore told Cho and Harry that Duram had wanted to speak to them. They both flew out right after classes. Once they arrived at the camp, they could tell the giants were preparing to leave. Duram confirmed this. "Yes Harry, we are going to go back to our land. Another large clan has chosen our side as well and we have formed an alliance. Together we will have sufficient forces to not let the Dark Wizards and the giants they control overrun us. There are still attacks, and the Dark Wizards are trying to convince more giants to follow them, but if our two clans show an alliance, we don't think many more will leave. It

has been our honor to know you and Miss Chang. You will both be welcome in our land anytime."

"Thank you sir. I hope that we will be able to make the journey. I appreciate your trust in showing me the spells. Don't think too badly of everyone at the ministry. There are some good people there," Harry said, trying to convince himself.

"I think that trust will return many benefits. Many of my kind have seen the articles of the Ministry putting pressure on you to reveal them and are heartened by the fact that you wouldn't. More will realize that we can live well with some wizards," Duram told him before Harry and Cho flew back, unhappy that they were leaving but glad that more giants were joining their side.

Harry's next match was against England. It wasn't as big as the Bulgaria match but there was a lot of interest about it. England wasn't having a great year but if they beat France it would help their playoff chances. France had already locked up a playoff spot for the first time in ten years. The Hogwarts Quidditch cup was the day after that match so Cho wasn't able to come with Harry to his match since her team was practicing. Harry had sent his extra two passes to Fletch at the Ministry. He wanted to keep Fletch liking him in case he decided to become an Untouchable next year.

Professor McGonagall said, "Please don't take offense but I will be supporting England this time Mr. Potter."

"That's ok Professor. Just don't be mad at me when France beat them," Harry replied with a smile.

"That's the way 'Arry. I will be cheering for you," Fleur added.

At the stadium, the coach was saying that even though they had a playoff spot locked up, it would be important to win to make sure they got a good ranking. "Potter. Don't be surprised if they're not exactly excited to see you here what with all that giant rubbish going on," Coach added.

They were announced first and when Harry's name was called, he did hear some boos but the cheers far outweighed them. Not as bad as he had expected. It would be worse if he missed the snitch.

Play started and Harry blocked everything else out. He tried to watch out for bludgers, keep his eye on the other seeker, watch the chasers and look out for the snitch all at the same time. It seemed like his team was off to a sluggish start. They didn't complete some plays they normally would have. Coach called a timeout with the score 40-30 England. "What's wrong with you guys? You can play better than this." He went on screaming for another minute and then play resumed. His tirade did seem to help some as France's beaters were able to disrupt a few drives with well placed bludgers. After a few of these, the chasers started to get back to playing as well as they could. Harry tried a feint towards the ground but the other seeker pulled up early. He must have realized Harry hadn't seen the snitch.

At 60-50 France, Harry saw their seeker dart off to the side. He quickly gave chase and thought it was a feint but then saw the snitch a little in front of the other seeker. England was going to get it. Harry remembered something and then directed his broom into the tail of the

other seeker's broom sending him out of control. The seeker regained control before crashing but the snitch got away. There were many boos from the crowd. England was given a penalty shot which they made.

When play resumed, it was England who seemed to be a little off balance. France was completing the runs. Harry tried another feint and the other seeker came very close to crashing this time. Then Harry saw the snitch tracking just under England's chasers on their scoring run. He made a dive and the other seeker didn't follow. The other seeker must have just thought Harry was going to break up the scoring run. When the chasers were passing the Quaffle back and forth, Harry came shooting between them barely missing the Quaffle and grabbed the snitch. England's seeker had never even seen it.

The crowd erupted in applause. Back on the ground, Harry could see the other coach screaming at his team. They quickly went into the locker room. "Excellent. This helped our playoff spot. We need to start off better next time but we sure finished well. Nice foul on the seeker Potter. Taking a trick out of Krum's book I see."

Harry spent longer in the shower than normal. He was just getting used to all of this weirdness. It kind of seemed normal that Kristi came in to shower not far from him. He went out to get dressed and wait for the others. The scene when they exited the locker room was as crazy as usual with reporters calling their names. Harry saw the reporter he talked to and walked that way. When he was almost to her, he saw his ring glowing green. He knew this meant an Unspeakable was near but he couldn't tell where.

"Hello Harry. Excellent match today."

"Thank you Ms. Mishmas."

"Some are saying you performed a dirty play when you ran into the seeker's broom before he caught the snitch."

"I assure you it was an accident, a loss of concentration on my part. I was glad to see he regained control before running into something."

"What is all this about giants? You aren't siding with them are you?"

"I was asked to be a student envoy to a clan of giants that happen to be camping near my school. It was an honor for me and my good friend. We presented the giants with welcoming gifts and they gave us gifts as well. This was my first experience with giants and so far this particular clan has been nothing but welcoming and forthcoming with information. I have no other experience to go on. So, I'm not siding with them, anymore than you would be. These particular giants happen to be on our side."

"One final question that some of the non-sporting fans would like to know. All of the other team members can be found at the club in Paris after a win. Many of my readers are young ladies who would like to meet you. Are you ever going to show up at one of these?"

"I'm sure I will sometime. I have so much schoolwork to do right now that I just can't spare the time." Then Harry heard.

"I'll make sure to drag our schoolboy there before long," Kristi said and pulled Harry away from the reporter. "See, I said you are very popular in Paris. I want to give you a piece of serious advice. I know they are going to start working on new contracts, and I also know that rookie contracts are just bad. Make sure you have a financial person you trust look over your new one before you sign it. Make sure they pay you enough. You have been the difference in the team this year and they know it."

"Thanks Kristi. I'll make sure I do that."

"So, where's your little friend today?"

"Playing for the Quidditch cup tomorrow so she couldn't make it."

"Then surely I can show you around a bit?" Kristi said.

Before Harry could answer, he heard, "'Arry! Over here." Fleur, Professor McGonagall, Fletch and Rose came walking over.

"Saved by the crowd weren't you." Kristi said while mussing up his hair and left.

"You're not mad are you professor?" Harry asked McGonagall.

"I'll get over it Mr. Potter," she said with a smile.

"Fletch! Rose! It's good to see you. Thanks for coming," Harry said and shook both their hands. Harry noticed their rings glowing as well.

"Thanks for the passes; I couldn't believe it when they were delivered. It was a good change of pace for both of us. You flew great," Fletch said looking around at the madness.

"I didn't approve of the foul on our seeker though," Rose said trying to act mad.

"Viktor Krum told me a ten point penalty is always better than letting the snitch be caught," Harry said smiling broadly.

"I supposed he's right," Rose replied.

"Did you both meet Professor McGonagall and Fleur?" Harry asked.

"Yes, they were nice to sit next to."

"Yes 'Arry but they wouldn't tell us what they did," Fleur said sounding hurt.

"They work in the ministry Fleur," Harry replied and glanced at Fletch.

"Yes, they said that but didn't say where."

"That sounds about right," Harry joked. The group stood around and talked for a while and then everyone went back to where they needed to be.

"Arry. Why won't they say where they work? They act like its some top secret area or something," Fleur said sounding really curious.

*"Now Fleur. You know there's no such thing," Harry said stringing her along.*

## **Chapter 14**

Harry went to the common room and found Hermione sitting by herself reading. "Where's everybody?" he asked.

"Still talking Quidditch. They'll probably be there all night. You look happy, so you must have won," Hermione asked.

"Yeah, it was a good match. McGonagall's not happy France won. Kristi said something unusual to me."

"That she wants to take you out?" Hermione joked.

"No, that wouldn't be unusual. She said contracts are coming up and I should get a business or financial person to help me with it. She says that rookie contracts are really bad and that the team will probably try to not pay me enough. I don't know anything about stuff like that. I'd keep playing for free if they'd let me."

"For once, I like what she had to say to you. That's good advice. You don't want the team to know you'll play for anything. I say you should find somebody to help."

"Did you hear the giants are leaving? They may even be gone by now. Duram said something about forming an alliance with another clan. Seems more aren't joining Voldemort."

"That's good; they must have thought we were worthwhile to side with. Any chance you'll talk to Ron when they come up?"

"Sure, if he apologizes to me. Otherwise, no way."

"You really need to work this out with him."

"I don't need to work anything out. Percy's a prat trying to climb to the top of the Ministry over anybody. If Ron sides with him, then so be it," Harry said in a tone that Hermione realized was final.

"By the way, who are you going to root for tomorrow?" Hermione asked.

"I'm rooting for Cho to catch the snitch but for Gryffindor to win. That's my official statement to keep me out of trouble," Harry joked. They were able to have supper by themselves since Ron kept everyone talking Quidditch until late. He and Hermione were back in the common room when the team came in.

"Slave driver that one!" Colin said angrily.

"I'm going to mess up just to teach him a lesson." Another player added.

"He's totally lost it," Ginny said walking by.

Ron walked over and yelled at the team, "Just be ready to play tomorrow!" He sat down next to Hermione and Harry got up. "You don't have to leave," Ron said but not in a convincing voice.

"Why, do you have something to say to me?" Harry asked, obviously annoyed.

"Not really," Ron added curtly.

"See you tomorrow Hermione," Harry said and left.

He was sitting next to Ginny at breakfast when the mail came. Hermione quickly glanced at the front page smiling but then looked worried when she started reading. She handed it to Harry;

#### *Ministry Feeding False Information About Seeker*

*This reporter overheard after France's win over England yesterday that the reason Harry Potter and another student were interacting with giants was that they were chosen to be envoys to a visiting clan. We did some checking of facts and found out that the students presented the giant's leader with welcoming gifts and were in return given gifts. When asked if he was siding with giants, Potter responded by saying "he was no more siding with giants than the reporter was. These particular giants happen to be siding all with us."*

*Now the information the Ministry leaked was that Potter was secretly meeting with giants about who knows what, and keeping information from the Ministry. Our Ministry needs to learn to not try and use smear campaigns. Especially on people who have been nothing but honorable. This reporter is calling for a full investigation in to how this information was leaked out and joins our staff in apologizing for the inaccuracies of our previous article.*

*On a lighter note, the reporter interviewing Potter after the win asked him when he would be coming to the celebrations at a club in Paris since there were so many young ladies wanting to meet him. He responded that he would sometime but had too much schoolwork to do. This was before Kristi Belig whisked him away assuring the reporter she would drag him to the club before long. Can you imagine a star seeker more worried about schoolwork than going out to a club? This is who the Ministry chooses to smear.*

Harry smiled broadly. "Finally, an article that makes me happy. Hermione, can I keep this one?" Harry looked straight at Ron and said, "It proves who was really wrong. I'm going to talk to Cho." He got up and went to the Ravenclaw table.

"What what's this one about?" Ron asked. Someone on his other side passed him a copy and his face fell reading it.

"Good luck today Cho. Officially I want you to catch the snitch and for Gryffindor to still win," Harry said giving her a kiss on the cheek.

"Thanks. Why didn't you come to see me after your match?"

"I figured you were like our team and not wanting to be bothered."

"Nope, we were done early and just sat around all night."

"Then why didn't *you* come find *me*?" he asked disappointed.

"We told her she needed a night off. We didn't want you talking her into a dance and affecting her performance today," Kelly said firmly.

"That's really what they said!" Cho confirmed. "So, you're going to that club sometime to meet young ladies?"

"I'm only going if you promise to come with me. I've never been out to a club or anything. The Leaky Cauldron and Three Broomsticks have been it. Three Broomsticks has a very strange crowd in the middle of the night though." They all looked at him confused. "It was last year, don't ask." Her friends started laughing but he thought Cho wanted a better explanation.

They all left to get ready for the match and Harry saw the Gryffindor team do the same thing. He went back over to Hermione. "This should be a really good match."

"Ron's even madder now," Hermione said sounding really worried.

"Why? What did I do now?"

"Being so happy about this article. You know Percy will probably get into a lot trouble for it."

"Good, he should. None of this is my fault. Percy leaked the info. Ron didn't believe me and got mad at me for suggesting it. Now, Ron is even madder at me because I was right."

"I think he's madder at himself than at you but he's not happy."

"Well I'm happy. And, if this gives you two another excuse to be alone, than you'll be happy also. See, it's not so bad," Harry said hugging her shoulder trying to make her feel better.

"We haven't been that happy alone lately," she confessed seriously.

"Probably the stress of the match plus being mad at me. He'll get over it. If he wins today, it'll probably all be gone. I want you to be happy though. Of any of my friends, you deserve to be happy the most."

She smiled. "Thank you Harry, that means a lot."

They were sitting in the front row on the Gryffindor side, ready to watch the match. They both clapped for the Ravenclaw team and stood up and yelled for Gryffindor. The match was really close. Both Cho and Ginny missed the snitch one time each. Harry's hope for Gryffindor to win but Cho get the snitch wasn't going to happen, they were too close. Both teams played a really clean game with no penalty shots awarded. When the snitch did come out, Ginny got blocked by her own chasers on a scoring run and Cho got off to a big head start and was able to catch it before Ginny caught up. Harry wanted to cheer for her but since he was a Gryffindor, he couldn't. They went down to tell the team they played really well.

"Ginny, if the chasers hadn't blocked you, you would have easily gotten to it," Harry said.



He skipped talking to Ron and ran over to Cho who was celebrating with her team and a bunch of Ravenclaws. She saw him and yelled, "Come here Gryffindor!" Cho hugged him tight. He was invited to their celebration but skipped it so she could concentrate on her classmates and this win.

Harry was walking back to his common room when Professor Dumbledore stopped him. "Harry, could you come with me please." He sounded like something was wrong. When they got to his office, Sirius was standing there not looking happy either.

"What's wrong?" Harry asked sounding very worried.

Dumbledore looked at him and said, "Professor Snape has been kidnapped." Harry was shocked. Why Snape? He hadn't been a spy for over a year. Dumbledore must have known the question Harry was thinking. "Our sources say that Voldemort didn't do this, it was another Death Eater. Maybe this Death Eater is trying to impress Voldemort, we just don't know."

"Why are you telling me? Is there something I can do?" Harry asked feeling helpless.

"No Harry, there's nothing for you to do. I'm going to meet a couple of the giants who just left here and they are going to help. We think two Death Eaters are guarding Snape and it should come as a huge surprise when two giants come in to rescue him. I will be there as well, but this shouldn't be any problem for the giants. I'm not entirely comfortable around giants, to tell you the truth." Sirius said sounding unhappy about going.

Dumbledore added, "Our big concern is what condition Professor Snape will be in. If they have been torturing him, he could be in bad shape."

Harry lit up. "Sir, if all they've been doing is the Cruciatus curse, I think Professor Snape can block it now. He asked me to teach him how to block that one earlier this year. He said he had made progress. So, if he's been able to block the spell maybe he'll be all right."

"This is news to me. Severus didn't mention it at all. Let's hope you're right. Please don't mention this to anyone. We will have a substitute until this is resolved. We just wanted you to know since Sirius would be gone," Dumbledore said, looking at Harry.

"Be careful Sirius. The giants are ok, just don't make them mad," Harry said and hugged his godfather.

He walked slowly back to the common room and found the whole team standing around talking about the match. Ginny yelled, "See, you should have been playing today."

"If those chasers had been in my way, Cho would have still caught the snitch. It was just bad timing, there was no way for you to play any better Ginny. I was there, you played great," Harry said, sounding distracted.

"We had a good run, won the cup twice. Nothing to be ashamed about," Dean said trying to make everyone feel better.

Harry leaned toward Ginny and whispered, "Those two don't look like it's going well. Ron's mad at me and I thought it would all go over if you guys won today."

"They've been talking quietly ever since we came up," Ginny said softly, not wanting anyone else to hear.

They all went down to supper together and Harry noticed most of the Ravenclaw table was empty. He was sure they were still celebrating. He sat next to Hermione but didn't say much, he was thinking about Snape. "What's bothering you Harry?" Hermione asked.

"I think you know me too well. I'm going to work on different expressions to confuse you," he tried joked back.

"That's all well and good, but what's bothering you?"

"Just a lot on my mind right now. How's Apparation coming?"

"Pretty good, we start going to Hogsmeade tomorrow. Now, I'm glad I didn't learn with you two. I would have never known all the background information about it."

"I'm just glad to have a free period. And now with the giants gone, I may actually study."

Back in the common room, Ron was talking to Dean and Seamus which left Harry and Hermione together. "Hermione, I want to tell you something. You'll find out part of this tomorrow anyway. Snape's been kidnapped."

"When? Do you think You-Know-Who did it?" she asked concerned for their Professor.

"It happened just the other day and Dumbledore doesn't think Voldemort did it. Sirius and a couple of the giants are going to try and rescue him. Whoever is holding him will be shocked when two giants come and beat down the door. So, we'll have a substitute for a little bit. There, now I'm not keeping anything from you."

"It doesn't make sense for Snape to be taken and You-Know-Who not to have anything to do with it. And, you do too keep things from us?"

Harry was confused. "Like what? I really don't think I do."

Hermione smiled a little. "Like where do you and Cho go to be alone? What have you been doing when you're alone? What's the real deal with Kristi?"

"Hermione! There's nothing with Kristi. Cho and I stay in the castle and I can't talk about what we do. You know that."

"I think there's more to Kristi than you say. I'd still like to know where you two get off to, and Cho tells her friends everything, why shouldn't you?"

"I don't know how much she tells them, but it embarrasses me. We call it -dancing-. She'll come right up to me with her friends around and ask if I want to dance tonight. I can't believe she does that."

"That's because she loves you and is comfortable that everyone knows she does. You should take it as a compliment. Why don't you tell me where it is? I promise I won't tell."

"Then I'd have to worry about you and Ron walking in on us."

Hermione gave a slight -huff- and said, "You don't have to worry about that. C'mon show me."

"Ok, but on one condition. You have to close your eyes when I say and keep them closed until I say open them. I don't want you finding the place without me. And, we need to take the cloak."

"Deal! Let's go." Harry ran up and hid his cloak under his robe and came back down. Hermione said they were going to do something but Ron didn't seem to care. They got near the secret stairs and no one was around so they put on the cloak and Harry made Hermione promise to close her eyes. He held her shoulders and led her to entrance and up the stairs. At the top he told her to open her eyes and he removed the cloak. Then he opened the door to the tower room. She was shocked. It is a very nice room with a soft rug, small loveseat and a large fireplace that was lit. You could see very far out the window. "Harry, this is really nice. How did you find it?"

"R.J. talked Dobby into making us a special private diner and Dobby led me up here. After that we ate up here almost every night. I think he and Winky keep the fire going."

"So, you and R.J. you...danced too?"

"Umm. Yeah. She was the first of course. She was...aggressive. Remember when you came back from holiday and my back was sore? It was because of her fingernails. She had me bleeding almost every time," Harry said with a chuckle.

Hermione laughed. "Think you'd still be with her?"

"I like to think so. Maybe it wouldn't have worked out but I thought it would. She treated me more normal than almost anyone ever has. I'm lucky things worked out with Cho and that she understands about R.J."

"You know that you've really grown up since you met R.J. I guess we should get back," Hermione said. Harry made her close her eyes again and they snuck back out. When they were far away from the stairs and no one was around, he removed the cloak. "Thanks for showing me that Harry."

"That's ok. I really don't need to keep anything from you." They walked back to the common room and found the others pretty much where they were before. Ron barely acknowledged them when they came in.

There were many questions when Mrs. Filmsaw was filling in at Defense classes. She assured everyone that Professor Snape was off on an errand and would be back soon.

Harry saw Professor Dumbledore later in the week and asked him about Snape. "Everything went remarkably well Harry. In fact, there are two bits of information you will be most

interested in. I will only share one of them with you today. Duram himself met Sirius and helped rescue Professor Snape who as you guessed, held up quite well. Duram wanted a message passed onto you. He wanted you to know that he had no choice but to use your gift while saving the professor. He said he understands how you felt."

"So, when will I find out the other information?" Harry asked anxiously.

"Soon Harry. Patience," Dumbledore replied looking like there was much more to the story.

That day Professor McGonagall asked Harry if he could get an extra pass for his match against Italy. She had an acquaintance that would appreciate going.

There was only two more weeks of class when Harry had his final match. He saw Cho a couple days before in their private area and asked her a question. "Cho. This may sound weird but I could use your help. Would you please be my manager?"

"Your what? What are you talking about?"

"Contracts will be coming up and everybody says I need someone who knows finance and business to be my manager. I would end up telling the team I'd play for free, so Fleur and Kristi told me to get someone I trust to do the contract part for me. It wouldn't take that much of your time so you can go do whatever job you want. I think a manager normally gets 15% of the contract."

"You want me to negotiate your contract and you'll pay me 15% of it?"

"Unless you want more. As soon as we sign the contract, you can quit if you want. I could look for someone else to do it next time if you're too busy at you other job."

"I can't believe you'd trust me to handle your contract. That's a big deal. Why don't you get a professional?"

"Cho, I trust you as much as anyone. All that's important to me is that I play. You're really smart and can figure out what I should be paid. If you need to get ideas, you could talk to Kristi."

"Before I say anything, I wanted to talk to you about my job after school. I've changed my mind on what I'm planning on doing. What would you think if I did the business stuff for Fred and George Weasley? They seem to have a really good plan and some startup money."

"I think that's great! What does your father think?"

"My father just wants me to be happy. He's ok with it. I think he'll be much more ok with me being your manager also since that will probably pay more than the Weasley's for a while."

"What does your father think about you still dating me after you get out of school, since I'll still be here?"

"He'd probably disown me if we ever stopped dating, which I don't ever want to happen. He's got this thing where you are the perfect match for me. He keeps saying that he's going to tell you to marry me. He says that he and my mom got married when they were sixteen."

"So, you're coming to the match Saturday and if it comes up, can I say you're my manager?"

"Yes you can. Cho Chang, Professional Quidditch manager. Sounds good."

"I don't know Cho Chang Potter, Professional Quidditch manager has a nice ring. Maybe your father is onto something," Harry said smiling his mind starting to think about something.

They got dressed and went back to their rooms. Ron and Hermione were still up and called him over. "Harry we want to talk to you," Hermione said with a strange look on her face.

"We've wanted to tell you something for a while now but just couldn't bring ourselves to but we need to get it out," Hermione continued after a brief pause. "Ron and I are breaking up."

"What? No way! But, you two are perfect for each other. What happened?" Harry was stunned.

"We just decided we were better as friends than anything more. There just wasn't that spark that we expected when we were alone. It's ok though; we've been talking about it for a while. We're still really good friends. You never know what will happen down the road, but for now we want things back like they were."

"Ron. Is this what you wanted as well?" Harry asked still not believing what he heard.

"Well, I think we both wanted it to be like you and Cho but it just wasn't like that for us. We care about each other and do love each other, just more as friends. We talk about how you and Cho are together and that's what we both want."

"I've always thought you two would be the best. I can't believe this," Harry said getting really depressed.

"We were most worried about disappointing you since we knew you would do anything for us. It had to be hard trying to give us private time and everything," Ron added sounding sad as well.

"I just thought it would be Ron and Hermione and then I'd come around once in a while. I've never pictured anything else. This has turned into the worst day in a long time."

"Don't say that. Now that it's out, we can get back to acting normal. This is really the best thing for us. And, it'll be the three of us all next year, back to normal," Hermione said trying to cheer him up.

"I can't believe how sad this makes me. I feel almost like Cho and I broke up."

"Don't be sad. We're really ok with it. We're still best friends and that's more important," Hermione said and hugged Harry.

"Mate. You're an international Quidditch star, you shouldn't be crying," Ron said trying to cheer up his friend.

"Don't let anybody take a picture of it," Harry joked, still trying to take in all of the information.

"I shouldn't have stuck up for Percy; I knew he probably did it," Ron said looking directly at Harry.

"Don't worry about it. None of that matters to me now. I shouldn't have rubbed it in when the article came out. I just can't believe you two are splitting up." Harry walked slowly up to bed. He had been so happy a while earlier and this just hit him hard.

Harry skipped breakfast the next morning and met the others in Defense class. They were waiting on the substitute but Snape walked in. Some of the students groaned but Harry, Ron and Hermione looked very happy. Snape seemed to nod at them and jumped right into the lesson. When class was over he said, "Potter a word please." Then when the other students were gone he continued, "Being able to block that spell made all the difference in the world. I can't thank you enough for that."

"No problem sir, can you tell me what happened?"

"I've been asked not to for now. You will find out soon enough. You can go now."

Harry was walking up to lunch when Cho came up. "Missed you at breakfast. You seem down, anything wrong?"

"Ron and Hermione split up."

Cho didn't seem surprised by the news. "Well, they didn't seem to be enjoying spending much time together. It's probably better since they look like they're still friends."

Harry looked at her shocked and said, "That's what they said. I almost cried when they told me. I always thought they would be perfect together."

"Harry, look at us and look at how they were. We joke around, kiss, and have fun. When was the last time you saw them acting like they were having fun? They weren't perfect together. Now you and I on the other hand are," Cho said and quickly kissed his cheek.

Harry spent the rest of that day with Ron and Hermione trying to have fun. It was getting easier to accept they weren't dating anymore.

The next day he got his stuff and headed to McGonagall's office for his final Quidditch match before the playoffs. McGonagall, Fleur and Cho were standing there when he opened the door with very strange looks on their faces. When he turned and shut the door he saw Sirius standing there. "Sirius!" Harry said and hugged him. "What are you doing here? I heard you and Duram got Snape out ok."

"Yes, but the most amazing part was the second wizard holding him. It seems this one had a silver hand," a wicked smile came to Sirius' face.

"Wormtail?" Harry asked.

"Yep. And guess what. He wanted to defect to our side. The little rat grabbed Snape thinking you would come after him. He almost didn't make it because Duram was going to kill him but Snape stopped him in time. The wizard that Duram did kill wasn't in on it and was the one who had tortured Snape. Snape said the blocking technique you taught him worked great."

"So, with Wormtail talking, does that mean you're finally cleared?"

"Who do you think the extra pass was for Mr. Potter?" McGonagall added with an obvious smile.

"I can't believe this. Let's go get this over with so I can talk longer," Harry said, now feeling as happy as he ever had.

They got to the stadium, and a few people gave Sirius looks like they recognized him but it didn't matter. They took their seats and Harry went into the locker room to wait. He couldn't remember being happier. Kristi who never talks before a match asked him if everything was ok. "Never better Kristi, never better."

Italy was announced first and there were cheers and then the crowd roared when France was announced. Harry felt like he was floating. When play started, Harry took off like a rocket, trying to disrupt their chasers, and even Italy's beaters. It seemed like he was easily dodging the bludgers. He broke up Italy's first ten scoring runs. Slowing down, Harry scanned the area for the snitch and felt the other seeker come close so he dove straight for the ground. The other seeker tried to pull up but couldn't manage it and crashed, rolling off his broom. Italy called timeout while their seeker got back up.

Coach yelled, "Potter! What the hell's with you today?"

"Just a good day coach!" Harry yelled back wanting to end the match so he could have more time with his godfather.

Not long after play started, Harry saw a flash near Italy's keeper. Harry shot off straight at the keeper and saw his eyes get wider and wider. He thought Harry was going to ram him and darted out of the way which left the snitch wide open for Harry to catch. It was over, France won!

All of the crowd and the team were cheering. This win secured second place in the league, behind Bulgaria. It would give them an excellent seed for the playoffs.

Back in the locker room, the team was really happy. "I don't know what you ate this morning Potter, but remember it. That was amazing flying," Coach said. They showered and headed out to face the reporters. Harry went straight to the only one he ever talked to.

"Congratulations Harry. The best record France has seen in over ten years."

"We just had a great team Ms. Mishmas. Everyone played really well."

"What do you think your chances are in the playoffs?"

"I think all the matches will be hard, but of course playing Bulgaria will be a real challenge."

"Will you be back with France next year? Do you think they can come up with a good enough offer? I hear many teams want to talk to you."

"Why would I think about leaving France? The fans here have been the best. This is a great team and I've learned so much from the coaches. I would be very disappointed to not be here next year. I couldn't imagine being happy anyplace other than France."

Harry found and hugged Cho and Fleur, shook McGonagall's hand and then was hugging Sirius when he heard.

"Nice interview schoolboy. They print that and the fans will demand the team bring you back." She noticed Sirius and said, "Now, who's your new friend?"

"Kristi, this is my godfather, Sirius Black. Sirius, this is Kristi, the best chaser I've ever known."

"Don't tell me, you taught him everything he knows," Kristi said shaking Sirius' hand.

"Actually, I wish I knew half of what he knows. Nice to meet you Kristi," Sirius replied giving the woman an appraising look.

"See you at practice schoolboy," she said and messed his hair, before hitting fists with him.

"What's her story?" Sirius asked?

Before Harry could answer, he heard another familiar voice, "Harry. We need to start discussing your contract for next year. We'd like for you to come back and play for us of course."

Harry interrupted him. "Um coach. You'll have to talk to my manager about that. She handles all my affairs. Coach meet Cho Chang. Cho...Coach."

She shook his hand and said, "Send me your offer and we'll look at it first thing," in a calm business-like voice.

The coach just looked at her but then smiled and walked away.

"I can't tell you how much I missed being out in public, and not as a dog," Sirius joked.

They all went back to the school. Harry sat with Sirius in Professor McGonagall's classroom talking for a while. "What are you going to do now?" Harry asked, still in shock that his godfather was no longer wanted.

"I'm thinking about traveling for a little bit. I'd like to see some old friends and to re-establish some old ties. It's strange; I haven't been really free in over sixteen years. The past few years were better than Azkaban of course but they still weren't free."

"Are you still going to stay at the castle when you're not traveling or are you going to get your own place?"



"I'd like to stay there if that's ok. At least until I figure out what I'm going to do. Now I can be a real godfather to you."

They talked for a while longer and then Harry went to the common room. "So, how was the match? You won didn't you?" Ron asked, being back to his friendly self.

"Sirius is free! He came to the match with us!" Harry exclaimed forgetting about Quidditch.

"Really? How?" Hermione asked.

"Wormtail. He was captured and that freed Sirius."

"That's great. Now he won't have to live in caves," Ron added happy as well.

"I hope he stays with me. I don't feel like being alone like I did last year."

They finished their exams early the next week and had nothing to do for a few days until the final meal. Harry tried to spend as much time as he could with both Cho and his friends.

"How will we see each other now?" Harry asked again, worrying about not seeing Cho as much.

"I think my father is going to invite you to visit us and, I think he would let me come visit you. I'll have to do work with the Weasley's, but I can see you after that. I'll come to the playoffs with you as well. We'll make it work Harry. It's only a year."

"Only a year? Think back on everything that can happen in a year. I'll be nervous about visiting your house, but if that made it possible to see you more, I'll do it."

"Don't go running off to clubs in Paris without me? I'm going to subscribe to the Daily Gazette even though I can't read French just to look for 'Harry Potter' written in there. If I see it near 'Kristi Belig', you're in trouble."

They all went to the final meal and after eating, they listened to Dumbledore's final message,

"What a year we've had. We've made new friends and valuable allies and have opened some people's eyes to see that there is good in every race out there. I am sad to see you seventh-years depart, but excited that you will be entering a new adventure. I hope we have prepared you well for the new challenges you will face. Those of us not leaving wish you all well. I would like to say that this year in particular has been one of my most satisfying. A wrongly convicted man who became a good friend has been cleared and can return to play the role of full time godfather. Our interaction with Beauxbatons has given me hope that our schools can become closer in the future. Seeing the remarkable growth of students also gives me great hope that the darker forces do not have much time left with us. Now, on to what you really want to hear. House points. In fourth place with 240 points Hufflepuff. In third place with 265 points, Slytherin. In second place with 310 points, Gryffindor. And, in first place with 320 points, Ravenclaw. Well done Ravenclaw, you hold both the Quidditch cup and House cup this year."

Everyone cheered, even some of the Slytherin's. They wouldn't have cheered if it had been Gryffindor who won. This was the first year since Harry started that Gryffindor was shut out of both cups. It seemed to bother some of the students and even Ron, but Harry and Hermione

didn't seem to mind. Winning the cup was really nice, but there were other things much more important.

They went down early and said goodbye to Hagrid. He was going to visit the giants again this summer but would be back before term. Hagrid was really happy that they had become our friends.

Harry, Ron, Hermione and Ginny all found a compartment on the train and Cho joined them quickly.

"Harry, where's your trunk?" Hermione asked, noticing that Harry didn't have one.

"Oh, Mr. Quidditch star had the house-elf take it," Ron said sarcastically.

"Dobby offered to take it for me; I didn't have him take it," Harry clarified.

"Speaking of that, are you playing for France next year?" Hermione questioned.

"I hope so, but don't know for sure. You have to ask my manager."

"Manager? C'mon you're not getting one of those are you?" Ron exclaimed.

"Have something against managers do you?" Cho asked coldly.

"Cho's your manager?" Ginny piped up.

Harry nodded and asked, "So, am I playing for France next year? Please say yes."

"I don't see why not. Their second offer wasn't too bad. We'll make them sweat for a bit and see about the next one," she replied. "I really think you should talk to other teams."

"No way. I like this team and they've been really nice to me. I don't care about the other teams."

"Your loyalty is costing you money," Ron added. "But, if you change teams you couldn't see Kristi all the time."

Ginny hit Ron. Cho laughed and said, "I knew he wouldn't talk to anyone else, but the French team doesn't know that. I don't want them to take too much advantage of your loyalty Harry. I'll take care of you, don't worry." She leaned over and kissed him.

"And, she'll take care of Fred and George. Did you know she's doing the business side of stuff for them?" Harry asked and caught everyone by surprise.

"Really? Why would you do that when you could go to the ministry?" Ron seemed totally confused.

"I think they have a chance to do really good. And now that I'll get 15% of Harry's contract, I can afford to take a chance on them," Cho said smiling. "I'll miss seeing all of you so much. Try to keep Harry out of trouble next year and take care of him. I want him to come back in one piece."

"I'll take care of him!" Ginny said a little too quickly and then added, "Keeping him out of trouble may be more than I can handle."

"Don't worry Cho we won't let anything happen to him," Hermione said and then got an evil smile. "But Harry, how will you go without dancing the whole time?"

"Hermione!" Harry blushed. Cho just laughed and squeezed Harry's arm but Ron and Ginny looked confused. They all enjoyed the train ride back. It was good to see all of his friends happy again. Ron and Hermione really did seem happier as just friends.

At the London Station, Harry walked Cho over to her parents to say goodbye. "It's good to see you again Mr. And Mrs. Chang," Harry said shaking Mr. Chang's hand.

"You too Harry. That was a very thoughtful gift you gave our daughter."

"When I saw that brooch, it just seemed to fit Cho. Nothing else came close."

"Bye Cho, I'll miss you." Harry went to just hug her but she gave him a big kiss, which made him uncomfortable since her parents were there.

"I'll see you soon Harry, I love you," she said loudly.

Harry quickly replied, "I love you to." He watched them walk away and went back to where the Weasley's were standing with Hermione and her parents.

"You make a cute couple Harry," Mrs. Weasley said, "Are you going to visit us this summer?"

"I'd like that. And, I'd like any of you to come visit me. Sirius said he may do some traveling, so I don't know if he will be there or not. I'll probably just help Mr. Wilkins work in the yard."

They all hugged and Harry watched his friends go. He stood there for another moment and apparated back to his home. Thankfully, Sirius would be there waiting.

*The End.*