

Growing up too fast

By

Sloth

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Chapter 1

During the train ride back from Hogwarts, Harry had almost pushed the terrible events and painful memories of the end of the Triwizard Tournament out of his mind. Setting in the car playing Exploding Snaps with Ron, Fred, and George made things just seem like any normal start of summer trip. Then, seeing how Mr. & Mrs. Weasley greeted their children and the extremely long hug Mrs. Weasley gave to Harry had brought him back to reality. Even Hermione had done something very unusual and kissed him on the cheek before leaving. Things were never going to be the same again. Voldemort was back and Cedric was dead. Harry had barely been able to escape with Cedric's body and return to Voldemort. If it wasn't for the ghostly images of Cedric and his parents who were the last people Voldemort killed coming out of his wand and helping him, Harry wouldn't have been able to reach the portkey and return to Hogwarts. Most of the students had stayed away from Harry after this and seemed to think that he was responsible for Cedric's death. Harry really didn't care much what most of the students thought, but when he saw how devastated Cho Chang was; it really bothered him a lot.

The Dursleys hadn't said one word to Harry on the ride back to 4 Privet Drive and this was just fine with him. He was worried about exploding and doing something terrible to them that could get him expelled from Hogwarts.

Harry spent most of the next week alone in his room, only coming out to get something to eat or to do the chores Aunt Petunia was making him do. They treated him like he had some disease and was only good for doing chores their 'little Dudley' wouldn't do, which was about any type of work. Being alone in his room with Hedwig was perfect with Harry; he really didn't want to talk to anyone. Hedwig didn't judge him or blame him for anything that had happened. She was always very happy just sitting on Harry's knee and being stroked.

It seems that all of Harry's friends were worried about him since at least one owl a day had dropped off letters asking him how he was. Harry really didn't feel like getting into any discussions so he simply replied with "I'm fine, don't worry" to each letter. In reality though, Harry was getting angrier with himself each day. How could he have just run away after what Voldemort had done? Why didn't he do everything he could to stop him right then? How many more of his friends would be hurt now that Voldemort had his body back and was still trying to kill him? The Weasley's were the nicest people Harry had ever met and had welcomed him into their family without question, and now they were at the top of the list of people Voldemort would try to hurt to get at Harry.

Harry had considered packing his trunk and flying off somewhere that no one knew about but realized that it was too late for this. Voldemort wouldn't leave his friends alone now; he would just assume they knew where Harry was and still come after them. There was no way to undo placing them in harm just for being friends with Harry. Each night this week Harry had cried himself to sleep, blaming himself for bringing so much worry and pain to his friends.

The only other emotion besides worry and guilt that Harry was feeling was anger. Harry could not remember being full of so much anger and hate before. Draco Malfoy's comments on the train back kept going through his head. "Trying to pretend it isn't happening aren't you? Muggles and Mudbloods will be first... Well second... Since Diggory was first..." That was all he got out before the compartment was full of hexes and curses being directed at him. Draco

loved that this was happening now. How could anyone be that evil? Cedric had died only a month earlier.

One evening, Harry was in his room feeling the anger and rage build in him when he wanted his 'Quidditch through the Ages' book but realized it was in his closet. This just annoyed him for some reason. Suddenly Harry felt the tips of his fingers get very warm and the next thing he knew, the closet burst open and the book flew straight at him.

Harry managed to duck to keep from being hit by the book that crashed into his desk instead. Harry looked down at his fingers and they looked and felt fine now. He couldn't understand how this happened; his wand was under the floorboard. He picked up his book and it looked normal. After a few minutes of confusion he went ahead and skimmed through the book trying to take his mind off of things.

Quidditch, Harry thought. If Voldemort hadn't come back he would have wanted to be a professional Quidditch player. Harry was a natural at Quidditch and once he found out his father was also a very good Chaser on the Hogwarts team; he just assumed it was a talent he got from his father. The only time Harry felt like a normal school boy was when he was flying around looking for the snitch. It made him feel so free and focused on a task. However, since Voldemort killed his parents and his godfather was framed for murders he didn't commit, Harry was stuck living with the Dursleys and couldn't use his broom at all during the summers.

These thoughts caused the anger he was keeping inside to come up again. Almost instantly the tips of Harry's fingers begin to get warm, but quickly returned to feeling normal again when he lost focus on his anger. Harry wondered if he should write to Dumbledore or Sirius about this. Then he thought, "No, I don't need to worry anyone else about something peculiar about me. They have their own issues to deal with right now and I'm going to start handling things myself."

Looking over at the clock, it was 2:00am and Harry decided it was time to try and sleep. He didn't really like sleeping because more nights than not he would be awakened by a nightmare. Sometimes the nightmares made his scar burn and he was now sure this was because Voldemort was doing something evil or feeling even more hatred toward Harry. Most times though, the nightmares were of his friends being tortured and then asking him how he could let this happen to them. Harry knew they didn't feel this way, but it didn't help seeing that in his mind.

Harry had been asleep for a while when he was awakened by a feeling of being watched and immediately saw a pair of big eyes and pointy ears staring at him. "AAARH... Get off me."

"Dobby is sorry sir. Dobby never meant to hurt Harry Potter sir."

Dobby started to grab one of Harry's schoolbooks to beat him on the head but Harry stopped him in time and said. "It's ok Dobby, you just scared me. Just poke me, remember?"

"Dobby will remember next time sir, Dobby is very sorry. How is Harry Potter sir? Dobby has been concerned." Dobby's expression changed from worry that Harry was mad about being scared to genuine concern for Harry.

"I'm fine Dobby, don't worry about me," Harry said trying to sound as convincing as he could. "How are things at Hogwarts?"

"Ah sir, Professor Dumbledore is adding extra security around the castle. Many witches and wizards are coming to see him sir. Some creatures we don't trust. Dobby is not liking this at all. Dobby remembers how it was the last time You-Know-Who was around." Dobby got an almost angry look on his face. He used to be the house-elf for Lucius Malfoy who is one of the main Death Eaters and also Draco's father. Harry had tricked Lucius into freeing Dobby during his second year at Hogwarts.

"But Dobby, you're working at Hogwarts now; you don't have to be around the Malfoys anymore. Professor Dumbledore won't let anything happen to you at Hogwarts."

"Ah sir, Dobby is not worried for himself, Professor Dumbledore is a great wizard and we house-elves are liking very much working for him. I is remembering how it was in the bad wizard family during those times. House elves were treated very bad sir and then when you defeated You-Know-Who, we were treated much better. I is worried that things will be even worse this time for my friends."

Harry could see the pain and worry in Dobby's eyes. It was the same thing Harry was feeling for his friends. "I know how you feel Dobby. I am worried about my friends too" said Harry with understanding. "You know I'm going to do everything I can to make sure Voldemort doesn't harm anyone, don't you?"

"Ah, Harry Potter is too noble, too brave. Harry Potter should be more concerned with his own safety than with others. Without Harry Potter, nothing would stop You-Know-Who from being worse than before. What is Harry Potter doing to be ready?" Dobby was now being very serious; Harry had never seen Dobby like this before.

"What do you mean Dobby? What should I be doing?" asked Harry.

"Ah sir, Harry Potter must learn. There is much to learn before he is in danger again." Dobby was staring directly into Harry's eyes as he said this. "Harry Potter must learn all he can. Harry Potter must not wait for learning to come to him."

Harry was stunned by the Dobby's seriousness. "Dobby, I don't understand what you mean. What can I do before getting back to Hogwarts?"

"Harry Potter has done nothing but worry and grieve since leaving school!" Dobby said very sternly. "Sir must be prepared. You-Know-Who knows what Harry Potter will learn in school and will be ready. Harry Potter must learn what is not taught in school. Harry Potter must know things You-Know-Who does not know he knows." Dobby pulled himself up and looked straight into Harry's face. "Dobby will help Harry Potter learn. Harry Potter must start learning." And with a 'pop' Dobby was gone.

This left Harry feeling very confused. Harry noticed a note on his desk that wasn't there before. It looked very old and quite ragged. The note simply said. 'Magic itself is not dark. The soul of the Wizard controls the Evil of the Magic. You must focus.' There was a small drawing that looked like a witch being burned. Her eyes didn't show any fear or pain even though she was almost entirely engulfed in flames. Her fingers were glowing and it looked like the other people were being blown away from her.

Harry didn't understand any of this, so he put the note into the floorboard and tried to sleep some more. He didn't dream at all the rest of the night.

The next morning Harry felt surprisingly better. He decided that Dobby's comments about not setting around and worrying were smart. After a breakfast of bread and some jam, Aunt Petunia told Harry he was to completely weed the back garden before he would be allowed to have any lunch. As long as it kept Harry away from Dudley it wouldn't be too bad.

Harry was weeding the largest area of the garden with the large rake and as soon as Aunt Petunia noticed this she came out yelling. "You can't use that rake on my garden, you'll destroy my plants. Use the small hand rake boy. Don't you have any consideration for how hard I've worked to get this garden in order?"

Harry thought about replying with "Your idea of hard work is yelling at me to do things for you," but surprisingly kept this to himself. He didn't want anything unexpected to happen and get into any more trouble with the Ministry of Magic. The Minister of Magic had been very nice to Harry, but he was sure that was over after the way Harry spoke to him at school. The Minister didn't believe Harry that Voldemort had come back and Harry lashed out at him while in the Hospital wing. Harry was quite sure his special treatment from the Ministry was over.

Still Harry was fuming inside about the way Aunt Petunia treated him and then adding on the memories of the Minister basically calling Harry a liar. Harry felt his fingers burning and the next thing he knew, the hand rake was zooming toward him. Luckily Harry caught the rake and Aunt Petunia was walking into the house with her back turned so she didn't notice what had happened.

Harry went back to weeding, but was thinking about what had just happened. He remembered the book coming out of the closet, his fingers getting warm the next day and now this happening. Did this have something to do with the strange note he found on his desk? Was this some Dark Magic that he was doing? Did he have to be very angry to cause this to happen? All he knew was that he felt confused.

The rest of the weeding out of the way Harry grabbed a bread and cheese sandwich before going back up to his room. When he got to his room, he noticed there was a note on his desk. He quickly picked it up and saw it was the same as the note from last night. He opened the floorboard and the note was not there anymore. "How did the note get back on my desk?" mumbled Harry to himself. Looking closer at the note, the words "You must focus" seemed to be clearer than the rest of the note. He just assumed he hadn't noticed this last night and put the note back under the floorboard.

About this time two owls came through the open window. Harry could tell that one of them was Ron's owl Pig. It didn't look like Pig would ever get any bigger or stop being so excitable. Harry quickly untied the note from Pig and read the note.

Harry.

How are things going with the Muggles? I know you're going to say everything's fine, and I'm sure you can handle anything they put you through, but if you need anything, just let me know. I'm sure I can convince Fred and George to come and break you out again.

Truthfully Harry everyone is very worried about you. I tell them you're quite capable of dealing with this, but well, you know how they are. Mom thinks of you as part of the family now so you should get used to this kind of concern.

I've been practicing my Quidditch so far this summer. I hope to make the house team now that we have an opening.

I bug mom about asking Dumbledore when you can come for the rest of the summer. She's a bit ticked off at me for asking so much, but I won't stop.

Ron

Harry quickly took out a quill and some parchment to write a quick reply.

Ron

The Muggles are basically giving me extra chores and then ignoring me, which is about the most I can hope for. I shouldn't need rescuing this year.

Tell you mom I appreciate her thoughts but I'd rather her just worry about all of you. If your family hadn't been so nice to me you may not be in so much danger. I'll be careful and watch myself but just make sure nothing happens to any of you.

Harry

Harry quickly tied the note to Pig's leg and she flew away. The other owl hooted in an annoyed kind of way. It was a very well trained owl, it didn't make a sound while He was replying to Ron, but he could tell it didn't want to hang around here. He untied the note and the owl quickly flew back out the window.

This note was from Hermione.

Harry

I'm spending the summer here at home with my family. They didn't think it would be a good idea for me to go see Viktor with everything that is happening.

I wasn't really looking forward to seeing him very much. It would have been very interesting to see where he lives and to be able to pick up some books from that area of the world.

How have you been feeling? Any more nightmares? Remember, if you do have any you should write to Professor Dumbledore and Sirius right away. They would want to know.

This sounds just like Hermione, Harry thought. Immediately tell your godfather and the headmaster of Hogwarts just because you have a dream.

Have you written to Ginny since you've been back? You really should you know.

Harry knew that Hermione would have known if he had written since Ginny and Hermione had gotten to be very good friends in the past couple years. He knew Ginny had a crush on

him and he didn't want to do anything to put her in any more danger than she was. It was better for him to miss his friends than for him to cause any more harm to them.

Well take care and write soon. Write something more than "I'm fine, don't worry" this time though.

Love

Hermione

Harry smiled as he thought about Hermione and Ron. They've been through so much in the past 4 years. He couldn't imagine having better friends than them. He wondered how much things would change if Ron and Hermione finally admitted their feelings for each other. Right now, He thought that would be a good thing for them. If they weren't around so much, maybe they wouldn't be so much of a target.

Harry decided to take a quick shower since he had been working in the garden all morning. Upon returning to his room, he noticed the note back on his desk. He set down on his bed and tried to study the drawing on the note closer. He was sure the words "You must focus" and the witch's glowing fingers were much clearer now. He was beginning to think this was related to the strange way his fingers had been feeling when he had gotten very angry. The first time this happened he had been angry already and then became further irritated by not having the book he wanted when suddenly the book came flying out of the closet.

He decided to try out his theory by attempting to summon one of his books from off the floor. He looked at the book and kept thinking the book flying to him, but nothing happened. He then decided to try and become angry about something again. Thinking back to Draco Malfoy's comments on the Hogwarts train actually made getting angry very easy. However simply being angry didn't seem to do the trick. If he was holding a wand, he could have used the summoning spell and called the book to him. Harry wondered if that is what was missing. Maybe that is what was missing. Maybe when he was very angry he actually thought about the spell it would take to get his book. Focusing hard on feeling like he really needed to get his book, Harry started thinking Accio Book, Accio Book. Suddenly the tips of his fingers felt very warm and then his book flew off of the floor and into his hands.

Within a few hours Harry was able to quickly perform the Accio spell without using his wand on all sorts of items in his room. He only had to focus clearly on the item and then think the Accio spell in his head. The only other thing he had picked up so quickly was flying on a broom.

It was about 2:00am when Harry finally decided to go to sleep. He felt very pleased with himself for figuring this out on his own. His pleasure didn't last too long. As soon as he fell asleep the image of Voldemort surrounded by the Death Eaters came to him. This was the image Harry saw after Voldemort had gotten his body back and summoned the Death Eaters back to him. Harry vividly remembered the look on Lucius Malfoy's face, like he had just been given the best present of his life. The strange thing about this dream is that no one was tortured and Harry didn't wake up afraid, he woke up angry. Harry decided right then and there that he was never going to run away again. The next time he met Voldemort, he promised himself that he would not run away.

Everything seemed so clear to Harry in the morning. He was going to learn as much as he could and stop living in fear of Voldemort and the Death Eaters. As Hagrid has said, "What will come will come. We just need to be ready."

Harry had planned on spending the day practicing his new talent but just then Aunt Petunia was beating on his door. "Wake up and get down here boy there is work you need to do."

Harry dressed and went downstairs to see Aunt Petunia talking to Mrs. Figg who used to watch Harry when he was younger and lived on the next block. "Mrs. Figg needs some help with her yard work and Dudley is too busy to help. You're to spend your days helping her until she doesn't need anything else done. This doesn't mean you get out of your chores here mind you." Mrs. Figg was nice enough, but Harry didn't enjoy spending time at her house due to the number of cats she kept there. But if he was going to be working in the yard, this shouldn't be a problem. He would still be able to practice when he got back home.

"I've got quite a bit of yard work to do Harry. I thought Dudley would be better suited to help since there are some large stones that need moved but Petunia here assured me you would be able to move them. We'll let's get going, there's a lot to get done," said Mrs. Figg in a pleasant voice.

It swelled up inside of him again. If it weren't for Voldemort, he would be living with his parents and probably practicing Quidditch with his father today instead. If he had let Remus Lupin and Sirius kill Wormtail during his 3rd year, Sirius' name would be cleared and he would be living with him right now. He tried to push this out of his mind; there was nothing he could do about it now.

It was a nice day, so the walk over to Mrs. Figg's house was quite nice. She didn't complain about Harry or tell him how worthless he was so that was an improvement over the Dursley's already.

In the back of Mrs. Figg's house the gardens were in quite bad shape and there were about 6 very large stones that she wanted move to the other side of her yard. Harry didn't see how he could possibly move them by himself. At least there was some normal weed pulling and trimming to do first before he had to worry about the stones.

After a few hours of work, Mrs. Figg came out with something for him to drink and asked if he would like to sit a few minutes. "Where are all your cats, Mrs. Figg?" Harry asked.

"Oh I gave them to my niece; they became quite a bother for me actually," replied Mrs. Figg. "How has your school been going Harry? Are they treating you ok there?"

Harry was startled at this question but then just assumed that Aunt Petunia had told her he was going to St. Brutus School for the Criminally Inclined. "School is actually very nice mam," Harry replied.

"I used to know some of the Professors there, I wonder if any of them are still around," Mrs. Figg was saying.

Harry was getting more worried that he would slip and say something so he quickly said "Mrs. Figg, is it ok if we stop for today? I'd like to do some of my summer homework this afternoon".

"Of course Harry, I don't want to keep you all day. Would you be able to come back over tomorrow and continue with the yard work?"

"That would be fine; it's actually nice being able to get out of the house for a change. I'll see you tomorrow Mrs. Figg. Bye."

Harry slowly walked back to Privet Drive. He wasn't anxious to get back there, but he hadn't planned on Mrs. Figg asking about his school. The time had gone by quickly and he was looking forward to going back the next day. If something came up about his school, he would try to change the subject.

"Well boy, were you able to move those stones for Mrs. Figg?" Aunt Petunia said with a smirk as he walked in the back door.

"No, I didn't get to those today, but I really don't think they will be any problem," Harry said confidently even though he had no idea how he was going to move them.

The strange note was back on Harry's desk but he noticed all the words were back to barely visible when just last night "You must focus" was much clearer than the rest. He wasn't complaining, if it weren't for this note he wouldn't have discovered this new talent. One thing was strange though. The drawing of the witch showed things flying away from her, so this must not be limited to the summoning charm. Harry thought of what Hermione would say "Well of course it's not limited to the summoning charm Harry you had to think of that spell for anything to happen."

Harry decided to try out another spell. He focused a book currently on the floor, and then pictured it being on his desk and then thought *Placio, Placio*. Quite quickly the book rose up and landed on his desk. After a few more hours of practice he was able to move any item he tried around his room. He could lie in bed and summon any book off of his desk and the return it without getting up at all.

These first weeks of summer vacation had actually been quite enjoyable. One thing was causing Harry some guilt. He had been getting nearly daily owls from his friends but hadn't been responding regularly. Some of this had been intentional; it annoyed him that everyone didn't think he could take care of himself and thought he needed to be checked on daily. He also thought that if he kept to himself more that Voldemort wouldn't see the others as so much of a target.

Taking out a quill, Harry wrote:

Hermione

Sorry I didn't write back sooner, I've been doing a lot of reading and thinking. Actually, you'd be proud of me. I've been thinking quite a bit about schoolwork and what we'll be doing next year.

Have you heard anything about Hagrid? I guess he's still off doing that thing for Dumbledore. I sure hope it goes ok.

Please be careful

Harry

Ron

Sorry I didn't write back sooner, sometimes with the Dursleys, I just want to get in my room and talk to Hedwig

I'm doing some yard work for Mrs. Figg who used to watch me when I was younger. It gets me away from the Dursleys for most of the day.

Has your dad heard anything about Voldemort or the Death Eaters? Just thinking about how they acted after the 3rd task makes me really mad. And then Malfoy's comments on the train make me want to hex him. I'm not going to put up with him as much this year.

Tell everyone hello and be careful

Harry

Ginny

How has your summer been so far? I hope you're enjoying it.

Are you excited about your 4th year? I just want to get back to Hogwarts. It feels more like home than here at the Dursleys.

Miss you

Harry

Harry tied each letter onto Hedwig's leg, stroked her and asked her to deliver them. Hedwig hadn't had much work lately so she was happy to have something to do.

Work at Mrs. Figg's house had been going well. He still hadn't gotten to the stones but the rest of the garden was coming along well. Most days he was left alone outside until Mrs. Figg came out with something to drink. Today however when Harry arrived at Mrs. Figg's today she was coming out of the house.

Chapter 2

"Harry would you like to walk to the store with me and help me carry some packages back?"

"Of course Mrs. Figg. I haven't been to the store in quite some time." Actually ever, Harry thought to himself. "Aunt Petunia doesn't like to be seen in public with me."

Mrs. Figg chuckled and said, "Now Harry, I can't believe Petunia would treat you like that."

Harry thought it was best to keep his opinions to himself. It was a nice day so the walk was going quickly. When they were up to the last block before the store, he noticed a little Muggle girl run out into the street grab her puppy that had gotten away. Suddenly Harry noticed a large truck coming down the street. The truck was going way too fast and the little girl wasn't moving. Harry started to yell and realized there was no way the girl could get out of the way and it didn't look like the truck driver saw her at all. Things seemed to be moving in slow motion. Harry heard the girl's mother scream and noticed Mrs. Figg finally turn to see what was happening. Without realizing what he was doing, Harry's fingers began to burn and all he was thinking was Allancia truck, Allancia truck.

The truck instantly stopped with the girl looking up to the truck right in front of her. The little girl's mother ran and picked her up hugging her tightly. The girl was still holding her dog in the same manner. Harry turned to see Mrs. Figg staring at him strangely. Worried about someone seeing him, he quickly said, "Mrs. Figg I'm suddenly not feeling very well. Would you mind if we went back? I'll come back to the store with you tomorrow if that's ok."

"Of course Harry," said Mrs. Figg without further comment. They walked back without saying a word to each other. When he was leaving she added in a cheerful voice, "I'll see you tomorrow Harry. I'm very glad you came with me today."

The rest of the day was a blur to Harry. Did he really stop that truck? It was so large and moving so fast, he didn't think it would have been possible. He was glad none of his friends were around. He didn't want any more things to come out where they had to say, "Oh Harry, that's unusual" or "Oh Harry, how did you do that?" All he really wanted was to be just Harry. Sleep came early for him that evening and fortunately it was free of nightmares.

Uncle Vernon was reading the paper when Harry came down for breakfast. Just as Harry was about to grab some bacon and go directly to Mrs. Figg's, Uncle Vernon started speaking loudly.

"Did you hear about the remarkable thing that happened yesterday Petunia? A young girl was nearly run over by a truck just a few blocks over."

Harry started to cringe. Had someone seen him?

"It says the truck driver is a hero for stopping his truck just in time. They don't know how that truck got stopped so quickly."

Harry relaxed a bit. Muggles he thought.

"It's quoted here that after the mother of the little girl stopped hugging the driver he said 'Well as soon as I saw her, I just pushed on the brakes as hard as I could. It's a good thing I was paying attention and do regular maintenance on my truck that's for sure.'"

"They should give him an award or something. That's the kind of people we need living around here," Aunt Petunia said looking in disgust at Harry.

Harry thought to himself, "Yeah, that driver was paying attention alright. His foot never even touched the brake. He wouldn't have realized the girl was there until he had already run over her." Harry leaned over Uncle Vernon to see if the driver's name was Lockhart.

"What are you doing boy? Don't you need to be getting to Mrs. Figg's? She better not say any strange things are happening while you are there or you'll be back in the cupboard," bellowed Uncle Vernon

On the walk to Mrs. Figg's Harry was worried that she may mention to Aunt Petunia that she and Harry were right in front of that truck yesterday. Would Uncle Vernon begin to think that Harry had done something? That didn't seem likely since something good had come of it. There is no way they would believe that his magic had caused something good to happen.

When Harry arrived at Mrs. Figg's she was inside and called out, "Harry could you please come inside?" Harry walked into her house for the first time in many years. Without the cats, it seemed much more pleasant.

"Yes Mrs. Figg, is there anything I can do for you?" asked Harry.

"How would you like to go shopping in London with me today? We won't walk all the way, I assure you."

Harry thought this seemed strange but said, "That would be great. But, you don't have a car, how are we getting there?"

"Well by floo powder of course," she said bluntly.

Harry nearly fell over. "What, but how do you ... Wait a minute... You're a witch!" Harry finally got out.

"Well of course I'm a witch Harry. Do you really think Professor Dumbledore would let a Muggle who wasn't your relation ever watch over you?" the woman asked this as if was obvious.

"Why didn't anyone tell me?" Harry asked dumfounded. "There would have been so many questions I could have asked you. Do you know what it's like being with the Dursley's all day? They hate anything to do with magic."

"I'm sorry Harry but there were reasons," the older woman said sounding remorseful, "Actually I hadn't planned on saying anything quite yet but your performance with that truck yesterday was quite astounding and I think a change of plans is quite in order, yes indeed," she looked at him with a warm, motherly expression and continued. "I'm very proud of what you did Harry you saved that girl's life you know."

"Truck?" exclaimed Harry, "You knew I did that? Are you sure you didn't do it, you're much more skilled... I... I just can't believe it was me."

"Oh Harry there is no way I could have gotten my wand out in time and I can assure you I couldn't do anything like that without my wand," she said with a bit of pride in her voice. "Of course the Muggles think the truck driver is a hero and everything."

"How did I do that then? I just found out a couple weeks ago that I could do the summoning charm without a wand and then just assumed this was something all wizards and witches could do".

"Well Harry most witches and wizards can do some wandless magic. Taking riding a broom for example. A Muggle couldn't just jump on a broom and fly. That is one type of wandless magic. The real trick is controlling it and focusing on what you want to do. I have never known a witch or wizard who could have stopped that truck like you did." The woman looked intently at Harry. "I was thinking if you would like, maybe we could explore this talent a bit more over the next few weeks."

Harry was still stunned that this wasn't a common talent but was very anxious to learn more about it. "Could we really work on making me better? I have a feeling that I should learn as much as I can before I meet up with Voldemort again. In fact I've been told by a very serious sounding house-elf that I need to learn as much as I can before the next year starts".

This took Mrs. Figg by surprise. "House-elf? Harry, do you trust this house-elf? Do you know who owns him? It's not like house-elves to say things like that."

"I trust this house-elf fully. No one owns him. I was able to get him freed during my 2nd year at school and he gets paid for working now. He has tried to protect me from harm before." Then Harry thought, "Of course he nearly killed me trying to protect me."

"Well then Harry that just makes me surer of what we should be doing. Are you ready to go?"

Mrs. Figg tossed the floo powder into the fire then stepped in and said, "Diagon Alley" and was gone. Harry quickly followed her.

"Where are we going Mrs. Figg?" Harry had normally been here with Ron and Hermione while all the students were picking up their books for the year. This was the first time he had been here when it wasn't packed with students. He wondered how much of this was due to normal school shopping schedules and how much was due to Voldemort's return and people being worried.

"We're going to a book store Harry. I'm not sure you've been in it before, it's down in Knockturn Alley".

"Oh, I've been down Knockturn Alley before. I fell out of the wrong grate the first time I used floo powder," Harry said, chuckling. "Actually I saw Lucius Malfoy selling some items in one of the shops."

"Lucius Malfoy huh? That doesn't surprise me. You did leave the area directly didn't you?"

"Oh yes. Hagrid noticed me and dragged me directly back to Diagon Alley," Harry just thought of something and asked. "Mrs. Figg, what do you do in the wizard world? If you don't mind me asking."

"No Harry I don't mind. I was an Auror. Quite good if I don't say so myself. Does that surprise you?"

Actually this did surprise him. Harry had pictured most Aurors looking like Mad-Eye Moody, all scarred up. "I guess it surprised me a bit. The only other Auror I've been around much has been Professor Moody, and that turned out to be Barty Crouch Jr. using polyjuice to impersonate him."

This visibly bothered Mrs. Figg a bit. "Yes, Barty Crouch Jr." she said sounding annoyed. "Did you know that Professor Moody is my brother Harry? He is one of the best Aurors there has ever been. He was sorry he didn't get to thank you personally last year. Being locked in a trunk for that long made him even more cautious I'm afraid."

"I didn't know he was your brother, but my godfather and Professor Lupin respected him very much."

"Your godfather would be Sirius Black wouldn't it? And Remus Lupin is a werewolf isn't he? My you do seem to have quite a range of friends. House-elves, half-giants, werewolves, escaped convicts," Mrs. Figg said sternly.

Oh great Harry thought. Talk about your relationship with a wanted murderer to an Auror. "You do know that Sirius is innocent don't you? Peter Pettigrew is alive and is the true murderer. He is still murdering people. He is the one who used the killing curse on Cedric Diggory after the 3rd task last year. He killed him right in front of me before tying me to a gravestone," Harry said this with more force than he intended to.

"I don't believe Sirius Black betrayed your parents or killed all those people Harry." Mrs. Figg stopped walking and looked at him warmly. "I'm sorry there is nothing we can currently do to prove his innocence." They started walking again. "And I don't think the, say variety of your friends is a bad thing at all. Ah, here we are Akzon & Delize Unique Books. Come on in Harry."

This looked like any bookstore on Diagon Alley would if they had let 100 years of dust build up on everything. "What are you looking for Mrs. Figg?"

She didn't respond and kept running her hands down the rows of books examining the title of each one. Harry noticed titles such as 'Curses Without Cures' and "Potions for Every Desire".

"Ah, here it is!" said Mrs. Figg pulling out a book. Harry noticed the title 'What Makes Magic Dark'. This reminded Harry of the note saying, "The soul of the wizard controls the evil of the magic".

Mrs. Figg paid for the book and before he knew it they were back in the pub having lunch. "Would you be interested in taking another trip with me tomorrow Harry? I have a friend who would like to meet you and may be able to give you some pointers."

"That'd be great. This has been the best start to a summer I've ever had," he exclaimed.

After lunch they used floo powder to return to Mrs. Figg's house. "Now Harry, how about moving those stones for me?" she asked.

"I really don't think I could lift them Mrs. Figg. Maybe we could get Dudley to help," Harry said sounding like he hated having to ask Dudley for anything.

"If you can stop a truck surely you can move a few stones! You really should think like a wizard first and then a Muggle second," said Mrs. Figg sounding very stern.

Of course Harry thought. He had been so used to acting like a Muggle outside of school it was difficult to think any other way.

They stepped outside and Harry could tell Mrs. Figg was watching him. This made him extra nervous. Would he be able to do it on something so heavy with her watching? Harry focused on one of the stones and then on a spot on the other side of the yard. Then he thought Placio stone, Placio stone. His fingers got quite warm and the stone rose up and went to the spot he had chosen.

"Quite nice Harry. Now move the other 4 at one time if you would."

She had said this like it was the obvious thing to do. Harry suspected that she had been a teacher before being an Auror. He wouldn't want to disappoint her, but he had never moved more than one thing at a time. He didn't know exactly how to do this.

Almost as if she could read his mind, she added, "Just do it like you have been Harry except see each stone going to specific spots. I have complete confidence that you can do this. You can see 4 stones and you can see where you want them. Just focus."

Being around her gave him a boost of confidence. He pictured all 4 stones and where he wanted them. Placio stones he thought. He felt the heat in his fingers quite a bit more this time but sure enough, all 4 stones moved to the exact spots he had pictured.

"See Harry, moving a stone is no more difficult than moving a book and moving multiple stones is as easy as picturing each one individually. That is how it works for me with a wand and I'm assuming that's how it works for you. How does it work for you with a wand?"

"I've never moved more than one thing at a time with my wand. And, I've never moved anything much heavier than a pillow with it either."

"Well Harry, I'm fairly certain you will always be able to focus your magic better with a wand which should make the magic more powerful that way. But it seems you have a natural talent for wandless magic. "

She was looking into Harry's eyes, which started to make him uncomfortable when she said. "I believe your greatest asset and biggest liability is your mind Harry. If you really believe you can do something, I'd bet you could. However if you doubt you can succeed, then the outcome would already be determined." This seemed to bother her a bit. "You didn't know how rare it was to do wandless magic, so you didn't start off thinking it couldn't be done and you just did it. I'm guessing it was the same with flying. You didn't know that it wasn't as easy as some people make it seem and you flew your first time like you had been doing it all your life."

She gave him an appraising look and said, "I'm giving you the book I bought today. It talks about how most wizards think anything other than very basic wandless magic is a myth. It also talks about other types of magic that most people don't believe exists anymore".

"Thank you," Harry said still amazed at how this summer was going. "Mrs. Figg how is it that the Ministry of Magic hasn't sent me any letters about my underage use of magic? A couple of years ago I received an official warning because a house-elf smashed a dessert in the kitchen."

"I'm guessing that the Ministry watches for common magic signs Harry. Since what you've been able to do is so rare, I doubt the Ministry is watching for it. Or it could be that they are so busy right now that they have let some things slip by."

"I have another question for you Harry. Before you found out you were a wizard were there any things you caused to happen that you couldn't explain? Anything at all? This may help give us an idea on things to explore this summer. "

Harry thought back to all the times with the Dursleys where Dudley and his gang would pick on him. "Well when Dudley and his gang used to pick on me I ended up on the roof at school when I was just trying to jump over the fence. And then at the zoo, I set a boa constrictor loose when it told me it had never been to Burma before."

Mrs. Figg look shocked. "You're telling me that Rita Skeeter's article was true? You really are a Parslemouth?"

Harry laughed and said, "Oh, you're a fan of Rita Skeeter are you? I'm surprised you will have anything to do with me then."

Mrs. Figg blushed. "Well I just read that section when I have nothing better to do," she added quickly."

"Yes, I can talk to snakes. Professor Dumbledore guesses that Voldemort accidentally gave me that ability when he tried to kill me the first time. I didn't know that was seen as a bad thing until Draco Malfoy set a snake on me during dueling lessons. The snake was going after another student until I told it to stop. Everyone thought I was egging the snake on to attack him. That's when they all thought I was the Heir of Slytherin."

"Well then are there any other things you can remember happening? Anything different?" she asked.

Harry thought for a moment and remembered how Aunt Petunia had always cut his hair and by the next morning it was back to exactly the same before she had cut it. "There is one thing. Aunt Petunia hates my hair. She said it was always unruly so she kept trying to cut it, but the next day it was always back to exactly the same before she had cut it. Even when she almost shaved my head, it just came back by the next morning. It drove her crazy and she finally gave up. I never really have to get a haircut or anything, it just stays the same."

This seemed to interest Mrs. Figg quite a bit. "I wonder," she mumbled.

"What is it Mrs. Figg? Is this another bad sign?" Harry asked instantly thinking that this would be yet another thing strange about him.

"Oh it's no bad sign Harry and it's probably nothing. I guess you had better be getting back home. I think it would be wise to keep your new talent to yourself for a while. I think it will benefit you most if you use it only when it is necessary. You've seen for yourself what happens with people start talking about your unique talents."

When Harry got home there were 3 letters on his bed and Hedgwig was asleep in her cage.

The first one was from Hermione:

Harry

I just got a letter from McGonagall telling me that I'm going to be a prefect this year.

Like there was ever any doubt about that he thought.

I'm going to have to work extra hard to keep up my grades with all the extra duties. I do hope you and Ron will try to follow the rules a little better this year. I don't want to take points off of my own house you know.

Would she really do that? He quickly answered his own question: Yep without a doubt.

I'm not sure Ron is happy about this he thinks I'll be worse than Percy.

I've got to go, much to do.

Love

Hermione

Harry was really happy for her. It didn't surprise him at all that Hermione was going to be a prefect. She was the smartest and hardest working witch he knew.

The next letter was from Ron:

Harry

Did you hear that Hermione is a prefect? That's just bloody great, now we won't get away with anything. She'll be worse than Percy; the power just goes to their head.

You know she'll take points from Gryffindor don't you. She's not going to play favorites, even for us. This is bad.

She did seem very happy about it. I bet this got her over the disappointment of not going to visit Vicky over the summer. I imagine she wrote to him first though.

Harry doubted this. He knew Ron really liked Hermione and the thought of her going to visit Viktor Krum bothered him a lot. Harry thought Hermione really liked Ron also but getting either of them to admit it would be nearly impossible.

I think you'll be able to visit us later in the summer. I was hoping it would be before your birthday but it looks like it may not be until a couple weeks before term starts.

I think they are going overboard on the protection thing. I mean you've gotten away from You-Know-Who every time so far. Why can't they just let us have some fun?

Don't let the Muggles get you down.

Ron

P.S. Mom is still really worried about you. You're like her youngest son now. I don't think there's anyway to get out of that!

Harry felt really warm knowing how Mrs. Weasley felt about him. The only time he felt part of a family was when he was with them. He also felt very guilty since he knew that their fondness of him made them a more likely target of Voldemort. Harry couldn't let anything happen to them.

Then he remembered the 3rd letter, it was from Ginny. Ginny had had a crush on Harry since she saw him when Mrs. Weasley helped him get onto the platform before his first year. It even became a bigger crush when Harry saved her from Tom Riddle in the Chamber of Secrets during his second year at school. Last year she seemed to have grown up a lot and didn't act as nervous around him. He assumed the crush was fading and that she was just becoming a friend. He always felt a special connection with her though. Maybe if things weren't so crazy right now.

Harry

Nice try with the questions about school on your last note, but I'm not letting you get away that easy.

Everyone is worried about you. We know that you're blaming yourself for what happened to Cedric, that's what you do. No one else blames you Harry. We are all very proud of how you handled yourself and that you got his body back for his parents. That is what you should think about.

How could I? It was me who suggested that Cedric take the cup with me so it would be a tie for Hogwarts. If I had just taken the cup by myself Cedric would be alive today. They can't understand how it is. Every year someone has been hurt because of me. I drug Ron and Hermione down the trap door in the first year. Ginny was taken into the Chamber of Secrets because of me in the second year. Ron's leg was broken, the Dementors nearly killed Sirius and Hermione, and Wormtail got away, which means Sirius, is still on the run in the third year. And then last year it was Cedric dying and the real Professor Moody being locked in a trunk all year. All of this was because of me.

Mom says there is a good chance you can come here for the last few weeks of break. You will come won't you? <say yes>

If you ever want to talk about anything, remember I'm here. I won't tell anyone else anything that you don't want me to.

Miss you

Ginny

This nearly made Harry cry. With each new letter from her, he missed her more and more. If things were normal, how would this have worked out? Would she still have a crush on him if he weren't 'The Boy Who Lived'? What would the rest of the Weasley's think about him liking Ginny? They'd probably kill him on the spot.

He decided to wait until tomorrow to write back. The rest of the evening was spent making things fly across the room. He concentrated on making multiple things move at one time. A few times he even managed moving some things and summoning other things at the same time. Things ended up crashing together in the air and not going where he wanted most of the time though.

The dream came to him again. He was tied to the gravestone with Voldemort having just come out of the cauldron with his body back. It was just how he remembered it but he didn't feel as afraid. He saw the people and the actions much clearer but wasn't terrified by what would happen. Just before Voldemort put the Cruciatius Curse on him he woke up. He wasn't sweating and his scar wasn't hurting, he was just angry that it had happened and there was nothing he could do about it.

Arriving at Mrs. Figg's house he knocked on the door. "Mrs. Figg its Harry".

"Come in Harry, but be prepared," she said.

Be prepared? What could she mean by that? He stepped inside and noticed pillows flying at him he using his Quidditch skills; he dodged a couple before being hit by the majority of them.

"Not quite prepared were you?" she asked. "Why did you dodge them? Why didn't you stop them? Muggle thinking, that's why." She sounded disappointed. Just yesterday she had sounded so proud and now that's gone.

"I didn't expect to be attacked by pillows and just thought about getting out of the way," he said forcefully.

"That's right you didn't expect to be attacked and didn't think about how to handle it. This is what we need to work on. You could have easily handled this if you had been prepared. You have the talent; we need to work on making you use it just as second nature. You stopped that truck with magic. Why did you think to use it then and not just now?"

"I knew I couldn't get to the girl before, so I thought about magic. I don't know why I didn't think of magic just now though," he said, letting the disappointment show.

"That's ok Harry. You exceed my expectations on the big things and I just assume you will handle everything the first time. We will work on these things," she was back to sounding positive again.

"Well, are you ready to go? We have a big day ahead of us. I think you'll enjoy this a great deal Harry."

"Where are we going Mrs. Figg?"

"The Ministry of Magic Harry. Have you ever been there?"

The Ministry of Magic he thought? This didn't actually make him happy. He couldn't understand why she would want to take him there. Did they know about the unauthorized magic he had been doing? "Ah no I've never been there. Why are we going there?"

She must have sensed the concern in his voice. "That is where my friend who wants to meet you works. I thought you would also enjoy a tour; it is a very historic place you know. We will be visiting areas that are not on the tour list though; I can assure you of that," she added that last bit slyly.

Tossing floo powder into the fire she said, "Department of Mysteries Ministry of Magic" but just then a ghostly voice came from the fire "Identification please:" Mrs. Figg responded with "Arabella Figg". The voice said, "Granted" and then she was gone.

Harry had never seen the fire ask questions before. What if he wasn't granted? Where would he end up? Or would the fire just spit him back out into Mrs. Figg's house.

He tossed the floo powder into the fire and said, "Department of Mysteries Ministry of Magic". Then he heard "Identification please:" "Harry Potter" he tried to say forcefully. The fire didn't respond instantly like it had for Mrs. Figg and this began to worry him. But just as he was about to step out of the fire he heard "Granted" and the familiar feeling of traveling by floo powder came over him.

He stepped out of the fire into what looked like the reception area for an office. It was mostly white with what looked like eyes in the walls.

"Welcome to Department of Mysteries Harry," said an older man standing next to Mrs. Figg. "I'm Mundungus Fletcher. I used to work with Arabella here until she began doing special assignments." He shook Harry's hand firmly. "It's a pleasure to meet you. I knew your parents and thought the world of them. I hear you've become quite the wizard in the past 4 years. I can't believe you didn't find out about being a wizard until starting school. Not sure I would have left you with those Muggles myself, but it looks like it turned out ok."

"Pleased to meet you sir. Sorry but what exactly is Department of Mysteries? I've never heard anyone mention it before."

"Well maybe you've heard it by another name. This is the Unspeakable department Harry. We don't talk much about things that go on here. Others in the Ministry know us, they know our positions but until our Department of Mysteries chief decides to tell the Minister of Magic about something we've been working on, we don't discuss it outside of the department. There is...ah...special security in this area and we don't allow many visitors."

Harry remembered Mr. Weasley mentioning people working in the Unspeakable department while we were at the Quidditch World Cup last year.

"But then why did we come here Mrs. Figg? I think this is great being here and everything, I just don't understand why we're here." Harry asked.

"Well Harry I was being truthful when I said I had a friend who wanted to meet you. Mundungus here is a good friend of mine and had wanted to meet you. Also, he agreed with me that there maybe some things we can do to help you out."

Harry didn't quite understand what kind of help they were talking about but it was great being around other wizards. He was going to try and enjoy it as much as possible in case he never got back in again.

"Let me give you a quick tour Harry." Mr. Fletcher said. "First of all if you had lied when you were asked for your identification while coming here you would have ended up in a special security area. It's not the nicest of places so people don't often try to sneak in here. We've had you added into our access list for a little bit. However, you can only get here once per day. If you try again later today you'll be sent to security. I wouldn't recommend that."

"Excuse me Mr. Fletcher but what are those eyes in the walls for?" Harry asked pointing to the eyes on the wall.

"Not Mr. Fletcher Harry, call me Fletch, just Fletch. No need making me feel older than I already do, right." Harry saw the smile on the man's face. "Those eyes are extra security. Won't be fooled by polyjuice potion, invisibility cloaks or anything else we know of. We take our security pretty seriously here Harry. So, if I ask you to not mention something to anyone, I will mean anyone. If you have any questions on what you can or cannot mention, just ask up. Is that ok? We'd hate to have to modify your memory."

"Yes sir," he responded not feeling quite as comfortable as he would have liked.

They spent the next hour walking around the department. It was amazing; there were many areas that he could hear loud bangs and strange noises coming from. It reminded Harry of Fred and George's room at the Weasley's. Harry met many people who congratulated him on the Tri-Wizard Tournament and he had to keep pushing the feelings of guilt out of his mind. These people were just being nice and were only considering the tournament itself.

"Ok Harry, let's get down to some real work now, shall we" Fletch said while leading Harry into an office with 4 other people. "Let me introduce the people who will be working with us for a while."

"Bill McGentry here has been a Auror and with us for 6 years, Larry Smythe has been in our department for about 15 years now, Rose Douglas has been here only a year and was the top of her class at a private school, and of course you know Arabella Figg who has been officially away from us for a while but is still a quite capable Auror."

Harry greeted each of the people and couldn't read any emotions except for Mrs. Figg who seemed quite happy.

"Mrs. Figg suggested that due to recent events, it might be wise for us to see if we can teach you some things in a short period of time that you wouldn't normally learn at school. We've heard rumors that you have had more than your initial run-in with the Dark Lord and those of us in this room do indeed believe he is back." Finally Harry thought; he hadn't met anyone at the ministry other than Mr. Weasley believed what had happened.

Fletch went on, "Now there are many here who either don't believe or don't want to acknowledge the Dark Lord's return, but in this department we don't have the luxury to ignore the signs. If you wouldn't mind Harry could you please tell us about each time you have met the Dark Lord or any Death Eater? This may give us some idea on what types of things to focus on."

Harry started with the first year. A centaur had stopped Voldemort from attacking him in the forest when Harry had found him drinking the blood of a unicorn. He then told them about Professor Quirrell not being able to touch him and that Dumbledore thought it was the protection his mother gave him by sacrificing herself to protect him. This visibly bothered Fletch and Mr. Smythe.

Then he went onto the second year and how the memory of a 16-year-old Tom Riddle opened the Chamber of Secrets and set a basilisk on the school. They seemed very interested in Fawkes' role and how the sword of Godric Gryffindor came out of the hat.

The third year was a little harder to explain since most of the people in the room thought Sirius Black was an escaped murderer and that Peter Pettigrew was dead. "So you're saying that Peter Pettigrew killed all those Muggles and that Black was framed for it?"

"That's exactly what I'm saying," Harry said as forcefully as he could. "Sirius Black is my godfather and I have seen Peter Pettigrew in person twice now. I asked Remus Lupin and Sirius not to kill Peter because I didn't think that is what my dad would have wanted. But, Peter ended up escaping and then the Dementors were coming to do the kiss on Sirius and Hermione Granger but I was able to chase them away with the Patronus charm."

At this there was audible laughter. Bill McGentry spoke up. "Do you mean for us to believe that a 13 year old boy was able to create a Patronus that drove away that many Dementors? There aren't many adult wizards who could do that alone."

This really bothered Harry. He was tired of everyone treating him like a child. However it happened, he had done it. He had faced Voldemort 3 times now and these people wouldn't even say his name. "I'll tell you what," Harry said while staring at Bill, "if there is any way you can get some Dementors while we are finishing here I'll gladly demonstrate what I can do with them. You seem to want to just think of me as the little boy of some old friends of yours that by some stroke of luck is alive today. All I know is what happened, not why. I don't know how my Patronus was able to do that, it just did."

"Now Harry," Mrs. Figg stepped in, "it's not that they don't believe you. You have to understand that even though you lived these events, they sound like grand stories when they are being told".

"Actually Harry I think we can get some Dementors in here today." Fletch walked to the hallway and spoke to someone who quickly went down the hall. "I don't want anyone here to either have any doubts or too high of expectations of you. I appreciate your offer to show us some of your talent and I hope you don't take our skepticism too hard. We see and hear a lot of things in this department, but we have to be focused on facts as much as we can. Please continue."

This was fine with Harry, he would rather just show them anything they wanted and get on with this. Reliving these experiences isn't what he had planned on doing today.

"Well after the Dementors were gone, we went to the hospital and Sirius Black escaped again." He wasn't going to tell them that Hermione and he had helped Sirius escape.

"Last year was the Tri-Wizard Tournament and at the end of the third task, Cedric Diggory and I decided to make it a tie since we had helped each other out of some tight spots during

that task. We grabbed the cup at the same time; however it had been turned into a portkey. We ended up in a graveyard, and Peter Pettigrew used the killing curse on Cedric and tied me to a gravestone. He then made a potion where he put what looked like a baby in a caldron and then needed some "bones of the father", so he took some dust from the bones of Voldemort's father. He needed "flesh of the servant" so Peter cut off his own hand and it dropped into the caldron. Then he wanted "blood of the enemy" so he cut open my arm with a dagger and put my blood in the caldron." Harry pulled up his robe to show them the scar from the cut. "Then a fully grown Voldemort came out of the cauldron and summoned the Death Eaters. Many of them showed up. He then did the Cruciatus curse on me so the Death Eaters could see that he could harm me. Then he showed them that he could now touch me. By taking my blood I no longer had the protection my mother gave me. Then he untied me and said we were going to duel. My leg was broken so it was hard to stand. I tried to disarm him but he was faster and did the Cruciatus curse on me again. Then he came over and asked me if I wanted him to stop doing that. I wouldn't answer so he tried to put the Imperius curse on me to force me to answer him. But I can throw that curse off without much trouble so he wasn't able to force me to do it."

Once again Bill McGentry laughed and said, "He can't be serious. Throwing off the Imperius curse from the Dark Lord, I can't sit here and believe that."

"Now Bill, I know that you have your doubts about this but I'm sure Harry thinks that is the curse which was used and..." Harry cut Fletch off and said, "That's it, let's prove this right now. I'm not going to set here and be as honest as I can and have you not believe me. I give you full permission to use the Imperius curse on me right now. If I can't throw it off, I'll leave and not take up any more of his time." Harry was staring at Bill now.

Mrs. Figg stepped in again, "Now Harry are you sure about this? Bill is very skilled in this curse it may not be pleasant".

"I'm sure Mrs. Figg. He can't be any better than Voldemort was, let's get this over with".

Bill pointed his wand at Harry and said, "Imperio". Harry felt no different and then heard "Come on Harry just tell us that you have been lying all along". He felt that saying he had been lying sounded like a good idea and would be great to do. Then in the back of his mind he heard 'Now really you haven't been lying, why would you want to say that?'

"Harry you should really just admit you've been lying."

'You haven't been lying and you know it. Just tell him so'

Bill was right in front of Harry now and Harry said slowly and clearly "I don't lie and I really don't like you at all."

Bill stumbled back at this and looked at Harry like he had never seen anything like him before.

Mrs. Figg and Fletch both started laughing. Larry had a look of satisfaction and Rose just sat there with her mouth wide open.

"Well now where were we?" Fletch said while still holding back his laughter. "Can you finish now Harry? I can assure you there will be no more interruptions."

"After I wouldn't do what Voldemort wanted he said he was going to kill me now. He started the killing curse but I was able to dive behind a gravestone. The Death Eaters were laughing and I knew with my broken leg I couldn't run away. I stood up to duel him face to face. I did the disarming charm again and he did the killing curse. Our spells met in the middle and then very strange things happened. They connected and moved us away from the others. A cage of light came from our wands and surrounded us. The Death Eaters couldn't get through. His spell pushed mine back towards my wand and it was shaking very hard. Then my spell pushed his back and when my spell touched his wand the ghostly figure of Cedric Diggory came out and told me to hold on. Then some old Muggle man came out followed by my mom. She was telling me to hold on that my father was coming. Then my dad came out and told me that they would be able to hold Voldemort off for a few seconds why I go back to the portkey. Cedric asked me to take his body back to his parents. Once I broke the connection I stumbled to Cedric's body but knew I couldn't get to the portkey. I used the summoning charm to bring the portkey to us while Voldemort was trying to say the killing curse. Then we were back at Hogwarts."

"Those are all of the times I've fought Voldemort or any Death Eaters." Harry felt very bad. Reliving all of the pain Voldemort has caused really bothered him.

Mrs. Figg put a hand on his shoulder. "Thank you Harry. I know this has been hard but it has given me a couple of ideas on what we need to work on."

There was a knock at the door and then Fletch turned around and said, "Harry, are you sure about the Dementors? We have access to some right now if you'd like."

"Yes I'm sure. If you're all willing to help me I don't want you to have any doubts about what I've been saying. "

They walked to a larger area. Fletch said, "Ok now we're going to be in the next room and in a couple minutes some Dementors will enter this area. I know you said you can handle this but just in case there are other wizards right outside the door. If we see you are having any problems they will step in."

Harry felt alone now. Knowing what was coming, he started thinking about his happiest thoughts. Then he felt the dreadful feeling of being near Dementors. Like all the happiness was being sucked out of him. Harry turned and saw not 5 but 10 Dementors. He stood his ground and concentrated on how he felt when he thought he was going to live with Sirius and yelled "Expecto Patronus". A huge silver stag erupted from the end of his wand. This seemed much bigger than the last time he had made one. The stag charged down the Dementors who quickly left through the opening they came in. Harry felt very satisfied at this but was going to ask for some chocolate anyway.

"All right Harry, nicely done," Fletch exclaimed while entering the room. "What's say you and I got get a bite to eat while the others talk about how to proceed. And while Bill figures out how he's going to face you again."

They entered an area with rows of tables and sat down in the corner. Harry could see many witches and wizards setting around talking and eating. He had never been around any wizard office before. This was all fascinating to him.

"Well Harry, what would you like? Just say what you'd like into the table."

"I'd like a hamburger, pumpkin juice and a chocolate bar please." As soon as the words had left his mouth a plate appeared with his food along with a glass of pumpkin juice.

Fletch had the same but without the chocolate.

Harry ate his chocolate bar first trying to get over any lingering effects of the Dementors.

"Fletch, I'm sorry about getting upset back there. It just seems that everyone treats me like a kid and is always making sure I'm all right. Bills attitude just reminded me of someone from school who always brings out the worst in me."

"Don't mention it Harry. We see you as a fourteen-year-old boy and don't realize all that you've been through. I know Dumbledore has the highest confidence in you and I can understand why. Don't worry about Bill; he lost a good deal of money on the Tri-Wizard Tournament and kind of blames you. He bet on Krum to win and for you to finish last."

Fletch and Harry sat there talking for a few minutes. Actually it was Harry asking many questions about working in the wizarding world and types of careers they held.

Harry was taking in all that Fletch was saying and the surroundings when he heard, "Well Harry, what are you doing here?" He turned to see Mr. Weasley and Percy walking over to the table.

"Hi Mr. Weasley, it's good to see you again. Hey Percy how are you? I'm just..." but then he was cut off.

Fletch quickly stood up. "Ah Arthur, good to see you again. Just giving Harry here a behind the scenes tour today. Come on Harry we better get back to it." He had a hand on Harry's arm pulling him along.

Harry called back "See you later. Tell the others I said hello."

Once back into Department of Mysteries, Fletch pulled Harry aside.

"Sorry about that Harry. We don't want any details of what we're doing getting around."

"You don't think Mr. Weasley would say anything do you?" Harry asked.

"Oh no, we could trust Arthur with anything. However, Percy seems more politically inclined if you know what I mean."

Harry knew exactly what Fletch meant. Percy had always been sucking up to his bosses in the Ministry. It had bothered Percy that the Minister of Magic had treated Harry like a son and didn't even know Percy's name.

Fletch went on "You can tell Arthur you are working on some special projects with us. Also tell him that I'm quite sure he would personally approve what we will be doing. But, he needs to know that as far as Percy is concerned, you are getting a tour. Nothing more. I'm sure Percy won't believe this but that's not my concern. Is that ok Harry?"

"Sure, as long as I don't have to lie to Mr. Weasley it's fine with me. His family has treated me better than anyone else ever has."

"Right then, let's join the others and see what we can teach you."

They joined the others in a large room but noticed Bill wasn't there.

"Well, we think we have some good ideas," Mrs. Figg said. "We only have a few weeks so we need to concentrate on what will get the most results. I'll be working with Harry at home so I won't need any of his time here."

Rose started off by saying, "I'll be trying to teach him some shield and blocking charms. We'll work on both blocking spells and objects." This was the first time Harry had actually heard her speak. She sounded very confident when she did.

Larry continued with, "I'll be working with him on the Cruciatius curse. We know this is a favorite of the Death Eaters and it has bothered Harry before. We'll work on throwing it off and then on some new techniques we're working on. If he can come as close to throwing it off as he did the Imperius curse, we can make some serious progress."

Mrs. Figg added, "Fletch, we thought it would be best if you worked with him on dueling. What to expect and some unconventional responses."

"Ah dueling, my favorite," Fletch added. "Don't worry Harry; we have a hospital wing right down the hall." The worry must have shown in Harry's face because they all started laughing.

"Ok then. I'll arrange everything and we'll see you back here tomorrow. Say 9:00am?"

"This sounds great to me," Harry said. "I don't know how to thank you for letting me come here and learn. Basically I live like a Muggle during the summer. "

"Now Harry," Fletch added seriously, "When we start tomorrow, we will need to be very serious about the training. We are taking time out of other tasks for this. We all agree it is very useful to help you out here. More than likely you will meet the Dark Lord before any of us do. If there is anything we can do to help you prepare, it is in all of our best interests. If we ask you to do something, please do it. It will be in the best interest of your training. Also, none of us will treat you like a kid. You will be treated like an Auror in training and we expect you to act accordingly."

"Thank you Fletch, I will do my best and I won't mess around."

Once back in Mrs. Figg's house Harry said, "I really can't believe you were able to get me Auror training. I'll do my best, I promise."

"Don't thank me yet Harry. It won't be easy. I imagine you'll quickly get tired of having curses put on you. If you had been able to stay with the Weasley's this summer I wouldn't have suggested it. I would you rather spend time having fun with your friends. But given the choice of being cursed all day or staying with the Dursley's, I guessed you might pick being cursed."

Once back in his room Harry began wondering what all he would be doing tomorrow. If he was able to learn everything they were going to teach him that may give him a slight

advantage the next time he faced a Death Eater or Voldemort. They would only expect him to know what the school has taught him.

Harry decided to write a letter,

Sirius

How are you and Remus doing? Has there been any news about Voldemort or the Death Eaters? I never hear anything staying with the Dursley's.

I have a question about something I saw in a book. What do you think of wandless magic? Some parts of the book make it seem like a myth but others seem to show it being very powerful. I'm not turning into Hermione and studying all the time or anything; I was just bored one night.

Do you know Arabella Figg? She is the Mrs. Figg that the Dursley's used to leave me with. I found out the other day that she is a witch. I'm going to try and spend some time with her to see if I can learn anything. I wish I could spend more time in the wizard world.

Love Harry

Say hi to Remus and Buckbeak

Harry really wanted to ask about his dreams and why he hasn't woken up scared in a while but didn't think Sirius would understand and would probably just find some reason to worry more.

Harry tied the letter to Hedwig and watched her fly out the window. He spent the next few hours practicing his wandless magic. Harry couldn't see how this was so unusual; it even seemed easier than using a wand.

Chapter 3

Harry was very excited when he arrived at Mrs. Figg's house the next morning, anxious to return to Department of Mysteries and begin his training.

"Come in Harry," he heard through the door. "You'll need to go by yourself today. I have some work to do. They're expecting you at 9:00am."

Harry tossed the floo powder into the fire and said, "Department of Mysteries Ministry of Magic". Then he heard "Identification please:" "Harry Potter". The fire responded instantly with "Granted" and the familiar feeling of traveling by floo powder came over him.

The next moment he was standing in Department of Mysteries with Fletch right in front of him. "Good morning Harry. Are you ready to get started?"

"Yes sir, I'm ready"

Harry spent the first couple hours with Rose mainly talking about shield and blocking charms. Going over which type of shield would work best for various curses. Harry tried to write this down but Rose wouldn't let him. "You need to just know these Harry. It can't be like studying a lesson. You just need to know." This really sounded like something for Hermione, not him.

Next came the thing Harry was dreading the most, Larry and the Cruciatus curse. This was an extremely painful curse that he wasn't looking forward to feeling again.

"Well Harry, this isn't going to be pleasant but if you can work this out it should be a significant blow to any Death Eater who tries to attack you. Now, from the little bit we know about throwing this curse off, it is different than the Imperio curse. Throwing that one is like a battle of wills. It seems that throwing the Cruciatus curse is more like wanting to get revenge. Instead of fighting the pain, concentrate on what you would like to do to the person performing the curse. It seems the angrier you can make yourself the more of the pain you convert into emotion. When we get to the point of me performing the curse, you will need to picture me as the person or thing you hate the most. The more hate you can generate for me at that point should directly reduce the amount of pain you feel. There have only been a couple people who could do this even slightly, but their accounts point to our conclusions. Try to think of something that makes you the most angry now Harry."

Harry thought of the way Snape treated him which does get him angry but that didn't seem enough. What about when Voldemort placed the curse on him. No, he was more scared than angry. He had been very angry at himself for running away from Voldemort and leaving him able to further hurt his friends. He would just focus on how mad he got thinking about giving up his chance to get Voldemort just so he could run away.

"Ok, I've got something now," Harry said tentatively.

"Well here we go then. There's not any way for me to control the amount of pain you will feel, it's just on and off. This isn't likely to feel as bad as when You-Know-Who performed it but it won't feel good. Remember try to focus on the emotion, not the pain. The madder you get the more control you have over the pain. We think." Larry added reminding Harry that this was kind of experimental.

Harry really wasn't looking forward to this. The Cruciatus curse had been the most pain he had ever felt. "I'm ready," Harry said weakly.

Larry raised his wand and said, 'Crucio'. There it was again, like knives being drawn across every spot on his body. Harry nearly collapsed even before he could think about being mad. 'You ran away boy' said a voice that strangely sounded like Uncle Vernon. 'You let him get away'. Harry could feel his blood begin to boil, even through the pain. How could he have let that happen? The pain still seemed bad now but he didn't feel like he would collapse. He wanted Voldemort in front of him right now. This time he wouldn't let the monster get away again.

Suddenly the pain stopped and Larry just stared for a moment. "Harry how did you stay standing through that? What was it like?"

Harry was still breathing hard but what he felt was still mad, he had forgotten about the pain. After a couple minutes he tried to describe to Larry what had happened. Larry was busy taking notes and asking questions about how long it took before he felt any difference. The questions were about how much the pain was reduced and how angry did he really get.

Harry described what he thought about to get angry to Larry and expected him to say things like everyone else. "It's not your fault Harry" or "You can't blame yourself Harry." But to Harry's surprise, Larry just said, "I may not agree with what makes you angry but if that is what you need to do to overcome this curse, it's worth hanging onto those thoughts." Larry paused and then asked, "Do you think there is anything else that could get you even angrier?"

Trying to think back to the first times he did some wandless magic and what had made him so mad those times. Then a thought came to him. Malfoy. Draco's comments on the train from Hogwarts. "Mudbloods and Muggles will be first... well second Diggory was first." That's it! Just thinking about that got his blood boiling more than the other thoughts. Thinking about Draco's comments about Voldemort coming back had to be what got him the angriest.

"I think there is something else Larry. Do you think we could try again?" Harry asked excitedly hoping to make some progress.

"We normally do that only once per day but it's really up to you."

"Yes, I'm sure. Let's do it again." Harry was mad already and was ready to begin.

Larry raised his wand again and said, 'Crucio'.

The pain started again, hot pokers being placed all over his body. 'You're next mudblood'. It was almost like Harry could hear Draco's voice. 'Diggory was first' 'You chose the wrong side Potter'. Harry now was standing straight up and felt nearly no pain at all. He was staring at Larry's eyes, which started to remind him more and more of Draco's. Slowly, Harry started to draw his wand. All he wanted to do was blast Draco to pieces. Then it was over. The anger washed away when the curse stopped.

"Amazing Harry, just Amazing. That thought seemed to be enough. You looked like you were going to kill me. If I hadn't stopped the curse I bet you would have blasted me. This is great. It means our theory was correct all along. It just needs as much anger as there is pain." Larry seemed very excited.

Harry thought back to how he felt. He was convinced it was Draco in front of him and had been ready to use any curse on him. This wasn't a good feeling at all. "I didn't like feeling that way at all. I could have really hurt you." Harry said with fear in his voice.

"Well Harry, that's the point. If someone is really using that curse on you they probably intend to kill you soon afterwards. This is an unforgivable curse so even if they weren't going to kill you they could still go to Azkaban for using it. You can't worry about what you will do to them. You need to think about what happens if you don't try to throw it. They will probably kill you and any of your friends. This isn't a nice curse and nice people aren't going to be using it."

Larry was right, Harry thought. If Voldemort was using this curse on him again, he intended to kill him next. This was just playing around to Voldemort.

Larry put his hand on Harry's shoulder and said, "Come on, that's enough here for today. Once we're sure you can throw this, I've got a surprise for you. One that I'm sure no one applying this curse would expect."

Next came the dueling lessons with Fletch. Larry hadn't mentioned anything about what had happened to Fletch and just dropped Harry off and left.

"Ok Harry. Dueling. I understand you've done some simple dueling in school. We'll we won't be doing any jelly-legs or tickling curses here, I can assure you of that. We will start by just hexing and cursing each other. We will each have a protection charm around us so the spells will do only ¼ their normal damage. This will get you used to recognizing spells and also experiencing what they do to your opponent. Do not dodge or block any spell. After I hit you with a spell and you recover, I want you to perform the same spell on me. I want to make sure you are doing the spells correctly. We will gradually decrease the protection charm around you so that you will need to successfully block or dodge spells as well as respond."

They each took their spots. Fletch started with '*Puncio*'. Harry felt like he had been punched in the stomach and the wind knocked out of him. He didn't want to feel that one if this was only ¼ normal. Straightening back up, Harry faced Fletch pointed his wand and said '*Puncio*'. Fletch doubled over but recovered much quicker than Harry had.

They send various spells at each other for the next two hours. Harry had never heard of these spells before and each one was painful.

"That was pretty good Harry. Not quite like school is it? If you have to duel with a Death Eater, they are going to try and hurt you, not tickle you to death. This is the kind of training Aurors go through." Fletch noticed Harry holding his side in pain, but also noticed the look of determination on his face. "I told you we wouldn't treat you like a kid and I'm proud of the way you've handled yourself today. Do you want to continue training tomorrow?"

"Of course I do! Experiencing these things makes me realize how lucky I've really been each time I've been attacked. There is so much I need to learn before anything else happens."

"Good, I was hoping that's what you would say. Same time tomorrow then?"

"You bet. I'll see you tomorrow, thanks."

Mrs. Figg was waiting when he got back with a worried look on her face. "How did it go Harry?"

"I think it went fine. There is so much I need to learn though."

"Good. We'll let's get right to our training. Let's go out to the yard. You can put your wand away, you won't be needing it."

"Ok, now I'm going to send various objects at you from many angles. Some objects will be heavy and some will be light. What I want is for you to stop all the objects and not break any of the household items. I don't want any glass broken. However if you break any of the heavy or non household items, that is fine. Ready... Go."

Harry hadn't been ready he was still considering what had to be done. The next thing he knew a bucket was flying toward him. He stopped it and it dropped to the ground. Next came a pillow.. Stopped. Rock. Stopped. Then came a dish. He stopped it and sent it over to the bench gently. He had started feeling good about himself and then he noticed Mrs. Figg smile slyly. Now at least two things were coming at once. This was going ok until a mixture of things that needed to be stopped and things that needed to be placed on the bench came at the same time. More times than not he broke the things that weren't supposed to be broke and even once he put a stone on the bench and broke everything that had been there before.

"Well Harry, what do you think went wrong?" Mrs. Figg asked sounding stern.

"You sent more at me than I could handle, that's what went wrong!" Harry said sounding annoyed.

"Now really," she said not agreeing with his answer. "When you're playing Quidditch there are what 6 players on the other team, 5 other players on your team, a couple bludgers the quaffle and the snitch, correct? From what I've heard you seem to have no trouble keeping track of all of them. You rarely get hit by a bludger and haven't missed a snitch yet as long as you stay on your broom. Do you know what I think went wrong?" she looked at him for a second and then continued. "When you play Quidditch, there are many things going on but you don't think about them. You just do what feels natural. You were thinking too much in our little test here Harry. The next time we try this just do what comes naturally. Picture the household items as a snitch and treat them gently. Everything else is just a bludger."

Harry was pretty depressed about his performance with Mrs. Figg. The rest of the day had gone well and the part he thought would be the easiest turned out to be his worst performance.

"Did you think today was productive Harry?" Mrs. Figg asked.

"Well until this last lesson I thought it had gone well. I studied blocking and shield charms but we didn't do much actual blocking. The Cruciatu curse work was painful but very productive. Fletch and I spent two hours cursing each other, which taught me quite a few new spells and was also painful. But it was one of the most fun days I've had in a long time."

"I'm glad you enjoyed it. Don't feel too bad about our training, it was quite difficult actually. I have confidence you can do it, you just shouldn't think about it so much. Just do what comes naturally. Same time tomorrow then."

"Bye Mrs. Figg. See you tomorrow." Harry was in quite a good mood while walking home. These people are really nice and it's great being around wizards all day.

Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon have just been ignoring him since they thought he hated doing the work at Mrs. Figg's. This is turning out to be a great summer.

Ron's owl Pig was flapping around his room when he returned. After getting the letter off, Pig seemed to wait around for a response. This was unusual for Ron; he normally didn't expect an immediate response.

Harry

Dad & Percy said they saw you at the Ministry of Magic today. They said you were with Mr. Fletcher who is an Unspeakable. What were you doing there? Is everything ok? You're not in trouble are you?

Percy said he asked his new boss Mr. Boskins about it but couldn't find out anything.

Does it have anything to do with You-Know-Who?

I told Pig to wait for a response, I hope you don't mind.

Ron

Ron was his best friend and Harry felt guilty about not telling him something yesterday after his first trip to the Ministry. He didn't want to keep anything from Ron but also didn't want Ron saying anything to Percy.

Ron

I meant to write you last night and tell you about seeing them. I really can't say much using owl post about being there. You know Mr. Fletcher's department is pretty secretive and I'm worried Percy may mention things to his boss that could cause Mr. Fletcher to be unhappy with me.

I can say that I'm not in trouble and it doesn't have anything directly to do with Voldemort.

Can you tell Percy that I got the tour since someone in the department wanted to congratulate me on the Triwizard Tournament?

It's ok if we tell your dad that I am helping out with some projects and that Mr. Fletcher is sure your dad would personally approve of what we're doing.

Maybe I can say more when I come to visit later in the summer.

Harry

He quickly gave the letter to Pig who took off out the window. Just as Pig was flying out of sight another owl flew in. He hoped it was from Sirius but turned out it was from Hermione whose owl waited for a response as well.

Harry

I heard you were at the Ministry of Magic the other day. Has something bad happened? You didn't do anything to get in trouble did you? You did check with Professor Dumbledore about this didn't you?

Harry laughed; his friends had so much faith in him. But, he had blown up Aunt Marge two years ago so he probably deserved it.

I know you can handle yourself and you don't want anyone worrying about you but this is very unusual don't you think.

I've asked the owl to wait for a response; I won't sleep well until I hear from you.

Love Hermione

He couldn't get mad at her for being like this. They have had many adventures during their four years of school and things are rarely normal around them. He just wished that he could be completely honest with her. She would think the training was a good idea but probably be worried that it was too dangerous.

Hermione

Nothing bad has happened and I haven't done anything yet this summer to get into trouble. You sure don't have much faith in me do you? Just kidding.

I don't know if Professor Dumbledore knows about the trip or not. He seems to know almost everything so it wouldn't surprise me if he did know, but I haven't told him. I'm going to be fifteen soon and with everything that has happened lately I just want to start doing more things on my own and being responsible for myself more.

I can't really tell you much right now about what I'm doing. That department I visited is very secretive. I hope you can understand this (remember the time-turner).

I've asked Ron to tell Percy that I was there on a special tour. I also asked Ron to tell his dad that I'm helping with a project that Mr. Weasley would approve of if he could. Please don't talk about this to anyone other than Ron. I'll be going to the Ministry daily for a few weeks. Maybe I can say more when I see you later.

Don't worry.

Harry

This owl was much more professional than Pig, it stood perfectly still while Harry tied the letter and then stretched its wings and flew away quietly. Harry wished that Ron and Hermione could join him for the training so he would have someone to talk to about it. He also wished there was someone here who could throw things at him so he could practice stopping and placing items. Dudley wouldn't mind throwing things but would freak out as soon as the items started flying around the room on their own.

Harry was feeling guilty about not telling Ginny anything. He wanted her to start being more a part of their group so he should write to her more. Pulling out another parchment and quill he wrote:

Ginny

You probably heard by now that I was at the Ministry of Magic the other day. Nothing is wrong and I haven't gotten into any trouble (which seems to be what everyone's first thought is).

I'm going to be spending some time there the next few weeks. Please don't say anything about this. Percy thinks I was there on a tour and I'd like to keep it that way. I'll tell you more in person when I get there later in the summer.

If anything was wrong I would tell you, I really would.

Don't worry

Harry

He tied this one to Hedwig and asked her to deliver it to Ginny. He knew that he should make more of an effort to include her. She was quite a good witch for her age and Harry knew it bothered her when she was treated like a child. Just like it bothered him when he was.

The next week went by pretty quick. The lessons with Rose had moved into practical applications. She would send various curses at him and he had to choose whether to block them or use a shield charm. This was going pretty well he had only made the wrong choice a couple times. Each of these wrong choices had him lying on the floor in pain but he wouldn't make the same mistake twice.

Larry was very please with how quickly Harry could throw off the Cruciatus curse. Larry started using a protection charm before saying the curse just in case Harry lashed out at him. Next week they were going to start learning the surprise that Larry had mentioned.

Dueling with Fletch was going well also. The protection charm on him was only reducing each spell by $\frac{1}{4}$ now and even on the rare occasion when Harry made a mistake and got hit he was able to control the effects and keep dueling. Fletch still had a protection charm reducing Harry's spells by $\frac{1}{2}$.

Mrs. Figg was able to send up to ten things towards Harry at the same time and he could handle each item correctly. Harry felt like he learned as much since this summer started than he had in a whole year of school. This was the first time he was actually wishing summer could last longer, that is until he walked in the Dursley's and Uncle Vernon started yelling about those darn owls.

Harry had gotten a response from Sirius while he was out.

Harry

Remus and I are both fine. There hasn't been any news so we've been at Remus' house mostly.

Why are you really asking about wandless magic Harry? What has been happening? I would like to talk to you in person about this. I may have some information for you.

You met the real Mrs. Figg did you? She had a reputation as a tough teacher and then she was one of the most feared Aurors there was. You know she's Mad-Eye Moody's sister? Listen to what she says Harry, she is very talented and you couldn't do much better than learning from her.

We're going to try and be near Hogsmeade once school starts so I hope to see you then.

Love

S.B.

Well, that was better than he expected. He didn't freak out about the wandless magic. I wonder what kind of information he has for me.

Fletch was waiting for Harry when he arrived for this weeks training. "Morning Harry. Are you ready to get a little more advanced training?"

More advanced Harry thought? He left sore and bruised every day. "I guess so. So what we've been doing isn't advanced?" he asked worried about what was coming next.

"Well yes and no. Except for what you and Larry have been doing it is basic Auror training. So for normal wizards it is advanced but for Aurors it is just basic training. What we'd like to start on now is some advanced dueling and Larry is going to work on that surprise he mentioned. This will be much harder and if you want to take a break that will be ok with me. You will now spend the first two hours with Larry and then the remaining time will be with Rose, Bill and I."

"Bill? I didn't think he wanted to help me. He didn't seem to like me much."

"It's not that he didn't like you Harry. His specialties are the Imperius curse and dealing with dark creatures like dementors. It didn't make him happy with someone your age came in and did as well as he could. He is a bit headstrong and it bothered him a little. Imagine some new first year student at Hogwarts coming in and being a better seeker than you."

"So why is he coming back now?" Harry asked.

"To be honest Harry, he wants to show that you still have weaknesses. We will be doing advanced dueling and he wants to help beat you. But, even if you lose the dueling matches I'm sure you will learn quite a bit going through this. Don't feel too bad if you don't win any matches during these sessions. It may not be fun but it should help you a lot."

Great Harry thought. Bill's coming back just to show me up. I knew this was going to good. "Ok, I guess I'm ready. Thanks for telling me the truth."

"I said I would treat you like an adult Harry and I meant it. You'll get the good and the bad. All right then, let's get you to Larry," Fletch paused. "Oh yes, I talked to Arthur Weasley and gave him a bit more information. He has some concerns but realizes it is probably in your best interest to do this. And he understands about our concerns with Percy."

They walked to an area that Harry had never seen before. It seemed further away from the other offices. Larry was waiting in a large room with many stone partitions.

"Ok Harry we're going to try something that only one other person has performed at all. I can't say who of course. It won't mean anything bad if you can't make this work, it is just something new we've been working on. Most people can't throw off the Cruciatus curse at all and the ones who can even a little don't recover quickly enough to have a good response prepared. So even though that curse doesn't break them a Death Eater would just follow up with something else while they are disoriented."

Harry realized that if Voldemort hadn't been just toying with him when he did the Cruciatus curse that's probably what would have happened. He would have just used the killing curse right after it.

"The spell you're going to learn is 'Totilla Desissa'. If it works correctly, you will take some of the magic that is causing your pain and transfer it into an offensive response. The problem is that if you are totally blocking the pain by focusing on being angry there is nothing left to transfer. See the problem. To make this spell work you have to let some of the pain through. The more you let through the more powerful this spell becomes. If you let too much pain through you could pass out or become too weak to concentrate on the offensive spell. There is not much margin for error with this one. Try focusing on that stone wall and saying the spell."

Harry really tried to concentrate on the wall and said, 'Totilla Desissa'. There was a small puff from the end of his wand but nothing else happened. "Sorry, maybe I wasn't focusing enough."

"No, no Harry, that's actually a good thing. The spell doesn't have anything behind it at this point so I didn't expect even that much. This means that you understand the spell and can direct it correctly. Ok, I'm going to go over here with a protection charm and what I want you to do is block all of the pain. Once you know you can control the pain, try not to be so angry and when you feel the pain come back direct the spell at that wall. Ready?"

Harry had been very happy when he could regularly throw the pain from this spell. Having to experience it again wasn't going to be fun. "Ok, I'm ready."

'Crucio' Harry heard and felt the surge of pain. Quickly he was able to throw it but could feel the rage in him. He thought about needing to calm down, to not be so angry and very quickly the pain was quite intense. He buckled to his knees and Larry stopped the curse.

"Are you alright Harry?"

"Yes, sorry it just all came back at once. I don't know what I did wrong. I just tried to calm down and not be so angry but it went too far."

"Ok, try this. Instead of trying to calm down, try controlling the anger. You can stay as angry as you want but convince yourself you have control the anger. Convince yourself that no matter how angry you get you can direct it and you won't lose control. In theory this should allow you to keep an anger level up but not as high. I'm just guessing here though, this is all new. Want to try again?"

"Yes, I want to get this right." He stood up and waited for the pain.

'Crucio' and it hit him. Then he heard 'Diggory was first', 'Mudbloods will be second' and by focusing on the anger the pain stopped. He tried to tell himself, 'I have control here, I won't act until I want'. The pain came back but wasn't quite as bad. It was still one of the worst things he had ever felt but he could keep control of his mind. Pointing his wand at the wall he yelled, 'Totilla Desissa'. His wand erupted in a white flash with what sounded like a small explosion. Suddenly he felt the pain stop and noticed the wall had been reduced to rubble."

Larry came running over "Amazing, simply Amazing. We were right all along, this can be done. How did it feel Harry, what was it like?"

Harry thought that Larry seemed more like a kid than he did at this point. Harry had always assumed this training was only for his benefit. It made him happy to know that Larry was getting useful information from it as well. "It was weird. The pain was still quite bad as soon as it came back but I could still think. My arm felt like I was throwing a punch and then there was the explosion."

"Very good. Can you try again Harry? Can you see if you can let through less pain and control the power of the spell?"

Letting through less pain sounded like a good idea and he really wanted to make Larry happy. "Sure, we can go again."

They ended up trying about five more times. Harry hadn't been able to reduce the power much. He couldn't seem to let in much less pain. Larry was still happy with the information and Harry's progress though. They were going to work on making it more powerful in the coming days, which meant more pain.

Larry took him to the other area where Fletch, Rose and Bill were waiting. Larry said to Fletch, "We got some useful information today," then turned and left.

"Ok Harry here's how we're going to work today. Practical dueling lessons. You have a good fundamental set of spells you know. You've been practicing shields and blocking. You should have good reflexes from Quidditch so we're going to jump right in. You are going to duel Bill first. The protection charm will only stop mortal damage and the only spell that is off limits is the killing curse. We have a medical wing right down the hall so you're in no grave danger. You have to think of Bill as a Death Eater. He's done this before so I can assure you he will be trying to win. Rose and I will be making notes and offering suggestions only after the match. You will win or lose without any help from us. Is this ok?"

"Real dueling without protection charms against someone who really doesn't like me. What have I gotten myself into?" Harry thought. "Everyone would be disappointed in me if I just left now. I really don't have any choice." Quickly, Harry spoke, "Yes, it's ok."

"Ok, then we will enlarge the room and add some items to make it seem like a room in a castle. Everything is available to be used."

Harry looked around. It seemed just like a smaller version of the Great Hall at Hogwarts.

"Ready...GO!" yelled Fletch.

Harry braced for the worst but Bill didn't attack immediately. He kept staring at Harry but was moving around. Ah, he's getting comfortable with the surroundings Harry realized. Suddenly Harry had an idea. Bill had just move in front of a chair. Harry used the movement spell and sent the chair crashing into Bill's back, catching him off guard. Harry felt somewhat pleased and quickly realized that was the wrong thing to feel. He wasn't ready for Bill's response. He was hit in the stomach by a spell and it mad him double over.

For the next twenty minutes, they hit each other, blocked, and dodged spells all around the room. Most of the furniture was in pieces now and Harry was very sore. During one of Bill's dodges he tripped. Harry quickly caused a beam from the ceiling to come down. Bill sent a spell at it that caused the beam to shatter but it wasn't enough because a large chunk of wood hit him in the head and knocked him out. Harry had won but couldn't believe this department actually made people do this for training. A nurse came in and tended to Harry's cuts and scrapes. Bill was taken down the hall for more care.

"Pretty good Harry," Fletch said. "I think you could have ended it sooner by being a little more aggressive".

Rose added, "Use magic for blocking more Harry. You seem to want to dodge as your first thought."

"I'll try to remember, thanks." This was very different than school he thought. People would be saying how wonderful he did at school. Here they just critique your performance and you're expected to do better next time.

"Ok, now you will duel both Rose and myself at the same time Harry."

"Two at once? How will I have a chance?" Harry said not trying to hide his worry.

"Well, do you think the Death Eaters will care if they have you outnumbered?" Fletch quickly responded.

Rose spoke up, "Just do what you feel is the right thing to do. Once you act, go on to the next thing. Don't watch your spells all the way to the target. Cast the spell and move on to the next threat."

Harry only lasted about five minutes before they disarmed him. This didn't make him feel happy at all.

"Don't worry Harry. I told you that you might not win any matches. Do you want to go again?"

"Yes, I need to be able to handle this."

Both Rose and Fletch gave him some suggestions about what they thought he did wrong and other things to try. They dueled this way about 10 more times before ending for the day. Harry had managed to win 3 and each time he lost he was able to last a little longer.

They kept on this routine for the next week and a half. Harry had been able to win almost all of the time while facing Fletch and Rose and always beat Bill by himself. When all three of them came at the same time he won most the time. They thought this was very good but Harry wasn't happy about losing even once. While Fletch was walking Harry out he said, "I hear you are going to the Weasley's next week and since Mrs. Figg has some other training for you tomorrow, Friday will be your last day here. I think you've come a very long way in a short time Harry. You need to have confidence in yourself and trust your instincts more."

"Thanks for all your help Fletch. I can't believe we've done so much in just a few weeks. I wish we learned as much at school in this amount of time. It's been great spending time around other witches and wizards and I am really looking forward to getting out of school so I can spend all of my time around them."

"Do you have any plans on a career after school then?" Fletch asked.

"Well, if this Voldemort thing gets settled I'd like to try and play professional Quidditch. That would be a dream. I don't know what will happen if Voldemort is still around though."

"If Quidditch doesn't work out for you, how about coming back and working for us? I'm sure we could get you into our department. Unless of course you want to move up the political chain," Fletch grinned as he said this last part.

"You think I could really make it into the Unspeakables?" Harry questioned, "That would be excellent. A close second to Quidditch even."

"I'm sure you'd fit in here. Well what do you say for a final test on Friday then? How about you against various obstacles? Some dueling, maybe a dementor. Do you think you'll be up for it?"

"I'll try my best, that's for sure. I've lost more the past few weeks than all my time at school, so what's one more time?" Harry said excitedly, "See you Friday then." Harry went back to Mrs. Figg's house. She was waiting in the living room for him.

"Mrs. Figg, why can't I go to the Ministry tomorrow?" he asked sounding disappointed.

"There is one last thing I was hoping to expose you to Harry. It will probably take most of the day and I want you to be fresh when we start. Oh yes, I've spoken to Petunia and told her I would take you to London with me on Friday and that your friends were picking you up there. However, you will be going home from the Ministry with Arthur. You'll need to bring your things over here Friday morning when you come."

"Good, the sooner I get out of the Dursley's the better. Do we have anything to work on today?"

"No, I've got some things to take care of. Why don't you just run on home? Let's start at 11:00 tomorrow"

"Ok, see you tomorrow".

As soon as he walked into the kitchen at the Dursley's, Uncle Vernon bellowed, "What are you doing home so early? You didn't do anything to cause her to kick you out did you?"

"No Uncle Vernon, she had things to do and asked me to leave," said Harry trying to watch his tone of voice.

"You're to go into London with her on Friday and help out with anything she needs before those people come to meet you. Do you hear me? Tell her she can just drop you off and leave so that she won't have to meet them when they come to collect you," Vernon yelled.

"Yes Uncle Vernon, I'll make sure she doesn't see them."

"And you'll be staying at that school during the holidays, you know that."

"Yes Uncle Vernon." Of course I would be staying. I never want to come back to this house.

Harry didn't do much of anything the rest of that night. He just lay in bed and thought about all the things that he'd been able to do so far this summer. Being around witches and wizards all day is great. If Sirius hadn't been framed, that's how I would have grown up. It all comes back to Voldemort and the Death Eaters.

Chapter 4

The next day Harry went to Mrs. Figg's, not knowing exactly what they were going to work on but eager to find out. "Come in Harry, I'm in the kitchen".

Walking into the kitchen he heard "Surprise! Happy Birthday Harry!" from a few different voices. "Sirius, Remus, Professor Moody what are you doing here?" Harry exclaimed.

"It's not *professor* Moody Harry. I have actually never taught before. That was the low-life Death Eater who taught you last year."

Harry was hugging Sirius tightly. "Mrs. Figg did you set all this up?"

"Of course Harry, I wasn't going to make you do work on your birthday. I know I have a reputation for being a slave driver, but even I have a heart."

"Hello Remus, I can't believe all of you are here. Has there been any news about Voldemort? Do you have any idea where he is?"

"Now Harry, this is your birthday party we shouldn't be talking shop today," said Mrs. Figg. "Open your presents why don't you."

Harry unwrapped the first gift. It was a book titled 'Inside the Ministry of Magic'. "That's from Arabella and myself Harry. Maybe it will give you some future career ideas." Moody said.

"Thank you."

Sirius got Harry a book about Habinshire England. This is where Sirius' house is. He can't go there of course but other relatives live there now.

Remus' present was a book of misunderstood creatures with a picture of a werewolf on the cover. Obviously a joke since he was a werewolf.

"Professor, how did you come to find out that Sirius was innocent? I mean we have two Aurors in the same room with a person who escaped Azkaban." Harry asked bluntly.

"Dumbledore told me the story before I accepted the job last year. I guess he assumed that I may notice him around the school with you being there."

"Harry, you seem to have grown quite a bit this summer. Arabella has been a bit mysterious on what you've been up to." Sirius asked.

Harry started to say something but Mrs. Figg interrupted him. "Before we give you the details, how about a little demonstration? Would you be up for that Harry?" she winked at him after saying this.

"If you don't think anyone will get seriously hurt I'm all for it." He said going along with her joke.

Sirius and Remus were looking rather confused when Mrs. Figg said, "Sirius, you've gotten a new wand by now, haven't you?"

"Arabella, you know it's illegal for me to have a wand. But of course I've gotten one. What else can they do to me?"

"Well then how about a little dueling?" she asked. "I suggest Sirius and Remus versus Harry to start with."

Remus just laughed. "What are you talking about? You want Sirius and I to duel Harry. He's only just now starting fifth year at school."

"I'll wager 5 galleons on Harry," she said flatly.

Moody quickly said, "I'll take that bet. My money's on the convict and werewolf."

Sirius looked at Harry and agreed to the duel. The living room was expanded so they would have room. "Here are the rules. A protection charm will be on each of you that will protect you from serious wounds only. The only spell that is not allowed is the killing curse. The Cruciatus and Imperius curses are quite legal for this duel. Does everyone understand and agree?" Mrs. Figg said with authority

"I agree," Harry said quickly. "And, you two better try your hardest. You don't know how mad I'll be if I think you're taking it easy on me. Remember I've had Voldemort put the Cruciatus curse on me twice now, so I have some idea what's coming. The best birthday present you could give is to beat me. Come on, you guys aren't that old are you?"

Sirius and Remus just stared at Harry who was looking back with a gleam in his eye. They had never seen him like this before; he seemed so much older right now.

In the first round Harry had blinded Sirius and had Remus choking for air in less than two minutes. They had greatly underestimated him.

"Where did you learn to do that?" they both said looking quite stunned.

Mrs. Figg spoke up, "Harry has been studying with some friends of mine this summer. I take it you both approve? Would you care to go again? Double or nothing Alastor?"

Moody said, "Sure, double or nothing. My pair wasn't ready the first time."

Remus and Sirius agreed to another match looking rather surly this time. They whispered something to each other. Harry knew it wouldn't be as easy this time.

This match lasted at least twenty minutes but ended the same way. They had all gotten in some good shots but Harry had been able to either use a shield or block almost every spell they sent his way.

They kept asking questions about how he had learned that but Mrs. Figg wouldn't let him answer and finally said, "Ok, how about this. One more match if you win we'll tell you the story. And, to make it a bit more interesting why don't you join them Alastor?"

"Sure, I have incentive to get in on this. That boy has cost me ten galleons. I at least want to know what you two have been up to."

"Ok, just a reminder," Mrs. Figg added, "you *can* uses two of the unforgivable curses. I assure you Harry can handle them."

Moody said something to Sirius and Remus and then they were ready.

Sirius sent a curse at Harry that he was blocking when he felt Moody placing the Imperius curse on him. "Why don't you just give me the wand Harry" "That's it just hand it here". Remus was standing right next to Moody waiting to take Harry's wand. Harry played along while keeping an eye on Sirius. When Harry was a few steps in front of Moody, Harry yelled Expelliarmus causing both Moody and Remus went flying back.

Harry laughed, "The fake Professor Moody taught me to throw that off last year. I'll give you another chance."

They went on for another ten minutes or so. They kept trying to surround Harry but couldn't quite do it. Harry had placed the Imperio Loco curse on Sirius which made him move in slow motion when he heard 'Crucio' and felt the pain. Quickly he did what he had been practicing and after a slight stumble, he turned and hit Moody with the 'Puncio' spell, which knocked him back. However at this, both Sirius and Remus yell Expelliarmus and hit Harry square on. He went sailing back, but the first thing he did was use wandless magic to summon his wand back to him and also to soften his impact with the wall. So at the end of the spell, he was still standing there with his wand. Sirius and Remus seemed stunned so Harry put a full body bind spell on them and quickly gathered up all the wands.

"Excellent Harry. I wondered if you would think to try something like that. I'm very proud of you," Mrs. Figg said. "Even though they lost, I think we should fill them in on how you've been spending your summer."

Harry spent the next hour telling the group some of the things he had been doing in the unspeakable department the past few weeks. He could see the look of amazement on Sirius' and Remus' faces. He didn't mention the special Totilla_Desissa response to the Cruciatius curse. Larry had asked him not to mention this to anyone.

"Did Professor Dumbledore approve of all this?" Sirius asked "It seems rather extreme to put him through it."

Mrs. Figg spoke up, "Headmaster Dumbledore was informed of this after the department agreed to give Harry some lessons. At first he wasn't sure it was a good idea, but I was able to assure him that it would be entirely Harry's choice and that Harry could stop at any time. The Headmaster would rather see Harry spending his summer as any normal fourteen-year-old boy, but I reminded him who Harry lives with and being locked in his bedroom or doing all the household chores is not normal fun for a boy his age. I convinced him that Harry would probably enjoy spending the summer with other wizards; even it was a little painful at times. What do you think Harry?"

Harry was surprised to hear that Mrs. Figg had stood up to Professor Dumbledore and worked to get this training for him. "That's true Sirius. Spending the summers at the Dursley's has never been fun. That is more like being a captive. This has been one of the best summers I can

remember. I would rather have a summer like this than anything else except for playing Quidditch."

Sirius seemed to relent a bit. "Harry, I don't want you to be forced to grow up too fast. We shouldn't be putting any more responsibility on you than any other school boy."

"More responsibility!" Harry exclaimed, "So far, every year someone has tried to hurt my friends or me at school. Voldemort has tried to kill me twice. Do you know how my summers really are? I wake up many nights scared to death that my friends are being hurt or that Voldemort is going to kill me. Can you understand how that makes me feel?" Harry paused to compose himself. "Since I started learning how to take care of myself better, I haven't woken up like that once. I still have the dreams, but I don't feel helpless anymore." He hesitated before continuing, "You all know that no matter what I do, he's coming after me again. Sooner or later a Death Eater or Voldemort is going to get to me, you know that. If I can learn anything that could help me last longer or survive I would have thought you would be all for it. Learning to take care of myself isn't making me grow up too fast, being at the top of the list to be killed by Voldemort has." Harry instantly felt bad for saying this. He hadn't intended to make Sirius feel bad. So he added, "But, it's really great having people like you care about me." Which seemed to help the look of pain on Sirius' face.

"I'm sorry Harry. You're right of course. I'm just upset that you can't stay with me and that I can't be there to help you with these types of things." Sirius added, "Maybe I'm also a little ticked that on your fifteenth birthday you out dueled me. I'll need to watch what I say to you in the future." He smiled at the end of this.

"Harry. I do have a question though," Remus said sounding very serious. "How exactly did you get your wand back after we disarmed you? That's something you seemed to skip over so far."

Harry glanced at Mrs. Figg who nodded at him in a signal it was ok to tell them about it. He told the story of the book coming out of the closet when he was very angry and the other strange things like that.

Then Mrs. Figg jumped in very excitedly. "Let me tell this part. Harry and I were walking to the store one day before he knew I was a witch. A large delivery truck was coming down the street obviously speeding when a little Muggle girl ran into the street to chase her dog. The truck driver didn't see her and couldn't have stopped in time even if he had. I started to reach for my wand but knew I wouldn't make it when the truck just stopped before it hit the girl. Instantly, it just stopped. I looked around and there were no wizards around and then I saw Harry rubbing his hands with a strange look on his face. He then said he wasn't feeling well and wanted to go back home. I knew right then he had stopped the truck and saved that girl. I decided that night to tell him I was a witch and to see if we could work on this new talent of his. You all know that most people think that wandless magic can only be used for the simplest of magic such as changing already enchanted items. There have been accounts in history of witches and wizards doing extraordinary things without wands. I purchased a book about some of those accounts and gave it to Harry. We began working together to see if he could control magic this way. He is quite impressive with the summoning, repulsion and placement spells. We haven't had the time to work on anything else though."

"You stopped a truck from running over a Muggle girl?" Moody asked. "What made you think you could do it? What prompted you to try?"

"I don't know," Harry said honestly "I didn't think about it. It's like I was being told to just stop the truck. I can't explain it really."

"I have a thought," Moody responded. "You said that when you throw off the Imperius curse that you hear a voice telling you the correct thing to do. You also said that you hear a voice that makes you throw off the Cruciatus curse. I think this is the same type of thing. Whatever gives you the confidence to throw those curses is what is allowing you to do things you never knew you could. You have some quite impressive people watching over you Harry, be grateful."

Could it really be his parents? He did hear his mom when the Dementors were near. Maybe they brought out the bad images and the good parts were there as well.

They spent the next couple hours talking about the other Triwizard tasks and how the Unspeakables had lost money by betting on Krum. When Moody asked about becoming an Auror after school Harry mentioned the Fletch had suggested becoming an Unspeakable.

"I think you should plan on being a professional Quidditch player Harry," Sirius said. "Then I could at least talk publicly about my godson instead of telling people 'I have no idea what he does'".

Sirius and Remus both hugged Harry and told him how proud they were of him when they left. Moody was staying for a bit to talk to his sister.

"Thank you for everything Mrs. Figg. This has been the best. Goodbye Professor Moody thanks again," Harry said.

"Make sure you bring your trunk and all of your school things tomorrow Harry," Mrs. Figg added. "We'll be leaving at 12:00".

Harry felt like he was floating all the way home. Seeing Sirius had made him so happy. He was going to miss going to Department of Mysteries every day but was really looking forward to seeing Ron and the Weasley's again. Not even Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia's complaints could dampen his spirits.

He had two packages on his bed waiting for him. The first was from Ron and was a new Chudley Cannons jersey in honor of Ron's favorite Quidditch team.

Happy Birthday Harry

Hope the Muggles aren't giving you too much trouble. Dad says you're coming home with him tomorrow. I guess that means you're going back to the Ministry.

Hermione got here a couple days ago. She's been studying every night.

Oh yeah, she's acting like a prefect already. We won't be able to get away with anything.

See you tomorrow.

Ron

The next was from Hermione and it was a journal. Her note said

Happy Birthday Harry

I'm really going to have to study extra hard to keep up my grades with all the extra work of being a prefect. I hope you two will try to follow rules this year. I don't want to take points from my own house.

This is a journal (really a diary but you wouldn't want to call it that). It may seem strange, but I thought it might be a good idea to write down the adventures you've had since starting school. With everything that happens to you it would probably be a great thing to show your kids one day.

I hope you don't think it is too weird. I imagine you would want to see one if either of your parents had kept one.

I'm already at the Weasley's so I'll see you tomorrow. I can't wait to hear what you were doing at the Ministry.

Love

Hermione

A diary, she got me a diary. Harry thought. She is the most practical person he knew. He would have never considered getting a diary but she did have a point. If either of his parents had kept one he would love to read it. They must have had great experiences. He couldn't imagine having kids of his own though. He thought it would be useful to record all the things that he, Ron, and Hermione had done. Not that many people would believe it all. Maybe it was a good gift.

He fell right to sleep. But it was not going to be a peaceful sleep. He was seeing a group of hooded figures surrounding a tall thin wizard. 'How could you let this happen?' the wizard roared. 'My most powerful supporters and you let him get away. Is this the best I can ask for?' The bowing hooded figures were all saying 'No my lord, we weren't prepared. It will never happen again.'

'You know this cannot go unpunished' the wizard in the middle said. One by one the wizard faced each figure and calmly said, 'Crucio' and each hooded figure screamed in pain. Harry knew what they were feeling but thought they deserved everything they would get. He couldn't see any of the faces until the wizard came to the last hooded figure. Harry hood the figure say 'My lord I have failed you and accept my punishment. I will not let it happen again.' The wizard said, 'I believe you Lucius, see that it doesn't happen again' The figure looked up and Harry saw the face clearly. Lucius Malfoy and then the figure was screaming in pain.'

Harry woke up with his scar burning but he wasn't afraid. As Hagrid said, 'What will come will come'.

Harry stayed in his room until late in the morning. The less time he had to spend with the Dursley's the better. He had everything packed and ready to go. He decided to let Hedwig out so she could fly there. He started dragging his trunk down the stairs and it was thumping

loudly as it hit each step. "Take care with those stairs boy". Uncle Vernon bellowed 'If you scratch even one of them you'll be doing lawn work all next summer to pay for the repairs'

Harry wasn't going to take this any more. He used wandless magic to make the trunk float right under his hand and calmly walked into the kitchen.

Dudley roared, "Harry's doing it again. His trunk is flying!" while gripping his bottom and hiding behind Aunt Petunia who was shielding Dudley from Harry. Uncle Vernon screamed, "You've done it now boy, you're not allowed to use your abnormality out of school. I'm going to suggest they lock you up."

Harry just looked at Uncle Vernon and smiled. "Am I going to get into trouble? Magic can only be done with a wand. Mine is packed in the truck Uncle Vernon. I'll see you next summer. Bye". Then he just walked out the door.

Harry reached Mrs. Figg's house but was starting to feel a bit nervous. He was going to be facing a test of what he had learned in a couple hours. He was sure that there were going to be things meant to trick him and to see how prepared he was. He knocked on the door and heard "Come on in Harry, I'll be ready in a minute"

Stepping through the door he immediately saw objects flying at him from all over the room. He quickly let his trunk fall and successfully stopped every item from hitting him and only needed to dodge a couple of times. When there was nothing else to stop he noticed Mrs. Figg standing in the doorway to the kitchen just smiling. "Well let's get going Harry, play time is over." She must have been a very tough teacher in her day he thought.

"Mrs. Figg, just in case I don't get a chance to thank you later, I really appreciate all you've done for me. I can't believe how nice you've been to me."

She looked at him in what seemed to be a motherly way and said "My pleasure Harry. It has felt good to be around a student again. Maybe I'll take it up again. "

"Mrs. Figg, do you think you could help me with something?" Harry asked. "Hermione got me a journal for my birthday and I'd like to charm it so that only I can read it unless I give permission for someone else to." Harry thought for a moment and his dream re-entered his mind. "I guess we should make the charm go off if I ever die though, otherwise no one would ever be able to read it."

This last bit shocked Mrs. Figg. "Harry, why did you say that?"

"Well, Hermione gave me this journal so that I could show it to my kids. If Voldemort gets his way that won't happen but it may still be a nice record of all the adventures Ron, Hermione and I have been through. I'm just trying to look at things realistically. I'd rather give it to my kids though."

"Well that is a very practical way to look at things, but I'm quite sure you will be giving it to your children." She proceeded to work out a charm that Harry wanted and placed it on the journal. "Now only you can read it unless you tap it with your wand and say the person's name followed by 'Is Granted Access'"

"Great, thanks. I guess I'm ready to go now."

Fletch was waiting when they arrived. "Final day Harry, ready for one last test?"

"I think so sir. I've been going through everything you've taught me." Harry said, dropping his trunk in Fletch's office.

"You go on into the room we were in the last time Harry. I've got to run a quick errand and then I'll meet you there." Without Harry knowing anything Fletch went to Arthur Weasley's office and was disappointed to find Percy there as well. "Hello Arthur, Percy. Arthur, I was wondering if you had a few minutes to spare."

This surprised Mr. Weasley. "Hello Fletch, what brings you to our area?"

"I would like to get your opinions on a project we've been working on. One that you may have some specific interest in." Fletch said hoping he wouldn't have to be very specific with Percy around.

"What could I possibly provide to..." and then he noticed the way Fletch was looking at him and it sunk in. "But I'd be happy to give my opinion if you think it would be of any use. Percy, I'll see you at home later."

Percy said, "Maybe I should come as well. I could write a report to put in the Ministry files."

Fletch said flatly. "I'm afraid we can only allow Arthur in right now, maybe next time though." Percy looked quite disappointed and a bit angry.

Mrs. Figg walked him down to the room and said. "I'll be in the observation room Harry. Just remember what you've learned but do what comes naturally. This will probably be difficult, so don't feel bad if you don't make it all the way through. I'm going to suggest one thing, if you need to, use wandless magic to your advantage. We don't need to explain anything to them about it, Fletch will understand."

All of the people who had been helping came down to see him before the test, even Bill who said. "Good luck Harry. No hard feeling about how we've gotten along is there? I do think you've come a long way."

This surprised Harry who said "Thanks Bill, no hard feelings at all." Harry didn't quite believe Bill and thought maybe Fletch made him come down. He was sure that whatever Bill added for this test would be difficult."

After what seemed like quite a long time Harry heard Fletch's voice. "Ok, Harry we're ready to begin. You will have no protection charms on you whatsoever this time. You will feel the full effects of any spell. Any wizards you face will have protection so that you cannot do fatal damage to them, so make sure you treat them as true Death Eaters. There may be other creatures and they also have protections. So, if you feel you need to kill a creature go ahead, they will be stopped but not killed. The only spell that is illegal is the killing curse."

Harry thought he heard a voice that was familiar but the sound was cut off. "What do you think you're doing here Fletch?" Mr. Weasley injected. "What are you doing to Harry, you can't let him go through this."

Fletch turned to him and said, "Don't worry Arthur. I wouldn't do anything to harm Harry. I can't explain everything, but please trust me."

"Ok, Harry here we go." Fletch announced.

Out of one corner of the room entered two wizards in hoods. It took about 15 minutes before Harry had finally beaten them. He had let a couple of their spells get through which made him angry with himself but recovered quickly.

Next came five dementors through one corner of the room and five from the opposite corner. Harry sent his patrons toward the first set but didn't know how to delay the second set. He decided to send one of the large benches lining the room flying at the second set. The bench slammed into the second set and delayed them long enough for the Patronus to finish with the first set and get over to them.

Next Harry heard a sound that sent chills down his spine. It was a werewolf. They had sent a werewolf after him! He had never fought a werewolf before. Then it came charging at him. He sent another bench crashing into it, which knocked it down. Harry was looking around the room and trying to figure out what he could do. The werewolf charged again and Harry used the puncio spell to knock it down again. While it was down, Harry brought one of the beams in the ceiling crashing down on it. He didn't know if that would stop it or not. For a moment he thought it had, but then the werewolf stood back up in the rubble and growled at him. Harry looked at the table behind him and was getting ready to send it at the werewolf when he noticed the table was set for dinner. Suddenly Harry knew what to do. Instead of sending the table at the werewolf, he sent one of the knives that was setting on the table. The knife hit the werewolf and it staggered and then collapsed. The knife was made out of silver that was fatal to werewolves.

Then came four more hooded wizards one from each corner of the room. They immediately started sending spells his way. He was dodging and using blocking spells. He managed to stun one of the wizards and was turning towards another when the other two simultaneously did the disarming spell on him. Instead of immediately retrieving his wand, he used wandless magic to bring down another ceiling beam on those two wizards. He then turned and sent the table flying to the remaining wizard smashing it into him. He quickly summoned his wand and turned to handle what came next.

After a couple minutes he heard Fletch's voice, "I think that will be all Harry, we'll be down in a minute to collect you."

Harry wondered why they stopped. Had he done something wrong?

Fletch turned to Mr. Weasley. "What do you think Arthur? Have we taught him a few things he wouldn't have learned in school?"

"That was amazing. I can't believe he can do that. I've never known an Auror who could have gotten through all of that," Mr. Weasley said.

"I feel the same way Arthur. And I can tell you that he didn't show everything he can do. Why don't you go to my office and we'll bring Harry in there. I'm not going to tell him that you watched this. You are probably the closest thing to a family he has and I thought you should

know that he could handle himself quite well. I hope you agree this has been in his best interest."

"I guess it is good he has learned so much, I just wish it wasn't necessary that's all. I'll be down in your office. Thanks for letting me to watch this." Mr. Weasley left and Fletch could tell he was trying to take in all that he saw.

"Arabella, do you think he'll tell Harry he saw this?" Fletch asked.

"I doubt it Fletch. He would probably think it would make Harry uncomfortable," Mrs. Figg answered.

When they went to collect Harry he immediately asked, "Did I do something wrong Fletch? Why did we stop?"

Fletch laughed "No Harry, you didn't do anything wrong, we ran out of opponents. I didn't really expect you to get through those last four wizards. It's not the first time I've been wrong. You did very well. By the way, I have something for you." He handed Harry an all black ring. "This is the ring of the Unspeakables and it was your fathers. We take them back whenever we lose a team member but I think it would be good for you to have this. Watch what happens when it gets near another ring." Fletch put his ring near the one he gave Harry and the top black stone glowed bright green. "Out in public, it will work over greater distances. If you decide to ever come join us we will get you a ring of your own, but you are an honorary member as of now."

Harry looked at the ring like it was the most important thing in the world. Something that his father wore all the time. He almost started crying right there. "Thank you Fletch, you don't know what this means to me. I only have one other thing of my dads." Harry hugged him.

"So much for acting like an adult Harry," Fletch joked. "Come on let's go meet Arthur Weasley so you can get on with your summer. Harry put the ring on his finger and it was the perfect size.

Mr. Weasley was waiting in Fletch's office when they arrived. "Hello Harry, are you ready to go home?"

"Yes, I'm looking forward to seeing everyone. Thanks again Fletch, Mrs. Figg I really appreciate everything you've done for me."

"You're welcome Harry, I'll see you soon," Mrs. Figg responded

Chapter 5

Mr. Weasley along with Harry walked back out to the reception area and Harry tossed some floo powder into the fire, stepped in and said "The Burrow" and the now familiar feeling of being sucked through the floo came over him. The next thing he knew, he was stepping out of the fire into the living room at the Burrow. Mrs. Weasley was there waiting.

"Oh Harry, how have you been?" Mrs. Weasley said while giving him a big hug. "We're so glad you could finally come stay with us. I don't know why Professor Dumbledore insists on you going to the Dursley's anymore. You've grown a bit this summer haven't you? Are you hungry?"

"Hi Mrs. Weasley. Thank you for letting me stay here. I'm not hungry right now. Where's Ron?" About this time Mr. Weasley came out of the fire.

He kissed Mrs. Weasley on the cheek, shook his head and said, "I've had a very interesting day. I'll never stop being surprised by wizards." He headed straight into the kitchen.

"I'm going to take my trunk up to Ron's room if that's ok," Harry said.

"That's fine dear. He's out back with the others right now. We weren't expecting you until later, I'm glad you were able to drag Arthur out of the office a bit early for once. I guess you know Hermione is already here and that she's a prefect."

"Yes, I heard. I'm not sure her being a prefect is a good thing for Ron and me though. How can we ask her to help us figure things out anymore?" Harry said while dragging his trunk up the stairs. Ron's room was the same as last year, bright orange, books and things everywhere. Hedwig was already perched on Ron's headboard. Harry thought it was the great being here. He dropped his trunk, got some water for Hedwig and went to find the others.

Standing at the back door, Harry stood for a moment watching his friends. Ron, Fred and George were having a contest to see who could throw a garden gnome the furthest. Hermione was sitting at the table with Ginny, both looking at something in a book. I hope Hermione isn't rubbing off on Ginny he thought. He couldn't handle two friends who only wanted to study. Harry thought he would do anything for them. He couldn't let anything bad happen to them. This must be how Sirius felt about him, Harry wondered and decided he should stop giving Sirius such a hard time about worrying about him.

He walked quietly out the door and just plopped down next to Ginny before anyone knew he was there. "Thanks for meeting me when I got here," he joked.

"Harry! What are you doing here already? We thought you were coming this evening with dad," Ginny said while giving Harry a hug. Normally she would just blush and say hi. Harry hugged her back tightly then quickly let go and said, "Your dad was able to leave a bit early today. I think he knew how much I wanted to get here."

Hermione gave Harry a hug but he let go quicker than he had when hugging Ginny. "You've gotten taller this summer. "

"Congratulations on being a prefect Hermione. How are you going to help Ron and I figure out how to get away with stuff this year? Maybe we can convince Ginny to help us. You know Ron and I can't do it alone."

"Well I would hope you two would follow the rules this year so I won't have to take points from Gryffindor," Hermione said. Just then Ron came over and added "We're going to have a much tougher time this year Harry. I hope we can just use all the old ways to get around the rules."

Fred and George came over and said hello. "Hey Harry. We're working on quite a few new things for Weasley's Wizard Wheezes."

Ron added, "Yeah Harry, they got someone to invest in their company. Complete git no doubt. Who else would trust them with any money?"

Fred and George looked at Harry and said, "Complete git, that's for sure." The rest of the afternoon they just messed around outside tossing gnomes and talking about what they did over the summer. Harry kept quiet for the most part and deflected questions about his activities as much as he could.

Supper that night was the best. Setting around the table with the Weasley's and Hermione was about as good as it could get from Harry's point of view. He would be happy staying like this forever. Percy kept trying to get information from Harry about what he was doing this summer.

"So Harry, how was your tour of the Ministry? How did you get into the unspeakable area?" Percy asked hoping to get some information.

Everyone looked at Harry who said, "The tour was very interesting, there were all these weird noises coming from rooms down in that area. It kind of sounded like Fred and George's room." They all laughed at this and it seemed to get them onto other subjects. However Percy wasn't going to let it go.

"I imagine, but how did you get into that area, they are very secretive?"

"I think they just wanted a chance to make me feel bad in person. A few of them lost money by betting on the Triwizard Tournament. They bet on Krum," Harry replied trying to smile.

"Krum, how could anyone bet on that git?" Ron added.

"You about fell over yourself to get his autograph, so who's the git here?" Fred added.

"But how did you get into the area Harry? There were no records of you coming into the floo in the Ministry reception area. There were rumors you were there almost every day," Percy persisted in his questioning.

Harry didn't know how to respond and was trying to make something up when Mr. Weasley answered. "Harry was granted special access into that department's floo. Very secure with unbreakable identity checks. They thought it would be best to keep reporters from the Daily Prophet from talking to him. Isn't that correct Harry?"

"Yes Mr. Weasley that is what they said," Harry said glancing at Ginny. She seemed to know there was more to this story.

Ron looked confused. "You were there every day Harry? You really got to--" and then was cut off by Mr. Weasley.

"I need to insist that you don't ask Harry any more questions about that department. You all know how seriously they take their secrecy and we wouldn't want to get Harry into any hot water if he accidentally said something he wasn't supposed do."

Everyone looked at Harry who kept looking down, playing with his food until Mrs. Weasley changed the subject back to getting ready for school again.

After eating way too much Ron said, "Hermione, let's go help Harry get his trunk upstairs."

But Harry started to add, "It's ok, I've....um Yeah, let's go do that." He glanced at Ginny who was looking upset and then added "Ginny, you want to help us?"

She looked up surprised, smiled broadly and said, "Yeah," as she jumped up to follow the trio. The four all went up to Ron's room. Ron and Hermione sat on the bed, Harry sat at the desk and Ginny sat on Harry's trunk.

"So" Ron said looking expectantly at Harry.

"So what?" Harry said seriously.

"So what's the real story with the Unspeakables?" Ron quickly said, and then added "Ginny, maybe you should leave us alone for a while."

"Ron, I think it's ok if she hears this. We were having trouble keeping anything from her last year and I'm sure she's gotten much better at figuring things out since then," Harry pleaded. Ron looked at Harry strangely.

Hermione had a slight twinkle in her eye when she said, "Ron, I agree with Harry. I think we should include Ginny more often. Maybe she can help me keep an eye on you two."

"Ok, fine. Just don't go running to mom if you find out things you don't like, deal?"

"Deal," Ginny happily said. Then she quickly added, "So, Harry what is the real story. Were you really there every day?"

"Yeah. The first day was when I saw Percy and your dad at lunch. Then I went back every day except for yesterday. Mrs. Figg had a birthday party for me yesterday and Sirius, Remus, and the real Professor Moody came."

"How's Sirius?" Hermione asked.

"They're all fine," Harry responded. "Sirius wasn't very happy when he found out about me going to the ministry every day. He kept asking why I didn't tell him. He's ok with it now. Mrs. Figg and I explained everything".

"Well explain it to us!" Ron exclaimed. "What were you doing there for so long?"

"Ok, I've been going through Auror training and received some advanced dueling lessons," Harry said flatly.

Ginny and Hermione gasped but Ron said, "Wicked, that's just too excellent. So are you an official Auror now?"

"No, I didn't go through all the training, it takes a long time. I only took the training that was related to stopping Death Eaters. I think they were trying to get me prepared for when I'm attacked again." His friends all got a sorrowful look when he said this so calmly. "Pretty much everything ended with them having some wizards or creatures attack me and me trying to stop them before they killed me. They had a protection charm on all of us so that none of us could actually die. Someone did go to the medical wing most days though. They seem to expect those things more than Madame Pomfrey does."

Hermione gasped again and said, "They were using real full power spells on you! Oh Harry, that was very dangerous. What do they expect to happen? How did they get approval to do this?"

"Well, the first week, the spells started at ¼ power and moved up to full power by the second week. They thought it was safe as soon as I learned some shield charms and blocking spells. I was pretty sore every day though. I don't think they got or needed approval though. They don't tell the other areas of the ministry what they are doing until they feel it is far enough along to be a sure thing. They kind of do whatever they want in that area. Fletch who is one of the department heads said I could come work with them after school if I don't play Quidditch. That seems like a long time off though."

"So, what kind of dueling did you do? What kind of creatures did they have you fight?" Ginny asked matter-of-fact.

"Well, we did normal dueling where the only illegal spell was the killing curse. They were allowed to do the Imperius and Cruciatus curses on me."

Hermione gasped loudly at this, Ron said "No Way!"

Harry went on, "Yeah, you know I can beat the Imperius curse, but the Cruciatus curse was very painful." He visibly flinched as he said this but went on. "So after learning some new attack spells and defenses I had to duel a few people one on one and then they did two people against me. I lost quite a few times and had to get hauled to the medic ward, but after a few days I was winning more than I was losing. One day they sent some dementors in for me to fight but I've know the Patronus spell for a while now so that wasn't any problem." All three of his friends were just staring and shaking their heads. Harry continued. "Today I had a final test which was really hard. They sent a werewolf at me."

"No way! A werewolf?" Hermione jumped up "That's too dangerous, what were they thinking. I hope you ran out of there before it got to you. Don't tell me you fought it?"

"Of course I fought it Hermione, that's what I was there to do. I didn't know what to do at first so I hit it with a table that knocked it down, but it got back up and charged again. I was able to collapse a beam in the ceiling that collapsed onto the werewolf. I thought this had done it but

the werewolf got back up and came at me. Then I noticed a plate with utensils on the table so I sent the knife at the werewolf that stopped it. The knife was made out of silver. "

"I can't believe they made you do all that," Ron said slowly.

"I guess I got lucky. Oh yeah, then they gave me my father's ring. He was an unspeakable as well."

"It's so black! Like you can see forever into it," said Ginny examining the stone.

"When it gets close to another Unspeakable's ring, it glows. Kind of weird actually," Harry added.

His friends sat there in silence for a while and Harry was worried they were thinking bad of him when Hermione spoke up. "Well, I don't approve of them making you go through so much pain, that's for sure. But if you learned a lot it all turned out ok, I guess."

"I'm not happy that you put yourself through all that," Ginny added.

"Come on, I told you all the truth. You shouldn't be upset with me. Acting like this will just make me not tell you about things like this in the future. Is that what you want?"

"Well, can you teach me to duel better but just leave out all the pain parts?" Ron added with a laugh. This lightened the mood a bit. They all asked more questions and Harry answered them all but didn't tell them about beating the Cruciatius curse or being able to do wandless magic.

Hermione announced, "Well I'm going off to bed now. I need to do some reading before falling asleep. See you tomorrow." She headed out and Ron followed.

"So, have they admitted they like each other?" Harry asked watching his two friends walk out?

"Of course not," Ginny said. "I think Ron's too stupid to realize how she feels and she's too stubborn to admit it."

"I agree. Maybe we can help them out a bit this year, what do you say?"

"Deal. Harry, I'm glad you're here now," Ginny said softly as she walked out.

The next day they were all going to practice Quidditch when Harry noticed Ginny coming carrying a broom. "Ron, is Ginny going to play with us? I've never seen her fly before."

"She's amazing Harry, a natural just like you. It makes me mad because she can fly better than I can. I hope she doesn't try out for the house team this year because she'll probably get picked over me. I was really hoping to make the team this year."

They started playing and Harry quickly realized Ron was right. Ginny was an amazing flyer. Ron had gotten a lot better, but Ginny could fly rings around him.

"Ginny, how did you learn to fly so well. You're amazing," Harry asked when he approached her.

She blushed brightly but didn't look away. "I don't know. It just comes easily. Is that how it was for you?"

"Yeah, it was the same thing with me. I guess we're just lucky. Are you going to try out for the team this year? We need a couple new players. It'd be great if both you and Ron made the team."

"I don't know if I'm ready to play on the team. Maybe I should wait another year before trying out."

"I think you should this year. You're a better flier than most of the team now, so I bet you'd make it."

"Thanks. Maybe I will try out."

They played for a quite a while and then went back up to the house. Hermione and Ron were talking together and Harry thought they made a good couple. He went up to his trunk and got the journal Hermione had given him. He had already written down most of what happened in their first year and was going to try and get the last three years in before they went back to school. It actually made Harry feel good to remember all they had done while he was writing it down. He was writing at one of the picnic tables and didn't notice Ginny, Ron and Hermione come over.

"I can't believe you're actually using the journal Harry. I expected you to think it was a stupid gift," Hermione said looking pleased with herself.

"Well, at first I didn't think I'd ever use it, but after thinking about it, I agreed it would probably be a good idea. I assume you've been keeping your own?"

"Of course, girls keep a diary which includes more than just the experiences that you're probably putting in yours." She looked over his shoulder and saw the pages were blank, and instantly got a very stern look in her face. "I thought you said you were using it? There's nothing written down."

"Way to go Harry, make her think you were actually using it and get caught faking it," Ron snorted.

"I have been using it," Harry assured them. "Mrs. Figg helped me enchant it so that only I could read it. Unless I give someone else permission to read it or until I die, then anyone can read it."

"What do you mean until you die? How can you talk like that? What's gotten into you?" Ginny exclaimed.

"Well. Hermione said it would be useful to give the journal to my kids sometime in the future, which seems strange to think about. But with the way things have gone for me, it's really more likely that I won't live long enough to have kids, but I thought it would be good to record our adventures so that you guys could maybe read it in the future and remember how much fun we had," Harry said flatly.

"Don't think about stuff like that," Ron said and turned to Hermione. "See Hermione I told you it was a stupid gift. Look what you've got him thinking about."

"Ron, I was thinking that it would be good for his children in the future. Harry, you know that's the truth." Hermione looked concerned now.

"I know Hermione, and I do think it is a very nice gift, I'm glad you gave it to me. Who knows maybe Voldemort can be stopped before he... you know. If so maybe I'll actually be able to get married and have a family. That's a long time off though."

"Ok, but why did you enchant it so that no one else could read it?" Hermione added.

"Well, maybe I am going to put some feelings that I don't make public? Also, I'm going to put in some details about things we do that could get us in trouble if a teacher ever read it. And think what would happen if Malfoy every got hold of it."

"So are you going to give us permission to read it?" Ginny asked.

Harry appraised his friend. "As long as you each let me read all of yours, that would be fair," Harry replied with a grin, knowing that would never happen.

"Harry, you can't read a girl's diary," Hermione announced.

"That's what I thought, so it looks like my journal stays private."

That night Harry had another nightmare. "I want that boy to suffer Wormtail. He has made me look weak by escaping with that other body." Voldemort was pacing around in a large room. "I can feel the doubt is some of my so-called faithful servants. They wonder if I can really kill the boy."

"I have no doubt you could kill him if that is what you choose to do my Lord," Wormtail added. "You were just showing him too much mercy before he slipped away. He fled from your power. He knows you would have killed him."

"Yes, showing mercy was a flaw. I shall not repeat that mistake. I don't want anyone else to attempt to kill the boy. I want to do it personally. He is going to suffer for delaying my pleasure."

Harry woke up with his scar burning but without fear. He knew Voldemort would try again so this dream wasn't anything new. His only concern was when it would happen. He didn't want his friends to be around the next time. Harry got up and went downstairs. Everyone else was asleep so it was very quiet. He stood in the kitchen just staring out the window thinking. 'Would he be able to stop Voldemort or the Death Eaters from hurting his friends? He knew Voldemort would hurt them just to get to him.' He was thinking so much that he didn't hear Mrs. Weasley come into the kitchen for a drink.

"Harry! You startled me. I didn't know anyone was up. Are you alright dear?" Mrs. Weasley looked concerned.

"Sorry Mrs. Weasley. I couldn't sleep so just came down for a bit. I was just getting sleepy again so I'll head back up now. Goodnight," he went back to Ron's room and was able to fall back to sleep.

The next days went by quickly. Harry fell into a regular routine of waking up after being asleep for only a couple hours. Each time, he went downstairs and stared out the window thinking. Mrs. Weasley had come upon him a couple times and always seemed worried about him. He just reassured her and went back to bed each time.

Today they were all going into Diagon Alley to get their new schoolbooks. Fred and George had used one of Ron's ideas for a new joke so they told him that they would buy him some new dress robes for payment. Harry wondered if the idea was any good or this was just their way of buying the robes they promised Harry they would after he gave them his Triwizard Tournament winnings.

After traveling by floo powder to Diagon Alley and getting some money from Gringotts, Harry, Ron, Hermione and Ginny split off from Fred and George and went do to their own shopping. Mrs. Weasley didn't like the idea of them being unaccompanied but since there hadn't been any news about Voldemort she agreed as long as they promised to stay in Diagon Alley where there were many wizards around.

They all needed some new robes since they had grown quite a bit since last year. Ron only got new dress robes and had to settle for Fred's hand-me-down normal robes. They were still in pretty good shape so it wasn't too bad. Seeing Hermione and Ginny while they were trying on their new dress robes made Harry realize how much they had both changed. Ginny's change was significant. Harry remembered back to how she was when he rescued her from the Chamber of Secrets, she seemed like such a little girl then. Now, even though it was only two years later she seemed much older. And Hermione, she seemed older than any of them. He also noticed Ron just staring at Hermione.

The friends were getting their new schoolbooks when he heard. "Well, if it isn't Potty and his fan club. I see you've added a new tag-along this year. Can't you get any friends other than that family? I told you to choose better." It was Malfoy.

Hermione and Ginny grabbed Ron before he could do anything and Harry just totally ignored what Malfoy was saying and continued talking to Ron.

"What's the matter Potter? Know I'm right don't you?" Draco added.

Harry turned to face Draco and said calmly, "Sorry, did you say something? All I heard was squeaking that sounded like a ferret." Harry then turned back towards Ron who was laughing out loud.

"Talk tough now Potter, you know what's coming..." and then he was cut off by an even more annoying voice

"Now, now Draco. I'm sure Mr. Potter is having enough trouble sleeping without you adding to his worries." It was Lucius Malfoy

Harry turned slowly and stepped in front of Mr. Malfoy. "Hello again Lucius," Harry said defiantly. "I imagine Voldemort wasn't too happy with his servants letting me get away. How did your punishment feel?"

Lucius was stunned by being talked to like this and it took a second before he was composed again. "What... I don't know what you're talking about. How dare you talk to me like that?"

"Of course you know what I'm talking about," Harry calmly said. "Voldemort wasn't too happy with you. How many of you were with him and you couldn't stop a fourteen-year-old boy from gathering up a dead body and leaving. What kind of faithful servants are you?"

Ron, Hermione and Ginny were watching with their mouths open. They had never seen Harry like this before. Even Draco had backed off a few steps.

"Listen to me boy. You need to learn your place. One day someone will teach you a lesson," Lucius spat out.

"One day someone may. However it won't be you." Harry was glaring into Lucius' eyes, not blinking. "I won't run again."

Lucius actually stepped back. "Are you threatening me boy? Do you know what I could do to you?"

"I know what you can't do to me," Harry responded. "The real question is do you know what I could do to you?" Harry turned to his friends and said, "Come on guys let's get some fresh air."

The group walked out of the store and was a block away before Ron said, "Did you see the look on Draco's face? I'm sure he had never seen anything like that before. That was priceless," Ron chuckled.

Hermione grabbed Harry's shoulder and turned him around to face her. "Harry, what was that all about? I don't think you should be speaking like that to Mr. Malfoy. He's quite powerful," Hermione added.

"He was there when Voldemort put the Cruciatus curse on me. He was one of the ones trying to stop me from getting back. He's nothing to me!" Harry spat. "Let's forget about him and go back to shopping, ok?"

His friends were all looking strangely at Harry but they went back to shopping without any more incidents. That evening after eating, everyone went up to pack since they were going back to school the next day. Ginny came down and was sitting at the table with Mr. and Mrs. Weasley. "How was shopping today Ginny? I see you managed just fine without me there with you," Mrs. Weasley said.

"Oh Mom. Everything was fine, but something weird did happen. I don't know if I should say anything but I'm kind of worried," Ginny said.

"What is it Ginny? Is everything ok?" Mr. Weasley asked.

"Well it was with Harry and Mr. Malfoy." Ginny went on to tell her parents the whole story about how Harry had spoken to Mr. Malfoy and what he said about it later. "Please don't say anything. Harry wouldn't want me to mention it. I'm just worried about him."

Mrs. Weasley patted her daughter's arm and said, "We won't say anything dear. You know he has been acting a bit strangely." She told them about finding him in the kitchen a few nights staring out the window and how he just made some excuse each time and went back upstairs.

The three of them didn't say anything for a few minutes and then Mr. Weasley spoke softly, "You know I saw Harry in the Unspeakable department before he came here. I haven't told you yet Molly but they were testing him on how he could defend himself and they let me watch."

His wife suddenly sat up and looked shocked. "What? Harry had to fight in that department and you didn't tell me."

"Sorry Molly but I thought it best," Mr. Weasley said then Ginny spoke up.

"Harry told us he had been through part of the Auror training and had been getting some dueling lessons this summer."

Mrs. Weasley looked even more shocked and then Mr. Weasley spoke up. "I guess that is all he was allowed to tell. I don't think that's half the story though." The man took a deep breath. "During this final test, he had to take on multiple wizards at the same time, then a group of dementors. And then they had a werewolf attack him and he barely stopped it." Mrs. Weasley could barely catch her breath. Arthur continued, "Finally they had five trained Aurors attack him at the same time. They were allowed to use unforgivable curses on Harry." Mr. Weasley looked directly at his wife. "He actually beat them all Molly. It was unbelievable. Even the head of that group, Fletch didn't expect Harry to get through the entire test. Fletch told me later that Harry hadn't even shown everything he could do." Mr. Weasley was just shaking his head. Ginny had clenched her fists so tight that her nails had dug into her palms slightly.

Mrs. Weasley gasped and said, "What do you think this all means Arthur? Why is Harry going through all of this?"

Before he could respond Ginny said, "He's sure that he will be attacked again, that's what I think. The Unspeakables must think that also so they've been trying to get him as prepared as possible. Harry has said a couple things about not running away next time and that he doesn't expect to live long enough to get married."

This shocked both Mr. and Mrs. Weasley. Mr. Weasley spoke up, "I think you're right Ginny. Harry expects to be attacked again. I think it bothered him that Cedric died last year and he couldn't do anything. He's been through so much and probably thinks there is a good chance he won't survive one of the attacks. I'm concerned that he may do something rash and actually go after You-Know-Who."

"Harry wouldn't do that would he?" Mrs. Weasley exclaimed. "He wants to live doesn't he?"

"I don't think he'll go looking for You-Know-Who, but I don't think he will do anything to avoid confronting him. And yes, I think he wants to live but it's got to be hard on him. Think

if you got up every day knowing the most powerful dark wizards in the world would do anything to kill you. I'm not sure I could handle it as well as he has. I just think we need to make sure Harry knows how we feel about him and that we want him to be around for a long time. If he ever felt isolated and alone, I'm not sure he would care if he died or not. Now, let's not mention this to anyone else. Treat Harry just as we always have."

Harry actually slept well that night and they all reached the platform in the morning without any problems. Mrs. Weasley was hugging her children and then came up to Harry. Giving him a big hug she said, "Have a good year Harry and be careful. Arthur and I think of you as part of our family now so if you ever need anything just ask us?"

"Thank you Mrs. Weasley, I'll be fine," Harry answered and then got on board of the train.

He was walking down the corridor when he heard Ron yell, "Oi, Harry, we're down here."

The four of them settled in for the ride to Hogwarts, Ron and Hermione on one side and Harry and Ginny on the other. Hermione had already attached her prefect pin to her robes. "Ok Ron," Harry said, "She's officially a prefect now, so we really need to watch what we say around her. We should find some kind of code that we can use when we need to talk about things that prefects shouldn't hear."

"Harry, don't be like that!" Hermione said sounding hurt. "I don't want to be left out. Just try not to break any rules this year."

"Oh right, what are the chances of that? How could we have any fun?" Ron added.

They were talking among themselves when the compartment door opened and they heard. "I'm surprised you really came back mudblood. You won't be able to pretend it hasn't happened for long." Malfoy smirked. Crabbe and Goyle were chuckling behind him.

"Hello Draco, I've been hoping you'd stop by," Harry said standing up. "I've got something for you to do for me."

"Why would I do anything for you Potter?" Draco spat. "You'll be getting yours soon enough."

"Well that's good; I wouldn't want to be kept waiting. Now, I want you to give this message to your father for me. Make sure you look at me while I'm saying this because I'm sure Lucius will want you to tell him how I looked." Harry waited a moment so this could all sink into Draco. "You tell him that I meant what I said. I won't run again." Harry took a step toward Draco. Crabbe and Goyle stepped toward Harry to protect Draco but when Harry took out his wand, they backed out of the compartment and he magically shut the door before anyone knew what happened. Pointing his wand directly at Draco who looked very scared Harry said calmly, "Make sure you get the message to him Draco. You can go now." The door opened and Harry sat back down saying to his friends, "Now, where were we."

Nothing was said until Malfoy left and the door was shut. "Good thing term hasn't started because that would be points off Harry," Hermione said angrily. "You can't go around hexing people. You shouldn't try to make Mr. Malfoy angry? I don't think that's a very safe thing to do"

"They're not people!" Ron exclaimed, "It was Crabbe and Goyle. I think this is going to be a good year. But Harry, I agree that annoying Mr. Malfoy isn't a good idea."

Ginny looked at Harry and said, "You will be careful, won't you Harry?"

"Don't worry about me, I'm not totally mental," Harry said with a smile. "If Malfoy thinks I'm unstable maybe he'll stay away from us more."

They went back to talking but both Harry and Hermione were much less talkative for the rest of the trip.

Chapter 6

The four arrived at the station and it seemed strange not seeing Hagrid when they got off the train. He must still be on special assignment. They made their way up to the castle and found some seats at the Gryffindor table to watch the sorting ceremony. Looking up at the staff table Harry saw a very familiar face sitting next to Professor Snape. It was Mrs. Figg. She must be the new Defense of Dark Arts instructor. "Ron, that's Mrs. Figg next to Snape. She was the one who got me the training this summer."

"Great, we've got an inside track with another teacher," Ron said.

"Don't count on it," Harry explained, "She seemed like a very strict teacher. I don't think we'll be getting any breaks in her class. Snape doesn't seem quite so surly this year does he?"

It seemed there were fewer first year students this year. Harry wondered if it was because parents were afraid for their safety with Voldemort's return. After the sorting, Professor Dumbledore had a few announcements.

"Ah, another year. Our normal Care of Magical Creatures instructor Hagrid will be a bit delayed in returning to the school this year Professor Grubbly-Plank has graciously agreed to help us out for a while this year."

"I wonder how things are going with Hagrid," Harry asked, the worry sounding in the question.

His attention turned back to Professor Dumbledore who was continuing to talk, "Also, once again we are welcoming a new Defense Against the Dark Arts instructor. Please welcome Arabella Figg a former teacher and a highly respected Auror for the Ministry of Magic. I'm sure you will all benefit from having her among us." Harry got all the Gryffindors to clap loudly for her.

Professor Dumbledore continued, "Now a few announcements of a very serious nature. As all of you except for the first years know already Voldemort regained his power at the end of last term." Many people were glancing at Harry. "So, certain extra precautions are being taken this year. Curfews will be strictly, and I do mean strictly enforced. I hope those of you who seem to take curfews as suggestions instead of rules understand that they are rules which should not be broken this year." Harry and Ron kind of slumped down in their seats. "Also, we have added some extra protection on the grounds this year so it is even more imperative that you do not stray too near the Dark Forest. Some of the security measures would be quite painful and perhaps even fatal. And finally, going against many recommendations, I am still allowing Hogsmeade visits, but they may be cancelled at any time for any reason I see fit. If that happens, please understand it is for your own best interests. Now, it's time to eat." Immediately all the tables were full of many types of food.

"I wonder what kind of security is in the forest this year?" Harry asked. "I'd like to see what they've come up with."

"Now Harry, you heard Professor Dumbledore," Hermione interjected in her 'prefect' voice. "We need to stay even further away from there this year. You know he was looking at you and Ron when he mentioned the curfews don't you."

Ron added, "Harry, do you hear something? You brought the cloak this year didn't you?"

"Ron!" Hermione exclaimed and then they proceeded to argue.

Harry looked at Ginny and laughed. She laughed with him for a moment and then added, "Please be careful this year Harry, for me."

Harry looked at her and her eyes seemed to be pleading with him. He knew she was just watching out for him. So he said, "Well, since you put it that way, how could I refuse? I'll be careful. Who knows, maybe I won't even see Madame Pomfrey this year."

Ginny laughed at this. "Oh right, what's the chance of that happening. Just try not to get taken to her in the first week, ok."

After eating they went up to the common room. Ginny headed over to talk with the other fourth years that she hadn't seen in a while. They remained with the fifth years hearing how each spent their summer. Harry told everyone he had another boring summer with the Dursley's. After a bit, they all went up to bed. Harry had a peaceful nights sleep and woke up ready to start the new term. "What do we have first Hermione?" Harry asked.

"Potions with Slytherin again," she said. "Don't let Snape get to you this year Harry."

"I don't think I will. I'll just ignore anything he says," Harry added.

They arrived on time. Ron and Hermione sat together and Harry sat at a table with Neville. The Slytherins came in closely followed by Snape who looked the same as he always did. "Now that you're in the fifth year, I won't need to be so nice to you. You will be expected to perform exceptionally at this level. I'm glad to see our Triwizard co-champion chose to continue his studies instead of going on a publicity tour." Harry just looked at Snape calmly and confidently. All Harry wanted to do was enough to get by in the class. He didn't see how potions were going to help him in the future. The rest of the class was hard and Snape had tried a couple more times to get a reaction from Harry but without success.

They all had Care of Magical Creatures next so they were walking near the castle entrance when Harry saw Cho Chang coming towards them. Harry kind of panicked and didn't know what to expect. "Harry, can I talk to you for a minute?" Cho asked.

"Uh, sure Cho," Harry replied and they started to move away from Ron and Hermione when they heard Professor Dumbledore speak.

"Harry, a moment please." Harry turned to see Professor Dumbledore and Professor McGonagall standing near them. "Am I correct in assuming that you were responsible for stopping that delivery truck and saving a young Muggle girl's life this summer?" Professor Dumbledore was looking at him with those twinkling eyes.

Harry saw Cho, Ron, Hermione, Ginny and her friends looking at him confused. Harry quietly said, "Yes sir."

Harry could tell this didn't surprise the Headmaster, but did seem to shock Professor McGonagall. "How did you manage to get your wand out so quick, and how did you manage to keep any of those Muggles from seeing you using it? Also, wasn't your wand supposed to

be locked in your trunk over the summer?" Harry couldn't quite make out the expression on Professor Dumbledore's face.

"I didn't have my wand with me sir," Harry said as if he was going to be in trouble.

"Now Mr. Potter," Professor McGonagall added sharply, "do you mean for us to believe that you stopped a speeding truck without a wand?" Her expression was of doubt, but Professor Dumbledore's eyes were still twinkling.

"Yes Professor. That is exactly what I am saying," Harry said confidently. He hadn't wanted to let his friends know about this new talent.

His friends were just staring at him in disbelief. Professor McGonagall started to ask something else but Professor Dumbledore spoke up, "That would explain why the Ministry could find no wand signature when they investigated. I would very much like to hear the details about this when you have time. Say before you turn in tonight? Professor Figg has already given me her account. I'm sure the young girl's parents are grateful the truck was stopped, no matter how it happened."

"And Mr. Potter, please stop by my office a few minutes before class this afternoon," Professor McGonagall said still sounding like she didn't quite believe him.

"Yes Professors," Harry said sadly. He thought he was in trouble on the first day of classes. He watched the teachers walk away, and then turned to see his friends still staring at him.

"Harry, why didn't you tell us about this?" Hermione demanded. "How did you stop that truck if you didn't have your wand?"

"Once again you're a Hero Harry," Ron said "Don't you ever get tired of it," his friend added smiling, but Harry could see the look in Ron's eyes, a questioning look.

Harry hung his head and turned, trying to get away.

"Harry, where are you going? Why won't you tell us what happened? You saved a girl's life," Hermione pleaded

Harry turned and saw his friends were coming after him. Harry said with obvious sadness, "Just once I wanted to have a normal school year. I'm tired of everyone thinking I'm either a freak, or dangerous." Harry looked at Cho during this last part. "I really wanted to be just Harry, a normal student for once. I'm going flying; I'll see you all later," He said sounding dejected

"Harry, how can you go flying? You don't have your broom," Ron asked sounding confused.

Just then they heard a rushing sound and Harry's Firebolt flew to a stop next to Harry. Harry looked at them with pain in his eyes, and flew off over the lake.

Ron asked seriously, "How did he do that? He didn't pull out his wand."

Ginny almost looked like she could cry she felt so bad for Harry. Hermione ran off saying, "I'll see you in class; I'm going to stop by the library first."

Well, it was out in the open Harry thought. He was just hovering over the lake. He knew that he shouldn't have reacted like this. His friends would understand, they had when they learned he was a Parselmouth, which is considered a sign of a dark wizard. He just didn't want to start the year this way. He decided to skim off the Care of Magical Creatures class and accept some punishment. He landed on the side of the lake near the Dark Forest. After sitting alone for about a few minutes he heard a sound behind him and stood up. It was Firenze the centaur who saved him from Voldemort in his first year. "Harry Potter, it is good to see you. You are so rarely alone; it is difficult to have the opportunity to talk."

"Hi Firenze," Harry said. "What are you doing out here?"

"Would you like to take a walk Harry? There are some who would like to meet you and maybe we could talk."

"Uh ..Sure." Harry thought this was very strange. Centaurs normally stayed to themselves and didn't speak to humans much. Who would want to meet me; he thought. Harry felt safe with Firenze so he walked into the forest with him.

"Do you remember what I said to you the first time we met Harry? I said the signs in the stars didn't look good but hoped we were reading them wrong. It turns out that we did read them wrong. This doesn't happen very often and it changed some of my kind's attitudes towards giving guidance to humans. The signs are very confusing now with a few possible paths. Only one of the paths seems to have an outcome that is positive to the creatures in the forest." They had walked quite far in the forest when Harry heard a familiar clicking.

"Aragog!" Harry exclaimed pulling out his wand. "Why did you bring me here?"

"You have nothing to fear Harry," Firenze said. "Aragog has wanted to say something to you for a couple years now."

The giant spider came closer and behind him Harry could see many quite large spiders milling about. "Harry, Friend of Hagrid. I would like to thank you for slaying what we fear most." Harry was stunned. The spider that had tried to eat Ron and him was now thanking him. The spider spoke again. "If my children had succeeded in killing you the creature would still be alive and we would be living in fear. We should have treated a friend of Hagrid better. Please accept my apology and the assurance that you and your friends will have our help if you need it in the forest."

Harry couldn't believe this. "It's ok Aragog," Harry said. "Everything worked out after all. Hagrid got released from Azkaban after the basilisk was killed."

Aragog stepped right up to Harry and said, "Please accept the mark of my family. You will be marked as a friend of my kind and have our protection. Hold out your arm if you would accept this from me."

Harry was very nervous but held out his arm. Aragog brought his pincers down and lightly bit his arm. It hurt quite a lot. Dark black marks almost like a web formed on his arm and then

disappeared along with the pain. Aragog said, "Goodbye Harry, friend of Hagrid. Good life to you." And then the spiders quickly disappeared into the forest.

Harry stared at his arm and couldn't see any mark. He turned to Firenze and asked, "What was that all about?"

Firenze said, "Harry, not all creatures who are natural enemies of you are truly evil. History has given creatures reasons to behave certain ways. Try to judge each creature individually if you can. There is something else I'd like you to see. A few days ago a creature came into the forest. A very rare creature not seen in these parts in many years. The creature seems to be looking for something and doesn't appear to want to leave."

Harry asked, "Wouldn't it be better to get Hagrid? He knows about all kinds of creatures."

"I would have shown this to Hagrid if he had been around. I am worried about Hagrid." They walked to a clearing and Harry jumped back when he saw a lion there. A bright gold lion.

"It's a lion!" Harry exclaimed. "Is it safe for me to be here?"

"It is not a lion Harry. Notice the wings."

Looking closely Harry saw large wings folded into the fur so they were almost invisible. "What is it?" he asked.

"It is a griffin Harry. Very rare regal creatures, quite powerful. They have no magical abilities but are almost impossible to kill. Try to approach it."

This didn't seem like a good idea to Harry but he did want to get a closer look. It was a magnificent looking animal. The closer Harry got, he actually felt calmer and almost comforted. The griffin looked up at Harry and then stood up facing him. This made Harry stop moving forward and wonder if he had gone too far. The griffin spread its magnificent wings and gave a loud roar. Instead of being afraid, the sound filled Harry with warmth and confidence, kind of like the song of the phoenix but yet different. The creature walked around Harry then paused looking up into his eyes. It almost seemed like it wanted something from Harry but he had no idea what.

Just then Firenze said, "Come Harry, there is one more who wishes to speak with you before you get back to the castle."

Harry didn't want to leave the griffin but turned and followed the Centaur. "What do you think it is doing here?"

"Seeing how it behaved when you were near confirmed my thoughts. I think it has something to do with you Harry. I don't understand what. Ah, here is the son of the leader of my clan."

"Harry Potter. My name is Bayne, son of Guidon chief of the centaurs. I met you one time before. I scolded Firenze for helping you with a problem. I didn't see that he should help you in the stars. I'm afraid the stars were read wrong. Firenze made the correct choice that day and the stars have become brighter since then. We are being tested with another choice Harry. If we choose wisely the forest has a chance to remain a haven for us. If we choose poorly we will be forced to flee this area. I am acting on the council of my father and Firenze. They both

chose the same option. This is why Firenze came to you today and showed you the creature that came to the forest. This creature is surely a sign but its meaning is unclear. I wanted to see you again for myself and present you with a gift from my father. This is only the third time in history we have given this to a human. Both other times were in times of great struggles and were the correct thing to do." Bayne approached and placed a necklace around Harry's neck. The small medallion looked like a Centaur fighting off a small planet.

"Thank you," Harry said. "But why are you giving this to me?"

"This will help you in the forest. You are a friend of the centaurs and will have some protections when we are near. Firenze will walk you out now. Take care, Harry Potter."

Harry followed Firenze in silence and upon reaching the edge of the forest Harry said, "Thanks for showing me all of this Firenze. It has been a very interesting walk."

"You're welcome Harry Potter. I would like to suggest that you get comfortable with the forest. The better you know the forest the better the forest will know you. Goodbye Harry. I'm sure we will speak again."

"Firenze," Harry called after him. "Do you think I'll be able to see the griffin again."

Harry could no longer see the centaur but heard, "I'm sure you will see it again".

Harry grabbed his Firebolt and headed back to the castle. He had missed all of Care of Magical Creatures and also lunch. He dispatched his Firebolt back to his room and went directly to Professor McGonagall's office ready to find out what she had wanted.

Knocking he said, "Professor, its Harry".

"Come in Mr. Potter and shut the door please."

She had said 'Mr. Potter' which didn't sound good.

Professor McGonagall looked at him for a moment and then said, "Professor Figg has told me some interesting news about you Harry." His mind was racing but he couldn't think of what she would have said that he would be in trouble for. "Is it true that you can consistently make your hair grow when it is cut?"

"What?" He wasn't expecting this at all. "I guess so. When my Aunt would cut my hair in the evening it would always grow back before the next morning. I would be so angry that she was cutting my hair and just wished it would grow back."

"You can stop looking so worried Harry, you aren't in trouble," she added with a slight smile. "Would you be willing to do a little test right now?"

"I guess so," Harry said reluctantly.

Professor McGonagall stepped up and cut a big chunk of hair off of his head. "Hey. Now the Slytherins will have even more to make fun of me about."

"Harry. I want you to concentrate very hard on making your hair go back the way it was before I cut any. Focus on your hair and concentrate hard."

Harry didn't know what she was doing but he did want his hair back so he really focused on his hair and on how he wanted it to look. He wanted the hole she just cut to be filled back in. After a minute, he couldn't feel anything happen when Professor McGonagall said, "Thank you Harry that will do."

"I'm sorry Professor; I just don't know what to do."

"That's quite all right Harry. I guess you should see how you look before you hear it from the others." She conjured a mirror and handed it to him. When he tried to find the spot she cut, he couldn't. It was exactly like normal.

"What happened?" he questioned.

"You grew your hair back Harry. Just like Professor Figg said you could. I've spoken to the headmaster about this and he feels it may be valuable to you if we teach you something extra. I'm not sure I completely agree but he has his reasons. Starting tomorrow Harry we will begin Animagus training. You seem to have the knack that may make it easier for you to learn."

"Really? I can become an Animagus? Will it take a year like it did for my dad and Sirius?"

Professor McGonagall flinched at Sirius' name; she didn't totally believe he was innocent. "You may be able to become an Animagus, it's not for sure. You seem to have an edge but I can't guarantee that it will work. Also, it took them a year because they were doing it secretly without any help. It could take as little as a month with proper training and discipline."

"A month! I'll do whatever you tell me to professor."

"There are a couple things you must agree to. First you cannot tell anyone, and I do mean anyone Mr. Potter. Ms. Granger and Mr. Weasley are not to be told yet. Also, you must choose an animal to become. It cannot be a magical creature and I would suggest you think hard about this. Choosing an animal that is not a good match for you wouldn't be much use. It seems that choosing an animal to become is kind of like choosing a wand where the wand does the actual choosing. When you think of the correct animal, you should just know. We cannot proceed until you have chosen an animal since that will determine the techniques we use. Please inform me when you have made your choice."

Harry spoke up quickly, "I already know which animal! I just saw one and it gave me such a warm feeling, almost like a phoenix's song. I want to be a griffin!"

"A griffin? How could you have seen one of those? They are very rare and I've never heard of anyone seeing one in many years."

"There's one in the forest right now professor. A centaur took me to see it earlier today." As soon as this left his mouth Harry knew it meant trouble.

"You went to the forest Mr. Potter? After what Professor Dumbledore said just last night. And you went off alone with a centaur! Do you have any regard at all for rules?"

"You're right professor, I know it. But yes I went into the forest with Firenze. He said I was to go see some creatures. First I went to see the giant spider Aragog that tried to kill Ron and me in our second year. Then he showed me the griffin. He said it arrived a few days ago and seemed to be searching for something. It walked up to me, spread its wings and roared. It gave me such a warm and comforting feeling when it roared. I didn't want to leave. Then we went to see Bayne the son of the clan chief who wanted to meet me. Firenze was with me the entire time, I wasn't in any danger."

"You don't think going up to giant spiders and something that could rip your head off is being in danger? But ignoring that for the moment, if you are sure about your choice, we could start tonight. Do you have any suggestions on how we could conduct your training without Ms. Granger and Mr. Weasley being obviously suspicious?"

"Well, since I'm probably going to get some punishment for going into the forest, you could punish me in front of them. It won't surprise them much that I'm in trouble already."

"You're probably right about that. Ok, I will give you detention for two weeks. That should give us a good idea how much time we will need. Do you think you could see the griffin again?"

"That would mean I have to go into the forest again Professor. But Firenze said he was sure I would see the griffin again."

"The question is how to get you in the forest again. I would suggest Hagrid but he won't be back for a few weeks yet. Do you have any suggestions?"

"I can go by myself. Both Aragog and the centaurs said they would protect me if I got into any trouble."

"Giant spiders and centaurs are your protectors now? Do you realize that you have more friends that are creatures people fear than you have normal friends? I will inform the headmaster of this information and see if he approves. I'll let you know the details this evening. One other question if you don't mind. Were you being totally honest about that truck incident?"

"Yes Professor, I really stopped it and I really didn't have my wand. It surprised me as much as anyone, that's for sure."

"Very well then, take a seat, the rest of the students should be coming in soon."

Sure enough within a few minutes the other Gryffindors came into the class. Ron and Hermione sat on either side of him.

"Harry, we're sorry about questioning you so much earlier. It's just an amazing story that we wanted to know the details. You know we don't think you're a freak don't you?" Hermione said looking genuinely sorry.

Ron quickly added, "We may think you're a git, but not a freak."

Harry smiled at Ron's version of apologizing. "I know you guys wouldn't think badly of me, I handled that the wrong way, I'm sorry. I should have told you from the beginning. I'm just tired of everything happening to me, can you understand that?"

"Well let some things happen to me for once, I could use some attention," Ron said chuckling. "You will tell us everything later won't you?"

"Ron, we don't need to know everything," Hermione added

"I want to tell you. I hated keeping anything from you two," Harry said. Hermione hugged him quickly.

Ron rolled his eyes at her and said, "Mental".

Harry was glad neither of them asked about his talk with Professor McGonagall.

The remaining classes went quickly and they met Ginny before supper and all ate together talking about their first day of classes.

Chapter 7

They were just about to enter the common room when Professor McGonagall walked up and said loudly, "Harry Potter! Is it true you missed class and spent the entire time in the Dark Forest? After the warning the Headmaster gave just last night."

All the students were looking at him like he was crazy. Ron, Hermione and Ginny all had their mouths open.

"Yes Professor, I'm sorry but I wanted to be alone."

"Alone is fine Mr. Potter but I dare say you are never alone in the Forest. That is a very dangerous place. You will come with me now," the Professor said sternly.

Harry turned looking at his friends and mouthed, "Sorry." He didn't have to act feeling bad, since hearing Professor McGonagall yell at him had made him feel that way.

They entered her office when she turned and said, "The headmaster seemed to find some humor in your little adventure into the forest and agreed to our plan. He seems to think that it is acceptable for you to enter the forest a few times to see the griffin and even mentioned accompanying you one time to see it for himself." McGonagall shook her head at the boy and said, "We will try some basic steps tonight and I would suggest trying to find the griffin tomorrow before the lesson if you can. It would help to have a few strands of its fur. There is a potion we could make that is similar to polyjuice potion that will get your body used to the form of the griffin. I'm not sure the creature will like having some hair pulled out, but it would help."

Thinking back to the size of the teeth on the griffin, Harry didn't like the idea of making it mad by pulling some hair out. He would see how things went.

During that lesson Harry had most of his hair cut off and was able to grow it back within thirty minutes. He had been able to grow his fingernails and get them back to their normal length. Both he and the professor were satisfied with this even though Harry wanted to be able to change right now.

Harry needed to see Professor Dumbledore before going to the common room. He approached the gargoyle statue and said, "Ton Tongue Toffee." Professor Dumbledore had obviously heard about Fred and George's invention.

Harry knocked and heard Professor Dumbledore call out, "Come in Harry, come in."

Dumbledore had an amazing office. There were so many interesting pictures and items around. "Hello Fawkes," Harry said as he passed the phoenix.

"Sit down Harry. So, tell me how you found out you could do wandless magic and tell me the story in your words of how you saved that girl. Arabella was very impressed with your wandless magic control. I'm actually very interested in seeing a demonstration since I have never actually met someone who could control it."

Harry told the professor how he had been angry and the book flew to him and the other strange things that happened before the truck. He then told the professor about seeing the truck and knowing there was no way it could stop. Then he just knew he had to stop the truck and just did it. He went on to describe the training Mrs. Figg had helped him with. He left out the time he used it during the Unspeakable test.

"How do you think it is that I'm able to do this sir?" Harry asked genuinely.

"This time Harry I don't even have a theory. This is a very rare gift. Maybe we all have it and it just hasn't been brought out. You've had some unique experiences and maybe they have helped push it to the surface. Whatever the reason, I think it is a very positive thing. I hope I didn't cause you any discomfort by asking you about the incident today? I assumed your friends already knew."

"It's actually a good thing you asked. Some feelings I was having got expressed and I think it was good for all of us. I just didn't want to be different this year. It would be nice to just be a normal student for a while. However, if you hadn't said anything, I wouldn't have gone off to be alone and wouldn't have talked with Firenze. Then I wouldn't have talked to Aaragog, Bayne or seen the griffin. So you really did me a big favor by bringing it up."

"It's funny how things work sometimes isn't it. I would like to join you tomorrow when you go see the griffin again if you don't mind. I've never seen one in the wild and they are one of my most favorite creatures. I hear that you and Professor McGonagall have worked out a way for you to get training without arousing many suspicions. Quite fortunate you ignored my warnings about the forest wasn't it?" Professor Dumbledore said grinning.

"Sir, after I met Bayne and he gave me a necklace, Firenze said he would suggest I get comfortable with the forest. He said the better I knew the forest, the better the forest would know me. Do you have any thoughts on this?"

"Bayne came and talked to you did he?" It seemed the Headmaster was pondering this for a moment and then continued, "May I see the necklace Harry?" Harry handed the necklace to the professor who studied it for a minute. "Did they tell you what this was Harry?"

Harry shook his head no.

"It is the mark of the clan of centaurs who live in this forest. By giving you this, you have essentially become part of their clan. They consider you extended family now. Quite unusual." Dumbledore handed the necklace back to Harry. "Would before supper tomorrow be acceptable to go see the griffin?"

"That's fine sir."

"Well then I'll see you tomorrow. I have a feeling this is going to be an interesting year Harry."

Harry walked back to the common room where Ron, Ginny and Hermione were waiting.

"So, how much trouble are you in?" Ron asked.

"Well there were no Gryffindor points deducted so you can't yell at me Hermione. I have detention each evening for two weeks. I don't know what all I'm going to do but that's not so bad. I thought it would be worse."

"So, why did you go into the forest? Tell us all about it," Ron asked excitedly.

Harry told them about the centaur and then when he got to the part about meeting Aaragog, Ron was shaken.

"You actually got close to that thing again, after it was going to feed us to its children? I would have turned and ran right then," Ron exclaimed

"Aaragog then bit my arm and these black lines looked like a spider web went across my arm and then just disappeared." Harry pulled up his robe to show them there was no mark.

"Aaragog said they wouldn't harm me or my friends so I guess all of you are safe in there as well".

"I don't care what he said; I'm not getting anywhere close to that monster again," Ron said.

Harry went on to tell them about the centaur and the griffin.

"Oh, there's a griffin in the forest right now?" Ginny asked. "They are amazing creatures. They're so beautiful. I'd like to see one."

"Ginny, no way. It's bad enough that Harry doesn't care about rules, but don't let him rub off on you," Hermione exclaimed.

"I know, I won't break any rules, but I'd love to see one," Ginny promised sounding disappointed.

The next day classes went by quickly. During the lunch break Harry had an idea and went to ask Professor Dumbledore a question. "Professor, I haven't told anyone about the animagus lessons, but I did tell Ron, Hermione and Ginny about going into the forest yesterday since they knew I had gotten into trouble. It seems that Ginny would really love to see a griffin. Do you think it would be all right if she came with us to see it? I haven't mentioned anything to her so if you don't think it's a good idea; she'll never know I asked."

Professor Dumbledore studied him for a minute and said, "I see no harm in it. I will have to ask her not to tell anyone else though. Do you think that will be a problem?"

"No sir, I'm sure she can be trusted. Thank you. I'll invite her and tell her that she can't tell anyone."

"She's quite an impressive young lady isn't she Harry?"

"Yes sir she sure is," Harry said as he was leaving. He continued to find Ginny before her next class began. He found her walking with her friends and ran over to her. "Ginny, can I speak to you for a minute?"

"Sure," She said and then told her friends she would catch up to them later.

"How would you like to see the griffin?" Harry asked her.

"Oh Harry, I'd love to but I promised Hermione I wouldn't break any rules," She responded with disappointment

"What if you could see it without breaking any rules? It would mean that you couldn't tell anyone about it, not even Ron or Hermione. Would you like to see it?"

"That would be great. I wouldn't tell anyone. How can I go into the forest without breaking the rules though?"

"I asked Professor Dumbledore if you could come with us tonight before supper. He said as long as you didn't tell anyone that it would be ok. If you're going with the Headmaster, you can't be breaking any rules."

"Oh Harry, Thank you." She gave him a big hug. "I'll meet you before diner then. Bye."

Having her hug him made Harry feel great. He was sure it would be safe with Professor Dumbledore with them. The rest of the day seemed to drag on since he was so excited about going into the forest. Harry didn't know if he was happier about seeing the griffin or being able to show it to Ginny. Either way, he was very excited. Immediately after the last class, he found Ginny in the common room and they got out without being noticed together and went to find Professor Dumbledore who was just coming out of his office.

"Ah Harry, Ms Weasley I see we're all ready. I think we should go out one of the side doors to avoid being seen. Harry, do you have a favorite?" he said with a chuckle.

As they walked along the lake, Professor Dumbledore and Ginny were talking about being able to see a griffin. Professor Dumbledore seemed as excited as Ginny. "This is where we need to go into the forest," Harry said.

"We'll just follow your lead Harry. We don't know our way around the forest since we try to follow the rules," Professor Dumbledore joked.

They walked along some narrow paths into the forest. Occasionally they would hear noises off to the side of the trail and catch glimpses of things moving just out of eyesight. Harry hoped they were things just watching out for them. Soon they came upon the clearing where the griffin was. "Let me go first since it has seen me before. Then if it seems calm come closer. Ok?"

"This is your tour Harry; we'll follow your lead," Professor Dumbledore calmly said.

Harry slowly walked toward the griffin that raised its head and noticed Harry. It stood and walked straight at him. When the griffin was right in front of Harry it spread its wings and roared, just like yesterday. Harry felt the warmth and confidence flow through him. He reached out and stroked the head of the griffin that reacted with a deep purring sound. Harry noticed Professor Dumbledore approaching with Ginny right behind him. Professor Dumbledore seemed very calm and confident but Ginny seemed worried. The griffin noticed them, looked up at Harry and continued purring. Soon they were all three stroking the griffin. Professor Dumbledore was studying it carefully while Ginny was just stroking it affectionately. Then Professor Dumbledore spoke up, "This has been a real treat for me, but I

suggest we get back before it gets dark. The forest isn't as safe after dark for most of us," he said looking at Harry.

Harry said, "Sir, maybe you and Ginny should go back a bit down the path. I need to get something for an experiment and it may not be happy when I do that. I'll catch up in just a minute."

"Be careful Harry," Ginny said as the two were walking away.

Harry knelt down, stroked the griffin and then talked to it. "I need to get some of your fur so I can learn to become like you. I'm sorry if this hurts you at all." The griffin looked up at Harry and licked his face. Harry reached down and plucked out a bit of fur and the griffin didn't react at all. "Thank you, I hope to come back and see you soon. Thanks for being nice to my friends."

Quickly Harry caught up with Ginny and Professor Dumbledore. It was starting to get dark as they were approaching the edge of the forest. The strange noises seemed to be getting closer and louder. Ginny was obviously getting a bit worried so Harry said, "Ginny. The things in the forest look and sound worse than they are. There are a lot of good things in here; nothing will happen if you're with us."

Professor Dumbledore added, "Actually Ginny, it seems that we are both safer having Harry with us. For some reason the forest creatures have taken a liking to him."

They were walking back into the castle when Professor Dumbledore said, "Thank you Harry, this was a special thing for me. Now, don't you have detention to do? Punishment for going into the forest I think?"

"Yes sir, I'm going right now," Harry said and then turned towards Professor McGonagall's office.

Professor Dumbledore turned to Ginny and said, "I hope you enjoyed that as much as I did Ms. Weasley. Keep an eye on Harry for me if you would. Make sure he spends time enjoying being a student, he'll grow up before he knows it. Goodnight."

This surprised Ginny, but she said, "I loved seeing the griffin sir. I'll watch out for Harry sir, he's almost part of the family."

"Ah yes, but I have the feeling that he doesn't want you to consider him part of the family," the old wizard added while walking away.

Ginny thought about what Professor Dumbledore had said. She didn't consider Harry a brother, but she thought he always saw her as a little sister.

Harry arrived in for animagus training. "I got the fur Professor".

"Good Harry, this should help a bit. Did you have any trouble going into the forest by yourself?"

"No professor, in fact Professor Dumbledore came with me. He really wanted to see the griffin."

Harry spent the first half of the lesson working on his hair, nails and fingers while Professor McGonagall was brewing the potion. She finished the potion and handed it to Harry. "Now, this will probably not taste very good Harry but it will help."

He quickly added, "It can't taste worse than polyjuice potion can it?" before he realized what he had said.

"How do you know what a polyjuice potion tastes like Mr. Potter? Never mind, I don't want to know. You could at least pretend to follow rules you know," she said but Harry thought he detected some amusement in her voice. "It will taste very close to polyjuice potion and the effects will be very similar. You will transform into a griffin for a very short time, maybe ten minutes. During that time try to extend the wings and get a sense for how the body feels by moving around. When you change back into yourself, try to remember, as much as you can about the time you were a griffin. This will make the training easier. You can take the potion for the next three days and that should give you a head start on the transformations."

Harry drank the liquid, which did taste like polyjuice potion and felt the same sickening sensation during the transformation. Within seconds he knew he had changed. All his senses were working so much better. He could smell the professor and knew where she was without looking. His eyesight was so much better. He walked around the room and felt like he had so much power in his legs. Concentrating, he extended the wings on his back and slowly moved them up and down. He thought about trying to fly but didn't think there would be enough room. The feeling was amazing, much better than turning into Crabb. After about fifteen minutes he turned back into himself and exclaimed, "That was amazing."

"I'm glad you enjoyed yourself Mr. Potter. You still have much work to do before you can perform that without the potion though. Now, concentrate on how your hands felt when they were changed and try to make them change without the potion."

Harry focused hard but was only able to make his hands puff up to the size of paws without fur the first few times. After an hour or so he was able to make his hands and feet change into griffin paws.

"You're doing well Mr. Potter. You should be on track to complete the training within a month. Please work on changing your hands and feet until you can do it within seconds. And do make sure no one sees you practicing."

"Professor, I have a question in the interest of trying to follow rules. The centaur suggested that I become familiar with the forest. He didn't say why or anything but I got the feeling it was important. Do you have any suggestions on how I could spend some time in the forest, especially in the evenings?"

"I don't think going into the forest at night is a good idea at all Mr. Potter. However I will bring this up with the headmaster and let you know what is decided. You should go back to your common room now. I should think you have some homework to finish."

Harry quickly went back to the common room. Everyone looked at him when he came through since they thought he was in serious trouble. He went over to where Ron and Hermione were sitting. "Are you regretting going into the forest now Harry?" Hermione said.

"I don't regret going in, I regret getting caught," Harry snapped back. "Hermione, just think about everything you've learned because you bent a few rules with Ron and me. You've seen more things in this castle than most seventh years. It's too bad you'll be missing out if we find something really interesting this year." Harry turned and headed straight up to his room immediately feeling bad for being so snappy with his friend. He knew Hermione was just being herself and she probably did regret having to follow all the rules herself. Harry closed the curtains around his bed and spent a good deal of time transforming his hands into griffin paws. He really wished that he could share this with them since they had helped him with everything in the previous years.

The next day was their first Defense Against the Dark Arts class with Professor Figg. They had this class with the Slytherins but Professor Figg would probably treat all the students the same so it wouldn't be as bad as potions where the Slytherins couldn't do anything wrong.

"Welcome class, I am Professor Figg. I haven't taught for quite some years but don't worry, I've been keeping involved in dealing with Dark Arts. It seems you've gone through quite a few professors in this class. I find it strange that the high turnover for this position started the year you all came to Hogwarts. Before that I think the instructors lasted quite some time. Could there be some connection?"

The Professor looked slyly around the room, not stopping when she saw Harry. He realized there would be no preferential treatment in here. "Even though you learned some quite useful things last year, that instructor was not really Professor Moody, it was an imposter using polyjuice potion to impersonate him." There were many whispers in the room. Harry and his friends knew this already, but many of the students didn't. "Some of you were already aware of this and one of you was helpful in determining the truth and finding the real Professor Moody. I know this because the real Professor Moody is my brother.

We will continue some of the uncommon training you were getting. These are unusual times and I don't think we have the luxury to slowly expose you to some Dark Arts. I am certain that some of you in this class have a keen interest in the Dark Arts for your own personal reasons and some of you have been on the receiving end of it as well. We will work hard in here and I hope you will learn that for every bit of dark magic except one there is an effective response. The most powerful aspect of dark magic is fear. If you are consumed by fear of something, you've already lost."

Class passed very quickly and Harry was even more impressed with Professor Figg. She was very talented, but even stricter than he imagined.

Ginny had caught up to them on the way to the Great Hall for lunch when Harry noticed Cho walking by herself. "I should probably see what she wanted the other day before I ran off," Harry said and then headed over to see Cho.

Ginny was slowing down and trying to watch their meeting but Ron called, "Come on Ginny, let's go eat." She didn't want to be obvious so she caught up to Ron and Hermione.

"Cho!" Harry called. She stopped and waited for him. "I'm sorry about the other day; I was just in a bad mood and didn't want to talk about what happened over the summer. I shouldn't have left when you wanted to talk. Do you want to talk now?"

She studied him for a moment and said, "Yes, I think we should. Let's take a walk." They headed out the door and walked towards the Quidditch pitch. They had walked over half way before Cho started talking, "Harry, I want to tell you that I don't blame you for what happened to Cedric last year." Her voice cracked a bit when she was saying this. He knew it really bothered her. "I really miss him. He was my first real boyfriend and everything. I don't know if we would have continued being together or anything, but it was hard to deal with him being gone so suddenly. It's like there was no closure or anything."

"I feel like it was my fault Cho," Harry suddenly added. "Cedric and I had helped each other during the final task. I warned him right before a giant spider was going to attack him and then he helped me when the spider attacked. He said I should take the cup by myself but I insisted we take it together and get a tie for Hogwarts. He kept saying no, but I insisted. If I had just taken the cup by myself he would be alive today. I am to blame. Voldemort just wanted me and I caused Cedric to be in the way of him getting to me. They just killed him right in front of me. They didn't give him a chance or anything." Harry sat down and almost started to cry.

Cho sat down next to him so close that they were touching. They were both crying, Harry a little but Cho was crying hard. "You know Cedric really admired you Harry. He said you were always played fair and that meant a lot to him. I know his parents really appreciate you getting his body back, I couldn't imagine how much worse it would have been if they didn't have a body."

Harry composed himself and said, "I'm not going to let anything like that happen again Cho."

"Don't be crazy Harry. What could you do? It's You-Know-Who and his Death Eaters, there isn't anything you could do." After a few minutes she said, "You know that if you had asked me to the ball before Cedric I would have gone with you. I thought you had already asked someone else."

"Thanks Cho. I hadn't asked anyone else; I was just being a stupid git. I really appreciate you telling me all of this. I didn't know how I was going to face you this year. I kept having dreams about you being very angry at me."

"I was never angry at you Harry. I've always known what kind of person you are and that you would never do anything to hurt anyone. Talking has helped a lot. Maybe we should get back up to the castle." They slowly walked back, not talking but both feeling better. Harry noticed Ron, Hermione and Ginny sitting at the entrance waiting for him. Before they got to them, Cho grabbed his hand and said, "Thanks again Harry. Maybe we could go into Hogsmeade together sometime. I feel safe around you." She squeezed his hand and went off to find her friends.

Harry stood there watching for a minute then heard Ron yell, "So, what was that all about?"

Harry felt astonished. "She just talked about Cedric and that she didn't blame me. Then she cried a bit. Just then she asked me to go with her to Hogsmeade, says she feels safe with me. I get her boyfriend killed and she feels safe with me. I'll never understand women."

"You did NOT get Cedric killed Harry, we've been through this!" Hermione exclaimed.

"I know, I really didn't mean it."

"I can't believe you Harry. You've got the prettiest sixth year girl asking you out already. You've got to tell me your secret," Ron said.

Hermione glared at Ron and said, "You've got a lot to learn Ronald Weasley. I'm going to class."

Ginny added, "I'm going as well." And they both stormed off.

"What did I say?" Ron gasped. Harry didn't know what set them off either.

Ron and Harry headed to Divination with Professor Trelawney. He hated this class even more than potions. Every year the teacher had predicted Harry's dramatic death.

"Welcome back students. This year we will begin with some gazing. Please give a reading to your partner and then we will interpret your predictions."

Harry decided to gaze for Ron first but couldn't make out anything. He just made something up. "It looks like you're riding a broom Ron. Any you're holding the Quidditch cup. I say you've made the team and we've won the cup."

"Wicked," Ron said. Ok, now my turn. Ron gazed into the crystal ball but instead of seeing a smoky haze like he had every other time he saw a black tangle of lines with no shape he could make out. "Harry, this is strange. Normally I can't see anything except haze but all I see now is a bunch of black lines." Professor Trelawney came over when she heard this.

"Obviously you're not concentrating enough Mr. Weasley. Let me have a look." She stared into the ball for a few minutes.

"How am I going to die this year Professor?" Harry asked jokingly.

"I don't know my boy. I've never seen anything like this. Something is obscuring the visions. Give me your hands." She took Harry's hands into hers for a few minutes and then said. "I feel nothing. It's like you're dead already." Most of the class gasped but then Ron spoke up.

"Well then Harry, it looks like you don't need to be very careful this year. If you're already dead not much else can hurt you."

Trelawney turned and glared at Ron and then said, "Class is dismissed for the day, this is most unusual."

"Now I'm actually worried," Harry joked "Every other year she's said I was going to die and it never happened and now she said I'm not going to die which means I'll probably be a goner for sure."

They headed back to the common room and played Exploding Snap until Hermione came in with Ginny. Instead of coming over, they went to the other side of the room. "I guess they're

trying to tell us something," Ron said. "Probably better this way, we don't want to say something and have Hermione take points from us."

Harry knew Ron would rather have Hermione around and Harry felt the same way. He was also feeling bad that Ginny was avoiding him as well. He didn't understand this. But he had more important things to think about. When everyone was heading to the Great Hall for supper, Harry had to head towards Professor McGonagall's office so they would think he was starting his detention. Ron didn't want to beg Hermione to sit with him so he tagged along with Fred and George who cut him some slack since they knew what it was like to have friends in detention and the strange ways girls behaved.

Harry snuck out and headed down to see the griffin. The griffin seemed slightly agitated today but Harry couldn't see anything wrong. He stroked it and was really trying to study the creature but it kept pacing around him. It stopped in front of him and just looked up into Harry's eyes. It seemed to be trying to get Harry to do something. Harry decided to try and transform. He got down on his hands and knees and concentrated on the griffin. In just a few seconds, he had actually transformed the front half of his body into a griffin. It must have been a strange sight, the back half was Harry's normal body and legs but the front half was all griffin. The real griffin looked back into Harry's griffin face and gave a loud roar. This made Harry feel even better than when he was in his normal form. He held the form for a few minutes and then changed back slightly worn out. The griffin then went and laid down looking peaceful again. Harry gave a last stroke to the griffin and headed back out of the forest. He heard a noise behind him and was startled to see Firenze coming up to him.

"I see you are learning other unexpected talents Mr. Potter. Do you intend to take my suggestion about the forest?"

"I've asked for permission to come at night but haven't heard if they will let me or not," Harry replied.

"Precious time escapes, don't delay much longer." The centaur turned and walked away.

Harry didn't really want to break any rules. Given the choice he would rather follow them. Arriving for his transfiguration lesson Professor McGonagall had the potion for him to drink. "This is the last time you will have the potion Harry. Try to feel every part of your body after the change. Go on and drink it now."

Harry drank the potion and changed. He could feel the power of the griffin. Everything was so clear and focused. He could make out small spiders on the ceiling and almost any movement caught his eye. Trying to focus on every inch of his new body, he extended the wings and whipped the tail back and forth. He stretched out extending the sharp claws. He thought of how he felt when he was with the real griffin then turned towards Professor McGonagall and roared. He could tell it was much louder than he had expected and the Professor stepped back quite a few steps. Just then the potion wore off and he was back in his own body. The timing couldn't have been better; quite a few students came running into the office exclaiming, "Professor are you alright? It sounded like a lion in here." The students all looked very worried.

Professor McGonagall stumbled with her words for a second and then recovered, sounding very firm and confident again. "We're just fine thank you. Mr. Potter here just opened a magical book about animals without realizing what the results would be. I dare say he won't

make that mistake again. Could you leave him to his detention now please?" The students left, but they didn't seem to totally believe her. Most students didn't trust Harry very much. Strange things always happened around him.

"Mr. Potter, what did you do that for? It shook the entire room."

"Sorry Professor. When the real griffin does that it makes me feel really confident and warm, I wanted to see what would happen if I did it."

"Yes, I see. You say that when the griffin roars at you that it actually gives you a comforting, pleasant feeling? To be truthful, I felt a bit afraid."

"Oh yes professor. I feel like I could do almost anything when it roars at me. When I was down there earlier, I was able to transform the front half of my body into a griffin. The real griffin looked at me and roared which felt great."

"We haven't worked on changing anything other than your hands and feet Mr. Potter. Did you really change half of your body? Could you demonstrate please?"

Harry focused on how he had felt after drinking the potion and pictured the griffin in his mind. Within a few seconds he had transformed into a full griffin without a tail or wings though. It didn't feel quite as draining as when he partially transformed.

"Very good Harry. I think spending time with the real griffin has given you quite an edge. You do know that you had no wings or tail don't you?"

"Yes professor. Maybe I wasn't focusing on all parts of the griffin enough. When I see it tomorrow I will really study those parts. When will I need to register with the Ministry of Magic professor?"

"About that, even though it is required that any animagus register, both the headmaster and myself feel that in your particular case it may not be the wisest thing to do. We will fill out all the forms and keep them here in case you are ever found out. That way you won't get into any trouble with the Ministry."

"So, it's ok to break the rules in certain instances?" Harry smirked

"It is ok for the headmaster to adjust certain rules in the interest of student safety Mr. Potter."

"Did he say anything about allowing me to go into the forest professor? The centaur told me precious time is slipping by."

"Hagrid will return before too much longer and since he is always looking for a reason to go traipsing through the forest, he can accompany you. I dare say he would be most pleased if you were to discover some new dangerous creature living in there. Let's see the transformation a couple more times before we stop tonight."

Chapter 8

Harry had managed to get a tail on the third try before quitting for the evening. Upon arriving back in the common room, Fred and George grabbed him as soon as he entered the room. Fred started, "Harry, we need to find a couple people for the Quidditch team. Oliver is gone of course, but Alicia Spinnet is injured and won't be able to play this year. Also, we need to vote on a new captain, which I think should be me, since I'm much better than George here."

"Shut up you prat," George added "We're going to have tryouts Saturday morning down on the pitch. We need you there to help judge."

"I'll be there. What about Ron, do you think he'll make the team?" Harry asked.

"He has a good chance since we need two players. If we only had one opening, I'd say Ginny would beat him out," George stated

"Ginny is going to try out for the team?" Harry asked sounding surprised.

"Well I would hope so, she's a better flier than we are, that's for sure. She'd make an excellent chaser or seeker. So you better be on your toes Harry or she'll take your job."

Harry walked over to where Ginny and Hermione were sitting. "Where's Ron?" he asked.

"How should we know? Probably looking for the secret to attracting girls," Hermione snapped.

"You know he didn't really mean that Hermione. Ron just says things before he thinks. Actually I have that problem to. But he was just joking."

"Then why hasn't he wanted to come around us?" she asked.

"You two don't exactly look like you wanted either of us around. Ginny, there are tryouts for the Quidditch team on Saturday; you'll be there won't you? I really think you'll make the team."

"I don't know," she said sadly. "Ron would be really mad if somehow I made the team and he didn't."

"Come on, you have to try out. You're an amazing flier. I'm glad that I don't have to compete against you; you could probably take my spot. I'm sure Ron would want Gryffindor to have the best team even if he couldn't be on it. You may both make it since Alicia Spinnet can't play this year we need two new members. Say you'll come, please?" Harry begged

This seemed to lift her spirits and she said, "Ok, I'll try but if I make it and Ron doesn't, you have to deal with him."

"Great. Oh yeah, Professor McGonagall told me that Hagrid would be back before long. I'm anxious to hear how his assignment went." Just then Ron came over to where they were sitting.

"So Ron, are you trying out for the team Saturday? I begged Ginny to try out also," Harry said trying to change the subject.

"Yeah, I'll try out. Not sure if I'll make it or not but I want to try"

"Harry can I ask you something?" Ginny said softly. "If you don't want to talk about it, that's ok. Can you tell us more about wandless magic? Hermione and I have looked in the library and there's almost no information about it. Any mention of it is that it's a myth and could never be controlled."

Ron added quickly, "You don't have to say anything if you don't want."

Harry appreciated his friend's effort. "I'll tell you what I know." Harry told them about the first few times when he didn't know what he was doing and then about the truck. "That's when Mrs. Figg told me she was a witch. All these years I thought she was some batty old lady with a bunch of cats." He went on to talk about how Mrs. Figg helped him practice and learn to control it more. "That's all I really know. I don't know why I can do it or if I can do anything else. We just worked on moving things around."

"Could you do something now?" Ginny pleaded

Harry looked around and then started sending pillows and books all over the room ending up with books in one stack and pillows in the other.

"Wicked, simply wicked. I'm beat though, heading for bed," Ron said with a yawn.

"Thanks for showing us," Ginny said before giving him a hug and heading to bed.

"You know we're really proud that you saved that girl. You don't have to keep anything from us, you know that don't you?" Hermione added seriously.

"I know, sorry that I ever did. Goodnight." When he got up to his room, Ron was already in bed. "Ron, what were you doing in the library tonight?"

"Nothing really," Ron said sounding guilty. "Parvati mentioned that Hermione had seemed to be avoiding me and wanted to know if I'd like to study with her. It was kind of nice actually. She doesn't mess with my head like other people do. Goodnight Harry."

Classes were uneventful the next day and Harry made it to the clearing with the griffin without being noticed. The creature looked agitated again. Harry closely studied the tail and wings. When he was stroking the wings, the griffin spread them widely so Harry could get a better look. They felt very powerful. Harry concentrated and was able to fully transform for the first time ever. He could tell the difference and that he had wings now. He walked around and could smell many things in the forest he never noticed before. He could hear things so much better as well. The real griffin stood in front of Harry and spread its wings, so Harry did the same thing. The real griffin took a couple steps, flapped its wings and flew out of the clearing. Harry was nervous but wanted to try. He tried to do the same thing the real griffin had done.

Harry took a few large steps and focused on flapping his wings. Then it happened, he just took off and flew. It just seemed natural. The real griffin was circling near the top of the trees.

Harry approached and it took off over the deeper part of the forest. Harry followed amazed at how free he felt. This was even better than flying on a broom. It was starting to get dark when the pair of griffins landed back in the clearing. Harry stayed in griffin form. The real griffin came face to face with Harry and kind of butted heads with him. Harry pushed back and then turned and went off towards the edge of the forest. He felt more comfortable in the forest while in the griffin form but changed back near the edge of the forest. Harry ran back up to the castle and headed straight to Professor McGonagall's office.

"You're late Mr. Potter. I thought you were taking this training very seriously."

"I am taking it seriously professor; I was flying with the real griffin!"

"You actually flew!" She sounded quite excited. "How did you know you were ready to try?"

"I changed when I was with the griffin and could feel that I had wings. The griffin took off and started flying so I just went after it. It just came naturally."

"Let's see then," she said still sounding unusually happy for her.

Harry changed quickly and spread his wings. The professor seemed to study them for a moment. Harry stretched out his paws and extended the claws before changing back.

"I actually think you've got it Mr. Potter. You picked it up quite quickly. I would like to have our training tomorrow down by Hagrid's hut. The only thing I'd like you to work on when you can be alone is your speed of transformation. The ideal thing would be for you to jump in the air and be fully changed before landing. I'll get the paperwork ready so that you will be official after tomorrow. We won't be filing the papers but you will have done your part. You can go now."

Harry was very happy while heading back to the common room when he noticed Ron and Parvati coming up the stairs. "Hey Ron, what's going on? Hi Parvati," Harry said.

"Hello Harry," she said nicely

"We've just been studying some more." Ron added.

"Parvati, I wanted to apologize for the way I acted at the Ball last year. You were being very nice by going with me and I behaved like a total prat. I'm sorry. You didn't deserve being treated like that," Harry said honestly

"It's ok," Parvati responded. "Thanks for apologizing though. It was nice going to the ball with you anyway. Now Ron here, he was being a worse git than you were," she said while poking Ron in the sides.

"I know, you've told me before," Ron laughed. Harry left them and headed back into the common room. It was weird to see Ron laughing with someone other than Hermione.

Hermione and Ginny were sitting in front of the fire with Crookshanks when he came over. "One more night of detention and then I'm free," Harry said. Crookshanks came and sat on his lap purring loudly.

"Is that all you guys want, to be free?" Hermione slammed her book and left the room.

Harry was stunned. "What did I say?" he asked Ginny.

"She's mad at Ron. He's been spending time with Parvati. He even goes to the library with her. Why would he do that?"

"I asked him about it last night. He said it was nice being around someone who was fun and didn't mess with his head like other people. I think it's getting to him that Hermione is so serious and doesn't show that she likes being around him."

"But Hermione really likes him, how could he rather spend time with Parvati?"

"Well don't take this personally, but girls are impossible for us to figure out. I know he would rather spend time with Hermione but she seems to be playing hard to get or something. Ron would rather have her act like she really likes him and that she doesn't mind him just being himself. I think that he likes that Parvati doesn't seem to judge how he acts."

"You wouldn't rather have someone like Parvati would you?" Ginny didn't know if she should have asked this.

"Not really. It's just so confusing for us to know how to act around girls we like. Sometimes we want to show that we like a girl and then she goes and does or says something that makes us think she doesn't want us to act that way. Then when we don't show that we like them they act angry with us. That's really hard to deal with. I wouldn't want to be with someone like Parvati. She would be ok as a friend to do things with but not as a girlfriend. I'd want someone who acted like they liked me but didn't let me get away with everything. Someone who was honest and didn't play games with my feelings. Maybe we're not supposed to figure girls out. All I know is that we need to find a way to get Ron and Hermione back wanting to spend time together."

"We'll figure something out, they were meant to be together," Ginny added.

"I agree. Some people just fit together. Goodnight Ginny," Harry said as he headed up to bed.

Harry transformed before getting to the clearing the next night. The griffin seemed more relaxed than it had the past few nights. He just stood near it for a few minutes, then spread his wings and flew off. The real griffin followed closely. They flew for a while and then headed back to the clearing. The real griffin was standing next to Harry when it gave a huge roar. Harry did the same thing. He could hear many birds taking flight in the forest. This just felt so natural to Harry. They ran through the forest for a while before Harry needed to get back. Just like last night, the real griffin butted heads with Harry. It seemed to look at him deeply before Harry turned to go.

He walked on the edge of the forest to Hagrid's hut where Professor McGonagall was waiting with Professor Dumbledore. "Hello Harry. Minerva tells me you have made some significant progress. I'm looking forward to seeing how close you are getting." Harry glanced at Professor McGonagall who gave a slight wink. "Whenever you are ready Harry."

Harry ran a few steps, jumped into the air, transformed and took off flying over the forest. He circled a couple times before landing. He then walked over near the professors, spread his wings and roared loudly. Then Harry transformed back into his normal form.

"I see Minerva was holding back on your progress. That was perfect Harry. I think your choice of animal was very wise. Is the real griffin still in the forest?"

"I think so sir. I was with it just before coming here. We went flying over the forest and then we ran around a bit. I wonder why it is staying here though."

"That's a much a mystery as why the centaurs made you a member of their clan I would say," Dumbledore said.

"Potter is a member of a centaur clan headmaster? What does that mean?"

"It means for some reason, they thought it was in their best interests to include Harry in their family. I don't have any real theories on why though. Either way, I'm impressed with your animagus form Harry. Well done. By the way, Hagrid will return before long and will be ready to spend some time in the forest with you after that. Do either of you have an idea how to explain Harry's absences from the common room?"

"Hermione will be really disappointed in me if she thinks I've broken any more rules," Harry said.

"Yes she does take her prefect duties seriously. I would think we could tell your close friends the truth. You don't mind the other students thinking you're in trouble again do you?"

"Not at all professor. I doubt they will have any trouble believing it."

"Then after you stay out with Hagrid the first night you will be caught and punished with detention for two weeks. Is this acceptable to you Minerva?"

"Yes headmaster. We are fortunate the students are used to Mr. Potter serving detention."

They were walking back up to the castle when Harry asked, "Do you think it is still necessary to keep this from Ron and Hermione Professor?"

"I'll leave that up to you Harry. I know how hard it is to keep something like this away from those who are closest to you. Remember that once they know, you can never go back. I would like you to wait until you can see Sirius in person before telling him though. I may have an idea about that."

"Thank you both for letting me learn this and especially you Professor McGonagall for spending the time to help me. I really appreciate all you've done."

"My pleasure Harry," Professor McGonagall said. "It's a fairly rare talent and I enjoy seeing others enjoy the experience. And I dare say you would have found some way to learn it on your own anyway. Your father and godfather both did so I don't know how you could have been stopped. It was safer to teach you the right way to do it."

Harry ran back up to the common room where his friends were talking in the corner. "Are you two ready for Quidditch tryouts tomorrow?" Harry asked.

Both Ron and Ginny said they were ready. Ginny sounded more confident than Ron did.

"Oh yeah, I have something to tell you guys. Come in a bit closer, no one else can hear." They all came in close. "Did I tell you that the centaur said I should get more familiar with the forest?" They said no. "Oh, sorry about that. Well the centaur said I should get more familiar in the forest. Professor Dumbledore agreed to let me spend some evenings in the forest. Hagrid is going to come with me after he gets back. You know Hagrid will like any excuse to go into the forest at night."

"There is no way I'd go in there at night, no way at all," Ron said. "I think you are completely mental."

"I'm surprised Professor Dumbledore agreed to that. You heard him after the sorting; he said it was even more dangerous this year. I wonder what all things are in there?" Hermione said, almost sounding jealous that she wasn't going.

"I wish I could go in with you. There has to be some very interesting creatures in the forest. Not all of them can be bad," Ginny said. "You guys have all been into the forest before and I haven't." Then she remembered about just being in there last week with Harry and Professor Dumbledore.

"It's not like I enjoyed going into the forest Ginny. A giant spider tried to eat me," Ron exclaimed.

"How are you going to sneak out every night, someone will miss you," Hermione asked

Harry laughed. "I'm going to get detention again! I'll sneak out Monday night and then I'll get in trouble for that and Professor McGonagall will yell at me and give me detention. Even you three would have believed that if I hadn't told you the truth."

"That's true, you getting into trouble isn't out of the ordinary at all. Wait, that's what happened to get you detention the last couple weeks. Was that real or fake?" Hermione asked.

Harry had hoped they wouldn't ask this. He looked uncomfortable for a moment before Ginny spoke up, "Harry, you haven't been in detention have you?"

"No, I haven't. But Professor Dumbledore made me promise I wouldn't tell anyone, not even you three. I really wanted to but he seemed very serious about this. Kind of like the Time-Turner Hermione. Sorry."

"You have been Fred and George's hero by getting into trouble so soon into the year and it was all an act. They'd be disappointed in you," Ron added. "So, what were you really doing?"

"I'm just trying to learn other things that may give me an advantage when I'm attacked again. It hasn't been dangerous this time though. I think that's the only reason they're letting me go into the forest. If I'm attacked they probably think I could escape into the forest. This will get Fred and George thinking I'm even a bigger trouble maker than they do now."

"I guess we need to trust that Professor Dumbledore knows what he is doing. I don't think he would knowingly put you in danger Harry," Hermione added.

They all decided to go to bed when Harry called out. "Ginny, before you go up, can I ask you a question please?" She looked confused but came back. After both Ron and Hermione were out of sight Harry whispered, "I don't really need to ask you a question, I want to show you what I've been learning if that's ok."

"Really! Why don't you want Ron and Hermione to know?"

"I don't think it's time for them to know, but I really want to show someone and I know you would appreciate it the most. Come on; let's go to an empty room." They threw on the invisibility cloak and snuck out to an empty classroom.

"Ok, remember this is me and you don't have anything to worry about," Harry said which made Ginny nervous. She had no idea what was going to happen. She nodded like she agreed but didn't say anything.

Harry stepped away from her a bit so she wouldn't be right next to him after he changed. Quickly he changed into his griffin form and looked at Ginny. She seemed stunned for only a second and then ran over and hugged him. "Harry you're an animagus! This is the best form ever! Show me your wings." Harry expanded his wings to their full width and then retracted them. "Who all knows about it? Can you really fly?"

Harry backed up and transformed back to his normal form. "Only Professors McGonagall and Dumbledore know, and now you do. No one else knows. Yes, I can fly. The real griffin and I have been flying over the forest."

"No one, not even Sirius?" she asked.

"No, Professor Dumbledore thought it would be better to wait until I see Sirius in person to explain everything to him. You won't let it slip to Hermione or Ron will you? I just don't feel like it is time to let them know. I hate keeping anything from them but it just seems like I shouldn't."

"I promise that I won't tell. But, why did you show me? I'm glad you did, but why?"

"I really wanted to share it with someone; I'm so excited about it. And, you like griffins so much I thought you would see the benefits of this form more than anyone. And, I guess in the past we've had secrets from you and I want to make sure you know that I don't want to keep anything from you if I can help it."

She hugged him tightly and said, "Thanks, that means a lot. We better get back; Hermione will wonder where I've been."

They snuck back into the common room and went to bed. Harry was glad he had told her. It felt like a weight had been lifted from him. The next morning Ron was yelling at him, "Get up Harry; I don't want to miss tryouts."

"We've got time, let me sleep," Harry grumbled.

"Come on, I want to practice a bit," Ron pleaded.

The pari walked down to the pitch with Harry carrying his Firebolt and Ron carrying a school broom. Harry watched Ron fly around a bit. He was quite good. Fred and George came down carrying a large package that they gave to Ron. "This is from Bill, Charlie and us." Fred said. "You better do well." George added.

Ron opened the package and saw a 'Nimbus 2100'. "Wow, a new broom. How did you guys do this?"

"Well we thought the investor in our company wouldn't mind us using a little for something like this. And remember Bill and Charlie chipped in a bit. They've got real jobs you know. It's not the latest model but it could fly rings around those school brooms," George said.

"Thanks guys, I can't believe this. I need to get the feel of it before tryouts start." Ron quickly took off. It was obvious that this was a much better broom than the school broom he had been using.

"Harry, we didn't need to use much on this, you don't mind do you? We also did the same thing for Ginny. You're not mad are you?" Fred asked

"Not at all, I would have liked to buy them but neither Ron or Ginny would accept something like that from me. Thanks for doing it," Harry added feeling very happy. Ginny would really be impressive with a broom like this he thought.

Soon the others came down. He noticed Ginny grinning broadly and talking quickly to Ron as they compared brooms. A couple third years and a few fourth years besides Ginny had come for tryouts. It wasn't a sure thing that either Ron or Ginny would make the team. Harry would rather have them on the team even if that didn't make the best team and wondered how Fred and George felt. He knew that Angelina would vote only based on talent. The current team members gathered together first and Angelina spoke up. "I think we need to vote on a captain first."

Harry quickly added. "But what if one of the new members would make a better captain?" He could see the shock on Fred and George's faces.

They all three agreed to wait until after the tryouts to vote on a captain.

They went through the first round and made cuts so that only Ron, Ginny and two other fourth year boys were left. They were all quite good and would fit on the team well.

"Now we're going to be a little harder on you. You really need to do your best in this next competition. We will vote for the two best after this round," Angelina said.

Fred and George were hitting Bludgers at them quite hard. Angelina and Harry were trying to get the quaffle through the goals and they had to stop as many as they could. Then the swapped and the competitors had to try and get the quaffle past Harry and Angelina. Harry wasn't very good at being a keeper and he only stopped the most basic shots.

"That's all. You all did very well and any of you would make a good addition to our team. We only need two new players so we will go vote now. The two of you who don't make the team should try again next year," Angelina told the group.

They all went off so the others couldn't hear them. "So what do you think?" Angelina asked.

"They're all really good," Fred said. "With any of them we should have as good a team as last year. I really think Ron would make the best keeper. He's a good flier but he was awesome blocking shots."

"I agree. He wouldn't make the team as a chaser right now but he should be able to live up to Oliver's legacy as keeper," Angelina said.

Then George added, "And, he knows more about Quidditch technique than any of us. He's really the biggest fan of the game. We like playing and watching, but Ron really understands the game."

"Ok, so does everyone agree that Ron is the new keeper?" And everyone agreed.

"Now the hard part. Which one of the three will be our new chaser?" she asked.

They were all quiet and then Harry spoke up, "I vote for Ginny. Even though she's been flying the least amount of time, she is at least equal to the other two. If she can get some real practice and playing time, she could really be awesome."

"I'm kind of worried about having her on the team though," Fred added, "it can get kind of brutal out there. Mom would kill us if we let something happen to her."

"Are you saying that a girl can't take care of herself Fred Weasley?" Angelina exclaimed. "We had three girls on the team the past few years and we won the cup. And none of us ended up in the hospital."

This hurt Harry. He had wound up in the hospital twice before. "I wouldn't want anything to happen to Ginny either, but that can't be a good reason to vote against her. Do you know how mad she would be if she found out that's why she didn't make the team? And, my vote for captain is Ron. Except for Angelina he is the most responsible one of us. He will make sure we actually get to practice."

"Everyone will think we just voted for those two because we're related. But when have I cared what people think of me?" George joked. They walked back to the group of competitors who were all looking very nervous.

Hermione was alternating between Ron and Hermione saying, "You did very well no matter what happens."

"All four of you did well, but here are our choices. The new keeper will be Ron Weasley." Angelina announced. Hermione and Ginny both hugged Ron. The other two fourth year boys shook his hand and then he ran over to the rest of the team. "The new chaser will be Ginny Weasley." Hermione hugged her and the fourth year boys were being very good sports and shook her hand also before heading back up to the castle.

"We should just change the name to Weasley's team," Harry joked. "Shouldn't you announce the new captain now?"

"Ah yes. It looks like my dreams have been shattered and I won't be captain this year," Angelina said somewhat joking. "We have chosen Ron to be our new captain."

"You're joking!" Ron yelled. "I'm the Quidditch captain."

"The rest of us didn't want the responsibility to get up early and get everyone to practice. We have more important things to be doing," Fred joked.

"Congratulations Ron, I think you'll do great," Ginny said genuinely happy for her brother.

Ron couldn't remember being much happier. "I get a new broom, make the house team and get to be captain, all in one day. To heck with your luck with the ladies Harry, I'll take this any day." Even Hermione smiled at this.

They spent the rest of the weekend just having fun. Harry was so happy for Ron. It was great that he was finally getting some recognition of his own. At his house, everything was about his older brothers or his only sister. At school it was usually about Harry, but now he was the house Quidditch captain. All his family would be very proud of him.

Chapter 9

The next few weeks passed slowly he was looking forward to Hagrid getting back. Finally it was announced that Hagrid had come back and would be taking over classes after the weekend. Harry was anxious for Monday's classes to be over so he could talk to Hagrid. Potions seemed to drag on but Harry thought that Professor Snape wasn't quite as mean to him. He still picked on Harry but only said comments about his schoolwork, not his private life. They all ran down to Care of Magical creatures and were surprised to see Professor Grubbly-Plank still standing there. "Hi Professor. We heard that Hagrid was back today. Are you still going to be our instructor?" Harry asked.

Before she could answer Hagrid came out of his hut and said, "Alright you three? C'mon in."

"Did you hear I'm Quidditch captain Hagrid?" Ron asked.

"Oh, I heard. There should be some kind of rule about having a team made up of all one family thought," Hagrid joked. "I'm sure you'll be doing just fine as captain. A more responsible thing to do than letting either of those brothers of yours take the job, that's for sure."

"Having trouble keeping these two in line this year Hermione?"

"Well other than Harry getting detention already this year they haven't been too bad. I keep getting the feeling they are keeping secrets from me though."

"Yeah, it's probably tough having a prefect as a best friend, especially for them."

"Hear you've been having an interesting year so far Harry." Then Hagrid lowered his voice but Ron and Hermione could still hear. "Do they know about you-know-what tonight?"

"Of course we know Hagrid. We're his best friends you know," Ron said proudly.

"Ok then. It should be fun. I've been away so long some of my friends might have forgotten about me."

The three of them headed over to join the other students for class. Hermione held back a little and said quietly to Hagrid. "Hagrid make sure you keep him safe. He's been acting a bit odd this year. I think seeing Cedric get killed really affected him."

"How could it not affect him? I don't know how he handles it all. But you don't worry; I wouldn't let anything happen to him."

Harry tried going to see the griffin before supper but it wasn't there. Harry transformed and roared but there was no response. He was extremely disappointed and was moping out of the forest when Firenze came up. "I think it accomplished the task it came to do Harry."

"I really wanted to see it again. It was such an amazing animal. I liked being around it. I thought maybe it would stay throughout the year."

"It was probably not truly happy here Harry. They like being left alone with their own kind and there are too many things around here."

"I'm glad it came. If it hadn't I wouldn't have picked that form. I should have thanked it."

"My thoughts are that it knew. Take care Harry."

Harry walked slowly back to the Great Hall. Most of the other students were already eating when he came in and sat next to Ginny. He whispered, "The Griffin is gone."

She looked at him and nodded. She had seen it and felt bad as well. After eating he noticed Hagrid get up to leave and give a nod in Harry's direction. He said loud enough that a few of the other Gryffindors could overhear. "I've got to take care of a couple things, I'll see you back in the common room a little later."

Ginny gave his arm a gentle squeeze and whispered, "Be careful."

Harry got to Hagrid's hut and Fang came bounding out and started licking his face. "Aargh, get off me."

"He's excited about going on a walk. Grubbly-Plank has been taking care of him, but she only walks around the grounds. Fang needs some real exercise." Hagrid gathered up his crossbow and they started walking. "How are you really doing Harry? You had a rough bit at the end of last year."

"It bothered me Hagrid. I kept getting really angry with myself. I realized that I needed to learn to be a better wizard and to protect myself more. Ron, Hermione and Ginny have been great; they've helped me feel a lot better. I also found out that the Mrs. Figg who lived close to me was a witch. She's the Defense of Dark Arts professor now. I wish she would have told me years ago."

"She is supposed to be a very tough Auror. You should be able to learn some useful things with her as your teacher. In general, I reckon learning to protect yourself better is always a good thing. With times being what they are, you just never know when you'll need it."

"So, are the giants going to join our side?"

"It looks like most of them are. It took... Wait, who said anything about giants? I was just on extended leave, that's all. But I'll say the leave went pretty good. I don't think the other side will be getting much help from them. Some may not help either side but most seem to side with us. Not much news out of you-know-who though. Strange being so quiet."

"Hagrid, if you like the creatures in the forest so much, why do you carry a crossbow? What is in here that would hurt you?"

"Oh, there are things in here that don't like anyone. You can just feel them when they get close. Most creatures just want to either be left alone or treated with respect, but some are just evil. I wouldn't shoot anything unless there was no other choice."

They walked pretty deep into the forest. Harry was trying to pay attention to landmarks so he could find his way out if he had to. It was pretty hard since at night almost everything looked

the same. Hagrid showed him a couple caves and told him of hearing wolves and other growls coming from inside. Walking down one path they heard the familiar clicking of Aragog and his family.

"Hagrid. It has been too long. And Harry, Friend of Spiders. You are both welcome in our presence anytime."

"Friend of Spiders? Have I missed something you two?" Hagrid asked looking confused.

"We were finally able to thank him for slaying the creature we fear most. A horrible mistake we almost made trying to eat him and his friend," Aragog said.

"I should think a mistake. You shouldn't eat any of my friends. But how did you thank him, Harry hasn't been in the forest this year. Or have you?" Hagrid said.

"Didn't I tell you? Firenze took me for a walk the first week of school. He said someone wanted to meet me. It was Aragog who said I had his protection in the forest and shouldn't fear his kind. Then I talked to Bayne and then I saw a griffin that had come to the forest."

"A griffin! I've never. What would a griffin be doing in our forest? They don't like being around people. Always being hunted they are. Is it still here?"

"I think it left. I went to see it before super and it was gone. I really miss it. I went to see it almost every night."

"You were in the forest every night? Who went with you?"

"No one went with me Hagrid. I can take care of myself you know."

"I know, or I should know by now. And you don't have Aragog to worry about anymore. Bye Aragog" The two headed back towards the castle. They got back around midnight and Harry snuck back up to his room.

In the morning Harry came down to the common room to gather his books for class and found Professor McGonagall waiting for him. Some of other students were standing around waiting to see what she said.

"Exactly what time did you get to your room last night Mr. Potter? There was a nasty rumor that you were seen coming into the castle well past curfew. Is there any truth to this?" Even though Harry knew she wasn't really mad, hearing her talk to him this way made him feel very worried.

"I um--Yes professor, I was out of the common room after curfew. I was looking for something in the forest, I'm sorry." Harry heard most of the students gasp but heard Fred and George say, 'Excellent'.

"Come with me right now Mr. Potter," Professor McGonagall said and he followed her to her office. "I take it there were no problems last night?" she asked, now sounding more normal.

"No professor. Hagrid showed me the location of a few caves and we talked to Aragog, but we were back by midnight so I was able to still get enough sleep," Harry responded. He wanted to make sure he sounded like they were being responsible.

"Very well, we'll say detention for two weeks. After this, I'd like you to be a model student for the rest of the year. Having a Gryffindor student receive 4 weeks of detention when we are only into the fifth week of term doesn't look good for our house you know."

"Yes professor, I will try my best. Thank you," Harry said and then went on to class.

The other students tried to ask more details but Professor Figg didn't allow any talking during class. She was almost as strict as Professor Snape, but she treated everyone the same. "This will be our last week of theory on avoiding and blocking spells so please pay attention. Next week we will be putting this theory into practice and if you aren't prepared it may be uncomfortable for you." Harry saw Neville squirm and look a little panicked.

During lunch break Harry was able to fill Ron and Hermione in on what happened last night. "It was actually pretty boring. We didn't see any creatures that I hadn't seen already. There are some caves in there that I didn't know existed. I don't really understand why the centaur thought this was important. I have detention for two weeks now, I'll be ready to quit after a couple days."

It seemed much harder for Harry to concentrate in classes this year. Only Defense Against the Dark Arts and Charms held his interest.

After supper, Harry went to Hagrid's for his detention trip into the forest. He really wasn't looking forward to it as much as he expected. He would rather be practicing dueling with Ron and Hermione.

"Aye Harry! Ready for another walk?" Hagrid asked. "Think you can lead us back to the caves tonight?"

Harry had tried to pay attention last night and hoped he could at least get close. "I think so Hagrid. Hagrid do you have any idea why the centaur would suggest I get more familiar with the forest? I don't see how this would help."

"Been wondering the same thing myself Harry. The only thing I can think is that maybe some of the other centaurs are watching and are getting used to you being around. Maybe he wants other creatures in the forest to see you and decide if they are going to be friendly or not."

"I hope everything I meet will be friendly." After saying this he was glad to see that he recognized the final path to the caves. "The caves are right up here Hagrid. I actually found them."

"Good work Harry. It's hard enough to find your way through here during the day, but you managed it at night. Let's head down this way. There is a way to get into Hogsmeade over here. We could stop in for a quick butterbeer if you don't mention to anyone what we've done."

"Yeah, let's do that. I won't tell anyone," Harry added, really liking butterbeer.

It wasn't that far but there were many turns. Harry wasn't sure he could find his own way back. They came out near an old road that led right into Hogsmeade. From there it was a short walk to the Three Broomsticks. Harry followed Hagrid in side.

"Ah Hagrid," Madam Rosmerta said walking over. "Unusual for you to be here so late. And what is a student doing out of the school this late?"

"Hello Rosmerta. You know Harry here."

"Of course, good to see you Harry, but I don't believe students were allowed out this late, especially these days."

"Harry and I are doing some special work in the forest and being that we were close to this side, I suggested stopping in for a little refreshment. He has permission to be in the forest with me tonight and since we were in the neighborhood."

"I don't exactly say that the forest is in the neighborhood, but if that's your story, who am I to doubt it."

Harry was amazed at how different the crowd was at night. Normally there were students and other normal looking wizards and witches (well normal for wizards and witches), and occasionally a goblin or two. But at night, there were many people who kept their hoods up and more goblins. He wouldn't like to come in here by himself at night.

He and Hagrid kept to themselves talking about the griffin and that Hagrid had been able to see some dragons over the summer. After their butterbeer they left and walked back up the road to the path. If you weren't looking hard for it, you wouldn't know where to re-enter the forest. It was getting late and Hagrid was walking faster. Harry had to almost run to keep up with him. Harry had a strange feeling that they were being followed all the way back, but he could never see anything. They finally got back to the castle and Harry went back to his room. He had planned on sneaking into the library tonight but it was too late to go now, he really needed to get some sleep.

In Professor Figg's class the next day, they were ready to talk about shield and blocking spells. She started off by saying, "Now, even though there are shield and blocking spells, only in very rare cases will they totally protect you from a curse, and there are some spells that they won't protect you from at all, so it is better to avoid being in a situation where you need to use one of these in the first place." This surprised Harry. He knew that the unforgivable curses couldn't be blocked, but he had been able to completely block spells over the summer.

Professor Figg went on. "The difference between blocking and shield spells is that a blocking spell deflects some of the force of the spell, which could cause the remnants of it to hit an unintended target. A shield spell when done correctly absorbs some of the energy of the spell that would limit the effects on you. In either case, you can expect to have some exposure to the spell you are trying to avoid." She went on to explain the basic spells and how to properly say and perform them. Harry wasn't paying much attention since he already knew this. He was wondering why he didn't feel the effects of the spells when he was blocking them. Were the Unspeakables not trying very hard? Now he was getting slightly worried.

"Mr. Potter!" Harry heard which snapped him back to class. "I hope you weren't thinking this lesson was unimportant," Professor Figg said sternly.

"No professor, I'm sorry. I was thinking about what you said about blocks and shields not being able to stop all the spell effects," Harry said slowly.

"I see," she said with a knowing look in her eye. "That is usually the case. There have been rare cases in history where a witch or wizard was able to entirely stop some spells. These have been written off as mostly myth but some of us have faith it can still be done. Now, who can tell me any curse that cannot be blocked or shielded?"

Hermione's hand darted up and was waiving when Professor Figg said. "I was hoping someone other than Hermione would know the answer but if not, please inform the rest of the class Miss Granger."

Hermione blushed a little and said, "The Cruciatus Curse."

"Very good Miss Granger, now any others?" Only Hermione raised her hand again, so Professor Figg said, "Very well Miss Granger, please tell us all of the ones you are thinking of."

"The Imperius Curse and the Killing Curse can't be blocked. All of the unforgivable curses," Hermione said.

"That is of course correct. I understand the fake Professor Moody tried teaching you how to overcome the effects of the Imperius Curse with some limited success." Harry felt some of the class looking at him even though Professor Figg didn't. He had been the only one who could throw off that curse. "What are the defenses for the other two curses?"

For once, Hermione's hand didn't shoot up. "Can anyone think of a defense?"

Harry raised his hand. "Yes Mr. Potter," she said sounding surprised he would be answering a question.

Harry continued "Don't get into the situation where it could happen to you. As the fake Professor Moody kept saying 'Constant Vigilance'". Some of the other students chuckled at this.

"That is the best defense, but I'm surprised you thought of it. From what I hear, you are usually going headlong into situations where this could come up." Most of the class chuckled at this. "Now, let's partner up and work on the shield charm. Please stick to using the leg-lock curse so we don't have stray curses flying around the room.

Harry decided to partner with Neville since Ron and Hermione were sitting next to each other. Neville had gotten a very white look on his face while they were discussing the Cruciatus Curse. Harry knew Neville's parents were in a mental hospital from having this curse placed on them. They wouldn't give in to the demands and their minds finally gave out instead of giving in. Neville wasn't able to stop any part of the curse while Harry was able to fully stop the curse but acted like some of it got by. He didn't want to explain to anyone how he could stop curses completely.

While they were walking to the next class Harry asked them, "How did you guys do on the blocking? Were you able to stop much?"

"I think its rubbish," Ron said. "I couldn't tell any difference."

"Maybe we just don't have enough practice," Hermione said, sounding unhappy. "I wasn't able to feel any difference either. Was it the same for you?"

"I didn't feel anything, so either Neville wasn't doing the spells correctly or I was able to block all of them," Harry said.

"Good bet it was Neville not knowing the spells," Ron added.

Hermione was looking at Harry strangely and said, "Let's try it now. I'll be able to perform the spell properly." She pulled out her wand and started the spell. Harry quickly performed the shield spell and didn't feel anything from Hermione's spell and was able to walk around.

"Harry, you CAN completely block the spell! Professor Figg said it was extremely rare to be able to do it."

"I was pretty sure I could do it since this summer I was blocking more powerful spells than a leg-lock curse, but when she brought it up I began to wonder." Harry added, "I wonder why she said that since she knew I could block all of a spell? And why did she bring up the defense against the unforgivable curses either? The only one I may have problems with is the Killing Curse."

"What about the Cruciatius Curse? That can't be blocked," Hermione asked quickly.

Without thinking Harry answered, "Oh, I can throw that one off as well. I mean I had it used on me about a hundred times this summer. I'd hope I could deal with it after that."

Ron and Hermione looked at each other. "You didn't tell us that!" Ron yelled. "How did something like that just slip your mind?"

This is the problem with keeping secrets from your friends, Harry thought. "Um--I thought I had told you. But really, it's not something you just to bring up. Hey guys I spent my summer getting the most painful curse ever put on me," Harry said slightly annoyed and started walking on to class.

After supper, Harry headed down to Hagrid's to spend more time in the forest. Harry was not looking forward to it. He had seen enough of the forest and didn't see any value in spending more time in there. It was nice to talk to Hagrid but he would rather be up in the common room with his friends. As he walked up to the hut, Fang came running out and greeted him with sloppy licks to the face. "Hi Fang, c'mon get down."

"Ready to go Harry? We'll make this a quick one if you don't mind. I've got some things to take care of tonight."

This was good news to Harry. "That's fine with me Hagrid. I could spend some time studying." They headed off with Harry leading the way. Harry really had the feeling they were being watched again but never could see anything around. Hagrid didn't seem bothered by anything and was just talking about how impressed he was with the job Grubbly-Plank was doing.

They rounded a sharp bend in the path and there was a hooded figure standing there.

"Well, what would a student and the games keeper be doing alone in the forest so late?" The figure said, and Harry was able to glimpse under the hood.

"Hagrid! It's a vampire!" Harry yelled while jumping in front of Hagrid. "Run, I'll take care of her." Harry had his wand pulled out and pointed at the vampire.

"Harry, No!" Hagrid started saying before the vampire spoke up.

"You! You'll take care of me?" The vampire said sarcastically. "Don't they teach you anything in that school boy? Your magic is nearly useless on me. What could you possibly do to take care of me?" she said with such arrogance.

Harry just glared at her for a minute before Hagrid spoke up again, "Harry, she is helping protect the school. This is R.J."

Harry looked confused but didn't take his eyes off of the vampire and kept his wand pointing at her.

"What do you think you were really going to do to me boy?" R.J. was still taunting him.

"Look behind you," Harry said flatly.

R.J. turned around and saw the section of a tree branch with a very sharp point hovering right behind her back, ready to run her through if Harry had chosen to. She turned back around with a totally different look on her face and said calmly, "I see they do teach you well. I'm impressed. Why didn't you go ahead and use that stake on me? Most wizards wouldn't hesitate to kill a vampire, especially being confronted by one in the dark forest." The vampire pulled back her hood and Harry was struck by how attractive she was.

Harry released the spell on the branch and it fell with a thud. "You hadn't done anything to try and hurt us yet," he said, still a little unsure about trusting her.

"R.J, this is Harry. Not exactly the best way for you to meet but all's well now," Hagrid said. "Harry, R.J. has been here since before the term started. Professor Dumbledore thought extra security was in order this year and she agreed help us out. Never met a vampire before have you?"

"No, I haven't." Harry said extending his hand and stepping forward. R.J. was strikingly beautiful. "Sorry about that stick through the heart thing, I didn't know you were friendly."

She took his hand and Harry felt how cold it was but he held it firmly. "It was my fault for startling you two. I knew Hagrid wouldn't be alarmed but I didn't expect a student would be able to cause me any worry. I learned a valuable lesson today. Thanks again for not going through with it," she said smiling. Harry was in awe with how beautiful she was. There wasn't any color in her face but still she was hauntingly attractive.

"Have you been the one following us?" Harry asked.

She seemed impressed again and said, "Yes. I'm supposed to be protecting the school and students. Having one wandering around the forest seemed like a risk to me, but I dare say you could probably handle yourself."

"R.J. is living near Hogsmeade now Harry. Some of the professors aren't too pleased by her helping with security but remember that some of them didn't want a werewolf teaching either," Hagrid said chuckling. "What say we call it an early night Harry, I've got a few things to do?"

"Why don't I show Harry around a bit Hagrid? That way you can get going and if Harry doesn't mind, I'd like to give him my perspective on the forest."

"I reckon that would be ok. Ok with you Harry?"

This sounded like a great idea to Harry; he had never been around a vampire before. "That sounds great," he said sounding more excited than he intended.

"All right then, don't be out too late or McGonagall will have my hide," Hagrid said while walking back.

"Well Harry, is there anything you want to see in the forest?"

Harry made sure Hagrid was out of earshot and said, "Not really. Tell the truth, I was getting kind of bored already. I've seen the caves and can find my way to Hogsmeade and know where Aragog's area is. I was ready to see if I could get out of coming down each night."

"I know what you mean. There are many things in the forest, both good and bad but you're not going to just find them by walking around. Most don't want to be found. So, what are your impressions of vampires?"

"Umm... we haven't studied them much but I always thought they were rather ruthless and not nice at all." But he quickly added, "But you don't seem that way."

R.J. smiled a bit. "Your original thoughts are most often right. There are a few who have decided to attempt to be a part of society but not many. Why aren't you afraid of me Harry?"

Harry thought for a moment and said, "Well, Hagrid is half-giant and everyone says how mean giants are but he wouldn't hurt anything. My godfather is an escaped prisoner from Azkaban and most wizards would try to kill him on sight, and yet all my friends really like him. My godfather's best friend who is also good friend of mine now is a werewolf and most people are really afraid of them. And, Aragog tried to eat Ron and me once but now he offered to protect me. So, I guess you have to judge each individual, not the group. Except maybe for dementors, I can't imagine them having any good in them at all."

"That's a good attitude to have Harry; most wizards don't feel that way. They see everything as the 'good' side and the 'dark' side. It's not always so clear-cut. Your attitude is also somewhat dangerous. You can't just trust everybody you meet though."

Harry looked at her for a minute and said, "Can I ask you something if you don't mind? How long have you been a vampire?"

"You should know better than to ask a girl her age Harry?" she said with a smile. "But I don't play those kinds of games so it doesn't bother me. I've been a vampire for about 150 years. I was 19 years old when it happened. I was stupid and trusted someone when I shouldn't have. I can't say I've always been on the good side either. In the beginning I was like most vampires and wasn't nice at all."

"Vampires aren't magical, are they?" She shook her head no. "Then how do you help with security against Death Eaters?"

"You don't need magic to deal with evil Harry. Vampires aren't magical, but also exist in the Muggle world. We've adapted to using their weapons." She pulled out a long sword from a sheath on her back. "Almost any creature can be killed by beheading. So, not only would a stake through my heart kill me, but taking my head would do it as well. Same for werewolves and wizards."

This made Harry flinch. He couldn't picture R.J. using a sword like that on something. She then added, "I bet you don't learn any other self defense except for magic do you?"

"Um... no. But I did some Auror training this summer and that's where I got the idea to make other objects into weapons. That's how I got the branch idea."

"What were you doing getting Auror training? That's not normal procedure for students now is it?"

"I don't really know why they let me. I think they are probably trying to help me protect myself for the next time Voldemort or the Death Eaters attack me. Most people don't want to even think about that happening, but some know it's going to happen and are helping me be as ready as I can."

"You actually said his name. You're something, you know that?" R.J. said looking at Harry strangely. "Most people would be playing it safe and probably hiding if they'd been attacked as many times as you have. And yet you're here in the forest putting yourself in danger."

"Voldemort will find a way to get to me, he did last year. I was being as safe as I could and many people were watching out for me and yet he got to me and used my blood to come back to full strength. They killed another student right in front of me and I was just lucky to get out alive. I want to learn as much as I can before the next time. I'm not going to turn and run when it happens again," Harry said with confidence.

"I admire your attitude. It may not be the most intelligent one, but since I've been around and seen many terrible things, I can understand your feelings. It's better to live your life on your terms even if it places you in unpleasant situations. How would you feel about learning a little Muggle self-defense? I could get Hagrid to let me work with you for a bit. That may be more interesting than trudging around the forest."

"Really, you'd be willing to do that? That would be great." Harry got serious for a moment and asked, "Can I ask you about how you feed now? You can't be living in Hogsmeade if you went around killing people."

"There are other options Harry. Some animals will provide the nutrition I need. Though they don't have the same flavor." Harry flinched again at this. "Then there are some fairly recent

potions that help out. I would rather live with certain limits than to go back to being the kind of person I was right after I became a vampire. I was resentful that so much had been taken away from me and that I would never have a normal life. I nearly killed myself a couple times before deciding on trying to live as part of the society."

"I have some of those feelings, but for different reasons," Harry responded. "I don't feel I can live a normal life. I don't feel like I can have a girlfriend and put someone else at that great a risk of attack. I hate the fact that the people who care about me are targets of Death Eaters and Voldemort. Sometimes I just want to push them all away and deal with it on my own. Until he is stopped, I can never have a normal life."

"Maybe that's why it's so easy for you to be close to werewolves, giants and now a vampire. We don't have normal lives either. Let's head back to the school, it's getting kind of late."

She was right, the time had flown by. When they got to the edge of the forest she said, "I'll plan on meeting you here tomorrow. We can try some self-defense training and maybe talk some more."

"Bye R.J. It's been really nice talking to you. See you tomorrow," Harry said and ran back to the castle. He hadn't been this happy in a while. R.J. was great; he just felt that he could tell her anything.

Harry was obviously happy the next day. Both Ron and Hermione noticed right away. "What's with you Harry, you seem really happy today. Haven't seen you like this unless you just caught the snitch," Ron asked.

"Anything you want to share with us Harry?" Hermione asked, suspiciously.

Harry wasn't ready to say 'Oh, I met a beautiful vampire in the forest last night and I'm really excited about seeing her again', so he just said, "Just woke up in a good mood, no harm in that. C'mon let's get to breakfast". He could tell they didn't completely buy that excuse but they let it slide.

Classes were a blur to Harry today. During a break, he said to them, "I need to go look something up in the Library. I'll see you in class".

"What! Harry, that's Hermione's line. What do you need to do in the library?" Ron said.

"Nothing important, I'll catch up to you later. Bye." He hurried down the corridor before they could ask any more questions. He bypassed the library and went to see Madame Pomfrey.

"Something is up with him," Hermione said.

"At least it seems to be something making him happy this time," Ron added

After classes they were studying together when Harry said, "Ok, I don't want to keep things from you so I'll tell you why I was happy today. Last night I met a vampire in the forest."

"A vampire! And you're happy about that. Have you gone totally mental?" Ron exclaimed.

"Harry, vampires are dangerous, what happened?" Hermione asked.

"This vampire isn't dangerous; she's helping to guard the school. She's helping with extra security."

"She? You met a female vampire and that's what made you so happy. Now I'm starting to understand," Ron joked.

"Ron! Harry wouldn't think like that about a dangerous creature. What did she do when you met her? Did Hagrid keep her away from you?"

"She shook my hand when we met. And then Hagrid left us alone," Harry said.

"So now you're alone in the woods with a female vampire. Oh, this keeps getting better," Ron snickered.

"What were you thinking? You're not going to be around her again are you?" Hermione yelled.

"She's going to teach me some Muggle self-defense since vampires aren't magical," Harry said.

"I don't like this at all," Hermione said strictly. "At least Hagrid will be around and he wouldn't let anything happen to you."

"Well... Um... Hagrid has work to do so he won't be around," Harry fumbled.

"Mental, totally mental," Ron added.

After supper Harry got up to go to the hut when Hermione grabbed his arm and said, "I really don't think this is a good idea. You shouldn't trust her you know."

"Don't worry Hermione, I'll be fine. See you tomorrow," Harry said and ran out.

Chapter 10

Harry walked past Hagrid's hut towards the entrance to the forest. It was already dark out and he found R.J. just a little bit down the trail.

"Hi R.J.," Harry said.

"Hello Harry. I wondered if you would really come by yourself or not."

"Why wouldn't I? I'm ready for some training."

"It still surprises me that you would be friendly to a vampire, that's all. Oh, I brought you this so we could train." She handed him a carved wooden sword. The handle detail was amazing and it looked very old. "It's so you can get the feel of a sword without hurting yourself, or me."

"This is beautiful. You'll be using one too won't you? Can I ask you a favor?"

"Yes, I'll be using a wooden sword also, unless you think you're good enough already for me to use my real one. And yes, you can ask a favor."

"I told my friends Ron and Hermione about meeting you. Hermione, um... didn't think it was a good idea and seemed worried about me. Ron just thought I was mental. Would you mind meeting them tomorrow night?"

"I'm surprised they didn't tie you up to keep you from coming down. In general I'd say they had the right attitudes. I wouldn't suggest you go meeting vampires either. I'll meet them if you want, but you know I can only be out after dark and you're the only one with the detention. How will they get down here after curfew?"

"Oh, that's no problem, we sneak out to see Hagrid all the time. They can come down to meet you tomorrow and then sneak back into the castle after a few minutes."

"Let's get started on some basic training." She showed him how to hold the sword and some basic blocking movements, all going very slow. It was very precise movements; much different than the way Harry practiced anything.

They talked and practiced for quite some time and then Harry asked, "What would you really do if I tried attacking you with the sword? I mean in full speed."

"Good question. Try to attack me. Don't hold back, even if you hit me it wouldn't be too bad. Whenever you're ready."

Harry didn't want to hurt her but knew she was more than capable so he quickly tried to swing the sword at her body. Before he knew it, she brought her sword down on his, twisted it and knocked it out of his hands. Then in an instant her sword was resting against his neck. All of this in the blink of an eye. His eyes were wide open and all he could say was, "WOW! That was amazing. I can't believe how fast you moved."

"Some of that is skill, but remember vampires can move quicker than normal people. But I have been doing this for over a hundred years remember. I better let you get back to the castle."

Harry picked up the sword and handed it back to her. "Ok, I'll see you tomorrow and thanks this has been great." He ran back up to the school and went to bed.

When they were all heading down to breakfast, Hermione said, "I see you're in a good mood again this morning."

"Yeah, we trained with swords! She's amazing, knocked my sword out of my hands and had hers against my neck in a flash."

"She had a sword against your neck and you're happy about that!?" Ron gasped.

"They were wood swords so I wouldn't get hurt. Oh yeah, how would you two like to meet her tonight?"

"All right! I've never met a vampire before so since you know one that won't kill me this is my best chance," Ron said excitedly.

"Ron, that's after curfew. We can't leave the castle. Since you're spending time with her, I would really like to meet her though," Hermione said sadly

"C'mon Hermione. You'd just be doing it to make sure that I'm being safe, so really you would be doing it for me. You two can use my cloak. You won't get caught. Think how many times we've sneaked down to Hagrid's?" Harry pleaded with his friend.

"That was before I was a prefect. I guess since it is for a really good reason I wouldn't get in too much trouble. Ok, we'll walk down with you but we won't stay long."

"Great, thanks Hermione. I know you'll like her," Harry said.

During one of the lunch breaks they saw a group of people around one of the notice boards. "What's going on?" Ron asked.

"They're having a costume ball on Halloween. Everyone has to dress up?" Dean answered.

"Oh great, another ball," Ron sighed.

"Oooh, this would be fun. Everyone will be dressed up in costumes," Hermione said expectantly.

Harry hated these things. He felt scared to ask anyone out and always put it off until it was too late. This ruined his whole day. They went on to class and most students were excited about the ball and talking about what they were going to dress up as and whom they were going to take. Harry and Ron were at a table together when Harry whispered, "Ron, you better ask Hermione early this time. Remember last year."

"But what if she laughs at me Harry? I don't even know what I would dress up as."

"You know that she's going to go to this thing with or without. Wouldn't you rather it was you she was with?"

"Ok, I'll try to do it tonight. I'd rather have double-potions than to do this though. What about you, who are you going to ask? Think Cho would want to go with you?"

Harry hadn't given it much thought really. He thought about Ginny, but she had seemed to be avoiding him lately. He didn't want to make things weird between them if she didn't feel that way about him. He could always break another rule and get detention so he didn't have to go.

They spent the rest of their free time talking about vampires mainly. Ron kept talking about them drinking blood. Harry couldn't see R.J. like this at all even though he knew that Ron and Hermione were right about most vampires.

Hermione had taken Harry's cloak down to supper and when they were in a quiet corner of the hall with no one around, Ron and Hermione got under the cloak and followed Harry out.

"Now don't take the cloak off until we get to her. I don't want anyone seeing you and coming down to investigate," Harry said.

They walked past Hagrid's hut when Ron said, "You don't think Aragog wants to meet us also do you?"

R.J. was standing right inside the path and said, "Did you friends decide it was too much of a risk to meet a vampire?" She sounded disappointed.

"Of course not, they're right here," Harry said while Hermione removed the cloak.

"Oh, you didn't tell me you had an invisibility cloak. You are full of surprises. I'm R.J. it's nice to meet you both, Harry has told me so much about you."

"H.h.hi. Harry's told us about you to," Ron put out his hand to shake hers and then kind of pulled it back when she grabbed it. "Your hand is cold!"

"Well, I am a vampire Ron, what did you expect. I originally asked Harry what they taught you in school about vampires. I guess my original thoughts were right," R.J. joked "Any you must be Hermione. Harry says you are the smartest witch he's ever known. It's a pleasure to meet you," she said extending her hand.

Hermione stepped forward confidently and shook her hand. "He told us quite a bit about you as well. He left out the fact that you're so young and pretty though," she said giving Harry a dirty look.

"Thanks for the compliment, but I am over 150 years old. Harry has told me about some of your adventures the past few years. It's a good thing you three are such good friends, it sounds like you work well together."

"So, you're were teaching him some sword fighting. Can I see the swords you were using?" Hermione asked coldly.

"Sure thing," R.J. said. Instead of grabbing the wooden sword, she pulled her real one from the sheath on her back. "Here's one of them."

Ron jumped back but Hermione held her ground.

"She's kidding Hermione. C'mon R.J. show her the wood ones," Harry added quickly.

"I'm sure Hermione knew I wasn't serious. She's smart enough to know realize that if I wanted to hurt you it would have happened already. She probably knows that I'm in your debt anyway since you spared my life when we met." R.J. picked up one of the wood ones and showed it to Hermione.

"I don't know what you're talking about. How did Harry spare your life?" Hermione asked honestly.

"Didn't Harry tell you about how we met?" R.J. asked.

"Obviously not the whole story. He's been keeping quite a few things from us this year," Hermione said with annoyance in her voice.

"He and Hagrid came across me the other night and Harry here yells that I'm a vampire and for Hagrid to keep back. He said that he could handle me. I was impressed that a schoolboy was telling a half-giant to get back but I also thought he was being arrogant since I didn't think a school-aged wizard could do anything to harm me but Harry had the situation under control. He had summoned a sharp stick and it was hovering right behind me. If I had done anything threatening, he could have run the stick right through my heart. I was really amazed that he didn't just go ahead and do it and that he was willing to be friendly to me. That's very rare as I'm sure you know Hermione."

Hermione and Ron were both starting at Harry shaking their heads. "You didn't think that story would interest us?" Hermione said looking annoyed at Harry. "We should get back to the castle Ron. Since I'm a prefect if I get caught I'll get into big trouble. It was nice to meet you R.J.; you know that we just worry about Harry," Hermione added.

"Of course, I wouldn't expect anything less of his friends. Bye."

"Bye R.J.," Ron added while disappearing under the cloak.

"You have very good friends Harry. You shouldn't keep things from them. They've chosen to be your friend and deserve to know things," R.J. said to him.

"I know. It just gets old having these weird things always happening to me. I'd rather be talking to them about getting perfect scores in school or something normal. Are you ready for some training?"

"Yes, I'm ready." They spent the remaining time talking and working with the wooden sword. This wasn't something Harry was a natural at and it didn't come easy. He really wanted to impress R.J. but felt he was barely doing anything right.

"R.J. if you don't have anything to do on Halloween, would you be interested in going to a costume ball at the school with me? If you don't want to, I understand and still want to come down at night, it's just nice talking to you."

R.J. looked at him for a minute and said, "How do you think the other students would take a vampire coming to their ball? I'm not sure their parents would like that idea."

"I've got that figured out. We could both be vampires! I asked Madame Pomfrey if there was any way to give me the same complexion that you have and she said there is a potion I could take that would last about twelve hours. Then only the teachers who know you, Ron and Hermione would know. They wouldn't say anything."

"You seem to have put some thought into this. I'd like to come with you, but I should ask Professor Dumbledore if he approves; but I expect that he will. I haven't been around a large group of people in some time. It should be fun."

Harry was as happy as he could remember while going back to the castle. It felt so nice talking to R.J. She didn't play games or hide her thoughts so Harry wasn't confused about what she was really thinking.

Things fell into a routine of classes, spell practice and then self-defense training for the rest of the week. Saturday they had Quidditch practice. Ron got everyone up for practice on time. He had a couple of ideas for new offensive plays that he mentioned. Everyone seemed impressed with the thought he had put into the plays. It was one of their best practices ever. Ginny was an amazing chaser and Ron was nearly as good as Oliver wood had been. Everyone was very excited about their first match against Hufflepuff who hadn't changed their lineup much.

After practice Hermione came over and joined Ron, Ginny and Harry. "You guys played really well. Maybe we'll get the cup again this year," she said.

"Yeah, Ron didn't let anything get by and Ginny is the best chaser I've ever seen," Harry said excitedly.

Ginny blushed obviously and said, "I thought the whole team played great and you caught the snitch as quick as ever. I'm really excited about playing."

"We should have the cup locked up if we don't have any injuries," Ron added

While they were heading back to the castle they saw Cho Chang walking towards them. "Harry, can I talk to you for a minute?" she asked.

"I haven't seen you around much so far this year," she said

"Oh, well I've kind of had detention most of the time. I stayed out a bit too late."

"Out in the forest from what I've heard. Are you going to the Halloween ball?" she asked.

"Yeah, I'm going to go, what about you?"

"I was wondering if you'd like to go with me, it would be nice to spend more time with you," she said quite confidently.

"I'm sorry Cho but I'm already going with someone else." He noticed her looking sad and added. "Our timing has just been off for these things. Thanks for asking though."

"I thought I would be early enough but I guess not. Maybe next time things will work out for us. Who are you taking?"

"Oh, I don't think you know her," Harry said while they walked back to the group.

When they caught up to Ron, Hermione and Ginny, Cho headed back to her group not looking upset with Harry.

"So, what was that about?" Ron asked.

"She asked me to the ball," Harry said.

"So, you're going to go with Cho then?" Ginny said flatly.

"I told her no. She's not the person I want to go with. She seemed to understand," Harry said. Ginny seemed surprised by this answer.

"You turned down Cho Chang! You are totally mental, you know that? You'll end up with Parvati again," Ron joked

"And, have *you* taken care of asking someone Ron?" Harry said loudly.

"Why yes he has. He asked me the other night when we were under the cloak walking back to the castle," Hermione said proudly.

"What were you two using Harry's cloak for?" Ginny asked sounding surprised.

"We... uh... we... were..." Ron stammered.

"We visited Harry during his detention," Hermione said honestly. Ginny looked like she didn't quite believe her though.

"I'm glad you asked her Ron. I wasn't going to ask Padma for you this year," Harry joked.

"I know, I know. I can't believe I got up the nerve to ask. She was nice though and didn't make me suffer too long."

"After the Quidditch match next weekend do you all want to go to Hogsmeade?" Ron asked.

"Yeah, we haven't been there as a group this year," Harry added. "I hope we win or it won't be a good trip. Want to come with Ginny?"

She looked excited and said, "Yeah, that would be great."

During a break in his workout with R.J. Harry said, "I wish you could come and watch the Quidditch match, Gryffindor has a really good team this year. I wonder if they could play a match at night?"

"I tell you what Harry. If your team is playing for the final cup, I'll come and watch you play. There are a couple precautions I can take that will make it tolerable for me to be out in the daylight for a short time."

"Really? That would be great. Ok, that's even more reason to win the cup. I've been getting some help on my costume for the ball. I probably won't pass for a real vampire, but it should be ok."

"I've sent for some special clothes I have had for a long time. Vampires don't wear things like that now, but it does fit most Muggle's view of what we look like."

"Where is your real home R.J? I mean when you're not doing security for the school."

"In southwest England Harry. Vampires can't travel by floo powder so it takes a full day to get there. I don't go back very often."

"I think of Hogwarts as more my real home than where I go during the summer. I live with Muggles who had me locked in a cupboard under the stairs until I was twelve. I wish that I never had to go back there. If they ever catch Wormtail, Sirius can be found innocent and then I could live with him. You know I asked Remus and Sirius not to kill Wormtail a couple of years ago and then he escaped. If only I had let them kill him, he wouldn't have helped Voldemort catch me and use my blood to regain his form and Sirius wouldn't be on the run. Professor Dumbledore thinks I made the right choice but I'm not sure."

"I can't say that I would have made the same choice in your place Harry. But if there's one thing I believe in it's that Dumbledore knows a great deal more than he lets on. If he thinks you made the right choice, I would believe him. You should head back up to school and get your rest for tomorrow's match."

Ron was very nervous all morning. He didn't eat anything and for Ron, this was very unusual. "Ok, now do you all remember the plays? We should be able to take them."

"Ron, enough already, we know what to do," Ginny yelled.

"Yeah you git, it's not like this is the first match for most of us. It's you two rookies that we're worried about," George said laughing.

"You two better not choke out there," Fred added.

They entered the pitch and Harry felt very comfortable. Whenever he was on his broom, he felt relaxed and free. Ron looked nervous but Ginny didn't show it if she was. Everyone was in position and Madame Hooch let out the snitch and threw the quaffle into the air to start the match.

Harry flew high at one end of the field looking for the snitch. He had a good vantage point to see how the rest of the team was playing. They were really very good. Fred and George were doing an outstanding job of keeping the bludgers away from the team and Ginny scored twice very quickly. Ron hadn't had to stop any shots yet. Harry thought of something that had happened during dueling practice when he was blinded. He had been able to smell and hear things so much better than he ever had before. He wondered if he really concentrated on seeing like he could in his griffin form if it would help. He concentrated really hard on how his sight was when he was a griffin and it started happening. Everything came into much clearer focus and he could see the movements so much better. It was almost like things had slowed down. He made out expressions on the player's faces and could see where their eyes

were looking. He easily saw a bludger head toward him and had plenty of time to get out of the way.

Finally he saw the snitch at the far end of the field, behind the goal near the ground. He could have never seen it normally. He took off in that direction but stayed high in the air knowing the Hufflepuff seeker would try to match him. He was sure no one else had seen the snitch so he stayed high up until he got to the other side of the goal post and then dove straight toward the ground, picking up speed. The other seeker pulled out without getting close to the ground but Harry continued on. He could hear the gasps from the crowd but he knew what to do. He pulled out of the dive with his toes scraping the ground and was able to grab the snitch before it moved much at all. Gryffindor won!

The roar of the crowd was great. Harry never wanted feelings like this to end. Ron was the first over to him. "How did you see that down there? I was right above it and never noticed it. I can't believe we won my first match. I didn't have to block a single shot!"

When the rest of the team was around, Harry said, "Ginny, that was great flying. You could have gotten us enough points that catching the snitch wasn't important." Everyone else agreed and she blushed.

After cleaning up, the four of them went into Hogsmeade. While stocking up on candy at Honeydukes, Harry added a couple of the blood-flavored lollipops to his order. "What are you doing with those?" Ginny asked looking horrified.

"Ahh..." Harry fumbled but then Ron stepped in "They're a gift for a friend."

Harry looked at Ron horrified. He hadn't wanted Ginny to know about R.J. yet.

"You boys. Is playing jokes all you think about?" Ginny scolded and walked out.

"It was the truth," Ron added with a smile. "They never expect us to tell the truth."

The group went to the Three Broomsticks and found a table. Ginny wasn't saying much so Harry asked, "Ginny, are your other friends ok with you spending so much time with us?"

Before she could answer Fred and George came over. "Harry. Heard Cho asked you to the ball and you turned her down, said you were taking someone else. So, who is worth turning Cho down for?"

Ron, Hermione and Ginny just stared at Harry. He hadn't told them about inviting R.J. "I'll be taking a friend, that's all. Cho understood."

"Ok, so who's this friend? Hagrid? We won't make fun of you too much you know," Fred said.

"You'll see. I don't want you two to scare her off," Harry responded, hoping they would let it drop. "And who have you decided to take?"

"I'm taking Angelina," Fred said quickly.

"And I'm taking Parvati. I promised I'd show her a better time than you did at last year's ball," George added with a laugh. They both walked away still laughing.

"So Harry, who *is* this friend you're taking?" Hermione asked with a smirk.

"I think it should be a surprise," Harry said finally. Ginny was giving him a very strange look. "We should be getting back to the castle," he added and they got up and left.

Before getting out the door, Hermione pulled him back a little and asked, "Did you ask Ginny to go?"

"What? No, I'm not asking Ginny. She had been acting like she doesn't want to be around me so I didn't ask her," Harry said sounding annoyed.

"Harry, that's just how girls are. She didn't want to hang around all the time so you wouldn't just see her as a friend."

"That didn't stop Ron from asking you. You're around all the time and he asked you. That's the way it should be," Harry responded.

"It took him long enough though. He probably wouldn't have if I hadn't gone to the dance last year with Viktor. And, I imagine you helped push him this year. I think Ginny is going to be upset that you didn't ask her though."

"You know with everything else going on, I really don't feel like dealing with games with my friends. I wish she would just be straight forward and honest," Harry said.

"So, you asked R.J. didn't you?" Hermione asked.

This surprised Harry. "Yeah, how did you know? Don't tell anyone please."

"You just seem to really like her and you bought her the candy. You just like her as a friend, right?"

"Of course just a friend. She's easy to talk to and very smart. She doesn't play games and says whatever she wants. It's nice being around her. Besides, she's over 150 years old; I'm a bit young for her," he joked as they caught up with Ron and Ginny.

Later that day when Harry came down to meet R.J. he gave her the suckers, which she seemed to appreciate. He said, "We spent the afternoon in Hogsmeade and I wanted to get you something."

"I envy you having close friends and being able to do things like that with. I think we'll start on a little hand-to-hand self-defense today."

She showed him some moves aimed at getting someone off balance or making them miss if they attacked. This wasn't as hard as the sword fighting they had been doing so Harry liked it better. He also liked being closer to R.J.

The next few days passed quickly. Since Snape hadn't been singling him out and since Draco had been keeping his distance, most classes were enjoyable. He looked forward to training

with R.J. in the evenings. The only bad thing was the way Ginny was acting towards him. She wouldn't even come close. If she saw him coming down the corridor, she would turn and walk the other way. Hermione must have mentioned that he had already asked someone else.

When Harry got down for his training, he saw that R.J. didn't look like she was ready to get started so he asked, "Is something wrong R.J.? You don't look ready to start."

She looked at him for a minute and said, "I have an idea. Since this is the last official night of your detention, let's go to the Three Broomsticks for a butterbeer. We could still be back at a reasonable time."

Harry had completely forgotten about this being the last night he could come down and work with R.J. This made him quite unhappy. While they were walking through the forest Harry said, "I forgot this was the last night. Maybe I'll be able to sneak down once a week or so. I really like talking with you."

R.J. smiled and said, "I'm not sure sneaking out of the castle is a good idea. Maybe we can figure something else out. I'd miss our talks and training also. It has been really nice being around people."

It took a while to get to the Three Broomsticks and when they walked in most of the other people stopped talking and started at R.J. as she came by. She just confidently walked to a table towards the back and sat down. "See how they act when they see a vampire? And, most of them know I'm here helping to protect the school so they are being extra nice. The crowd that is in here late at night are not the most respectable group to begin with."

Just then Madame Rosmerta came over. "Can I get you anything R.J.? Ah, hello Harry. You do have quite the assortment of friends don't you?"

"Harry will have a butterbeer and I'll have the usual please," R.J. answered. Once Rosmerta left she whispered to Harry, "I think she would rather I didn't come in but she is always polite when I do."

After the drinks were delivered Harry asked, "So you're still coming to the ball tomorrow aren't you?"

"Of course I am. I can't wait to see what kind of vampire you make," she said smiling.

They sat and talked for a while when R.J. realized it was getting very late. "Harry, we need to be getting back. I'm afraid you will be late by the time we walk through the forest." The couple got up and walked out quickly.

Before they entered the path into the forest Harry stopped and said. "I have a quicker way." R.J. turned and looked at him confused. "Only two professors and one other person know about this but I'd like to show you. I hope you're not afraid of heights."

R.J. shook her head, still looking bewildered. Within a second Harry transformed into the griffin. R.J. had taken a couple steps back quite shocked at this but then stepped back toward him and stroked his fur, which felt great to Harry. He spread the wings on his back and tried to indicate she should get on. After a moment of hesitation, R.J. got on his back and held on

tightly with her legs. Harry took a couple of steps and leaped into the air, the powerful wings carrying them easily. He could feel R.J. gripping him tightly, which also felt great. She was saying, "This is amazing." over and over. She was stroking his fur all the way back. He could have flown on like this all night.

Harry decided to land right past Hagrid's hut very close to the forest. He didn't think anyone would be able to see them easily. After landing, R.J. got off of him and he transformed back. R.J. was already asking, "I didn't know you could do that. You're not the same griffin that was in the forest early this year are you?"

"No, that's where I got the idea to be a one though, and I think it helped me become one much quicker than I could normally have. Professor McGonagall was helping me."

"Why haven't you told your friends about this? This is quite an accomplishment from what I hear."

"I don't want them to think there's something else that is weird about me. Also, like you said once the students find out about something, there is no taking it back. I don't want to show them until it is necessary."

"I still think you could show Ron and Hermione, but it's your choice. I'll meet you at Hagrid's hut before the ball tomorrow. He has agreed to let us meet up there. Goodnight, and thanks for the ride, it was truly amazing."

"Anytime. It's better than flying alone!" Harry said while heading back to the castle.

Chapter 11

The next day they were watching the Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff Quidditch match but talking about the ball. "What do you think Snape will dress up as?" Ron asked.

Harry laughed and hadn't even thought about that. Seeing the teachers in costumes would be worth going by itself.

Ravenclaw beat Hufflepuff after Cho caught the snitch. She saw Harry standing and cheering and waved at him. After the match, Harry was surprised that Ginny was going to Hogsmeade with them. This would be the first time she was around him in a week. They were beginning to walk away when Cho came over. "Harry. Thanks for coming to the match."

"That was a great catch Cho, I'm glad we weren't playing you today. You want to come to Hogsmeade with us? The girls have a couple last minute things to get before the ball and then we're going to the Three Broomsticks for a few minutes. We'll be back early enough to get ready for the ball."

"I'd love to, thanks. My friends had other plans so I would have just stayed here."

Ron and Harry waited outside why the girls shopped for their last minute additions to their costumes. "I still can't believe you turned her down Harry. You are coming tonight aren't you?"

"Of course I'm coming, I told you I asked a friend. You'll approve," Harry responded.

The girls finally came out with their bags and all seemed to be in a good mood, even Ginny. They found a table at the Three Broomsticks and soon Madame Rosmerta came over to take their drinks.

"Now what can I get you all. Harry! Back again so soon? I like seeing you in the daytime instead of the middle of the night. Will it be five butterbeers?"

"Ah, yes, five. Thanks," Harry answered and noticed all the others staring at him.

"What did she mean so soon Harry? When were you here in the night?" Cho asked.

"Well, I was celebrating the end of my detention last night and came in for a minute," Harry answered, not really wanting this to come up.

"Hagrid brought you here at night? He shouldn't have done that," Ginny said angrily.

"I saw Hagrid in the castle last night so he couldn't have been with Harry," Cho added.

"It wasn't Hagrid. He hasn't been doing my detention for almost two weeks."

"Did *she* bring you here?" Hermione asked, sounding like a teacher.

"Yes Hermione, I came with her to celebrate ending detention."

"I have no idea who you are talking about. Who did you come with Harry?" Cho asked.

"The friend I'm bringing to the ball. She's been doing my detention and now it's over. You can meet her tonight if you want."

"I'd like to know what kind of detention you've been doing at night with a woman who is now your friend," Ginny said loudly before storming out.

"I'll go talk to her. Maybe she'll understand when she meets her tonight," Hermione added quickly before running after Ginny.

"You're bringing R.J. to the ball! No way! Does McGonagall know? How did Hermione know?" Ron asked.

"Who's R.J.?" Cho tried asking again.

This was getting too complicated Harry thought. "R.J. is in helping with the extra security for the school. Now that Voldemort is back, Professor Dumbledore thought it might be wise to have additional security. She has been training me in some Muggle self-defense as part of my detention and we became friends. She doesn't really have many friends so I asked her to come to the ball. And yes Ron, McGonagall knows and Hermione figured it out last week."

"That sounds like you Harry. Being friends with someone who doesn't have any. I think it is a very sweet thing you did and I would rather you turn me down for something nice like this instead of just wanting to take another student," Cho said while squeezing Harry's arm. "We should probably head back though. I'm going to try and catch up with Hermione. Thanks for asking me to come."

After she left, Ron said, "I can't believe you're bringing a vampire to the school ball. Everyone is going to freak out."

"No they won't. It's a costume ball and I'm dressing like a vampire also. They won't know she's a real vampire. You'll be nice to her won't you?"

"Of course I'll be nice to her. Still, I think a warm bodied Cho would have been a better choice," Ron added smiling. "I'm going to be a knight. I found an old leather armor suit that McGonagall said I could borrow that fit pretty well. Hermione even approved of it. Sorry that Ginny got so upset. She still has that crush on you I think."

"Hermione said I should have asked Ginny to the ball. Would you have been mad if I had asked her?" Harry asked

"It would have been weird at first but I wouldn't be mad. Don't know how Fred and George would take it though. They'd probably be ok. But, what could ever make you ask Ginny instead of Cho? I mean c'mon!"

"Something is just weird with Cho now. She's pretty and nice but with Cedric and everything, things are just different. Ginny is more like you and Hermione, a good friend that you like being around. I just don't like all the games girls play, trying to get you to like them by not talking to you and avoiding you. I can't figure any of that out," Harry said exasperated.

"That's why you just stay clueless like me," Ron joked while they walked out of Three Broomsticks and headed back to the castle.

Harry headed straight to Madame Pomfrey to get the potion and hoped it didn't taste as bad as polyjuice. "Now this will take effect quickly once you take it. It may not be comfortable at first but I assure you it will be fine within a couple minutes. The effects will last about twelve hours and you should avoid sunlight until it has completely worn off. It won't seriously hurt you but will be uncomfortable. This is a very strange request you know?"

"Thank you Madame Pomfrey It will make my costume seem much more realistic."

Before the Ball started, Harry grabbed his costume and the potion and headed to Hagrid's hut. Hagrid was setting outside and greeted him. "Hello Harry. R.J. has already changed so you can change in my hut. She is waiting out of sight so you won't see her first. Nice thing you're doing by asking her."

Harry went in and changed into the costume. The cloak had a much higher collar and was trimmed in bright red. He wore a white ruffled shirt and black leather pants. Just with the costume, he thought he made a decent vampire. He looked at the potion and decided he had to do it right, so he downed the entire glass in one gulp. It wasn't as bad as he expected. In a moment, he started feeling very cold and started shaking. This was like being back in the lake before the gillyweed took effect. Looking at his hands, he could see them turning very pale. His fingernails finally turned black and he no longer felt cold. Actually he felt pretty normal. He walked over to the mirror and was shocked to see his face. His normally bright green eyes were as black as coal and even his lips were very black. He thought that he looked exactly like a vampire. He walked outside and even Hagrid was surprised by the change.

"Harry! I'd never know you weren't a real vampire. That potion really did the trick." Then he added loudly. "Ok R.J. he's in the costume now."

She came out from behind the hut and Harry was shocked. "Wow!" was all he could say.

"I'll take that as a compliment Harry," R.J. added. She had a black robe trimmed in red just like his but wore skintight dark red leather pants and a matching leather sleeveless top with a very low neckline highlighted by a gold necklace. Her lips were dark red, not black like his. "I could say the same about you. You make a very handsome vampire Harry."

"You look amazing R.J. Are those your own clothes?" Harry asked, still staring.

"Yes, a long time ago we used to get dressed up once in a while. I haven't worn these in many years."

"I told her that the students and teachers will be falling all over themselves when she walks in," Hagrid added.

"Let them fall, I know who my date is," she said taking Harry's arm.

"Bye Hagrid," Harry added.

"You really do look amazing," Harry said one more time walking into the castle.

They were a bit late so most of the students were already in the Great Hall when they walked in. Soon after opening the doors, the loud noise of talking stopped and everyone was staring at them. Then they heard much whispering and a few gasps. "Kind of like the Three Broomsticks," Harry whispered. "There's Ron and Hermione." The couple walked slowly over to where Ron and Hermione were sitting with Ginny and Neville. No one spoke to them on the way over, but at least the noise was coming back into the hall.

Hermione stood up when they approached. She was dressed as a 'fair maiden' that went well with Ron's knight costume. Hermione looked very pretty and he imagined Ron was pleased with himself for asking her now. "Hello R.J. It's nice to see you again. That's a very -um- impressive costume."

"Hello Hermione. Thanks. I really like yours as well. The medieval time period is one of my favorite, great clothes. Ron, you make a striking knight," R.J. said.

"Harry, how did you get your skin color changed?" Hermione asked while giving him a hug. She jumped back a bit. "You're cold! And your eyes aren't green. How did you that?"

"You're cold? Let me see," Ron said while grasping Harry's hand. "Wicked!"

"Madame Pomfrey gave me a potion. It'll wear off by tomorrow."

"Harry really put some thought into this," R.J. added smiling.

"Ginny, Neville, this is my friend R.J.," Harry said walking up to Ginny.

"Nice to meet you R.J.," Ginny said coldly and went back to talking to Neville.

Just then Fred and George came over "Harry, now we see why you turned Cho down. How did you end up with such a beautiful date?" Fred said extending his hand to R.J.

She smiled and took his hand but he immediately pulled it back. "What. It's cold, you're a real vampire!" George exclaimed

Harry stepped forward and said. "George, feel my hand, it's cold too." Harry held out his hand and George took it and felt that it was cold also.

"Whew, you had me worried for a minute. That's an amazing costume," George said smiling again.

"Yeah, hands down you two are the best we've seen. Even though Hermione here looks pretty impressive, our little brother isn't up to her standards," Fred joked.

"Ah, you are Ron's brothers. Harry told me all about you two. Hope I didn't give you too much of a fright with the cold hands and all?" R.J. added smiling.

Harry pulled R.J. closer and whispered, "R.J. I don't mind anyone else knowing you're a real vampire if you want. It doesn't bother me at all. I just jumped in because I didn't know if you wanted others to know."

"Let's keep it to ourselves for tonight. No need to worry anyone," She whispered back. "Do you know how to dance?"

"I have a couple of times, but don't really know what I'm doing."

She pulled him out on the dance floor and took the lead. This wasn't like dancing before where he really didn't want to do it. He liked being close to R.J. and she was making this easy for him. They danced for a few songs, completely oblivious to everyone staring at them, they were enjoying dancing and talking. After a while they were walking back to the table when Professors Dumbledore and McGonagall stopped them. Professor McGonagall had on a simple tiger mask and an orange robe. Professor Dumbledore had a normal looking robe and a bright phoenix mask. "Enjoying yourselves? It's good to see you taking time off R.J.," Dumbledore said.

"Thank you. This has been highly enjoyable so far," R.J. answered.

Professor McGonagall asked, "I happened to be looking out the window last night and could have sworn I saw a griffin flying over the forest with someone on it's back. You haven't been showing off for everyone in school have you?"

Harry felt his stomach drop. "No professor, only one student knows but I really wanted to show R.J. I thought it would be dark enough that no one would see."

Dumbledore stepped in. "Ah, no harm done Minerva. Harry, would you mind if I had a dance with R.J. I'll get her back to you right after." R.J. started dancing with Dumbledore who seemed to want an excuse to talk to her. Harry went on back to the table and sat down.

"You actually seemed to be enjoying dancing," Hermione said with a knowing look in her eye. Just then Ginny said something to Neville and they got up and went to get more punch. Other students came over and asked Harry questions about R.J. and how he was able to look so much like a vampire. Ron and Hermione seemed to be enjoying themselves instead of fighting. Harry felt a tap on his shoulder and found Cho standing there. "Care for a dance Harry?" He thought it would be fine while R.J. was dancing with Dumbledore so he took her up on it.

"That's your friend, huh? She's very pretty and both of your costumes are amazing. I came with Bill Thomas, a seventh year. He's nice and we've become decent friends. Everyone is talking about voting for you two for the best costume. I don't think anyone else is close." The dance was nice, they talked a lot and while walking back they ran into R.J. and Professor Dumbledore.

"Thank you for letting an old man enjoy a few dances Harry. Enjoy the rest of the ball. And Harry; I think you should need one more night of detention right after the ball. But no flying," Dumbledore winked and then left.

That meant he could stay up talking to R.J. for an extra few hours. Harry was so excited that he almost forgot about Cho. "R.J. this is Cho Chang, she's an amazing seeker for Ravenclaw. Cho, this is my friend R.J.," Harry said.

"Pleased to meet you Cho. That's a lovely costume you have," R.J. said warmly.

"Nice to meet you R.J. I hope you don't mind me taking Harry for a dance; I hadn't gotten to talk to him yet. I should be getting back to my date now though."

"Not at all Cho, it was nice to meet you," R.J. responded and then turned to Harry and said, "She's very pretty Harry, and a seeker as well. I'm lucky you turned her down and brought me." R.J. held his arm as they walked back to the table. They sat and talked for a while longer then heard a bell ring to get everyone's attention.

"Now is the time to announce the best costumes. This was decided by all of you and the teachers voting," Dumbledore announced. He held up a parchment and read. "The overwhelming choice is Harry Potter and Miss R.J." There was loud clapping and then Dumbledore interrupted. "However, as much as it pains me I must disqualify them from competition and in turn award the competition to Jamey McMillin and Kacey Gonphan the two mice costumes. Congratulations all of you."

"That's not fair, you two were the best by far," Ron roared. "Why'd he disqualify you?"

"Probably because I'm not wearing a costume Ron," R.J. said. "Sorry about that Harry."

"I'm not complaining. I've had a great time," Harry said smiling. Just then he felt someone behind him and noticed Professor Snape.

"Potter. R.J. Not content with werewolves and escaped convicts as friends I see. For someone who always does the good thing you sure seem to have questionable friends," Snape said.

"Good to see you again, Severus," R.J. said. "He's just kidding Harry; he's known me for a while."

"Yes, well you can tell your godfather that I approve of this new friend more than the werewolf," the Potions Master turned and left.

"He's never that nice to me. He really doesn't like me at all," Harry said.

"Snape's not so bad really. Sometimes things happen in life and a person's whole outcome is based on how his friends support him. People without real friends have a hard time dealing with things sometimes. Don't let him get to you."

They talked for a while longer then most people were going back to the common room. Harry and R.J. said goodbye to Ron and Hermione and walked out the front, back toward Hagrid's hut. Harry suggested taking a walk by the lake. They walked without talking for a while and then R.J asked, "So, what's the story with you and Cho?"

This startled Harry but he said, "Well, it's kind of weird. I had a crush on her since the first time I saw her. Then I asked her to the Triwizard Tournament ball last year but she had already been asked by Cedric Diggory the other contestant from Hogwarts. Then when we both took the cup and were taken to where Voldemort was, Wormtail killed Cedric. I brought his body back with me. Seeing Cho's face when she was crying so much kind of changed everything. It's just weird any more. I'm surprised she even talks to me."

"She doesn't seem to blame you at all. Do you think anything will change with you two?"

"I would say we might become better friends but probably not more than that. I can't really even think of that knowing Voldemort is going to come after me again. Why are you asking about her? Was the date so bad that you just want to talk about Cho?" Harry answered with annoyance.

"I had a really nice time at the ball Harry. I just thought that you and Cho could make a good couple and if you would rather spend time with her, I would understand."

"I'd rather spend time with you R.J. And now that I don't have fake detention anymore, I won't get to see you as much. I will try and sneak out whenever I can. I'll send Hedwig with a note so we can try to meet. If that's still ok with you."

"I'm glad you want to spend time with me. I'm sure we can meet whenever possible. In fact we may see each other more than you think. Dumbledore has suggested that we could do some self-defense sessions up in the castle in the early evenings. That way I would be up there a couple times each week."

"Really? That would be great. I'm sure that Ron and Hermione would want to come also. I should be getting back to the castle; we should walk back to Hagrid's."

Harry took her hand and they walked along the lake. She stopped before reaching the hut and said, "I really had a good time tonight, Harry. I can't remember when I felt so normal. Thank you" Then she leaned in and kissed him on the lips. Harry wasn't quite sure what to do since this was his first real kiss but it felt natural to just kiss her back. Harry was just looking at her after the kiss when she asked, "Is everything all right? You have a strange look on your face."

"Don't laugh or anything but that was my first real kiss. I didn't really know what to do," Harry hung his head embarrassed.

R.J laughed, which didn't make Harry, feel any better. He was looking horrified when she said, "I'm sorry Harry but it's so amazing that you've fought the most evil wizard of modern time, who has tried to kill you a few times and yet you've never kissed a girl before. You need to get your priorities straight." This made Harry laugh as well. He thought that sounded like something Ron would say. "I think we should try it again since that was your first time even though you did it perfectly." She pressed into him again and gave him a deep, slow kiss. Harry put his arms around her and held her. He was disappointed when it ended and they turned to continue to the hut.

"Don't mention the training yet, I want it to be a surprise. I'll see you in a couple days, send Hedwig if you need anything. Thanks again," she said.

"Ok, see you. This has been the best night ever," Harry responded.

Harry was in such a good mood the next couple days that all his friends kept asking what was up. He was walking with Ron and Hermione after last class when Cho came up to them. "Hi guys. Harry, I wanted to say that I really liked R.J. and thought your costumes were the best. I can't believe you were disqualified, do you know why?"

Harry looked at Hermione who shrugged her shoulders; which Harry took to mean that he should tell Cho about R.J. She would be finding out soon enough anyway. "Cho, I want to tell you something about R.J. You know how convincing she looked as a vampire?" Cho nodded.

"We'll that's because she really is a vampire. We were disqualified because she wasn't wearing a costume."

Cho looked horrified. "You're kidding, right?" Harry shook his head no and so did Ron and Hermione. "She seemed so nice; I thought all vampires were monsters."

"That's what most people think. That's why she doesn't have any real friends. Everything I said was the truth, I just left out the vampire part."

"I should know by now that nothing is ever quite normal with you, huh? I'll just have to get used to it I guess," Cho added with a smile but it still bothered Harry how she said it. Cho split off to catch up with her friends and Harry asked Hermione

"What do you think she meant by that?"

"I would say she really wants to be better friends with you but isn't used to all the extra things that happen to you," Hermione answered.

"You guys seem to handle it fine? Ron's still a friend after almost being eaten by Aragog with me and we all made it out of the trap door the first year. Does it bother you?"

"Not me," Ron added quickly. "Imagine how boring this place would be if we had to hear about you and a couple other students doing all this stuff. I'd rather be there doing it with you."

"Exactly," Hermione said.

The next morning there was a group around the bulletin board. There was a notice: "Non-Magical self defense training"; "Evenings after supper"; "Limited to the first ten fifth year students"; "Sign up here". Harry noticed that the first three names were. H.Potter; H.Granger, R.Weasley.

"Hey, who signed us up for that?" Ron said without thinking.

"Wake up Ron. Who do you know that can teach non-magical self defense?" Hermione said sarcastically.

"R.J.'s going to teach these?" He asked.

"She wanted it to be a surprise, I assumed you two would want to come along. If you don't we can take your name off," Harry said.

"I wouldn't miss this for anything," Hermione quickly said.

Harry saw Cho sign up and she waved at him but continued on with her friends. He didn't know how to feel about this.

After supper they headed to the classroom where the self-defense training was going to be held. All of the other students were already there. There was Cho and one other Ravenclaw, Malfoy, Crabbe, Goyle, two Hufflepuffs and then Ron, Hermione and Harry.

"Which teacher do you think will be trying to teach this?" Malfoy smirked. "I doubt many could do anything non-magical to defend themselves." Crabbe and Goyle laughed.

"Actually, it won't be a teacher Mr. Malfoy," R.J. said while walking in. "I'll be giving these training sessions."

"Why are you still looking like a vampire? Halloween's over," Draco added laughing.

"It's hard not to look like a vampire when you ARE one. That's why we needed to hold this in the evenings. I don't get out much during the day."

Harry heard the students who didn't know already talking and then looking at him. "You're a real vampire?" One of the Hufflepuff girls asked.

"Potter, you brought a vampire to the ball? What, couldn't get a live girl to go out with you?" Draco said

Harry thought about pulling out his wand but before he could do anything Cho spoke up. "For your information Draco, I asked Harry to go to the ball with me but he wanted to take R.J. I thought they made a good couple." Harry just stared at her wide-eyed.

"Ok, let's get back to the reason we're here. Yes, I'm a vampire but I assure you that you will all be perfectly safe from me. I didn't bite anyone at the ball did I?" She said smiling. "I do know quite a bit about self defense without the use of magic and I think you may see it could be useful in certain situations. In the worst cast it will give you all some exercise that waving a wand doesn't do. We'll be practicing mainly hand-to-hand defense but there are many ways to fight without magic. Harry, would you help me demonstrate using swords?"

He walked forward ready for her to hand him the wood sword, but she handed him a real metal sword that looked very sharp. She must have noticed the confusion in his eyes because she whispered. "Try not to take off my head please," and then smiled. He was more worried about her taking off a part of him. "Will the rest of you back up please? I don't want you losing any limbs the first night."

"Don't hold back R.J. See if you can take off his arm," Draco taunted.

"Ready Harry?" He nodded slightly. She brought the sword down fairly slowly in motion they had practiced before so he blocked it easily. The swords hitting still made a loud clang each time. He tried to respond and to attack her but she blocked it easily. After a couple minutes, her strokes weren't as slow as before and Harry was really concentrating hard to block them all. When he started to get really worried she stopped and said, "Not bad Harry. Of course if you met a vampire who really wanted to hurt you with one of these. I doubt any of you could stop it. Try to attack me again Harry. Try really hard."

Harry stepped forward and lunged with his sword and before he knew what had happened she used her sword to twist his from his grip and had swung hers around and stopped it right next to his neck. All the other students gasped and Harry's eyes were wide with amazement. She just winked at him and said, "Don't ever put yourself into a situation where someone you don't trust could do that to you. Muggles may not have magic but they have developed many ways to hurt each other that work just fine on wizards."

The rest of the class was spent learning basic hand-to-hand moves. Harry had worked on all of these already but really liked practicing them again. Everyone was tired by the end of the session. R.J. had really made them work. Even Draco seemed to enjoy this type of training. "I hope you will all come back for the next session as well. I'll leave the swords at home next time."

Harry, Ron and Hermione stayed behind for a few minutes. "That was a great session R.J. We don't get much exercise doing magic all the time so this was a good change," Hermione said.

"I say Quidditch is enough exercise for me but this was fun," Ron added.

"I'm glad you both came. I hope it wasn't just because I signed you up. Now I wonder what will be said when their parents find out there is a vampire in the school?" R.J. said.

"They all seemed to enjoy the session, even Malfoy; so I expect the students will tell their parents how much they liked it," Harry said.

"We'll meet you back in the Common Room Harry, don't be long. I don't want to have to take points from you," Hermione said while smiling and pulling Ron out the door.

"Ron is pretty good at this, he's a quick learner. I was worried about teaching this, not knowing how the students would react to me. I think seeing me at the ball probably helped. I've missed seeing you every night though," R.J. said.

"I missed you too. I was thinking about asking Professor Dumbledore if there was any way I could see you some evenings without sneaking out. He likes you and knows I would be safe. He wouldn't want the other students to find out though or they would want to be out at night. I knew the students would like you if they just gave you a chance."

The next morning while they were eating, mail was delivered and Hermione took one look at her Daily Prophet and said, "Harry, you're not going to like this."

She showed him the front page that read:

What's next for the 'Boy-Who-Lived', Diner with Dementors?

Harry Potter who counts; escaped convicts, werewolves and half-giants as his closest friends obviously isn't content to date normal witches anymore. He has chosen to bring a vampire to the Hogwarts Halloween Ball. He went so far as to take a very dangerous potion that basically turned him into a vampire during the date. "His skin was so pale and cold, and his eyes were pure black. It was kind of scary" one of the students was overheard saying. "She wore such a revealing outfit, it's no wonder Harry was under her vampire spell."

Even though Cho Chang; one of the prettiest girls in the school; asked him to go to the Ball, Harry chose to take a vampire instead. This reporter finds it odd that Ms. Chang would ask Harry to the ball when he was involved in the mysterious death of her boyfriend Cedric Diggory last year at the end of the Triwizard Tournament. Cedric and Harry supposedly tied for the cup but Harry was the only one to come out alive.

How the headmaster could have permitted this to happen once is unthinkable, now this vampire is giving special self-defense instructions to a small group of students. What other creatures will soon have access to the vulnerable students?

Can befriending dementors be far behind?

"I should have seen this coming," Harry said. "She probably won't have anything to do with me again. I should send her an owl tonight." He felt terrible, but then some of the students from the training class who had seen the article came up and told him that they weren't worried and had already told their parents about her. They were still planning on taking her training if she was still going to have it. This made him feel somewhat better.

Ginny read the article after Hermione and just said, "She was a real vampire and you didn't even tell me!" and then stormed out. This was not starting out to be a good day.

Students who weren't in the training started coming up to Harry asking him if he had really brought a vampire to the ball. He got annoyed with answering the same questions over and over. He tried to stay out of common areas where there would be many people. Hermione had told him before potions that Ginny was really upset with him for not telling her that R.J. was a real vampire. "Tell her that if she wasn't trying to avoid me so much maybe I would be able to tell her things again," he said.

"You tell her yourself. I don't know what's come between you two."

"I'm not going to worry about all the games she plays. If she wants to be my friend, she should act like it." Just then Snape walked in and they couldn't talk any more.

They were walking down to supper when Professor Dumbledore came up to them. "Enjoying the new training sessions I hope? We should add it as a regular activity. Harry, would you mind taking a walk with me, there is someone who would like a word with you." Harry looked pleadingly at Ron and Hermione but turned and followed Professor Dumbledore down the corridor.

"I hope you approve of the self-defense training we started. I think it does Miss R.J. good to be around so many smiling faces. You two seem to have hit it off quite nicely," Dumbledore said with his usual twinkle in his eyes.

"I doubt she'll want to come back after the article in the Daily Prophet. She probably won't want to see me again."

"I think you underestimate R.J. Harry. Remember she's been around a long time and I seriously doubt that article will bother her. Why don't you stop by Hagrid's this evening? I'll see if I can get R.J. to stop by as well."

"Really? Thank you sir. I really like spending time with her. She's so easy to talk to; I can tell her things I wouldn't want to tell Ron or Hermione. She really seems to understand."

"I imagine she does Harry. She seems happier than I have ever known her to be since meeting you. She told me about your first meeting and how much it surprised her. She respected your talent and your ability to give everyone the benefit of the doubt. I think you'll continue to find she is a very special person."

Harry thought this would be a good time to see if he could spend time with R.J in the evenings. "Professor, do you think there is any way that I would be able to see R.J. in addition to the training classes? I can't really talk to her in there."

"I'll have to think about that Harry. We can't have you running around the forest anymore. I dare say we should try to figure something out so you don't have to resort to sneaking out of the castle to see her. Ah, here we are. You can go on in, I'll leave you here." He left Harry outside of a classroom in one of the far unused sections of the castle. Harry opened the door and saw Remus Lupin and Sirius talking.

"Sirius, Remus! What are you two doing here?" Harry said running over to give Sirius a hug. "Nothing's wrong is there? Any word on Voldemort?"

"Calm down Harry, nothing's wrong," Sirius said with a big smile. "Can't your godfather and his best friend come to visit?"

"You're looking good Harry. You know I miss teaching here," Remus added.

"So, any word on Voldemort? We haven't heard anything here," Harry asked excitedly.

"No, nothing specific. It's kind of strange; we expected to hear more by now. People in the ministry are saying that's because he's really not back but we know the truth."

"This is purely a social call; we hadn't seen you since your birthday party and thought it had been too long," Sirius said but Harry could tell there was something else.

"I'm not that dense, there's something else isn't there?"

They both laughed and then Remus said, "Your godfather here wants to meet this new girl you took to the ball. The word is she's quite a looker."

Sirius looked kind of embarrassed but said, "I am your godfather and was just curious about who you're seeing. Is that so bad?"

"Would you be so curious if she wasn't a vampire? That's the only reason you're here isn't it?" Harry asked obviously annoyed.

"I'd just like to meet her Harry. I'm not jumping to conclusions or anything. You're probably right that I wouldn't have come if I heard you were seeing some other student, unless it was a Slytherin. And it was an excellent excuse to make the trip."

"Ok, I understand but give her a chance. I mean your best friend is a werewolf and you'd trust him with anything. I just like being around R.J. She smart and I can talk to her about things I can't with Ron or Hermione. I'm trying to see her tonight down at Hagrid's and will ask if she can meet you tomorrow after her session. If she's still talking to me after that article."

Remus got a sly look in his eye and said, "Can you see if she'll wear the outfit she wore to the ball! More was said about the outfit than her being a vampire. I heard that none of the students even knew she was a real vampire since your costume was so good. That was very smart."

"She did look amazing and with the potion I took, my skin was the same color and as cold as hers so once people saw me they didn't suspect her. Only Ron and Hermione had met her before, so they knew. Now that she's taught the first self-defense session and with the article everyone knows. They pretty much all think I'm mental."

"That thought had crossed my mind, but I'll give her a chance," Sirius added. They spent the next hour just talking about other things and really enjoying the time together.

Harry ate quickly and then ran down to Hagrid's hut. He knocked and Hagrid answered the door. "Hello Harry. Dumbledore mentioned you might stop by. Not letting that article get to you are ya?"

"That article doesn't bother me, but I don't want it to upset R.J. They've said worse things about me in there before."

"That's the attitude to have. Who cares what they say. We all know ya and that's all that matters. I was a bit surprised at first when I heard ya was taking R.J., but you both seem to be happy and that's what counts." They continued talking for a while and then there was a knock on the door. Hagrid got up to answer it and said, "Hello R.J., Harry here was hoping you'd come. I've got a couple things to do so I'm going to leave you two alone for a bit."

"Hello Harry," she said while giving him a quick hug, but didn't seem happy. "Dumbledore sent me the article and said you may want to talk about it. I'm really sorry if this caused you any problems, I didn't think about you being famous and what being with me may cause. I shouldn't have..."

"Wait a minute," Harry interrupted, "I don't care about that article for me; I was worried what you would think. I didn't know if you would ever want to see me again."

She instantly cheered up and hugged him again. "I expected you to say that you couldn't be around me anymore. Nothing they can write would bother me; I just don't want to cause you any problems." This cheered Harry up and they laughed about it for a while. Then Harry said, "Most of the students from your training had already told their parents and they all want to keep training with you. Other students just think I'm even more mental than they already did but that doesn't bother me."

"Well, in that case." She leaned forward and gave him a nice long kiss. "I didn't think we'd be doing this again."

Harry remembered Sirius and sat back. "There is one favor I need to ask. My godfather is here and would like to meet you. This embarrasses me but it seems important to him. He wouldn't have risked coming here if it wasn't. Would you mind meeting him and Remus Lupin after the session tomorrow?"

"I don't mind at all Harry," she said quickly. "If I was in his place, I would demand to meet me. You've never had real parents; this is the kind of things they do."

They talked for a few more minutes and kissed a few more times before Harry had to go back to the castle. He had been dreading coming down since he thought it may be the last time he would see R.J, but now he was very happy.

Chapter 12

The next day went by fast and Harry was please to see that all of the students originally signed up for the training still came back. He was even glad that the Slytherin's were there. R.J. walked in looking confident and said. "Glad to see you all are willing to put your life in such peril to get a little more training." And then she smiled. Training went well and they were all tired by the end. Harry had already told Ron and Hermione about going to meet Sirius so they left with the rest of the students. Harry and R.J. walked down the corridors and entered the office where Sirius and Remus were waiting.

Before Harry could say anything, R.J. said, "Sirius Black, do you know what my bounty would be if I brought you in? And you must be Remus Lupin, Harry's werewolf friend. It's a pleasure to meet you."

They both looked at her for a moment and then started laughing. "Nice to meet you as well R.J.," Sirius said.

"You were right Harry, she is beautiful," Remus added.

After talking about nothing important for a couple minutes R.J. asked, "Harry, would you mind taking a little walk with Remus? I imagine that Sirius would like to ask me some questions alone."

"Um...Sure. Be nice Sirius, ok?" Harry said and then he and Remus walked out and down the hall. "So, what do you think?" Harry asked.

"Honestly? If she weren't a vampire, she would seem to be the perfect woman. She's pretty, funny and smart. So even taking off a little for her being a vampire, I'd say as long as you know what you're doing, I won't complain."

"Thanks. The biggest part of her being a vampire that bothers me is that I can't see her during the day. She hasn't seen a Quidditch match and I don't get to spend much time with her," Harry said while they continued walking. They talked about school and other things for a bit and then went back to the office.

"You both seem to be in one piece so it must have gone well," Remus said after walking in.

"I like your godfather Harry; he doesn't beat around the bushes. He is very direct when he wants to know something. And, you have to admire someone who broke out of Azkaban. I'd still like to know how he did that. Well, I'm going to get back to work now. I'll see you soon Harry."

After she left Harry turned to Sirius and asked, "So, what do you think?"

"No real complaints here, except for her being a vampire. But if you are comfortable with that, she seems like a great girl. You're probably safer when she's around than with most wizards. Is it strange with her being so cold?"

"It doesn't seem strange to me. But she's the only girl I've ever kissed so I don't have anything to compare it to. I just know I feel really good when she's around."

"That's really all that's important." They talked for a little while longer before Harry headed up to bed.

The next few weeks went by quickly. They were all busy with school and Quidditch practice. Harry spent some time after each training session talking to R.J. but wished they could be together more often. He hoped to be able to spend more time with her over the holiday break since not many students stayed at the school. Even schoolwork was going well this year.

Harry was sitting in the common room with Hermione and Ginny who was now at least being around Harry again when Ron came in all excited. "Harry. Mum said Dumbledore is going to let you come to our house for the holiday. This'll be great, Bill and Charlie will both be there."

This made him feel very weird. He liked the Weasley family and would normally be excited to spend time at their house but he was really looking forward to spending more time with R.J. during the break. "But I always stay at the school during the break. Tell you mom thanks but I think I'll stay here again." Ron looked devastated at this and Ginny didn't look much better.

"Why don't you want to come to our house? It'll be fun. You can't want to stay here alone?" Ron pleaded.

"He won't be alone," Hermione added. "At least not during the evenings. That's why you're staying isn't it Harry?"

"I haven't had much private time with R.J. since the ball. With most everyone gone during the break, I hoped to be able to spend some time with her. Can you understand Ron? If it weren't for wanting to see her, I'd love to come home with you. You can see Hermione anytime but I don't get many chances." With that, Ginny slammed her book shut and left.

Ron still looked upset but said, "It would be so much easier if you would just date Cho. Mum's going to flip when I tell her that you're not coming so you can spend time with a vampire." Harry hadn't thought of this but knew there was no way to keep her from knowing since Ginny, Fred and George also knew he liked R.J.

Even though Ron didn't say anything else, Harry could tell his feelings were still hurt. Ron just wasn't the same the next couple days and Ginny wouldn't even look at Harry. This made him feel even worse but he had been getting more excited when he thought about spending time with R.J. in the castle. Only Hermione was acting normally to him. He didn't think she approved of him liking R.J. but she was glad that he had been happier.

Harry walked them all to the exit when they were leaving for the Holiday break. Ginny didn't even say goodbye. He wondered if things would ever be the same between them. "Happy Christmas Ron, tell everyone I said Hi."

"Yeah, you too. I sure wish you were coming with us."

"Happy Christmas Harry," Hermione added cheerfully. "Don't get into any trouble while we're gone and do be careful." She glanced at Ron and added, "He'll get over it. A few days after being back you'll never know anything different."

"But what about Ginny? I've never seen her act this bad toward me before," Harry asked with a hurt look on his face.

"How did you feel when Cho went out with Cedric? Ginny has had a crush on you for years and you're seeing someone else. And now you'd rather be with R.J. than spend time with her family. She probably thinks there isn't any chance of you two being together anymore."

"I don't know how I feel about her. Until I met R.J., I had hoped we would be better friends this year. I was only worried about what Ron would say. Then Ginny started acting weird to me and R.J. came along. Why are you girls so hard to figure out? Happy Christmas Hermione." Harry walked back to the Great Hall regretting not going with Ron. He looked around and there were even less students than normal staying over the break and he didn't see anyone that he had talked to before.

After getting bored with studying, Harry decided to go and see Hagrid. He pulled on his thick robe and muffler then headed toward the hut. It had snowed over the past couple days so the Hogwarts grounds were all white. There was a nice path from the castle to the hut so it was an easy walk. Harry knocked on the heavy door and yelled "Hagrid, it's Harry, are you in there?"

He heard Fang barking loudly and then the door came open. "Harry. Thought you'd be taking holiday with Ron. What're you staying here for?" Hagrid backed up and let Harry into the hut. Harry took off his robe and sat down into one of the huge chairs.

"I needed to catch up on some schoolwork. All that detention had gotten me a little behind. We've got OWL's this year and I should try to do good."

Hagrid looked at him suspiciously. "Since when did you give much thought to O.W.L.s? Are you sure you aren't staying to help out with security now?" he said with a chuckle.

"I do need to study for the O.W.L.s during the day but was hoping to see her in the evenings. You think that will be ok don't you?"

"Don't see why not? Kind of strange though, you fancy'n a vampire. I've been corresponding with my big friends. With You-Know-Who being so quiet, no body feels rushed to make any plans. Big mistake if you ask me. We know he's back and he'll be planning something big, you can count on that." Harry knew Hagrid was right. Voldemort had returned and it was just a matter of time before he did something to let everyone know he was back.

Harry had gone back to the common room and was really going to try to study until supper. He planned on sending R.J. an owl this evening to setup when he could see her but he couldn't do that until it got dark. He had almost fallen asleep when a loud 'POP' startled him. He turned to see Dobby standing next to couch. "D-D-Dobby! What are you doing here? I mean. Good to see you and all but you startled me."

"Dobby is sorry sir. Dobby was surprised to hear Harry Potter is staying at the school for the holiday. He is usually with his friend."

"I needed the time to study Dobby." Which wasn't a total lie, he really did need to study. "I've been too busy most of the year."

"Ah busy getting into trouble. We is seeing you come and go into the forest. We is also knowing sir's friend from the ball. Would Harry Potter like a special supper tonight? Not many students to cook for."

"Special supper, what do you mean? I don't mind eating down in the hall like normal. Don't go to any trouble for me Dobby."

"Ah, sir is too nice. It is no trouble at all. We is liking taking special care of the students. Follow me, you will like it." Dobby had a strange look on his face. Like he was hiding something, but wasn't afraid about it. Harry followed Dobby up a few flights of stairs and to the end of a corridor that he had never been down. It was already dark when Dobby stopped at a curving flight of stairs that led into one of the towers.

"Where are you taking me Dobby? Why do I have to eat up here?"

"Dobby can't say sir, he promised. Harry Potter will like eating in the tower, Dobby is sure of it. Dobby must return to the kitchen sir, there are other students to take care of." Dobby gave Harry a large smile and then with a 'POP' he was gone. Harry thought about turning around and going back to the hall for supper but was really curious why Dobby would bring him here so he went up the spiral stairs and when he got to the top, he couldn't believe what he saw. "Glad you could come Harry. Hope it was worth the climb." It was R.J. standing at the top in a cozy room with a fireplace. In the center of the room was a table for two with candles and everything.

"R.J.!" Harry said, unable to contain his excitement. "How did you do this? I was going to send an owl later hoping to see you." He ran over and hugged her tightly. It felt so good to hold her. This made him forget the guilt of not going with Ron.

"Dumbledore told me that you had signed up to stay at the school over the break even though he gave permission for you to go to Ron's. I was really surprised you made this choice but Dumbledore seemed to expect it. He gave me permission to come up to the castle and see you in the evenings. He even mentioned that you had a very good friend on the staff here that could see to any arrangements. Dobby thinks the world of you Harry. He took care of all of this." Harry looked again at the room. The fire made it feel very warm and with the private table, it seemed really romantic. Harry would have to remember and buy Dobby some particularly tacky socks for this.

"I can't believe you did this. This is the best." They had a really nice supper and talked the whole time. Harry told her about how he met Dobby in his second year and how he tricked Mr. Malfoy into freeing Dobby.

After eating they moved to the couch where it was much more comfortable. She leaned into him and he put his arm around her. Normally Harry was very shy and unsure around girls but he felt so comfortable with R.J. that things just seemed natural. She told him about some of the changes she's seen in the past one hundred and fifty years. This was the only time he was interested in hearing about history. She brought up her home again and then said. "Wait, I brought a map so you could see where my home is. It's in my bag, let me get it." She started to get up but Harry stopped her and said. "You don't have to get up." And he quickly used wandless magic to summon her bag.

"How did you do that? You didn't use your wand. I've never heard of anyone being able to do that before." She sat up very attentive now, which hadn't been his intention at all. He thought he had already told her about this.

"Oh, I thought you already knew about that. I can do some wandless magic. I just found out this summer and Mrs. Figg helped me practice. I've only tried summoning and banishing but they work fine without a wand. Sorry, I thought I had already told you." Then he pulled her back into him. However she sat back upright and asked? "Are there any other little tricks I don't know about?"

"Um...I'm a Parselmouth."

"Really? You can talk to snakes? Isn't Voldemort famous for that also?"

"Everyone at school thought I was the Heir of Slytherin a few years ago when the Chamber of Secrets was opened and they found out I could talk to snakes. The monster was a giant basilisk. Dumbledore thinks Voldemort passed some of his powers to me when he tried to kill me the first time. That's the only thing I can think of that you don't already know."

She leaned back into him and asked? "Is it strange being so famous? I remember right after your parents died everyone was talking about how you defeated Voldemort. Everyone was celebrating and toasting your name."

He never thought about that before. "Until I was eleven and Hagrid gave me my invitation to Hogwarts, I didn't know I was a wizard. Heck, I didn't even know wizards existed. Remember, I lived in a cupboard under the stairs with my Aunt and Uncle. They don't like me at all. I don't really like being famous. Every time someone meets me, they stare at my scar. And, anytime I do something in public; it ends up in the Daily Prophet. So, what was it like for you growing up before... You know."

"How about I save those stores for another time, I need to leave before long and I'd rather do this." She turned around to face him and gave him a very long kiss. They spent the rest of the time in silence watching the fire and kissing. Then the couple walked down the stairs together. Harry was walking her to the door when they met up with Professor Snape near the entrance.

"Missed you at supper Potter. Probably doing something to warrant more detention I would bet," he said this but didn't sound as evil as normal.

"Hello Severus. Harry and I had a private meal. I'm not sure the remaining students are ready to have me eating with them."

"I trust you'll put your daylight hours to good use and actually study a bit? You do have O.W.L.s this term and you can't copy off of Miss Granger to get by."

"Yes sir, I intend to study. I'm also going to help Hagrid with some of his creatures."

"Straight up to your room after seeing her out Potter. If I catch you wondering the halls after that, you'll regret it."

"Goodnight to you too Severus," R.J. said.

Snape walked on down the hall and Harry whispered to R.J., "I can't believe how nice he's being to me. He must really like you or something. He's never like that to me."

"I did him a favor some time back and he's always treated me fine since then." They reached the door and she said. "Goodnight Harry. Is it ok if I come back tomorrow?"

"Ok? I want you to come back every night!" He gave her a quick kiss and she walked away. He did as he promised Snape and went straight back to his room. It was weird to have it all to himself. He was the only Gryffindor who stayed over the break.

The next morning he stayed in the common room studying until lunchtime and then after eating he decided to thank Dobby so he snuck down to see him. No sooner had he entered the kitchen than no fewer than six house-elves were asking him what he needed and if there was anything they could do for him. When he replied that he just wanted to see Dobby, they ran off to find him. In an instant Dobby came running over and hugged Harry tightly. "What an honor it is for Harry Potter to come to see Dobby. Was everything satisfactory last night sir? Miss R.J. didn't give us much instruction." Dobby looked slightly worried.

"Everything was great Dobby, thanks." Dobby went back to grinning widely. "Can I ask you a favor?"

"Of course sir, Dobby would do anything."

"Are there any other nice and quiet places in the castle where I could have another diner with R.J.? And, would it be too much trouble for you to set something up on Christmas eve for us?"

"No trouble at all sir. Dobby would be honored to make a special evening for Harry Potter. It is good to see sir very happy."

"Thank you Dobby, see you later," Harry said while leaving. He headed straight for the library. He had to find something for R.J. for Christmas and wanted it to be special. He read about where she lived and found out that the Prince and Princess who ruled over the area had been brutally murdered almost one hundred sixty years ago. They never found the body of the princess but found her blood everywhere. No one was ever caught. That area is also known for a beautiful kind gem, the Veganos Ruby. Harry thought that would be a perfect gift but didn't know where to look.

He decided to ask Mrs. Figg so he looked through the castle and found her talking to Professor McGonagall in one of the large common areas. She greeted him as he approached. "Hello Harry. Surprised to see you here during the break."

"Yes. After Professor Dumbledore gave permission for you to stay at the Weasley's, you chose to stay here instead. That's not like you Mr. Potter," Professor McGonagall added.

"Well, I wanted some time alone and I do need to study for my O.W.L.s."

"And spending time having private diners with your friend didn't figure in at all, did it?" Professor Figg added with a smile. Even Professor McGonagall seemed to have a smile. "Now, what was it you wanted Harry?"

Harry hadn't wanted to say anything in front of Professor McGonagall but didn't want her to think bad of him by asking to speak to Professor Figg in private, so he just said. "Well, I wanted to get a present for R.J. and don't know where to look. I've decided what I want to get."

"I'm sure that between us we can tell you where to find what you're looking for Harry. What exactly did you have in mind?"

"The area where R.J. is from is known for a Veganos Ruby and I'd like to find a necklace made with one if I could," he said blushing a little.

"How did you decide on that gift Mr. Potter?" Professor McGonagall asked.

"I looked up her home in the library and read about the history of the area and it mentioned about that ruby being from there."

"I see. You won't spend time in the library doing home work but don't seem to mind researching about this," she responded with a twinkle in her eye.

"I think that's an excellent choice Harry. It shows you put real thought into the gift. I have a couple catalogs in my office that should have something along those lines. Why don't you follow me up there now?"

"You seem quite taken with Miss R.J. Harry. Your godfather is worried about the whole thing. He just wishes you would find a nice girl student."

"I think she's great. Who knows what will happen, but I really like being with her right now." Harry was looking through the catalog and was glad to see a few things made with that kind of ruby and that they weren't too expensive. Mrs. Figg had suggested a couple styles but they just didn't seem like R.J. to Harry. Finally he came to one that really stood out to him. It was a square stone mounted in solid black making the ruby seem darker than the others. This made him think of R.J. It wasn't too girly and had a look of confidence to him. "I like this one," Harry said happily.

"Interesting choice. Not my style but I can see this fitting R.J. perfectly. You have good taste Harry. I can order this for you today if you'd like. The store is not too far so it should arrive by tomorrow."

"Thanks Professor." He was done shopping now. He had already ordered gifts for Ron and Hermione. He sent a card to Ginny. The next few days were great. He slept in each morning, studied some and then spent time with Hagrid. But his favorite part was when R.J. got to the school in the evenings. He had asked her to make sure she came up for Christmas Eve dinner. She hadn't missed a night yet but he wanted to make sure. He had gone back to the kitchen to make sure Dobby had arranged supper for that evening. Dobby had seemed even more excited than normal and told Harry that everything would be taken care of. Harry was getting nervous about it now. That day, he was too nervous to study so he spent most of the day down with Hagrid. He went back to his room early and made sure he looked ok. He even put on one of his nicer robes and then went down to the entrance to wait on R.J.

While he was waiting, he hadn't noticed Professor Dumbledore come up behind him until he heard. "Waiting on your supper guest Harry?"

This startled him but he recovered and said, "Yes sir. Dobby is setting up a special place tonight. Sir, I really appreciate being able to have meals with her. Thank you."

"My pleasure Harry," Dumbledore said, eyes twinkling. "You know that since she's been around, you haven't broken any more rules. Or at least you haven't been caught. I'm also quite certain that you will be pleased with Dobby's arrangements tonight. Have a nice meal Harry," the Headmaster said and then walked into the hall to join the other teachers and students for supper. Just then the school doors opened and R.J. walked in. She had dressed up a bit also and looked amazing.

"Hi R.J. You look great."

"Thanks Harry, you look pretty good yourself." Just then there was a 'POP' and Dobby appeared right before them. "Harry Potter, Miss R.J. I has your table ready. Follow me please." Harry laughed at how 'professional' Dobby was acting. Harry couldn't remember climbing so many stairs in the castle before.

"Dobby, where exactly are we going?"

"Harry Potter will be pleased, it is a nice room with a view. Not much further."

"They came to a door at the top of the stairs. Harry didn't know how far they had climbed and once he opened the door, he realized just how far. This opened onto the roof of Hogwarts. There was a large open area and near the edge of the roof there was a table with some candles set on it. What was even stranger was that even though it was snowing now, there was a dry path all the way to the table and the table didn't have any snow on it.

"Dobby! How did you do this? I can't believe it. This is amazing."

"Dobby knew Harry Potter would like this. Dobby had help sir. If Miss R.J. and Harry Potter stays on the path, they will be warm and dry."

"Harry, I can't believe this." The couple could look out from the table over the lake and watch the snow fall. There was nothing around them but he was warm and the snow wasn't landing on either of them. "This is one of the most beautiful views I've ever seen," she added. They didn't talk very much during the meal; instead they looked out watching the snow fall on the lake. The full moon gave everything a warm glow. There was a path all along the roof where the snow wasn't falling so they walked around for a bit before returning to the table for desert.

They had been talking for quite a while when Harry looked at his watch and said, "It's past midnight. Happy Christmas R.J." Then leaned over and gave her a kiss.

"Happy Christmas Harry. I can't remember having a better one."

"I've got your present here," he said. "I hope you like it. I've never picked out anything like this before." He handed her the box that had come beautifully wrapped.

She opened it slowly and after removing the wrapping she opened the lid and gasped. "Harry! This is gorgeous! Do you know what this is?" She hadn't looked up from the necklace yet.

"It's a 'Veganos Ruby'. I looked up your home trying to find a good gift and saw that these come from there. I hope you like it." He sounded nervous.

"Oh, I love it! This isn't a common cut for this stone. It is usually round or pear-shaped. This is perfect. I can't believe you did this." She still hadn't taken it out of the box.

"Can I put it on you?" he asked hesitantly?

"Oh, yes, please. It's just so beautiful I could look at it all night." He took it out of the box and placed it around her neck while she was holding up her hair. She had such smooth skin. He fumbled a bit fastening it but managed to get it hooked. She stood and gave him a big hug and kiss. When she pulled away, he could see tears in her eyes. He didn't understand why. "You're crying. What's wrong? Should I have gotten you something else?" he said sounding very worried.

"Oh no. I just can't remember ever getting a better present than this. I really can't remember being this happy either." She hugged him again. After pulling back and whipping her eyes she said. "I've got your gift too. Dobby was going to leave it by the door." She got up and walked to the door returning with a long thin wrapped package. She handed it to him saying. "I hope you like it."

He took the package and unwrapped it. It was a sword! The handle was ivory and into it was carved a griffin and the initials H.J.P. On the other side of the handle was a design and the initials R.J.V. He picked it up and it felt so light. The moonlight was reflecting off of the blade, which had, a design of thin black lines that looked familiar. "This is great R.J. Reminds me of when we first met and you were teaching me some sword defense."

"The blade is made from the same metal as my sword which has lasted over a hundred years. I wasn't sure how to get the handle done but I think it turned out ok," she said with a slight hesitation.

"It's beautiful. What's the design on this side of the handle?"

"Oh, that's a symbol of my family."

"What do your initials stand for?"

"You can't tell anyone, ok? Rebecca Jane. You can't be a good security expert with a name like Rebecca Jane, so that's why I'm R.J."

"I won't tell. But what's the V for?" he asked.

"How about I keep that to myself for a while? Let's watch it snow a bit more." They stood at the edge watching the snow fall. Harry noticed that she kept feeling the necklace and smiling.

They headed in a bit later and Harry walked her to the door. "Thanks again Harry for one of the best nights I can remember." She gave him a hug and a nice deep kiss.

"You're welcome. I can't remember one any better either. See you."

When he awoke the next morning, he noticed his presents in the common room. He ran down and began opening them. Sirius had given him another photo album showing his parents, Lupin and Sirius in school. He didn't notice Wormtail in any of the pictures and assumed Sirius had removed any reference to him. Ron had sent him the latest Chudley Cannon jersey. Hermione always put thought in her presents and sent him a book on legends and myths of magic. There were some sections on the lore of wandless magic and why people think it is just a myth. The last package was a small tin of homemade sweets from Mrs. Weasley. This was the first year she hadn't sent him a sweater. His heart sank. Maybe he had really offended her by staying at school.

Except for feeling guilty about offending Mrs. Weasley, Harry was really enjoying the remaining days of the break. He had been studying more than he expected to. It was nice to have so much time to himself where he could walk along the lake or just sit in any of the empty rooms reading and practicing. The best part was seeing R.J. each evening. She had made it up every night. Only on the last full day of break did it hit him that after tonight he wouldn't get to spend near as much time with R.J. as he would like. When she arrived that night, they just went to the kitchen and grabbed something quick to eat there and decided to just lie around in the Gryffindor common room watching the fire.

Harry was sitting on the floor against a chair and R.J. was lying on her back with her head in his lap. He was stroking her hair when he said, "I wish break could last longer. It's been great spending so much time with you."

"Me too Harry. We'll still see each other, just not as much." She pulled him down and gave him a long kiss. They were lying next to each other on the rug now. They were kissing on and off for a while and Harry felt differently some how. He had kissed R.J. many times before but this wasn't the same. He felt like he couldn't get enough of her. She was lying next to him looking into his eyes and whispered, "Why don't we go up to your room? It would be more comfortable."

Now Harry felt nervous again. He had been feeling confident and comfortable being close to R.J. but suddenly felt apprehensive. She must have sensed this because she took his hand and said, "Don't worry" while leading him up the stairs. When they reached his bed, he was glad that he didn't have as much out on his desk. Ron's bed area had posters of the Chudley Cannons Quidditch team but all Harry had on his desk were a couple books and his model of the Hungarian Horntail dragon he faced last year. He was back to feeling like a fifteen year old boy, nervous and unsure. They sat on the bed for a minute. She picked up the model of the dragon and it paced around her hand for a minute before curling back up and going to sleep. She asked about this and he explained having to get the golden egg in the first task of the Triwizard Tournament last year. He was feeling more comfortable now so when she put the model back down, he leaned in and kissed her again. They laid back and carried on with some deep kissing. R.J. rolled over on top of Harry and got up on her knees looking into his eyes. She slowly pulled her top off. Harry could hardly keep his eyes off of her bare chest. When he finally did look back at her face, she was just smiling at him. She then unbuttoned and removed his shirt before lying back on him for more kissing.

Harry's mind was racing. He wasn't sure what to do but didn't want this to end; he tried to make all of his caresses nice and slow. R.J. then sat up on the side of the bed and Harry knew she was removing her leather pants. He quickly tried to do the same but suddenly felt very uncoordinated, fumbling with everything. R.J. was already lying back down before he had

removed his pants. Having her whole naked body next to his felt amazing. He looked into her eyes and whispered self-consciously, "Sorry, I just don't know what to do."

She looked back warmly and said, "Don't worry, you'll know." And then she rolled over on top of him and was kissing him deeply while his hands were caressing her body. She then did something that just felt amazing. He held her tight while she started moving her hips slowly on him. He started feeling what he should be doing and began moving up to meet her.

She sat upright on him but kept moving. She looked so good with the moon shining on her that he said, "You look beautiful." She smiled and flattened back onto him. After a few minutes, he had rolled over onto her and was trying to do what felt natural at this point. Both of their breathing became deeper and faster and their actions were becoming more forceful now. Harry was worried for a moment about someone hearing their sounds and coming up but at this point didn't really care. He felt her move much more deliberately now and she was gripping him very tightly. R.J. began to moan deeply and pull him in with amazing strength. He began to feel something like he had never felt before. Such an amazing feeling and he looked into her eyes while she was still holding him tight.

They kissed deeper than he thought possible. He wanted to stay this way forever. "Harry, that was amazing. I think we've found something else you're a natural at."

This embarrassed him but he responded with "I can't believe how good that felt, you were fantastic." He kissed her again and then just lied next to her lightly caressing her chest and stomach.

Looking out the window, R.J. quickly said, "Harry, it will be light soon, I need to leave now. Tonight was great." He got up to get dressed and walk her out but she stopped him. "You stay here. There will be less explaining if I'm by myself and someone sees me."

He hugged her again feeling her body next to his. Then he watched her get dressed and couldn't believe what had just happened. She kissed him again and he said, "That was the best R.J. I'll see you soon." She winked and left out the door.

Chapter 13

Harry had slept in the next morning and was getting a quick shower before the other students started coming back to school. When the water hit his back, it stung very sharply. He moved over to one of the mirrors and noticed many scratch marks. How could he have missed these last night? Thinking back, he knew exactly how he could have missed them and gave an audible laugh. Getting dressed, he carefully pulled his shirt on since the scratches were still tender. He knew that he couldn't go to Madame Pomfrey about these. He ran the conversation over in his head. "Now Mr. Potter. How did you get these scratches on your back?" she would ask, to which he would respond, "Um well, I was making love to a vampire last night and things got out of hand." Harry just laughed thinking about that conversation.

Harry went down to meet the train. When he noticed Ron, Hermione and Ginny, he ran over to meet them. "Glad you guys are back, I really missed you."

"We missed you too. Thanks for the card," Ginny said, still acting a little coldly to him.

"You missed a really good time Harry. Mum seemed a bit ticked," Ron said and then gave Harry a pat on the back, which made him recoil away. "What's wrong?"

"Oh, nothing. Just slept wrong."

"Did you have a good holiday Harry?" Hermione asked while they were walking.

He didn't want to blurt out that he had a great time because it would make it seem like he made a good choice not going with Ron and Ginny. "It was ok. There weren't many students left up here."

"So, tell us what we really want to know. How was it spending so much time alone with R.J.? Anything happening?" Ron asked excitedly.

"Ron! Don't ask things like that," Hermione scolded. "I'm sure nothing happened, and even if it did, Harry wouldn't be talking about it. He has more manners than that."

"Ok, fine. But did you at least get to see her a bit. I mean if you gave up coming with us, I hope you at least got to see her. Did she get you a present?"

"I was able to see her," Harry saw Hermione looking at him with a questioning look. "She came up to the castle some evenings. I didn't break any rules while you were gone Hermione." Well, having a girl in his room was actually breaking a rule he thought. "She gave me a sword for a present. She had it made and the handle is carved ivory. It's really nice."

Ron and Hermione started talking about something so Harry hurried up and got next to Ginny. "So, did you have a nice holiday?" he asked, trying to get things back to normal.

"Yes, it was very nice having the whole family together," she said this kind of sharply and Harry felt a sting in his heart.

"Ginny, other than asking R.J. to the ball, have I done something to make you mad? If I have, I'm really sorry. I would never intentionally do anything to hurt you?"

She looked up at him and he thought he saw a little warming in her eyes. "No, you really haven't done anything. I did kind of want to go to the ball with you and when you turned Cho down and said you were going with a friend, I kind of got my hopes up that you were going to ask me. And now everything seems to be about R.J. and you didn't even come to our house for holiday. We seem to be getting further apart."

This really pulled at Harry. "You know that I would have turned Cho down and asked you if I hadn't already asked R.J. I even asked Ron if that would have been ok. I didn't want him to be mad if I had asked you."

"Really? You asked Ron if he would mind? I wouldn't care what he thought anyway. I guess it doesn't really matter now."

"Is there any way we can go back to being good friends? It was a surprise to me about liking R.J., and I never intended for any of this to come between us. You're one of my best friends. I'd rather it be the four of us instead of just Ron, Hermione and me. I really miss you being around."

She looked longingly at him and said, "I'd like that too. I'm sorry for acting so weird to you. I just didn't know how to handle everything."

"Now all I have to do is find a way to make your mom forgive me for skipping holiday."

"She's really not mad. Well at first she was hurt, but Bill and Charlie kept reminding her how often they skipped holidays with the family to be with their girlfriends. I think that made her realize boys just do things like that. She really considers you part of the family you know."

"So really, I should have asked her how she would feel if I had asked you out and not Ron then. She'd probably think it was like you were dating your brother!"

Ginny elbowed him as they walked. He hoped things were getting back to normal now.

They all arrived for the first self-defense session since break. This would be the first time Harry had seen R.J. since term started again. He was really looking forward to it. "I see everyone is back. Did you all have a nice break?" R.J. asked the class. Harry noticed she was wearing the necklace he had given her. It did seem to fit her well.

One of the Ravenclaw girls noticed it also. "That's a beautiful necklace R.J. I hadn't noticed that before."

"Thank you. It was a recent present from a very good friend. It's quickly become my favorite."

"Don't tell me Potter gave that to you? No way he could have picked something like that out," Malfoy stated.

"Now that you've stated the obvious Draco, I can assure you that he did indeed pick it out. Now on to the lesson."

Hermione and Ron were staring at him. "What?" he mouthed and then went back paying attention to the lesson. After class they went up to R.J. Hermione quickly said, "Nice to see you again, did you have a nice holiday?"

"One of the best times I can ever remember Hermione," she added giving Harry a quick glance. "Did Harry tell you about our Christmas eve supper?"

"No, Harry didn't give us many details except to say he really liked the sword you gave him."

R.J. went on to tell them the all about the meal on the roof and how romantic she thought that was. Ron kept gagging and rolling his eyes but Hermione seemed to appreciate hearing about it. Hermione seemed impressed about the thought Harry had put into finding the perfect gift.

They were walking back to the common room and Ron kept joking, "I can't believe you acted like that with her? What are you turning in to? Private romantic meals. C'mon."

"I think it's sweet Harry. It seemed to mean a lot to R.J.," Hermione said.

"Oh, it's so sweeeeet Harry," Ron said laughing.

"Shut up Ron!" Harry said. Ron knew he was kidding.

After climbing back into the common room Hermione asked, "Can we see the sword Harry?"

"Um, sure. I'll go get it." Harry quickly ran up and pulled the sword off the wall over his bed and brought it down. He handed it to Hermione who studied it closely.

"This is really impressive work. There's so much detail."

"She said it was made from the same metal as her sword. Did you see the handle?" Harry said.

"What's this carving on the side with your initials? Why would she have a griffin there? And, on the other side the initials R.J.V. What does the V stand for?"

Harry thought quickly. He hadn't wanted to admit he had been keeping him being an animagus from them. "The griffin must be for Gryffindor. She wouldn't tell me what the V was for. She said she would some time though." He took the sword and the all headed up to bed.

Things had gotten into a routine of schoolwork, Quidditch practice and trying to see R.J. as much as possible. Their next Quidditch match was coming up this weekend against Slytherin. Slytherin was also undefeated so far but Gryffindor was ahead on points right now. Harry wanted to beat Slytherin more than any other team. Ron was worried about this match.

"We really need to be ready for them. They play really dirty. Harry, catch the Snitch as soon as you can and let's get out of this with a quick win."

"Ron, we've played them before. We know what to expect," Harry responded.

"I've heard they are even worse this year though. Someone has gone to Madame Pomfrey after every one of their matches so far." Ron sounded kind of worried.

Harry noticed Cho walking alone and ran up to talk to her. "Hi Cho. I haven't seen you since the break. Did you have a good holiday?"

"Hi Harry. It was very nice being with my family. I didn't see you on the train, did you stay here again?"

"Yeah. There weren't many students left here but I was able to get some studying done."

She looked at him for a minute and said, "You seem different. Did you change your hair?"

"Um. No. Haven't changed anything."

"Something seems different. It's a good thing though. See ya."

This seemed odd but he went back to Ron and Hermione.

"So, what was that about?" Ron asked.

"Just asking how her holiday was, that's all."

"Since when do you just run up to Cho and ask how she's doing?" Ron asked confused.

"Ron. What's wrong with that? Harry's just being nice to her. Honestly," Hermione added.

The Quidditch stands were crowded for this match since both teams were undefeated. Harry wasn't nervous but could tell that both Ron and Ginny were. It actually seemed that Ginny was handling it better than Ron. Fred and George kept telling Ginny to be careful since the Slytherins didn't play nice. She got angry and kept yelling that she could take care of herself.

The match started and sure enough, the Slytherins were playing rough. They were sending Bludgers as fast and hard as they could. Harry was concentrating really hard on finding the Snitch quickly just as Ron suggested but hadn't seen any sign of it. Ginny had been playing amazingly and had already scored five times. Ron had been able to stop all but one of the Slytherin shots so far. Fred and George were doing a fantastic job of keeping the Bludgers away from the team. They didn't have time to try and aim them toward the Slytherin team, they were just trying to keep them away from the Gryffindor team. This was one of the longest times Harry had played and not even seen the Snitch yet. He heard a whistle blow. Slytherin had called a time-out. Harry went down to the rest of the team and heard Fred yelling. "We're up one-hundred-eighty to twenty! Ginny, you're killing them." It was true; she was almost unstoppable so far. "We're just waiting on you now Harry. Let's end this thing."

Once play started, Slytherin had gotten seriously dirty. Their beaters were swinging the bats and not caring if they hit the other players or not. The Gryffindor chasers had dropped the Quaffle twice just trying to get out of the way of a swinging bat. Harry knew he had to find the Snitch fast. He saw Ginny get the Quaffle and head toward the goal and then caught a flash of gold near the ground. He dove toward it and Draco was right behind him. He heard a Bludger coming and turned in the last second to just miss it but lost the Snitch in this move. Looking back up, he saw the Slytherin beaters and one of their chasers heading toward Ginny

from different sides. Harry flattened out on his broom and was going to try and get there first. They had collided with her and she lost her balance and started falling. Harry knew he couldn't turn his broom around and get to her in time so he just dove off of his broom after her. He started to change into his griffin form but suddenly got a strong feeling that he shouldn't. All he could think to do was to try and slow Ginny down. He tried wandless magic to summon her. All of this was happening so fast and yet he felt like everything was in slow motion. He kept concentrating on summoning Ginny. They were both approaching the ground quickly when she seemed to slow down and almost hover. Harry was still falling and grabbed her but now both of them were falling even faster. He changed to trying to banish the ground. There wasn't much time, and they hadn't slowed down. He felt them start to slow but the ground was still coming up fast. They were slowing down but he realized it wasn't going to be enough. At the last second, he rolled so that he was on bottom and they hit the ground with a loud thud and there was the sound of breaking bones.

Only the Cruciatus curse had been more pain than this, and this was real pain, it couldn't be blocked. He tried to stay conscious and said, "Ginny, are you all right?"

He heard her say. "I think so. I think my arm is broken though. Are you ok?"

That's all he wanted to hear. Once he knew she was going to be OK, he was only able to get out. "I don't think so." Before passing out.

Harry awoke to darkness. He felt so sore. He realized he was in the hospital wing and then noticed a shape near the window. Without his glasses, he couldn't recognize who it was. "Who's there?" he said with a gravely voice.

"Harry! You're awake." The shape came over quickly.

"R.J. What're you doing here? What happened? The last thing I remember was falling and... GINNY! Is she ok?"

"She's fine Harry, just a broken arm. Madame Pomfrey fixed her right up. How are you feeling?"

"Sore, I hurt all over. How long have I been here?"

"This is your second night. You broke most of your ribs; you're leg and your collarbone. Plus you had some internal bruising that will be painful for a while. I'm glad you're awake, I was really worried when you didn't wake up at all last night." She was gripping his hand.

"You've been here both nights? Thank you. I'm glad you're here."

"What were you really thinking? Why didn't you fly to her on the broom or change into the griffin?"

"I knew I couldn't change directions on the broom fast enough. I planned on changing as soon as I jumped but something inside of me just told me not to change. I can't explain it but it just seemed like a bad idea. But I had already jumped so I had to do something. I guess trying to banish the ground wasn't such a good idea."

"It must have worked some, you're still alive. Falling from that height without slowing down at all would have probably killed you."

"You know what I really want?" he asked weakly

"No Harry, what do you want?"

"I want a kiss. It's been too long." he said trying to force a smile.

She kissed him and then he fell asleep again. He woke again the next day and pulled his glasses from the table and quickly put them on. There were many cards and much candy on the table around his bed. There was an especially large tin of candy from Mrs. Weasley. Madame Pomfrey must have heard him moving around since she came over quickly. "Finally decided to wake up did you? You had done pretty well this year; I hadn't seen you for any treatment until this time. Of course you made up for that with the damage you did this time. How are you feeling?"

"I'm a little sore but everything seems ok. How long do I have to stay here?"

"If you feel up to it, you can leave right before lunch. I do have some rules though. Your bruises are still healing internally so no rough activities for a week. That means no Quidditch practice until next week. And don't try flying again until you learn to grow wings."

Just then, the doors came open and Ron, Hermione and Ginny ran over. "You're awake!" they all said together.

"Oh Harry, you saved my life!" Ginny tried to hug him but when he groaned in pain she let go. "Sorry. I can't believe you did that. How did you get to me? Why didn't you change?"

"Change? What's she talking about change?" Ron asked.

"What happened with the match? Did we lose after we were gone?" Harry asked anxiously.

Hermione frumped and said, "No. You won but everyone else ended up with detention. The rest of the team attacked the Slytherin beaters and then the rest of their team joined in. It took Snape, McGonagall and Hagrid to break it all up. The Slytherins were disqualified for such dirty play."

"They deserved it Hermione. They almost killed Ginny!" Ron said.

Ginny was still holding Harry's hand when he said. "That mean's we're going to play for the cup! Ron, if we win you'll be the captain of the team that won the cup!"

Hermione looked at Harry seriously and said, "Back to something important. What did Ginny mean when she said 'Why didn't you change?' How did you plan on getting her when you jumped? I'm assuming you used wandless magic to slow her down because she almost stopped in mid-air."

Harry had to tell them now. "Ok, please don't be mad at me but I've been keeping something from you two that Ginny knew about for a while now." Ginny was hanging her head. Ron and

Hermione both looked at each other confused. "I knew I couldn't turn my broom around fast enough so when I jumped, I planned on changing into a griffin to catch her."

"What do you mean 'changing into a griffin'?" Hermione asked

"I'm an animagus. I learned during my first detention this year. I can change into a griffin," he said hanging his head.

"Really? You can really do that. Harry, you'll get into a lot of trouble if anyone finds out you're an unregistered animagus. I still can't believe you learned that without us finding out."

"Why didn't you tell us? And, why does Ginny know?" Ron asked sounding hurt.

"I won't get into trouble Hermione. I've filled out the paperwork but Professor Dumbledore doesn't want me to register yet. He thinks it is better if this is kept quiet so that Voldemort doesn't find out. I may be able to use it the next time he comes after me. Remember when I said there was a griffin in the forest and Ginny really wanted to see it. Well she went with Professor Dumbledore and me to see it one day and then I just wanted to show someone after I learned how to change. Please don't be mad."

"How could I be mad at my best friend lying in a hospital bed when they just saved my little sister? But quit keeping these kinds of things from us!" Ron said with a smile.

"Was it hard to learn Harry?" Hermione asked matter-of-fact. "How long did it take?"

"McGonagall thinks it was something I had in me. I used to grow my hair back when Aunt Petunia would cut it. McGonagall then made a potion using the fur from the griffin, kind of like polyjuice potion that turned me into one for a few minutes. With her help, I learned in a couple weeks. So only McGonagall, Dumbledore you three and of course R.J. know about this."

"You told her and not us?" Ron added angrily

"No more, I won't keep anything else from you," Harry promised.

They walked down to the hall for lunch. Hermione kept asking him what it's like and questions about how he learned. When they opened the door and walked in, it got quiet for a second and then it erupted into applause and cheers for Harry. He blushed and tried walking around the side to avoid as many people as possible. He sat down at the Gryffindor table. Fred and George couldn't stop thanking him. They didn't look good, they both had black eyes and some scratches. He looked over and the Slytherin's looked even worse. "It looks like you got the best of them. I wish I could have seen that." He said. Everyone kept asking him how he got to Ginny and there were many questions about her seeming to slow down before he caught her. He tried to just dodge the questions instead of telling everyone about wandless magic. Cho had come over and hugged Harry saying how glad she was that he was ok and that Ginny was really lucky to have such a good friend. She smiled broadly at this.

Harry said quickly. "If you win your next Quidditch match, we'll be playing you for the cup this year. We won't be going easy on you." He smiled as he said this.

"You mean when we win our next match and I wouldn't expect you to go easy on us. Don't think we'll be a pushover either. Bye," Cho said with a twinkle and then left.

Fred leaned over and said, "Now Harry, are you sure you're making the right choice? Cho is such a nice warm-blooded hottie."

Then George added, "He's been so close to death enough that warm-blooded isn't important to him anymore."

Harry and Ron were walking to Divination when Colin Creevey came up to Harry and said. "Harry. Professor Dumbledore would like to see you." Harry shrugged his shoulders at Ron and then walked to the statue that leads to Dumbledore's office. Harry said "Bats Balls" and the statue opened. At the top of the stairs, Harry knocked on the door and heard Professor Dumbledore tell him to come in.

"Ah Harry, sit down, sit down." Dumbledore said, seeming to be in a good mood. "I understand you gave quite a performance at the Quidditch match. I wish I could have been there to see for myself. There are many rumors on why you're not dead and how exactly Miss Weasley seemed to slow down." His eyes were twinkling. "One question though. Why didn't you change into the griffin?"

Harry explained the story again about planning to change but getting a strong feeling that he shouldn't.

"Interesting. It's probably best since you recovered nicely. Explaining away why you're not dead is easier than explaining how you changed into a griffin. I'm very proud of you. Once again, you put someone else's life above your own safety. I imagine that Sirius will have some harsh words for you but that's expected. It's quite a feat to stop someone from falling even with a wand, and yet you managed it without one. With a bit more time you may have been able to stop your fall as well. You were able to slow down enough to prevent any long-term injuries. How have you been handling the questions about what happened?"

"I just try to act like I don't know what happened and I'm just lucky to be alive. Everybody seems to believe me when I play dumb."

"I too often find that is the best course of action."

Harry hadn't seen R.J. since she came to the hospital wing. He had missed the first training session and now Madame Pomfrey wouldn't let him participate in this one so he had to just sit and watch. He didn't mind just watching R.J. Class was a little rough and Hermione had landed a few hits on Ron so he was a little sore at the end of class.

"This was a brutal class Harry, good thing you were sitting out," Ron said winded.

"I wish Madame Pomfrey had let me come back tonight, I'm ready."

"We'll see you back in the common room Harry. Bye R.J.," Hermione said.

"Do you feel well enough to meet me this evening?" R.J. asked with a sly look on her face.

"Sure. Where do you want to meet, down by the forest?"

"How about the tower where Dobby brought our first meal?"

This surprised him but it sounded better than the forest. "Great, how about in one hour?"

"Good, I'll be waiting for you."

He met up with Ron, Hermione and Ginny in the common room. He was in a very good mood but didn't want to say anything about why. Hermione would be mad he was sneaking around and he didn't want to mention meeting R.J. in front of Ginny. They had finally gotten back to being good friends again.

They had been studying for nearly an hour when Harry announced he was going to bed. Ginny said she was going also but Ron and Hermione were going to stay up for a bit. Harry quickly gathered up his robe and quietly headed down the stairs. He hoped Ginny hadn't come back down. Luckily only Ron and Hermione were there.

"I thought you went to bed." Ron said sounding annoyed. Harry realized he wanted some time alone with Hermione.

"Don't be mad Hermione but I'm going to see R.J."

"Harry, you can't go into the forest anymore, you'll really get into trouble."

"She's in the castle. I'm going to go see her for a while. OK?"

"As long as you're staying in the castle, I'll pretend I didn't see you."

"Don't hurry back," Ron added and then he heard "Ow." And assumed Hermione had hit him.

Harry threw on the cloak and scrambled down the corridor and up the stairs to the tower when they had their first meal during the holiday break. He slowly opened the door and said, "R.J. are you here?"

She stepped from behind the door and said, "You can take the cloak off now Harry."

He let the door shut and then removed his cloak. Immediately she gave him a big hug and a kiss. "I was so worried about you when you were in the hospital. You wouldn't wake up."

"It was nice that you were the first thing I saw when I did wake up. Are you still going to be able to come and see the final match? We're playing for the cup."

"I wouldn't miss it. I'll speak to Severus about making the potion I need. Now back to our limited time together." She smiled and then pulled him to the floor. Harry felt much more comfortable this time with what was going to happen. They had to try and be quieter than the last time since there were many students in the school now. It was so enjoyable to watch her pull her top off and walk toward him. He kept walking backwards just so it would take her longer to get to him. After they were fully undressed, he just kept teasing her and then finally got on top first this time. She was really strong and forceful once they got going. They had rolled over many times before they both collapsed in total enjoyment at the end. After laying back he realized she had scratched his back again. He rolled her over and ran his fingers over her back for the next few minutes until she rolled back and gave him a long deep kiss.

"You should be getting back to your room Harry. I don't want to get you into any real trouble."

"It'd be worth it. It seems so long ago when we first did this." They both got dressed and Harry left first. He made it back to the common room without any trouble and was being very quiet coming through. He went to his room and saw the Ron was already asleep so he slipped into his bed and quickly fell asleep.

Ron and Harry went to watch the Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff Quidditch match to see which team they would play in the finals. Hermione and Ginny had other things to do so they planned on meeting them later. Harry caught Cho's eye when she was looking around and waved at her. She smiled and waved back. "I say she's still interested in you. Are you sure you don't want to give in to her?" Ron asked.

"She's just becoming a better friend, that's all. So, how are things going with you and Hermione? Are you spending enough time alone? I really don't mind if you two want to do things without me tagging along. I fully understand. I'd be telling you to bug-off if you were always hanging around R.J. and me."

"We're alone enough. It's kind of weird when we are. We only talk about school stuff and how stupid you are. We haven't even kissed. Just the thought of that seems a bit weird. Have you kissed R.J. yet?"

"Sure, we kiss a lot now. It's really nice. We talk about everything, growing up and things we like and don't like. I can honestly say we've never talked about how stupid you are though. I think the big difference is that you and Hermione have been good friends for a long time now so you know all about each other. R.J. and I haven't known each other long. It's just different."

The match started so they got into the action and were cheering for Ravenclaw to win. Ron actually wanted Hufflepuff to win since they would be easier to beat but Harry wanted Cho's team to win. It didn't take very long for Cho to catch the Snitch. Now she would be playing Harry's team for the Quidditch cup. Harry walked down to the field to congratulate her.

"Cho, you were great again. I really hope you have an off day when we play you."

She gave him a quick hug and said, "Thanks Harry. I hope we play our best so we have any chance at all. You want to go to Hogsmeade with us? The rest of the team won't mind."

This sounded fun to Harry so he asked, "Ron, we didn't have any plans later with Hermione did we?" Ron shook his head. "I'm going to go to Hogsmeade with the Ravenclaws, I'll see you tonight."

He was having a really good time with their team. They weren't treating him like an enemy and were just enjoying their win. "You guys really played well today. It should be a good match for the cup." Harry told them.

"We hope you go diving off your broom again so we can get an advantage," One of the other players joked.

They were all coming back into the castle later when Fred and George saw him and came running over. "You guys weren't prying any team secrets out of him were you?" The

Ravenclaws made a bunch of rude comments about Fred and George and continued on. Harry stayed behind and talked to Fred. "Do you think we can take them without too much trouble?" Harry asked.

"Should be able to if Ginny stays on her broom. So, what's really up with you and Cho? You're not seeing her and R.J. are you? Wouldn't want to cheat on a vampire, I can tell you that." Fred responded.

"Cho's just a friend."

"That's what you said about R.J. at first too," George jumped in. "Mum couldn't believe that your girlfriend was a vampire. Then Charlie admitted he'd always had a thing for vampires also. They've both ditched the family for girlfriend so mum couldn't stay upset with you. Heck I'd ditch the family in a second for a girl."

Over the next few weeks, Harry had been able to see R.J. alone a few more times. They'd only talked and kissed but it was still nice just being around her. The night before the Quidditch Cup match, she had left him early saying she wanted him to get enough sleep. She was going to meet Ron and Hermione to watch the match. It would be nice to see her during the day.

Harry made his way to the pitch with the rest of the team they all felt nervous since this was for the cup but had confidence that if they didn't make any mistakes they could win. Ravenclaw took the field first to loud applause from the stands. Then Gryffindor came out and the applause seemed about equal. Harry made a lap around the field and settled in high above the goals. Cho Chang came up and hovered off of his left side. She was probably going to do her usual tactic and mark wherever he flew. Before the whistle, Harry yelled over to her "Good Luck today Cho."

She smiled back and said, "You too Harry." Harry looked in the stands and saw R.J. sitting next to Hermione and on her other side was Professor Snape. Harry wondered what Hermione thought about setting so close to Snape.

The whistle blew and the real action started. Harry and Cho both kept trying to find the Snitch and watching out for Bludgers. Both Ravenclaw and Gryffindor played clean games so they didn't have to worry about sneak attacks from the Bludgers. Harry decided to keep Cho on her toes and acted like he saw the Snitch. He went racing about half way down the field and dove straight toward the ground. Cho was tailing him as close as she could. Right before hitting the ground, he pulled up and streaked across the field. Cho had pulled out of the dive earlier and now wasn't near Harry. Out of the corner of his eye, he caught the flash of gold and knew it was the Snitch. Since he was still so close to the ground it was close to his level. Cho looked where he was going and saw the Snitch also. She dove from where she was but it would be a harder catch for her to get it coming from above. Right before Harry got to the Snitch, it darted toward one of the stands. He was getting closer and Cho was right behind him. The Snitch veered straight up right next to the stands and Harry pulled his broom to go straight up flying very close to the students in the front row of those stands. He twisted around and was closing on the Snitch when a Bludger made him veer off. Cho was behind him and continued closing in on the Snitch that was now above where Harry was. He would be coming at the Snitch from almost directly below and Cho was still closing straight behind it. This was going to be very close, she may get to it before he does. Cho was reaching out to grab the Snitch and the instant before she closed her fingers, Harry came streaking up from below and snatched it before she could get hold of it. That was the closest he had come to every losing a match.

At first the crowd didn't know who had grabbed it. Then Harry raised the Snitch over his head and heard the announcer "Gryffindor Wins!" and then the stands erupted into applause. Ron was the first one to him yelling. "We won the cup! You did it Harry!" Then the rest of the team got to him and they were all screaming that they won the cup. When they got to the ground, they were all hugging each other when the Ravenclaw team came over. Even though they lost, they were really good sports and congratulated him on the catch.

Cho gave him a big hug and said. "I almost got you that time Harry. Once before I leave school, I'd like to beat you." Just then Hermione and R.J. came running over. Hermione was hugging Ron and R.J. gave Harry a big hug.

"You all played great," Hermione said very excitedly. "Ron, you're the captain of the Quidditch Cup team."

"Harry, that was amazing flying. I never knew you would be that good." She leaned in and whispered. "Kind of like something else you are amazing at." Harry blushed and saw Hermione looking at him. He wondered if she had overheard R.J.

R.J. turned to Ginny and said, "You are an excellent flier also Ginny. If the match had lasted much longer you would have scored enough that catching the Snitch wouldn't matter."

Ginny smiled at her and said, "Thank you R.J. I appreciate you saying that."

R.J. pulled Harry aside and said, "I'm going to leave now, it gets more uncomfortable the longer I'm out in the sun. I'll see you next week, ok?"

"Thanks for coming, it really meant a lot to see you there. See you." Harry gave her another hug and she left. He watched her go until he was being drug back into the celebration.

The celebration really got going after supper. They started out in the Gryffindor common room but moved to one of the bigger classrooms to have more space. Harry got the rest of the team together and asked if it would be ok to invite the Ravenclaws since they played so well. They all agreed so Harry found Nearly-Headless Nick and asked him if he wouldn't mind going and inviting the Ravenclaws to the party. After a few minutes they started coming in until most of their house were enjoying the celebration also. They even hung their banner along side the Gryffindor banner. It was great that Ron and Ginny were getting so much attention from this win. Ron deserved to have more good things happen to him and Ginny needed to get more confidence on her flying.

The next few weeks were very busy. Everyone was studying hard before taking his or her O.W.L. tests. It was very important in the wizarding world to get a high mark on these tests. The self-defense training classes were cancelled so everyone would have more time to prepare. Harry was only able to sneak around and see R.J. a couple nights. He wanted these tests to be over soon. Finally the time came. The tests would be held over the next two days. A perfect score would be sixteen. Percy Weasley had gotten fourteen when he took the tests. Fred and George had only gotten seven. Ron really wanted to beat Fred and George. Hermione really wanted to get a perfect score. All Harry really cared about was getting them over with.

After the first day, Harry and Ron thought they did pretty well. "Divination was questionable since we just make stuff up anyway," Ron said. "You should have gotten full marks in

Transfigurations since you're an animagus already Harry. Tomorrow the big ones are Potions and Defense against the Dark Arts. "

Potions was the one Harry was worried about the most. It all came down to how hard Snape wanted to be on him. First he breezed through Defense Against the Dark Arts. Having the Auror training over the summer really prepared him for this. Ron didn't think he did very well on the test though. Potions was really difficult. They had to make a potion that would age them to be one hundred years old and then make the reversing potion after they took the first one. It was hard enough for Harry to think but his one hundred year old brain wasn't working as quick. Finally he managed to get it right and returned to his fifteen-year-old form.

They were all waiting anxiously for the letters to come with their results. Professor McGonagall came into the common room to hand them out. Harry, Ron and Hermione took theirs and went to the far corner of the room to open them.

"You go first Hermione, you'll be the best," Harry said, making her blush.

She opened and read the letter then said, "Well I didn't get a perfect score. I only got fifteen."

"Fifteen! That's better than Percy did!" Ron yelled and then hugged her.

"That great Hermione. Where did you miss a point?" Harry asked.

"Defense Against the Dark Arts. That was really hard," she said sadly.

"Ok Ron, you next," Harry said.

"Why me?" He responded but went ahead and opened his. "Nine, I got nine! That's better than Fred or George. Ok Harry you go."

Harry opened his and looked stunned. "I got eleven! How did I get eleven? Look at this; I got full marks in Divination. All I had to do was predict my painful death and she gives me full marks. I think we all did great. This calls for a celebration in Hogsmeade tomorrow. What do you say?"

Chapter 14

Ron and Hermione both agreed that with the stress of these tests were over they needed a break. There were many fifth and sixth years in town the next day. The seventh years were still taking their N.E.W.T.s so they were too busy to come. The friends ended up in the Three Broomsticks sitting with Ginny, and then later, Cho and a couple of her friends joined them. Everyone was talking about the O.W.L.s and congratulating Hermione on getting fifteen.

Harry had been sitting next to Cho and actually spent more time talking to her and her friends than he had talking to the Gryffindors. He felt a tap on his shoulder and saw Ron and Hermione looking at him sternly. "You do remember which common room you go back to at night don't you?" Ron said loud enough that the Ravenclaws overheard.

"That's ok Harry, we were just heading out anyway," Cho said. Harry watched them walk out and then turned back to Ron.

"Sure you made the right choice?" Ron asked with a smile.

Harry had just started to answer when they heard some loud explosions and screaming coming from outside. Harry pushed to the front and once outside saw why everyone was screaming. It was the Dark Mark and at least six Death Eaters.

"Harry!" He heard Cho screaming.

Turning he saw one of the Death Eaters holding her with his wand pointed straight at her head. The hand holding the wand was silver. Wormtail had Cho!

"Potter! My master wishes to speak with you. If you refuse, she dies now!" Wormtail said clearly.

Harry could hear Cho crying and see the terror in her eyes. He saw a sixth-year try to cast a spell at one of the Death Eaters but was blasted backwards before he got the first words out of his mouth.

"The next one who tries anything dies." Wormtail spat. "Potter! Now, what's your answer?"

Harry couldn't stand seeing Cho so scared. "Fine. Let her go and I'll come with you now."

He heard many people say "Harry!" and then singled out Hermione's voice. "No way, he'll kill you this time. Let's get Dumbledore."

Harry took a few steps toward Wormtail who backed up seeming a little afraid. "No tricks. You let her go and I'll go with you."

Wormtail smiled an evil smile and said, "You know it doesn't work like that. You have one minute until she's dead." The last thing he heard was Cho screaming, "Harry." Before they vanished.

He ran to the spot and drew his wand. One of the other Death Eaters said, "This medallion is a Portkey. It will take you to where she is. You don't have much time."

Harry turned and saw the other Ravenclaw girls crying hysterically. He saw the other Gryffindor students mouths moving but really couldn't make anything out. Staring at Ginny directly Harry said, "What choice do I have?" before stunning one of the Death Eaters and then taking the Portkey and vanishing.

The first thing noticed upon arriving was a terrible, familiar cold feeling. Suddenly, someone said, "I'll take that," and quickly grabbed the Portkey away from him. Surveying his surroundings, he saw what was giving him the cold feeling. Standing a ways away were three different groups of Dementors. He couldn't tell how many were in each group but it looked like a lot. One group was standing inside the entrance to a cave, one was behind him and one was off to the right. They were far enough away that they weren't affecting him too much. Straight ahead he saw Wormtail and Cho.

"I'm here Wormtail, just like I said. Send Cho back now," Harry said coldly. He could tell Cho was even more terrified than before.

"I don't think so Potter. My master will want to decide her fate." Wormtail laughed. "You get over here next to her."

Harry quickly went to Cho as Wormtail went to where Harry was standing. Looking back at Wormtail, Harry could easily see the group of Dementors in the cave now. Reaching Cho, she grabbed onto him, "Harry, what's going to happen?" and continued crying.

Harry could feel the anger building in him but couldn't risk anything happening to Cho. He held her tight and said, "Don't worry, I'll figure something out." Looking around more, he realized that he recognized this place. They were in the Dark Forest. Why were they so close to the school? If Harry could get them away, he could run back to the school from here. The problem was he didn't know how many Death Eaters or Dementors were really around, and he really wanted to know why they were so close.

"Wormtail. If your master doesn't show up soon, I'm going to take my friend and leave," Harry said sounding as confident as he could. "You wouldn't do anything to stop us would you? Surely not after I'm the reason you're still alive."

Before Wormtail could answer Harry heard a familiar voice. "Glad you could make it Harry." Voldemort. Harry thought, and then he heard Nagini his snake. "Will I be fed tonight master?"

"Oh yes, you will eat well tonight Nagini, only not yet," Voldemort replied.

"Why don't you come with us Nagini. I can feed you tonight as well. And, I won't ever need to milk you," Harry said to the snake speaking Parslemouth.

"Don't talk to my snake boy!" Voldemort roared. Harry noticed the Death Eaters from town had now showed up. One came up to Voldemort and whispered something.

"So Nathan. You let yourself get stunned by this boy in front of the whole town," Voldemort said in disgust looking at the wizard Harry had stunned.

"Yes master. I'm sorry master he was too fast," the squirming wizard said.

"I hate making an example of you but we cannot seem weak. CRUCIO!" Voldemort said and the wizard fell to the ground rolling in pain.

Harry looked at Cho who seemed like she could pass out at any time. He quickly squeezed her hand and said, "I won't let anything happen to you." Glancing down at his hand, he noticed his ring was glowing bright green. This meant an 'Unspeakable' was here. Was one of the Death Eaters an unspeakable? Harry quickly turned the ring over so no one would notice. During the quiet after Voldemort released the spell, Harry thought he heard a familiar sound; one that still sent shivers down his spine.

The sound was masked by Voldemort talking again. "You should really consider joining me Harry. Think of the incredible things we could do together."

"Why don't you let Cho go so that we can talk about it?" Harry answered.

"That might be possible," Voldemort said while taking a couple steps toward Cho. Then he suddenly stopped and turned to Wormtail. "She's Muggle-born! You brought me a Muggle-born witch!"

Wormtail went white and started shaking. "I...I...I didn't know master. She was sitting with him at the table. How could I know?"

Harry knew Voldemort only considered pureblood wizards good for anything but didn't understand why he was so mad.

"Crucio" Voldemort shouted and Wormtail started screaming in pain.

Harry saw Cho turn away crying. This time Harry was sure he recognized the sound during the quiet moment after the spell. Harry whispered to Cho. "Cho. Listen to me carefully. Tell Dumbledore there's an Unspeakable here, many Dementors and some death eaters." She looked at him terrified and confused. "You're going to be ok Cho, make sure you tell him."

"Why do her parents make any difference? Let her go anyway, I'll still be here," Harry said loudly.

"You know me well enough by now Harry to realize that's not going to happen. She was going to be a messenger. To inform the others and to get them to come for you. We have other 'friends' waiting for that opportunity. I won't use a Muggle-born for such an important task. She's just a spare now."

There was that word, just like last year. "Kill the spare." Is what he had said then? Calmly, Harry said, "You let her go now, and I'll let you leave here tonight."

Voldemort just started at him for a minute and then started laughing. "You'll LET me leave? Don't you remember last time Harry?"

And then another voice rang out, "That's how he spoke to me earlier master. I told you about it." It was Lucius Malfoy. "Let me deal with him."

"Have it your way Lucius," Voldemort said in a strange tone.

"I've been waiting for this Potter," Malfoy spat.

Quickly Harry used the constricting curse and cut off Malfoy's breathing. Lucius started gasping for air. After a moment, Malfoy fell on his knees and had his hands near his throat trying to pry off the invisible force crushing his throat. Then Harry heard Voldemort say, "Release him or she dies now." Harry released Malfoy.

"I asked you then Lucius if you knew what I could do to you. Obviously you didn't," Harry spat at him. Cho was just staring at Harry in amazement.

"My, my Harry. Your extra-curricular work this summer seems to have paid off. Get back where you belong Lucius. I've been keeping tabs on you Harry. Can't have you running off now can I? I think you've forgotten how unpleasant disappointing me can be." Voldemort pointed his wand at Harry and yelled "Crucio".

For an instant the pain was terrible, and then Harry quickly blocked the pain but still fell, pretending to be in agony. He didn't want this secret to get out just yet. He could see the pain in Cho's eyes watching him go through this but couldn't hear her screaming his name. Harry looked up at her and gave her a little wink. Then he felt the spell stop. He clung to Cho while standing and whispered. "Don't worry, that doesn't hurt me. Tell Dumbledore it's a trap, not to come. Tell him I have friends and family here, he'll know." Cho didn't look like she understood.

Suddenly Harry heard clicking and screams. Hundreds of large spiders were attacking the Dementors and some of the Death Eaters. Then Harry heard hoofs and saw the centaurs jumping across at some of the other wizards. Harry quickly cast a patronus to slow down the Dementors, grabbed Cho's hand and ran into the forest before any spells could be cast at him. A short distance down the path they met Firenze the centaur who had helped Harry.

"Harry Potter. You must leave now. You cannot win this. Get on," Firenze said.

Cho was just muttering, "Who... What".

"Firenze, please get Cho out of her. Get her to the school," Harry pleaded.

"It is for you to go Harry, it is too important to lose you."

"I would die before I let something happen to her. With her gone, I can concentrate on what is important. Please before they get here."

Firenze grabbed Cho and was throwing her on his back when she said, "C'mon Harry, we can both go."

Harry looked at them and said, "Than you Firenze, for everything. Tell Aragog thanks as well."

Firenze quickly answered, "Goodbye Harry Potter. It has been a pleasure." And then the centaur sped off. Harry could hear Cho yelling after him.

Well, this was it, he thought. He wasn't going to run. He walked back toward the caves. The screaming had died down by the time he got back. He heard Voldemort yelling at the Death Eaters and then suddenly stop and turn toward him. "Decided not to run away? Not what I expected Harry. This saves me the trouble of coming for you again." The group of Dementors in the cave started walking toward him. Harry cast another Patronus which chased them back, deeper into the cave.

"Not up for dueling this time? Not sure about the odds?" Harry was trying to provoke Voldemort into making a mistake.

"I just like the show you're putting on. Since it will be your last, I thought we would prolong it a bit."

Harry walked to the side a bit until he had a clear view of the cave, concentrated as hard as he could and quickly cast the reductor curse to blast away solid objects. Voldemort dodged as if he thought the curse was coming at him but it hit square on the top of the cave. With a loud rumble, the cave collapsed, either killing or trapping the Dementors and any wizards inside. He could hear the other Death Eaters mumbling between themselves.

"Silence you fools. Can't any of you even challenge a fifteen-year-old boy?" Voldemort screamed.

Two of the wizards cast spells at Harry but he was able to block them both. Then Harry saw another group of Dementors start to move up. Before he cast the patronus, he heard a yell and then saw a Dementor fall. Taking this opportunity he was able to use the Puncio spell on one Death Eater and stun another. Another scream and yet another Dementor fell. Then Harry saw her. R.J. was here! She was using her sword on the Dementors. Voldemort and the remaining Death Eaters started sending spells toward Harry and it was all he could do to dodge them. Suddenly he heard a different scream and then "STOP!"

Back at the castle Dumbledore had ordered all the students into the Great Hall. The Headmaster had gathered the teachers near the entrance with the witnesses to the abduction to get the details on the incident. Dumbledore started off saying, "Ministry officials are at the scene now trying to get any more information. All I know at this point is that Miss Chang was abducted and Harry voluntarily went after her." Ron, Hermione, Ginny and Cho's friends all started talking at once. "One at a time please," Dumbledore asked calmly. "Miss Granger, if you would continue."

Hermione told the story of Cho and her friends leaving and then hearing screams and explosions. Then she mentioned about the wizard holding Cho. "He held his wand right at her head sir. It was strange, his hand was silver. Not like he was wearing a glove or anything."

Dumbledore didn't seem surprised by this. The other student's accounts were very similar. Only Ginny had also noticed the silver hand.

"Minerva. You and I will go to Hogsmeade to attempt to get more information. Severus, will you please go to the Ministry and see if they've gotten anything there."

Dumbledore was speaking but got interrupted by Hagrid crashing through the door. "Professor. A centaur is coming and has someone with him."

The group headed to the door when Dumbledore spoke, "Students, do NOT leave the castle for any reason." This came in a tone that they fully understood to mean business. "Teachers, do not leave on the errands yet, but please get Madame Pomfrey. Hagrid, please accompany me to meet the centaur."

They watched as Dumbledore and Hagrid swiftly made their way to the centaur. When Hagrid pulled the person off the centaur some of the students saw it was a petite girl and the Ravenclaw's yelled "It's Cho!" Hagrid and Cho were quickly walking back toward the castle but Dumbledore remained and talked to the centaur. After a moment, Dumbledore quickly arrived at the castle also. Cho was still terrified and shaking. They all moved into a quiet room off of the main hall.

"Are you all right Miss Chang? Are you hurt at all?" Dumbledore asked in a calming voice.

"N.n.No, I'm not hurt, just scared," she whimpered in response.

"Quite understandable." Madame Pomfrey entered with a glass of smoking liquid. "Drink this, it should calm you down. Do you mind if yours and Harry's friends stay while I ask a few questions about your ordeal?"

Cho looked up and saw the worry on the faces and said, "I don't mind." Then she remembered something and sat up straight. "Professor, Harry told me to tell you something, he made it sound important. He said to not leave the school, it's a trap. Don't come after him."

"We can't just leave him alone!" Ron yelled.

Dumbledore raised a hand and said, "Did Harry say anything else?"

"Yes, he said there are Dementors and Death Eaters. Oh, and an Unspeakable. I'm not sure what that is though."

"Was he sure about the Unspeakable? Did he say who?" Dumbledore asked.

"No, he only said an Unspeakable," Cho replied still obviously confused.

"How could Potter know an unspeakable? They take security very seriously," Snape asked.

"He's been training with them over the summer, let her finish," Hermione snapped.

There was a look of shock on everyone's face except Dumbledore and Hermione. "Miss Granger is correct Severus. Please, back to the matter at hand. Can you tell us the details now Miss Chang?"

"Spiders! Giant spiders! Harry said something about there being friends and family near and then giant spiders attacked. They didn't come after us though. That's when Harry pulled me away."

"Ah, those would be his friends, and you met his family already Miss Chang. The centaur which brought you back is Firenze. That clan of centaurs has kind of adopted Harry. I assure you the spiders won't harm him."

"How has Potter become friends with giant spiders? And what has he done with the centaurs?" Snape asked, looking totally confused.

"Aragog tried to eat Harry and me a couple years ago but we got loose and then Harry killed that giant snake which the spiders were afraid of. Aragog told Harry he was in his debt after that," Ron spat out.

Cho and her friends couldn't seem to grasp all of this.

"And as you know Severus, the centaurs normally don't like human contact but seem to have found reason to give counsel to Harry. They have done so on more than one occasion this year with positive results. That is how he met Miss R.J. by the way," Dumbledore said.

Ginny spoke up, "If Harry pulled you out of the area and got you to the centaur, then why didn't he come back as well? What happened to him?"

They all turned to look at Ginny who was standing very confidently and expecting an answer. "A reasonable question Miss Weasley. Miss Chang?" Dumbledore said.

"The centaur told Harry he had to leave, that he couldn't win but Harry said to just take me. Said he would die trying to protect me but could concentrate with me gone. Then Harry thanked the centaur for everything and told him to thank that Aragog. Then the centaur just said goodbye and brought me here."

Dumbledore suddenly looked very sad and tired.

"What is it sir? Harry's out in the forest, can't we go help him?" Ron pleaded.

"If we go to help Harry, the school will be attacked. I've always thought that one of the things that made Harry accomplish remarkable things was that things we in the wizarding world think are impossible is that he doesn't know better. He grew up not knowing anything about magic so he has no preconceived notions about what's possible and what's not. As long as he believes he can do something, he seems to find a way."

"But Hermione didn't grow up in the wizard world either," Ginny added.

"True Miss Weasley. Miss Granger is also remarkable but the difference is that Hermione bases most of her actions on logic and facts. If she has read or heard from reliable sources that something is expected, she believes that way. Harry doesn't seem to place the same emphasis on reading or researching. He just goes off and does things," Dumbledore said with a smile, then turned serious again. "Hearing his comments to the centaur has me concerned that maybe he doesn't truly believe this is winnable. Can you tell us the details now Miss Chang?"

Cho told the entire story. She was stopped at the point where Harry mentioned the name Lucius. "Are you sure that was the name?" Snape said sharply.

"Yes. The wizard said something like he'd been waiting for this and all of a sudden he was gasping for air and Harry was just pointing his wand at him. I hadn't heard Harry say any spell. The wizard fell to the ground and Harry dropped his wand then said something like 'I told you that you didn't know what I could do to you Lucius'. Then You-Know-Who just laughed and said 'Lucius get back where you belong' and then said something about keeping tabs on Harry over the summer."

"That would make sense with Harry's Unspeakable comment," Dumbledore said quietly.

Cho went on. "Then You-Know-Who did the Cruciatus curse on Harry." Professor McGonagall and even Snape flinched at the thought of it. "But it was strange. I thought Harry was in real pain but when he looked up at me, he just winked at me. And then when he stood up that's when he said not to worry because that doesn't hurt him and then mentioned friends and family. It didn't seem like the curse had bothered him at all."

"That's impossible Miss Chang. I personally know how powerful that spell is coming from Voldemort," Snape hissed.

"But she is an eye witness to just that fact Severus. I fully believe her," Dumbledore said kindly.

"That's all there is sir. Then we ran and met the centaur," Cho finished.

"Thank you Miss Chang. I know that was difficult. You have prevented us from making a mistake that could have caused further pain within the school. Why don't your friends escort you with Madame Pomfrey now? You could use a good nights sleep."

"What are you going to do about Harry sir? He's still out there," Cho pleaded.

"I'm going to wait Miss Chang. That is what Harry said to do. What choice do I have?"

"That's exactly what Harry said before going after Cho!" Ginny exclaimed. "He turned back toward us and said 'What choice do I have', stunned that wizard and took the Portkey. He had a choice. He could have stayed with us and been here now!" Ginny was glaring at Cho.

"Miss Weasley. I'm sure you don't mean that. Would you expect anything less of Harry? Remember he and your brother left the safety of friends and went into the Chamber of Secrets to rescue you. They both came back. Don't lose hope yet."

"Yes sir. I'm sorry Cho, I really didn't mean that," Ginny said crying.

Cho was crying again as well said, "I understand Ginny."

Just then they heard a distant roar, felt the ground shake and saw a blinding blue flash through the single window in the room. Then nothing, it had stopped as suddenly as it had started.

"What was that?" Ron yelled.

"Excellent question Mr. Weasley," Dumbledore said while walking back to the entrance hall.

Looking up Harry saw Voldemort smiling. "Throw down your wand Harry or she dies," Confused Harry looked around and saw that a Dementor was holding R.J. off the ground by her throat. "A Dementor's kiss is worse to a vampire than to a wizard Harry. Throw your wand down and I'll let her come to you without her sword of course. The Dementors and Death Eaters won't harm her."

Without thinking it through, he threw his wand off to the side. Harry heard Voldemort make small laugh and the Dementor released R.J. and backed away. She slowly got up and ran to him.

"Harry, I'm sorry they stopped me. You shouldn't have thrown down your wand," She hugged him tightly.

"How touching. Harry, we are more alike than you think. We both appreciate the friendship from creatures of the night," Voldemort said with a gleam in his eyes.

Harry stepped forward and said, "What are you talking about, I'm nothing like you. Now, will you let us leave or do we have to fight again?" Harry was trying to sound confident, but inside he was terrified. He wanted to get out of here with R.J. as fast as he could.

Voldemort had a strange look in his eyes and then he heard it. A sudden 'woosh' and then the thump. Turning around he saw another older vampire standing with a sword in his hands and R.J. laying on the ground. The second vampire had cut off her head.

In a rage he turned to Voldemort and said, "You said she wouldn't be harmed!"

Calmly, Voldemort said, "No Harry, I said the Dementors and Death Eaters wouldn't harm her. I didn't mention my other friends. Meet your friend's companion before you came along."

Harry knelt down next to her body. The necklace he had given her had fallen off. He picked it up and held it tightly. Never before had he been so angry. He didn't care at all if he lived or died he only wanted revenge. Looking up at the second vampire, he suddenly became aware why people were terrified of them. This vampire just looked evil and his fangs were extended. Just the feeling he gave off was of death. Then Harry heard Voldemort say, "I had always planned on taking care of you myself, but my new friend's technique is just too enjoyable to watch. Good Bye Harry."

The vampire smiled and raised his sword. Before the vampire could swing it there was a sickening sound and a tree branch the size of Harry's leg came ripping out of the vampire's chest, covered with blood. Quickly Harry summoned his wand back and blasted the closest Death Eater; which happened to be Lucius Malfoy. One set of Dementors started coming closer, but Harry noticed the second set had never come any closer since the beginning. Harry sent a patronus to keep the approaching set back and just stood glaring at Voldemort who had a totally different look on his face now. Harry could sense fear.

"This is it Voldemort. I'm not afraid of you. You can't do anything else to me that will make me afraid."

"Is that so Harry? If not fear, what about pain? Crucio!" The evil wizard roared.

This was exactly what Harry had hoped for. Harry concentrated on letting in as much pain as he possibly could. When he felt like he would pass out from any more he pointed his wand and yelled as loud as he could, 'Totilla Desissa'. For a second, Harry saw Voldemort's eyes get huge and he saw the terror in Voldemort's face and then there was the blinding white flash from his wand. Instead of just blasting Voldemort back, there came a huge blue explosion. The last thing Harry remembered was being blown backwards very violently.

Everyone in the Great Hall was wondering what had just happened. Dumbledore came in and made an announcement that everything was fine and the students would be staying in that room for the evening. Prefects were standing around both entrances making sure no one left.

Cho and her friends, and Ron, Hermione and Ginny were still standing in the entrance Hall waiting with Professor McGonagall and the head of Ravenclaw house. "Hermione, what do you really think that was?" Ron asked quietly.

She had tears in her eyes and said, "I don't know, but it didn't sound good."

Professor McGonagall said, "Come now Miss Granger, we don't know that anything bad has happened?"

Cho spoke up quickly, "We *do* know something bad has happened; we just don't know if Harry is still alive!"

"Of course, I meant we don't know if that flash was something bad happening to Harry," McGonagall responded, trying to make everyone keep up hope.

"Let's see, there are Dementors, Death Eaters, You-Know-Who and Harry out there, how could it have been a good thing?" Ron asked sounded dejected. Ginny came over and hugged her brother.

After a few minutes Snape who had been standing outside stepped in and said, "Headmaster, a Dementor is coming."

Quickly Dumbledore stepped outside, quickly re-opened the door and said, "No one come out this door. Severus, please come with me."

Everyone inside the entrance hall looked very worried, even Professor McGonagall. After only a few moments, Snape came through the door in a hurry saying, "Please get out of the way." In his arms he was carrying a limp, bloody body. It was Harry. Harry had cuts and blood all over him and his arms were just hanging down limp. In his right hand, the necklace he had given R.J. had become tangled between his fingers and his wand was tangled in the chain. Harry's eyes were rolled back into his head and instead of showing white, they were totally yellow.

"Harry! Is he..." Hermione started to ask.

"I don't know Miss Granger," Snape said, not even slowing down, instead heading straight to the hospital wing.

Everyone in the entrance started crying; even Ron was having trouble holding back.

"He'll be ok. Madame Pomfrey can fix things," Hermione said, trying to sound like she believed it.

"Didn't you see him? Was he even alive then?" Ron said angrily.

"Mr. Weasley! Please let's get the facts before saying anything," McGonagall said holding back a tear. Cho was crying openly. The door opened again and Professor Dumbledore came in.

"I don't have much to say right now except that Harry's friend R.J. is dead. A Dementor brought Harry back and another Dementor carried Voldemort away. Voldemort is in at least as bad of shape as Harry. It seems not all Dementors are on Voldemort's side in this. Please return to the Great Hall for the evening. There will be no visitors tonight."

There had been no change in Harry's condition in the week left in the term. Madame Pomfrey had allowed visitors but Harry didn't change. Hermione had helped Ron pack up Harry's trunk on the day of the final feast and noticed his journal on the table. She opened it, expecting to see blank pages, but quite a few of the pages had extremely blurry text. Hermione couldn't read it but she could tell where he had written. "Ron, look at this," She showed him the journal.

"What do you think it means?" Ron asked.

"I don't know, let's take it up to the hospital with us."

Ron, Hermione, Ginny and Cho were all visiting Harry when Professor Dumbledore came in. "It's good to see his friends here. Madame Pomfrey doesn't think it makes any difference but this is where we disagree. I think he can tell when friends are near."

"Can't anything be done for him?" Cho asked solemnly.

"Maybe if we knew what was truly wrong with him. Madame Pomfrey has been perplexed about his condition from the start. With the injuries he sustained, he should really have died but as you see he hasn't. However he's not exactly normal either. You may have noticed his eyes when he came in. We can't explain why they are yellow or why his breathing is so rapid. The good news is he hasn't gotten any worse."

"Professor. This is Harry's journal I gave him for his birthday so he could record his adventures for his children," Hermione said

"And what would you be doing with it Miss Granger?" Dumbledore asked slyly.

"Um... Harry had it charmed so that only he could read it unless he gave someone permission or until he died. Normally the pages had been totally blank, even just after he wrote something but now you can see which pages were written on. You can't make out any words it's too blurry. What do you think it means?"

Dumbledore studied the journal. "My guess would be the charm. Even though Harry isn't getting any worse, he's not in very good shape right now. Why do you think he put that particular charm on the diary?"

Ginny spoke up, "He doesn't expect to live long enough to fall in love and have a family. He told me that when he was staying at our house. He expects Voldemort to win one of these times."

"Well, it wasn't this time was it? So he was wrong on part of his prediction. You said Voldemort's name Miss Weasley. Why now?" Dumbledore asked.

"If Harry can say it, why shouldn't I?" she replied.

"Why indeed?" the Headmaster responded.

"What will happen to him over the summer?" Hermione asked.

"He will stay here until he wakes up. I have full confidence he will wake up whenever he is ready. I don't think the physical damage is the reason he is like this now. Harry and R.J. were getting very close. I know this from talking to R.J., not just from Harry. Voldemort killed Harry's parents and now he has killed someone Harry was falling in love with." Ginny and Cho both flinched at this. "I think the pain of that happening again is what he is currently battling with. Having said that; we are still unsure how he did survive the physical damage. Harry has healed remarkably well in a short amount of time. Go down and try to enjoy the feast. You all know that is what Harry would want you to do."

The mood in the hall was mixed. Everyone was down a little, even the Slytherins. The news of Voldemort being beaten again had hit Draco hard. The Ravenclaw table was worried about Cho and the Gryffindor table was worried about Harry. They heard Professor Dumbledore get everyone's attention and say. "Another year of learning out of the way. For some of you, this may have been your last year of learning as you are off to the real world now. For a year that had gone remarkably well, it has taken a sour turn at the end. Very similar to the events of last year. As you all have heard by now, Voldemort arranged the abduction of one of our students and planned on that being the first step in a surprise attack on the school. Thankfully that plan failed. Miss Chang was abducted in Hogsmeade to be used as lure for another student who was to be used as a lure for some of the teachers to rescue. Had we attempted this rescue, the school was to be attacked while we were gone. The plan started off well. Miss Chang was taken and the second student; Harry Potter did go after her. Thankfully Harry and Miss Chang were able to learn some details of this plot. With some help, Miss Chang was able to get back to the school and warn us. It wasn't meant to be that way for Harry. He had to contend with some dark wizards, Dementors and Voldemort himself. The bad news is that someone most of you have seen; our special self-defense instructor and Harry's guest to the Halloween ball; Miss R.J. has been killed and Harry is currently in the hospital. The good news is that our sources tell me that Voldemort is in worse shape than Harry. I have no other news on his condition other than that I expect him to recover. Please raise your glasses to Miss R.J. who gave her life helping to protect this school. Awarding the final points for the outstanding effort in keeping the teachers from making a terrible mistake has caused a tie for the house cup. Ravenclaw and Gryffindor will share the cup this year." There was clapping and some cheers but it was not a big celebration.

Boarding the train, Hermione and Ron were saying goodbye to Hagrid. "Don't ye' worry none. He'll come out of it. I'll be here with 'im every day. He's tuf'r than 'e looks."

"Wish we could stay too Hagrid," Hermione said and then boarded the train.

Ron, Hermione and Ginny had a compartment to themselves when they heard a knock. "If that's Draco, I shooting first and asking questions later," Ron scowled. Opening the door they found Cho instead. "Oh, it's you." Ron added.

"Sorry, I can leave if I'm bothering you," Cho said.

"No, we thought it might be Draco," Hermione quickly explained. "Come on in."

Cho sat down next to Ginny and asked, "Would you mind if I rode back with you? Right now, I have more in common with you than my other friends."

"Sure, fine by me," Ron said.

"Of course, we understand," Hermione added.

"Yeah," Ginny said rather coldly.

After some awkward small talk, Cho asked, "Ginny, would you mind telling me what happened in the Chamber of Secrets a few years ago? Dumbledore mentioned something about Harry and Ron coming for you and well you know the rest of the school doesn't ever hear the real stories. You guys have done so much and the rest of us sometimes don't believe or don't hear about it. I'd like to hear it from you if you don't mind."

Ron and Hermione looked at each other and gave a chuckle. Cho looked confused. "Sorry Cho but earlier this year Ron and I were complaining that Harry was keeping things from us too much and when he suggested that he just not tell us anything, we had a discussion on which would be better, not doing all these things with him and just hearing about them later or really being involved. It was an easy choice really, we'd rather be involved so I can understand you wanting to know."

"He still annoys us by keeping things from us. In fact he told Ginny long before us that he was an animagus and..." Ron was saying

"RON!" came the cry from both Ginny and Hermione.

"Harry's an animagus? Really?" Cho asked excitedly.

"Ron, you're as bad as Hagrid," Hermione said. "Cho, no offense but there are some things that only Harry should tell people. Right Ron."

"Um, yes Hermione. Sorry Cho. Go on with your story Ginny," Ron said meekly.

Ginny told the story and it was actually the first time Hermione had heard certain parts so she sat there listening closely also. At the end Cho said, "Thank you Ginny. That was beyond most of the rumors being said."

"Ok, my turn. You guys wouldn't believe how he talked to Mr. Malfoy. He was almost taunting him. And then he cursed him like it was nothing."

"Oh, we'd believe it. He stood up to Mr. Malfoy in Diagon alley when we were buying our books this year. We couldn't believe it. Thought he was mental," Ron added.

"He talked the same way to You-Know-Who. Harry wouldn't back down from anything that was said. It was scary. But, while you all are talking to me, what really happened with that flying car that year?" Cho asked.

Hermione got a stern look on her face but Ron lightened up. "Oh, that's a great one, let me tell it! Have you met Dobby yet?"

They spent the rest of the ride back telling Cho about the things they had done. It passed the time and really lifted their spirits.

Chapter 15

Back at the castle, a week had passed with no change in Harry. Sirius had been staying at the school to be close whenever Harry woke up. Professor McGonagall and Professor Snape had stayed as well. One morning, when Madame Pomfrey went in to check on Harry she let out a loud scream and came crashing out the door. Within moments, Sirius, Professor McGonagall and Dumbledore were outside. Snape was just coming up when Pomfrey calmed down enough to say, "There's a lion in there!"

"A Lion?" Sirius and Snape said together. "Is Harry all right?"

"Calm down, calm down. This is a good thing. It is not a lion Madame, it is a griffin and it is Harry," Dumbledore said with a twinkle.

"Harry? I don't understand?" Sirius asked totally confused. Snape didn't say anything but looked as confused as Sirius.

"Sirius, we planned on telling you but when you came to visit, meeting R.J. seemed to be the thing to do. It just slipped our mind. Harry is an animagus," Dumbledore said calmly.

"Potter an animagus? Did he register or is this another of summer studies?" Snape asked.

"He did it by the book," McGonagall stepped in. "I trained him. He was able to learn it in under a month. And he has filled out the registration paperwork but we are holding it until such time as it becomes public knowledge."

"A month! It took me nearly a year," Sirius exclaimed.

"Yes well he had some help. It seems a real griffin turned up before term this year and Harry stumbled upon it. He was able to get some hair and I made a potion that helped the process along. However, even with the potion, he made remarkable progress," McGonagall added.

"Yes, yes, but back to the current situation. He has woken up. Let's see if we can talk to him," Dumbledore said and they walked through the door.

As soon as they were in the hospital room and Sirius started to speak, the griffin let out a huge roar and swatted one of the beds so that it crashed into the wall near them. The teachers quickly backed out of the room.

"Why is he like that? And, why is he so mad?" Sirius asked, concerned.

"That would explain things," Dumbledore mumbled to himself.

"Excuse me Headmaster," McGonagall asked.

"Did you notice his eyes when we brought him in? Yellow. We couldn't understand how he had lived with all of the injuries and why his breathing was so shallow and rapid all this time. You know that griffins are extremely hard to kill. That is why they were hunted so much. My guess is that roar we heard right before the flash was Harry and that all this time he has been a griffin except for the body. As for why he is mad. Well, assume you're a griffin that has a

natural mistrust of humans. All you know is that you've been attacked and now you wake up in an unnatural place with five humans walking toward you. What would you do?"

"Let me go in by myself," Sirius offered.

"I'm not sure that is wise. You're a dog in your animagus state. A big dog yes; but no match for a griffin. If he can sense your dog form that would be worse than a human. None of us would be a match for an angry griffin if it really wanted to attack. I'll go in alone."

Dumbledore walked through the door and didn't step any closer. The griffin gave a low growl. "Harry. You're safe here. You're at school and no one will hurt you." The griffin paced back and forth. "Can you change back? There are others who want to talk to you." Dumbledore took a step forward. The griffin roared again, turned and crashed through the window. Dumbledore quickly went to the window and saw the griffin flying toward the forest. The others came in after hearing the crash.

"What happened?" Sirius yelled.

"He jumped out the window," Dumbledore said calmly.

"He jumped?" Snape exclaimed.

"Not to worry Severus. He can fly of course," Dumbledore replied and Snape just shook his head.

"Now what do we do. We've waited weeks for him to wake up and now he's flown away," Sirius said almost panicking.

Dumbledore's eyes lit up and he said, "I have an idea where he is. I'll go by myself and see if I can talk to him. Minerva, could you fill them in on how Harry came to be an animagus please?"

Dumbledore walked down the path into the forest. Approaching the spot where Harry had taken him to see the real griffin he heard the low growl again and then saw the griffin pacing back and forth. "Ah Harry. I thought I may find you here." The griffin kept pacing. "You are really safe now. Nothing here will harm you. You remember bringing me here to see the real griffin don't you?" The griffin stopped pacing and just stood there staring. "Your godfather is here and wants to see you. Everything is ok now."

The griffin changed back into Harry who collapsed to his knees and yelled, "It's *not* ok! They killed her. She's gone." Then Harry fell to his side crying. Dumbledore came to his side and sat down not saying anything. "Why me professor? I just want a normal life."

"Normal is in the one doing the living Harry. Yes, R.J. is gone, we have seen to her arrangements. You will be able see for yourself. How are you doing though? You had us all worried."

"I just hurt, all over," Harry suddenly straightened up. "Sir, what happened to Voldemort? How did I get back to the castle?"

Dumbledore held up a hand and said, "You were brought back by a dementor. It seems not all dementors are as bad as I had thought. They have assured me that the prisoners in Azkaban will not be freed. It was quite a shock seeing a dementor gently carrying your body out of the forest. As for Voldemort, he was also taken by another group of dementors. From what we hear, he is in worse shape than you were. I also doubt he has access to as good of care or as many dear friends to watch over him."

"The Unspeakable! Did they find out who it was?"

"Yes Harry, thanks to you they did. It wasn't a currently active member but one with connections inside none the less. The man is in custody now and a man named Fletch told me to tell you thanks and said, 'The offer still stands' He didn't explain this offer though."

"Fletch told me that if I don't play Quidditch after school that I could become a real unspeakable. He'd get me a job in his department."

"That's high praise Harry. Most wizards would do nearly anything to get into that department."

"Did Cho make it out ok? She seemed really scared."

"Miss Chang is fine and delivered your messages perfectly. Your friend the centaur made good time getting her out from what I hear. Are you ready to walk back to the castle? There are some people who are quite anxious to see you up and about, and not in a form that could rip them apart. You gave Madame Pomfrey quite a start."

"I'm sorry sir, I'll apologize to her. I woke up and felt so afraid and confused. Speaking of Cho getting out, I really need to thank Aragog before long. Without his help, I don't think she would have made it."

"All in due time. Let's go back to the school. Before we get back, I'd like to ask you one question without the others present. Did you ever have any doubts about what you were doing?"

Harry thought for a moment and said, "Until Firenze had taken Cho away, yes. I didn't know how to get her out of there safely. After that, no. I didn't know if I would get out myself but I didn't have doubts about what I was doing. It was weird, I can't explain it."

"No need to try. Let's go in."

The others were waiting in the entrance hall. Immediately Sirius ran up and hugged Harry. "I'm so glad you're ok. I was so worried."

Harry hugged him back saying, "Easy, I'm pretty sore." Then he smiled.

Madame Pomfrey approached a little slower than normal and asked how he was feeling. "Fine Madame. I'm sorry about scaring you earlier, I was confused," he said.

"That's quite all right Mr. Potter. I would have just liked to know who was and wasn't an animagus in my care," she glanced at Dumbledore.

After some initial greetings and questions Dumbledore asked, "Would you be up to some questions Harry? We know what happened until Miss Cho left and minor items that the dementor told me but I think details would help us all. Or would you prefer waiting until tomorrow?"

"If I could have answer while I'm eating, I'm ready now. I'm starving!"

"Getting back to normal," Sirius said.

"Professor, is it OK if Sirius comes with us. He'll probably ask later and it would be easier telling the story once," Harry said with a smile.

"Of course Harry, nothing about your state should be kept from him," Dumbledore added.

"Potter. Would it bother you if I were present as well? Some tidbits of information about your confrontation with Voldemort peaked my curiosity," Snape asked.

"Of course not Professor. If any of you want to be there and ask me questions, I have no problem with any of you hearing anything that happened." Harry said, "Does that cover everything? I need food."

They all arrived in Dumbledore's office and the food was already on the table. Dumbledore said; "There was one catch with getting food at this time. You had to agree to talk to the delivery ...um... elf". Dobby was standing there beaming.

Dobby ran over and hugged Harry tightly. "Harry Potter sir is back! We were so worried in the kitchen, it was hard to work. We were surprised no one returned the food. You learned much this year. Dobby didn't know if it would be enough. Harry Potter is a great wizard."

Harry was blushing and said, "It's good to see you too Dobby and thanks for the push to learn new things this summer. Without you I may not be here. I need to talk to these people now, tell Winky I said hello."

"Oh yes sir! It will make her most happy. She has been worried also." Then 'pop' and the little elf was gone.

Dumbledore had a smile on his face. The other's looked like they really wanted to make fun of him. Harry said quickly, "Kind of goes overboard doesn't he?"

"Before you start Harry, why didn't you tell me you were an animagus?" Sirius asked, with disappointment in his voice.

"I planned on it. The first time I saw you after learning, I planned on showing you. But it turned out to be the first time you met R.J. and really, I was more excited and nervous about you meeting her than about being an animagus. I'm really sorry."

Sirius looked at him for a moment and said, "I can live with that. I can still remember when girls were far more important than telling family about any thing else."

"I have a question if you don't mind Potter," Snape said; "What can you tell us about this training over the summer?"

Harry answered immediately, "Sorry Professor, I can't tell you much of anything other than I went through some of the Auror training. I don't mean any disrespect; I haven't told anyone exactly what happened, I do mean anyone. Some of it isn't pleasant to tell but I do really appreciate being able to do it."

"Good answer Potter," Snape said. "One more before you begin. Miss Chang said you told her to mention that friends and family were there. What did you mean by that?"

"Easy. The friends were Aragog and his children. After Voldemort did the Cruciatius curse on the first Death Eater, I thought I heard the clicking of them talking. Then after the second, I was sure. This was when I felt confident about getting Cho out of there. The family was the centaurs. They have kind of adopted me into their clan. I knew that Professor Dumbledore knew this and would worry about me less knowing I wasn't alone."

"Why are giant spiders your friend?" Sirius asked.

"Well at first they weren't. Aragog tried to eat Ron and me in our second year but since I killed the basilisk, he apologized and said he and his family would help protect me. I'm not going to get in any trouble for any information that comes out here today am I?"

"This is entirely between-term talk Mr. Potter," Professor McGonagall stated.

Harry went on to tell the story from his point of view starting with Cho being abducted. The only time he had to stop was when he got to the part about R.J. being caught by the dementor. "Voldemort said if I threw down my wand, the Death Eaters and dementors wouldn't harm her, so I did. When R.J. got to me, we hugged and Voldemort said something about us being alike and both enjoying the friendship of creatures of the night. Then a vampire I hadn't seen just killed her. He cut off her head." Harry stopped for a moment and then described dispatching a tree branch through the heart of the vampire.

"But you just said you threw down your wand. How did you get your wand and then dispatch the branch before the vampire attacked you?" Snape asked.

"I don't need a wand to do things like that," Harry said calmly.

Snape spoke up. "Excuse me, what are you talking about? How could you do that without your wand?"

In an instant, Harry summoned a book off of the shelf and sent it straight at Professor Snape, stopping just in front of his face. Harry never pulled out his wand. Snape's eyes were huge and then Harry returned the book to the shelf never once touching his wand. "Um something else I found out I could do over the summer," Harry said.

Professor McGonagall was smiling broadly.

When Harry got to the point about Voldemort putting the Cruciatius curse on him Snape spoke up. "This is of particular interest to me Potter as you can imagine. I personally know the effects of that curse from him. How am I to believe that you can tolerate it?"

"I learned how this summer sir. Truthfully, I can do more than tolerate it. I can either ignore it or use it as Voldemort recently found out," Harry said.

"Can you be more specific Harry?" Dumbledore asked, obviously interested.

"Not going into details but somehow over the summer I learned to throw off the effects of the curse. It really doesn't bother me at all. Kind of like the Imperius Curse. Then I learned that if I would let in just enough of the pain to not pass out, it could be channeled into an extremely powerful offensive spell. It didn't work as I expected against Voldemort but obviously did something."

"Potter, there are records of wizards being able to throw off the Imperius Curse. It's still very impressive, but it is documented. I haven't heard of anyone who could throw off the Cruciatus curse," Snape said, not in a mean tone, but a questioning one.

"Professor, I really don't mind if someone here tries it out. This same thing happened over the summer when I said I could throw off the Imperius Curse. No one believed me and then I proved it. I've been told this is highly unusual and I'm not offended at all. Before we continue, I insist on proving it. And, if Professor Dumbledore doesn't mind, I'd prefer him to do it. I've only thrown it off from Voldemort and one other person so it would be informative to me." Harry looked at Dumbledore and said, "And please sir, don't hold back, I really want to know."

"So do I Harry," Dumbledore said and then stood, pointed his wand and said "CRUCIO". Harry felt the initial rush of pain, much more intense than Voldemort's had been but he was able to step away from the pain, point his finger at the professor and say, "Bang".

Dumbledore release the spell, smiling and said, "Proof enough Severus?"

Snape was looking at Harry in awe and then asked, "What about this channeling into an offensive spell?"

Harry quickly replied, "Oh, not here, it would cause too much damage."

Dumbledore gave an audible chuckle while the others looked confused. "Continue with the story Harry."

Harry told the rest of the story until the last second that he remembered.

"One final question from me Harry," Snape said. He never called me Harry. "Why do you think it was that Draco Malfoy didn't interact much with you this year? That seemed odd to me."

"Well sir. When we were buying books before term, I wasn't exactly um... respectful to Mr. Malfoy and then when Draco made his usual visit to our compartment on the train I um... told him to ask his father how it felt to be tortured by Voldemort for letting a fourteen-year-old boy escape after the tournament last year. I think I made it clear I wouldn't put up with much this year. But, since term started, I haven't done anything to him at all."

After a moment with nothing said Dumbledore asked, "Any further questions for Harry? No? Then if you wouldn't mind excusing us, I have a personal matter to discuss with him." The other teachers and Sirius left the office and Dumbledore continued. "Harry I want to talk to you about Miss R.J. if you don't mind." This wasn't what Harry really wanted to talk about. "I mentioned that we took care of her arrangements and that you could visit when you were

ready. Sirius will accompany you whenever that is. I have a letter that she left in my possession just in case something like this happened. She was a very practical, intelligent woman Harry. She always planned for the worst case." Dumbledore handed Harry a letter from R.J. "I don't know the wording Harry, but I do know the specifics of what this letter is saying. Would you like me to leave while you read it?"

Harry thought and then said, "No sir. I'd rather you stay if you don't mind." Harry read the letter;

Harry.

If you're reading this, that means things haven't gone well for me. I wanted to put down some thoughts and feelings just in case something like this would happen. These past months with you have been the happiest I can remember since becoming a vampire. Since I am not around anymore, I want you to know that every minute I spent with you were precious and I wouldn't give it up for anything. Something obviously has happened to disrupt our being together and for that I am truly sorry. You are a unique person and someone who I hold the utmost respect for. I hope that this will be a bit outdated and I would have told you that I love you before you read it in this letter. You have treated me better than I could have imagined and given me so much enjoyment. Please don't mourn me. My only regret is that I couldn't spend more time with you. I won't miss being alive, just being with you.

At the time of writing this, I hadn't told you my last name. I promised I would when you asked about the handle of the sword. It is Veganos. The same as the ruby you gave me for Christmas. My family owned the land where this stone was first mined. Ready for another shock. I was a princess in my youth. My relatives ruled the land near my home. I am the last of my family so there is no one left to take care of my home. As you can imagine, I had no family. This is a more personal letter describing a legal letter in Professor Dumbledore's possession that gives you full ownership to my property and assets. I only ask one favor. There is a family that has cared for the grounds of my home for many years. They are good people and know all about me. Please let them continue to provide their services. My assets, which are now yours, will cover any expense for them. I have written a letter for them also describing you and my feelings for you. They will understand. By the way, he made the sword I gave you for Christmas.

Please don't mourn for me Harry. You are an extraordinary person and I am fortunate to have known you before my long life ended. I am sorry for not being around longer. I hope that the conditions of my passing were worthy and made you proud.

I love you.

Rebecca Jane Veganos.

Harry just started crying again. After a few minutes, he asked, "What does this really mean Professor?"

"It means Harry that you have inherited the Veganos castle and grounds. That is where we have buried her, near her ancestors. I will place some protection around the grounds and if you would like, you can now call that place home. You do not have to return to Privet Drive if you don't wish to."

Harry sat in silence for a minute and said, "No one understood me falling for R.J. Even my friends asked why I didn't go for Cho instead. R.J. treated me differently. She didn't seem to care about the history or anything; she seemed to like just me. I didn't care about her past or her being a vampire. She treated me better than anyone I've known. I just can't believe she's gone. I can't imagine feeling that way again. She died because she got so close to me."

"Do you think it would have made any difference in the outcome Harry? I think she would have done her job the same if she had never met you. R.J. took her responsibilities very seriously. Trust me when I say I understand what you're feeling Harry. However, I can assure you from knowing Miss R.J. for a long time that I know she would want you to try again. Imagine how long she's lived and what happened to anyone she's loved in the past. She would outlive any person she cared for. When I first met her, she swore to never care about a person again. Look how that turned out. Deep inside, she knew the joy of loving someone and you gave that to her. If she hadn't met you and the same fate happened, she would have died not knowing that feeling. I doubt she would change a thing. I know it's hard now, but remember to open your heart again. There are a few very special people out there who would love to be a part of your life. Make sure you give them a chance."

Dumbledore had written Harry's friends; who had been sending daily owls asking about his condition; telling them that Harry was awake and was going to be leaving the school but not going to Privet Drive and that he wasn't ready to talk to anyone or answer questions. Harry really just wanted some quiet time.

A couple days later, Sirius and Harry were ready to make the trip to Harry's new home, the Veganos Castle. He wasn't looking forward to leaving Hogwarts but it wasn't as bad as going back to the Dursley's. Harry had received a letter early that morning:

Mr. Harry Potter.

As per the last request of Princess Rebecca Veganos, we have transferred ownership of her assets to you account. In doing so, we have transferred the contents of your exiting vault to her old vault. The next time you are in our branch, please return the key to your old vault. Your new vault will not require a key.

Do not hesitate to contact us if you require any assistance.

Head Goblin,

Gringotts, Diagon Alley.

Before departing for Hogsmeade, Harry said goodbye and thanked all the professors who stayed until he recovered. He and Sirius (in his dog form) walked into the Three Broomsticks, straight toward the fireplace, threw in some powder, said "Veganos Castle" and then stepped in.