

The new face of evil

By

Sloth

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Chapter 1

Prologue: Eight years after Harry, Ron and Hermione graduated Hogwarts.

The past eight years have seen many changes in the wizarding world and especially in Harry Potter's life. Ron Weasley has now been married to Parvati for the past seven years and has two beautiful children. Ruth Ann (6), and Brian (4). Harry had been named godfather to both of the children and loved nothing more than spending time with them. Ron was the starting seeker for Puddlemere United after substituting as starting keeper when an injury forced the starter to miss the last three games of the season a few years ago. Ron also still ran the Weasley Wizard Whizzes store in Hogsmeade.

Fred Weasley was now married to Angelina and had a little girl, Elizabeth (3). George was a confirmed bachelor and regularly dated different women. The twins ran the main WWW store and had turned into very successful businessmen.

Ginny Weasley had spent her first year out of school trying to start her own fashion design company that Harry invested in. She had recruited the help of Cho Chang for the business side and Katie Bailey came in to provide contacts and take photographs. Her company GW Designs was taking off very well specializing in high-end gowns and wedding dresses. Harry had been able to talk his one-time girlfriend and Chaser on the French National Quidditch team Kristi Belig to do some modeling and advertising for the company and soon after, Ginny had quite a choice of models to choose from.

Hermione Granger was another story. She lived as Harry's roommate until she finished at the university, graduating with honors. Then she accepted a research doctor position with the Stonham Institute in Venice Italy. Harry had introduced her to Dr. Stonham during her first year at the university. The week she left for this position things had clearly changed between the two best friends. Harry didn't even attend Hermione's going away party and from that point on, never mentioned her name to his friends. Even without this, his friends knew something had changed. The boyish exuberance in his face was gone and was usually replaced by the look of someone who has been exposed to much more than any twenty year old boy should. None of their friends knew exactly what happened for almost a year, until Ginny traveled to Venice and finally got the story out of Hermione. Ginny had told the rest of their friends and they all immediately treated Hermione differently. They had all become even extra protective of Harry once they knew the story as well. They only saw Hermione on holidays, and not even all of them. Hermione didn't keep in contact that much even with Ginny, whom was closer to Hermione than anyone else at this point. When Hermione was around, Harry was polite but made every effort to not be around her and not to talk to her.

Now for Harry, things were going great until the incident with Hermione. The French National team was on a streak of 2 undefeated seasons and their third European Cup championship. Harry quit Quidditch after the next undefeated season, a year after Hermione left. It came as a complete shock to the entire Quidditch community and especially to all of his friends. In fact, only his godfather Sirius Black had known what to expect. Harry stayed completely out of the public eye for most of a year after the announcement. He and Sirius had formed two companies, a security company called Marauders Inc and a foundation to help magical children afford a good education and health care called the Lilly and James Foundation.

After a year, Harry came back out in public thanks mainly to Ginny Weasley and the witches she was meeting through her design agency. Ginny had introduced Harry to some nice beautiful witches and slowly Harry became comfortable being out with a witch again. In fact, within a year, Harry was back to enjoying dating even though the constant hounding by the press hadn't relented at all, and in fact had seemed to increase.

Marauders Inc had really been a cover for some witches and wizards to fight against the new dark magic threat. This threat wasn't from a single madman, but from many smaller groups that posed their own set of problems. The large scale public threat didn't seem the same, but these small groups were beginning to become better organized. Marauders Inc worked with Ministries in various countries and would work to infiltrate and expose these dark wizarding groups. They stayed out of the spotlight and allowed the individual Ministry Law Enforcement to take all the credit for the arrests. Harry, Sirius, Remus, Severus Snape and a few other wizards who fought against Voldemort were helping out. Harry had some very good investments and made enough to support both companies in the beginning. In fact, Lilly & James took in more in contributions than they needed most years. Marauders Inc also made money by doing specialized security services for large corporations and by being awarded assets when they shut down illegal operations. The company could design and implement security systems as well as provide private security when needed. None of his friends knew anything about the real purpose of Marauders Inc., though they had their suspicions.

The story of the incident between and Hermione was finally told to their friends by Ginny. Harry had been happy that Hermione got a position at her dream company, but things took a turn for the worse before she actually left. Hermione had accompanied Harry to the celebration when the French Team won the European Quidditch Cup for the third straight year.

The celebration lasted well into the night so just like each year; Harry got a two bedroom suite at a hotel in Paris. Hermione had been planning on her actions for some time now and was just waiting for the right situation. She was going to leave the next weekend for Venice and wanted to do something before she left. She had never been with a boy before, even though she was now twenty years old. She almost made a huge mistake and slept with a boy she dated her first year at the university, but found out this boy had started seeing her at Draco Malfoy's suggestion so he could get Hermione to help with a spell that Draco wanted. Hermione had only really kissed a few boys/men before, including Ron, the student at the university and Harry. Harry's had been by far the most passionate, and the two friends had been able to deal with the kiss just fine. Something had always been in the way of them pursuing anything further. Tonight Hermione wanted something more. If she was going away, she wanted to make sure her first time was really with someone, she wanted it to be the person she admired more than any other in the world. Harry was kind, gentle, honest and caring. Basically everything she would ever want. The problem was she knew that for the next few years she would be focusing all of her energy on her career.

Harry had learned to hold his alcohol over the years of celebrating and was in fine shape when the couple got to the hotel. They each went to their own bedroom but Hermione had soon called Harry into hers. As had happened a few times before, Hermione and Harry had kissed. These were all very passionate kisses and had always ended at this. This time was different. Hermione pulled Harry's head back to her when he broke the first kiss. After Harry was pulling away again, Hermione said, "Please stay Harry. I really want this."

Harry had been confused. He knew that he had always wanted something like this to happen since he had such deep feelings for Hermione but had always been scared to start something that may risk their friendship. Their lovemaking that night had been extremely passionate and had lasted the entire night. Harry had been with four women before this, all older and two of them much more experienced. Hermione had heard Cho telling her friends about how good Harry was but she had no idea. With Hermione, Harry put everything he had into pleasing her. Hermione had nothing to compare it to but she had never expected it to be as good as it was.

After waking up in the morning, Harry had made love to her again before they both showered. While they were eating breakfast, Hermione broke the news to Harry that she didn't want him to come to Venice with her. She said she would be working too much and wouldn't be able to spend any time with him. Harry had pleaded and said he didn't care but Hermione insisted. She had basically told him that she wanted to do this on her own without him around to lean on. Harry took this revelation really hard. Not because she wanted to go to Venice on her own, but because she had just pulled him into her bed and asked him to make love to her last night. There is no way he would have done that if he knew she was leaving him the next day. Harry's reaction really did shock Hermione. She had never considered that Harry would react this way; she thought he would be upset about not going to Venice, but not about them making love. That was the last she saw of Harry for two years.

Chapter 1.

March, eight years after leaving Hogwarts...

In Venice, Hermione looked at the calendar again. Today was one of her best friend's birthday. Well she still thought of him as a best friend. He had been very cool to her for some time now but the fact was she didn't have many friends at all and he was still one of her best. Hermione hadn't been back to see her old friends in almost a year. Every year that went by caused her to miss them more and more. She didn't think it was supposed to be this way. Her career was going great and she was working for her dream company and yet she felt emptier than she ever had. Admitting she had been wrong about this job was next to impossible for her but at least she wanted to see her friends again. Seeing most of them was usually fine. They didn't treat her like they used to but they were still nice and she knew they cared. Her other old best friend however tried his best to never be around her. Oh, when he was around he was nice enough but she could tell it was forced and that he wanted to escape as quickly as possible. Hermione hadn't anticipated his reaction to her leaving the way she did and didn't know how she could ever put it right.

It was a cool end of March afternoon in Hogsmeade. Ron and Parvati now lived in a large house at the end of town with a huge yard. Ron's birthday party had been going on for over an hour, and even though it was Ron's party, the children were having the best time. Most of the adults were sitting around the tables having a drink, talking but Harry was rolling around in the grass with the kids. By far, Harry was their favorite 'uncle' even though he technically wasn't one. Harry rarely came to big family functions without something for the kids and was the first one they came to hug when many people came in.

Harry was playing in the grass with Ruth and Brian when he felt something. Leaning down to the kids he said, "Your aunt Hermione just came in. You should go say hi." The kids took off running inside. Harry continued playing with Liz when Ron asked where the other kids went running to. "I told them someone just came in that they may want to greet," Harry informed his friend.

Ron got up to go inside and when he reached the door, he turned around and gave a very strange look to Harry. Harry asked Angelina if it was ok if he took Liz for a quick fly, and she agreed of course. Angelina was nervous when Harry took Liz on her first ride when the little girl just turned one but quickly realized that Liz would be safe anywhere with Harry. Angelina wouldn't even let Fred take Liz for a ride yet but let Harry take her at any time.

Harry gave a hug and a kiss on the cheek to his date today. He had been dating Steffi for a month now. Steffi was a model and Ginny had introduced them at a party. The two hit it off pretty well from the start. Steffi was strong, confident, smart and gorgeous. She didn't let Harry get away with much and always challenged him.

After the kiss, Harry summoned his broom and the other adults heard Liz squeal with delight as Harry rose up with her very quickly. Liz loved to fly with Harry. She always had a big smile on her face and often, Fred would ask Harry to fly with her when she was being especially cranky. Harry loved this also but had another reason for wanting to fly right now. He didn't want to be around during the greeting of the newest arrival.

Ruth and Brian walked up to Hermione soon after she appeared. Brian stayed close to his sister but Ruth said, "Hi Aunt Hermione. Uncle Harry told us to come say hi to you." Hermione gave a confused look. She had often caught bits and pieces of comments people would say about things Harry does or could do but she never asked specifics.

"Well I'm glad he did. How are you both?" Hermione said hugging the kids. Just then Ron poked his head in.

"I didn't know you'd be here," Ron said giving her a quick hug.

"I didn't want to miss your birthday. Besides, I wanted to see everyone," Hermione said.

"You know that he knew you had arrived. Kind of scary," Ron said.

"That's what Ruth told me," Hermione replied shrugging her shoulders.

The two old friends talked a bit before Ron led her outside to see her other friends. Ginny was the first one up and greeted her warmly. "Hermione. I'm glad you came; we didn't expect to see you. You don't look like you came by floo?"

"I shouldn't need an excuse to come see my friends but it always seems to work out that way. I apparated down the street and walked," Hermione responded and then greeted everyone else. "I can't believe how much Ruth and Brian have grown since I saw them last." Hermione paused and said, "Fred, where's little Liz?"

"In her favorite place in the world, on a broom with Harry," Fred said and then pointed high into the sky.

Hermione's eyes got huge. "Angelina! You and Fred let her go up on a broom?" Hermione asked shocked.

"Well only with Harry of course," Angelina replied as if it was the most obvious thing in the world. "No one else, not even Fred has a chance of getting her away from me for something like that," she said and everyone laughed at Fred.

Once Hermione got over the shock of seeing the little girl so high in the air, Ginny introduced her to Steffi. Steffi was very polite and greeted Hermione warmly. Ginny had told Steffi all about Hermione just in case something like this ever happened. Ginny knew Harry didn't talk much about past girlfriends so Steffi wouldn't have found out from him.

They were sitting around talking when Harry finally landed. Ruth and Brian came running over yelling. "Uncle Harry, take us flying." The two kids tackled Harry as soon as he was completely off his broom and Liz came back to her mother looking very wind-blown but extremely happy.

Steffi had come over and whispered something to Harry. He told the kids he would have to rest a bit and then they started hitting him in fun. When the couple got back to the table, Harry pulled Steffi to the far end near Fred before the couple sat down.

Harry was talking to Fred when he heard, "Hi Harry." Harry turned to see Hermione looking at him. He also noticed most of the other guests were watching his reaction as well.

"Hermione. It's good you made Ron's party," Harry answered without emotion.

"Ruth and Brian said you told them to come and greet me in the house. How did you know I was here?" Hermione asked.

"They would have greeted you without me telling them to. They're great kids," Harry replied glancing at the children.

"True, but how did you know I was here?" she asked again.

"Lucky guess," was all Harry said before turning back to Fred.

After eating and after Harry wore the kids out by playing with them some more, Angelina announced they needed to get Liz home. Harry whispered to Steffi and then the couple announced they needed to leave as well. "If I don't get my full night's sleep, Steffi will threaten to leave me for that male model she was on the cover with," Harry joked.

Fred and Angelina traveled by floo powder due to the fact that Ron had anti-Apparation charms on his house since he was a Quidditch star now. They said goodbye to everyone and Hermione noticed how warmly Ginny hugged Steffi goodbye. When Harry was about to leave Hermione said, "Bye Harry, nice to meet you Steffi."

Harry only responded with "Hermione," before he took Steffi's hand and apparated away.

"He really hates me doesn't he?" Hermione asked her friends.

"You know that I honestly don't know Hermione. You know how he is, won't talk about stuff like that with anyone," Ron said giving Hermione a regretful look.

"He hasn't seemed to get any better around me in all these years," Hermione responded feeling really bad.

"It's not like you've been around very much, so it's not like he's had much chance," Ron replied.

"I've been busy Ron," Hermione said with some anger.

Ron held up his hands. "I didn't say you weren't, I was just stating a fact."

"He's right Hermione. We know you've been busy and we're proud of you but it's true you can't expect Harry to ever get any better when he only sees you for a couple days a couple times a year," Ginny added.

Hermione stayed with Ginny that night and they both went back to Ron's the next morning for breakfast before Hermione was set to return home. The four of them were sitting out back talking after breakfast when Hermione gave a slight scream. Harry had just appeared next to their table.

"Harry! Don't anti-Apparation barriers mean anything to you?" Hermione exclaimed.

Harry turned to Parvati and asked calmly, "Parvati. Do you mind me popping into your backyard?"

"Of course not Harry. We don't care if you pop straight to the kitchen; you know that."

Harry turned back to Hermione. "Then no Hermione; anti-Apparation barriers don't mean anything to me," Harry said and then was assaulted with, "Uncle Harry. Are you ready to go?" Ruth had come running up to him.

"Ron. What time are you forcing me to bring her back to you today?" Harry said picking the little girl up.

"Around three should be fine," Ron replied and then Harry and Ruth popped away.

"Do you really think its safe having her go through the barriers with him?" Hermione asked.

Ginny looked at her friend sadly and said, "Hermione. Do you think for a second that Harry would do anything that could hurt his goddaughter? If so, you've been away far too long."

Harry and Ruth spent the day walking around the zoo and eating ice cream. Harry arrived back at Ron's right before three and instantly Ruth started telling her parents about their day. Ron looked at Harry and asked, "Think you'll ever work things out with her?"

"Doubt it. See no reason to really. I can deal with the couple of times a year I run into her. And, the kids keep me happy enough even when she is around," Harry replied.

Hermione had cried the entire day after she got back home. She thought back to how things had been only four years earlier. She had been as happy as she could ever remember and now was one of the lowest points. Hermione still didn't fully understand why her actions caused Harry to get so angry but obviously they had. She knew Harry had never mentioned it to any of her friends so she knew that they heard the real story from Ginny. Hermione could remember back to two mistakes that she wished she could have back. One when she chose going to a school orientation instead of a Ministry function with Harry which caused him to start dating Kristi for real and the second was the night she convinced him to make love to her. She didn't regret that they had made love; she just regretted what it did to their friendship.

Hermione decided to make a real effort to repair all of her friendships, and decided to take a few days off next month and go back to spend time with them.

Harry and Sirius were working on breaking a terrorist ring that was getting access to extremely dangerous potions and using them to form terrorist weapons that were being used on both wizards and muggles. The two were spending a great deal of time tracking people down all around the world. Harry had been in the Amazon jungle for over two weeks now trying to find a native Indian settlement that supposedly had information about why the potions were so dangerous and potentially an antidote.

Hermione got back to London and looked up Ginny. Ginny was glad to see her and agreed with Hermione's idea to spend more time around her old friends. Hermione was somewhat resentful that it had been Ginny who set Harry up with his current girlfriend but Ginny made it clear that she would always do what she thought was best for Harry at this point. If there was one thing Harry brought out in his friends, it was loyalty. They knew he would do anything for them and in return, they always tried to do what was best for him. Ginny invited Hermione to a family meal that they were having Saturday. Ginny wasn't sure if Harry would be there since he had been gone for a couple weeks now and no one knew where he was.

"Does he disappear often like this?" Hermione asked.

"Oh yes. He's been gone for almost a month before but he almost always makes it back to family meals. He doesn't talk about what he does to anyone. I think dad must know because they talk privately quite a lot. Of course dad won't say anything," Ginny said.

Hermione spent her days off watching Ron play Quidditch, and going to work with Ginny. She had been really concerned about coming back but it had already lifted her spirits by spending time with Ginny and seeing how happy all of her old friends were. Hermione was also impressed with how well Ginny's design company was going and at how professional Ginny had become.

The day of the Weasley family meal was stressful for Hermione. She knew that Mrs. Weasley especially blamed her for the change in Harry. Molly was always polite of course but it was really obvious to Hermione how she felt. Everyone had been at the house for a couple hours and were outside enjoying the day. The adult boys were playing Quidditch and the girls were just talking and watching the kids with Mr. & Mrs. Weasley when Harry appeared near them. He looked very tan, like he had spent the past few weeks on a beach someplace except that he didn't look relaxed or rested at all. Instantly he was mobbed by the kids yelling, "Uncle Harry. Did you bring us something?"

Harry held out his empty arms and got a sad look on his face. "I've been really busy and there weren't any shops around."

The kids got a sad look and Ruth said, "That's ok Uncle Harry we're glad you came."

"Well in that case, maybe you'll accept these," Harry said and suddenly three carved wooden flutes appeared in his hand. "These are Muggle instruments, you play them like this." Harry took one of them and played a nice little melody and then handed the flutes to the kids.

Mrs. Weasley was the first one to him and hugged him tightly. "I'm so glad you could make it Harry, we didn't know if you would or not."

"I try my best Mrs. Weasley. I haven't had a home cooked meal in a while now," Harry said.

Mr. Weasley was there next and said something quietly before the two moved off a bit. Harry did something with his hand and a fog seemed to surround the two men and no sound came out. A minute later, the fog cleared and the others heard Mr. Weasley say, "I'm glad you at least came for the meal."

He was greeting everyone and then said, "Hermione. Not like you to be back so soon."

"I just wanted to spend more time with Ginny. Looks like you've been lying around on a beach someplace," Hermione said.

Harry gave a short laugh. "Not likely. Try the middle of the Amazon Jungle."

Everyone looked at him and Mr. Weasley said, "Harry!"

"Sir. It's a big jungle and enough people have seen me there already. I don't think you all knowing what isn't being hid very well anyway will really matter," Harry replied staying very calm and reserved.

Mr. Weasley looked down regretfully and said, "I suppose you're right."

"It doesn't look like you're getting enough rest," Ginny added.

"Hey, you try sleeping with monkeys throwing things at you all night," Harry replied in a half-joke.

"I have. Remember I grew up with Fred and George," Ginny joked and drew immediate responses from the twins.

Harry took Liz for a quick fly on the broom before everyone sat down to eat. Mrs. Weasley was nice enough to put Harry at the opposite end of the table from Hermione. The talk with the family was nice and enjoyable. Hermione was amazed at how no one questioned Harry about what he has been doing, and it was eating her up because she really wanted to know.

Harry got up right behind Mrs. Weasley to help her get things back to the kitchen. Hermione looked at Ginny who nodded back. Mrs. Weasley was just coming back outside when Hermione went in. Mrs. Weasley gave her a strange look but didn't say anything. Harry knew she was there instantly. "Is there something you want Hermione?" Harry asked without turning around.

This kind of stunned her since she was just getting ready say something. "Can we talk?"

Harry turned around right where he was and said, "Ok, talk."

Hermione was struck by just how emotionless Harry was to her. Being near him used to fill her with such warmth and courage and now there's nothing. Before she could say anything Ruth came in and threw her arms around Harry's leg. Harry knelt down and said, "Is it ok if I go talk to Aunt Hermione for a couple minutes?" Harry smiled at the little girl and then Hermione felt the warmth again. She knew that was what Ruth was feeling as well and one of the reasons the little girl liked being around Harry so much.

Ruth looked at Hermione and turned back to Harry and said, "Ok, but be careful." Harry kissed the top of her head and promised he would. Ruth left and with her went any of the warmth.

Chapter 2

"Fine, let's talk," Harry said and Hermione started to walk outside but was stopped. "No. I don't want them to see us leave. Too many questions." Harry held out his hand and as soon as Hermione touched it they were down by the lake. Harry quickly let go of her hand and waited for her to say something.

"Is it ever going to get any better between us?" she asked still stunned at being taken away suddenly.

Harry thought for a second and said, "I don't see why it should. We don't make a scene the little time we're together so no one is bothered."

"I don't understand why this got so bad. Why did what happen cause all of this?" she asked.

Harry looked like he was choosing his words carefully. "You obviously never knew me Hermione and I must not have ever really known you."

"Harry I really don't know what was so bad. I don't regret what we did, I thought it was wonderful."

"I regret losing my best friend Hermione. That's what I regret," Harry replied quickly.

"You didn't have to lose your friend Harry. We could have still been friends."

"Now that's a common line. We could still be friends. Isn't it the guy who usually says that just after he screws someone and leaves town?" Harry said a little more sarcastically than he meant.

"That's not nice Harry. You knew I was going to Venice. That wasn't a surprise."

"But, I didn't know that you were going to tell me not to come with you. Why did you leave that little piece of information out?" he asked.

"I just needed to do this on my own."

"Then you should have told me that before. You used me Hermione. Plain and simple. You hid information from me and used me to get something you wanted. Then you just threw me away," Harry said sadly.

"That's not true. Maybe I should have told you before. But I never threw you away. You knew how important that job was to me. You knew I wouldn't stay..." she was saying but Harry cut her off.

"Don't talk to me about that job. I wanted you to get it. I was happy for you. I always encouraged you to go do whatever you wanted. I always supported you with your career. And you screwed me and left. I'm done talking." Harry grabbed her hand and they were in the kitchen the next second. "I think you need to learn a couple little words before you ever speak to me again." Harry quickly turned and went outside and announced, "I need to be leaving."

They all tried to get him to stay but he turned to face the kitchen and said, "I'm sorry but I can hear the monkeys calling my name now."

Ginny asked, "When will you be back?"

Harry glanced at Mr. Weasley and then just said, "Hopefully before long. Thanks again Mrs. Weasley," Harry said and then was gone.

Ginny went in to find Hermione crying in her bedroom. As soon as Ginny walked in, Hermione hugged her and cried, "He's so cold to me. He's gone." Ginny got Hermione to tell her everything about the conversation.

In the end, Hermione didn't get the comforting she thought she deserved. "He gave you a chance just then Hermione." Hermione looked confused. "Did you even listen to what you were saying? Everything was you and your job and how you felt," Ginny continued.

"I should have known you'd take his side," Hermione said angrily.

"If I thought you were right, I'd take yours just as quick. Think about it from his point of view. Say you had volunteered to come someplace with him and he didn't object. Then, a few days before you both were leaving he would have seduced you into making love for the first time and then told you the next day that he didn't want you to come with him. How would you have felt? Would you at least expect an apology from him?"

Hermione started to open her mouth but Ginny said, "Think about it. Have you ever even once apologized to Harry for treating him like a whore? Because that's how you treated him. Maybe that university changed you because all I see is someone who only thinks about what they want. And I'll be honest. Unless I see a change I'll do everything I can to make sure Harry stays away from you. He's nothing but kind and caring. He cares more about other people and their feelings than his own every time. You saw how he looked tonight. He could have been trying to get some rest but instead he came half-way around the world because he knows we like to have him here."

"I can't believe your saying this to me Ginny," Hermione said.

"You know; me either. You used to be one of my most favorite people in the world and now I see a self-centered woman who doesn't realize yet what all she's thrown away," Ginny added.

"I can tell coming here was a mistake. Tell your mom I appreciate her having me," Hermione said before apparating away. Hermione spent the next day crying alone in her apartment. How could Ginny know what she was feeling? She doesn't know how hard things are for me? Why should I apologize to Harry? He acted like he enjoyed that night.

Later in the day after more thinking Hermione's thoughts softened. Ginny did start her own design business and it is doing well, so she does know that sacrifices need to be made. Harry must be busy and he took time for them. If Harry had made love to me and then told me not to come with him I would be upset as well? Upset? I'd curse him into next week. She thought back to the warmth she felt when Harry was hugging Ruth. God I miss that. "I've just dug myself a deeper hole," she said out loud.

A couple weeks later, wizarding papers all around the world were talking about a huge sting operation.

Brazilian Task Force Destroys Illegal Potion Smuggling Organization

In a brazen raid, the Brazilian Task Force stormed a camp used by smugglers. These worldwide smugglers were trading illegal potions. These potions have been used to torture wizards and muggles alike throughout the world. Thanks to the effort of the authorities in Brazil who traveled deep into the Amazon Jungle, some major players in this smuggling outfit are now in custody of the authorities.

Harry and Sirius were having lunch when they read the paper. "What would we do without the Brazilian authorities?" Sirius joked.

"Yes, it's amazing how they were able to locate that camp and take it over so deep in the jungle," Harry joked back. "We did get paid, didn't we?"

Sirius smiled, "We don't get the credit, but we do get the cash."

"It would be simpler if everyone just did the right thing and we didn't have to spend so much money to get these people," Harry said.

"You know this is just the small fish. We've got to get the ones creating this stuff," Sirius said.

"I know; it's just not something I look forward to," Harry responded.

Sirius had been a huge help over the years. He had been the main thing that kept Harry sane through all the craziness. Sirius was very smart when it came to catching criminals. Marauders Inc would not have worked without Sirius calling the shots. He and Remus could almost anticipate what was going to happen. Sirius had even gotten better about not worrying when Harry went out on missions. More than a godfather, Sirius had turned into one of Harry's best friends. What was ironic was that Sirius was Harry's godfather and Harry was Sirius' son, James' godfather.

When Hermione read the paper that evening at home, something about it made her think back. Harry had been in the Amazon and was looking very tired. The way he and the Minister of Magic were talking made it seem like something going on. Come to think of it, over the past couple years there had been quite a few of these crime busts around the wizarding world. She really wished she could talk to Harry about this.

How did things get so out of hand for her? She had started her job with such high hopes. The fact that Harry was upset with her had caused her to work even harder and she rose up in the company quickly. Even that didn't make her happy. She always wanted more and put everything she had into the job. Now she's well respected and controls much of the research but it's not research she would like to be doing. Hermione was very successful in the company she always dreamed of working in but now the company doesn't seem like such a dream. She

had the career and respect she always wanted but couldn't help feel that the price was too high. Even her parents had told her to slow down and to enjoy life but she wouldn't listen.

She looked down and reread the note that Ginny had sent last week.

Hermione

I'm sorry things ended badly when you were here. We've been friends too long for me to lie to you. Maybe I shouldn't have said some of the things I did, and I really do want to keep in touch more than we have in the past. If you come back, it may be better to either talk to Harry in private, away from the rest of us or to just go back to making small talk. I really wasn't trying to take his side and I promise that I would stand up for you when I think you're right, even against Harry. I don't think that would be necessary, he has never said a bad word about you.

Everyone enjoyed seeing you and I hope you can come back again or maybe I'll come there when you're not working so much.

How about you try coming over when we're not around all the family. There is a party being held for the opening of a new ward at St. Mungos Hospital. Ron and I are invited (Harry of course will be there). It would be nice to see you outside of a family gathering.

Love.

Ginny

Harry had been able to stay in town for a few weeks and was enjoying watching Ron play Quidditch. Harry would have quit coming to the matches, but since the coach had allowed him to start staying in the team box so he didn't have to deal with the press and people always wanting to talk to him. In this respect, he and Ron were complete opposites. Ron loved the attention and spent a lot of time talking to all the reporters. Harry hated talking to the press and just tried to ignore people wanting an autograph or even more annoying, people wanting to just touch him. Ron and Ginny just laughed when people would get so nervous and even faint when Harry was around but it annoyed him. After the defeat of Voldemort, Harry was billed to be the most powerful wizard in ages. At first Harry laughed it off but it kept getting worse. Every little thing Harry did got blown out of proportion so much that for a while, Harry hated using magic in public. Then being billed as the best Quidditch player for four years straight had also added to his mystique. Harry had thought by quitting Quidditch and basically going into hiding for a while that it would die down but it only made things worse. Sirius had finally convinced him to just ignore it and to live his life the way he wanted.

Hearing the crowd cheer brought Harry out of his daydream and he saw that the Puddlemere seeker had caught the snitch and was taking a victory lap. He laughed at how Ron went from one reporter to the next answering the same questions. Finally Ron made his way over to Harry. "I think you'd give up the money as long as they made sure you got to talk to at least five reporters after every match," Harry joked.

Ron went a little red and said, "No. I want the money but I'd quit if they took the reporters away. I still don't get why you don't like it."

"Maybe if it was only Quidditch, I would feel the same way you do. So are you going to the celebration?" Harry asked.

"Of course, and you're coming too. We won't be too late."

Hermione had seen their picture in the sports section of the Daily Prophet a few days later. It showed a jubilant Puddlemere team and she could make out Ron in the group. She also saw Harry standing off to the side smiling broadly for his friend and could tell he had no jealousy whatsoever. Hermione wanted her friends again. She wanted to be there celebrating with Ron as well. She wasn't about to give up her career but wanted all of her friends back, not just Ginny.

Hermione had arrived at Ginny's the morning of the party and the two friends spent the day shopping and getting ready. Ginny had purposely not invited a date so she and Hermione could spend time talking. The party was in the entrance hall of a new area of the hospital. There were tapestries covering areas of the wall where it looked like the name of the new ward would be. The two women were shown to a table in the middle of the room that had a reserved sign on it.

Reserved G.W. Designs

"My Ginny, I didn't know you had such pull," Hermione said smiling.

Ginny laughed. "Oh, I don't. Harry does this all the time so his name isn't on things. I don't mind, it helps my business whenever the name is on something."

Yet another thing that Hermione didn't know about this Harry. "How is it working with Harry? I know your business has been taking off, but is he still an investor?" Hermione asked, hoping to get more info about him.

Ginny brightened noticeably. "It's great; I couldn't have done it without him. He introduced me to people and helped convince some of his dates to wear my clothes, which helped a lot. We really only started making money last year but he never once said anything about the amount he's put in, or the way I want to do things. He says we're equal partners but I think he should have about 75% of the company."

"Why didn't you and he ever get together?" Hermione asked honestly.

Ginny got a sad look on her face but just then they saw Ron and Parvati come in so she didn't get to answer. "Hermione. We didn't know you'd be here," Ron said giving her a quick hug.

"Oh. It's not a problem is it?" Hermione asked a bit concerned.

"No... Of course not. You know Harry's going to be here, right?" Ron asked.

"Yes Ron. Harry and I are capable of acting polite in public thank you," she replied more than slightly annoyed.

The hall was beginning to fill up quickly and the friends were moving around talking to various people. They heard a change in the crowd and saw people look to the entrance. Hermione noticed Harry and Steffi, followed by Sirius and Kelly, and then Professor Lupin

and a pretty witch Hermione had never seen before. Harry and Steffi went in one direction and the rest of the group went in another. Hermione watched for a bit and was surprised at how well Harry was working the room. He easily moved from one conversation to the next and always kept his date involved in the discussions. It hurt her a bit to see how good of a couple they seemed to be.

It took nearly an hour for the two to make their way to the table and the rest of their friends. Harry greeted everyone and didn't even flinch when he came to Hermione. He had hugged Ginny, Ron and Parvati tightly but had lightly shook Hermione's hand, just how she had seen him do to the various witches he greeted on the way in. Steffi lightly shook everyone's hand at the table and again didn't flinch when she came to Hermione.

"Where's your date Ginny?" Harry asked.

"Just wanted a break to spend more time with Hermione," she replied and Harry just nodded in return.

Steffi leaned in and whispered something to Harry who kissed her on the cheek and leaned over to Ginny. "Ginny. See that woman near the statue over there?" Ginny nodded. "She's the new editor of Modern Fashion Magazine. Let me introduce you to her."

Ginny looked nervous for a second before standing up and asking, "How do I look?"

Harry kissed her cheek and said, "Gorgeous as always, come on." Harry put his hand on the small of her back and directed her to the woman.

Back at the table, the remaining four tried to have light conversation. "What brought you back this time Hermione?" Steffi asked in a tone that sounded like just polite conversation.

Hermione wasn't sure how to take this but was giving the witch the benefit of the doubt. "I'm trying to take my parents advice and to spend more time with friends. They think I've been working too hard."

"But that's normal for you Hermione. Man I remember how you used to get mad at Harry and I when we wouldn't study as much as you," Ron joked.

"Then you'd go storming off to the library and Ron and Harry would slink into the corner and keep studying so you wouldn't be mad," Parvati added.

"I didn't know they did that," Hermione exclaimed obviously hearing this for the first time. "I thought they would go play chess or exploding snap."

"You never asked us what we did now did you?" Ron said and the three of them laughed.

The conversations went on about things that happened in school until Harry and Ginny got back with Ginny beaming. "She's noticed my stuff, and she's going to come to the studio next week to see some of the new work." Ginny hugged Harry again. "Thanks again."

"Hey, Steffi was the one who introduced me to her. Besides, she had already seen your work and liked it," Harry said.

"Thanks Steffi, I really appreciate all you've helped me with," Ginny said honestly.

"No problem. Your designs are better than most of the stuff we wear lately. And, now Harry owes me one," Steffi said kissing Harry's cheek.

"Harry. Hermione thought you and I were playing games after she would yell at us and storm off to the library to study. She had no idea we were studying," Ron joked.

Harry looked straight at Ron and said, "That was a different world Ron." He then stood up and took Steffi's hand. "Let's go mingle."

Ginny quickly got the atmosphere at the table pleasant again. Hermione kept seeing Harry and Steffi talking to many people. The couple didn't come back until someone tapping on a glass got everyone's attention.

A tall important looking man was standing on a small platform so every could see him. "Thank you all for coming. We are here to celebrate the opening of the new Dumbledore Children's Care and Research Ward." The tapestries vanished and the names were unveiled.<clapping> "This ward would not have been possible without the support of many of you here. While everyone who contributed played an important part in the success of this project, there is one person we would like to recognize for going well above what we expected in terms of support. This person also suggested the name, which the board immediately recognized as one that identified the qualities we hope to uphold. Before we start on the wonderful meal, would you all give a round of applause to everyone who contributed, and especially to the president of the Lilly & James Foundation, Mr. Harry Potter."

Hermione felt something just drop in her stomach. She had been the one so obsessed with her career and what could she show that she's actually done to help people? Now Harry who had almost always done things for fun had helped three people start successful careers of their own and was actually doing things that made a huge difference to the community. Hermione came tonight to try and get back her friendship and has just had another kick that showed her how big of a mistake she had made.

Harry stood up and listened to all the clapping. He caught Sirius' face through the crowd and could see the look of pride. Steffi stood and gave him a big hug. Harry sat back down blushing badly. "Why didn't you tell me the name?" Ron asked.

"I wanted it to be a surprise. Don't you approve?" Harry replied, still red from embarrassment.

"Better than Potter's Pediatric Ward or something like that," Ron joked back.

Harry didn't notice the man behind him until he felt the hand on his shoulder. Turning, he saw Sirius there and immediately stood up and hugged his godfather. "I can't tell you how proud I am of you making this happen. Dumbledore and your parents would be amazed."

"Thanks Sirius. You had a big hand in this as well, don't forget," Harry said.

Sirius was still smiling at Harry when he heard, "Hi Sirius. I haven't seen you in a long time." Hermione had stood up and was next to him.

Sirius glared at her and said, "Hermione," as nicely as he could force out before taking Harry's arm and saying, "If you would excuse us for just a minute, I have some ---business--- to discuss with Harry." Sirius led Harry near the bar and starting saying something. From the table it didn't look like a happy conversation but suddenly Harry took Sirius' arm and they vanished.

"Will you ever get used to him doing that? I had forgotten how weird it felt to suddenly be somewhere else." Hermione asked.

"When has he done that to you lately?" Steffi asked quickly.

"He did it at the Weasley family meal to me when I wanted to talk to him," Hermione answered.

Steffi gave Ginny a hurt look but turned and said nicely, "I like the spontaneity when he does it to me. Not to mention the rush of power."

Ron quickly picked a new subject. A few minutes later, Harry walked back up to the table. "Sorry about that. When Sirius wants to talk, he talks."

The meal was nice and there was a lot of small talk during it. Afterwards music started and there was some dancing. Ron and Parvati were one of the first couples up. Not long after them, Harry and Steffi danced a few songs and then danced one with other people before going back to the table. Ginny asked Harry to dance next so the two of them went to the floor leaving Hermione and Steffi alone at the table.

"I'm sorry if I've made you uncomfortable. I am really just trying to see my friends more," Hermione said.

"Oh, you don't make me uncomfortable; I just don't want to see Harry uncomfortable," Steffi replied and the two women became quiet again.

Harry had taken Steffi back to the dance floor just as Remus Lupin came to the table. "Hello Hermione...I mean Dr. Granger, It's good to see you again."

"Professor Lupin. It's so good to see you," Hermione stood up and shook his hand.

"It's just Remus, I'm not a professor anymore," Lupin joked.

"And I'm just Hermione. What are you doing now?" Hermione asked.

"I'm over at Marauders Inc with Sirius and Harry. Speaking of Sirius, he didn't cause you any bother did he? Come and tell me while we dance." Lupin took her hand and led her to the floor.

"No, but it was clear I'm not his favorite person anymore. I'm getting used to how my friends treat me but it's still a shock meeting someone I haven't seen in a few years. Except you of course. You must be one of the only people that knew us back then that hasn't looked like they wanted to hex me from the start."

"I'm sure it's not that bad Hermione. I take what Sirius says with a grain of salt and Harry won't say anything of course. You know Harry actually stunned Sirius a couple years ago when Sirius said something about you. Sirius is very protective of Harry, which is kind of funny since Harry could blast Sirius into next week. But, enough about that, how have you been?"

Hermione described her job and how much responsibility she had everything had been positive until. "But seeing how Ron, Ginny and Harry are around each other, I'd like to have those friendships back."

"If that's what you really want, then do it. You can find something less stressful around and still have plenty of opportunity to make up for lost time. They're all good people and would love to have you around more."

"I don't think all of them would love that. I tried to talk to Harry at the Weasley's a while back and I don't think it went well. You know not having close friends has made me out of practice for talking about things."

"Then try again if that's what you want. I can tell you one thing honestly, Harry cares a great deal for you but I don't see him ever making the first move to reconcile with you. He didn't take things well when you left and even though he would probably risk his life to save you, he won't make the first move. He can be even more stubborn than his father was and that's kind of scary. That's just my opinion though; take it for what it's worth." Lupin smiled.

They were near Harry and Steffi when the song ended. "Ah Steffi. Good to see you. Any chance I could have this dance?"

Steffi looked at Hermione and then Harry and answered cheerfully, "Of course Remus."

Harry started to walk past Hermione to get to the table when she said, "Will you dance with me Harry?"

Harry turned and for an instant, Hermione thought he looked like he wanted nothing more than to run away but he answered politely, "Of course Hermione." The two danced but Harry held her no closer than was absolutely necessary and didn't say a word. Finally Hermione spoke, "Can I talk to you in private before I leave tomorrow?"

Harry looked into her eyes and said, "Do you think it will turn out differently than last time?"

"I hope it will. I want it to."

"Fine. How about lunch tomorrow? I can pick you up at Ginny's."

"Sounds good. I can't believe you helped build this place."

"I didn't help build it," Harry quickly replied. "I raised some money for them, that's all. A lot of other people raised money as well."

"If you say so. You know, I saw in the paper some big organized crime bust in the Amazon right about the time you were there. You wouldn't know anything about that would you?"

Harry gave what Hermione almost thought was a smile and for an instant, she felt some of the warmth she used to feel around him before it suddenly went away. "The Amazon is a big place, I'm sure it wasn't close to where I was. How is the world of corporate ladder climbing? There's not much higher you can go without starting your own company is there?"

Hermione gave him a questioning look but answered, "It's different than what I expected in the beginning. There are more restrictions on what we work on than I expected."

"But aren't you close to a breakthrough on a potion to help people like the Longbottoms?" Harry asked calmly.

Hermione stopped dancing and just stared at Harry for a second but picked it up again. "That's our most classified project. How do you know anything about that?"

Chapter 3

"I get around. Neville will be grateful when you succeed," Harry replied but Hermione thought she detected a sly smile.

"If we succeed. I shouldn't even be talking about that, it is one of our most secret projects," Hermione said still looking strangely at Harry.

The song ended and Harry said, "Then don't talk about it. Thanks for the dance Hermione." He ushered her back to the table.

Steffi was just coming back as well and she whispered something in Harry's ear. He quickly spoke up, "It's been good seeing you all again. Thanks for coming everybody. I hate being embarrassed without you guys around." Harry nodded to Hermione, which was quickly picked up by Ginny. Hermione watched as the couple tried to make their way out. They were stopped and said goodbye to many people on the way.

Hermione sat there totally confused. How had Harry known about the secret potion they were working on? What was she to make about his response to the raid in the Amazon? They had a pleasant conversation while dancing so maybe the talk tomorrow would go well. Hermione danced with Ron and another man that night before she and Ginny went home.

"So, what was the nod about?" Ginny asked.

"We're going to talk over lunch tomorrow."

Ginny looked concerned. "It's going to go better than last time isn't it?"

"I hope so. I really thought a lot about what you said to me after the last time. I should have just listened to you that night. I considered how I would have felt if he had done the same thing I did and realized I didn't handle it well. I had really only saw my side of it before and since he wasn't talking to me, I never really understood."

"Well hopefully things will get better between you two," Ginny stated.

"You were interrupted when I asked you the last time, but why didn't you two ever get together? You get along great," Hermione asked.

Ginny looked sad but said, "Don't get upset or anything, but I think it's because of you." Hermione looked shocked. "You know I actually thought we might when we were working together but then after you left and I saw what it did to your friendship, there was no way I would risk it and I'm sure Harry felt the same way."

"I'm sorry Ginny, I really didn't expect for things to go so wrong," Hermione said.

"That's ok, I'm over it."

"Obviously Harry is as well. He and Steffi make a good couple," Hermione said sounding a bit sad.

"Sure they do, but it won't last, it never does," Ginny replied quickly getting Hermione's attention. "He goes out with gorgeous, talented women who end up really falling for him. Then they want to get really close and he can't let them. They don't have the implicit trust we have in him so the part of his life he keeps closed off usually ends up coming between them. Kind of sad actually."

The two girls sat in silence for a minute before Ginny continued, "So, did you enjoy the party?"

"I still can't picture Harry doing things like that. All I remember was him playing Quidditch and working with the Unspeakables. Now he does this Marauder thing and charity work. That just amazes me."

"We thought he was joking when he told us he was going to start the foundation, but he's done some really good things."

"What's up with the other company, Marauders Inc? What exactly do they do?"

Ginny looked a bit nervous but said, "Some security work, that's all we know. Can you believe that editor is going to look at my designs?"

Hermione wanted to know more about Marauders but allowed Ginny to change the subject. "See, we all tell you they're good. I'm so happy that you're doing so well. You Weasley's are just charmed, you've all done great."

The girls stayed up late talking and went for a walk the next morning before getting ready and sitting in the kitchen waiting for Harry. Right before noon, Harry appeared on Ginny's back patio and knocked before Ginny called him in. He was carrying a large picnic basket and said, "Is a picnic acceptable to you Hermione?"

"That's fine with me. Don't want to be seen in public?" Hermione tried to joke.

"That's not it. After our last talk, I thought it would be safer to be somewhere in private in case there was yelling or one of us vanishes suddenly. I'd hate to see what the press would say if they got a picture of us screaming at each other," he said smiling. Hermione didn't know if he was joking or not. "Ginny, would you mind us having a picnic in your backyard?"

Ginny smiled and said, "Not at all. I'm going into the studio for a bit anyway."

Harry went out to setup the blanket and Ginny hugged Hermione. "Be honest Hermione. You know he doesn't talk about feelings much so you're going to have to just say what you want. He'll come around if you're honest with him."

Hermione walked out to where Harry had the blanket laid out. "This was a good idea."

"I'm glad you approve. It really wasn't because I don't want to be seen with you or anything. If we're still talking after lunch, we can go for ice cream." Harry smiled. Hermione appreciated the effort but still couldn't feel the normal warmth from him.

Harry laid out a tray of fruit, a tray of vegetables and two sandwiches along with some pumpkin juice. "If you'd rather have something else, I can go get it real quick," Harry said.

"This is perfect Harry. I wanted to explain..." Hermione started but Harry got stiff and interrupted her.

"I don't want to hear another explanation. If all you're planning on telling me is your explanation again, I can leave the food and go right now."

Hermione was shocked by his seriousness. "I'm just bad at this Harry." She hesitated and tears formed in her eyes. "I'm sorry Harry. I'm so sorry for the way I handled everything. I never meant to mess things up so bad. The last thing I ever intended was to hurt you." She started crying openly now. The next thing she knew, Harry had slid next to her and pulled her into a tight hug.

"I believe you Hermione. The thing that hurt as much as anything was that you never even tried to apologize to me for what you did. I would have done anything for you back then and when you messed up, you wouldn't even apologize to me. I still can't believe that," Harry said but didn't let go of her.

Her head was buried against Harry and the tears were flowing freely. "I don't know what to say. I felt so bad but just threw everything I had into my job instead of trying to fix things. Look what I've done. None of my friends treat me the same and you can't stand being near me. How could I have let this happen?"

"It's ok Hermione. If the roles were reversed, they would all be treating me worse. Ron would have tried to kick my ass multiple times. You're making an effort to fix things with Ginny and I know she appreciates that. Ron will be easy to fix as well."

"But what about you?" she asked.

Harry hesitated. "Well, you know me. I've been told I can be pretty pig-headed on occasion, but I'd like to give it a shot. No promises, but if nothing new comes up, I'm sure it can be better than it has been," Harry said and gave her a squeeze. "So come on, it'll be ok."

"But Harry, you don't know how bad things are. I really don't like my job and I don't have any real friends. Even the way Ron and Ginny treat me here, they're better than anyone I know in Venice." Hermione couldn't believe how easy it was to open up to Harry. She missed having someone she could talk to like this.

"Then find a new job and don't spend so much time in Venice. Those things can be fixed easily," Harry said still hugging her.

"But it's the top research facility in the world and I don't get much free time."

"All I can say is that you're the smartest witch I know and you could work anywhere you choose. Don't ever feel like you're trapped. If the job and Venice are making you unhappy, change one or both of them. You can do anything you want, I know you can."

She hugged him very tightly. "Oh Harry. I've missed this so much."

"Me too. C'mon, it's going to be ok. I went through the trouble to fix this lunch, we should eat it," Harry said.

"Oh, I'm sure you went through a lot of trouble. Had your house-elf whip it up no doubt," Hermione said wiping her eyes.

"I guess I can't pull that one by you. Now eat or Winky will be disappointed."

It ended up being Hermione who talked nearly non-stop through lunch. She described the place she worked and how interesting parts of Venice were. She had cheered up a lot but suddenly got a serious look on her face. "There is one other thing I want to say about what happened." Harry put his glass down and looked at her. "I don't regret what we did. I regret not being upfront about Venice and how things went after, but I don't regret that night."

"I regret it," Harry said quickly, causing Hermione to hold her breath, "It would have been the most special memory in my life if we had stayed close, but now it's my biggest regret. That wasn't something I used to do unless I planned on being with the person for a long time," Harry said.

"I know. I just wanted to tell you that." She paused. "What did you mean it wasn't something you used to do?"

"Oh...Don't get upset, who knows it may be just because I was getting older or maybe because I date models who are usually shallow, but it doesn't really mean the same thing to me anymore. I haven't really felt it was special in a long time. That's my issue though, nothing for you to worry about." Harry gave a weak smile.

"I'm sorry. I had no idea," Hermione said and hugged him.

"Don't think about it. We haven't killed each other so do you want some ice cream?"

"That sounds nice. But I do want to ask you something. What was the Amazon all about and how do you know those things about what I work on?"

"Can't answer either of those but I'd be glad to buy you some ice cream."

"I know something's going on with you. You go away for weeks at a time. You know things about top-secret projects. You hide your talks with the Minister of Magic. Something's going on."

"As you've probably seen when our other friends have been around, I come with a don't ask, don't tell policy. Take it or leave it." Harry gave her a look and she knew he was very serious.

"Fine. I won't push it...yet. Now let's get some ice cream," Hermione said. They went to Florean Fortescue's parlor and each had a cone before returning to Ginny's.

"I need to go. Thanks for suggesting the talk. It was nice," Harry said.

"Thanks for forgiving me Harry, I'm really sorry."

"That's enough apologizing. Just seeing you reminds me enough of it, you don't have to bring it up any more. I'll work on getting over it. Come back when you get a chance," Harry said.

"I'll try to do that. Take care Harry," Hermione said.

"You too Hermione," Harry said and disappeared.

Hermione began owling Ginny on a regular basis but hadn't sent Harry any yet. She hadn't asked him if it was ok and didn't want to push him. Ginny had invited her back for another weekend and Hermione promised herself she would ask Harry during that visit. When she and Ginny attempted to contact Harry, Winky had told Ginny that Harry had been gone for a couple weeks and she didn't know when he'd be back. Hermione was disappointed but still had a nice visit with Ginny and things between the two girls were getting better fast.

Hermione ended up coming back in two weeks for the twin's birthday party at the Burrow. She arrived with Ginny to everyone else's surprise. "You've been back more so far this year than in the previous four Hermione," Fred joked.

"I can bet it wasn't because of our birthday," George added.

"Shut it you guys or you'll deal with me," Ginny said and it actually shut the twins up. The party was a lively affair with many practical jokes being played. Hermione tried to stay out of the line of fire and kept looking for Harry.

After a couple of hours, Mrs. Weasley came outside looking flustered and said something to Mr. Weasley who went directly into the house. About five minutes later, Harry followed Mr. & Mrs. Weasley outside. Hermione could tell he wasn't in good shape; he was limping and favoring his side.

Upon seeing him, the kids ran over. "Uncle Harry! I knew you'd come," Ruth said and the kids started hugging and beating on him. Hermione saw Harry try to keep a smile even while wincing from the pain.

"I couldn't miss a Weasley birthday party. I brought you something," Harry reached into his pocket and brought out three magical eggs that each opened to find smaller eggs inside. Each time one was opened, it flashed a color and said something in Russian. Liz and Brian didn't think that much of them since they were so young but Ruth loved her gift and hugged him tight.

Harry waved to the rest of the guests but didn't move much; he stayed close to Mr. Weasley. Ginny, Ron and Hermione went over to him. "Are you ok Mate?" Ron asked.

"Oh yeah. Must have eaten something that didn't agree with me. Just like me to get something the day of a party," Harry tried joking. His friends were looking at him with very worried expressions. "Glad to see you made it Hermione. Everyone is starting to get used to seeing you here. Don't go disappearing again."

"I was back a couple weeks ago and Ginny and I tried to see you but you weren't home," Hermione said.

Hermione noticed Mr. Weasley shift uncomfortably. "Oh, you know out running around I suppose. I'm really sorry but I should go home and lie down for a bit. Winky can make me something. I'll try to be healthy the next time you come Hermione." Mrs. Weasley hugged him lightly and he disappeared.

Mr. Weasley quickly tried saying something to the twins to get everyone focused on the party. Hermione was having none of that and pulled Ron and Ginny off to the side. "What's up with him? It wasn't his stomach. He was limping and holding his side," Hermione asked.

Ron glanced at Ginny and they looked at Hermione guiltily. "We really don't know. We can't even ask about it without mum and dad jumping all over us. And you know Harry; he won't say anything at all."

"I want to go see him. Ginny, come with me," Hermione demanded.

"He won't like that Hermione," Ron said shaking his head.

"Ginny will you come with me? You can say I forced you to come," Hermione pleaded.

Ginny looked really worried for a minute but then said, "Don't tell anyone Ron. Say we went up to my old room. We'll be back later."

Ron shook his head again. "Hermione. You're pushing things."

Ginny and Hermione went inside and apparated to Harry's living room. They were suddenly terrified when the first thing they saw were four wands pointing at them. Harry, Sirius and two medi-witches all were ready to blast them.

"What the hell are they doing here?" Sirius yelled lowering his wand. "I told you not to go over there."

Harry lay back on the couch and said, "You two shouldn't have come. I suppose this was your idea Hermione."

"I knew something was wrong and we wanted to make sure you were all right," Hermione said and stepped closer. She and Ginny saw that Sirius was having a broken arm mended. Harry only had his shorts on and had a very swollen knee and a gash in his side that the witch was healing. There were bruises on both of them.

"I'm not being mean Hermione but for four years you haven't given a damn if I was all right or not. Why the sudden change? Ginny knows I can take care of myself," Harry groaned.

Hermione and Ginny moved next to him while Sirius put his shirt back on. "I have worried about you Harry. What have you gotten yourself into?" Hermione asked.

"If you say anything, I swear I'll wipe her memory," Sirius yelled.

"Trust me Sirius, please. I won't say anything important. It'll be ok. Get a fresh robe and go kiss your wife," Harry said sitting up now that his wound had been closed. The two medi-witches told them both to drink some potion and get some rest, and they left quickly. Sirius ran upstairs and came down with a new robe and tossed Harry one as well. Looking at him you couldn't tell anything had happened.

"Good to see you Ginny. You shouldn't have come you know," Sirius said. "I meant what I said Harry. I'll wipe it," Harry waved and Sirius disappeared.

Hermione started to say something but Harry quickly interrupted and pulled the robe around him. "I can't say anything about what happened. Ginny knows that already. Now, if you two want to sit around and talk about other things, I'm fine with that. If you want to badger me about something I can't answer, I'd rather you leave so I can rest."

"Can you at least tell us where you were?" Hermione asked.

Harry's eyes almost twinkled. "I'm sure you will figure that out in a couple days Hermione. If you haven't already."

Hermione looked around a bit. "I miss this place. You still have the library and it looks like there are more books than I had."

"I do read Hermione. What else would I have to do on evenings like this?" Harry said trying to joke.

"Don't joke about this Harry. You know we all get worried about you," Ginny said.

"And I love you all for caring but I'd rather you not worry. Today was bad timing. If the twins had been born one day later you two would have never known anything happened. I'm going to have to complain to your parents." Harry smiled. "So, what all pranks happened at the party?"

Slowly Hermione and Ginny told Harry all about the party. Discussing the twins lifted the mood between the three but before long, the two girls could see Harry fighting to stay awake so they announced they would be leaving. Ginny came over and asked, "You're not mad at me for coming are you?"

Harry smiled, hugged her and said, "When have I ever been mad at you?" He then kissed her on the cheek and looked at Hermione. "Besides, I'm pretty sure it wasn't your idea." He pulled back from Ginny and addressed Hermione. "My godfather takes our security *very* seriously. The world isn't all corporate politics and backstabbing. You should really be careful." Hermione was almost shocked to see the look in Harry's eyes. There was none of the playful boy she had grown up with. Then suddenly a twinkle appeared. "Maybe next time you're around I'll watch what I eat so I'm not ill." He sat back on the couch slowly.

"I hope you do. Will you be up for lunch tomorrow?" Hermione asked.

"Tomorrow's bad. Sirius and I have some things to finalize in the morning and then I'm off to some fashion show in Milan. You know I've got to keep making contacts so that Ginny doesn't boot me from the company for not pulling my weight." Harry smiled.

"I'll see you next time then. Do be careful," Hermione said.

Harry waved and they both left. He sat there and thought that he really needed to do some thinking about what he wanted. The last talk with Hermione had caused an enormous weight to be lifted from him. He had carried around unresolved issues for a long time and it had affected many things. Before the night with Hermione, he had actually been thinking about pursuing something but dropped all thoughts of seriously being with the woman after it. With the weight lifted, he wondered if it was still possible after all this time. He knew it would be a

risk, but couldn't decide if it was worth it or not. He fell asleep before coming to any conclusions.

When the girls came back outside, Ron gave them a quizzing look and when they were near him he asked, "Well you're in one piece. But, do you remember anything that happened?"

Hermione just said, "Of course." But then sat down and didn't say much.

Ginny made it clear later that night that she wasn't going to talk about any of it. "Harry's probably my closest friend Hermione. I worry about him a lot but know that he and Sirius know what they are doing. I really don't want to even think about any of that part of his life."

Hermione knew she was serious and didn't pursue the issue. She just concentrated on getting back into Ginny's life more. Hermione and Ginny spent the next day in town and then Hermione went home that evening a little depressed that she didn't get to spend any time with Harry. The next morning at the office, Hermione finally got around to looking at the paper.

Another Potion Smuggling Raid Wounds 15 in St. Petersburg, Russia.

Russian Ministry Special Agents raided the offices of Stalantic Inc, a business used as a front for trade in illegal potions and drugs. The business was said to be one of the largest suppliers of the drugs to Western Europe. The offices sustained major damage but amazingly, no Agents were wounded. Three of the top officials of the company along with twelve of their security force were wounded in the raid. This raid should cause a major interruption in the worldwide smuggling operations that have sprung up over the last few years.

Hermione put the pieces together quickly. Harry had given the kids magical eggs that spoke Russian and then told her she would figure it out soon. He had obviously been in Russia. And the last time he was in the Amazon and there was a big raid there as well. Hermione had the connection, but didn't have a clue what part Harry and Sirius would be playing. She also knew she had seen the company Stalantic before. It had been discussed at the office.

Hermione remembered Harry's birthday was coming up. They had each still sent cards on birthdays but there were never any words. She decided to try and see him this year so she wrote a note.

Harry.

I know your birthday is coming up soon and wanted to see if anyone was having a party for you. If not, maybe we could go out to eat with Ron and Ginny. It would be my treat.

I hope you don't mind me writing, you know I've never been very good at trying to make friends and trying to get back into the good graces with old friends is just as hard for me.

Let me know if we can get together for your birthday.

By the way. You weren't in recently in Russia by any chance were you?

Hermione.

She sent the note with her owl and was actually getting a little excited about seeing her friend again. She had been checking for a reply every day and finally one came.

Hermione

Thanks for thinking of my birthday. I haven't really celebrated it much in the past few years. I will be out of the country during my birthday so I'll have to miss seeing you. I'm sure Ginny will still want you to come over.

I didn't properly thank you for our talk when you came over. It did me a world of good talking about things with you. It made me realize that things could have been better if I had handled things differently. I'm sorry I wasn't feeling well on your last trip.

Now, what would I be doing in Russia?

I can't believe you've been coming back so often. Are you sure one of those potions you work on hasn't affected you?

Harry

Chapter 4

Hermione did some digging at her company and came across some documents that related to Stalantic Inc. That company had been contracted to destroy a large quantity of an experimental potion that didn't turn out as intended. The ingredients had been written down incorrectly before the batch was made. The result had been labeled toxic and was to be destroyed. Dr. Stonham personally oversaw the transfer of the potion to Stalantic to guarantee it was handled properly. She thought that having that company get raided for smuggling didn't fit with a company that disposed of chemicals but then she thought that they could do legitimate work as well.

Back at work, Hermione had to put the thoughts of Stalantic out of her mind because all the focus was on discovering the potion to help restore mental capacity to people who had been placed under the Cruciatus curse for too long. This potion could also be a breakthrough in treating many forms of mental illnesses and promised to make an enormous amount of money for Stonham Research. Dr. Stonham had been pushing the research team to work as much as possible on trying to solve this issue.

From the beginning, Stonham Research had been a stressful place to work and people were driven to their limits. Hermione actually did well in this environment since she had left all of her issues behind when she moved to Venice. But now that she was thinking more and more of her old friends, the pressure was starting to wear on her.

Hermione did manage to get out of work and go see Ginny the weekend of Harry's birthday and found that spending time with her old friend was making a big difference in Hermione's attitude. It bothered Hermione more than she let on that she couldn't see Harry. Especially since she hadn't been able to talk to him much the last time she was back. However, just spending time with Ginny, Ron and his family was bringing back many old memories of how much she enjoyed their company.

In the offices of Marauders Inc, Harry, Sirius and Remus were discussing the next project. "You do know where this evidence is pointing don't you?" Sirius asked.

"Yes Sirius, I just can't believe that she's aware of it," Harry said.

"Why has she recently come back into everyone's life? It seems too much of a coincidence to me," Sirius responded.

"I don't know Sirius. I still think that the two things aren't related," Lupin added. "Either way, does it really matter? We have to go through with this."

"As long as she doesn't find out anything before hand," Sirius said looking at Harry.

"I'm not a total git. I want this as much as you guys do. Even if I see her again, I won't say anything about what we do," Harry said. "She's smart you know. She already asked me if there was a connection to me being in the Amazon and that bust there and the one in Russia. She saw the gifts I brought back for the kids and put the pieces together."

"And what did you tell her when she asked?" Sirius asked this and Remus looked interested in hearing an answer as well.

"I said that to be around me you have to live with a don't ask, don't tell policy. I just don't answer any question I don't want to. We're going to take that company down, if she's there or not. I won't let her get hurt though."

"If she's involved, she's going to get hurt, just not physically," Sirius said.

"If she's involved, I can live with that. But, she's not involved. Plan this like any other project. This is a big one," Harry said expectantly.

"It still won't get us the one at the top, but it should shake things up a bit," Lupin added.

"I say we still let the vampires handle him," Sirius said angrily.

"We've talked about this before," Lupin quickly said, "We try to play by the rules."

Harry was torn as well, he really wanted the person behind a lot of this, but they were never able to directly tie him to any of the operations. Harry often felt it would be easier to just hand him over to the vampires but couldn't bring himself to agree to the idea. Harry left Lupin and Sirius alone to plan the next operation. That was their area of expertise and Harry trusted them completely.

Harry spent a lot of the next week sitting alone on the far side of the Hogwarts Lake, near the dark forest. It was one of the places he felt most comfortable. He would often sit there for hours playing catch with the giant squid and sometimes go wandering around the forest. Harry was thinking about the final years of school, and about how things had changed so much since then. He was trying to get the courage to ask a question that could go very well or very poorly but it was one that he desperately wanted to ask. His mind finally made up, he apparated to Ginny's studio which was on the edge of Hogsmeade. "Hey Ginny."

"Harry. What are you doing here?" She hugged him.

"Can't I just drop in on my business partner and one of my best friends?" he joked.

"Of course you can, but knowing you it's more likely something else," Ginny said with a smile.

"I really need to start mixing things up. I'm tired of everybody being able to predict what I'm doing." After a moment, he continued, "Are you free for lunch tomorrow afternoon? I'd really like to talk to you about something."

"We can talk now if you want." Ginny really wanted to know right now.

"No, I need to do something first and then I'd rather talk away from here. I'll take care of the food and pick you up at 2:00 if that's ok," Harry said.

"That sounds fine. Won't you even give me a hint?" She pleaded.

"I'm so bad with that stuff, I'd give you a little hint and you'd have it all worked out before tomorrow, so it's safer if I don't say anything."

Harry waved at Ginny. "See you tomorrow at 2:00," then he disappeared. Harry went home for a couple hours before going to have a talk that would start the ball rolling on a process that absolutely terrified him.

Harry arrived at Ginny's studio right on time the next day carrying a large picnic basket. She looked angry with him. "Steffi called last night and said you broke up with her! How could you do that? I thought you two were doing great. She said you told her that you wanted to date someone else." Ginny noticed the picnic basket. "And, you're not even taking me to a real restaurant?"

Harry turned and saw Ginny's assistant looking at them. "I wanted to talk about something and there may be yelling and hitting and stuff. I thought it best to not chance the press getting a picture of it. And I was right since you're yelling at me already," he said honestly.

Ginny thought he was kidding at first but didn't see him smile. "It's not bad news is it?"

"I hope not, but that kind of depends on you. Come on, let's go." Harry took her hand and they vanished but reappeared instantly at Harry's favorite place to think.

"We're having a picnic at Hogwarts?" Ginny complained.

"I like this spot, it's relaxing. If you really want to go someplace else, I don't mind," Harry replied, suddenly worried she didn't approve of the location.

"I was kidding, this is a nice place. I remember all of us sitting in this area a lot during your last couple years," Ginny said thinking back to the memories.

Harry quickly laid out the blanket and got the food out. "So, why did you really break up with Steffi?" Ginny asked nervously.

"Eat a bit first. There will be less to throw at me in case it goes badly," Harry said sounding a bit nervous.

"I can talk and eat, now spill it. Why did you break up with her?"

"I told her the truth. I wanted to date someone else and I wanted to talk to you about my idea," Harry replied looking very nervous.

"But Harry, she really liked you and I think she could have dealt with you know...everything," Ginny said feeling sorry for Steffi.

"You're probably right, but lately I've been thinking about someone else," Harry said sighing.

Ginny looked confused for a minute but then launched into Harry, "If you dumped Steffi because you want to start dating Hermione, I'll...I'll... I don't know what I'll do but it won't be pleasant. Steffi was great and I can't believe you would even consider dating Hermione again, especially so soon."

"Ginny, let me explain."

"She just comes back a few times and you're ready to throw everything away and try to be with her? I want her as my friend, but I'd rather she stayed away than hurt you again."

"She won't hurt me, let me explain."

"Fine Harry, you try to explain and then I'll tell you what I think," Ginny yelled at him.

"This is why I brought you all the way out here. The press would be having a field day with this in Hogsmeade."

"Don't joke around Harry, start explaining."

"You know when Hermione and I had our talk and she apologized and told me her point of view?" Ginny just nodded. "After I thought about that for a while, it was like a weight was lifted from me. I had been carrying around all this stuff and it just fogged everything up. After I heard her side and heard her apologize, things got clear and I saw how much of that I brought on myself. I've been coming here a lot since then and thinking about what I really wanted. Sirius always said that if I really want something, I shouldn't be so scared about trying to get it and in the past month, I've come to agree with him."

"But Harry, Hermione's ok as your friend, but I'm just worried she'll hurt you if you tell her how you feel. You know where her priorities are."

Chapter 5

"Ginny. Hermione won't hurt me and I don't want to date her," Harry said forcefully.

Ginny started to respond but got a really confused look on her face.

"You know the real reason Hermione and I stopped being friends? It was because of her lying or misleading me. I could have dealt with everything else. I may not have been happy, but I would have still been her friend and stood by her. So, I think that as long as two people don't lie or mislead the other about important issues, even if things don't work out they can still be friends. Look at Kristi and me; she was honest and said what she wanted and when that couldn't happen, we broke up but still really like each other as friends. I realize that can happen as long as both people are honest with each other."

"Ok, so who did you dump Steffi for?" Ginny was really confused.

"I didn't dump Steffi for anyone, I broke up with her because she's not who I wanted to be with." Harry scooted a little closer to Ginny, took a deep breath and said, "Ginny. I'd really like it if you would go out with me sometime."

Ginny just stared at him with wide eyes and kept staring for over a minute. Harry got worried and decided to ask again. "I'm asking if you would please go on a date with me. If you don't want to, that's ok I won't be mad. I'm just tired of being too scared of rejection to say what I want. More than anything I want us to stay friends, so whatever you think, tell me honestly."

Ginny was still staring without saying anything and Harry felt his heart drop. "Oh... I guess I should have kept this to myself. If you're uncomfortable, you don't have to stay, I'll pick up." Harry started to stand but Ginny grabbed his arm very firmly.

"If you're joking with me that would be the meanest thing ever and I swear you'll regret it," Ginny said with a very serious look in her face that actually worried Harry.

"I've never been more serious about anything Ginny. I really want to go out with you. But if you say no, I promise I won't act any differently to you than I have been," Harry said staring in her eyes.

Finally Ginny did something that Harry didn't expect. She just started laughing out loud. For the next couple minutes, she just fell back and roared with laughter. Harry had about enough. "Why didn't you just say no instead of making me feel like such a loser by laughing at me?" Harry said obviously hurt.

Ginny grabbed his arm and pulled herself up trying to stop laughing. "...Not laughing at you," she said and wiped tears from her eyes. "Oh Harry. I've never been happier." She hugged him and burst out laughing again.

Harry hugged back still feeling very confused. "Um... so then will you go out with me?" he finally got out.

Ginny pushed back and said, "You are so dense! Of course I'll go out with you." She hugged him tightly again.

"Good. What's so funny about this?" he asked.

"I don't know. I was so angry and hurt when I thought you were going to go running to Hermione and you asking me out was the last thing in the world I expected to hear, it was just a shock and relief. I just couldn't help myself."

"Um...ok then," Harry replied still not sounding sure.

Ginny realized this and pushed back, gathering her composure. "Harry. I would like to go out with you very much. See, I said that with a straight face. I just can't believe this is happening."

Harry got another serious look. "I do have one favor. We can take this as slow as you want and everything, but is it all right if we don't date other people while we're trying to make this work? I wouldn't feel comfortable if we did."

Ginny hit his arm. "Wake up Harry. I don't want to date anyone else, so of course that's ok. It's not like I've got a line of guys waiting for me like you do."

"I don't have guys waiting for me," Harry replied trying to joke.

She hit him again. "You know what I mean. You could have any girl, and you just had one of the top models around. Why would you want to date me?" Ginny asked seriously.

"Because I want to be with you Ginny. I knew it five years ago and was just too stupid or scared to say anything then, and then things went weird in my life. I'm not going to mess up again."

"You wanted to go out with me five years ago?" she asked loudly and Harry just nodded. "I should kick you for not asking me then!" Harry was just looking at her when she said, "I came up here and started to hate Hermione and now I can't wait to thank her for coming back and talking to you." Ginny grabbed him again.

"Do you think we should wait to tell people? You may decide after a date or two that it's not working out," Harry asked.

"What's not to work out? We know almost everything about each other now. I know how well you treat the girls you had been dating, not a single one has ever had anything bad to say about you. Are you worried that you may not like dating me?" she asked with a concerned voice.

"Not at all!" Harry instantly replied. "I have no doubts about dating you. But you still may want to wait; I mean we haven't even kissed. What if you end up wanting to break up because you don't like the way I kiss?" Harry said sounding very much like the schoolboy she used to know.

Ginny gave him a very strange look and then quickly leaned in and kissed him on the lips. It wasn't a quick peck either and after the initial shock, Harry was overcome by a warm feeling and butterflies in his stomach. He put his arm around her and lay her on her back kissing her passionately. After a long, sensual kiss, he pulled back and looked into her eyes.

"Wow...um...there'll be no problem with the way you kiss," Ginny whispered up to him.

He pulled her back to a sitting position. "So, you want to tell people soon then?"

"Soon? I want to tell everyone right now!" Ginny exclaimed.

"Slow down. Let's tell Ron and Parvati first. Remember, you've got a bunch of older brothers that may want to kill me. And, your mum and dad may not want me back at the house so let's do them in small chunks."

"You're so stupid. Everyone in my family thinks the world of you and I'm sure they'll be happy. They'll be shocked for sure, but then they'll be happy." Ginny hesitated. "You said something earlier that I agree with. I'll never lie or mislead you about anything important Harry. I promise. So if anything ever goes bad, we have to remain friends."

"I agree. I'll never hurt you intentionally. I couldn't stand to lose you as a friend, but I'm glad you want to try and be a bit more," he said smiling at her.

"Ok, tomorrow night, Ron and Parvati at my place and we'll tell them. But, tonight we get some food, eat at my place and snuggle on the couch. Deal?" Ginny asked confidently.

"Fine by me, but that's not much of an impressive first date. I want to take you out on a real date. You deserve it."

"I know I do, but I'm too excited for anything else right now and I don't want to go home wondering if this was all a dream or anything. We'll just sit around and snuggle tonight and you can plan a date for this weekend."

"Yes Miss Weasley," Harry joked.

She smirked at him before giving him another long kiss. "I cannot believe this just happened."

Harry looked serious again. "You know this is going to get weird for a while. There will be stuff in the press; your family will treat us weird. It's just going to be weird. Can you handle all of it?"

Ginny looked deep into his eyes. "If you're with me, I'll have no problem handling it." She kissed him quickly and said, "Come on let's go."

Harry quickly picked everything up and they apparated back to the studio, where Ginny told him to wait around for her. She kept giggling and punching Harry in the arm whenever she went by. The other people in the office were looking at her like she was crazy. She walked by Harry and whispered, "I really want to kiss you again."

Harry stood and walked towards her. "We can't here, they'll all see," Ginny said looking nervous. With a flick of his hand, the area around them became very foggy so that no one could see though. He kept walking to her and pulled her into another deep kiss. "This is going to be so great," she said after the kiss. Harry moved back to his chair before clearing the air.

They picked up some food and went straight to Ginny's house in Hogsmeade. The first thing she did was change into more comfortable clothes and a pair of old socks, probably Bill's, as they were her favorite. She walked around getting things ready and giving Harry a hug each

time by. They were sitting across from each other at the table eating when Harry noticed she kept staring at him. "Gin... I'm no different than I was the last time we ate together."

"That's not true. You are. I can see it in your eyes. They look like they did when you were back playing Quidditch. I don't think I ever realized they had darkened over the years, but now they're as bright as ever."

"I feel like I did back then. I'm actually happy, really happy. You don't know how worried I was about asking you. I hadn't been able to sleep for a while now. I didn't know if you'd hex me or immediately say no."

"I can't believe you were worried. Have you ever been turned down when you asked someone out?" Ginny asked.

"Sure. Cho didn't go to the ball with me remember."

Ginny laughed. "But that's it. You could have any witch you want."

"Since you said yes, I have the witch I want. Really." Harry reached across and squeezed her hand.

"I want to tell somebody right now. I can't stand waiting," Ginny said.

"Don't be too anxious. It'll be nonstop when the word gets out," Harry told her.

They spent the evening with Ginny curled up in Harry's side like it was the most natural thing in the world to do. She had actually done this quite a few times before, but it was just as friends then. Now he was her boyfriend and it felt even better. They stayed up late talking and watching TV and Harry noticed her falling asleep. "It's late, you should get to bed. I'll see you tomorrow night."

"I don't want you to go," Ginny said.

"I'll be back tomorrow and you need to get some sleep," Harry said.

Ginny looked nervous. "I'm serious. Don't go."

Harry looked at her and said, "We said we would take it slow and so far we haven't. We have all the time in the world."

"We don't have to take it that slow. I mean we're past all the awkwardness of getting to know each other. And, I didn't throw you down and shag you near the lake, so we've gone slow."

Harry's eyes got huge and Ginny continued, "I'm kidding. But really, you've stayed with me before when I've been really scared. We won't do anything, but I really don't want you to leave. I still can't believe this is real."

"I promise this is real. Get me a blanket and I'll sleep on the couch," Harry said.

Ginny looked nervous again. "Stay with me. Like you do when I'm scared. Please," she pleaded.

There was no way Harry could refuse her when she looked like that. "Fine. Go on and yell when you're in bed. This is not going slow." He kissed her forehead and she ran down the hall.

He heard some fumbling around and after a few minutes. "Ok, I'm in bed."

Harry walked in shaking his head. She was in bed, off to one side with the covers pulled up. He took off his shoes and socks and lay on top of the covers next to her. She pulled an arm out and snuggled up next to him with her arm draped across his chest. "You don't know how happy I am," Ginny said.

"Me too. Now we just have to make sure we don't do anything to mess up our friendship."

"We won't, I promise," she replied. "Goodnight Harry."

He kissed the top of her head and said, "Goodnight Gin."

Ginny woke before him the next morning and just stared at his face. She had so many wonderful dreams that night but none made her happier than having Harry next to her when she woke up. In the past, he had stayed when for one reason or another she had been very scared and having nightmares. Nothing helped except for having him stay with her. She pulled up and kissed his lips lightly. Instantly his eyes snapped open and then a broad smile came to his mouth. "You never did that when I stayed before," he said.

"I thought about it of course," she said with a sly grin. "I'm going to have a shower." She rolled out of bed and Harry saw she had on a thin nightshirt that didn't totally obscure her body.

She stepped into the bathroom when Harry said, "You never wore anything like that around me either."

She peeked back into the room, produced a sly smile and said, "Oops, I forgot," then went into the bathroom and closed the door. Harry absent-mindedly put on some socks and shoes and tried to flatten out his clothes and waited for Ginny. He watched TV until she came out wearing jeans and a loose fitting shirt. "Thank you for staying last night." She kissed him deeply.

"Thank you for that," Harry replied. "I'm going to go home and shower. Are you really sure you want this. After tonight, it will be out in the open."

"Oh, you can't get out of it now. If you do, I'll tell my brothers you asked me on a date and then spent the night in my bed before dumping me," she said with an evil look.

"Don't even kid about things like that. Besides, I have no intention of ever dumping you. See you tonight," he said before disappearing.

Ginny couldn't work that day. She just kept finding herself giggling at her desk and the other workers were really starting to look at her strangely. She decided to walk along Diagon Alley for the rest of the day. She wandered around aimlessly looking into all the shops. When she finally realized what time it was, she quickly went to the store to buy the ingredients for the meal she was going to fix and then went straight home. Ginny looked around like she almost

expected Harry to be there. Two days ago and she would have felt fine being home alone. Now, she wanted him there with her. She busied herself making the meal and again found herself giggling.

Ron and Parvati appeared in her kitchen a little earlier than she expected. Harry still hadn't arrived and Ginny started getting little thoughts about him changing his mind. "Why the sudden invite for supper?" Ron asked.

"Just felt like seeing my favorite brother and his wife," Ginny said smiling.

"Who else is coming Ginny? There are four plates," Parvati asked.

"Oh, Harry said he was coming as well," Ginny said and got a huge smile on her face, glad that she was facing away from her brother.

"You drug Harry away from Steffi for one of your meals? Are you sure he said yes?" Ron joked while he was pouring the girls a glass of wine, and grabbed himself a beer.

"Ha Ha Ron," Ginny said and then heard a knock on her back door.

Ron opened the door. "Oy Mate! When are you going to learn to just pop straight in? Damn annoying having to let you in each time," Ron said.

"You can't just pop into a single woman's house Ron. It's just not right," Harry said smiling at Ginny. He walked to Parvati and hugged her. "I still don't know how he's kept you all these years." Harry told her which resulted in a smack on the head from Ron. It took all of his control not to give Ginny a bigger hug than he normally did but he didn't want to give anything away yet. He handed her a bottle of wine and said, "I hope this goes with the meal."

The conversation was nice and light during the meal. Afterwards, they were all having a drink after eating when Ron said, "What got you away from Steffi tonight?"

"Um...we broke up a few days ago and I couldn't refuse Ginny's offer," Harry said calmly.

Ron and Parvati looked shocked. "Really. No way!" Ron exclaimed.

"You two made such a cute couple," Parvati said and Harry saw Ginny flinch a bit.

"So, what happened?" Ron questioned.

"Nothing really. I just realized I wanted to try and date someone else and wouldn't feel right trying while I was dating her," Harry said and let his foot touch Ginny's under the table.

"Someone else? Man, she's one of the hottest models around. Who are you going for, that swimsuit bird?" Ron asked and was quickly hit by Parvati.

"No, I've had it with models. I'm thinking of someone whom I have a real connection with," he said and felt Ginny's food move against his.

Both Ron and Parvati's eyes got big and then Ron looked angry. "If you're thinking about dating Hermione, I'll kick your arse. She's ok as your friend, but nothing else. Please don't tell me you're going to date her."

Harry quickly held up his hands. "I have no desire to date Hermione at all. I've already asked a girl to go out and she accepted. We haven't had our first date yet but I wanted you to meet her," Harry said with a smile.

"As long as it's not Hermione I'm happy for you. Is the new girl coming over later?"

"Promise you'll be happy for me?" Harry asked and Ron looked totally confused. "Ron. I asked Ginny out on a date and she accepted."

Chapter 6

Ron looked stunned but then started laughing. "Good one Harry. Like you'd dump Steffi to go out with Ginny." Ron stopped laughing when he felt his ears growing. Ginny had hexed him. "Ok, I'm sorry Ginny, but come on. Now Harry, you never go after the girl, so who finally got you to make the first move?"

"I swear, it's Ginny," Harry said looking worried.

Both Ron and Parvati looked back and forth from Ginny to Harry and back. Parvati was the first to speak. "That's great you two. How'd he do it?"

Ginny started to answer but Ron cut her off. "You're really going to date my little sister?" he asked this very seriously.

Harry looked at him with the same serious expression. "That's the plan. I haven't yet, but she did accept. Are you ok with it?"

"You really broke up with Steffi so you could ask Ginny out?" Ron asked and Harry nodded. There was silence for a minute then Ron continued. "You know. I'm pretty much ok with that. Better than the git's she had been dating."

Ginny got up and hugged Ron tightly. "You know of course that if you hurt her."

Harry spoke up. "I'm sure there wouldn't be much of me left when Ginny got done, but whatever there was, you and the rest of the family would finish me off," Harry said without smiling.

"Something like that," Ron said shaking his head. "But just think of that swimsuit model." Ginny pointed her wand and Ron said, "Kidding, just kidding. Who else knows?"

"No one," Ginny said. "We wanted to tell you first so don't tell anyone. We're going to tell mum and dad and then let the rest find out on their own," Ginny added with an evil grin.

The group moved to the couch and Parvati asked again how Harry had asked so Ginny told the story but left out everything that happened after leaving Hogwarts.

"Do you always have to go overboard?" Ron asked.

"You should try it once in a while Ron," Parvati teased. "Maybe it would get you special treatment at home."

Ron's eyes lit up. "We'll talk later Harry." Then he thought. "I don't want to hear you two talking like that."

Ginny put her feet up on the table and almost instantly Ron said, "You two haven't! Ginny. Are those Harry's socks?" Ron looked very flushed.

Ginny blushed and said, "Well, it looks like they are."

Harry's eyes got big. He thought his felt different this morning; he must have picked up Bills. Ron stared at him. "You two haven't have you?"

Harry started shaking his head no but Ginny said, "That's none of your business Ronald."

"Don't talk like that Ginny. This isn't funny. You haven't had your first date yet, and I don't care how long you've known each other." Ron was almost yelling.

Harry kept shaking his head no but Ginny spoke again. "It's my business if we have or haven't. But just this once I'll answer. No, we haven't. But since you brought it up, I may just shag Harry right here on the couch after you two leave tonight."

Harry hung his head and kept shaking it. Parvati started laughing loudly. "Ginny. I think I handled the news pretty good. Don't go pushing me over the edge yet. You know, Harry just seems to have a way with women. They all want to shag him right from the start."

"And how often does he actually let that happen Ron?" Ginny asked calmly.

Ron looked at Harry and said, "Never. He always makes them wait. Bit stupid if you ask me."

"So if you don't have any faith in me, at least have some in your best friend," Ginny said.

"Don't talk to me if you two ever start doing anything," Ron finally said.

The rest of the evening went well. Ron had taken it much better than Harry expected which gave him some hope about telling her parents. Ron and Parvati were just about to leave when Ron said, "You'll be leaving soon won't you?"

"He'll leave when I'm ready for him to go. Goodnight Parvati," Ginny said and Harry just waved.

Once the two were alone Harry said, "Remind me to never ever make you mad. You're scary, you know that?"

She gave him a deep kiss and said, "I wanted to do that since you got here. You know I kept having thoughts that you changed your mind and weren't coming."

"Never," Harry said kissing her again. "That would have broken my promise to be totally honest. If anything ever changes, I'll talk about it immediately to see if there is something we can do. I won't keep it bottled up."

Ginny asked, "How long 'til Ron comes back?"

Harry shrugged his shoulders and was helping pick up when Ron popped back into the kitchen, not five minutes later. "Thought you were leaving?"

"You shouldn't do that unless you're prepared to see things you don't want to," Ginny said. "I may just have Harry put some anti-apparation wards on the house."

"You'd do that too since they don't mean a bloody thing to him," Ron said before leaving.

After they finished picking up, Harry said he needed to leave. "Can I convince you to stay again?" She asked.

"You could, but I think it's best if I go home. I really want to date you, not just move in with you. I know we have a head start on being comfortable with each other, but I don't want to take advantage of that. How about we go out Friday and then tell your parents on Saturday? If they don't kill me, I'll feel much better," Harry said before the two of them kissed goodnight a few times and Harry left.

Harry was having lunch with Sirius the next day. "We're making progress on the next project. It's not looking good for her you know. She's right up top with the rest of them," Sirius said.

"I still don't believe she really knows what's going on with the stuff," Harry replied.

"You're not going to let any surfacing feelings for her cloud your judgment are you?"

It annoyed Harry when Sirius questioned his ability. "No Sirius I'm not. She's just a friend and will never be anything more. It will never be like it was and if we see that she's involved she'll get the same treatment as the others."

"Fine, I'll drop it," Sirius finally said. "Want to come over for supper tonight? Kelly and James would love to see you."

"Can't, I have a date. I'm actually kind of nervous about it," Harry said.

"Nervous. Why? You've been dating Steffi for a while now. Not going to ask her to marry you or anything?"

Harry laughed. "I'm not seeing Steffi anymore. I'm going on my first date tonight and I want it to be special."

"Oh. You know, it's your business and all but I wish you'd stay with one girl for more than a few months. We just get comfortable with them and you go and spring new ones on us."

"I hope this one will last much longer," Harry said and kind of blushed. "This could be the one."

Sirius looked shocked and then kind of chuckled. "Right. You haven't even been on a date yet and you're talking about the one. You go and get me convinced that you're so much more mature than I think and then say something like this."

"I'm going out with Ginny Weasley tonight," Harry said and it shut Sirius up quickly.

"Really? Kind of sudden isn't it?"

"I don't think so. You told me I should have done it five years ago. For once I wish I would have listened to you," Harry joked back.

"Let that be a lesson to you. Always listen to your godfather." Sirius smiled and gave a sigh. "So, who knows?"

"Ron, Parvati and now you. If she wants to have a second date with me we'll tell her parents this weekend.

"Well, congratulations. I wasn't expecting this," Sirius said. Harry went home early to make sure all the arrangements were made. He silently thanked Hermione again for having him put in a Muggle telephone. Making plans for a date where he wouldn't be recognized often called for Muggle devices. Harry was getting very nervous about this date, and couldn't remember the last time he was actually nervous about a girl. He had liked the girls he dated for more than a couple times, but it was never that important to him. Even though he felt comfortable with Ginny, the act of taking her on a first date really made him nervous.

Harry appeared outside of Ginny's front door. This was something he almost never did. Normally he popped into her back yard and knocked. He stood there trying to calm his breathing for a moment and knocked. Ginny looked confused. "What are you doing out here?" she asked before pulling him inside.

"Picking you up for our date. Don't tell me your other first dates just popped into your back yard or into your kitchen?" Harry said kissing her on the cheek.

"I don't let guys know where I live before the first date, so I would usually meet them someplace."

"Oh. You look great Gin," Harry said looking at her warmly.

"You too Harry. You look like a very respectable Muggle," Ginny grinned.

"Are you ready?" he asked and she took his arm before they popped to the Leaky Cauldron. They both drew looks for being nicely dressed like Muggles, but Harry was so well known in here that no one bothered him. "You two look very nice. Not spending the evening here I take it," Tom the owner said as they walked by.

"Hi Tom. No, we're going to wander around Muggle London tonight. See you later," Harry replied before he and Ginny went out the door into the Muggle streets. Harry walked holding Ginny's hand as they talked about nothing important. They arrived at a very nice and popular restaurant where Harry had made reservations. He and Ginny walked up to the hostess who asked his name. "Harry Potter, I should have a reservation."

"Yes Mr. Potter," the hostess said not impressed by the name at all. "If you would like to wait in our lounge, it should only be a few minutes," the lady said, motioning them to a quiet lounge area.

Harry put his hand on Ginny's back and ushered into the area before getting her a glass of wine from the bar. When he came back to sit next to her, she was smiling broadly. "You'd make a fine Muggle Harry. I bet you're not used to having to wait on a table."

Harry gave a smirk. "I'll have you know, I spend a great deal of time in the Muggle world. It's the only place I can feel like a normal person. I come around here and just walk around sometimes. I really never get tired of standing in line with everyone else."

Ginny gave him an appraising look. "I didn't know you did that."

"Good. There're still some things you can find out about me. It's ok coming here isn't it?" he asked.

"Oh yes. I've never been here and it is kind of nice not having everyone pushing to be around you. I think I can understand why you like it here."

Harry leaned over and gave her a quick kiss. "I know I should wait until after our first date, but you just look so beautiful." Ginny blushed brightly. "Want to know something else I bet you don't know about me?"

She nodded. "I actually have flats in Muggle London and in Muggle Paris. When I really need to get away I go to one of them."

"Really? You actually live like a Muggle?" she asked, obviously surprised.

"Well, not totally. Everything in the flats is Muggle-stuff, but I still do everything magically."

"Will you show them to me?" she asked.

"If you don't dump me, maybe I will," he said and was just leaning in for another kiss when the hostess came to show them to their table. They ended up in a quiet booth back in the corner. They took their time with the meal and Ginny kept commenting that everything took so long in Muggle restaurants. Harry didn't mind because that gave them plenty of time to talk. After the meal, they walked hand-in-hand up a few more blocks to the theatre district. Harry went to the call window and picked up their tickets and they went to see the production. It was supposed to be the current popular thing to see and Harry had to ask a connection to get them the tickets.

Ginny had never been to a Muggle production like this and was really enjoying seeing all the other people dressed up and how they acted. "They're so much more proper than wizards are at these things," she commented. They went to their box seats overlooking the stage and waited for the production to begin. The production was very elaborate and Ginny seemed to be in awe of the whole thing. This wasn't Harry's favorite thing to do but he had been correct in guessing that Ginny would really enjoy it.

Once it was over and they were back on the street Ginny exclaimed, "That was fantastic. Can we come see it again sometime?"

"Of course. If you still want to go out with me we can have another date, and if not, we'll come as friends."

She hit his arm and said, "I really can't believe we're on a date. You know I'm not nervous or anything. I just feel so comfortable with you."

"I'm not sure that's a good thing. You're supposed to be excited to be on a first date," Harry said getting a sad look on his face.

"I am excited. It's just that it feels so right," Ginny replied giving him a peck on the cheek.

"It's not quite over yet," Harry said and flagged down a carriage being pulled by a large white horse. Harry talked to the driver for a couple minutes and then helped Ginny get into the carriage. It had gotten a bit cool and the man offered them a blanket. Harry took the blanket, smiled at Ginny and said, "May as well do it the Muggle way," before spreading the blanket over their laps. He put his arm around Ginny and she snuggled into his side enjoying the ride. Their driver took them through a large park that had many trees lit up. Ginny couldn't believe how warm and comfortable she felt. She had always dreamed about being out with Harry and now that she was, it felt like the most natural place to be. When they were leaving the park, the driver turned and asked, "Are you sure about the destination sir?"

"Yes, quite sure," Harry replied and pulled Ginny a bit closer. Before long, the carriage stopped in front of the corner that contained the Leaky Cauldron and the driver helped Ginny out before saying, "Not the safest part of town sir. Will you be alright?"

"I think we'll manage, but thank you," Harry said and tipped the man. They watched the carriage go around the corner before they entered the Leaky Cauldron. Even though it was very late by now, there were still many oddly dressed witches and wizards talking. Harry led Ginny off to one side and he apparated them back outside her front door.

"Harry. I'm with you, why didn't you just go inside?"

"First date Gin. I need to say goodbye at your door. I hope you don't think this is too presumptuous, but I'd really like to kiss you," he said looking straight into her eyes.

Ginny felt like she could just melt into him and pulled him close before he kissed her. If it was possible, this one made her feel even better than the first one by the lake had. She actually felt weak-kneed when he finally pulled away. "Um...want to come in?" she asked.

"Want to...Yes...But since it's our first date I won't. I really had a good time tonight, thanks for going out with me."

"Thanks for finally getting up the nerve to ask me. You should have done it years ago," she said giving him a quick kiss.

"You could have asked me you know," he stated.

"You don't know how close I came to doing that. Every time, you would do something sweet and I'd be happy enough just being your friend."

"Well, then I'm sorry for being stupid for so long. Just think we'd be way beyond first dates now. Maybe I would be coming in," Harry said raising his eyebrows.

"I'm ok with you coming in tonight Harry," she said and quickly blushed.

"I should go before I lose my will power. I'll meet you at your parents tomorrow. Thank you for a great date Gin," Harry said and kissed her cheek.

"There's such a thing as going too slow Harry," Ginny said with a sly smile.

"We can work on that after our next date if you'll give me the chance," he said with a smile.

"I'll hold you to that Harry. Goodnight," Ginny said before going inside and closing the door. Harry quickly went home feeling happier than he could remember feeling. Ginny went inside and actually jumped up and down a few times and fell onto the couch laughing. This had been a perfect evening. She had gone out alone with Harry and he paid attention to her, laughed at her jokes and treated her like he really wanted to be there with her. She couldn't believe it was actually happening. Ginny usually took things very slow when she dated a boy but she would have skipped all of that if Harry had come in. Something about her always wanting him and her knowing what kind of a person he was made her want to experience everything with him. Maybe it was also because she felt safer with Harry around than at any other time. She actually said to herself, "You're not going to make me wait for much longer Harry Potter." As soon as this thought came out of her mouth, she blushed and started laughing again.

Ginny lay in bed for a long time that night replaying the date she had just been on. She wanted to remember every second of it. She felt like the most special girl in the world. She had enjoyed being a Muggle for the evening since Harry seemed so comfortable doing it. Finally she dozed off and replayed the date in her dreams, but this time it ended the way she had wanted it to.

Harry also lay in bed without sleeping for a long time that night. He had felt so good having Ginny with him tonight. Why had he waited so long, he had lost so much time with her? He couldn't believe how frustrated he was. For the longest time, he hadn't minded putting off being intimate with any girl he had dated, but he really had a hard time leaving Ginny tonight. He kept telling himself that he wanted everything to be perfect and not feel rushed. When he finally fell asleep, he had a smile on his face the entire night.

Waking the next morning, Harry's smile quickly faded when he remembered that they were going to tell Ginny's parents tonight. Ron had taken the news ok, maybe her parents would. Harry spent the day going to his two flats and making sure they were very clean in case he ever showed them to Ginny. They were both clean of course but he went over everything again just to make sure. He stayed at the one in Paris until it was time to go to the Burrow.

Ginny had arrived at the Burrow earlier that day and couldn't sit still the entire time. She kept trying to read but couldn't get past the first paragraph before starting to giggle. "Ginny dear, are you all right? You're acting quite queer?" Mrs. Weasley asked.

"It's just been a good week at work mum," Ginny said giving her mum a kiss on the cheek. Ginny began helping her mum cook and kept humming. She didn't notice the strange looks her mother kept giving her.

"Isn't it just a beautiful day mum?" Ginny asked

Mrs. Weasley looked out the window and then to her daughter. "Is there something you want to tell me dear?"

"No mum. I just think it's a great day, that's all," Ginny said, going back to helping cook, but couldn't contain herself. "I'm dating someone new," she just blurted out.

Mrs. Weasley smiled at her daughter. "Well, that explains why you're so happy. Tell me about him."

"He's nice and sweet. He's gorgeous. He's perfect," Ginny said in a sighing voice.

"Well all that sounds good, but we still want to meet him if you're going to be seeing much of him. He must be special for you to be in such a good mood," Mrs. Weasley said smiling at her only daughter.

"Oh mum, I know you'll love him," Ginny said blushing.

The table had been set for four people since Ginny told her parents Harry was going to come over. "Why was Harry coming dear?" Molly asked her daughter.

"He was not doing anything tonight and I just invited him. That's ok, isn't it?" Ginny asked.

"Of course it is. You don't need to ask. Harry's always welcome here. How has he been?"

"Oh mum, he's great," Ginny said before she caught herself. She started blushing and said, "I mean he's doing great."

Mrs. Weasley studied her daughter and said, "I see."

Just then there was a knock on the door and Mr. Weasley opened it to find Harry outside. "Harry. Come in boy, come in," he said shaking Harry's hand.

"Hello sir." Harry replied and walked in. Mrs. Weasley came and gave him a big hug. "How are you dear?"

"Fine Mrs. Weasley. Thank you for having me tonight," he replied.

Ginny came and gave him a longer hug than Harry thought she should have. "Thanks for coming Harry," she said.

"I'll take any chance I can get for you mum's cooking," Harry replied. He noticed Mrs. Weasley looking at him differently. The meal was great, as Mrs. Weasley's food always tasted fantastic to Harry. She had always treated Harry like a member of the family. This fact made the prospect of telling them he was dating their daughter all the more daunting. When dessert was served, Harry felt Ginny kick him under the table.

"Um...Mr. Weasley, Mrs. Weasley, can I tell you something?" Harry asked, suddenly becoming very nervous.

Mrs. Weasley didn't look too confused but Mr. Weasley did. "Of course Harry, what is it?" he asked.

"Um... well sir I...I mean we...well I wanted to tell you that I asked Ginny out on a date the other day and she agreed," Harry blurted out and sat up straight. Ginny kept glancing between her mum and dad.

Mr. Weasley looked shocked, but Harry couldn't tell what Mrs. Weasley was thinking. "Um...Aren't you dating that model?" her dad asked.

"No sir. I...We broke up so that I could ask Ginny out," Harry said feeling like he could be sick.

Her dad started to say something but Mrs. Weasley beat him. "What brought this on Harry? You've known her for a long time."

"I've thought about it many times before," Harry said and started blushing. "I guess I was just too scared to ask. But I've finally started taking my godfather's advice about not being afraid to go after something I really wanted. I thought it was worth the risk to ask."

Mr. Weasley then asked, "Have you already gone out?"

Ginny spoke up. "Yes dad. Harry took me out last night. We went to eat at a Muggle restaurant in London and then to a Muggle play before he dropped me off at my front door," she said glancing at Harry.

Mrs. Weasley smiled a bit and said, "Well, I couldn't be" but was cut off by Mr. Weasley asking. "What about your job Harry?"

Chapter 7

Harry wasn't expecting this. "Sir?" he asked confused.

"How do you think this would affect your job?" Mr. Weasley asked, sounding very serious.

Harry thought for a second and said, "I don't think it would sir. I mean, you all treat me as family now, so I don't see that my dating Ginny would matter for my job. If I was hurt I think she would be upset even if we weren't dating."

"It's true dad," Ginny spoke up. "Hermione and I went over there after Harry left the last time and saw the medi-witches patching him up. I always worry about him." Ginny gave Harry a sad look.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Weasley looked very uncomfortable with this statement. "But what about in the future?" Mr. Weasley asked again.

Harry realized what he was asking. "Sir, it would be the same if I was seeing Ginny or not. I want a family someday and when that happens, I don't intend to put myself in situations I find myself in today. I don't enjoy coming home with broken bones and cuts, or having to spend days in some little Muggle hospital in Brazil." Harry felt Ginny grab his hand and he saw the look of hurt on Mrs. Weasley's face. "Whenever I'm lucky enough to get married and have a family, I won't let those things happen. I hope things will be better by then, but either way, I'm changing my part," Harry said this very confidently.

It looked like his answer shocked Mr. Weasley because he sat there staring for a second and then said, "Well then, I suppose you've realized what her brothers would do if you ever hurt her?"

"Yes sir, but I can assure you that won't ever be necessary," Harry said and Ginny hugged him.

Mrs. Weasley instantly went to her daughter and gave her a big hug. "So, is this why it was such a great day dear?" she asked her daughter.

Ginny and her mom went into the other room and talked, but Mr. Weasley said, "Sorry about all those questions Harry, but she is my little girl."

"I understand sir. I just wish I would have had more courage years ago," Harry said and then the two men went to join the women in the living room.

"So, do your brothers know yet?" Mr. Weasley asked.

"Only Ron. We want the others to find out on their own," Ginny said with an evil smile.

"Oh, Sirius knows. I told him yesterday. He would also join your brothers if I ever mess up," Harry said.

Harry and Ginny went for a walk around the lake. "Remember how many times we came down here just to walk around and talk?" Ginny asked.

"You didn't know this, but I usually spent the time watching you," Harry said.

"You did not! Why would you have been watching me?" Ginny asked.

"I think it started after my fourth year. When I came here that summer, I couldn't believe how pretty you had gotten and how much you had changed since school got out. From that point on, I never looked at you the same. If I had seen you at school and you hadn't been Ron's sister, I would have done anything to go out with you," he said.

"I knew you always thought of me as just Ron's little sister," Ginny said sounding angry.

"It's not that I thought of you like that. I always wanted more; I just didn't want to risk losing Ron as my best friend. Just like I didn't want to lose you as my best friend by asking you out. I was really scared," he said.

"You're so weird. You'll date a vampire, face down death eaters, dementors and Voldemort in your sixth year but you were too scared to ask me out until ten years later."

"Yeah but I had made mistakes with Voldemort before and I knew that if I made a mistake with you, it would be my last one," Harry joked and pulled her down on top of him where he proceeded to give her a very deep kiss. "I'm here to apologize for my stupidity and beg forgiveness."

"What will you do to get my forgiveness?" she asked playfully.

"Whatever you say," he replied in the same playful voice.

"Ok, stay with me tonight," she said.

"Ok, no problem. I just did that the other night."

"Under the covers this time," she said very calmly.

Harry's eyes got big. "That's not taking things slow Gin. It was hard enough when I was on top of the covers."

"Was it now?" she asked raising her eyebrows. Harry blushed profusely. "All I'm saying is stay with me and sleep under the covers. If you don't want anything to happen, it won't."

"It's not that I don't want it to happen, I just want it to happen differently for our first time. I want it to be very special and won't forgive myself if I just give in before we can make it special. When did you get so pushy about getting what you want? Is this how you've been with your other boyfriends?"

"No, I haven't been like this, ever. I'm just so comfortable with you that I don't see the need to hide anything. Besides, I wanted to kiss you since I was ten and saw you on the platform and I waited all these years to finally get the kiss. I've wanted to do more with you since my sixth year and I don't see the need to wait much longer on that either."

"You're a very aggressive girl Miss Weasley." Harry said smiling.

"I thought you liked aggressive girls. I heard R.J. was very aggressive, and we all know Kristi was," she said giving him another quick kiss.

"Well, I guess I do. That usually saves me from being so dense about what I'm supposed to do. I like to think I've gotten better about knowing what to do over the years."

"Oh, you've gotten better, but I'm not willing to let you go as slow as you do with your other girlfriends."

"Well, we'll see how good my willpower is then won't we? Come on, let's say goodbye to your parents and get back to your place."

The couple went back inside and talked to the Weasley's for a bit before returning to Ginny's house. "Ok, so are you ready to be a real couple? Once we're seen out together a few times, it will all be out in the open," Harry asked.

"I'm ready. None of that will bother me. I've been around you enough in public to have an idea what will happen. I can't wait to see my brother's reaction." The two ended up snuggling on the couch until Ginny suggested going to bed. Ginny went in first and got ready and into bed before she called Harry in. Harry felt very nervous even though he had slept in her bed many times before including just the other night. He went to the bathroom and came out in his boxers and t-shirt and could see Ginny just smiling up at him from under the covers. He first lay down on top of them but Ginny spoke up quickly, "We had a deal Harry. Get under her now," she said trying to sound demanding.

"I see how our relationship is going to go. You're going to keep ordering me around aren't you?" Harry said as he slipped under the covers. He was close to her but not touching.

"I won't order you around in public. Your fans can keep thinking you're the boss," she said and turned onto her side and snuggled into him. Harry had his arm wrapped around her and touching her back. He couldn't remember wanting to be with someone more than he wanted Ginny, but he made a promise to himself that he wanted his first time with Ginny to be away from their normal lives.

Ginny pulled up and gave Harry a nice deep kiss. He held her tight while she did this and then after she pulled back and moved to her position snuggled against him she said, "You know, something's not right."

Harry instantly got worried. "What? Do you want me to get back above the covers?" he asked sounding guilty.

Ginny looked into his eyes and smiled. "No, that won't help. Wait a minute," she said and pulled the covers above her head. Harry felt her fumbling around and moving quite a bit. Suddenly her head popped back above the covers and she said, "There, that's a little bit better."

Harry didn't understand and looked confused. Ginny realized this and pulled one of her arms out and Harry saw she was holding her nightshirt. That's what she was doing under the covers he realized. "Oh." Was all he could say and she curled up against his side. They both flinched when Harry's hand came down on her now bare back. Her arm was across his chest and her hand was on his shoulder. He began lightly running his fingers over her bare back and felt her

move in tighter to him. He couldn't believe that Ginny was lying next to him only wearing her panties and he was having a hard time not throwing his promise to himself out the window.

Ginny was as nervous as she could ever remember feeling, but also feeling very liberated. She felt like she could do anything and wanted nothing more than to be close to Harry. She had dreamed of being with him for so long and didn't plan on letting a little thing like embarrassment keep her from what she wanted. Making another decision, she suddenly rolled over and said, "It's still not right." She reached over and pulled up on Harry's t-shirt. "Take off your shirt Harry."

"Ginny. You agreed to wait," Harry said.

"It's just your shirt Harry. I want to feel you next to me," Ginny demanded.

"If you weren't so darn beautiful, I'd say no. I don't know why you always get your way with me." He sat up and pulled off his shirt and threw it on the floor. He saw the evil grin form on Ginny's mouth. Harry shook his head and slid back down. This time when Ginny curled into his side, he immediately felt the difference. He felt the warmth of her body against him and could feel her chest against him. "There, that's much better," she whispered. Harry had to agree she was right.

Ginny's hand was lightly running over Harry's shoulder and upper chest while his was again running up and down her bare back and lower neck. Her caresses started going up and down his side causing him to flinch quite often. He finally decided to give up trying to get to sleep and swiftly grabbed her and slid her up his body so he could give her a kiss. "You're making it very hard to sleep," he said and pulled her into a deep kiss.

She pulled away smiling. "Oh, I'm sorry. I don't know what's gotten into me."

Harry decided to try something that had worked in the past and he quickly rolled her onto her face and sat straddling her. "What are you doing?" she asked, sounding disappointed to be moved from her position. Harry didn't answer and began massaging her back. He occasionally leaned down and nibbled on her lower neck and ear causing her to tense up and give a little moan. Harry slowly worked his massages up and down her back, with occasional light traces along her sides to keep her guessing. After a bit of this, Harry moved off of her but kept rubbing her back. He would now let his light traces flow over her rear and down to her upper thighs. He grinned when she absently minded spread her legs a bit when he did this. He didn't take advantage of the new room and kept his motions exactly the same. After quite a bit of this teasing, he concentrated all of his stroking to her mid and upper back and after about twenty minutes of this, he heard her breathing become very regular and he smiled to himself. Slowly, he pulled the blankets up and lay on his side keeping one arm across her back. It didn't take long for him to fall asleep as well.

The next morning, he was woken by the sudden weight of someone sitting on him. "You'll make that up to me Harry Potter!" Harry blinked his eyes and found a very angry looking Ginny Weasley straddling his waste. He was still getting things focused when she said, "You knew that would put me to sleep, didn't you? You owe me for that." Harry finally focused on the red-head yelling down at him and was pleasantly surprised to see she hadn't put her nightshirt back on. This was the first time he had ever seen her without her top and was very pleased with what he saw. Her skin looked flawless and he thought her chest was the perfect

size. Again, he couldn't believe how lucky he was. A broad smile came to his face. "What do you have to say for yourself?" she demanded.

Harry pulled his arms out and placed them on her waist and said, "My god Gin, you are so beautiful. I can't believe what a fool I was before." This obviously wasn't what she expected and she started blushing. He sat up pulling her tightly into him and giving her a very passionate kiss. After the kiss, she seemed a little short of breath and he said, "When we are able to be together, I'll owe you as much as you want. You're perfect." Ginny just stared and got tears in her eyes. Harry quickly felt bad. "I'm sorry Gin. What did I say?"

"Nothing...I just can't believe you actually want to be with me. How did I get so lucky?"

"I'm the lucky one. I'm just glad we finally have a chance to be this way. You were right last night. It was much better after your suggestions," Harry said allowing his hands to move up the side of her chest.

"Told you. Next time we just start that way," Ginny said. "I wish you hadn't tricked me last night. I can't stop thinking about being with you."

Harry kissed her and made a decision. He quickly flipped her onto her back and pressed down into a long kiss. She was pulling his head into her mouth and he began using his hand to rub along her side. He started placing small kisses down her neck and to her ears and then back to deep passionate kisses on her lips. His hand was now lightly caressing around the swells of her breast and down to her thigh, flat stomach. Every so often, he would trace down one of her thighs and slowly back up on the inside of the thigh. He smiled when she would raise her hips and slightly spread her legs, but he avoided the area she obviously wanted him to touch.

Ginny was beginning to breathe harder and he finally let his fingers run lightly over her panties one time on the way back up from her thigh. She let out a low throaty moan when he did this and opened her eyes to see him staring back into them. "I thought you were going to wait?" she managed to ask.

Harry kissed her quickly and said, "I am going to wait." He quickly kissed her so that she couldn't ask any more questions and went back to work with his hands. His traces were lingering over her panties now and she was obviously pushing her hips up to meet his hand. He slid his fingers under the waistband and heard her give another moan. Quickly gripping them, he managed to rip them away in one motion causing Ginny to gasp.

Harry then moved slightly on top of her so that only one of her legs was not under him. He felt her hip move up into his lower waist. He slowly kissed down her neck and then down the center of her chest. She kept one of her hands on the back of his head, lightly playing with his hair. He traced circles around her breast with his tongue while rubbing her hip and leg with his hand. Her breathing was very rapid now and when he finally took one of her breasts into his mouth she tensed up suddenly and pulled her head tightly into her. Her free leg wrapped around him and pulled him to her.

She started moaning very loudly and then felt her catch her breath. He could tell what was happening and was surprised it had been so quick. He kept the pressure on her with his lower waist and pulled her leg with his hand. When she finally started breathing again, he kept to his original plan and continued kissing her chest and stroking her leg. She whispered, "Oh my gosh," and this gave him more reason to continue. Soon, he felt her hips start to move again

and he was now kissing around her lower stomach. His free hand was now off of her leg and running over her chest and lightly caressing her breasts. When he heard her breathing get rapid again, he slid down a bit more. He breathed deeply and slowly let his breath out so she could feel it between her legs. He heard her gasp as he started kissing down her inner thigh before moving to the other one and kissing back up.

She now had spread her legs very wide in an obvious invitation. Harry began moving his face back and forth just barely touching her hair causing her to keep flinching. After just a minute of this, she moved her other hand to the back of his head and pulled it down onto her. When his tongue finally did reach her, she moaned, "Oh Harry." He began moving his mouth all around her. She would occasionally pull him very tight but Harry kept trying to tease her. Soon, he heard her start to moan deeply and breathe very hard. Then he placed his mouth around the spot he knew she wanted and sucked in deeply. Her hands pulled him in very tightly and her legs wrapped around his back. She bucked into him a few times and almost sat up before finally falling back down on her back.

Slowly he slid back up her body, kissing as he went. He kissed her neck and wrapped his arms around her and just held her for a while. Finally he heard her say, "My gosh Harry. I can't believe how good that felt."

He whispered in her hear, "My pleasure, I couldn't keep my hands off of you any longer." He pulled up and smiled at her. She put both hands on his head and pulled him into a very deep sensuous kiss. She started stroking his side and when he felt her hand go below his waist, he stopped her. "If I let you do that, there is no way I could wait. I'm going to have to stay frustrated if there is any hope on waiting."

"But Harry, I really want to," she begged.

"And so do I, but let me make it special. We'll go away next weekend. And, no more staying over until we do."

She pouted. "A whole week?"

Her hand was working its way down his body when he grabbed it. "I should go home and have a shower, but can you do me a favor first?"

She smiled and again started caressing him. "Um, not that favor," he said quickly. "I want to watch you walk to the shower now that it's light out. I still can't believe how beautiful you are."

Ginny just stared at him and couldn't believe that's what he wanted. She couldn't believe how good he made her feel about herself. He really made her feel beautiful and sexy. She knew she was ok looking, but nothing compared to the models he had dated. This had been one of her biggest concerns. She kept thinking that once he saw her that he would realize he'd rather be with one of them, but here he was asking to see her and calling her beautiful and she could tell he really meant it. Well if that's what he wanted, she would gladly give it to him. She confidently stood up, turned and looked straight at him and gave a fake yawn and stretch above her head. When she looked back at him, she saw him looking straight into her eyes with a large smile. She slowly walked out of the room and then peaked back in. "Happy now?"

He frowned and said. "No, you didn't give me a kiss before you left."

She ran back and jumped on the bed and gave him a deep kiss before jumping up and running back out.

Harry dressed and waited for her to come out of the shower. She had on a dressing robe and gave him a hug. "I would have done anything for you this morning," she said playfully.

"I'll remember that," he said smiling.

"You do owe me a new pair of panties."

"Maybe we'll go shopping for some. I should probably get you a few pairs in case that happens again." He kissed her and said, "Oh, there's an event on Wednesday, would you like to go with me?"

"Of course Harry. I can't wait for another date with you. Don't forget about next weekend, I'm not letting you keep me waiting much longer."

"I don't think I could wait much longer." He kissed her goodbye and left.

Ginny was in such a good mood the next week that everyone she knew kept asking her what was up. She just said that she was in a good mood and wouldn't give any details. They even came into her office a few times when they heard her just break out laughing when everyone knew she was alone. Harry was feeling great as well but since he only saw a few people who knew him well, he didn't get many questions.

Harry appeared outside of Ginny's to pick her up for the fundraiser event. He had on his nice dress robes and knocked on Ginny's back door. She opened it quickly and instantly planted a big kiss onto him. "I missed you so much," she said.

"It's only been three days Gin," Harry said hugging her.

"Three nights! I don't like sleeping alone," she said with a pout coming across her face.

"As far as I know, you've slept alone most of your life. And, didn't you even tell me once that you kept making your boyfriends leave because you couldn't sleep when they were here?"

She blushed and silently cursed Harry knowing so much about her. "Well maybe but things change. I'm allowed to change my mind aren't I?"

Harry looked at her again in her nice dress. "You look great by the way. I'll have to work to keep the other guys away."

"Don't ever worry about that, I've got what I want," she replied before they left for the event.

The event was a lot of high-society and important business people raising money to purchase large tracts of land to use as a sanctuary for magical creatures. The foundation had given enough money and they were to be seated at a table with some very important business people. He and Ginny had made their way around mingling with the couples. Most of the other people there were older wizards, which caused Harry and Ginny to keep to themselves

quite often. Ginny loved walking around and was impressed with how easily Harry moved from one conversation to the other. He also never hesitated to introduce Ginny as his very good friend. Ginny remembered he always introduced his dates as just his friend and she appreciated the subtle difference. They were alone near the bar when Ginny said, "I can't believe how easily you talk to these people."

"They're no better than us. Some of them are actually not nice at all, but at least they give money to help out. Don't think that just because someone is here that they're a good person."

Ginny and Harry danced to many songs during the event. While taking a break, they were standing near the bar when a very attractive woman asked Harry to dance. Harry glanced at Ginny who gave an approving nod so Harry went to dance with the woman. Ginny actually liked watching him dance and thought the two of them moved well together. Instead of feeling any jealousy, she felt happy that she was here with Harry. She had always been the woman he would dance with once and then go back to his real date before, and now she knew she was the one he would be coming back to. She got a very warm feeling when she caught Harry's eye and saw him give a wink from the dance floor.

After he came back, she leaned in and whispered, "You're so sexy. You seem so confident moving between these people. Want to stay over tonight?"

"Don't talk like that Gin. We're going away in a couple days and I already feel like there's so much pressure on me. What if I can't...you know...perform?"

Ginny laughed out loud causing some couples close to them to stare. This didn't bother Harry at all. "Have you ever not been able to perform?"

Harry quickly said, "Of course not."

"Then I won't let you use that excuse. You're going to give me what I want this weekend or you won't be walking much," she said and looked serious.

"What have I gotten myself into?" he joked, rolling his eyes.

The rest of the night went quickly. Ginny never tired of being with Harry. He rarely left her side and always made sure others knew she was with him. When Harry finally took Ginny home, he said a quick goodbye in her kitchen and left before he changed his mind about staying.

The next day Harry noticed a large picture in the Daily Prophet showing Ginny and him dancing. Normally he wouldn't look twice when his picture was in the paper, but this one actually made him smile. He had Ginny were dancing and she looked up at him and they gave each other very warm smiles. The article went on to talk about the two of them that night and that they came as a couple and danced most of the night. "Well it's out in the open now," Harry thought.

Harry hadn't talked to Ginny before appearing at her back door early Saturday afternoon. He knocked on the back door and Ginny pulled him into a big hug. "I missed you," she said.

"I missed you too Gin. All packed?"

"Packed? You told me I couldn't bring anything." A worried look came to her face.

"Oh that's right." He snickered before getting hit.

"Now can you tell me where we're going?" she asked.

"Nope, you'll see in a minute. By the way, did you get any grief over the picture in the paper the other day?"

Ginny blushed profusely. "Oh, kind of. My assistant seems really upset with me and I keep thinking people are whispering when I'm in Diagon Alley. I've been keeping away from seeing my brothers until you're there so they'll take anything out on you."

"That's not very nice. Maybe we should just cancel this little trip," he said, trying to sound serious.

Instantly she pulled out her wand. "That wouldn't be a very healthy thing to do."

"I guess not. Give me your hand and we'll go," Harry said taking her hand. Instantly they appeared inside of an office. Ginny still couldn't tell where they were, but she smelled the ocean. She was about to ask when a large man came from another room. "Ah. Mr. Potter. We've got everything setup for you. Let me take your bag."

Harry handed the man his bag and said, "Felipe, this is Miss Weasley. Ginny, this is Felipe, a friend of mine."

The two shook hands and Felipe said, "Will you two be going directly there?"

"Not directly. It seems Miss Weasley forgot her luggage. Could we get a car to the shopping district please?" Harry asked.

"Of course, one will be up directly. I'll take your bag on," Felipe said and left.

"Forgot my luggage did I? You're walking on thin ice. Now, where are we? And, wasn't he a Muggle?" Ginny asked.

"Yes, he's a Muggle. I kind of gave him a second chance a couple years ago when he fell in with the wrong crowd. He's really a good guy. We're in Monaco. I know this office doesn't look like much, but Felipe runs a company and we'll be out of here shortly."

Chapter 8

Just then a car pulled up and Harry escorted Ginny to it. Harry told the driver where to go and they were off. Ginny was just looking out the windows at the beautiful area. The bay was gorgeous and all of the homes and shops along the hills were beautiful. The driver let them out at the corner of a street that seemed to be lined with many fancy clothing shops and cafés. "Since you forgot your luggage, I'm just going to have to get you some new ones," Harry said smiling. "And, don't forget a dozen or so new pair of panties."

Ginny squeezed his arm and smiled. "What kind of clothes will I need? I don't know what we're going to do?"

"You don't? I thought you knew exactly what we're going to do," Harry said smiling evilly.

"Well I meant before that," she responded.

"You'll need a nice cocktail dress for tonight and something light for brunch tomorrow. And, at least three pair of panties for tonight and tomorrow." He looked at her very seriously and she blushed again.

Harry followed Ginny around to no less than ten women's clothing stores. He hated the shopping part but did enjoy it when Ginny would model the selections for him. He always pushed for her to get the sexier outfits and in fact she went back to a store they visited previously and did get a very sexy low-cut black cocktail dress and a pair of shoes to go with it. She found a nice sun dress for the next day and then they went into a lingerie shop. Harry had only seen that one pair of Ginny's panties and they were nice, but rather plain cotton ones. He steered her to the more lacy variety and watched her eyes light up when she found a few sets that she really liked. After she had picked out at least ten sets, Harry paid for them and they left.

"You weren't nervous at all in there. How often do you go into women's lingerie stores?" she asked.

"Remember I've dated models for a few years now. They would drag me into these kinds of stores all the time. But, I've never suggested taking any girl into one before. I wanted to take you there," he said giving her a quick kiss.

"Why couldn't you have woken up years earlier?" she joked. "Are we staying in a hotel around here?"

"Nope, we're not staying in a hotel. You'll see later. Let's go have a drink," Harry said and led Ginny to a café where they sat and had a relaxing drink, watching the people go by. Ginny was really enjoying seeing how the people here were dressed.

"They all seem so snobby," she voiced.

"That's the only bad part about this place. Everybody acts like they're better than everybody else. That's why I like Felipe; he's just a good guy. That's also why we're only staying one night."

"So, where *are* we staying?"

"I guess it's time to show you since you'll want to get ready to go out tonight." Harry took her hand. "We need to find a quiet place to disappear." They walked down a narrow street and into an alcove before quickly disappearing. Instantly they reappeared on the deck of a small yacht in the bay. "It's not huge, but it's ours for the evening," Harry said.

Ginny just looked around in awe. They were facing back towards the city. The yacht was anchored in the center of the bay. Ginny took off around the yacht, going inside to the captain's area before seeing the stairs down to the living quarters. There was a large salon with portholes just above the water line and a hallway leading up to a very spacious master bedroom.

Harry waited in the salon for her to finally come out. When she did, she gasped, "This is just amazing," and proceeded to give Harry a kiss.

"Not compared to some of the ones around here. I've been at some events on some of them and they could hold almost a hundred people. Those are amazing," he said and then added. "I thought we might want something a little more private."

"I think you made the right choice. Now, I'm going to have a shower and get ready. Can you manage without me for a bit?" she joked, nibbling on his ear.

She went into the master area and when Harry heard the shower running, he quietly walked in there and sat on the floor watching her shower. He watched her and thought how stupid he had been to not do something about dating her before now. She hadn't noticed him sitting there until she stepped out. She gave a quick scream and yelled, "How long have you been watching me?"

Harry just smiled and said, "Ever since you stepped in. Just thinking back to how much time I've wasted." He stood up, gave her a kiss on the cheek and walked back to the salon to wait for her.

She came out a while later in the new black cocktail dress and Harry was just about speechless. She stood there for a minute, and not understanding the look on his face began to fidget and get worried about what she looked like. "Is something wrong with the dress?" she asked.

"Oh, no. You look great. Almost as good as earlier." She just blushed. "Give me a minute to change," he said and quickly threw on a nice suite he had brought, before coming and then they went to the top deck. Harry looked at his watch. "Our ride should be here any time." It was a bit dark by now and Ginny was looking at the lights of the city from their view. It was so peaceful and quiet from this spot.

She focused on an object approaching their location. "What's that boat doing?" she asked.

"That should be our ride," Harry replied and when the smaller boat came alongside, he stepped into it and helped Ginny get in. The smaller boat quickly weaved them through the other boats and brought them to a dock near a large hotel. A man on the dock helped them out of the boat and Harry led her inside the casino. As soon as she stepped in, Ginny stopped and looked around. "Have you ever been to a casino before?" he asked her.

"No. I've never seen anything like this," Ginny said still looking around. Harry took her hand and walked her around explaining the different games.

"What do you want to try?" he asked.

"Only the slot machines. You'll have to teach me the other games at home before I'd try them," she said. They walked over to a couple of slot machines next to each other and he gave her some large coins. They played next to each other for a while and Harry smiled each time Ginny would win a few coins. She had actually been doing better than he had, but he enjoyed seeing her having fun playing. Harry turned back to his machine and then was surprised to hear a quick squeal from Ginny as she jumped up and down. Then he heard the ringing and the sound of coins falling into the bin. "I won! I won!" Ginny was saying bouncing up and down.

Looking into the bin, Harry was surprised to see how many coins had actually come out. They gathered them up into a bag and Harry said they needed to get going to their supper reservations. They went to the cashier and Harry was surprised to see that Ginny had in fact won around 200 galleons that he took in pounds. "Here Ginny. You won about 200 galleons." Harry handed her the bills.

"No Harry, you keep those, we were playing with your money." She demanded, happy to pay him back some.

"Ok, I'll put them in the torn panty fund," he said smiling, then took her hand and headed to the restaurant. They got their table outside overlooking the bay quickly and Harry ordered a bottle of wine for them. They were at the end off to one side so they had a great view of the bay and the twinkling lights of the boats.

During the meal, Harry would lightly touch Ginny's hand and tell her how beautiful she was. He would then run a hand lightly down her bare arm and watch the goose bumps come up. "Aren't you ready to go back to the yacht yet?" Ginny asked him.

"I thought we would go walk around town for a while," Harry replied.

"I don't think so Harry. You're not going to put me off any longer," Ginny demanded. Harry paid the bill and they walked to the restrooms. Harry glanced around and quickly followed Ginny into the girl's. "Harry! What are you doing in here?" Instead of answering, Harry spun her around, putting her back against the door and gave her a very passionate kiss. When he pulled back, she only said, "Oh my." He pulled her into another kiss and apparated them back to the yacht.

They were standing on the deck looking at the lights when she said, "Want to go downstairs now?"

Harry gave her a wicked smile and said, "I don't think so." Ginny got a disappointed look on her face and was about to say something when Harry put up his hand to stop her. She looked confused and he pulled some of the padding off of the benches and summoned the blankets and pillows from the bed. "What do you think you're doing?" Ginny asked.

Harry didn't answer but instead pulled her into another deep kiss. Harry kept her standing and nibbled around her neck. "Um...Harry." He heard her moan but kept nibbling. He got down on

his knees and nibbled at her stomach through her dress. Slowly he ran his hands up the back of her legs and lightly grasped the sides of her panties and slowly pulled them down. He looked up with a playful grin and saw her looking down at him with a look he couldn't figure out. She stepped out of the panties that were now around her ankles. Now, he ran his hand up the inside of her left leg and smiled when she spread her legs a bit when his hands approached the top. He didn't continue any higher and instead moved his hand to the other leg and stroked back down. He repeated this motion a few more times and then looked back into her eyes and slowly pushed her back against the railing. He never left his knees and after a few more minutes of teasing with his hands running over her inner thighs and rear, he lifted her skirt and moved his head beneath it.

He leaned in and placed a kiss above the top of her hair while moving one arm between her legs and gripping her lower back pulling her in. She spread her legs more and gave a very low moan. Harry then began placing slow kisses all around and then pulled her tightly to his face. After a few minutes of this, he heard her breathe deeply and moan often. He quickened the pace of his tongue and felt one of her hands on the back of his head. Before long, she was moaning loudly and then he felt her move her hips into him. He then began suckling as she held his head tightly against her and cry. "Harry. Oh my god, Harry." He kept his face tightly pressed to her until her breathing became more regular and she released the pressure on his head. Backing off slightly, he caressed her legs again before removing his head from underneath the dress. Standing up, he saw the look of satisfaction in her eyes but before she could say anything, he quickly moved behind her and worked her to the other side of the boat where she was still looking at the lights of the city. He then began nibbling the back of her neck while he let his hands roam up and down her sides. She had reached up and was stroking his head when he slowly unzipped the dress and kissed down her back through the new opening. While kissing back up, he stopped and unclasped her bra so he had nothing but skin to feel.

When he reached her neck again, he let his hands roam along the bare skin of her back and then up and down her sides, lightly brushing the sides of her breasts. When his hands got to her shoulders, he put pressure on them so she lowered her arms from his head and then slipped the dress and bra off over her arms. It quickly fell to a heap on the deck. Harry pressed his whole body against the bare back of the now totally naked form of Ginny Weasley. He reached around and hugged her and kissed the side of her mouth when she turned her head to him. During this kiss, he slid his hands up and caressed her chest while she reached around behind her and tried to pull him to her even tighter.

Ginny couldn't believe what was happening. Here she was totally naked on the top deck of a boat in a harbor full of other boats. A few weeks ago, she would have never imagined that she could do something so bold and yet now it just seems so perfect and nothing else mattered. She fumbled around behind her trying to undo his belt but he backed away and began to do it himself.

She turned around to watch him and didn't seem embarrassed about being totally naked on the deck of a yacht at all. He just smiled and removed his jacket and then his tie never taking his eyes off of her. He stepped in and gave her another deep kiss while working to remove his shirt. She had gotten his belt undone and hand unfastened his pants by the time he removed his shirt. He quickly helped her remove his pants and was quickly standing in front of her in only his boxers. She stepped back and smiled. "You know, I've never seen you without your boxers before."

"We can get under the covers if you want," Harry joked back.

"Oh no. You've seen me a few times now and I'm not letting you out of this." She took hold of the sides of his boxers and slowly pulled them down, staring into his eyes while she did this. He stepped out of them and was now as naked as she was. He stepped in to give her a kiss but she put up her arms to keep him back as she obviously appraised his body. For a long time she looked him up and down.

"Do I pass?" he asked.

"Oh yes. This is more than I ever imagined." She then stepped into him and gave him a kiss while her hand moved below his waist to stroke him. After a couple minutes of this, Harry walked her back to the wall of the cabin.

He stepped back and said, "I still can't believe how sexy you are." He saw the look of appreciation in her eyes as he stepped forward. Before she could kiss him, he lifted her up and pressed her against the wall. He heard her moan his name and wrap her legs around him. He slowly worked her up until he was pressing into her wetness. Ever so slowly, he moved her until he felt himself enter her slightly. He heard her catch her breath when she felt this as well and pulled his head into a deep kiss. Harry felt her tighten her legs trying to pull him deeper into him. Harry was having none of this and began to let himself move just slightly deeper into her. Each time was just a bit deeper and he felt her legs tighten with each movement. After he felt himself about half in, his next thrust was firm and as deep as he could, causing her to suck in her breath quickly.

He pressed her hard against the wall and smiled as she gasped and moaned deeply. Now, his movements were slow and deliberate, nearly pulling all the way out before pressing fully into her. Harry was surprised that it didn't take very long at this for him to recognize her pleasure approaching and made sure each movement was as deep as he could. When he felt her tighten and squeeze him firmly with his legs he kept her pressed against the cabin and slowly moved up and down just a bit to keep the friction there. After she pulled him into a very deep kiss, she looked deep into his eyes and said, "My god Harry, that was amazing."

"I hope you're not ready to quit," he said with a sly smile and gripped her tightly and waddled over to the pad and blankets in the middle of the deck. He gently laid her on her back and began moving again. He varied his movements and at times had her arms stretched above her and pinned with one of his hands. He knew he was close when he heard her start to moan, and this time, she was even louder than before and was calling out his name.

They were both moaning each other's names before joining each other in a wonderful climax.

Ginny loved how close he held her when this happened. She had never felt anything like the pleasure he had given her but her most favorite memory was him calling her name and knowing that he was getting so much pleasure with her. She couldn't believe how close to him she felt. This was something she had dreamed about since her sixth year at school, and even in her dreams, it had never been close to this good.

When she finally opened her eyes, she saw him smiling at her with his bright green eyes boring into her. "You were amazing Gin," he said before rolling her over onto him but never losing contact. He reached around and worked the blanket up over them and she laid her head

onto his shoulder while he stroked her back. It wasn't very long until he knew she had fallen asleep. He smiled and closed his eyes and soon joined her in a peaceful night's sleep.

Ginny woke before him the next morning and squinted until she adjusted to the early morning sunlight. She was lying next to him but still half on him with one leg and one arm draped fully over him. Closing her eyes, she tried to replay all the moments of the previous night. If she hadn't woken up next to him, she may have even thought she had dreamt all of it, but normally her dreams weren't nearly as good as her memories of the night were. She must have been smiling because she heard, "You must be trying to remember the same dream I had." Her eyes snapped open to see his staring back at her. "Good morning beautiful," he said.

"Morning Harry," Ginny said and for some reason blushed profusely and lowered her head to his shoulder.

"Why are you blushing?" he asked quickly.

"I don't know. I wasn't embarrassed at all last night but seeing you staring up at me in broad daylight on the deck of this yacht, it just doesn't seem real," she said.

"I hope it was real. I can't remember having a dream that good before," he said giving her a peck on her head. "So, we've kissed and a bit more now. Are you going to let me keep dating you?"

She instantly leaned up. "Damn straight you are. I can't believe we did that out here in the open like that. You're just full of surprised."

"Ready for some breakfast?" he asked and she agreed. He quickly summoned a couple towels and they each took one to cover themselves and walked down to the salon. Harry removed a fruit tray and some scones that had been placed there for them. They took the food back to the deck and Harry made them some mimosas as well.

Sitting there eating, Ginny would occasionally giggle and blush. "I don't know what you did to me Harry. I can't believe I wasn't embarrassed at all last night."

"Hum... Maybe I'll have to work harder to see where you get embarrassed. I don't know why you would be though; you looked so sexy, both in and out of that dress. I couldn't wait to get you back here."

"You suggested we go walk around!"

"If you would have agreed to that, I would have just carried you back here. There was no way I was going to wait," he replied.

"I'm going to have a shower," she stated. "No watching this time." Harry waited until he heard the water and then went down. She saw him and said, "Hey, I said no watching." Harry didn't say anything and just let his towel fall and stepped into the shower with her. "Harry. There's not much room in here."

"Then we'll just have to stay close together," Harry said and pulled her to him. He took the soap, lathered his hands, spun her around and began soaping her shoulders and back. He kept getting more soap and got ever inch of her back and arms and then reached around and began

working on her chest paying extra attention to her breasts and stomach. He then kneeled down as much as he could in the cramped quarters and soaped her legs and he his hands brush over the area between her legs. Reaching around, he ran his fingers trough the curly hair between her legs and began stroking lightly.

"Do you think there's enough room in here?" she asked and started to turn around. He didn't say anything and wouldn't let her turn around. Backing up with her as far as he could, he pushed her shoulders over so she was slightly bent at the waist away from him and then bent his knees and smoothly entered her from behind. "Oh...Oh...gosh." He heard her say as soon as he began slow deliberate motions. He alternated between holding her shoulders firmly, pulling her into him and reaching around and toying with her area and the area right above their motions. This went on for a long time until she began pushing back against him in earnest. Again, she began calling out his name loudly and bucking back into him. It didn't take much of this to push him over the edge and he held her tight to keep her from falling. After leaning around to kiss her, he separated and allowed her to stand up straight.

While kissing, he grabbed the soap again and said, "I think we should get back to this." And then he washed her body again before taking the soap and washing her hair. She had never taken a shower with a man before and loved the feeling of Harry washing her and stroking her hair. She just couldn't believe how good Harry made her feel. She also took a good deal of time washing him and was surprised to see how quickly he responded to her touches. She was behind him and had him firmly in her hands stoking quickly. She kept whispering things in his ear while doing this and it didn't take him long to lose control again and he had to put his hands on the wall to keep from stumbling. "You're so sexy Harry," she whispered just as he had started to recover. He kissed her and allowed her to finish washing him before the exited the shower.

They were both getting ready listening to the music playing when Harry noticed her sitting in front of the mirror with a tear in her eye. He quickly knelt down next to her and said, "Gin. What's wrong? I didn't do anything did I?"

She just looked at him with total amazement. "This is just so perfect Harry. I never thought it would be like this," she said and gave him a very tight hug.

"I thought it was great too, but why cry?"

"I just can't believe how I feel and I'm afraid something will happen," she said.

"Nothing's going to happen unless you don't want to see me anymore. I'm so happy with you that I'll never do anything to mess it up."

"Are you sure Harry? I mean, this really scares me. Are you sure this is what you want?"

He looked straight in her eyes. "Look at me Gin. I'm sure this is what I want. I have no doubts at all. Now, are you sure?"

"Me? Of course I'm sure. I'll do anything to make you happy," she exclaimed.

"Just be yourself Gin, that's all I want, it's all I ever wanted." They hugged and he continued, "Come on, we need to get home. Remember, the family meal this afternoon."

After dressing, and packing everything, they went to the deck for one more look around. "This has been perfect Harry, just perfect." She kissed him deeply.

"Of course, since you were here. Without you it's just a boat in the harbor." He smiled and they apparated to her kitchen. "So, how do we act at the family supper?" he asked.

"We act any way we want." Ginny quickly responded.

"So, you won't mind if I throw you down on the table and have my way?" Harry asked raising his eyebrows.

"Ok, maybe it is better if we talk about this." She thought for a minute. "We'll start off acting as just friends. I want the twins to find out in an interesting way."

"But you are ok with everyone knowing about this?" He asked a little unsure.

"Of course! I want to scream it out to everybody right now, but I also want to see the look of shock on Fred and George's faces," Ginny replied.

Harry was getting ready to leave and whispered in her ear, "Thanks again for going out with me." And quickly went home.

Ginny couldn't stop smiling and kept holding herself back from calling any of her friends and telling them about her weekend. Her closest friends were Parvati who knew about Ginny dating Ron, Lavender who didn't and Hermione who also didn't. Ginny was suddenly struck by a concern about how she would take the news. Hermione had been Harry and Ginny's closest friend until sleeping with Harry. Ginny still wasn't sure exactly why she was coming back now. She didn't know if it was to get closer to Ginny, or closer to Harry. Ginny knew she'd have to talk to her about it tonight, but even that couldn't bring her mood down much.

Ginny busied herself around her house and took another shower, flashing back to her last shower and what Harry had done to her. It made her flutter just thinking about it. After getting ready, she put on a new dress that she had bought with her casino winnings. It was just nicer than what she normally wore for casual clothes and Ginny really liked the way it looked.

When Ginny arrived she saw that Fred, Lavender, George and his latest date Tina were already there and sitting around the outdoor tables. She was greeted with "Hey sis," and hugs from her brothers and Lavender. George introduced her to Tina and Ginny felt she could like this one much more than the last one he had brought. That one only lasted a month.

"Nice outfit," Parvati said. "Is it new?"

"Yes, just got it," Ginny said blushing. They heard the familiar popping sound and saw Hermione walking up. Ginny actually ran to her friend and gave her a big hug. "I'm glad you came."

This kid of startled Hermione but she hugged back and said, "I'm trying to come back more."

Everyone at the table said hello to her and then Hermione asked, "I tried to come see you yesterday but you weren't home. I waited a bit and then went back."

"Oh, I had a date," Ginny said.

Ron and Parvati looked at each other knowingly, but Fred and George started to say something before Hermione spoke up, "I came over this morning and you weren't home either."

Now Ginny really blushed. "Um...I was still on my date."

Now Ron got an angry look but Fred exclaimed, "You were out all night with a boy!"

George added, "Have you no shame woman?"

Lavender spoke up, "You have to tell us all about it."

Ginny grabbed Hermione and said, "Ok, but I have to tell Hermione something first." The two girls went inside and sat in Ginny's old room. Hermione looked confused but Ginny started, "I wanted to tell you alone. I started dating Harry."

This obviously wasn't what Hermione expected, but she recovered quickly. "Um...That's great Gin. When did this happen?"

"A bit over a week ago. Are you ok with it?" Ginny asked sincerely.

"Of course I am. I want to get my friends back, I didn't expect anything else from Harry," Hermione said, trying to sound like she meant it. Inside she wasn't so sure. Part of her had held out hope that she and Harry could be together, but the fact that Ginny was dating him wasn't going to stop her from trying to repair her friendships. She was honestly happy for Ginny. "So, tell me about the date," Hermione asked.

Just then the door burst open. "Oh no you don't. You can't leave us out there and just tell Hermione about your torrid weekend. We want to hear." Lavender exclaimed. Parvati caught Ginny's eye and gave a questioning look but Ginny just smiled. "So, who was the guy?" Lavender asked.

Chapter 9

"I'll tell you at the end," Ginny said and started describing the entire weekend. She was good enough friends with Parvati, Lavender, and Hermione to tell them everything and Tina seemed nice enough so Ginny didn't mind her hearing. The girls made Ginny repeat many things. "You really went to Monaco and he wouldn't let you take any clothes?" "He bought you all new stuff?" "A yacht, a real yacht all to yourself?" "No, he kissed you like that in the girl's bathroom?" "No way...on the deck...out in the open?" "You were just standing there and he did that!" "Up against the wall?" "And then you slept out there? That's so romantic." "The shower! Like that!"

"Are you sure you didn't make this up Ginny? No offense, but that's better than those romance novels," Lavender asked not fully believing the stories.

"I swear it's all true, and I'm probably leaving parts out, they just keep coming back to me even now," Ginny said still bright red.

"I can't believe you were like that and went along with it," Lavender said.

Suddenly they heard "I can believe *he* would do those things." They turned and now it was Hermione turning red.

"You can't believe *who* would do it; she hasn't even said who it was?" Lavender asked and then turned looking confused to Ginny. "So, who was it Ginny?"

Ginny smiled, still blushing, took a deep breath and said, "Harry." Lavender and Tina gasped and turned to Hermione.

"Oh..." Lavender said and then added, "So, I guess Cho wasn't exaggerating?"

"Not at all," Ginny said with a sigh.

The girls talked a bit more and then they heard the kids yelling from outside and Parvati said. "Your date must be here Ginny." Ginny made them all promise not to tell the boys who her date was with and they went out side to find Harry on the ground, being attacked by the kids.

"Get off me, get off me," Harry fake yelled at the kids. "Ok, I give up." Harry stood up when he saw the girls come out. He hugged Parvati and Lavender and then even gave Hermione a quick hug. "Good to see you again."

Hermione tried to put on her best face. "You too Harry."

Ginny came up next and they had to fight to make it a quick hug before Ginny introduced the unfamiliar guest. "This is George's friend Tina."

Harry shook her hand and said, "Nice to meet you Tina."

"You too. Ginny's told us all about you," Tina said and went to George's side. This comment caused Harry to blush and he looked at Ginny trying to guess how much she had told.

George spoke up, "Hey, saw you both in the Prophet the other day. You better hope Steffi doesn't see that, you two looked pretty chummy."

"Steffi and I broke up a couple weeks ago," Harry said.

Parvati got an evil look and quickly said, "Isn't that interesting, Harry's not dating Steffi. So, guys, do you know where your little sister was this weekend?" She hesitated and then added, "Monaco on some yacht."

Her brothers looked at her in amazement but Ron had an icy look. "Who would want to take you to Monaco?" Fred asked.

"What potion did you give the git?" George added with a laugh.

Lavender then asked, "Harry, what did you do this weekend?" She also had an evil grin on her face.

Harry kind of stuttered and said, "Um...went on a date."

"Really? Where did you take the lucky girl?" Parvati added.

"Um Monaco I think," he said quickly.

"Speak up boy," Fred teased.

"Monaco," Harry stated firmly.

"Really? You were both on dates in Monaco. Now what are the odds of that?" George asked seriously. The girls were just looking at the twins in amazement. How could they be so dense?

"How was your date Harry?" Parvati asked.

"Oh, it was great. By far the best ever," Harry answered honestly.

"So who did you take?" Lavender asked, getting to the point.

"Was it the swimsuit model? She's such a bird," Fred threw in.

"It wasn't the swimsuit model. I'm not sure my date wants anyone to know, she may be trying to keep it a secret," Harry said with a slight smile.

He then heard, "Secret? I'll show you secret." And then suddenly felt Ginny falling onto his lap, giving him a big kiss right in front of her brothers. Harry kept his arms out to his side so the Weasley boys wouldn't think he was instigating this. After she finally pulled away, leaving a winded and thoroughly worried Harry, he saw the look of total confusion on the twin's faces, but could tell Ron wasn't happy.

Suddenly the twins made the connection and they both yelled, "Mum!"

Almost instantly, Mrs. Weasley came running out. "Yes dears?"

"Ginny's dating Harry and now she's sitting on his lap," Fred said hoping to see a row.

Mrs. Weasley just smiled and said, "Well of course she is dear. She went away with him this weekend. Honestly you two." Then she turned and went inside.

The twins turned with open mouths and looked at Ginny. "You told her?" George asked.

"Of course we did. Ron and Parvati knew as well," Ginny stated standing back up, much to Harry's relief.

"I didn't know about this weekend," Ron said angrily.

"You told us not to tell you when we started doing things," Ginny said calmly and Harry's eyes got huge.

Ron still looked mad but Fred said, "Come on Ron, he's a sight better than the other gits she goes around with."

"Got to wonder about him though," George added. "I mean, did you see the swimsuit model that's been after him?"

Ron got up and walked toward the lake and Harry saw Hermione go after him.

Lavender came and hugged Ginny. "I'm happy for you Ginny." She then looked at Harry. "And, if you hurt her, I'm on the list after her brothers to kick your arse."

"Man, everybody I know is on that list. If I screw up, I'm going to have to live a Muggle life," Harry said.

Hermione had just caught up to Ron. "Does this really bother you?" Hermione asked once she got next to him.

"When they told me they had gone out on a Muggle-date, it didn't really, but this is just a big jump. Harry normally goes much slower with girls. Why are things going so fast with Ginny?"

"Maybe because they've been so close for so long. I mean they know almost everything about each other. Ginny said something inside about thinking Harry had been trying to take things too slow."

Ron sighed. "That's what I was afraid of. I mean, she's been crazy about him forever. What if something happens, she'll be really hurt," Ron said, clearly worried about his little sister.

"Do you really think Harry would intentionally hurt her?"

"No, not really. I mean, he's like my brother, and she's my sister, so having them together is a bit weird, but I'm happy for them both. I saw how he was after you left and it wasn't pretty. If something like that happens between them, it'll be worse since I always see them both. He'll stop coming around and she won't be the same. I'll lose them both."

"I don't see that happening. I think they've already talked about making sure they talk about any issues quickly. Harry also admitted that he wished he had handled things differently with me before so I think he'd be better and I don't see Ginny doing things the way I did either. She'd go to Harry, hex him and make him talk instead of just staying away like I did."

Ron smiled. "You know, you're probably right." He looked at her for a minute and said, "It's good having you around more. Are you ok with them?"

"Of course I'm right," Hermione said putting her arm around Ron and starting to walk back. "I like being around and will try to do it more often, and yes, I'm ok with them. I really want to get things better with Harry. I think things with Ginny are great now."

When they got back, the food was just getting to the table and Hermione sat down next to Ginny and they had a wonderful and enjoyable meal. After the meal Mr. & Mrs. Weasley went inside and left their children out to talk. The kids had worn themselves out and were asleep in on the couch. Hermione spoke up, "Taking any more trips for work Harry?" The other Weasley's looked like they couldn't believe she was asking about his job since they never did.

Harry didn't seem bothered. "I'll be around for a couple weeks and then on a business trip for a bit."

Ginny then asked, "How long will you be gone?"

"Could be two or three weeks. Then I should be able to take a break," he said turning to Ginny for this last bit.

"Three weeks. I'll miss you," Ginny said kissing him on the cheek.

"I'll be back as soon as I can, then I'm here for a long while I hope," he stated and then added, "Now, who's having the next party?"

The group allowed the subject change and began talking about which of them would throw the next party so they had an excuse to get together again. Everyone began going home and only Harry, Ginny and Hermione were left sitting at the outside table.

"I'm happy for you two," Hermione said, trying to sound confident.

"Thanks Hermione. That really means a lot," Harry said. "Our little talk made me see what an idiot I've been so I'm trying to set things right. I owe you one."

"Me too," added Ginny.

"However it happened, I'm happy for you. I should be heading home, I've got an early day tomorrow," Hermione said, sounding a bit sad.

"Any thought to chucking the whole corporate executive thing and finding something a bit simpler around here?" Harry asked.

"Thoughts, that's it. It is nice being around everyone again. Especially when we can say more than two words to each other."

"I agree. Don't either of you let me act like that again. One of you come and hex me or something. I can be such an arse."

"Yes you can but it took two of us to make things so bad. At least we both want that part behind us," Hermione said.

"So, you were both arsens. Now we just need to make up for lost time," Ginny added. "I do hope you can come back more Hermione."

Hermione went home and then Ginny took Harry back to her place. "You two are making real progress," Ginny said. "Nothing for me to worry about is there?"

Harry grabbed her and pulled her tightly to him. "Nothing at all to worry about, I promise you. I'll make sure to do everything I can to make sure you believe that every day."

"You know, I do believe it. So, are you ready for bed?" Ginny asked with a sly look.

"I can't stay so often. That's not taking things slow."

"Neither was shagging me out in the open on that yacht, but I thought it was pretty amazing," she replied smiling. "I don't want to take things slow. I want to do what feels right without thinking about it."

"I'll make you a deal. We can forget trying to go slow as long as you promise to tell me if you think things are moving to fast, *and* promise to not get mad if I ever think they are."

"Deal," Ginny said quickly. "Now, let's go to bed."

The two went straight to her bedroom, undressed and climbed into bed. Harry tried to just snuggle up behind her and go to sleep, but she kept pressing her rear back into him and making it very hard to try and sleep. Things quickly progressed into a very active, very vocal lovemaking session that lasted a couple hours before they fell asleep in each other's arms.

Harry had already woken up, fixed breakfast and was bringing a tray into the bedroom and found Ginny already awake. "I thought you might have left me," she said.

"Never without saying goodbye," he quickly said. "I just thought you'd like a bit of breakfast in bed before a hard day at the office."

"Um...Now I could get used to this," she moaned.

"Well after the performance you gave last night, it's the least I could do," he said leaning down to kiss her.

"I don't know what you've done to me Harry Potter," Ginny replied after the kiss.

Harry stayed until Ginny left for work and then he went home, got cleaned up and met Sirius at the office to continue planning the next mission. Things were tense around Marauders Inc. They knew the next mission was a very important one that could make a big difference in the current rise in trade of a new potion. This potion took two forms, one that gave a very pleasant, very addictive high and was mainly sold as a drug to Muggles. The other form was

in some ways worse. It could produce dementor-like paranoia and fear. If the potion was ingested, these fears sometimes lead to total mental breakdown. If the potion was converted into a powder form it produced less severe reactions, but was still enough to be useful to terrorists. The potion had just been discovered about six months ago and Marauders Inc had recently tracked down the source. They knew there was a limited supply and at first had just planned on stopping the distribution and getting the supply off the market. However, sources had been hinting that someone was going to try and steal the original formula.

It had been an accident that the potion was even around. The company was originally working on a potion to actually benefit those with mental disorders, including many of the people dark wizards had tortured in the past. This specific attempt had been deemed a failure and all samples were supposed to have been destroyed. Marauders now knew which company and even which department had originally made the potion and had learned that the original formula. The information was that someone wanted the original formula now that it had been determined the potion was so valuable to criminals.

Marauders had come up with a plan and were putting everything in place to start the end of the following week. Now, all that was left to do was to monitor the contacts to make sure nothing had changed and to wait. The waiting was harder than normal due to someone involved in the company.

Hermione groaned as she got out of bed. The past couple weeks had been very busy and stressful. A small team was being pushed hard to find the potion to help those who had lost their memory or who had been tortured too much and were now no more than vegetables. The team felt like they were close and the president of the company, Dr. Stonham had been insistent they find the final missing piece as soon as possible. The team was made up of the top five researchers in the company, Hermione included and two assistants who didn't know much about potions and research, but had the security clearance to do whatever was necessary to make the researchers more efficient. One of the assistants; Kevin was a relative of a VP in the company and annoyed Hermione to no end. He was efficient, but he always made comments and just didn't seem very professional. She had almost requested that he be taken off of their team, but he was a good worker. She just got irritated thinking about how Kevin questioned things she said and he would always ask, "Are you sure?" Whenever she asked for things. He also refused to call her Dr. Granger, and insisted on calling her by her first name. Normally this didn't bother Hermione, but since Kevin flatly refused to call her Dr. Granger, it rubbed her the wrong way. Hermione could feel her blood pressure rising just thinking about it, and the thought of another long day with the boy didn't make things better.

In the shower, Hermione let her mind wander to things Harry had said about finding a less stressful job closer to her friends. With weeks like this one, she was sorely tempted to do just that. The team finally left the office at about 1:00am and agreed to re-assemble at 9:00 for another long day.

This day had seemed even worse than yesterday. Around 10:00 in the evening, the team had just finished sharing a bite to eat and all were looking very tired; all except for Kevin. This was another thing about him that annoyed Hermione. He never seemed to tire out and having him seem so attentive really irritated her. The team was in an isolated part of the building that was very secure. Other than some security guards, all the other employees had left long ago. The silence of the research room was interrupted by the appearance of Dr. Stonham.

"Are you getting any closer?" he asked in a cold voice.

The entire team kind of jumped but Hermione spoke up, "It doesn't seem so sir. We can't seem to find the missing ingredient. What brings you down here this late?"

The man had a strange look in his eyes. "A bit of bad news actually. Dr. Granger, can you help me open the vault?"

Hermione looked shocked. "I'm sorry sir, that's against our procedures. After hours, we need two more executives as witnesses."

"I'm aware of the procedures, but this is an exception," the man said with what seemed to be a smile.

The other researchers were looking at each other confused but Hermione said, "I'm sorry sir, I can't do that. If it's an emergency, we could call the others in."

"Very well. Could you all please come with me for a moment?" Dr. Stonham said calmly.

With quick glances to each other, the team followed the older man into a large room that contained the door to the vault. "Are you sure we can't make an exception Dr. Granger?" the man asked again, sounding very cold.

"I'm sure sir, we need to follow procedures. I can ask the others to come immediately if you'd like," Hermione responded still sounding confused.

"Oh, that won't be necessary. I had hoped to do things the easy way," Dr Stonham said and just then, the doors to their area burst open and ten hooded wizards came at them wands ready.

"Don't anyone even flinch. Slowly set your wands on the table," one of the wizards yelled. With glances to each other, the team laid their wands on the table.

"How did they get in here? This is the most secure area of the building," one of the male researchers asked.

"They must have followed me in," the old man said but didn't seem too concerned about the wizards. "Now Dr. Granger, we have one more chance to do this the easy way. Will you assist me in opening the vault?"

"No sir, something isn't right," Hermione said becoming afraid.

The lead hooded wizard yelled, "On the contrary, everything is going exactly as we hoped. Bring her over here." Two of the other wizards roughly pulled Hermione near the vault and brought her wand with them. "Now Dr. open the vault with Dr. Stonham or we start convincing your associates that you don't care about them," the lead wizard said with a hint of enjoyment in his voice.

"I'm not going to help open the vault," Hermione said.

"As expected," the lead wizard said and pointed his wand at another of the female researchers. As soon as the word 'Crucio' came out of his mouth, Kevin threw himself in front of the woman and took the curse straight to the chest screaming in pain.

Hermione looked at Kevin and then to the man casting the spell. He was holding it so long. "Stop!" Hermione screamed and the man stopped casting the spell.

"He must have a thing for the lady to take the pain for her. So, you'll open the vault?"

"You'll kill him," Hermione said still concerned for the assistant.

"Not kill him. You know what happens to people who are under the curse too long. If only you had finished the cure, it wouldn't matter. Open the vault now!" the man screamed and when Hermione didn't instantly move, he called out, 'Crucio' again. Kevin had just been helped up and stayed in front of the female researcher and took the full force of the spell again. He screamed and finally fell to the floor. The screams seemed to go on for so long. Hermione had tried to run to him but was held back.

"Ok! I'll do it!" Hermione finally yelled. The spell was stopped and Kevin lay on the floor, still twitching. Hermione didn't know if it was too late for him or not.

The lead wizard was handing Hermione her wand when he said, "Even the slightest movement from you and next time, he dies, along with the others." Hermione knew the man was serious and took her wand and went next to the vault.

Hermione and Dr. Stonham tapped the specific location on the vault and said a small spell and the door vanished. The wizard took her wand and threw her over near the other employees where she immediately knelt down by Kevin.

Dr. Stonham walked next to her and said, "You could have spared him you know." There was a smile on the man's face.

"You set this up," Hermione said.

"Very good. I got tired of waiting on all of you to make me rich. It seems one of your failures has become very much in demand. The supply we already shipped has almost run out and that only increased the value of the formula."

"What are you talking about?" Hermione asked.

"The thousands of liters of your earlier mistake that Stalantic *disposed* of for us. It has become one of the most sought-after drugs ever. That formula will make me a very, very rich man."

"You're going to sell it to terrorists? You'll never get away with this," Hermione yelled.

"Oh, won't I? Let's see. International terrorists breach our security and force you and me to open the vault by killing all the other researchers and when you try to escape, tragically you die as well. I end up wounded and unconscious when the authorities finally arrive to find the vault open and everything gone. It will look like a normal robbery and no one will have a clue the formula is gone." Dr. Stonham actually chuckled.

"You're going to kill all of us then?" Hermione asked still not believing this was happening.

"I'm not of course, but he is," Dr. Stonham turned to the lead wizard.

"That's part of my bonus for this job. My employer counted on you not being cooperative. It seems he is not a fan of yours. His exact words were 'Kill the filthy mudblood.'" All of the wizards laughed and Hermione got a very cold feeling in the pit of her stomach.

Chapter 10

Hermione leaned down to check Kevin's face and felt him pull her close so he could whisper something, "Get the team as close together as possible, and make sure they're holding hands." Hermione flinched in shock and looked at Kevin's face. He looked back straight into her eyes, showing no effect from the curse and winked at her. Hermione was dumbstruck. There was only one person she knew who could do that and how could this be him? She slowly let Kevin back down and pulled the other team together trying to not be obvious.

"So, I guess it was too late for him," the lead wizard joked. "If only you had found the cure." Suddenly, Hermione felt a huge surge of power and Kevin disappeared only to appear standing up on the other side of the wizards. Instantly, she saw the familiar shimmer of a shield charm surround the team and Kevin started casting spells, quickly taking down four of the wizards before anyone noticed him standing there. Everything seemed to be happening faster than she could focus and within what seemed like seconds, all of the hooded wizards and Dr. Stonham were unconscious. A spell flew by Kevin's head and he turned to see more wizards coming down the corridor. He quickly got the door closed and cast a powerful locking charm on it.

Kevin ran to the group and said, "Make sure you're all holding hands, we've got to get out of here."

One of the men said, "How, we can't Apparate from here."

Kevin just replied, "How can you be such a good researcher when everything is can't? Now hold hands." They all did what he said. Kevin turned to Hermione and winked before he grabbed their hands and they all disappeared. In the next instant, they were in another office building with four other wizards around. Hermione instantly recognized Sirius.

"Any problems?" Sirius asked while the other wizards went to work.

"Like clockwork. How long do I have?" Kevin asked.

"Three minutes tops," Sirius replied.

"Ok, don't do her. Tell her the story and we'll give her a choice," Kevin said.

"That's not a good idea," Sirius argued.

"I don't have time to argue. I trust her, if she accepts the choice and gives us her word, I believe her. Make sure she knows how serious we are," Kevin said and disappeared again.

Sirius turned to Hermione who started to say something. "Don't say anything, just listen." Sirius explained the story that his team had concocted to explain the break in. They were modifying the memories of the other researchers to fit this. Hermione turned and saw the real Kevin sitting unconscious in a chair against the wall but continued to listen to Sirius. When Sirius was done with the explanation, he said, "Now Harry wants to give you a choice, but I don't. If you accept keeping your memories of this and you ever break his trust, it will become very unpleasant. A lot of people are counting on us to remain in the shadows and I don't like risking that. So, think carefully before you answer him."

Just then Kevin reappeared. "Everything's taken care of, are they all ready?" Sirius nodded toward Hermione and Kevin walked to her.

"I suppose you've figured out that I'm not Kevin. Man you're hard to work for, busting my chops the past couple weeks." Kevin kind of smiled but Hermione still had the look of total bewilderment. "Now Sirius told you the story we've planted in the other's heads. Do give me your word that you will stick to that story, or would you rather have your memory wiped of this and the story implanted? Make sure what you really want."

Hermione jumped up and hugged Kevin tightly but didn't say anything. "Mione, we can't wait, I have to get you back before the authorities get there. Please choose."

She pulled back and said, "I want to remember and I'll stick to the story."

"I knew you would," Kevin said before taking her to the others who were stunned and hand their hands bound to each other. They quickly disappeared and re-appeared back near the vault.

"Harry what happened here?" Hermione said noticing the other group of wizards now unconscious on the floor.

"They decided not to listen to me," Harry said with a smirk.

Hermione hugged him tightly again. "Hermione. We'll talk later. I don't want you to go to your place alone; they've probably already been there as well. I'll meet you once the authorities finish questioning you."

She started to argue but they heard the sounds of people coming. "I have to stun you, get with the others. I'll see you later." Hermione sat down and Harry quickly stunned her and left.

About three hours later, Hermione left the building and walked a bit down the sidewalk when she heard, "They finally let you out."

She jumped and didn't see anyone when she turned. "Harry, are you wearing your cloak?"

"I don't need a cloak to be invisible Hermione. Where have you been?" Harry said. "Now, I want you to Apparate into some back room of your place and since I don't know what the inside layout is I need you to do something. I'm going to take your hand and when you start to Apparate, concentrate very hard on the destination."

"I can't Apparate with someone," Hermione protested.

"Trust me Hermione. I'll follow if I'm touching you when you go. Also, be prepared, I'm sure they've been there."

Hermione felt very nervous and concentrated hard before Apparating. The next thing she knew, both she and Harry were standing in a small bathroom in the rear of her apartment. Harry immediately became visible and got in front of her with his wand out. When they stepped out, she saw that Harry was right, her apartment had been gone through and everything was thrown about. Harry quickly went from room to room and made sure no one was there. "They've already gone and I placed a locking charm on the door."

Hermione threw herself at him and gave him a huge hug before breaking down into tears. "It's ok Hermione. You're safe." She was still crying freely. "It's ok, let it out. I'm here; nothing's going to happen to you."

"How did this happen? My dream job ended up creating a drug that they were going to kill us for. They were really going to kill us." Hermione sobbed.

"But they didn't. We stopped them before they hurt anyone and they didn't get the formula. If they can't create any more of the potion, it will all go away."

Hermione composed herself and asked, "Did you hear what that wizard said his boss told him to do? Did you hear the words?" Hermione only knew one person who had ever called her that.

Harry sighed deeply and said, "I heard and yes, he's behind this. We can't prove it yet, but we're working on it." Harry hesitated and said, "I think you should gather some of your stuff and come back with me. I doubt they'll come back here, but by tomorrow, the press will start hounding you. It will be out in the open that Stonham Research was behind that drug and it won't be fun."

"I don't want to be a bother, I'll just go somewhere," Hermione said sniffing.

"You're never a bother. If you don't feel comfortable staying with me, I can leave the castle for a while and you'll have it to yourself."

"Why are you so nice to me? After what I did and threw away all my friends for this company."

"I'd do anything for you Hermione, even if it had been a month after you left, I would have still done anything. Now, let's go and we'll figure out the living arrangements back at home."

Hermione slowly started putting things together to take. She wasn't saying anything and was moving as if in a daze. "Only take things that are sentimental, we'll get you new stuff," Harry said.

"But, my job?" Hermione asked.

"That company is history. When the press gets the story of how he was going to give the formula to terrorists, it's all over. You know that."

Hermione looked very dejected and Harry tried helping her find things to pack. In the end, she didn't take that much. It didn't seem like more than you'd take on a short trip. They were about to leave when she looked around. Harry spoke up. "Don't look at it. You don't want to remember it like this. Try to think about the good times here."

She looked at him seriously and said, "There weren't any good times."

Harry hugged her and took them to his place. She stepped back and looked around. "I know it's late, but you should either call your parents or owl them. The press may call them looking for you and they'll be worried if they can't find you."

Winky suddenly appeared. "Miss Granger. Winky is happy to see you again. May Winky get you anything?"

Hermione slightly smiled at the elf and said, "Hello Winky. May I have some tea please?"

Almost instantly, the elf came back with a glass of tea.

Harry took her bags upstairs while she wrote a note to her parents. It didn't take her that long to finish and she gave the parchment to Hedwig to deliver. Hedwig affectionately nipped her fingers and flew away.

When Harry came down, Hermione was sitting on the couch, just staring at the fire. Harry sat next to her and said, "You know, you are really hard to work for. Two weeks and I was ready to quit." He tried to smile.

"I can't believe that was you. You were so annoying. I bet you did that on purpose," she said smiling a bit.

"Well maybe a little. I'm surprised you came to me when I was on the floor. I half expected you to tell them to go ahead and do it again."

Hermione hit his arm. "I didn't know what to think when he...you whispered to me. Then you winked and I just couldn't believe you were there. I just knew it would be ok after that."

"It's not going to be easy for a while. The press will want to connect you to Stonham and the authorities may want to question you more. I'd like you to not talk to the authorities without a lawyer. Marauders' has a very good one that can help. Just don't worry about anything; we can handle whatever comes up. This will pass and then everything will be fine."

Hermione looked at him and then started crying hard. He held her and just let her get it all out. After a long time, he walked her up to her room. "Remember, you're safe here. I'll be right across the hall if you need anything and Winky is just a call away."

"Thank you Harry. I don't know what I'd do without you."

"You'd be fine; you were for almost four years," he said with a quick hug.

She stepped back quickly and almost yelled. "No I wouldn't! Look what I got myself into on my own. I would be dead right now along with the rest of the team."

Harry pulled her back into a hug and said, "Ok, this time things didn't work out. I feel some of it's my fault since I introduced you to that scum bag."

"Oh no you don't. You can't take any of the blame for this. If I hadn't left like I did, you would have been around and probably seen it earlier. This was all my doing by being so blinded by my career."

"Whatever it was, it's in the past. Go to sleep now and we'll start figuring things out tomorrow." Harry hesitated. "I don't mean to imply that I'm going to tell you what to do or anything. I meant to say you'll start figuring things out and I'll be there to provide any help you'll let me," he said trying to smile.

She looked up to him. "No, *we'll* figure things out. I really want your help."

"Good, but remember that I'll support you in whatever you want to do," Harry said and gave her a little push into her room.

She went in and had one of the best nights sleep she had in a long time. She slept very late the next morning and instantly felt comfortable in her surroundings. She threw on a robe and walked to the kitchen where she was surprised to find another friend. "Hermione!" Ginny exclaimed and gave her a very big hug. Hermione was a little ashamed for needing to be here. "It's so good to see you. Are you ok? Harry didn't tell me anything other than that there was an incident at your office and you may be staying for a while."

Hermione felt instant gratitude to Harry for not telling Ginny the story without her being around. "Oh Ginny. I can't believe how bad I let things get." Hermione started crying again and Ginny just hugged her.

"We can talk about it if you want Hermione. I took the day off."

"You don't have to do that. But, I would like to talk about it. Is Harry around?"

"He said he was going to the office. What happened? I haven't seen him for a couple weeks," Ginny asked.

Hermione tried to tell Ginny everything she remembered and ended up breaking down and crying a few times during the story. Describing what happened when Harry stopped the wizards and got the team out made Hermione even more amazed that it had happened. At the end, the first thing Ginny said was, "Harry was actually your assistant for two weeks and you didn't know it?"

"Ginny. Doesn't the things he did surprise you at all?" Hermione asked not believing Ginny could just accept the things Harry could do.

"Honestly; not really. Nothing magical he does really surprises me anymore. But, him working as your assistant does."

Hermione actually smiled. "Oh, he was annoying and I was so mean to him. I can't believe he put up with that for two weeks to protect me."

"I believe it. He'd do anything for you and you should know that," Ginny said seriously.

"Yeah, I guess he would." She looked around. "Have you seen the Daily Prophet? I want to see if there's anything about the company."

Ginny got a guilty look. "Um...Harry took it. He said he wanted to be here when you read it."

"Oh. Must be bad." Hermione thought for a minute. "Do you think this is the kind of stuff he does when he goes away for weeks?"

Ginny sighed. "Yes, it is. I've known for a while. Harry won't talk about it of course, but I've overheard mum and dad. I can tell when they're worried about Harry. Dad won't tell me

anything but we do have a little code so I can tell how worried he is. He gives me a number between one and ten with ten being the most worried."

"So, what was the number for this one?" Hermione asked.

"This was a four. Dad knew Harry could handle this one," Ginny said.

Hermione shook her head that what she had just witnessed was only a four. "Have there been any tens?"

Ginny really looked sad. "A couple. We don't even have the family meals when they're really worried. Dad just mumbles 'If it wasn't so darn important, or he shouldn't have to do this.'"

It was late afternoon when Harry came home. "Sorry I wasn't here when you got up, but there was a bunch of paperwork and stuff like that." A second later there was a pop and two big boxes appeared next to him. "Oh, I went and got as much stuff of yours as I could. If you want to move back, I'll haul it for you; I just couldn't stand to leave the apartment in such a wreck."

Ginny came and gave him a big hug and kiss. Hermione was right behind him and gave him a tight hug. "Thanks again. It almost seems like a nightmare."

Harry looked between the two. "How much did you tell Ginny?"

Hermione quickly said, "Everything."

Harry sighed. "I'm sorry I can't talk about my job Ginny. I'm really not trying to keep things from you; it's just safer for everyone I work with."

Ginny smiled. "I know. I've kind of known for a while what you do, so it's not a surprise. The worst part must have been working for Hermione."

Harry laughed. "Oh yeah. I'm glad I won't have to do that again." Hermione hit him and Harry said, "If you think of anything I didn't bring back, tell me and I can go get it. The press was waiting outside, but they didn't see me."

Hermione quickly said, "I don't ever want to go back there. If I never see Venice again, it will be too soon." She hesitated and then said, "I suppose I'll have to go get rid of the apartment."

Harry spoke up, "Not if you don't want to. We know people who can handle that for you." Harry studied his friend and then said, "I suppose you want to see the paper." Hermione gave a pleading look and Harry handed it to her.

Hermione looked very depressed reading the article. It talked about the company being behind the illegal potions and Muggle drugs and then mentioned that former Hogwarts graduate Dr. Hermione Granger was the lead researcher who had discovered the formula. At the end it mentioned gratitude for the Italian Ministry Special Forces who stopped the theft."

"Special Forces? Is it always like that? You do all the dirty work and they get the credit?" Ginny asked angrily.

"It's really better that way. Are you ok Hermione?" Harry asked.

"I'll never be able to get another job. They will think I created that drug," she said sounding very unhappy.

"Not everyone will think that. None of your friends will. I'm sure you will quickly convince any company that it wasn't intentional," Harry said.

"Harry. I wouldn't hire someone if I had seen their name in this article."

"It'll pass Hermione, I know it will," Harry said trying to be as comforting as he could.

"You don't know. You have no idea what it's like. Everybody loves you," Hermione snapped.

"Don't you talk to him like that. He risked his life for you and you go and yell at him," Ginny spat.

"Do you think bad of Sirius?" Harry asked calmly.

Hermione looked confused, so Harry continued, "Sirius was the most hated man in the wizarding world for a while. Guess what, he became the chief of police for a while."

"He was proven innocent," Hermione responded.

"And you will too. Listen, we know that you didn't intend to make that stuff and you thought it had been destroyed. The press is just trying to stir things up. It will die down and everyone will know you're innocent. I saw how much it hurt Sirius, but he fought back. You can too. It won't be easy for a while, but we'll be here to help any way we can."

Hermione looked at Harry and jumped up to hug him and started crying. "I'm sorry I said that to you. I didn't mean it." She hugged Ginny next, but Ginny didn't return it quite as warmly.

Harry wanted to change the subject. "Now, I have a serious question." Both girls looked at him. "What about living situations?" Harry paused and saw the girls start to think. "I would feel better if Hermione stays here. It's private and safe. But, if you don't feel comfortable being my roommate or if Ginny doesn't feel comfortable with you living here, I can move out."

Everyone was silent for a moment and then Hermione said, "I don't know. You've done enough for me already. I can go find a place."

"As soon as you find a place in your name, the press will hound you. If you're not comfortable being my roommate, I can move out. I do have other places to stay."

"I'd be comfortable being your roommate, that's not it." She hesitated.

"I think you should stay here," Ginny stated. "Things may get complicated for a while and it's safe here."

"Would you rather me move out?" Harry asked his girlfriend. "I'll do it."

"I know you would, but I don't want that. It would be better if you were here as well," Ginny said and then turned to Hermione. "I wish you'd think about what you're saying before you start yelling at him."

"I will, I didn't mean it. Are you sure you won't mind?" Hermione asked.

"Not at all. I trust Harry completely. Besides, maybe I can get him to stay over more often," Ginny said with a smile.

"Ok then. If it gets weird, we'll figure something else out," Harry said.

They were sitting around in the kitchen talking later when they heard someone Apparate. "Harry! Did you see the paper? Did you know Hermione's company was making drugs?" Ron was saying loudly but stopped when he saw the three of them. "Oh. Hello Hermione. Is everything ok?"

Hermione looked down and said, "Yes Ron, everything's fine. I found out my company was making drugs, evil wizards were going to kill my research team and me until Harry came and saved everyone."

Ron kind of took this in stride. "Man, when do I ever get to have any fun?" Hermione looked up very relieved. "So, what are you doing over here?" Ron asked.

"The company will probably shut down, so I moved back here until things settle down," Hermione said.

Ron looked between Harry and Ginny and then said, "And, that's ok with everyone?" Harry and Ginny both nodded. "If you two made up so quickly, why couldn't you have done it years ago? It would have made things so much easier."

"Almost like old times," Harry said. "Now if I could only convince Ginny to move in."

Ron looked like he would explode but Harry continued, "Kidding Ron... Kidding." Ron didn't quite go back to his normal happy self. "Did you leave Parvati at home with the kids?"

"She's gone to her mum's, so I'm off for the night," Ron said smiling.

"Well then let's open some wine, sit around and do nothing but talk," Ginny suggested and that's just what they did. There was much laughing and many stories being told. All in all, it was one of the best nights Hermione had in a long, long time. Ron didn't even get upset when Ginny would snuggle into Harry's side and give him little kisses.

Finally, after a few bottles of wine, Ron announced that he should go home. "You'll be going before long, won't you Ginny?" Ron asked.

"Don't ask questions you might not like the answer to Ron," Ginny said. Ron just shook his head and left.

"Thanks you two. This has been one of the best nights I've had in years," Hermione said, sounding a bit drunk. "I'm going up to bed," she announced and Ginny and Harry stood up. Hermione gave Harry a big hug. "Thanks for saving my life even after everything I've done."

"Don't think about it. Just try to pretend we didn't get so weirded out about it. Let's just forget those three years happened."

Hermione hugged Ginny. "Thanks for being such a good friend."

"We love you Hermione. I'm glad you're here," Ginny said honestly. They watched almost giggling as Hermione had trouble going up the stairs.

Harry turned and gave Ginny a big kiss. "I've wanted to do that all night."

"Then you should have done it. I don't care if anyone sees," Ginny said pulling him into another kiss.

"So, want to stay over?" Harry said lifting his eyebrows.

"There was no way I was leaving. I hope you know some good silencing charms to put on your room," Ginny joked grabbing his hand and pulling him upstairs. Fortunately Ginny knew a good silencing charm and it was put to the test that night. The two hadn't been together since the trip to Monaco and Ginny was very relieved that Harry wasn't hurt saving Hermione. As soon as the couple entered the bedroom, Ginny quickly cast the silencing charm and turned to see Harry right in front of her.

Harry pulled her into a very deep, very passionate kiss that nearly buckled her knees. When the two finally broke apart, Ginny gathered her senses and said, "I missed you so much."

Harry smiled and said, "I've been gone longer than that before."

"That was before you corrupted me," Ginny replied faking a concerned look.

"Who corrupted who? You're the one who said we were going too slowly."

"Well, no sense bringing that up again," the redhead said pushing Harry back. "We're past that point and I really have missed you." Ginny started unbuttoning Harry's shirt while Harry leaned in for another kiss. By the time the kiss was over, Ginny was pushing Harry's shirt off of his shoulders. He quickly helped with removing it the rest of the way. Harry saw the girl get a large smile. Without hesitation, she reached for his belt and quickly undid it. Not taking her eyes off of Harry's face she unzipped his pants and while pushing them down, she again gave Harry a passionate kiss. Harry had stepped out of the pants and after this kiss, he was clad only boxers. Ginny stepped back and looked him up and down.

Harry, not feeling embarrassed by this at all asked, "Do I pass?"

Ginny didn't answer for a moment but then said, "You don't know what you do to me."

Harry chuckled and said, "Well obviously you can tell what you do to me."

Ginny laughed knowing exactly what he meant. "Well, let me see if we can do something about it." She came forward and carefully removed his boxers and actually made a deep throaty sound. She kissed her way back up his chest and after another amazing kiss, she felt Harry start to unbutton her shirt. Quickly Ginny backed up and smiled at Harry's confused look. "Let me do it," she offered.

Harry smiled and propped a pillow against his headboard and lay down ready to watch his girlfriend. Ginny gave a slow, very suggestive strip tease leaving any inhibition far behind. After removing her panties in a very slow, deliberate manner, she heard Harry groan as she ran her hands over her breasts. Ginny suddenly felt very powerful when she saw the look in Harry's eyes; she had never been looked at like this before. For the next couple minutes, she stared directly into his eyes and let her hands roam to places that no one had ever seen her touch before.

She had been slowly moving toward the bed and when she got close enough, Harry, who hadn't said anything during her show suddenly grabbed her and pulled her onto him. Feeling the warmth of his naked body against hers, as well as feeling how excited Harry was gave her so much pride and happiness that she could affect him this way. After a kiss where Ginny could feel the desire from Harry, she had planned on doing things the way she wanted, but quickly found out Harry had other ideas.

Harry quickly rolled them over and then turned Ginny back so she was face down. She started to object, remembering the last time he did this, he gave her a back massage and she fell asleep. But, she quickly felt the weight of his body on her back. Harry started kissing the back of her neck and began sliding down her back, kissing lightly as he went. After what seemed to be an excruciating long time, she felt Harry lightly nipping at her rear. Ginny felt him kiss down the back of her left leg and then back up her right. When he approached her rear again, she felt him grab her hips and raise her up a bit. Not knowing what was coming next added to her excitement.

She gasped as she felt him enter her easily. She had never actually made love in this position before and was stunned to feel how deep Harry felt in her. With long, slow strokes, Ginny knew it wouldn't be long before she felt great. When she felt the wonderful feeling start, she was again shocked to feel Harry's hand come around and firmly rub circles around her most pleasurable place to be touched. That did it for her and suddenly, she was moaning and calling out his name. The feeling seemed to last for an amazingly long time before she began to relax.

After relaxing for a moment, Ginny gave a disappointed groan when she felt Harry get up. He turned her around, sat on the bed and pulled her into him, maneuvering her legs on either side. Ginny pulled tightly into his lap. Harry looked into her eyes and said, "You are so beautiful."

She felt herself melt when he said this. Quickly she reached between them and guided him into her and watched his eyes roll up when he slid completely in. Harry pulled her into a deep kiss and she began moving her hips. Harry was stroking her back and occasionally grabbing her rear, pulling her into him even tighter. The two of them never broke their kissing and within a few minutes, they were both breathing very deeply. They broke the kiss and each could hear the other loudly calling out their lover's name. Just when Ginny didn't think she could take any more and knew what was about to happen, Harry surprised her again by standing up and laying her on her back and begin to move very quickly and deeply into her. This was all it took for both of them and with much noise and pulling to get closer to each other, they finally collapsed.

Ginny couldn't believe how much pleasure he had just given her and hoped he felt somewhere close. She loved the feeling of Harry on top of her, she just felt totally complete and safe. "I can't believe how you make me feel," she said softly into his ear.

Harry pushed himself up, looked deep into her eyes and said, "I can't believe how amazing you are. You are so gorgeous. You know of course that I'm going to be begging for you to do strip-teases for me quite often."

Ginny smiled broadly knowing that Harry liked her performance and suddenly blushed thinking how unlike her it was to be so bold. "If what we just did comes after, I'll do them for you anytime."

"I can't wait. Do you know this was the first time we did this in a real bed?"

"It's just as good in bed as it was in the shower," Ginny said giving Harry a kiss.

The two got comfortable with Harry spooned behind Ginny and quickly fell asleep. After waking up the next morning Ginny said, "Now it's going to be even harder to sleep alone. I could really get used to this."

"You know so could I," Harry replied thinking it seemed perfect waking up next to Ginny. The couple took a shower together spending a bit longer than they needed washing each other. After getting ready, they went down, surprised at how late it was.

"I was beginning to wonder about you two." They heard Hermione say causing them both to blush. "Do either of you want some potion? I felt bad from all the wine and made some?"

The couple looked at each other and Ginny said, "No thanks, I really feel fine." Harry agreed. Any uncomfortable feelings quickly left and the three had a nice breakfast.

"Hermione, have you given any thought to what you want to do?" Harry asked.

Hermione sighed and said, "Not really, it still hasn't sunk in."

"You're welcome to stay here until it passes. Take your time, read, spend time in the Muggle world, anything you want. I wouldn't suggest you go into the wizarding world for a while," Harry said.

Hermione looked at her friends sadly. "I don't want to be a bother to either of you."

Ginny spoke up quickly, "You won't be. That will give me an excuse to leave the studio early, so we can spend time together."

"How long do you think it will take before there's a trial or anything?" Hermione asked.

"You'll probably see the magistrate within a month. If it goes to trial, it could be six months or so," Harry informed her.

"Six months! I need to stay in hiding for that long?" Hermione exclaimed.

"You don't have to stay in hiding. I just think it would be easier on you if you did, and I think it's best. Our lawyer is pretty good and he's going to do everything he can to get it over with soon, so it should be much less than that, but I want to tell you the truth," Harry said.

Hermione sighed. "I know and appreciate that." Hermione gave Harry an appraising look and said, "When did you get so responsible? You just seem to know how to handle the situation."

"I guess the past few years have been," Harry paused, contemplating the next words, "enlightening." After a long pause he asked, "What are you going to do today?"

Hermione answered, "I suppose I should go talk to my parents to let them know I'm ok and what may happen."

"Do you want me to go with you?" Ginny asked.

"Would you mind? I don't think this is going to go well," Hermione said.

"I'm going to the office so I'll see you two later," Harry said and then gave Ginny a kiss and left.

The two girls talked for a while before leaving to visit Hermione's parents. Since her parents weren't on the floo network, the girls had to walk to the end of the lane before Apparating. As soon as they arrived, Mrs. Granger ran to her daughter. "Oh Hermione! What have you gotten yourself into?" Mrs. Granger hugged her daughter. "Your father and I are so worried."

Hermione pulled back and said, "I didn't do anything mom, it's not like the paper said."

Just then Mrs. Granger noticed Ginny. "Oh, hello Ginny. Let's go sit down and you can tell me what's going on." The three women went to the kitchen table.

"Oh mom, it's actually worse than what was in the paper. Dr. Stonham was behind the drug, and he tried to sell the formula to criminals," Hermione said, tearing up.

"Well, that's what was in the paper, but it made it sound like you helped develop the drug," her mom said.

"It was a potion that was mixed wrong and he said he sent it to be destroyed," Hermione said sadly.

"What's going to happen now? And, why are you staying with Harry?"

Hermione and Ginny went on to explain what they think will happen next and ended up spending almost all day at the Grangers. Her father was understanding, but also told her that she shouldn't have poured so much into her job in the first place. By the time the two women left, Hermione was actually feeling worse about everything that happened. Ginny tried to do everything she could to cheer up her friend. The two arrived back at the castle and sat around talking for the rest of the night.

Chapter 11

After a couple weeks, Hermione had been getting very comfortable with the situation. She had enjoyed her time being able to relax and read. Since she was isolated from all the press, and no one brought up what happened, it was almost like it never really happened. When Harry came home one day she came straight to him and asked, "Why do you have so many Dark Arts books in the library? You've got some pretty obscure volumes in there."

Harry looked at her for a second and said, "I don't believe any magic is dark, it's all in how you use it. Godric told me to keep learning and I try to do that. I couldn't imagine using some of the spells I've read about, but I think it helps to know that they are out there. Besides, you're the one who got me interested in going to the bookstores in Knockturn Alley, so you can't say much."

"I guess you're right. How many of them have you read?"

"I've at least skimmed through all of them and really read most of them. I told you that you really rubbed off on me our seventh year. I can't get enough of the stuff anymore," Harry said smiling, and then added, "I'd rather you didn't spend your time reading those dark books, just read the good ones."

"I think I'll do that. I looked through one of the dark ones today and just the descriptions of some of the spells could give you nightmares," Hermione replied, and then she added, "I found out something else today. The lawyer, Melvin said the Italian Ministry is going to officially charge me with helping Stonham."

"I expected as much. What did Melvin say?"

"He said we can beat it but I'll probably have to go to trial to be found innocent. I don't want all that back in the press," Hermione said getting a tear in her eye.

Harry went to her and said, "Melvin's good, you can count on him. You know that I can't testify don't you? As far as anyone knows, I wasn't there."

"I know, I'm not asking you to. I was just starting to feel normal again."

"When do you have to go to court?" Harry asked.

"I'm supposed to go before the Magistrate on Monday. Then the trial might not be for another month or two."

"Well, we'll take it one at a time. You should be able to bypass the press until they formally charge you. Getting out after that may be tricky."

"That's what Melvin said. I just want this to be over." Hermione became really nervous about the meeting with the Magistrate.

Early Monday morning, Hermione was surprised to see Remus Lupin in the kitchen when she came down. She was dressed in a very nice conservative suit, just like Melvin had asked her to. "Remus. What are you doing here?"

"Good morning Hermione," Lupin said. "I'd like to accompany you, if you don't mind."

"You don't have to do that. Harry didn't ask you did he?" she said sounding a bit annoyed.

"Harry didn't ask. He just mentioned that he wished he could go with you and I volunteered. If it gets me out of the office for a day, I like it," Lupin joked.

The two of them met the lawyer and then Apparated to the Italian Ministry building where they were quickly shown to a chamber. Melvin, Remus and Hermione were sitting in the room near the magistrate's chamber waiting. Hermione kept pacing the floor, but the two men sat and waited patiently. Hermione was looking through the window on the door and could see into the office across the hall when she thought she recognized someone that she hadn't expected to see walk by the window in the other office. She stood still and focused on that office, then saw the magistrate walk by, turn and shake someone's hand. She saw no further movement and after a couple minutes of wondering if the person she saw was really the person she thought, she went back to pacing.

After a few more minutes, the door to their room opened and the magistrate walked in. Melvin and Lupin immediately stood up. "Gentlemen, Dr. Granger," the man said. "After further review of the evidence, it is the desire of the Ministry to not bring charges against Dr. Granger, to make a statement clearly stating that she had no knowledge of the illegal activities at Stonham Research, and that her research had been impeccable."

Hermione stood there shocked but Melvin spoke up quickly, "Thank you sir. Please convey our gratitude to the Ministry for the consideration to Dr. Granger." The man nodded and left the room.

"So what does that mean?" Hermione asked expectantly.

"It's over. They won't be formally filing charges and will issue a statement clearing you to the press. You don't need to worry about this anymore and your name is cleared. It's over," Melvin said calmly, like he was expecting this.

"But why?" Hermione asked, clearly confused. She saw the two men look at each other. Then she spoke up, "It was Harry, wasn't it? I thought I saw him in the magistrate's office a minute ago."

"The Ministry must have realized it was in their best interest to not charge you. You were obviously innocent, and they knew it," Melvin stated and didn't mention Harry.

Hermione looked at Lupin who added, "The Ministry owes a lot to Marauders Inc, and especially to Harry, but they wouldn't drop this if they really thought you were guilty."

"So, he just walks up to the magistrate and asks him to not file any charges. Just like that?" Hermione asked not actually believing that could happen.

Lupin smiled. "Something like that. Come on, let's walk out the back and go home."

The three of them appeared at Harry's and found him sitting at the kitchen table eating a sandwich. "Back so soon?" Harry called out sounding perfectly normal.

Hermione walked straight to him and said, "Why are you always fighting my battles for me? You don't need to keep helping me." She sounded very angry. Harry almost fell out of his chair and got a very terrified look in his eyes and began mumbling when Hermione continued, "Now you listen to me," then she dropped to a sweet voice. "Thank you," and hugged him tightly.

Finally, Harry let out his breath and said, "You scared the hell out of me." He breathed a few more times. "I expected you to be upset, but not as much as you just sounded."

"This is the new, improved Hermione. I'm not too self-centered to get upset about a good friend helping me with something I know nothing about."

Harry stood and shook Lupin and Melvin's hands. "Thanks you guys."

Melvin said, "No problem, it's my job."

The two men left and Hermione hugged Harry again. "I'll never be able to repay you for everything."

"Then don't try. You were innocent and didn't deserve what happened to you in the press and a trial would only have made it worse. Now, your name is clear and you can go find a job wherever you want."

Hermione thought for a bit. "Would you mind if I hung around for a while? I want to think about what I really want to do."

"Stay as long as you want. You're always welcome here. When the news hits the paper, we'll go celebrate."

"Damn right we will," Hermione agreed.

The next day there was a fairly prominent article with the Italian Ministry declaring that Hermione had no knowledge of any illegal activity and that all of her work had been beyond reproach. That weekend, he, Ron, Parvati, Ginny, Harry and Hermione went out and had a major celebration. They ate and then went to a popular club in Diagon Alley.

There was a huge commotion with Ron and Harry coming into the club. It wasn't uncommon to see Ron out in public and by himself he attracted a fair amount of publicity. Even though Harry had been out more since he started dating again, it was still not a common sight and the two of them at the same time caused quite a stir. The friends were able to find a table at the far side of the club and quickly ordered drinks. Even before the drinks arrived, Ron and Parvati headed for the dance floor.

Harry was amused at how Ron talked to everyone that came up to him, clearly relishing the attention. "Ron can't get enough of that," Harry said looking at his friend.

"The trappings of a professional Quidditch player seem to agree with him," Hermione laughed back.

"But Harry would rather be home alone," Ginny said kissing his cheek.

"Not alone, not anymore," he replied as he turned to kiss her lips.

Hermione shook her head and said, "Enough you too."

Ron and Parvati came back after several minutes and quickly Ron grabbed Hermione's hand and said, "This is your celebration, c'mon let's dance."

Hermione only hesitated for a second before saying, "That's right it is!" She followed Ron out to the dance floor and got into the spirit of things.

"I can't let you stand here all night. Would you please dance with me?" Harry asked his date, who agreed and the two joined their other friends on the floor.

While dancing, Hermione noticed that Ron would talk to all kinds of people, but Harry totally ignored everyone who came up to him and only focused on Ginny. She didn't know how he could ignore so many people trying to talk to him but assumed it had to be years of practice.

The two couples came back to the table after a few songs and were talking and watching other people in the club when a tall, slender, stunning oriental girl tapped Harry on the shoulder.

"Good to see you again Harry," the beautiful girl said.

Harry turned around and smiled brightly as he said, "Hitomi! How have you been?"

"Same as usual. And you?"

"Nothing ever changes for me. Hitomi, this is Dr. Hermione Granger," Harry said as he introduced the girl. Harry never addressed Hermione as Dr., and it made her feel good that he did use the title when introducing her. "You probably know this is Ron Weasley, keeper extraordinaire for Puddlemere, and his wife Parvati." The girl shook their hands and nodded. "And this," Harry said turning towards his date, "is my girlfriend Ginny Weasley." Ginny immediately picked up on this introduction. Every time Harry had introduced dates to her in the past, they were his friend, but he clearly said she was his girlfriend.

Hitomi shook Ginny's hand clearly appraising her and said, "Nice to meet you Ginny. Make sure you keep this one in line."

"Oh, I intend to," Ginny replied to the girl.

"Hitomi models for the Darning Agency," Harry announced.

"It pays the bills," the girl said and then turned to Ginny. "Would you mind if I had a quick dance with your date? It used to be like pulling teeth to get him onto the dance floor."

Quickly Ginny answered, "Not at all, he could use the exercise." Ginny smiled at Harry who gave her an evil look over his shoulder as he followed Hitomi to the dance floor.

The friends watched as Hitomi and Harry danced and were surprised at how suggestively they moved together. Obviously the two had spent much time dancing before and both seemed to be enjoying it. Hermione noticed Ginny watching, but couldn't understand her friend's expression. "The way they dance doesn't bother you?" Hermione asked.

Ginny quickly replied, "Oh no. When we would be out with Harry before and he would dance with girls other than his date, at first I wondered how they could deal with it, but every single time, Harry came back to his date and made sure she knew that he was there with her. Even if he was on a date that didn't seem to be going well, he would make sure the girl he came with knew he was with her. I couldn't imagine Harry ever cheating on a girl."

Ron jumped in, "It's true. We've been out and he has wanted nothing more than to get away from his date and I've seen him turn down offers from amazing women. Again, kind of stupid if you ask me." Ron was quickly hit by Parvati.

Ginny added, "And, it kind of makes me excited to see him move like that with someone else, knowing he's coming home with me."

"Hey! None of that talk when I'm around," Ron yelled, but not sounding really angry. Then Ron turned to Parvati, "So babe, if I go grind with another woman would you it turn you on?"

Hermione and Ginny looked intently at Parvati, clearly interested in the answer. "No! I know you'd just be fantasizing about her. Then we'd get home and you would want me to magically change my hair color again for the night." Parvati really didn't seem angry but Hermione and Ginny's eyes were huge.

Ron blushed profusely and stammered, "Um...What we do in the privacy of our own bedroom isn't for their ears."

"Tell us more about my brother the pervert!" Ginny exclaimed.

"Um... Let's go dance, love," Ron said pulling Parvati out to the floor.

"Do you really think he does that?" Hermione asked.

"I wouldn't be surprised," Ginny replied just as Harry and Hitomi came back.

"Ginny, thank you for letting me borrow this one. I forgot how well he danced," Hitomi said smiling at Ginny.

"Anytime; he's fun to watch," Ginny replied as the girl left.

"Ex girlfriend? You looked good out there," Ginny whispered to Harry.

Harry kissed her on the lips and said, "We dated a few times. And you look good everywhere. I hope you're not too attached to the panties you're wearing tonight." Harry raised his eyebrows.

"Who says I'm wearing any?" she replied clearly capable of matching his comments.

Before Harry could reply he heard, "Hey you two, remember there are other people here." Hermione had a large smile on her face when she said this.

Ginny didn't even blush but asked, "Harry, do you know anything about Ron asking Parvati to change her hair color some nights?"

Harry nearly fell back and gasped, "How do you know about that?"

Now Ginny and Hermione were really interested. Hermione said, "Parvati just said something about it before Ron drug her out to dance. C'mon spill it!"

Harry got really red and said, "I can't, that's Ron's private business."

"It's not that private, you know!" Ginny exclaimed.

"Well, remember Ron and I go to the pub most Thursday's and after a few drinks, he mentions things," Harry said not really wanting to go into this.

Now, Ginny looked like she was going to open a Christmas present and said, "Oh, you have to tell me!"

"He'd kill me. How would you like it if I talked about things I fantasize about to him and he told your friends?"

"I'd rather you just tell me yourself, but we already know about the hair thing, you just need to give us the details." Ginny pleaded.

Harry saw Ron still out on the floor so he leaned in and said, "Well, you know Ron gets hit on a lot." The girls nodded. "I think this is just his way of spicing things up between the two of them. He's even snatched some hair before and asked Parvati to use polyjuice potion."

Both girls gasped and Hermione exclaimed, "Parvati didn't go for that did she?"

Harry laughed, "Nope, Ron had a black eye for a few days."

They were all laughing when Parvati and Ron made it back. Ron looked confused and asked, "What did I miss?"

"Obviously half your brain cells!" Ginny exclaimed and started laughing again.

It was very late when they all went home. Hermione quickly went to her room and Ginny was almost dragging Harry into his. Once inside, she seemed very intent on removing his clothes as fast as she could. "Man, what did I do to cause this reaction?" Harry said clearly enjoying Ginny's desire.

"Just being you. And, seeing you dance with Hitomi made me realize how lucky I am," Ginny kissed him deeply and then looked seriously into his eyes. "You know, I would take the polyjuice potion if you wanted."

Harry looked shocked, sat up, let his hand stroke her face and said, "Gin. You're what I want. When I fantasize, it's about you." He kissed her deeply.

"Um... That's what I wanted to hear," she said continuing to remove his clothes. "You'll have to tell me about these fantasies sometime. Maybe I'll want to make them a reality."

"Maybe sometime. What about your fantasies? Do you want me to use the polyjuice?"

Ginny quickly answered, "Never! Actually, I fantasized about you when I was with someone else." She immediately realized what she said and put her hand over her mouth, embarrassed.

"Really now! I really want you to tell me what yours are," Harry said wanting to know what Ginny really wanted.

"I'll do that, but not now. I know exactly what I want to do now," she said slipping out of her dress.

After hours of active, noisy lovemaking, Ginny was thinking of how amazing things were with Harry. She thought her life was pretty good before, but in the past few months, things had become better than she could have ever dreamed. She fell asleep across him and had wonderful dreams.

Hermione was starting to feel restless about her future. She was happy being around her friends again, but really wanted to start working. She didn't mention anything to her friends because she didn't want them doing more than they already had for her. During the days, she secretly started researching other places she could go work. She really liked doing research, but preferred to stay closer this time. Hermione spent the next couple weeks looking, but not finding anything that she really felt strongly about. She ended up spending a lot of time at Ginny's office and was there one day when Sirius appeared and said, "Can both of you come to Ron's immediately?" he said this without hesitation and they could tell something was wrong.

"What's wrong Sirius?" Hermione asked.

"Just come to Ron's right now," Sirius said and disappeared.

When the two girls got there, the mood was very tense and Ron was almost going crazy. "What's wrong?" Ginny asked running to her brother.

"Parvati and Ruth have been kidnapped." The girls were shocked and couldn't even speak.

Ginny finally asked, "What do they want?"

Ron turned to Hermione with a look of disgust and pushed the ransom note into her hands.

Weasley,

If you want to see them again, you will follow this very closely. The Dr. will deliver the formula to a location we will specify tomorrow. You, that show off friend of yours, and his godfather will be enjoying a nice lunch outdoors in Diagon Alley so we can make sure you won't be near Granger. If we so much as think anyone is with her, it's all over for your daughter. You have one chance to have this end with your wife and daughter unharmed. Don't try to be a hero.

"It went through the Muggle mail until it got to Hogsmeade," Sirius said.

Hermione tried to approach Ron but he backed off. "Don't come near me. You and that damn job of yours caused this."

Sirius spoke up, "Ron, it's not Hermione's fault."

"Where's Harry?" Ginny asked.

"Talking to some Muggle contacts. We think they are probably being held in Muggle London," Sirius replied.

"Do you have the formula they want?" Ginny asked.

"No. It was in the vault that night. I couldn't re-create the formula if I tried," Hermione said starting to cry. "Ron, I swear I don't have it."

Ron started to say something but they heard, "She's telling the truth, she doesn't have it." Everyone turned to see Harry standing there. Everyone other than Sirius was shocked and a bit intimidated when they saw him. The friends flashed back to how Dumbledore looked when he was angry and Harry seemed even more terrifying, almost seeming to glow.

"How do you know she doesn't?" Ron yelled.

"Because," Harry said producing a parchment, "I have it."

Chapter 12

"You? How did you get it?" Hermione asked.

"Did you think I was ever going to chance this falling into the wrong hands? How many people do you think died over this stuff? Until there is a counter potion or spell, this can't fall into the wrong hands," Harry said still looking very menacing.

"Without Stonham Research, how will there be a counter potion? Who can research it?" Hermione asked.

"Sirius and I know people. They're working on it," Harry said this as if it was the obvious answer.

Hermione again seemed shocked and asked, "How? Who could do that?"

Before anyone could answer, Ron yelled, "That's all well and good, but what about Parvati and Ruth?"

"There's no way I'm going to let something happen to Parvati and my goddaughter. And, after we've got them, I'm going to rip the people that took them into little pieces," Harry said with no hint of amusement.

Everyone took a step back from him and he continued talking, "We'll do just what they want. A girl from work will use polyjuice to become Hermione and will take the parchment to them. Then the girls get out and I go in and pull them apart. End of story."

Everyone was too intimidated to say anything until Sirius spoke up. "Do you really think they'll just let the girls go once they get the formula?"

Harry calmed down a little. "No, that's just what I wanted to happen." Everyone relaxed a bit. "Once fake-Hermione gets taken to the place, Sirius and I will Apparate there. Sirius will get Parvati and Ruth out, fake-Hermione will leave and I'll take care of the slugs."

"How are you going to know where they take Hermione?" Ginny asked.

"Muggle technology," Harry said holding up a medallion on a chain. "This is actually a transmitter. And this," Harry held out a small electronic device that showed numbers, "is the tracking part. It shows the location of the transmitter. Hermione wears the medallion and when they take her, Sirius and I just Apparate to wherever she's at."

They all seemed impressed at this. "You're not going without me," Ron stated.

"No way. Sirius and I have a bit of practice with this stuff," Harry replied to his friend.

"I'm serious Harry. This is my wife and daughter. You have to take me," Ron pleaded.

Harry looked at Sirius, then Sirius handed him a cigarette lighter. Harry turned to Ron, handed him the lighter and said. "Sirius thought you'd be like this. This is a portkey. Sirius made it so that it will return back to here. You open the top and then when it closes, you come

back here. You can go *only* if you promise that all you'll do is get to Parvati and Ruth and activate the portkey. No looking around, no spells, nothing else. That's the deal, take it or leave it."

"I can do that. All I want is to help get them back," Ron said examining the lighter.

"I'm not letting someone become me either. What if they ask a question about the formula? I'm the only one who can answer," Hermione said.

"We hope they won't have time to ask," Harry said.

Sirius spoke up, "It may be safer to let her go, just in case some other researcher is in on this."

"Fine, let's just make this amateur hour," Harry said in exasperation.

"Harry. I know you're good and Apparation's kind of your thing, but can you really Apparate to a GPS location?" Hermione asked.

Everyone was looking at Harry who just shrugged and said, "I don't see why not. I mean you just pick a spot and go, right?"

Everyone groaned. "You've never tried it?" Ron exclaimed. "We can't screw this up."

"You don't have to come Ron. Sirius and I can do this alone," Harry said without emotion.

"Ron, Hermione will have the formula so even if we miss, she'll give them what they want and maybe they will all go free. Or, at least maybe they'll look at the formula for a bit and give us another chance," Sirius told them.

"I won't miss," Harry firmly stated.

Fred, George and Ginny were going to stay with Ron to help keep him sane that evening, and Brian was staying with Mr. & Mrs. Weasley. Hermione offered to stay but Ron didn't want her there since he was irritated it was her formula the kidnappers wanted. Back at the home, Harry handed Hermione another lighter. "This is your portkey. If things go poorly, use it," Harry told her.

"I'm not leaving if Parvati and Ruth are still there," Hermione said.

Harry looked at her and Hermione knew he was angry, but he calmly said, "Fine. I'm giving you a way out. You're a big girl and can make your own choices." He turned and went to the kitchen to get some juice.

Hermione followed a bit later. "Do you think this will work?"

"I'd feel better if you and Ron weren't going. Actually, I'd feel better if I knew the location and went by myself."

"Harry, you can't do everything by yourself," Hermione said firmly.

Harry looked her directly in the eyes and said, "Hermione, you have no idea what I'm capable of."

This actually frightened her but she tried not to show it. "Ron and I will be fine. We want to help," Hermione said. "I want to help since it's my fault."

"Now, all through school you kept telling me to not blame everything on myself. Take some of your own advice. This is not your fault. There are evil people out there who will use anything or anybody to get what they want."

"But I feel like it is," Hermione said hugging him.

"I know how you feel. Remember, it's how I felt all those years, and every time you would yell at me for thinking it was my fault. Why don't you go to bed?"

Hermione agreed with that idea and went upstairs. Harry sat on the couch for a while before falling asleep. The next morning, Hermione came down and found Harry asleep on the couch, obviously having a bad dream. She knelt down and started stroking his head and he relaxed a bit. Then she heard a little pop and saw Ginny appear a little bit away. Ginny gave Hermione a strange look and asked, "What are you doing?"

Hermione didn't stop stroking and softly said, "He was having a nightmare and this always helped."

"Oh." Was all Ginny said before she walked over and gave Harry a light kiss on the lips, which woke him up quickly.

"Hey. What are you two hovering over me for?" he said with a smile and then remembered what they had to do. "What time is it?"

Ginny said they received instructions at Ron's house and Hermione was supposed to start walking down the street away from the Leaky Cauldron at 11:30. The guys were supposed to be having lunch outside at that time as well.

Harry went up and took a quick shower before they all went to Ron's. The mood was very tense. Ron and Hermione were pacing, Sirius was sitting reading the paper, Harry was staring out the window while Ginny was rubbing his back. When Sirius said it was time, Harry leaned to Ginny and whispered, "Want to stay over tonight after we bring them back?"

She looked into his eyes and gave him a very deep kiss, not caring about the others. "Definitely. Be careful."

The four of them walked past the barriers and apparated to the Leaky Cauldron. Hermione stayed inside and the guys went to an outdoor restaurant and ordered. Harry paid ahead of time since he knew they would be leaving. They all acted like they were reading things. Sirius was reading a paper, but Harry was looking at the GPS receiver and tracking Hermione's location. Ron was nervous and kept asking where Hermione was. Harry always answered, "A few meters from where she was the last time."

Hermione was walking down the street and when she got about ten blocks away, a car pulled up and threw a small box on the ground in front of her. A man said, "Pick it up." And then the car sped off.

Hermione looked around then slowly bent to pick up the box. As soon as she touched it, she felt the familiar pull of a portkey. When she landed and looked up, she saw three men pointing Muggle guns at her. Glancing around, she saw Parvati and Ruth sitting in the corner with two more men pointing guns at them. Parvati screamed and Hermione said, "I'm here to give them what they want. Then they'll let us go."

The Muggle closest to Hermione laughed. "That's not likely. Give me the formula." Hermione handed the parchment to the man who glanced over it. The man put the parchment into a tube and when the top was closed, the tube filled with smoke and the parchment disappeared.

Hermione started fumbling in her pocket and found the lighter. She quickly thought about using it but couldn't bring herself to leave Parvati and Ruth, so she removed her hand.

"You've got the formula, let us go," Hermione demanded.

"You were supposed to die the last time. My employer was very upset that you didn't. This time you won't be so lucky. Think about it, we take you away from the show off and then Weasley has to live with the loss of his wife and daughter. My employer will be very pleased. The only thing better would be if we could kill Potter at the same time."

At the restaurant, Harry sat up straight. "She either apparated or used a portkey. She just moved at least 5km. Ok, grab my arm," Harry said. "No wands Ron; when things happen go straight for Parvati." Ron nodded and they vanished.

In the next second, the three men appeared in the same room with Hermione with Ron only a meter from Parvati. Harry quickly yelled, "Don't move."

"Very good Potter," the Muggle said. "I see you're familiar with guns. Tell them what will happen if anyone moves or twitches their wands"

Parvati was crying, hugging Ruth tightly and Ron wanted nothing more than to run to them. "Ron. Muggle guns are much faster than spells. There's no way for you to get to her before they shoot. No way."

"That's right Potter. This will be interesting. I've been told you're good. You may actually have a chance at saving one of them, but not all three. Who do you save? The school sweetheart or Weasley's wife and daughter?"

"Why don't you let them go since you have the formula? I'll even go with you," Harry offered.

The Muggle laughed. "That's not what I'm paid to do. Someone will die here and you have to choose. Who do you protect?"

Harry, Ron and Sirius had already talked about what to do in case things turned bad. Ron and Sirius were waiting for Harry to do something before they acted. Harry looked down and Hermione could feel the waves of magic flowing off of him. Suddenly, he was gone and she saw the shimmer of a shield in front of Parvati. Before she could turn back, she saw

something dark in front of her and heard the gunshots and then the spells. A second after the gunshots, she felt someone fall onto her and as she was falling, she saw Ron, Parvati and Ruth disappear. She then heard a couple more spells and then there was silence. Suddenly aware of the weight on top of her she looked up to see a mass of dark hair and knew someone was on her. Struggling, she tried to move but the body didn't budge. She started to yell but felt the body being pulled up and heard Sirius scream, "Harry! Are you ok?"

There was no answer and when she finally sat up and looked, Sirius had rolled Harry onto his back and she saw the front of his shirt covered with blood. She screamed but Sirius was trying to wake Harry. He seemed so lifeless. She crawled over to him thinking he must be dead but then saw him give a bit of a gasp, and his eyes fluttered open. Sirius started to say something but Harry choked and said something barely audible. "Safe?"

Sirius understood and said, "Yes Harry, they got out safe. Now hold on and we'll get help."

Harry rolled his head to the side and Hermione saw a look that confused her. It wasn't fear or pain, it was almost peace. She started to reach for him when he suddenly disappeared. Hermione screamed. "Harry!"

Sirius quickly pulled her up. "Hermione. Go back to Ron's. I'll come there when I have some information. Don't go looking, you won't find him."

"No! I want to go with you. Where did Harry go?" Hermione demanded.

"You can't get in. When I know anything I'll come straight there."

"What about them?" Hermione said pointing to the stunned wizards. Then she noticed that Sirius had been shot in the shoulder as well. "And, you're shot."

"I'll be ok and someone will be here to pick them up. I need to get to Harry, right now. Go to Ron's," Sirius said and vanished.

Hermione looked at the bodies of the wizards and after deciding she had no choice, used the portkey and quickly went to Ron's. There was a flood of sounds when she appeared.

"Hermione!"

"Where's Harry?"

"Oh my god, you're bleeding."

Hermione looked down and saw the front of her shirt was covered in blood and then saw everyone staring at her. "It's not mine," she said, not wanting to blurt out whose it was.

"It's Harry's isn't it?" Ron asked. "I thought I saw him fall when we were leaving."

Hermione didn't answer at first but Ginny screamed, "Is it Harry's? Is he ok?"

Hermione knew she had to answer. "It's Harry's. He apparated in front of me to stop the bullets. They must have gone all the way through him." Just thinking of the implications of this caused her to start crying.

"Where is he?" Ginny demanded. "Is he ok?"

"He just vanished. I don't know where he is."

"Where's Sirius?" Ron asked and Ginny screamed, "Is Harry ok?"

"Sirius was shot in the shoulder and said he was going to Harry." Hermione looked at Ginny with such sorrow in her eyes. "I don't know if Harry is ok. He didn't look good." Ginny almost stumbled before Fred caught her. Hermione went on to tell what she knew. "So, after he asked if everyone was safe, he just vanished."

"But, Sirius must know where he went. Maybe he went to St. Mungos," Ron said.

"Sirius said not to go looking because we wouldn't find him so I don't think that's where he went," Hermione said.

"You saw him before he disappeared. Do you think he'll be ok?" Ginny asked softly.

Ron spoke up, "You know Harry, he'll be ok."

Ginny screamed at her brother, "Look at all that blood! How can he be ok?" Then she turned to Hermione. "All to protect you!"

Hermione was hurt by this and thought about trying to comfort Ginny but she had already been pulled into Fred's arms. Hermione checked on Parvati and Ruth. They both seemed fine and Hermione was at least happy to see that their captors hadn't done anything to either of them. Ruth didn't want to leave Ron's side and Ron wouldn't leave Parvati's side. After a couple hours, Hermione approached Ginny. "I'm sorry Ginny. If anyone can pull through, Harry can."

Ginny looked up with swollen, red eyes and said, "I know. I shouldn't have said that to you. I'm just so worried." Hermione hugged her friend to let her know she cared. "I can't lose him, I just can't," Ginny sobbed.

"You won't Ginny, you'll see," Hermione said, trying to sound like she meant it, but the image of Harry lying there in all the blood didn't help. About an hour passed when Sirius' head appeared in Ron's fireplace.

"Harry's stable and it looks like he's going to be ok. The bullets missed vital organs, but he lost a lot of blood."

"I'll donate some," Ron yelled and all the others quickly offered.

"That's generous, but Harry won't use anyone else's blood. He donates as often as he can and it's stored for him," Sirius stated. The implications of this immediately hit his friends hard. They all felt so bad knowing Harry was hurt often enough that he had to store his own blood. Sirius' voice pulled everyone back. "Ginny, Hermione, if you'd like to see him, you can meet me."

Ron protested. "I want to see him." The others stated they would just go to the hospital as well.

"Technically, he's not in the hospital." Everyone looked confused. "There is no record of him being there, none of the doctors would have seen him. He's not there. That's all I can say. Please don't go down there asking to see him. Imagine if the press heard that all of Harry Potter's friends were at the hospital wanting to see him." "Ron I doubt you want to leave Parvati's side right now anyway." Ron kind of nodded. "I've received clearance to take Ginny and Hermione with me. Apparate to the lobby of St. Mungos."

"But I thought you said he wasn't there," Hermione stated, sounding confused.

"He's not, but I can get you to him from there. Let's go," Sirius said and his head vanished before there were any more questions. Once the girls arrived Sirius said, "Follow me and please don't ask any questions." Sirius led the girls down a hall and turned into a corridor that they never would have noticed. After walking for a bit, they didn't look like they were going anywhere, Sirius stopped, took out his wand and tapped an area on the wall then said, "Walk through here," and then he stepped through the wall.

Once they were through, both Girls looked around in shock. It was a small hospital. There were three rooms and a few people busying themselves. Sirius walked through one of the doors and then they saw Harry on a table. Ginny started to run over but Sirius stopped her. They watched as a female doctor poured something into Harry's wounds. What was strange was that she was standing about a meter away from Harry and doing this with her wand. Harry was obviously still unconscious.

"Why is she standing back?" Hermione asked.

"There is a shield around him," Sirius said.

"Why? Who would hurt him here?" Ginny questioned.

"It's not for his safety, it's for ours. He's woken up before and...well...bad things have happened."

"What is she pouring onto him?" Ginny asked.

"Probably phoenix tears," Sirius said. "Fawkes almost seems anxious to produce them so that we can store them here."

Hermione looked at the doctor and thought she recognized her. "Sirius. Is that Dr. Antoine?"

"Very good Hermione. Yes, she works here," Sirius said.

"She was one of the top medical researchers in the world and then just dropped out a few years ago. She was running her own center and everything," Hermione said stunned that such a prominent researcher was standing a couple meters away.

"That's what I hear," Sirius responded.

"Can we go to him?" Ginny asked.

"Yes, but you can't go past the shield, not until he wakes up."

"But he won't hurt me," Ginny said.

"Ginny, those are the rules here, actually those are Harry's rules, he insists," Sirius said and the three walked over near Harry.

Hermione thought he already looked a lot better than when she saw him before. "See Ginny, he'll be ok." Then Hermione noticed the doctor and asked, "He will be ok, won't he?"

"Yes Dr. Granger, he will." Hermione was surprised the lady knew her name. "He was very lucky though. A centimeter either way on any of those bullets and he wouldn't be. You're Miss Weasley aren't you?" Ginny nodded. "Well, we hope he'll wake up before long, but until then you can't get too close."

Ginny walked as close to Harry's head as she could and began talking to him. "Harry. Can you hear me?" She waited for any sign before she started just talking to him calmly and saying nice things.

Hermione was watching her friend when the doctor came over. "I'm sorry you can't get closer right now."

Hermione looked startled and said, "Oh, I understand. I've seen him wake up from nightmares before. You're Dr. Antoine aren't you?"

"Yes I am." The lady shook Hermione's hand. "I was glad to see that whole mess with Stonham Research didn't drag you with it."

Hermione looked confused. "If you don't mind me asking, what are you doing here? You had one of the top Research Centers in the world and then you just quit."

The doctor chuckled a bit and said, "Take a walk with me; I think you'll be interested in seeing something. We'll come back if Harry wakes up." The two women walked in silence through a couple doors and then Hermione stopped dead in her tracks when she saw the next room. It contained equipment and a potion store that looked at least as good as the one from Stonham Research. The doctor could see Hermione's confusion. "I thought you would recognize the potential."

Hermione looked up at the doctor in awe and the lady went on. "I finally realized that everything I had poured my life into wasn't what I wanted. I kept fighting to be the best and one day I looked back to realize that I didn't like what I had been fighting for. It cost me a marriage and most of my friends. Then I realized all I had was my job, so I gave it all up."

"One day I was sitting in a small Muggle café in Paris and noticed Harry eating alone. It seemed so absurd that probably the most powerful wizard of modern time was sitting, reading a book in this little Muggle café. I knew who he was of course and had always wanted to meet him so I introduced myself and we started talking. He was so much different than I ever imagined. He told me about you and that you were the smartest witch he ever knew and about how proud he was of you working for Stonham. We talked for a while and got on the subject of wanting to do things for children and doing research on things that would make a difference and not necessarily money. One thing led to another and after about three months of back and forth conversations, I came here. I do research on things that we think will really make a difference. Harry and the Foundation provide a lot of our money and in return, Harry

gets free medical care. He jokes that it's cheaper to fund the foundation than to keep paying for his care."

Hermione was just floored thinking about this. "You work for Harry?" Hermione asked bewildered.

"Oh no. The Foundation funds most of the center, but within the center, I make the calls. Not many people know about us and I like it that way. Now, what about you? What is your plan now that Stonham is shut down?" the doctor asked.

Hermione went on to tell the whole story of how she didn't like her old job and that she didn't know what she was going to do. After about 30 minutes of this the doctor asked a question. "Why don't you come to work here? At least until you decide what you want to do long term." Hermione looked speechless. "We pay a fair wage. Nothing like you could make in the real world, but we also do things differently. We don't do things for money; we do them because we think they will help."

Hermione brightened and then asked, "Did Harry ask you to offer me a job?"

The doctor laughed. "No, he would never do that. He did mention that he wished you would find something you liked close by though. I wouldn't offer a job just because Harry asked anyway. However, if he didn't want you here, I wouldn't ask. His opinion about people means a lot."

"I'd like to think about it, this is all so sudden and I'm still worried..." Hermione was cut off by a slight rumble.

The doctor stood up. "I would guess that Harry's awake." The two women walked quickly back to Harry's room.

Chapter 13

Ginny had been sitting with Sirius waiting for Harry to wake up when they felt like they were hit in the face with a wave of water. Jumping up, they both saw that Harry's eyes were open. He looked around confused and then without doing anything, his glasses flew to his face. Ginny tried to get to him but the shield stopped her. "Can you get rid of this thing?" she exclaimed.

Sirius was already casting the counter charm to drop the shield and as soon as it was down, Ginny was next to Harry with her hand on his head. "How do you feel?" she asked. She saw Harry mouth something but couldn't hear so she lowered her ear to his face. "Kiss me," she heard him whisper and she instantly got a huge smile and gave him a light kiss on the lips.

Just then the Hermione and the doctor came in. "Ginny. Give the man a break," Hermione said walking over to Harry.

Hermione grabbed his hand with tears in her eyes and said, "We were worried about you."

"Is everyone all right? Did they hurt Parvati or Ruth?" Harry asked in a gravely voice.

Ginny spoke up. "Thank goodness no. Parvati said they didn't do anything to them, and kept them together in a room until just before Hermione showed up. They were just scared."

"Are you ok Sirius?" Harry asked.

"Just a scrape. The doctor took care of it right away," Sirius answered.

"So, I'm the only stupid one that got hurt," Harry said trying to smile.

"You saved my life again. I'm bad for your health," Hermione added.

Harry smiled and said in a very soft voice, "No. It's better that your back."

"How do you feel?" Hermione asked.

"Just tired. The doctor here is much better than Madame Pomfrey," he said trying to joke.

The doctor asked him a few questions, made him drink another potion and then said, "Think about it," to Hermione before she left. Ginny looked confused but Harry smiled knowingly.

"I was so worried," Ginny said giving Harry another kiss.

"Everything turned out ok," Harry said. "So Hermione. What do you think of Dr. Antoine?"

"She's an amazing woman. I've read all about her."

"I know. Remember I used to read your magazines when you were off at school," Harry injected.

Harry was trying to listen to Hermione telling Ginny and Sirius about her talk with the doctor and he fell asleep again. When he woke sometime later, he found Ginny sitting next to his bed still holding his hand. He reached over and stroked her hair and she looked up and smiled. "When I asked you to come over tonight, I didn't mean here?"

"It's better than being home alone," she said.

"Come up here, I think there's room," Harry asked.

"I don't want to hurt you."

"Let me worry about that, I want you next to me." Harry slid over and onto his side and let Ginny crawl up next to him. It still hurt when he breathed deeply or moved his arms too quick, but he managed to get comfortable curled up behind her. He put his arm over her and kissed the back of her neck. "Um... much better if you ask me."

"I was really scared. There was so much blood on Hermione when she came back," Ginny said softly.

"Are you going to be ok? This was a bad one. I hate Muggle guns. I'd rather get cursed all day than get shot."

"I'll be ok; I just don't like to think of you being hurt. We just got together and I don't want anything to happen to you," she whispered.

"Try not to think about it. I don't want you to worry. I don't want you to have any regrets about being my girlfriend."

"Oh, I don't. Except for just worrying about you now, I've been happier than I ever imagined."

"Good. Do you think Ron will get off my back about dating you now?"

"Maybe. I didn't think he was ever going to let go of Ruth and Parvati when they got back. Ruth keeps saying her daddy saved her and mommy."

"That's sweet," Harry said and started kissing her neck.

"Just what do you think you're doing?"

"Just seeing if it hurt when I did that. I've never messed around in a hospital bed before," Harry said and nipped her ear.

"Don't you dare. You're supposed to rest and if you won't do that with me up here, I'll go back to my chair. I want you home as soon as possible."

"Yes boss," Harry said and laid his head back down.

"Don't you forget it," Ginny replied and they both were quiet until they fell asleep.

They were still asleep the next morning when the lights came on. "I liked it better when your girlfriends didn't come up here," Dr. Antoine said loud enough to wake them up.

Ginny quickly sat up and Harry said, "She's special," sounding half asleep.

"I gathered as much. Let me check your wounds," she said and removed his shirt and the bandages. "It still amazes me how quickly you heal. Even with the phoenix tears, you'll be pretty sore for a while since there was so much tissue damage. Someone was watching over you, that's all I know. The bullets passed through without tearing things up too much."

"So, can I go home?"

"It's too soon Harry," Ginny exclaimed.

"Not necessarily Ginny. If all he's going to do is lie in bed here, he can do that at home. Winky can make sure the bandages are changed. You will stay at home won't you?" Dr. Antoine asked.

"Don't I always do what you tell me?" Harry said with a sly smile.

"Not hardly," the doctor replied. "There are a few more things I want to check, just to make sure everything on the inside is ok. You should be out of here after lunch."

"Why don't you go on to work Ginny? I'll go home as soon as she lets me."

"I guess I should. There're things I need to take care of. Is it ok if I come over tonight?"

"It's always ok if you come over. You don't have to ask," Harry said. Ginny leaned in and gave him a quick kiss before leaving.

"Not your usual type," Dr. Antoine stated with a smirk.

"Maybe not my usual type, but definitely my type," Harry replied with a sigh. "What do you think of Hermione?"

"It's like looking at myself a few years ago," the Dr. replied.

Hermione was still at the castle when Harry appeared. "What are you doing here so soon? I thought you would be there for days. Ron and Parvati wanted to come see you but Sirius wouldn't take any of us back."

Harry, feeling a little weaker and sorer than he expected slowly sat down and said, "She's got more important things to do than to deal with me. She's good."

Hermione came and sat down next to him. "I'll never be able to thank you enough for saving me twice in the past few months." Harry started to say something but Hermione interrupted. "Let me finish. When you saved us at Stonham, I was amazed and grateful but it didn't really hit me how serious it was. This time is different, I saw how bad you were hurt. I can't stand for you to be in so much pain because of me."

"It's not because of you," Harry quickly said.

"Ok, not because of me but you got shot to keep me from getting hurt. Why?"

Harry thought for a minute. "For a long time, you were the most important person in the world to me. You were my best friend ever and if I'm being honest, I think I really loved you as more than a friend since our seventh year. I would have done anything for you," he said hesitating.

"But..." Hermione started to say something.

"Let me finish. Things may never be like they were, but you're still a great friend and I wouldn't want to see you get hurt. You put yourself in danger to help Parvati and Ruth, my goddaughter. I would never let anything happen to you."

Hermione gave a small chuckle. "Since we're being totally honest. I think I loved you as more than a friend since sixth year as well but you were with Cho. I kick myself even today for not going to the reception for the Giants because you ended up taking Kristi and then you two started dating. Do you think things would have worked out with us if we had admitted our feelings back then?"

Harry thought and said, "Probably not." Hermione got a look of surprise on her face, this wasn't what she expected. "I mean we would have been great until your graduation from the university. You would have still taken the job in Venice and I would have followed you but I think the job would have still come first in your life and we would have split eventually. At the time, I didn't mind coming second, but couldn't even imagine that now. Family and friends come first to me and that's all I can understand." Hermione looked like she could cry then Harry added, "But, I think for those four years until you graduated, we would have been awesome. At that time, I don't think there would have been a better couple than us. If we could have stayed that age forever, it would have been perfect."

Hermione thought for a few seconds and then said, "I agree we would have been great together. I don't know what would have happened after graduation. Maybe having you around would have changed things. Those four years were the best times of my life."

"Same here. And now, we have to be responsible adults. You were always responsible of course, so you just added adult," Harry joked then became serious. "Do you think you'll take Dr. Antoine up on her offer? You could make a huge difference."

"I don't know."

"It would be a big change for you. You don't have to make it permanent you know. There is something she is working on right now that is extremely important and you would be the best person in the world to help. If you ever wanted to do me a favor, I'd love for you to help her try to finish this project. Then, if you don't like the environment, or just want a change of scenery, you can leave."

"What's this project you think I can help with?"

"A counter potion and spell for that drug formula. Once we have the counter, the original formula won't be so valuable. She's been working on it since a month or two before you left the company and thinks she's close to a solution."

This shocked Hermione. "How could she have been doing that? Without the formula, it would be almost impossible to even try to come up with a counter."

Harry gave a big smile. "She had the formula all that time of course."

"I'd like to ask how you managed that, but I doubt you'd tell me. Is everything you do legal?"

Harry sighed. "Honestly no. We try to look at the bigger picture. If bypassing some laws means that we can really make a difference, we do it. Eventually, we tell the Ministers most of what we've done. I hope that doesn't make you think less of me. We try to do things legally but sometimes we just can't wait."

"I'm not sure I can approve of that, but it seems you do have the best interests of the wizarding world at heart."

"Do you think Dumbledore followed the law all the time? He was harboring a wanted criminal for years. He regularly bypassed the wishes of the Minister of Magic. He did what he thought was right all the time. If certain laws got in the way of that, he chose to ignore those. We try to follow the same model. I can assure you that we try to do what we think is right. Remember, this is not just my opinion of what is right, Sirius and especially Lupin decide these things."

"I guess I can agree with that. It would be interesting to work with Dr. Antoine, she's very smart," Hermione said.

"One thing to keep in mind though. You may see more of Sirius and me in um...uncomfortable situations. You couldn't talk about that to anyone, not even Ginny. Would you be able to keep that part of our life away from our friends?"

"It would be hard, but I'm sure I could." Hermione thought a bit. "You know, I'll do it. I can't keep sitting around here doing nothing. Will you tell her for me?" Hermione asked.

Harry smiled slyly and summoned a Muggle-looking pen. He handed the pen to Hermione. "This is your portkey. Click it open and then closed and you'll go to her area. I hoped you would help us out and asked Sirius to make this a couple weeks ago. I was just trying to find the right way to introduce you to Dr. Antoine."

Hermione shook her head and said, "You just think you're so smart don't you? Think you've got me all figured out."

"Oh no!" Harry said quickly. "I'm constantly surprised by you, I just like to be prepared, that's all."

"I should probably go see her tomorrow now that the formula is out in the open," Hermione said looking sad.

Harry laughed. "Haven't you learned anything about Sirius and me since you've been back? We would never allow that formula to get into their hands. That parchment had a couple items missing AND it burst into flames two minutes after it left your hand."

Hermione looked at her friend in awe again. "How did you get to be so sneaky? You're not the same clueless boy I used to know."

"I'm learning from the masters. Sirius and Remus have taught me a lot the past few years. Not to mention we deal with some not so honest people. And, I'll have you know I am still clueless, I just hide it better."

"Do you think he was behind this as well?" Hermione asked, not needing to say the person's name.

Harry breathed a few times and said, "I'd bet on it, but I doubt we'll prove it. I really need to think about how to deal with him."

"What does Marauders actually do?" she asked.

Harry smiled a bit and said, "Mostly, we design security for companies. You know anti-Apparation wards, invasion detection, and stuff like that. Lupin, Sirius and even Snape are amazingly smart about company and personal security. As weird as it was to start working with Snape, I'd say he's even better at thinking about security than he was as a potions master. You'd be surprised how much money the company makes off of that stuff."

"But that's not all you do," she said raising her eyebrow.

"You know the other part. There are probably five of us that are involved in that part and Sirius is the brains. Snape is also really good with understanding the criminal mind," Harry said with a chuckle. "Lupin is the one who keeps everything on track."

"What about you?" Hermione asked.

"Me? I just do what the others tell me to do," he said with a twinkle in his eye.

"Hmm. Somehow I don't totally believe that."

Harry gave a small groan and said, "I'm going up to bed for a while. Ginny may come over later."

"I'll send her up if she does." Hermione appraised her friend. "You know, I am happy for you two. You both deserve it."

This made Harry smile broadly. "Thanks Hermione, that really means a lot." Instead of walking, Harry just popped up to his room.

Ginny ended up coming over, but Harry was already asleep, so the girls sat around talking the rest of the evening, and Ginny went home after that.

Harry ended up having nightmares all evening about his friends being hurt. He woke up more angry than he could remember being in a long time. Sirius came to the castle to check on Harry and found him physically looking much better and in the kitchen with Hermione. Harry had been in a very foul mood ever since he got up and Hermione hadn't been able to comfort him much. Finally Harry asked his godfather, "It was him again, wasn't it?"

Hermione knew whom Harry was talking about and heard Sirius answer, "It looks like it."

Harry stood up and started pacing and the other two started feeling the change in him. When Harry turned to pace back toward them, they saw no trace of the friendly person they loved. Pure hate and power were radiating from Harry, who said, "I've got to stop this. No matter what happens to me, I've got to stop him."

Sirius spoke up quickly, "I have some thoughts, but you've got to calm down before we discuss them."

Hermione added, "Harry, please calm down. Don't do anything that would get you into trouble."

"Why don't you go work out some frustrations and we'll discuss the options after that," Sirius firmly stated.

Harry looked quickly between the two of them, and the both felt the turmoil he was feeling. After a few seconds, he said, "That's probably a good idea; I'll see you both later."

Before he could leave, Sirius said, "I'll come down in a minute." Harry quickly disappeared.

"What's he talking about?" Hermione asked, concerned for her friend.

"He's going to the Unspeakables to train for a bit. It allows him to relieve his tensions without actually hurting people." Sirius sighed and said, "He doesn't have any other avenues to take it out on things without causing real damage."

"Take me with you," Hermione demanded. "I've been away for too long, and I've shown I can keep a secret."

Sirius thought for a second, turned to the fire and said, "Sirius Black for Fletch, Department of Mysteries."

After a few seconds, a head appeared in the fire, "Sirius, what can I do for you?"

"Good to see you Fletch. Is Harry there already?" Sirius asked the head.

"Oh yes, he seems really intense," the head replied.

"Can I get clearance for myself and Dr. Granger to come and observe?"

The head hesitated and then said, "I'll give her a one time access, but she can't see anything on the way. Give me two minutes," the head said and vanished.

"Ok, do what I do," Sirius said stepping into the fire saying, "Department of Mysteries." A ghostly voice said, "Identification." Sirius replied, "Sirius Black" and heard "granted." Then Sirius disappeared.

Hermione followed the same steps, worried about the whole thing, but was also granted access and when she arrived; Sirius and another man were there. "Welcome to the Unspeakable department Hermione. This is Fletch."

Hermione extended her hand and a man took it saying, "Good to meet you Dr. Granger, I've heard a great deal about you."

Hermione shook the man's hand and was still appraising the surroundings and said, "I can't say I've ever heard of you before."

Fletch laughed and said, "That's why we like Harry." Fletch looked at Hermione and said, "I'm sorry to do this but we have to do a Confundus charm on you so that you will not be able to identify or recognize anyone you see on the way to the training room. As soon as we arrive, I'll cancel the charm."

Hermione nodded and Fletch quickly cast the charm. The three walked down to a training room and then Fletch removed the charm and Hermione started recognizing people and areas again. She saw Harry through some windows as he was fighting a couple wizards. She noticed he didn't seem to be using much magic, so she asked, "Why isn't he using magic?"

Fletch replied, "Harry doesn't feel like it's much training when he matches them magic for magic, so he tries to not use much unless he really needs it."

The three watched Harry fight the wizards and saw him not block spells, but Apparate out of the way and then use hand-to-hand techniques to subdue them all. After handling a few wizards like this, suddenly a werewolf came charging out of a room, causing Hermione to scream. Harry couldn't hear her but did see the werewolf and instantly changed into a griffin and charged to attack the werewolf. The two animals met in the middle of the room and after many loud growls and squeals, the werewolf was sent flying into the wall with a huge chunk out of its side.

The griffin quickly changed back into Harry as a mountain troll started to attack. Harry dodged a few blows from the club and while he was preparing another dodge, he heard a sound and turned to see another troll swinging a club. He couldn't dodge this blow and was sent flying into the far wall, striking it very hard. Harry fell to the floor in obvious pain while the trolls approached slowly. Harry was on his hands and knees, his hand was glowing white and he was rubbing his hand over his chest. Hermione gasped, "What is he doing?"

Fletch answered, "Probably trying to heal himself, he hit the wall pretty hard."

Sirius was pressed to the glass as was Hermione. They saw one of the trolls raise its club and prepare to strike but Harry didn't move. Hermione screamed, "Stop this! He's going to be killed!" Neither of the men did anything. The troll swung the club and when it was merely centimeters from his head, Harry disappeared, reappearing on the far side of the training area. He quickly started saying a spell and one of the trolls started attacking the other. Once one of them had defeated the other, it turned its attention back on Harry. This time, he held out his hand and a thick beam of white light formed at the end of his hand. When the troll approached, Harry stood tall, and when the club came close, he disappeared, reappearing behind the troll and driving the beam of light straight into the back of the troll causing the creature to fall to the ground.

Harry was still stumbling, not having fully recovered from the blow from the club when another enemy appeared. Harry turned and when he saw the next enemy, he kind of stumbled back before he heard, "What's wrong Potter, can't stand the truth?"

Harry was looking at the form of Draco Malfoy across the room. Harry still didn't say anything and heard, "Do you see her with him when you sleep? He got to her before you had your chance. You didn't win."

The observers saw the change in Harry instantly. He pulled himself up seeming much bigger than he actually was, and they couldn't see any indications that he was hurt or tired. Harry started walking toward the fake Draco. Draco started casting spells, but Harry casually blocked each of them, not taking his eyes off the blonde haired wizard. In the observation room, Fletch said, "Look at his eyes!" The others noticed Harry's eyes were starting to glow deep red, nothing like the normal green, or even dark green they had seen before. When Harry was almost on top of Draco, the observers saw his hand start to glow blue, then saw Harry drive his hand into Draco's chest. Draco started screaming as Harry's hand went right through his skin until only his wrist was visible. There was no blood or gaping wound, the hand just sunk into the man. Draco started flailing his arms, beating Harry around the head, but Harry didn't flinch at all and kept staring into Draco's eyes, his hand buried into the man's chest. After a few minutes, the observers saw Draco start to turn blue, and within another minute, the enemy was totally blue and rigid. Suddenly Harry yanked his arm out of the still man, pulled back and hit the man in the face with a brutal punch. This punch caused the blue man to shatter into millions of little parts, like an ice sculpture hit with a club. Once the parts contacted the ground, they immediately disappeared.

The observers stood around in silence, trying to realize what had actually happened. Harry flicked his hand and a silvery phoenix came flying out and he instantly disappeared. The phoenix flew straight into Sirius who turned to Fletch and said, "Harry went to the doctor."

Fletch seemed to compose himself and turned to Sirius and said, "You tell him I want to talk to him about that performance. I'm concerned he ended it like that."

Chapter 14

"He's had a lot on his mind lately," Sirius tried to say, but also sounded unhappy.

Hermione had been too stunned to say anything, but hearing the two men talk caused her to ask, "Is this normal for him?"

Sirius responded, "The first part was, but the way he dealt with the last boggart wasn't, not at all." Sirius thanked Fletch and then turned to Hermione, "Let's go home, he'll probably be back in a few hours." Fletch cast the Confundus charm on Hermione and they went back to the floo before he removed the charm.

"It was nice to meet your Dr. Granger. I hope you understand about our security," Fletch said.

Hermione still looked lost but said, "Of course I understand sir. I appreciate you letting me come at all." Sirius thanked Fletch and the two returned to the castle.

Hermione was the first to talk, "Does this happen a lot?"

Sirius sighed. "Hermione, Harry has to deal with a lot of things that really bother him. If he didn't have the values he's blessed with, he would just deal with the problems without regard for rules. Part of him would like nothing more than to make all evil people just disappear, and frankly, he could probably do it. So, he tries to take out his frustration during training instead of breaking all of our codes of conduct."

Hermione let this sink in and then asked, "What would things be like if he went to the other side?"

Sirius raised his eyebrows and said, "You know the answer to that. We're fortunate that even after everything he's been through; his parent's values are still what guide him. It's hard on him. He's in a catch-22. If he breaks the rules and deals with the bad guys, he becomes close to being like them. But, if he follows the rules and the people end up doing something else bad, he blames himself because he knows he could have stopped them. It's tough."

"I never would have thought of it like that," Hermione said obviously worried about her friend.

Harry came home late that night and found Hermione on the couch. "Want a glass of wine?" Hermione asked.

Harry gave her a strange look and said, "I should go on up to bed."

"I'd really like to talk for a little while," Hermione said hopefully.

"Nothing good ever starts like that," Harry said before pouring himself a glass of wine and sitting down. He took a sip, turned to Hermione and asked, "So, what do you want to talk about?"

Hermione thought for a minute and then meekly said, "I saw you today. I went with Sirius."

Harry's expression changed, he looked beaten, shook his head and said, "I suppose you're disappointed in me as well?"

"What do you mean?"

"I have to go see my boss tomorrow and Sirius already expressed his displeasure at what I did, I just assumed you'd do the same."

"What did you do to him? I've never seen anything like that."

"You remember the other day when I said that magic itself isn't dark, it's how you use it?" Hermione nodded, so Harry continued, "Well what I did was dark magic, plain and simple. I shouldn't have done it. The freezing charm itself isn't bad, but the magic to allow me to grab his heart is and I used it in a dark manner."

"But it wasn't a real person, so it wasn't bad," Hermione said trying to cheer him up.

"You're wrong Hermione. I should have never allowed myself to do it on anything ever. I was just so angry with him and lost control and now people are disappointed in me."

"Just tell them everything that's going on, they'll understand."

"You don't understand. I can't let myself lose control like that, I just can't. Marauders' is allowed leeway in what we do because we keep to certain codes and me using magic like that crosses a boundary. If I do things like that, I could cause big problems for us."

"It'll be ok. Fletch will understand and the fact that you're bothered about it shows how you really feel," Hermione said forcefully.

Harry thought for a second before saying, "Thanks, talking about it helped. It's nice having you around. I haven't had anyone to talk about things with other than Sirius for a long time and he's not the most understanding person."

"I missed our talks as well and I'm glad to be around," Hermione said, got serious again and asked, "What have you found out about your magic the past few years?"

Harry kind of sat up, he wasn't expecting this question. "Well, that was pretty direct." He hesitated and said, "After I gave up Quidditch, I kind of dropped out and spent a year reading everything I could. I stayed out of the wizarding world, but read and practiced every magical spell I could find. I found every book I could on Godric Gryffindor and read all of them as well. He had a knack for picking things up."

"Oh, I'd love to read some of those books," Hermione said sounding interested.

Harry smiled and said, "Still trying to figure me out I see. The Unspeakables helped out a lot and designed some tests and it turns out I'm pretty magical, way more than I thought."

"I told you so! You told me I was crazy," Hermione said proudly.

"I know, I know. But I didn't know what to do with it. Actually I still don't, so I just try to keep learning and doing what I can." Harry was silent for a moment. "You know, I'd still give it up to be just Harry," he said and Hermione could instantly tell he was totally honest.

"I know you would Harry," Hermione said before giving him a hug.

After a long pause, Harry looked directly into her eyes. "Sometimes when I do things, I can tell that people I care about get a little afraid of me and I don't like that," he said really opening up.

"None of the people who know you are really afraid of you. You may intimidate us, but we all know you would never hurt us," she said pulling him tight.

After a minute of silence, Harry downed his wine and said, "Thanks for talking to me, you always know what to say."

"After all you've done, it's the least I can do," Hermione said as Harry walked to his room.

The next morning, Harry walked to Fletch's office and knocked. "You wanted to see me sir?" Harry asked.

"Yes, come in," Fletch said looking concerned. "It's about what you did to the last boggart yesterday."

"I guessed as much. I shouldn't have done it like that. With everything he's doing right now and with him behind the kidnapping of my goddaughter, I just wanted to hurt him," Harry said.

"Would you have done it to the real Malfoy?" Fletch asked.

Harry thought for a minute, sighed and said, "Probably."

"You've got to keep a handle on this. I understand you wanting to hurt him, but if you're going to hurt him, don't do anything that a normal wizard couldn't do. Then, no matter what happens, no one can say you used your power to hurt him. Go kick his ass all over the place, but no advanced magic, and especially no dark magic."

"You're right. Sirius is working on getting him setup or something; so hopefully, I won't have to touch him at all. I'm really sorry about doing that and will try my best to control my emotions," Harry said softly.

"I believe you. I just don't want to see you start to go down the wrong path. Always take the high road. It may take longer and be more difficult, but in the end you'll be able to live with yourself," Fletch said shaking Harry's hand.

"Thanks. I should go see Sirius now," Harry said and went to Marauders' to find out the latest information.

"So, what are we really going to do about this?" Harry asked his godfather.

Sirius signed and said, "He's really good about keeping his involvement non-traceable so I see we have two options, both bad. We can break our own code and he could just disappear." Harry saw that his godfather didn't look too upset at this option and after what seemed like too long of a pause he continued, "The other option is to see if the old man could be convinced to help us out."

Harry's shoulder's sunk with the realization of what this option would mean. "We can't break our code. We can't be like them, as much as I'd like to turn him over to the vampires or something; we can't do it like that." Harry sighed. "I just can't believe we would consider dealing with him."

"If we just let the vampires know how unhappy we are with him and let it slip where he'll be sometime, maybe the problem will take care of itself," Sirius said and Harry couldn't tell if he was kidding or not.

"You know that Dumbledore and my parents will know how we handle this. There's no way Dumbledore would do it like that and I don't want to face him one day if I did," said Harry sadly. "You think the old man will go along with it?"

Sirius thought for a second. "I'd bet anything on it. He wants that more than anything and if he was willing to turn the boy over to Voldemort, he'd do this."

"How do we set it up? No one can know," Harry said sadly.

Sirius went on to say he'd work on getting a plan for a meeting Harry really didn't want to have. It went against almost everything he thought was right but knew at this point, it was the lesser of two evils.

When Harry went home, he found Ron there talking to Hermione. Ron looked very depressed and said, "Can Sirius wipe Rose's memory of the kidnapping?"

Harry looked stunned, but said, "He could, but is that what you want?"

"She's just a kid, she shouldn't have to deal with the memory of something like that," Ron stated.

Harry understood what Ron meant, but wanted to point something out. "Ron, if Sirius wipes the memory, she won't remember you saving her. It's a terrible thing that happened to them, but since they weren't hurt, and Rose remembers you saving them, do you really want her to forget that?"

Harry could tell Ron was torn and watched his friend pace for a while before asking, "Do you think she can handle it?"

"I think she can. It was a horrible thing, no doubt, but in the end, she knows that her dad saved her. I think that's a far more positive memory than the kidnapping was negative," Harry said.

Ron sighed and said, "I guess you're right. Do you know who was responsible?"

Harry looked sad and said, "We think so, and it won't surprise you."

Ron knew immediately who Harry was talking about and looked furious when he said, "This has got to stop. If you can bring him to me, I'll kill him myself."

Hermione spoke up, "You can't do that! You can't become like him."

"Hermione, this was my daughter and wife, I don't care what I become."

Harry spoke up, "Ron, we're looking at another way. Please, give me a chance to deal with this first. Ruth is my goddaughter, and I want the slug as much as you. Give me a chance."

Ron looked seriously at his friend and said, "I'll give you a chance, but I won't wait forever. He's going to pay." Ron left shortly after saying this.

Harry and Hermione didn't bring the subject up the rest of the night.

The next day was Hermione's first day of working with Dr. Antoine. She arrived early in the day and quickly found the Dr. "Welcome Dr. Granger. I hope you're ready to get started, we have a high priority issue we are trying to resolve."

"I'm ready Dr., I assume this is the antidote to the drug?" Hermione replied.

"Correct. We are actually making progress, and now with your input and help, I have high hopes we can actually crack this before long. Once we do, we send it to another group who will get it out to the Ministries, and also try to develop a counter charm," Dr. Antoine said.

"Isn't it weird to do all this work and then just hand it to someone without anyone knowing what you did?" Hermione asked.

"Actually, it's not. The team and some very good friends know what we accomplish. For me that's good enough," the Dr. said happily and then added. "Working here won't get you on the cover of any magazine, but it will allow you to work with people who really want to help."

The two women spent the day together with three other people, two men and another woman trying ideas and combinations of ingredients that may provide the key for an antidote. Hermione was pleasantly surprised at how enjoyable it was to work with Dr. Antoine and the team. Hermione was impressed at how smart the other Dr. was and also how easy she was to get along with. Hermione found herself often talking to another researcher, Dr. Steven Harlan for much of the day. The two hit it off and he helped Hermione feel like she fit in. Even though they worked very hard that day, when Hermione left to go home, she felt exhilarated and couldn't wait to tell someone.

Harry and Ginny were both at the castle eating a late snack when Hermione arrived and immediately started talking. "Dr. Antoine is so amazing. She's the smartest witch I've ever met. I'm going to love working with her." Hermione hugged Harry and said, "Thank you for introducing me to her."

Harry turned to Ginny and shook his head and said, "Think she enjoyed her first day at the new job?"

Ginny smiled and replied, "It seems like it, but I'm not sure."

"Cut it out you guys," Hermione demanded. "It was nothing like Stonham."

Harry laughed and said, "You never cease to amaze me Hermione. Everything can be falling apart and when you meet someone really smart, you're instantly in a good mood."

Hermione didn't know how to take this, but said, "I'm serious, she's amazing. I think this is going to be really good. I can learn a lot from her. They've already made good progress on an antidote for the potion. With her help, I'm actually optimistic we can do it."

Harry smiled and said, "It's good to see you like this. Between the two of you, I have no doubt you'll be able to pull it off."

"It's good to see you so happy Hermione. See, things just happened for a reason," Ginny said to her friend.

"I know it's only one day, but I can't wait to get back there," Hermione said still sounding very happy.

"I'm glad you like it Hermione. I'll owe you big time if you can help with the antidote," Harry said.

"Oh no. I already owe you more than I'd ever be able to repay. I just have a good feeling that we'll be able to do it," Hermione stated.

The three friends ended up talking well into the night before going to bed. Hermione had become very comfortable with Ginny staying at the castle many nights and had totally pushed any thoughts of anything more than a friendship with Harry out of her head.

Harry went to Ron's one evening at Ron's request so that Harry could see Ruth for himself. Ron was really concerned with long term effects of being kidnapped on his daughter. Parvati turned out to be much stronger than Harry expected and other than being more protective of the children, she showed no outward signs of the ordeal. Harry appeared in their backyard and knocked. Parvati answered, "Harry, come in."

Harry hugged her tight and she whispered, "Thanks for coming. Ruth seems fine, but Ron is worried."

"I'll give my honest opinion, but I think she's a tough kid. She must get it from you," Harry whispered, hugging her back.

Ron quickly came in followed by the kids, "Hey mate!" Ron was saying before he was interrupted by the kids.

"Uncle Harry! Uncle Harry!" the two children yelled before trying to jump into his arms. This was the first time Harry had seen Ruth since the kidnapping.

"Hey you little munchkins," Harry replied. "How are you?"

"Uncle Harry, did you see my daddy save mommy and me?" Ruth asked sounding very excited.

This brought a large smile to Harry and he said, "No, my back was turned, tell me about it."

"He was great!" Ruth exclaimed, "He jumped to us before the bad men could do anything and then made some blue thing that kept us safe until he brought us home. My daddy brought us home. He was very brave," the little girl said before hugging Ron who was bright red.

"He was brave, wasn't he? You're lucky to have the parents you do, they wouldn't let anything bad happen to you kids," Harry said. "Here, I brought something for you, Brian and your mom." Harry handed each of them a small bracelet. The girl's were a charm bracelet and Brian's was a leather woven one with a small red stone. "These are very special and I'd like you to wear them for a while."

Ruth put hers on quickly and said, "I love it, thank you." Harry gave Ron a look and Ron put the bracelet on Brian who didn't seem to mind the thing, but really didn't know what to think.

Ron said, "Can you two go play, I need to talk to Uncle Harry for a minute." The kids agreed and ran out.

Harry sighed and said, "These bracelets are special portkeys that Sirius made. Parvati, yours is the controller. The three charms on yours are special. If you squeeze the largest one, you and both kids will be brought here. If you squeeze either of the smaller ones, one of the kids will be brought here. I hate that we even have to think about things like this, but until I've dealt with the problem, I'd feel better if you had them." Harry really looked sad as Parvati put on the charm.

Parvati didn't seem sad as she jumped up and hugged Harry. "Thank you so much. I've dreaded letting them out of my sight."

"I didn't think it bothered you so much?" Ron said.

"Oh Ron, I wanted to be strong for you. I know how you worry about everything," Parvati told her husband who hugged her tight.

After pulling back, Ron shook Harry's hand and said, "Thanks mate."

"Well, hopefully before too much longer they can just be normal bracelets. And Ron, I think Ruth is handling this just fine. You're even more her hero now and that will stay with her for a long time," Harry told his friend who almost looked like he could cry.

"But you did everything," Ron said sheepishly.

"You did the important part. You did exactly what was needed and that's what counts," Harry said firmly. After a few more minutes of talking, Harry said, "I have to go. I have a date with a certain redhead and if I'm late...well you can imagine what she'll do."

"I told you that you didn't know what you were getting into," Ron joked as Harry disappeared.

Ron's Quidditch hadn't been going too well and in addition to their seeker, Ron was taking a beating in the press. Puddlemere had lost their last match before the holidays, and Ron was in a foul mood when he and Harry were in the Leaky Cauldron on their weekly outing. "We just sucked today," Ron exclaimed having already downed too many drinks.

"These things happen. Everybody has off days, you guys are still having a pretty decent season," Harry said trying to cheer his friend up.

"I guess so. I'm just tired of losing," Ron replied.

"I know you want all the press to come back around," Harry joked.

"I can't help it, I like being popular," Ron said back with his first laugh of the night.

"Get used to losing weasel," came an annoying voice from the end of the bar.

Harry recognized the voice, but before he could do anything, Ron was up and had already thrown the first punch, connecting to Malfoy's nose. Before Ron could throw another, Harry grabbed him. "Ron, don't do anything else!" Harry yelled.

"You know what he did!" Ron bellowed.

Now, some of the patrons had gathered around to try and keep the two apart. Malfoy stood up, wiping the blood from his nose and said smugly, "What did I do weasel?"

Ron started to say something but Harry pulled him and said, "Don't say a word Ron!"

Ron turned to Harry and looked like he wanted to fight but Harry said, "We'll deal with it, I promise."

"Always having the show off protect you, even after you hit an innocent man just wanting a drink," they heard Malfoy say with amusement as they left.

Once a safe distance away, Ron turned to Harry and said forcefully, "I can't sit back and do nothing! He was behind it and you know it."

Harry hung his head. "I know, and Sirius is working on something. If you do something bad, you'll be the one in trouble and will lose everything. The team could suspend you if you get arrested. Give me a couple months," Harry pleaded.

"I hate letting them out of my sight Harry," Ron's expression turned to pain. "I can't keep my mind on the game."

"They've got the portkeys now, and you have people watching. I don't think he'd try the same thing again. After the holidays, we'll figure something out." The two friends finally went home, but Ron didn't look like he was going to drop this.

The next day there was an article in the Prophet.

Quidditch Star Assaults Schoolmate

Ron Weasley, keeper for Puddlemere United assaulted Draco Malfoy, a schoolmate from Hogwarts without provocation in a local pub. Witnesses say they just saw Weasley fly off his seat and strike the other man.

Weasley was quickly drug out of the establishment by long-time friend Harry Potter.

Malfoy said he wouldn't press charges because he didn't want to get a fellow schoolmate into trouble and understood that Weasley's Quidditch career is in the slumps right now.

Weasley is the youngest son of the Minister of Magic and this reporter wonders if he realizes how his actions reflect on his father.

Harry read this article and groaned. "What's the matter?" Hermione asked. Harry gave her the paper and watched her read it. "Will he ever learn to control his temper?"

"Doubt it, it seems to be a family trait for everyone except Mr. Weasley," Harry replied. "I bet he gets a howler today."

"Do you think he'll do something to Malfoy?" Hermione asked concerned.

"I hope not, but you know how Ron is. I asked him to give me a couple months to figure something out. Sirius is working on it."

The two finished breakfast before going to their respective jobs.

The holidays were approaching and one evening when Harry was with Ginny and asked, "Can I take you away before Christmas?"

Ginny smiled and answered, "This isn't my busy time at the office, so you can take me away anytime Harry. Where do you want to go?"

"Let me surprise you. It will be warm and there will be a beach, that's all I'm saying. Oh, and we'll be back Christmas Eve," Harry replied.

"That sounds nice," Ginny replied. "I'll need to get some new bathing suits, mine aren't that great. Want to come help me pick them out?"

"I'll just watch you model them," Harry said raising his eyebrows.

Ginny agreed and Harry took her to Paris the next day looking for bathing suits. Ginny first picked out some nice suits very much like the ones she already had, and then came to a section that had much more revealing ones. Harry saw her eyes light up. "Do you think I should get one of these?" she said holding up a very skimpy suit.

Now Harry's eyes lit up. "Oh yes!" he said enthusiastically.

Ginny picked a couple more and asked, "Would you let me wear these in public?"

"Ginny, you are extremely sexy and would look great in them. If you feel uncomfortable, pick something else, but I think you'd look amazing," Harry said.

Ginny just shook her head at Harry and tried the suits on. She would have never expected herself to agree to wear something like them in public, but hearing Harry tell her how good she looked gave her the confidence to go ahead and get them.

The next morning the two were ready to leave and Harry apparated them into their hotel room for the next week. Ginny was instantly drawn to the open sliding doors that overlooked a calm, beautiful blue-green ocean. "Oh my gosh! Where are we?" Ginny asked.

"We're in Jamaica Ginny. This place only has ten rooms, and I think only a few are taken right now. Is it ok?" Harry asked, wanting to make sure Ginny was ok here.

Chapter 15

"This is amazing! I've never seen water like that before," Ginny exclaimed. "Do they know about us? I mean we just popped into the room."

"They know what we are, but don't care. They are really nice people and treat everybody the same. It's supper time over here, so we can walk up the beach and have a light meal before trying to sleep."

The two changed into appropriate clothes and walked barefoot up the beach. Ginny seemed really happy and couldn't get enough off the soft sand between her toes. They found a small candle-lit restaurant and had a light meal under the stars before returning to their room. They were in the hammock with Ginny lying back into Harry watching the waves roll in when she asked, "Is this really how our life will be?"

Harry was confused and asked, "What do you mean Gin?"

"I mean, are we really going to be able to go places like this whenever we want? This just seems so surreal."

Harry laughed and said, "If you wanted to spend all of our time at places like this, we could do it. But, if you wanted to spend all of our time at your place in Hogsmeade, we can do that too. All I want is to make you happy, and I'll be fine wherever that is."

Ginny looked deep into his eyes and said, "How did this really happen?"

Harry thought and then sighed deeply and said, "I wanted to say this in some perfect romantic spot, but all that really matters is that you really know." Harry pulled them both out of the hammock and looking deeply into Ginny's eyes, he said, "You don't know how happy you make me. I would do anything for you. I think I've told you those things before, but what I want you to know is that I love you, Ginny Weasley. I think I have for a long time, but now I want you to know that I love you like I have never loved anything or anyone before."

Ginny was staring wide-eyed at Harry when he said this. Her insides were doing all kinds of strange things. She didn't know how long it had been since Harry had spoken his last words when she finally realized what was going on around her and she saw the look of confusion and concern in Harry's eyes. Instantly, she smiled brightly and said, "You knew about my crush, but I never dreamed I could feel so strongly about anyone, ever. I've known I loved you for years, but had no idea I could love anyone as much as I love you, Harry Potter."

Harry pulled her into a passionate hug and said, "I wanted to say this to you before the first time we made love, but I didn't want to scare you off. I knew I loved you then."

Ginny just looked at him and could barely contain her tears when she said, "Me too Harry. I could barely hold back telling you that I loved you the first night you stayed over. You kept saying we should take it slow and I didn't want you to freak out, but I wanted to tell you so bad."

"That just goes to show we should always say what we really want to each other," Harry said. "Well, at least for the rest of our vacation, it is out in the open." Harry smiled.

The next day, after sleeping in, the two walked to the beach and were greeted by the groundskeeper, Juicy who pulled two chairs down to the water for the couple. Ginny finally removed her wrap and said, "I cannot believe I'm wearing a thong in public."

Harry kissed her and said, "If I had my way, you wouldn't be wearing that much."

The two quickly fell into a routine of getting up, eating a light breakfast, going to the beach where Juicy had two chairs always waiting for them and laying around for hours. Some days, the most they moved was to cool off in the crystal clear blue water. One day however, after much pleading Harry convinced Ginny to try parasailing. She had been very nervous about this and almost asked the jet-ski driver to take them back before they got to the boat. They were able to find a parasail that held two people at a time, and this was the only way Ginny agreed to go up. Ginny was breathing very fast and kept looking at Harry while they were getting harnessed up and hooked into the parasail. Once they started to rise up, the wind caught the sail and they lurched to one side, Ginny asked, "What if we fall?"

Harry laughed and said, "Are you a witch or not? Just Apparate back to the room."

"But what if I panic and can't?" Ginny exclaimed.

"I have no doubt you can do it, but I promise that I won't let you hit the water. I've caught you before and I can do it again," Harry promised and leaned over to kiss her.

Once the parasail was fully extended, Ginny's attitude drastically changed and Harry could see the huge smile on her face. "This is great!" she exclaimed.

"I thought you were worried about falling," Harry laughed at her.

"Not anymore. Look how beautiful everything is," she said looking back towards the mountains in the distance. "And, it's so calm up here. Thank you for talking me into this," she added giving him a kiss.

"Let this be a lesson, if I suggest something, you should try it," Harry said raising his eyebrows.

"Well, I already do that with some things," she mischievously replied.

"That you do. Maybe I'll have to be more creative," Harry said playing back.

After the ride, the two went back to their drinks and chairs near the inn. Ginny ended up wanting to parasail a couple more times before the week was up.

By the end of their vacation, Ginny had become so comfortable with herself that she had started lying on the beach in her thong without her top on, like many of the other women. As exhilarating as this felt, her biggest benefit was how Harry treated her when they got back to their room in the evenings. When they would go up to get ready in the evening, with Ginny walking ahead of Harry in her thong, and topless, Harry rarely let her get into the shower before throwing her down and ravaging her in the first private area they found. Ginny had become accustomed to being topless around other people, and even other women whom she thought were much more attractive. Harry hadn't paid any attention to the other women and always made Ginny feel like she was the most beautiful woman on the beach.

Their lovemaking the night before they returned home was the most erotic. After a late meal, the two were walking back along the beach to their hotel when Harry pulled Ginny into a deep kiss. After the kiss, Ginny went to pull Harry back to the room but he resisted and quickly cast a couple of spells that Ginny didn't recognize. He turned to her and pulled her into a very passionate kiss and then laid her down onto the sand.

"Harry, we can't do this here, people will see," Ginny said but still kissed him deeply.

"Trust me, no one will come by," Harry said pulling her up so he could remove her dress. Within a few seconds, Ginny was standing totally naked on the beach in front of Harry. Turning, she could see other people walking toward them, but when they got within viewing distance, she noticed them suddenly turning around and start walking the other direction. When she turned back to Harry, she saw he had already disrobed and was standing naked in front of her.

Harry pulled her into him and kissed her deeply. He slowly sat back onto the sand and pulled her on top of him. Without much foreplay, Ginny straddled his waist and Harry quickly entered her. Ginny quickly started moving on top of him and occasionally looked to either side to see people suddenly turning and walking away from them. Ginny couldn't believe how excited she was to be grinding into her lover while she could see other people walking toward them and then suddenly turning around and walking away. It really didn't take long before Ginny was screaming Harry's name and collapsing onto him.

After this, Harry kissed her deeply and helped gather their clothes. He helped her throw her sundress on. He pulled his pants on, but she kept his shirt. The two quickly made their way back to the room and made love again in the hammock overlooking the ocean before slowly walking to the bedroom and collapsing onto the bed for a few hours of sleep. They left early the next morning so they could see Sirius and his family on Christmas Eve.

Christmas arrived with Hermione going to see her parents, and Harry going to the Burrow in the morning. When Harry arrived, Ginny greeted him at the door with a big kiss. Kissing around the family still made Harry feel nervous, but the rest of the people were in the living room opening presents. "It sounds louder than normal," Harry stated.

Ginny beamed and said, "Everyone's back this year. C'mon." She started dragging him into the living room.

"Harry's here!" Ginny exclaimed and Harry heard everyone yell their greetings.

Ron loudly said, "We couldn't wait on you mate."

Harry laughed that no matter how old Ron got, he wasn't about to wait to open presents. It looked like Ruth and Brian were taking right after their father. Looking around, Harry saw all the normal people and then saw Bill who was usually working so much that he rarely got back. Next to him was Charlie, looking as tan as ever and next to him was a pretty brunette woman who also looked as tan. Continuing around the room, Harry was shocked to see another Weasley staring back at him. Percy was standing in a corner just glaring at Harry. Penelope was sitting down in front of him not looking like she was enjoying herself.

Ginny tugged on Harry and they moved further into the room. "You both look good with a tan," Mrs. Weasley said as she hugged Harry.

"Thanks Mrs. Weasley, we were lucky not to burn," Harry replied.

"At least we can tell you left the room during the day!" George threw in drawing an evil look from his mother.

Harry saw Bill say something to Charlie and the two older brothers got up and walked to Harry. "Let's talk," Bill said before ushering a very worried looking Harry out the door. He glanced over her shoulder and saw his girlfriend just shrug her shoulders and wave.

Outside the two men stood in front of Harry with their arms crossed just looking for a minute. Finally Charlie spoke, "Do you really know what you've gotten yourself into?"

He said this so seriously that Harry didn't know how to take it and before he could reply, Bill added, "You think you've dealt with some problems in the past mate, but I'm not sure you understand how scary she can be."

Harry, still not knowing exactly how to take the two softly said, "I'm willing to take the risk."

Charlie put his hands on Harry's shoulders and said, "Normally we should say that if you ever hurt her, you'll answer to us, but in this case I don't think she'd leave enough of you around for us to deal with."

Finally Bill broke the atmosphere when he extended his hand and said, "I couldn't be happier for her mate."

Charlie added, "Same here, it's good to see her so happy, and tan!"

As soon as the three entered the back door, Ginny was there. "If you two did anything to him, you'll live to regret it!"

Charlie turned to Harry and said, "See what we mean!" Then the two brothers continued to the living room.

"What did they say?" Ginny asked.

Harry hugged her and said, "They said they were happy for us."

Ginny breathed a sigh of relief. "How is everyone getting along with Percy?" Harry asked.

Now Ginny breathed deeply and said, "Tense, very tense. He just showed up and surprised everyone. He's also being sickeningly sweet. Something's weird, but it is nice to see him again."

"He gave me a really weird stare when I came in. Probably because he doesn't like me and now we're dating."

"I don't care what he thinks, so don't let it bother you. C'mon let's watch the kids finish with their presents," Ginny said pulling him back into the room.

Later that day, Harry was able to get Ginny into a private area as he watched her open his present and saw her eyes get big, but then she turned to him with a confused look. "This is an amazing gift Harry, but why did you pick it? I had never considered a pensive before."

"Remember how you were skeptical when I told you how long I've noticed and thought about you?" Ginny nodded. "I put in all my memories of the times that I was admiring and thinking about you into it," Harry saw her eyes get big when he said this, but he continued, "Also, I put in my memories of us starting from when I came to your studio to ask you to lunch. This way, if I'm ever away you can use this to know how I really feel about you."

"You really put them all in here?" Ginny asked and Harry nodded. "Show me how to use it," she demanded.

"Ok, first I'll show you how to add a memory. Concentrate on a thought and place the tip of your wand against the top of your head. Then, slowly pull it away and you should see a silvery thread hanging, and you just drop that into the pensive. Try it."

Ginny stood in silence for a second and then seemed to be concentrating. She placed the tip of her wand against the top of her head and sure enough, when she slowly pulled it away, there was a silvery thread of the memory. She smiled brightly and dropped the memory into the pensive where it swirled around and disappeared.

"Perfect!" Harry said. "What was the memory of?"

"You telling me you loved me for the first time," Ginny replied.

"My version of that is already in there," Harry smiled as he said this.

"So, how do I see them?" she asked. Harry went on to explain that the most important thing is knowing how to get out, and then he told her exactly how to access the stored memories. Ginny wanted to try it out immediately, but Harry talked her into waiting since all the family was still at the Burrow.

"At first, I kind of thought this was a weird gift," she admitted. "But now, it's probably the most thoughtful thing I've ever received. Thank you." Ginny gave Harry a nice hug and kiss.

"I'm glad you like it. I wanted to get you something special. C'mon let's get back to the others."

A couple hours later, Hermione showed up after visiting her parents and Harry instantly felt like this was how Christmas should be. A big family all together with his best friends watching each other act stupid with their new gifts, it was perfect. Harry hadn't said anything to Percy and kept noticing him staring whenever Harry looked around. This was actually bothering him but he didn't want to say anything.

Harry was up getting another glass of juice when he felt a hand on his shoulder and turned to see Mr. Weasley. "Can we talk a minute?" the man asked.

"Of course," Harry replied and was lead outside by Ron's dad.

Once they were a few meters out of the door, Mr. Weasley stopped and looked concerned as he asked, "What can we do about Malfoy?"

Harry knew the man was serious because he rarely asked things this directly. Harry started to reply, but a movement near the kitchen door caught his eye and he saw a tall red-head watching the two men. Harry cast a spell that encased the two men in a fog and put a silencing charm around them before he answered, "Sirius is working on something and if it works out, it should be handled totally legally."

Mr. Weasley sighed, "That's good to hear. I'm really afraid Ron will do something if he doesn't see something happen. Actually, I can't blame him too much since it's all I can do to keep myself from going after Malfoy."

"Please sir, even if Sirius' plan doesn't work, let me deal with him. I promise that if this first thing falls through, Malfoy won't cause us any more problems."

Mr. Weasley looked at Harry very seriously and said, "If that happens, you know I'll do everything I can to keep any heat off of you."

"I know sir. I just know people would be disappointed if I resorted to dealing with things that way. Sirius feels confident about his plan, so hopefully it will be over before long."

"Can you tell me about it?" Mr. Weasley asked.

Harry sighed and told the man what the plan was. "Which is worse?" Mr. Weasley questioned.

"If we keep an eye on him, I think the son is worse. He's got a personal thing against me and anyone I care about. If we watch the father, we can deal with him later. There's just no good way to handle this," Harry said sadly.

"We'll have to watch him close. You know he won't stay out of things. Let's go back in," the Minister said.

Harry cancelled the spells and the two men walked back inside to find Percy still in the kitchen. "The Minister having secret meetings could cause people to wonder what he was up to," Percy said coldly.

Harry stepped up before Mr. Weasley could say anything and said, "You know your dad is like a father to me and I had a personal problem I wanted to discuss with him. It's kind of embarrassing so I didn't want anyone to hear."

Mr. Weasley looked angry but said, "No need to say anything else Harry. Come on you two; let's get back to the others." Mr. Weasley continued into the other room leaving Harry and Percy in the kitchen.

"What prompted your sudden interest in Ginny?" Percy asked.

Harry was trying really hard to remain calm. "It wasn't sudden. I finally woke up to how great she is."

"Maybe you'll officially be part of the family before long," the redhead stated.

"Maybe, but I doubt that would make any difference to the others, they treat me like that now."

"After all you've done for them, it's no wonder," Percy said with an evil look on his face.

Just then, Ginny walked in and said, "Is everything all right in here?" She was looking between the two.

"Of course, I was just telling Harry how happy I was for you two," Percy said giving Ginny a kiss on the cheek before returning to Penelope.

Ginny gave Harry a questioning look and asked, "Is that all?"

"Pretty much, it's no big deal. Let's get back in there," Harry said not having convinced Ginny that nothing else happened.

Percy left not long after this and everyone else stayed until late in the evening. Harry and Ginny left when Hermione did. Ginny went to Harry's that night and when the three were sitting around talking; Hermione got a serious look and said, "I missed having Christmas with you all so much."

"We missed having you," Ginny replied.

"Hey, that's all in the past, we'll have many Holidays together from now on," Harry stated.

Hermione went on to tell her friends how her Holidays had been for the past few years and again, they all agreed things were better now.

Over the week, Sirius started making plans to deal with their problem, and Harry agreed to give his godfather some time to make arrangements. Harry was able to convince Ron not to do anything and to give Harry a chance to handle Malfoy.

Late one evening, Harry had taken Ginny to a quiet, romantic Muggle restaurant when she finally decided to ask why he was being so quiet. "Just thinking about work. I'm sorry I'm being such bad company," Harry said.

"You're great company; I can just tell you're worried. Is it going to be dangerous?" Ginny said getting a very concerned look.

"You're too nice if you're calling me good company." Harry took her hand and kissed it softly.

Ginny smiled back but wouldn't let her question just go away. "Is it going to be dangerous?"

Harry looked at her thoughtfully and could tell she wouldn't drop it. In fact, he had been more comfortable talking about his work with her. "This time, it's not dangerous at all, but it is something I feel really uncomfortable with. It's almost like I have to make a deal with the devil."

Ginny was worried by Harry's expression. She could read him really well by now and could see when he was worried or angry, but this time he almost looked defeated already. This was a new expression for him and one she thought didn't fit him at all. "Is it something you have to do?"

"Oh yes. This has been going on too long and we'll all be better when it's over," Harry sighed. "Now, onto a much more pleasing subject. Have I told you how amazing you look tonight?"

Ginny could see his whole expression change and just loved it when he looked longingly at her. "I seem to remember you saying that a few times, but I won't get tired of hearing it."

Harry leaned over and gave her a quick kiss. "You do know Miss Weasley that I'm hopelessly in love with you and would really like for you to stay over."

"I do know that and never get tired of hearing it since I still can't believe how happy you make me." She got a sly smile and said, "And what would you do to convince me to stay?"

Harry took this challenge in stride and leaned in to whisper something in her ear. Ginny gave a small gasp and stared at Harry with wide-open eyes and instantly turned as red as her hair. "You'd do that?" Ginny asked sounding stunned.

Still looking unfazed, Harry smiled and said, "For you, of course. Does that mean you'll stay?"

"That means I want to leave here right now and see if you can really do that or not," Ginny said expectantly.

The couple left and went back to Ginny's and true to his word; Harry did things to Ginny that night that had her screaming in ecstasy over and over. Waking the next morning Ginny had such a fulfilled look and asked, "Where do you come up with these things?"

"I have a vivid imagination where pleasing you is concerned," Harry said kissing her and then added, "and you were pretty accommodating as well."

This caused Ginny to actually blush a bit, but she said, "It was pretty wicked, wasn't it?"

"It was great, that's all I know," Harry said before they got ready and each went to work.

Harry was in his office when an owl dropped a note to him asking him to immediately come to Dr. Antoine's office. There were no other details, so Harry apparated directly to her office. "What's up?" Harry asked and immediately found himself engulfed in a tight hug from Hermione.

Hermione let go, backed up and yelled, "We did it! We actually did it!"

Harry looked confused so Dr. Antoine said, "We found the counter potion. Dr. Granger provided the key."

"Really! That's amazing," Harry said giving Hermione a tight hug.

Hermione stepped back and said, "Without all the work Dr. Antoine did before I got here, I wouldn't have gotten the idea. She was actually very close."

Harry shook Dr. Antoine's hand and said, "The two of you are an amazing team. Now what do we do?"

Dr. Antoine said, "We send this to the Ministry of Health and also to your friends who should be able to come up with a counter charm before long now that we know the ingredients."

Dr. Antoine said, "I think this calls for a little celebration. I've always wanted to cruise the Greek Islands for a few days. How about that Dr. Granger?"

Hermione answered quickly, "I think that sounds perfect, the team would love it."

Dr. Antoine turned to Harry and said, "Can you stay out of trouble for a bit? There won't be anyone here if you need anything."

"I'll be a good boy, I promise," Harry said smiling. "Send the potion to Lupin and he'll get the people working out a counter charm." Harry left leaving the team to their private celebration in the offices.

Ginny was at Harry's when Hermione arrived later. Immediately, Ginny greeted Hermione. "Congratulations! Harry told me what you did," Ginny said hugging her friend.

"Thanks. Dr. Antoine is just great to work with. She's so smart and easy to get along with. And, the rest of the team is amazing," Hermione said happily.

"You mean she's easier to work with than I was?" Harry joked.

"Everybody there is really great," Hermione stated.

"Dr. Antoine mentioned that Steve has been flirting with you," Harry said raising his eyebrows.

Hermione actually blushed a bit and said, "Dr. Harlan is just being polite and trying to make sure I fit in." Hermione hesitated and then added, "But, he is cute."

"Hermione! So, are you going to go out with him?" Ginny asked.

"He hasn't officially asked or anything," Hermione replied.

"But, they're both going on a little celebration trip," Harry added.

"Maybe they'll be some *real* celebrating between them," Ginny said with a smirk.

"Get off it you two. Although it would be nice to have a real date. I mean going out with you two is nice and all, but it's not the same as being on a real date," Hermione said.

"He seems like a really good guy. I always said I never met anyone who was good enough for you, but Steve is a good guy. I couldn't complain," Harry said honestly to her.

"Oooh, he must be good if Harry likes him," Ginny said.

"Well, we'll see what happens," Hermione said.

"If you'd like to go out with him, let him know. You know how us guys are," Harry told her.

"Yes, I do know how you guys are. After everything that's happened, I may have to be a bit more aggressive," Hermione said.

"Aggressive is good," Ginny said laughing.

"Hermione, you don't realize how important finding the counter is. Now, that formula isn't very important since even Muggles would be able to counteract the effects of the drug. Once there is a counter spell, terrorists couldn't use it either. This is really big," Harry said looking proudly at his friend.

"It still seems weird we're not going to make any money off of it and not being able to tell anyone what we've done is strange, but it feels good to know we did something that will really help," she replied feeling proud.

The three friends talked well into the night before they all turned in.

Harry met Sirius the next day and the two decided on the plan to deal with their Malfoy problem. Sirius had provided Harry with an exact location to Apparate to. Harry wasn't nervous, but stayed at the office until late that night. Around midnight Harry Disapparated and appeared in a corner of a large dark room. Harry looked at the two sleeping figures in the bed and silently walked to the far side before casting a charm on the closest figure causing it to remain asleep no matter what happens.

Harry confidently walked to the foot of the bed and spoke loudly, "Wake up Lucius."

Chapter 16

The man opened his eyes, blinked a few times, grabbed a Muggle gun from the nightstand and started to fire. Harry quickly summoned the gun, dispatched it to the floor without touching it and said, "I'm not here to hurt you. In fact, I'm here to offer you a deal where I would help you."

Malfoy turned and saw his wife hadn't woken up. "What have you done to my wife?" the man demanded.

"She's charmed to stay asleep, nothing more," Harry said calmly. Harry threw a cloak at the man. "Put this on, I want to show you something."

"I'm not going anywhere with you. How did you get in here anyway? I've got the most advanced anti-apparation wards on this house," Malfoy said angrily.

"It doesn't matter how I got in, and you are going with me whether or not you put on the cloak, not get up," Harry said starting to get angry.

"You won't get out of here without someone seeing us," Malfoy said.

Harry quickly grabbed the man's arm and the two instantly appeared in a dark, damp dungeon. Malfoy was still trying to adjust to the new surroundings when Harry said, "We got out of the Manor without anyone seeing us."

"Where are we?" Malfoy demanded.

"An unused dungeon under Azkaban," Harry stated calmly and saw Malfoy's eyes get huge.

"Why are we here? You said you weren't going to hurt me," Malfoy said not quite so angrily now.

"I've actually brought you here to ask for your help," Harry said hating every word.

Malfoy's attitude picked up a bit when he said, "Interesting, I'm listening."

"I hate every second of this, but I'm giving you a chance to save your son. He has done some things to people I care about, that have nearly caused me to remove him from existence. But, I want to give you one chance to keep him around. I want you to give the authorities enough information to put Draco in here for at least twenty years," Harry said this last bit very forcefully.

"You want me to turn over my son? Are you crazy?" Malfoy spat back.

"You were going to turn him over to Voldemort," Harry replied.

"Is that the deal you wanted? If I don't get him sent here, you'll kill him?" Malfoy looked amazed.

"I wish it was that easy, but I don't think you'd go for that. I'm willing to give you your magic back in exchange for locking Draco up."

Malfoy was obviously thinking about this and finally said, "Let me get this straight. I give the authorities enough information to get him locked up and you'll make me magical again?"

"Specifically you have to get him locked up for at least twenty years and then I'll make you magical."

"What if any of the information could cause me," the man hesitated, choosing his words, "embarrassment?"

"I'm sure it will be ignored considering the benefit you would be providing to the wizarding community."

"When do I have to give you an answer?" Malfoy asked obviously interested.

"Before I return you to the Manor," Harry said flatly.

"This is a different side of you Potter. I agree to the terms, give me my magic," Malfoy said with a smirk.

Harry laughed and said, "After Draco is locked up here with at least a twenty year sentence, I'll do it."

"How do I know I can trust you?" Malfoy asked.

"I've always done what I said I'd do. There is no way I'll trust you with anything, but I will give you my word that as soon as he's here, I'll come back and make you magical. That's the deal," Harry said with finality.

"I hate having to trust you, but I agree to your terms. How long do I have?"

"You have one month, after that I handle things myself. Some of the dementors would be willing to do me a favor and keep Draco in this dungeon without anyone ever finding out," Harry said feeling ill he just made a deal with Lucius Malfoy.

"Agreed. Take me back to the Manor now," Malfoy said and Harry grabbed the man's arm and they appeared back in the bedroom.

"One month and if it hasn't happened, I'll use everything I can get my hands on to track him down and take care of this myself and you'll never be magical again," Harry said standing toe to toe with the man.

"I want my magic more than anything Potter. I mean anything. I'm not happy with the way Draco has been doing some things and think he is a bit out of control and to some extent, he deserves what he will get," Malfoy said in a tone that Harry actually believed.

"I'll cast the counter on your wife just before I leave. She will not know anything happened. One month," Harry said before casting the counter charm and apparating back to his office.

After some pacing and thinking, he apparated home around four in the morning and wasn't too surprised to see Ginny in his bed. Harry quietly got undressed and slipped into bed without waking her up. He still couldn't fall asleep and was still awake when Ginny woke up a couple hours later. "Morning beautiful," Harry said kissing her cheek.

"Harry! Where were you? I really wanted to see you last night," Ginny said kissing him deeply.

"Dealing with the devil. See, I told you it wasn't dangerous," Harry said stroking her head.

Ginny knew he was bothered by something, but didn't want to ask him about his work. Harry wasn't able to put his concern with dealing with Malfoy out of his mind, and spent a great deal of time at Marauders working. This bothered Ginny a bit since she hadn't seen him since the morning he came to find her in his bed. She finally convinced him to come over to her house one evening and the two were watching TV when Hermione popped in very excited, "There you two are!"

Ginny and Harry turned to each other and started laughing. "What's so funny?" Hermione asked.

Ginny composed herself and said, "We were just saying that Ron has finally learned his lesson about popping over here after he stumbled on us last week, and now we have to worry about you!"

"Oh, whatever. This trip was amazing!" Hermione said and then launched into telling her friends all about the trip.

Both Harry and Ginny quickly caught that every few sentences had something about Dr. Harlan and after Hermione finally wore herself out talking Ginny turned to Harry and asked, "Did we hear more about the trip or more about Dr. Harlan?"

Harry looked at Ginny seriously and said, "You know I'm not sure. I don't seem to recall her mentioning too many details about the islands, but a whole lot about Steve."

"Oh sush you two! The islands were great and I did too say a lot about them," Hermione blushed when she saw her two friends looking at her with smiles. "But, Dr. Harlan officially asked me out as well."

"Ah, the real reason our Hermione is glowing so much," Harry added and was quickly hit by a cushion from the couch, thrown by Hermione.

"I'm so anxious to get back to the office. Dr. Antoine and Dr. Harlan had some excellent ideas on the original potion we were working on, the one to help people with mental problems," Hermione said excitedly.

Ginny laughed and said, "So, you couldn't wait for your trip to be over so you could go back to work. You need to re-evaluate your priorities."

"Does this mean that you're going to stick around for a while? I expected you to go back into the big corporate world again," Harry asked.

Hermione kind of smiled and said, "I'm thinking about sticking around for a while. That is if I'm no bother to you guys."

"No bother at all," Ginny said. Ginny really wanted Harry to herself tonight but wanted to be polite so she asked, "Want to stay and watch some TV with us?"

Hermione blushed again and said, "Um... I can't. I'm meeting Dr. Harlan for supper. I just wanted to tell you guys how great the trip was."

"If you bring him back to the castle, you don't have to worry about Harry walking in on you. I intend to keep him here tonight," Ginny joked to her friend.

"Ginny! I haven't known him that long," Hermione exclaimed but then added, "But just in case, that's good to know." Harry and Ginny saw the smile come across Hermione's face just before she disappeared.

Joking with Hermione got Harry's mind off of Malfoy and Ginny sensed his improved mood and used it to her advantage. "So now you have to stay here," Ginny said kissing Harry's neck.

"Hmmm...What would you ever have in mind?" Harry asked clearly enjoying the kisses.

It seemed Harry wanted this as much as Ginny did because the two were soon naked on the floor in front of her couch. As often happened, their lovemaking had become quite physical and when they were both exhausted and lying on top of each other, Ginny joked, "I think you owe me a new end table."

Harry looked at the broken legs on the table and replied, "I believe it was your idea for us to get up on it." He kissed her and then added, "Next time we get a metal one."

The night and next morning had been great and Harry hadn't thought of his problems at all, but once back into the routine of spending time alone or at Marauders, his concerns quickly came back.

A few weeks after the meeting with Lucius, Harry was flying, trying to think about what to do in case Lucius didn't come through on his part of the bargain. As much as Harry hated the thought of giving the man his magic back, he really didn't want to take matters with Draco into his own hands. One such morning, he had been flying when looking down, he noticed Sirius flailing his arms outside of his back door. Harry quickly flew to the ground and heard Sirius shouting, "He did it! They got him!"

Sirius stuck the Daily Prophet in front of Harry

Wizard/Muggle Crime Ring Busted

The crime ring that has been linked to many of the world wide smuggling operations that have terrorized Wizards and Muggles alike was dealt a major blow last night when a meeting between the top leaders was raided. The raid resulted in the arrest of five Wizards and seven Muggles from all around the world. The biggest surprise was that Draco Malfoy, Hogwarts graduate and heir to the Malfoy fortune was apparently the leader of the ring.

A top source within the Ministry was quoted as saying, "We always thought he was involved, but never could find proof. Thanks to someone close to Draco, we now have more than enough proof to send him to Azkaban for a long time. Also, many of the other people arrested have offered to give more information about Draco in exchange for lenient sentences. Currently, we should be able to lock him up for at least fifty years."

Now, sources within the Ministry have positively identified the person who turned over the information that tied Draco to many of the criminal acts. None other than Lucius Malfoy, Draco's father supplied the information. When Lucius was tracked down, his only comment was, "As much as it pains me to see my son arrested, I had to do what was in the best interest of the wizarding community which is where my sole loyalties lie."

We have learned that Lucius will be receiving a commendation from the Ministry for outstanding service to the community. Our community should look to him as an example of someone sacrificing personally for the benefit of the community.

Harry actually felt ill reading this. "A commendation! What have we done?"

Sirius put his hand on Harry's shoulder and said, "At least Draco will be put away. We didn't really have a choice."

"I'm not sure that in ten years we'll be so pleased with our choice," Harry said sitting on the ground still upset.

"The Ministry is rushing the trial and hope to start it next week," Sirius said clearly happy.

"Ron should be home from Quidditch practice before long, I should go over there to see how he handles the news," Harry said.

"Why wouldn't he take it well?" Sirius asked confused.

"Comments he's made recently have me worried. I'm afraid he'll be upset that he couldn't do anything to Draco personally. You know how Ron is."

"But Draco will get what's coming to him, surely Ron will let it go at that."

"Remember how you were when Wormtail made that deal? Even though it got you freed, you stormed around for months upset that you couldn't kill him with your bare hands."

Sirius thought for a minute and then said, "It still bothers me. If I ever see him, he'll regret it."

"That's what I mean. Ron has a temper at least as bad as yours and I think it's really going to bother him that he won't be able to confront Draco."

Harry apparated to Ron's backyard and Parvati let him in to wait. "Isn't that great about Draco being caught?" Parvati asked, clearly happy.

Harry tried to hide any regrets he had and said, "Definitely. I still say he won't be getting what he deserves, but hopefully he'll be locked up for a long time."

"I know I feel so much better now that he's locked up," Parvati added.

The two sat around talking for about another hour when they heard Ron apparate home. "Hey mate, what brings you here?"

"Just bringing some good news. The ferret was arrested last night and they have enough info to lock him up for a long time," Harry said watching his friend for any reaction.

At first Ron's eyes lit up like he just had Christmas. Ron grabbed the Daily Prophet and read the article, still looking very happy. "Lucius turned his own son in! Why would he do that?"

Harry didn't want to tell anyone what he had done yet so he just said, "I say he wanted to increase his standing in the Ministry."

"But how could he do anything with the Ministry, he's not magical?" Ron asked confused and continued to look at Harry. After a moment, Ron asked, "You said that you and Sirius were doing something to get Draco. It's too much of a coincidence that Lucius all of a sudden turns Draco over, just when you two are trying to get him. What did you two do?"

Harry sighed and said, "Nobody knows this other than Sirius, but we dealt with Lucius. If Draco gets put away for at least twenty years, I'll get Lucius his magic back." Harry hung his head.

"What!" Ron roared. "You're going to give the top Death Eater his magic back? Are you mental?"

"Sirius and I talked about it Ron. Malfoy was the one who had a personal thing against all of us. He was more dangerous than his dad. We didn't have another choice."

"Yes you did! You could have brought him to me and let me pummel the little slug," Ron said still angry.

"Then you would have gotten arrested!" Parvati exclaimed. "I don't want you to be put away because of Draco."

Ron looked between the two of them and finally said, "What are you going to do about Lucius now?"

"Your dad and Sirius will try to watch him closely. I told him that if we caught him doing anything evil, we'd come after him."

"I don't like this at all. You should have let me have a chance at Draco," Ron said sounding really sad.

"It'll be better this way. Lucius was always concerned with himself, and Draco was obsessed with getting to us, so it'll be better," Harry said trying to convince himself this was true.

"When's the trial? I want to go watch him squirm," Ron added.

"Within a couple weeks, but none of us can go," Harry said this and saw Ron's face sink.

"This can't look like any of us were involved. This has to be totally Lucius turning his Draco over to the authorities."

"So, I don't even get to see him sentenced! Bloody great," Ron said before storming into the back yard.

"Well, that didn't go well," Harry said to Parvati.

"I'll talk to him more later. He told me not to tell you, but he's been having nightmares about the kidnapping. It's bothering him more than Ruth or me," Parvati said with concern in her voice.

"Makes sense actually. You know how us guys are, if we can't protect you from everything, we blame ourselves. I'm actually glad he was the one to get you guys out. I hate to see how he would have been if he wouldn't have been involved." Harry said and then was silent for a minute. "Tell him to come over if he wants to talk more, I'm going to go to the office for a while," Harry said kissing Parvati on the cheek and then disappearing.

Harry had seen Ron nearly every day before the trial, trying to get his friend to realize this was the best they could hope for in dealing with Draco. Ron did understand this, but it didn't help his attitude much. He still felt cheated by not being able to even talk to Malfoy.

The day the trial started, Harry, Ron, the twins and some other friends got together and tried taking their mind off of the proceedings by playing Quidditch at the Burrow. They really weren't keeping score and just trying to pass the time. It was actually working pretty well since the antics of the twins could cause almost anyone to forget their worries for a little bit. It was late that afternoon when the Minister of Magic came out to the boys. Ron was the first to see his father arrive.

"So, how did it go? Is it over?" Ron asked expectantly.

Mr. Weasley got a strained look and said, "It's going to last another day. He keeps insisting that he wasn't the one calling the shots."

"What! They're not falling for that are they?" Ron exclaimed.

"It won't keep him out of Azkaban, but he's got everyone wondering," Mr. Weasley admitted.

Ron turned, grabbed Harry by the arm and walked off so the others couldn't hear and said "If he gets out of this, he's mine."

Harry could tell by the look in his friend's eyes that Ron meant every word. He tried to sound confident when he said, "He won't get out of it."

Ron wanted to go home and left quickly, so Harry went home as well. Ginny was there waiting when he arrived. "Hey, I didn't know you were coming over. I would have left earlier."

Ginny gave him a big kiss and said, "That's ok, I know Ron needs the company right now. Was there any news?"

"It looks like the trial will last another day, but that's it. Ron just wants it over."

Ginny kissed his neck and said, "How about I try to take your mind off of it for a few hours?" Ginny had the naughty look in her eyes that Harry loved so much.

"I don't know when Hermione will be back," Harry said trying to keep his willpower.

Ginny smiled broadly and said, "I do." She paused and could tell Harry wanted to know so she continued, "She's staying with Dr. Harlan."

Harry's eyes got big. "Really? That's great. He seems to make her really happy."

"Well, we'll see how happy he really makes her after tonight," Ginny joked. "But, that leaves us free to do whatever we want."

The two quickly went up to the bedroom where Ginny quickly took control of things and directed Harry as he brought her pleasure over and over before joining her into a final, vocal acknowledgement of their pleasure.

After recovering a bit, Harry kind of chuckled.

"What's so funny?" Ginny asked.

"Just how much you've changed. For the first few years you knew me you could barely say two words to me and now you're giving me very explicit instructions on what you want me to do," said Harry kissing her forehead.

"God I was so stupid back then. I couldn't even walk straight when you were around," she said, shaking her head.

"Oh, I see and now it's no big deal to be around me," Harry said trying to sound offended.

"It's still a big deal, but I know that you won't think badly of me. I don't see any reason to hold anything back around you."

"Thanks. That really means a lot to me. I couldn't imagine you ever doing anything that would make me think less of you."

"I'll keep that in mind," she said and then looked thoughtful. "So, tell me one of your fantasies. Maybe we can make it happen." Ginny reached down and began stroking Harry.

Harry thought for a second and then said, "Well, since you put it like that, I think I've got one." He was already aroused and pulled Ginny on top of him.

Ginny gave a deep moan as Harry entered her, but she got a confused look and said, "But we do it like this all the time."

"Not exactly, hold on," Harry said with a sly smile and then Ginny felt them rising

She felt Harry sink even deeper into her as both of their bodies started rising off the bed. The full force of her weight pressed her down onto him as she wrapped her legs around his body and gripped his shoulders. "What are you doing!" she exclaimed.

Harry didn't answer until they were at least three meters off the bed, suspended in mid-air. "I always wanted to see if this would work," he said smiling and then moved his hips and continued, "and I'd say it has real potential."

Ginny's eyes were big as she sat straight up, trying to keep her balance and clearly enjoying the feeling of the pressure of riding Harry with nothing to rest her legs on. Slowly, she started grinding her hips back and forth looking into Harry's face and getting even more excited at the slight sense of fear seeing how high they were in the air.

Within a few minutes, they were both near the edge, the combination of the newness of this sensation and the slight fear factor adding to the pleasure. Harry was firmly gripping Ginny's hips and helping her to move with even more force. Harry knew he wouldn't last much longer and was just about to tell this to Ginny when he heard her cry out his name and say she was there. When his release finally did come, he lost concentration and the two suddenly dropped. Ginny gave a sharp scream and Harry was quickly able to recover and stop their descent just before they would have landed on the hard floor of the bedroom.

Concentrating hard, he directed them up and back onto the bed before saying, "Sorry about that, it just felt so great that I forgot what I was doing."

"It would still have been worth it," Ginny said with a sly smile. "Besides the sudden stop actually felt pretty good." She kissed him deeply and said, "I hope you've got a few more fantasies we can try sometime."

Harry got a really naughty look and said, "Definitely, but next time is one of yours."

"Hmmm....I'll have to give that some thought," she added while the two lay there lightly stroking each other and falling asleep.

The next morning during breakfast, Harry asked, "Want to come hang out with us today?"

Ginny got a sad look and said, "I can't. You know I've got those two dresses to finish before the fashion show. I really want to do good there."

"I'm sure you'll do great. Who's modeling them for you?" Harry asked.

"You're ex, Kristi. That fashion editor mentioned that my drawings looked like they would be worn by a very confident woman and I thought Kristi fit well. She seemed really excited about doing it as well," Ginny said clearly happy.

"Better than one of those dainty models, that's for sure. I'm sure you'll do well.

"I hope so. So, I'll see you this weekend, I'm cooking remember," she said kissing him goodbye.

Harry left for the Burrow early in the afternoon so they could again pass the time playing Quidditch. The twins weren't able to keep Ron's mind off of the trial as well today, so time seemed to drag by. Finally, Mr. Weasley and Sirius showed up late afternoon and were quickly besieged by Ron asking questions.

"Is it over? What did he get?"

"He got fifty years," Mr. Weasley said.

"Fifty years! That's great," Ron exclaimed.

Harry could see something in Sirius' expression so he asked, "But, something else happened didn't it?"

This brought Ron out of his excited mood. Sirius gave a sigh and said, "He made a deal. He gave the names of some important Muggles that were involved and they reduced his sentence."

Chapter 17

"Reduced it to what?" Ron asked angrily.

"Twenty-five years," Mr. Weasley told his son.

"They cut it in half just for some Muggles!" Ron exclaimed. "He's getting off way too easy. He'll only be in his forties when he gets out. He'll have over half his life yet."

Harry actually sighed in relief. He had expected Sirius to say that Draco wasn't going to get much time at all. Now Harry had to keep his part of the bargain and go see Lucius Malfoy.

Hearing Ron complain brought him out of his thoughts. "Harry, can you believe that's all he got? Now do you think it was worth it?"

"Ron!" Mr. Weasley exclaimed, causing the twins to look between the two, clearly realizing they were being left out of something.

"It's just like a Malfoy to come out like this. After everything he's done, he gets half his sentence dropped for giving up a few Muggles. I can't stand this," Ron bellowed and left.

"Let's go to the office, there's some things I want to go over with you," Sirius said and Harry could tell he really wanted to talk. The two said their goodbyes and left.

"He got over twenty years, so I suppose we've got to keep our part," Sirius said sounding very unhappy.

"I guess I'll pay him a visit tonight. Ron's not taking this well," Harry added.

"He'll have to get over it. They're taking Draco straight to Azkaban. Make sure the old man knows we'll be watching and the consequences if he does something bad," Sirius said.

"Oh, I will. You know, I understand how Ron feels. Part of me is all twisted up knowing I can't take anything out personally on Draco."

"Believe me, I understand. I just think this is the best we can get right now. It will be good to have some quiet time for a while," Sirius said patting Harry on the shoulder. The two went out for a meal and then to a small Muggle pub to shoot billiards until around one in the morning.

"Well, I guess it's time," Harry said.

"Just give him back a little," Sirius added.

The two walked out of the pub and when they were alone in a dark alley, they both disappeared. Harry appeared in the corner of a dark room and was greeted with, "I still don't know how you get in here, but right now I don't care. Give me my magic."

"What about your wife?" Harry said seeing the woman lying in bed.

"She won't wake up. Muggle sleeping pills. As much as I hate Muggles, I've been forced to use some of their items over the past years. That will change as soon as you hold up your end of the bargain," Malfoy spat.

"You know that we'll be watching you closely," Harry said approaching the older man.

"I intend to be a model citizen. I've already been given some job offers, what with the commendation and everything," Malfoy said with a smug look on his face.

Harry felt his anger rise, "I'd like nothing more than to tell everyone the real reason you turned him in. If we find out you're behind any disturbances, all bets are off and we'll come for you."

"Are you going to talk all night or keep your end of the bargain?" the old wizard taunted.

Harry quickly said a spell that sent the wizard crashing into the wall and watched as he fell, seated to the ground. Harry bound him there with his arm straight out and sat down next to the wizard. Harry pulled up the sleeve on Malfoy's robe and saw the dark tattoo like mark on the man's arm. He lay his wand across the mark and onto his own arm and begin saying the spell that he had only used once before. This time, he kept close watch on the mark and the instant it became invisible, he stopped the spell, not wanting to give the man any more magic than was absolutely necessary.

Harry stood up and said the spells to release Lucius and to revive him.

Malfoy blinked a few times and pushed himself up, rubbing the back of his head. "Well? Is it over?"

Harry nodded and saw Malfoy pull up his sleeve and see that all traces of the dark mark were gone. He instantly got a broad smile and reached into the dresser drawer and pulled out a wand. The man said, "Lumos" and instantly a bright light filled the room. He cancelled the spell and turned to Harry. "I expected you to find some way out of the deal."

"If I could have thought of one, I would have. I'm warning you, it's not going to take much for me to come after you and as you've seen, I can get to you anytime and there's nothing you can do."

Malfoy laughed. "Why would I do anything? I plan on being an upstanding Ministry Official before long."

Hearing this nearly made Harry feel ill and he quickly disappeared, still hearing Malfoy laughing.

Hermione questioned Harry the next morning. "Where were you last night? I thought you would have wanted to talk about Draco's sentence."

"Had to take care of some business. What do you think about it? Ron's upset that he dealt down to twenty-five years," Harry replied.

"I know, I saw Ron yesterday. He'd had a bit to drink and seemed to be a bit annoyed at you," Hermione said not understanding why Ron would be upset with Harry.

"He's just upset that he couldn't get his hands on Draco and hoped I could help him out. I would have liked him to get fifty years, but twenty-five is better than nothing. If he's still sane when he gets out, maybe he'll be changed."

"I just thought you both would have been much happier, I think this is great."

"You're just happy with everything right now. I mean I rarely see you anymore since you're always with Dr. Harlan."

Hermione blushed and said, "He's pretty great. I'm just amazed everything has worked out so well."

"For once I can say 'I told you so,'" Harry said. "When you first came here, you were so worried that everything would be horrible and I told you it would all be ok. Mark this down, the only time I've ever been right."

Harry went to Ginny's Saturday for the meal she promised. She had been so busy with her design business that the two hadn't spent as much time together as normal and they were both anxious for some quiet time together.

Ginny had fixed a nice light meal for the two of them which they ate with Ginny describing everything that had been happening at her office. Harry had been content to just let her talk about her work and was very proud of all she had accomplished. He also had other things on his mind, and listening to her helped drive some of them back a little.

The two were sharing ice cream from a single large bowl when Ginny realized Harry had been quiet. "Have I been talking the entire night?" she asked, seeming embarrassed.

"It's been great hearing everything you're doing. I told you the Weasley's were all gifted. Every one of you has done great when you put your mind to it," Harry replied.

"It is a big change from when you first met us all those years ago," Ginny said sighing. After noticing that Harry was still quiet she asked, "Is something on your mind? You're being awful quiet."

Harry looked at her for a bit, causing Ginny to feel a bit uncomfortable. "I did want to talk to you about something," he added softly.

Ginny tried to read his face, but couldn't tell anything. "Ok, you can tell me anything."

"How do you think things have been going with us? We started off going pretty fast," Harry said a little quicker than he intended.

Ginny was a bit taken aback since this isn't what she would have expected. "I think they're going great. I told you we shouldn't worry about going too fast and just do what felt right."

Harry nodded and said, "That's kind of what I wanted to talk about." Harry took her hands causing Ginny to start thinking the worst. "I think we jumped into this really quickly and basically didn't slow down." Harry breathed deeply a few times causing Ginny to worry even more. "I want to talk to you about making a change," Harry finally got out.

Ginny tried to hold back any feelings when she said, "Harry, I think things are going great. It hasn't been too fast for me."

"I hope you still think that after this," Harry said dropping down on one knee. Ginny's mind was racing when Harry looked deep into her eyes and clearly said, "I love you very much Ginny Weasley and want to know if you would please marry me?"

Ginny could see the doubt in Harry's eyes and just this small fact made her love him even more. He truly wasn't sure that she would say yes. Ginny was sure of course and quickly pulled Harry into a tight hug and said, "Yes! Of course I'll marry you!"

Harry finally let out a large breath he had been subconsciously holding and said, "Whew! Well I guess this is for you then." Harry produced a small box that he slowly opened revealing a dainty gold band with a very large round diamond in the center. The diamond seemed to glow with a slightly bluish tint.

"Oh my gosh! This is amazing! I can't believe how big it is," she said as Harry slid the ring onto her finger.

"Remus figured out a charm for me to put on it. You know how the message spell works, right?" Ginny nodded. "Well, it won't travel very far, so your ring is charmed so that I can use the message spell no matter how far apart we are. That way if I'm ever really far away, I can still make you know how much I love you," Harry said and was immediately engulfed by a tight hug from Ginny.

Ginny had tears streaming down her cheek when she said, "Are you sure this is what you want? I just can't understand why you want to be with me." She buried her head in his shoulder again.

"I love you Gin! I think we're perfect together and couldn't imagine being happier. Don't ever think that I wouldn't want to be with you, you're all I ever want."

She pulled back shaking her head and staring at her new ring. "When do you want to do it?"

"I want to do it a little later tonight," Harry said and after he saw the look on Ginny's eyes he added, "Oh, you meant the wedding." Ginny quickly hit him, so he continued, "We can have the wedding whenever you want. I'm ready today, tomorrow, next month or next year if you want to wait."

"I don't want to wait!" Ginny exclaimed and then thought for a second. "How about in three months? That will give mum and I enough time to arrange things."

"Three months is fine. I would suggest hiring a wedding coordinator, but I doubt your mom would go along with it. I want you to have the wedding you want, anything you want is ok with me."

"Really? You won't care what I do?"

"I trust you and as long as it makes you happy, it's what I want. Actually, I have a couple requests. I'd like to wear black and I'd like the groomsmen to wear dragon-hide boots."

Ginny laughed and said, "No problem, I wouldn't have it any other way." Ginny kissed him deeply, produced a sly smile and said, "You know, I've never made love to my fiancé before."

"Humm.. Maybe you'll let your inhibitions down a little," Harry said nibbling on her ear.

Harry started to get up but Ginny pushed him back onto the couch, smiled and stepped back. She then proceeded to do a slow, sensuous strip-tease as she had a few times before. This time when she finally got completely naked, instead of the light touches she usually applied to her own body, she really let her fingers work around and into her most private areas. She tried to keep her eyes locked into Harry's but as her own touches were pushing her further and further into her pleasure, she couldn't help but to occasionally close them and moan loudly.

Each time she re-opened her eyes, she saw the look of desire on Harry's face and this just gave her the confidence to continue. It didn't take much longer before she felt the tingling of her ecstasy begin and she closed her eyes and started to rub herself very firmly. Just when she was about to peak, she was shocked to feel something different and looked down to see the top of Harry's head as he had just locked his lips to where her fingers were already working hard. This was much more than she could handle and she had to hang onto the back of a chair to keep from falling as her body convulsed with waves of pleasure.

When he felt her settle down a bit, Harry kissed up her body, swiftly picked her up and on the way to the bedroom said, "God you're amazing."

Ginny kissed him deeply as he gently lay her on the bed before undressing and joining her. Harry made love to her and brought her to pleasure over and over that night before the two collapsed into a very peaceful sleep still tangled together.

In the morning Harry smiled at her and asked, "Are you going to lose any more inhibitions once we're married? I'm anxious to see what you come up with next."

Ginny blushed a little but said, "I think I can come up with a bit more."

The two got cleaned up and went to the Burrow to tell Mr. & Mrs. Weasley. Harry was really less worried about this than he was about telling them he originally wanted to date Ginny. Both of her parents were very happy for them and Harry had to start avoiding walking too closely to Mrs. Weasley because any time he got close she would pull him into a very tight motherly hug.

Mrs. Weasley wanted to throw them an engagement party and Ginny agreed that next Saturday would work well. Ginny wasn't going to be able to help much during the week due to work at her office, but Mrs. Weasley wanted to do everything herself anyway. After many hours with the parents, Ginny and Harry went to the castle and found Hermione there.

Instantly Ginny ran to her friend and stuck out her ring, "I'm getting married!" Ginny exclaimed as Hermione stared at the ring.

Hermione seemed awestruck and after hugging Ginny, exclaimed, "I'm so happy for you two! When is it going to be?"

"Three months!" Ginny said happily, "Assuming I can actually wait that long."

"I'm actually surprised he didn't drag you off and elope," Hermione said with a smile toward Harry.

"I would have went!" Ginny exclaimed. "But, it will be nice having a real wedding."

"Your parents would have skinned me if I didn't give you a real wedding," Harry added.

"I couldn't be happier," Hermione said and then added. "Actually, this will make my news easier." Ginny and Harry looked at her intently. "I'm going to find a place of my own."

"You don't have to do that," Harry said honestly and Ginny agreed.

"I was thinking about it anyway. Things are getting a bit more serious with Dr. Harlan and I want to try things on my own again," Hermione said looking slightly sad.

"I understand, but you know that even after we're married, you'll always be welcome here," Harry said.

"Here? What makes you think we'll be living here?" Ginny asked and Harry couldn't tell if she was serious.

"I'm sorry Gin, I never meant to just decide..."

Harry was cut off by Ginny smiling and saying, "Of course we'll live here Harry!" She kissed him and then got a strange look on her face.

"Hermione! Why don't you take my place? It's already got some security and you can live there as long as you want. Who knows, maybe you'll go straight from there to Dr. Harlan's place."

Hermione kind of blushed but said, "You'd let me live there? You know that sounds like a great idea. I can stay here until you two get married."

Now Ginny blushed and said, "Ummm... I was actually hoping to use that as an excuse and just move in here soon. That is if it's ok with Harry."

"Of course it's ok with me, I'm just worried what your parents would say," Harry added.

Ginny smiled and said, "They know we're together most of the time anyway, and giving them the extra reason of Hermione wanting to move out and take my place will help. Don't worry, I'll tell them by myself."

The three friends sat around talking about plans for the rest of the night before all turning in for the night.

The next day, Ron came over looking particularly serious. "Is anybody else around?" Ron quickly asked.

"No, it's just us. What's up?"

Ron started pacing, but finally sat down, looked at his feet and said, "I can't deal with this Malfoy thing."

Harry kind of assumed this is what was bothering his friend. "He's gone for twenty-five years, that's not bad."

Ron sighed and said, "I don't think it would have mattered if he had got the full fifty. I didn't even get to yell at him! He took my wife and daughter and I can't do anything."

"What do you want to do to him? Locked up with the dementors is pretty bad."

"Harry, I know you've done a lot for me. You've done more than I could ever repay and I appreciate that." Ron hesitated and then continued, "If there is any way you can give me a few minutes alone with him, I'll never ask for another thing. And, if you weren't dating my sister, I'd set you up with twins." Harry appreciated Ron still trying to make a small joke.

"What would you do if you had time alone with him?" Harry asked.

"I'd pummel him! I just want to hurt him so bad."

"Would you promise to not kill him?" Harry asked seriously.

Ron suddenly became very attentive. "Really? You'll help me?"

"Not unless you give me your word that you won't kill him. You have to make sure he can heal."

"I can do that. As much as I want to stomp him into the ground, I can control myself. Do you really think you can do this?"

"The dementors still owe me a favor or two, maybe I can get you a few minutes with him."

"I'll owe you big time! Anything you want," Ron offered.

"Ok, be my best man when I marry your sister," Harry said calmly.

"What? Are you seriously thinking about that?"

"I hope so, I asked her yesterday," Harry said smiling.

Ron gave him a brotherly hug and said, "As much as I don't understand it, I can tell you're really happy so that's all that matters. I couldn't be happier for you two, and I know it's a dream come true for her."

"One other thing," Harry said seriously, "no one can know about the thing with Malfoy. This is between you and me." Harry thought and then added, "Well maybe Sirius, I probably need his help to set this up."

The two friends sat around talking for a while with Ron clearly in a better mood. When Ron left, Harry went to the office and tried to recruit Sirius to help Ron out. Surprisingly, Sirius didn't have as many reservations about this as Harry did and was anxious to help.

Sirius arranged things to happen during the normal Thursday night boy's night out and accompanied Harry to the pub where they met Ron. "The dementors don't trust you to control yourself, so they will be watching to make sure neither of you kill the other one. Don't do anything to piss them off," Sirius said firmly.

Harry apparated Ron to a dimly lit, damp dungeon. "We're under Azkaban," Harry said. Ron looked nervous. "You do understand that he could get the upper hand."

Ron stared straight at Harry and said, "There's no way that will happen. I want this more than I've wanted anything, ever."

"Ok, when he gets here, I leave and will be back in exactly thirty minutes. Don't kill him! When I come back, I'll be outside. I don't want to see him," Harry said.

Just then the two heard sounds from outside the door. "What do you think you're doing? Where are you taking me?"

Just then the door opened and a pale white-haired man stumbled in with a half-shocked, half-terrified look on his face.

"Hello Malfoy," Harry said coldly.

"Potter!" Draco's eyes were looking for a way out. "This isn't like you, stacking the odds in your favor."

"This isn't Harry's business, it's mine!" Ron yelled with fire in his eyes.

"You know the deal Ron," Harry said before apparating back to the pub.

"Did he crap his pants?" Sirius asked with a gleam in his eyes.

"He didn't look happy," Harry said without enjoyment. "C'mon, let's get a private booth so Ron isn't seen when he comes back."

The two asked Tom for a private parlor and took their drinks to the room. "We can't let anyone see Ron if Malfoy gets the best of him," Harry added. The two men sat around talking with Harry glancing at his watch ever couple of minutes. Finally it had been almost exactly thirty minutes. "I should go get him. I hope they're both still alive."

Harry apparated outside of the dungeon and immediately came face-to-face with two dementors guarding the door. "<Anything unusual?>" Harry thought, communicating with the dementor.

"<Your friend had to be warned a couple times, nothing else.>" One of the dementors replied and then opened the door and stepped into the dungeon.

Harry immediately heard heavy breathing and after a moment, saw Ron stumbling out, clutching his side. Harry was immediately worried, but Ron looked up with one of the brightest smiles Harry could remember seeing and said, "That was the best thing ever!" Ron quickly coughed after saying this.

"You look like hell! Who won?" Harry asked going to his friend.

Ron strained and smiled brightly again and said, "Oh, I won! I spent the last ten minutes just kicking him around the room."

"Tell me where you hurt and I'll see if I can heal you. I can heal the cuts as well," Harry offered.

"Not this one!" Ron exclaimed pointing to a large gash near his left eye. "The slime ball hit me while we were still talking. I want to remember exactly the kind of person he was."

"Fine, but it will need cleaned. Let me take care of the others and your ribs. Sirius is waiting to buy you a drink."

Ron stood there and winced a few times as Harry healed all the smaller cuts and bruises. Harry cleaned the gash over Ron's eyebrow as best he could but knew there would be a scar. "What are you going to tell Parvati about that?"

Ron just smiled and said, "Bludger to the head and the medi-witch wasn't around."

After about ten minutes of work, the two were ready to return when Harry turned to the dementor and thought, "<What about Malfoy? Will he be healed?>"

"<He has twenty-five years to heal.>" Was all the dementor said before gliding into the room where Draco was.

Harry apparated with Ron back to the private booth where Sirius was waiting. "Is that all he got out of the fight?" Sirius asked pointing to the cut near Ron's eye.

"It's the only one he wouldn't let me heal," Harry said rolling his eyes.

"Now have you got that out of your system?" Sirius asked.

"It'll have to do. I really would have killed him and not felt bad about it at all," Ron said without emotion and it kind of bothered Harry that he knew Ron wasn't lying.

"It may not have bothered you right now, but it would have in the future," Sirius added. "C'mon let me buy you a drink and you can tell us everything that happened."

Sirius ended up buying many drinks that night and he and Harry were both relieved that Ron seemed to be satisfied with his encounter with Draco and could put that chapter of his life behind him. The three stayed out until very late before stumbling back to their respective homes.

Mrs. Weasley had arranged a large engagement party for Ginny and Harry. She had invited many of their friends from school as well as friends of her and the Minister of Magic. She was obviously very excited about her only daughter getting married. When Harry arrived, there were already many people and much activity going on.

"Harry!" Ginny exclaimed when she saw him. Harry's eyes were still big looking at all the decorations around the lawn at the Burrow. There were many tables with food and drinks, and fresh flowers everywhere. "Isn't this amazing!" Ginny added.

"You're mom did all of this?" Harry asked stunned.

"She wanted to do more, but I made her stop," Ginny replied.

Harry looked worried and asked, "How did she take the news about you moving in?"

Ginny chuckled and said, "Well differently than I expected. She said she understood and all of that, but she also said that she's still going to send me any owl's to my place until after we're married and she's not going to tell anyone until we're married as well."

"So, she's pretending that you're still living at your place, but spending every night at mine?"

"Something like that, you know she's so old fashioned. But, you can help me move my stuff over tomorrow, that's all I care about."

Harry heard a familiar voice calling his name and turned to see Katie Bell, "Ready for your pictures?"

Harry greeted her and then asked confused, "Who said anything about pictures?"

Mrs. Weasley had just come over and said, "Harry! It's your engagement, there *has* to be pictures."

Ginny grabbed his hand and said, "C'mon we'll get this part over with and then you can have fun."

The two followed Katie down by the lake where another set of decorations had been setup specifically for photographs. Katie spent almost an hour taking pictures in various poses. Quite a few had been taken with Mr. & Mrs. Weasley in them as well. When Ginny was alone in the pictures with her parents, it made Harry feel good to see how happy they all were. He flashed back and thanked the stars that he was lucky enough to meet Ron on the train that first day.

When Katie was done with the private pictures, Ginny leaned into Harry and whispered, "I talked to her about coming over and doing some *special* pictures of us together." She raised her eyebrow at Harry.

Harry's eyes got huge and he said, "You did not!"

Ginny nodded to confirm that she indeed had, and added, "She's already seen you naked, so it's not a big deal. And, I don't intend for them to be on Witches Weekly or anything, they'll just be for us."

Harry shook his head and said, "I don't know what's gotten into you Miss Weasley."

Ginny kissed him and said, "You better get used to calling me Mrs. Potter because in less than three months, that's what I'll be."

Harry kissed her deeply and said, "We should have just ran off so I could call you that now."

The two were still in a deep kiss when they heard, "That's still a disturbing sight," coming from Ron who was standing with Parvati watching the couple.

The party was grand and Harry thought it was really enjoyable seeing so many people that he hadn't in quite some time. Mrs. Weasley had done an amazing job with the party and Harry could tell she was extremely proud of her daughter.

Late that afternoon, when the engagement party was winding down, Ron, Parvati, Ginny, Harry and Hermione were sitting outside of the Burrow relishing in how good things were at the time. "If we would have just won the Cup, I couldn't imagine things any better," Ron said with a large smile.

"You know, I agree. I can't believe how much things have changed since last year," Hermione added.

"I can't believe I'm going to be Mrs. Harry Potter!" Ginny said happily, leaning over to give Harry a kiss.

"I'm just happy we're all doing well and back together. I don't want anything to happen that keeps us apart again," Harry said looking at Hermione.

"Nothing will happen. And without some psycho trying to take out personal grudges against us, we can all relax," Hermione said with a sigh.

"At least for twenty-five years!" Ron added downing the last bit of his drink.

The friends sat around talking, content in the fact that their lives were going to be much less complicated for them all.

In a far corner of an unused Ministry building, Lucius Malfoy deliberately walks to a meeting with a man he has never met, but has heard a great deal about. An owl had delivered a long note to the Malfoy Manor a few hours ago. This note had listed off all of the unreported activities of Draco Malfoy, and even the involvement of Lucius in some of the operations. The note contained no threat or attempt at blackmail. At the end of the long string of documented illegal activities it simply said, "We can do better. Meet with me." Then it gave the location of the office Lucius was approaching.

Lucius had intended to lay low for a while, content in having his magic back. But, with some in the Ministry accepting him back so warmly, and now this opportunity presenting itself, he couldn't keep the old desires down. Entering the office, Lucius saw a cloaked and hooded figure standing alone. "Your note was intriguing," Malfoy let slide from his mouth.

"I hoped you would find it as such," the hooded figure said. "You've obviously realized that I was the one who really directed Draco's operations." The hooded figure paused and when Lucius didn't say anything, continued, "Your son was very good, but had some weaknesses. He relied on Muggles too much."

Lucius almost growled and said, "Yes, they will be the downfall of us yet."

The hooded figure laughed, "Don't worry about them, we won't rely on them. We will use them where necessary since they are expendable. Second, Draco didn't follow the plans. He always added his own...embellishments to our well-coordinated operations and that caused many of them to fail. But, his biggest weakness was his unrelenting vendetta on Potter, Granger, and Ron Weasley. Draco placed the highest value on hurting those three, even higher than successfully completing the operation. That was his undoing."

"Yes, I told him that on many occasions. His obsession with Potter drove everything he did. I admit that I would like nothing better for Potter to be gone from this existence as well," Malfoy coldly said.

The hooded wizard laughed again, "Believe me, Harry Potter's time will come, as will the other's who betrayed me. Potter has never used a spell against me but has caused me great harm on multiple occasions. However, my focus is not Potter, my focus is power. If I have to befriend Harry Potter for a time to gain the power, I will. But have faith, when the time is right, Potter and the others will pay for everything they've done.

"How do you expect to get this power with him and his godfather out there watching all the time?" Malfoy asked.

"Easy, I will act like I play by the rules. Their weakness is that they always do the right thing and that means we have a huge advantage. I am offering you a partnership. You have old connections in the Ministry, and I have some newer ones. Now that you have been warmly welcomed back, between the two of us, we can move to control key departments. Once we have a majority of support, we will move to replace the Minister and then take that position as well. Then, slowly we will control how things really get done. Once we are firmly seated in power, we will take our revenge on Potter and the other's who have betrayed us," the hooded wizard said in a cold dark voice.

"And what about the other operations? They were very profitable even with my son's failures," Lucius asked.

"Oh, they will continue. They will be quieter and we will focus on making money, not on the destruction and terror that your son prized. These will be profitable times for us as we continue to go after the real prize," the wizard said and the stepped closer to Lucius. "I take it from your comments that you approve with this plan."

Lucius laughed coldly, "I had already begun within my own circles. My son told me a lot about your style and I approved from the beginning. As long as I see progress toward controlling the Ministry, I approve."

"I must say I was surprised when you turned Draco in. At first, I thought they had convinced you to support their side, but once I saw that you left out the really useful information about our operations, I knew there must have been another reason. Care to share it?" the wizard asked.

"Power, plain and simple. I have been lacking power for many years, and I was given the opportunity to get it back. I feel like I've been reborn and this time, nothing will stop me from getting to my goal. Fortunately, we have the same desires. And, this time we don't have someone blinded by revenge to guide us. I am content to wait to get my revenge, but I will have it," Malfoy said.

"Good. I'll be in touch Lucius. You can use the same technique your son did to contact me, but until the goal is at hand, you will not know who I am," the wizard said.

"That's acceptable. This has been a very stimulating discussion," Malfoy said before turning and leaving.

The wizard stood there for a few minutes and then walked out of the office and headed toward more often used sections of the building. He removed his cloak before stepping through a door into a common hallway with other witches and wizards, and once through, he blended in with other employees. Just before he stepped through the exit door he heard, "Ah, there you are. I wanted to have a word with you before you left."

The wizard turned around and came face to face with the Minister of Education. "I just wanted to tell you how impressed everyone has been with your work lately. You have really come into your own within the Ministry."

The wizard extended his hand and said, "Thank you sir, I think I've finally realized my true calling."

The Minister said, "I agree. Now, keep your focus and I'm sure we can do great things together. Goodnight Mr. Weasley."

Percy Weasley shook Mr. Gallah's hand and said, "Great things indeed sir, thank you," and with that he turned and stepped through the exit with an evil smirk on his face.

The End