

Was it all enough?

By

Sloth

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Chapter 1

Harry had just Apparated back into his home, Veganos Castle. R.J., the vampire he had fallen in love with left it to him when she was killed. It was a nice, comfortable castle that Harry hadn't changed much in the two years he had lived there. R.J. had very good taste for art and furnishings. She had also left all of her assets to him and they were currently in a large vault at Gringotts. Harry had spent more time away from his new home since he first came here than he had in it. It would take a while before he felt comfortable here.

His godfather, Sirius Black, who recently had his name cleared, was waiting for him. "Welcome home Harry."

"Now that you're free and you don't need to worry about my health or anything, what are you going to do with yourself?" Harry said, happy in the fact that his godfather could now live his life freely.

"I'm going to go see old friends and places I've been away from too long. I haven't been spending much money these years, so my vault at Gringotts is looking pretty good. It will be good to know I can come back here whenever I want."

Harry had asked Sirius to live here until he decided what ever else he wanted to do. "I have a couple weeks until the playoffs, but then I have the rest of the summer with nothing to do and not much schoolwork to prepare for."

"Well, if I can work it out how would you like to come with me on a couple trips? If the people I'm going to see are close to anything interesting, you should come along. It would be good to spend time with you outside of Hogwarts."

Sirius had left the next day to visit Remus Lupin. Sirius talked about all the things he planned on doing over this trip and sounded like a teenager. Sirius had of course seen Lupin quite a lot over the last few years, but they've never been able to go out into public before. Harry laughed thinking about the two of them getting thrown out of a pub for being too loud or something. Sirius had times when he didn't act like an adult.

Harry spent the next couple days getting used to the castle again. He felt more comfortable than he had the previous summer and it was starting to sink in that this was where he would really be living.

After trying to replay his only loss of the year over and over in his head, Harry made a resolution to get into better shape. He first thought of this seeing Viktor Krum at the Quidditch match earlier. Viktor looked in amazing shape and he was the best seeker in the world. Then, seeing how fit Kristi was just made him want to look better. To himself, Harry just looked taller than two years ago, but not in good shape.

Harry decided to try running and doing more yard work to start off. Getting up early he tried to run down the lane to the Wilkins' house and back. He didn't make it all the way back before the pain in his side stopped him. Harry had hoped to at least make it much further. After resting he went out and worked in the yard, but this didn't seem like it would help much so found some old objects around and tried lifting them like he had seen on the television when

he was still with the Dursley's. Before supper, he ran again, with the same bad results. He was quite tired that night and fell asleep quickly.

Anxious to get up and try running, he was stopped by extremely sore muscles as soon as he tried to get out of bed. He had trouble walking down the stairs. Dobby had asked if he was all right but Harry assured him it was just from working out. He missed his morning run and lifting session, but did make the evening run with the same poor results. The next day he made all three sessions and made it a little further running. Remembering how sore he had gotten, he only did the morning run on Friday so that he would be fresh for practice the next day.

Dobby went with him to Quidditch practice, even though it wasn't required anymore. Dobby liked getting out and helping the trainer and since he was so much help, the trainer approved as well. The coach just made them run over plays and had Harry go through some blocking moves in slow motion. Coach didn't want anyone getting hurt in practice since the playoffs were coming up.

Harry just about to go home when he heard, "Potter. So school's out. Are you and your little friend spending every waking moment together?" Kristi asked showing the same unreadable expression as always.

"What happened to schoolboy?" Harry questioned turning to greet the beautiful woman. "And I don't know when Cho and I will be able to see each other. She's starting a new job and living with her parents."

"We'll get back to schoolboy after your break. It's just you and your godfather in this castle of yours?"

"Sirius is out traveling right now. After the playoffs, I may take a couple trips with him since I've only seen the inside of Quidditch stadiums. Either that or some summer work at the Ministry."

"You should at least join me out on the town one of these nights. I'll make sure you're taken care of."

"As fun as that sounds, I imagine it would get me into real trouble. I'll have to keep wondering how much fun it would be," Harry said before Apparating away.

After Harry had cleaned up from his run the next morning, there was a knock on the door and Mrs. Wilkins was there. "Do you still want to practice French?" Mrs. Wilkins asked.

"Of course. If this is any trouble for you, we can skip it," Harry offered, not wanting to be a burden on his neighbor.

"No trouble at all. Angie needs to practice reading and writing French as well, so you can help each other. I'll bring her up next time." They worked for a couple hours and Harry thought it was easier to learn to speak French than to write. They talked about school and things that happened around the area while Harry was gone. It was really nice having company around. Mrs. Wilkins decided to come up a couple times a week; around the time his run was done in the morning.

Harry had gotten his passes for the playoffs at the last practice and sent one off to Professor McGonagall. He saved one for Sirius and one for Cho, and that meant he had one left. This was a problem because normally he would invite both Ron and Hermione, but he only had one pass. He wrote them both explaining the situation and suggested they both pick the day they wanted to go and in case of a tie pick a number between 1 and 10 and the closest got their pick. They both picked the final day but Ron got closest so Hermione was coming to the first day of playoffs and Ron was coming to the finals. This meant that if France lost the first day, Ron wouldn't be watching his team play. But, he would still see the finals, which was still really good.

He wrote a note to send with Cho's pass,

Cho

How have you been? You've probably been really busy and not had time to think about me, but I've been thinking about you a lot. I can't wait to see you. Have you started at the twin's shop yet? Do I have a contract with France yet?

Before he could finish, an owl flew in with a parchment tied to its leg. He removed the parchment and found an owl treat for it.

Harry

I've been missing you so much. You've probably had so much to do and think about with the playoffs that you haven't been missing me. I can't wait to see you. You're sending me a pass for the playoffs aren't you? We're getting close on a contract with France. I think they'll do a little better. I've been looking at the financial plan for the Weasley Wizard Wheezes and it still looks doable. I think they may need to get another investor, but we'll see.

I really want to see you soon. What do you think about the idea of me Apparating over for a day? Let me know?

I love you

Cho

Harry laughed at how the two letters started out the same. He threw the first one away and started over,

Cho

I was in the process of writing you when your owl came. I think about you all the time and have been really missing you. I enclosed your pass for the playoffs. I think it would be great to see you. Sirius told me that you could get past the security to Apparate here so that would be great. You come anytime you want, you never need to ask. I want you here all the time.

I love you

Harry

Harry quickly took this to Hedwig and asked her to deliver it as quick as she could since he really wanted to see Cho. Then Harry went to workout and studied for a while before his evening run. During his next French lesson he heard a familiar noise and then Mrs. Wilkins gave a sharp scream. Harry turned to see Cho standing there looking horrified. "I'm sorry Mrs. Wilkins. I didn't mean to scare you."

"T-T-that's ok. How did you do that?" Mrs. Wilkins asked.

"That's how we travel. Now that I've passed the test, I'll travel the same way. I've been hoping Cho would come to see me for a while," Harry explained.

"Well then, we'll end the lesson just a bit early today. See you next week Harry. Nice to see you again Cho," Mrs. Wilkins said showing herself out.

"Bye," Cho replied and waited until the door was shut before giving Harry a big hug and a kiss. "I've missed you so much."

"I'm so glad you came," Harry mumbled not wanting to break the kiss.

They just hugged and kissed for a couple minutes before Cho brought up the contract. "We should be done next week Harry. They want it done before the playoffs and so do I. I think they want to make an announcement or something."

"That's great Cho. Are you comfortable with what they've offered?"

"I think it's fair. God it's good to see you," she said kissing him again.

"You too Cho. Hey, you mentioned something about the twins might need another investor. Is anything wrong?"

"No, just with the building they're renting and building up inventory, it will be close until sales get rolling. They seem confident though. They are really talented with this stuff."

"Cho. Don't say anything to anyone, but I'm their investor. Actually, I just gave them the money the first time. If they need more, I'd really invest some this time."

"I wondered if you had given them the money. They keep making comments that made me think it could be you. If it looks like they need it, I'll bring up your idea."

"That gives me another idea. I don't know if you'll think this is weird or anything but there are stacks of partnerships and investment stuff in my vault at Gringotts. Would you want to go through it sometime and figure out what it is and if I should be investing in other things? I think I'm asking if in addition to my manager, you'd be my financial advisor?"

"You'd want me doing that? I don't think it's weird. R.J. wanted you to have it, I'm sure she would want you to handle it well. I'd love to Harry. Man, just out of school and I've got three great jobs. Well, two great jobs and one hope to be great one. Where's Sirius?"

"He's out traveling. I think he went to see Remus Lupin. Can you imagine those two getting into trouble now that Sirius can be seen in public?"

"So, does that mean we have the place to ourselves?" she smiled slyly.

"Why yes it does. What ever would you have in mind? Are you sure you want to since we don't have to sneak around?"

"We'll figure other ways to make it exciting," Cho said pulling him up the stairs. After they were undressed and on the bed, Cho squeezed his leg and said, "Harry. What have you been doing, you leg feels a little tighter?"

"I've been trying to get into shape by running twice a day and lifting weights a couple times a week. I think I have a long way to go. But, thank you for noticing," he said and flipped her over to start kissing down her back. They messed around and made love for a couple hours.

"You never cease to amaze me Harry," Cho said after a long moan.

"I'm glad your father let you come over today. Actually I'm kind of surprised he did."

"Really? I tell you, he really likes you. I hope to be able to come over once during the week, depending on my work and then once on the weekend. He's still going to invite you over later in the summer."

"That's great. I was worried we wouldn't be able to see each other much. You should work out teaching some class at school for one year. That way I could still see you. And think of it, I could sneak off with the teacher."

"Yeah, you could do that now. I'm sure Fleur would oblige you. She may be part Veela but she'd like to dance with you."

They stayed in bed until late afternoon and then had something to eat before Cho went back home. Harry thought it was really great seeing her. He went to practice very happy after seeing Cho the other day. It was another easy one with the coach just running the drills over and over.

"Still no chance for hitting the town?" Kristi asked getting quite close.

"I need to keep my head straight for the playoffs Kristi. You're bad tempting me like that."

"How about I pop over and cook you something. Actually, I don't really cook but I could bring something."

"I can't cook either; house-elves take care of it. The problem is; you can't Apparate near my house."

"House elves? You really have house-elves? And, I've seen you pop out of here, why couldn't I pop there?"

"The house elves are my friends and I couldn't get along without them. You can't Apparate their because of security. Can't go by floo either without authorization."

"Why would you need security?" she asked looking confused.

"Voldemort of course." This was obviously not what Kristi expected to hear. "I mean he's only tried to kill me four times since I started at Hogwarts. I imagine if it was opened up and he found out where I lived, Death Eaters would pop in there all the time." This came out as just a matter-of-fact statement that surprised Kristi.

"You're not serious? I mean he's been gone since you were a baby."

"Sorry to disappoint you but he came back to full strength a couple years ago by taking some of my blood. So, if you show me around, I've got to come to you." Kristi was looking at him strangely but he just said, "See you at the playoffs."

Sirius had gotten back the day before Cho came over. "The contract is ready Harry; I hope you think I did ok."

"If I'm still playing for France and you're satisfied, then you did ok." Cho handed him the contract and stood their worried. Sirius had come in to see what Harry thought.

"Cho is this right? This is what they're going to pay me?"

"I double checked everything; the contract is what they offered," Cho said, still sounding unsure.

"Give me a quill before they change their mind." Harry took the quill and signed the contract. "Sirius, they're going to pay me 250,000 galleons to play Quidditch! They're insane!" Sirius took the contract and read over it.

"Cho, you're amazing!" Harry said and hugged her.

"I have to agree with Harry. You did a fantastic job," Sirius added.

Cho was smiling proudly and said, "I think we could have gotten more but Harry would have needed to threaten to go to another team and he refused to do that. And, you can do endorsements for a lot more money. But, that's not all. The league wanted to do a little figure of you, like the one Ron had of Krum. I saw their model and worked with them on the action and they gave you the standard licensing fee for that. That adds up to another 10,000 for the first year."

"Now that's kind of weird, but if Krum went along with it, I will." The thought of a little model Harry made the real Harry nauseous. "Well Cho, once they transfer the money, we'll

need to go down so I can transfer 65,000 into your account. You earned it. I don't think I'll do any endorsements, but if I ever do, 25% is yours."

Cho looked ecstatic, "They should transfer the money tomorrow after I get the contract to them. My father is going to freak out. He thought I wouldn't make hardly anything at the Weasleys' and then maybe 20,000 or at the most 25,000 as your manager."

"I want one of those figures Cho," said Sirius making a face at Harry. "What are you going to do with your contract money Harry? Have you given any thought to that?"

"I asked Cho to be my financial adviser and to go through all the investments R.J. left to help me figure out what to do with them. Does that seem ok?" Harry asked and Cho looked at Sirius concerned.

"I think that's a very wise decision. I wish I had someone who understood all this stuff when I was your age. Of course I didn't have as much but still."

"I'm trying to keep my parent's money, R.J.'s stuff and now the Quidditch money separate, so if you ever want anything, the Quidditch money is available." Harry offered, thinking he would gladly share any money he had with Sirius.

"Thanks Harry but I should be set. I think the Ministry is going to give me a settlement for wrongly imprisoning me for all those years. That should allow me to travel all I want."

Harry met Cho in Diagon Alley the next day and they went straight to Gringotts. Most of the wizards were staring and pointing at them. It used to be because of his scar, but now it was because of Quidditch. He still didn't like it, but at least he brought this attention on himself. "Harry, it's so weird with everybody pointing and talking about you. How can you just ignore it so well?"

"They did it for my first couple years of coming here because of my scar, so I'm used to ignoring it. I really don't like it though. I'd rather no one notice me. Does it bother you that much?"

"I'll get used to it. It'll only get worse after the playoffs. Imagine how it would be if you played for England and were doing well. I don't think I'll get used to all the girls following you around."

"You saw how the students acted when Viktor was around. He just ignored them and ended up going for the one student who didn't act like any of that mattered, Hermione. I want you Cho, and nothing anybody else says or does will change that." He kissed her and saw people taking their pictures; luckily they were almost into Gringotts. Harry went to the Head Goblin's desk.

"Excuse me sir," Harry said only being a little more comfortable talking to goblins.

The goblin looked up annoyed at first and then recognized Harry and quickly acted friendly, "Ah, Mr. Potter. What can we do for you today?"

"Two things sir. I just had some money deposited from the French National Quidditch Team."

"Of course Mr. Potter. It is already in your vault. Separated as you requested."

"Thank you. I would like to transfer some of that money to Miss Chang; she is my manager. Currently she doesn't have an account here. And then we would both like to go to my vault. She is also going to help me understand the investments."

The goblin looked at Cho who tried to not act afraid. "Of course. We could also provide any assistance on your investments you would require. Let me get the paperwork for Miss Chang." The goblin sent a helper to get the paperwork and Cho quickly filled it out and was given a key from the goblin. "Miss Chang. When you need to access your vault, please see any of the tellers along the main aisle. They can help you. Now, let me get someone to show you to your vault."

Another goblin took them on the trip to his vault. Harry had grown to really like the rides down to his vault and hoped Cho would as well. When they stopped in front of Harry's vault, Cho had a smile on her face as she exclaimed, "That was great!"

They climbed out of the little cart and the goblin told them to stand back. Cho asked, "Where's your key Harry?"

"I guess this one doesn't need a key. The vault my parents left me did."

The little goblin opened the vault in the same way as Hogwart's vault 713, where the Sorcerer's Stone was kept; Cho's eyes suddenly got really big. There were two good-sized piles of gold and then off to the right rear there was a huge mound and smaller piles of gemstones. The little goblin said, "This first stack on the left is the current deposit, separated just like you requested." It looked only slightly bigger than the stack Harry's parents had left him. Now at least he had an idea how much they had left him.

"Cho, 25% of this pile is yours and will be in your vault today. Do you want any right now?"

Cho still looked stunned but did need to take some right now. Harry went to the piles of investments while she was putting coins in her bag. Cho came over and started flipping through some of parchments with Harry. "This is a lot of stuff! I didn't think it would be so much."

"Do you not want to do it?" asked Harry, not wanting Cho to feel uncomfortable.

"No, I really want to do it. It will just take longer than I expected. Let's just take a bit of it today," Cho said and they took some of the parchments and put them in her bag. They got back into the cart for the trip back to the lobby. Cho was being quiet as they walked outside.

"What's wrong Cho?"

"It just hit me how rich R.J. was. I can't believe she left you that much money."

"Me either. I try not to even think about it. Except for paying the Wilkins and general stuff on the castle, I've been using the money my parents left me. After you figure out what all the investments are, I may not change anything and just leave it alone. Right now, I just don't know what's there."

"I'm not sure I would handle it as well. I mean all the hassles of people staring and pointing at you. Plus putting up with school and teachers. I'd probably just go live on an island somewhere."

"Maybe we'll just do that sometime Cho. I really like my life right now. The only bad thing about going back to school is not seeing you. If you were still there, I wouldn't mind it at all."

Harry went with Cho while she did some shopping and then went to Florean Fortescue's Ice Cream shop. Florean was always nice to Harry and offered to give them some on the house but Harry insisted on paying. "You've always given me ice cream sir. I'm finally doing ok and insist on paying for it. I appreciate the offer." They sat inside back in the corner so they wouldn't be noticed and Harry told Cho about running away from the Dursleys' when everyone thought Sirius was after him and staying at the Leaky Cauldron. He would sit at the ice cream parlor doing homework all day.

Cho told him some stories of her first few years at school as well. When they were ready to go, Cho went directly home and Harry went back to his.

Cho and Hermione came to his house early Saturday to leave for the playoffs together with Harry and Sirius. Cho had worn some of the new clothes she bought. She always dressed well, but these were very nice and modern. Hermione noticed immediately. "Nice outfit Cho, is it new?"

"Oh yes. Harry took me to Gringotts yesterday to get a vault and paid me for negotiating his contract. I've been eyeing this outfit for a while, but wouldn't want to ask my parents to buy it."

Until it was time to go, Hermione kept quizzing Cho about N.E.W.T.s. Cho didn't seem to mind but did look a little relieved when Harry announced it was time to go to the match.

Professor McGonagall had traveled directly to the stadium. Once at the stadium, Cho kissed Harry and went to their seats while he went to the locker room.

"Ok, England again. You win today and we play again tomorrow. If you don't make any mistakes and Potter keeps his eyes open, we should take this," Coach said. France had the better record so they were announced second.

Harry tuned out the crowd and just wanted to get the match going. The whistle blew and things took off quickly. Harry quickly got into a rhythm and tried to break up scoring runs and dodge Bludgers as much as possible. France was playing really well and it was frustrating England. Harry performed three feints in a row and their seeker didn't pull out of the third and got ploughed. After the timeout, Harry kept taking off quickly and then stopping, trying to confuse their seeker. After a while, Harry saw the Snitch and took off. Their seeker hesitated, thinking Harry was faking and that was all the head start Harry needed. He reached the Snitch easily before their seeker. France won! While flying down, Harry heard the crowd yelling his name. Potter. Potter. The team celebrated quickly and went into the locker room.

The coach was happy, "Ok, the finals are tomorrow. No partying tonight. One more win is all we need." Harry showered quickly and once the team was ready, they headed out to face the reporters, with Harry going to the usual woman.

"Getting to be a regular thing Harry. Congratulations."

"Thank you Ms. Mishmas. I'm really glad we won. I thought the team played perfectly today. We'll give the team tomorrow a good run if we play this well again."

"Who do you think it will be? Any predictions?"

"They will both be hard to beat, but Bulgaria has just played fantastic all this year. If they don't make any mistakes, we'll be playing them tomorrow."

"Rumor has it that you signed a contract to continue playing for France next year?"

"Yes, that's right."

"We hear you really played hard-ball with the team to get a large contract."

"I don't know about that. I have a fantastic manager who handled it all. All I wanted was to make sure I came back to this team. The fans here have been amazing. I wouldn't consider anyplace else. Thanks."

Harry saw his friends coming over and he hugged Cho tightly. Then he hugged Hermione, Sirius, and Fleur and shook McGonagall's hand. "Sorry professor but England got in our way."

"I understand Harry. I won't hold any long-term grudges," she said smiling. "Thank you for the pass, I didn't expect it."

"Why not? You and Fleur are like my good luck Charms. I wouldn't know what to do without you two here."

"Potter. Another good match today. Don't mess up tomorrow," said Kristi while messing up his hair.

"Hi Kristi. You played great today," he said while Cho quickly came up to his side. Cho had always felt a little threatened by the seeker since Kristi didn't hide the fact that she wanted to show Harry the sites in Paris.

"I have a question for your little friend. Miss Chang would you consider becoming my manager as well? I heard you did quite well and if Potter here trusts you, you must be more honest than my current manager." Kristi asked in a very business like tone.

Harry smiled proudly but Cho was stunned and she barely got out, "I don't see why not Kristi. I'll think on it tonight and tell you tomorrow. Thanks for asking."

"Be ready tomorrow," Kristi said to Harry before hitting fists with him.

"Wow. If you get a few more players, you'll make more than me!" Harry said missing the look Hermione gave Cho.

Chapter 2

Harry and Cho stayed down in one of the boxes to watch the second match while the others went up to their seats. Cho looked around and saw most of other French team. The thing that struck her was that all of the other guy players had at least two women hanging all over them. She knew that they were celebrities but had always been out in the stands and just heard all the girls yelling. She'd never really seen how the girls that got back with the team actually behaved.

Cho continued looking around and saw Kristi motioning her to come over. Cho told Harry she'd be back and left him watching the action on the pitch. "You looked surprised at how they act?" Kristi asked directing her gaze to the girls hanging on the male players. "This is pretty tame since we have to play again tomorrow. You should see how things get once everyone has been celebrating for a few hours."

"I don't know what I expected, but I am kind of surprised. I guess they're always like this?" Cho replied still surprised.

Kristi nodded and said, "But not our little schoolboy. He acts like he could care less about any of this."

The 'our' little schoolboy seemed to sting. "It's not an act. Honestly, sometimes he seems so naïve about things," said Cho shaking her head. "I notice you don't have anyone hanging on you?"

Kristi smiled and said, "Where's the challenge in that? By the way, I meant it when I asked you to be my manager."

Cho was going to ask Kristi what she meant about the challenge but something caught her eye. She ran back to Harry and told him she was going to take care of something and left quickly. The match was about ready to start when she came back with a couple of shirts. "Did you see these?" she asked angrily while holding up a shirt with Harry's head from the nose up on front and his scar glowing red. "They don't have a license for these."

"What did you do Cho?" Harry asked, concerned. The shirt only irritated him a little so he really didn't care.

"I found the stand selling these; went to security and had him shut down. He said that if I didn't press charges he would split the take with me. I wasn't going to press charges anyway; I just wanted him to quit so I took his offer. Here are 500 more galleons," Cho said trying to hand a bag of money to Harry while still looking angry.

Harry just laughed and hugged her. "Keep the money Cho. I am the luckiest person alive to have you with me." Harry kissed her and they watched as the match started. Harry had brought the omnioculars he got at the last World Cup and kept them focused on Viktor, trying to learn as much as he could. Viktor just seemed menacing on his broom; his eyes were really focused scanning for the snitch. It was like Viktor didn't worry much about the other seeker and only rarely went to breakup a scoring run. Harry saw that Viktor must just feel when the other seeker was close because he gave no hint when he was starting a feint. The other seeker was lucky to pull up in time and when Viktor took off again, Harry couldn't tell any difference in his motions, but within a few seconds Viktor had the snitch. Viktor's expressions never

changed; there was no way to read what he was really thinking. France would play Bulgaria again tomorrow for the Cup.

Harry and Cho were standing just inside the lounge area when their friends made it back. "Man Krum's good," Sirius said shaking his head.

"You don't have to tell me," Harry quickly replied.

"You got the snitch the last time you played Harry, you're just as good," Hermione added trying to make her friend feel better.

"Thanks Hermione but it was just luck. It turned toward my side at the last second," Harry admitted.

Cho spoke up, "Did you see these shirts they were selling?" She held up the shirt with Harry's head. They all laughed and said they had almost all bought one to wear back but didn't want Harry to hex them. Cho didn't think it was that funny. "Well, they weren't licensed."

"Cho had the stand shut down! Can you believe it?" Harry said impressed.

"The man running the stand offered to split what he had made so far if I didn't press charges. He had made 1,000 galleons off of those shirts! Now, Harry won't take the money."

"Harry, Cho's right you know. It was illegal for him to be using your ...um...head to make money. You should take it," Hermione said moving closer to Cho.

"I tell you what. Why don't you two take the money and go shopping? I mean it. Hermione, go get an outfit like Cho's since you liked it so much. I'm sure Cho could find something else also. It would make me happy if you two did that. One rule. NO BOOKS," Harry said still amused at how worked up the two girls got.

"Harry. You don't have to do that, I was just agreeing with her," Hermione said blushing. She hadn't meant for Harry to give her anything but Cho grabbed her.

"Harry said he didn't want it and I'm sure you'd like to make Harry happy wouldn't you?" Cho said nodding at Hermione.

Then Cho turned back to Harry and said, "See you tomorrow Harry, I love you." She kissed him and he heard Hermione yell, "Me too Harry," before the two girls apparated away.

McGonagall left shortly which left Harry and Sirius talking to Fleur. Sirius thanked Fleur for being a good friend to Harry and they looked like they were getting along well. Fleur left then Harry and Sirius went home as well. The two men talked about Lupin and how much fun the two old friends had going out. "Where's your next trip?" Harry asked.

Sirius thought for a minute and said, "I want some place warm, with a beach and girls in bikinis or less. I read a in a muggle book one time that an author wrote about an island as the most beautiful place on earth. It's called Bora Bora, and it's somewhere in the South Pacific. But, I can't go there until I have a real girlfriend to take with me. Until then, maybe the south of France." They sat around for a while talking about places Sirius wanted to visit. They all sounded good to Harry since he had never been out of England except to Quidditch stadiums.

Harry went to bed early and felt pretty good about the match but nervous the next morning. Viktor Krum seemed to be playing really well and Harry would just need to be lucky to beat him. Ron showed up early and wanted to hear all about yesterday's match.

Harry let Sirius tell it all. "You can beat Krum Harry. He's not that good," said Ron, sounding like he meant it.

"You say that but you bought a little model of him," Harry joked.

Ron's ears went pink and he said, "I'll just buy one of you today."

"You're not coming back here if you do," Harry said angrily.

"Why not, I have one," Sirius said and fetched it from his bag. Sirius held up the little model of Harry in French National Team robes. It paced around his hand smiling and would occasionally put out its fist.

"Sirius! I can't believe you bought one of those things. That's just wrong!" Harry exclaimed, totally embarrassed by the little model.

Sirius and Ron joked about it and Harry said, "C'mon put that away. Don't irritate me before I go get abused by Krum."

Just then Harry heard a sound and turned to see Cho in his house. She had another new outfit that was a bit more risqué than she normally wore. She wore a very tight red leather dress that was much shorter than anything Harry had ever seen her in. Around her neck was a thick gold chain with the dragon brooch Harry had given her. Harry heard "Damn!" come from Sirius.

"Thank you Sirius," Cho said confidently.

"Cho, you look...um... amazing. I don't think you should go too far away from me today," Harry said giving her a big kiss. Harry flashed back to how different Cho looked back in her fifth year when Harry first developed his crush on her. Now, she's eighteen and has grown into an amazingly beautiful young woman.

"I take it you approve? I couldn't wear something like this very often, but when my boyfriend is playing for the European Cup, I'll bend the rules. And, I figured out how to make the brooch work with it."

"Don't tell me Hermione got something like that as well?" Harry asked worried.

"No, she did get something nice, closer to what I had on yesterday. She said to tell you thanks," Cho said and kissed him on the cheek.

Ron who hadn't spoken yet said, "What happened yesterday? And Cho, you're not going to work with the twins like that are you?"

"No Ron, I wouldn't wear this to work. And yesterday..." she started to continue but Harry cut her off.

"Please let me tell this. Ron it was great. First Kristi asks Cho to be her manager. Then Cho goes running off and comes back with some stupid shirts in her hand that had my head on them. She was really irritated. She actually shut down some guy selling the shirts because they didn't a license to use my head! Can you believe it? The guy was so worried about getting prosecuted that he gave Cho half the money he had made and then left. So Cho and Hermione went shopping and well you see the results."

"I should have picked the first day," Ron said sounding upset.

"I don't think you would look quite as good in a dress like that Ron," Sirius said joking.

The time came and they all went to the stadium. Harry noticed as soon as they arrived that many of the men were eyeing Cho. Before she headed up to her seat he said, "You are by far the sexiest woman here. Stay away from the other guys." She kissed him and followed Sirius and Ron out.

Harry waited in the locker room and listened to the coach keep telling them they couldn't make any mistakes. They were the visiting team for the final and had to be announced first. Once in the air, Harry calmed down and tried to block everything else out. This became impossible once Krum came out onto field; the crowd went wild cheering for him.

Like last time, Krum circled the field and came up to meet Harry. They hit fists and Krum said, "Told you we'd meet again. You have played very well."

"I watched you yesterday, you were amazing. Good luck today Viktor," Harry replied and they both parted.

Play started and everything just moved so fast. Harry tried to watch Viktor without making it obvious what he was doing. Harry wished he had the confidence to just ignore the other seeker like Viktor seemed to do. One thing was clear; France had improved since the last meeting of these two teams and was hanging very close to Bulgaria. Harry and Viktor swapped feinting runs in which both times they stayed right with the other seeker until the last possible second before breaking off. Harry could hear the gasps from the crowd both times. Once, Harry tried the fake start that had worked well against England and Viktor actually bought it, telling Harry that Viktor was watching him as much as Harry was watching Viktor. Right after this move, Harry saw Viktor take off and Harry hesitated for a second thinking it was a fake start like what Harry did but then he caught the flash of gold. Harry took off after Viktor and was right on his tail when Viktor closed in on the snitch. Taking a page from Viktor's book, Harry nudged into the tail of Viktor's broom enough to throw him off and draw a foul. When Viktor regained control, he looked at Harry with rage in his eyes but quickly regained his composure when Harry raised his hand in a 'sorry' kind of message. Viktor understood what Harry had done.

The two seekers went back and forth for a while with feinting and fake starts until they both saw the snitch and went for it. They were close until suddenly the Bulgaria chasers swerved in front of Harry and he was forced to dive down a bit to miss them. This gave Viktor a slight advantage. Harry had almost caught up when the snitch veered just a little toward Viktor allowing the other seeker to grab it. Viktor had caught the snitch!

Harry heard the crowd roar and felt totally deflated. He had never missed the snitch before as long as he was conscious. Slowly flying down to the team, he heard the cheers for Viktor

when suddenly he felt a tap on the shoulder. Viktor had flown over next to him. "The luck went my way today. You played very well."

Harry responded, "Thanks Viktor. You deserved to win. At least we're both not being carried off." The two seekers hit fists and Viktor flew away holding the snitch high above his head causing the crowd to erupt into even more cheers.

Harry was ready to get yelled at for his miss, but even though no one on his team was really happy, they didn't take it out on him. Coach said, "We played well today, there's nothing to be mad about. We took second place in the European Cup tournament. When has this team even made the playoffs before? Go out and celebrate all we accomplished this year. I couldn't think of anything we should have done differently."

Harry spent longer in the shower than normal and sat down with his towel around him. He hadn't even realized Kristi had sat next to him until he heard. "It had to happen sometime, don't worry about it. Krum's the only one to beat you to it this year. We're not ready to hurt you...yet." Kristi went back to her locker area to change. Harry was nearly the last one changed and went out to the reporters. He walked over to the normal reporter slower than usual.

"Congratulations on a great season. I guess you're human after all."

"Thanks. I should have got to it. The rest of the team played perfectly."

"Everybody gets beat once in a while. Now that you have a break, what are your plans?"

"Maybe travel a bit with my godfather. We haven't spent enough time together."

"Make sure you both visit Paris. You will be welcomed at any location in town. I want to thank you for the interviews this year."

"My pleasure Ms. Mishmas. You were recommended by a good friend. See you next season."

Cho came running up and hugged him. "You played great Harry. Everyone in the stands thought so." All the rest of his friends said the same thing.

Cho was giving him a big kiss when they heard, "Maybe I should have tried that to cheer you up. What would your little friend say about you acting like this?" Kristi said not realizing it was Cho who was kissing him.

Cho pulled back and said, "She would be glad he was."

Kristi looked Cho over and said, "Impressive, very impressive. Any decision on my request?"

"I'd be glad to manage you Kristi. Tell them to send the contract over and I'll do my best," Cho replied.

They shook hands and Kristi said, "Take good care of him until next season. I'm getting used to winning."

They all moved into a private lounge area and talked for a while with other players and their friends. Cho was talking to Kristi off and on. Ron kept saying he couldn't believe how many beautiful women were back here. "I should get some type of job for a Quidditch team," he kept saying over and over. Ron noticed that even the trainers had good looking women around.

Finally, all of Harry's other friends had left and he and Cho were just watching the other people celebrating. "Ready to take me home Harry? Think you're up to a quick dance before I need to leave?" Cho said and gave him a deep kiss.

"With you dressed like that, I'm about ready to dance right here. What about Sirius, he'll be there?" Harry moaned.

"I'm sure Sirius will stay downstairs, he's a big boy," Cho said and they left.

When they got back, there was a note from Sirius. "I've gone out for the evening. I hope you two can manage on your own."

"See Harry, he knows how things are supposed to work," Cho said smiling.

"Why don't I know these things?" Harry asked slightly annoyed.

"That's what you've got me for, to teach you. C'mon," Cho said and they went upstairs. Cho was acting more confident and aggressive this time. She seemed to play around more before she let Harry remove her new dress. They were both worn out and were just recovering when Cho said she needed to get home.

"What did your father say when you left in that outfit?" Harry wanted to make sure her father kept liking him.

"He said I should be doing more things like this to keep you interested. He says you're going to be tempted by other women all the time. I think he'd be mad at me if I let you slip away."

"I won't be tempted. I really love you and you looked just amazing tonight."

"I love you too Harry. We'll see each other soon," Cho said and then left.

Sirius was back the next morning. "Cho's quite a catch Harry."

"I don't know how I got so lucky," Harry admitted.

Harry decided he didn't want to sit around all summer so he wrote a note to see if he could go back to the unspeakable department for a while.

Fletch

How is everyone doing? I'm off for a few weeks and was wondering if there is anything I could do with your department? It doesn't have to be anything like the last time (I don't mind if it is though). If there is anything I could help out with or do for any of you, I'd be glad to.

I could come three days a week since I'm learning to read/write French twice a week right now.

If there's nothing useful I can do, I understand and it's no problem.

Take care

Harry

He went and found Hedwig and sent the note. He would like to see all of them again and keep in touch in case he wanted to work there. He changed and went for his run and then worked outside for a while. He was surprised when later in the night, Hedwig turned up with a response from Fletch. Harry had expected it to take a few days.

Harry

We'd love to have you. I don't think it will be like last time. We may try to have you finish Auror training but then the rest will be looking at a couple new items that have been uncovered.

I don't know how long it will last, there are some strange things happening at the ministry. Some people are really trying to pry into what we do here. I'll setup the floo to allow you in for the rest of the summer. Three days a week will work well with us. Can you start Friday?

See you then.

Fletch.

Great. Now Harry would have something useful to do. For the next couple days, he did his normal routine of run; French writing lessons; study and run again later. Sirius had been gone almost the entire time. Friday morning, he got up early and had to wait until a realistic time to go to the Ministry. He threw the power into the fire and said, "Department of Mysteries Ministry of Magic," and instead of being whisked away, a ghostly voice said, "Identification please." Harry responded with "Harry Potter," then he heard "Granted" and was pulled into the fire.

"Hello Harry, good to see you again." It was Rose Douglas who had been here the last time Harry came.

"Hi Rose. Good to see you're still here," Harry replied looking around at a familiar setting.

"C'mon in, they're waiting," Rose said and led Harry down the hall to Fletch's office.

Harry recognized the two men sitting in the office, it was Fletch and Larry. "Hi Harry, glad you wrote to us," Fletch said shaking Harry's hand. Larry did the same.

Harry saw something that looked familiar and said, "What's that on the table?"

"Oh these?" Fletch said moving out of the way. "We were just replaying the European Cup match." There were little models of Harry and Viktor. The model Harry would walk around

and hold out his fist but the Viktor model just scowled at the other model and then Larry would knock the Harry model down and the Viktor model would seem happier, causing everyone in the room to laugh. "Had to welcome you back proper didn't we?" Larry joked.

"Still can't tell you how much we appreciate the quick information on the former employee who became a Death Eater. Sometimes we may talk a little too much to people that used to work with us. You really saved us on that one. We're all curious what really happened out there. Mrs. Figg only knew what that girl you saved told them."

Harry went through the whole story and they made him repeat some of the parts. At the end, Larry seemed happy that Harry had been able to use the 'Totilla Desissa' spell. "I don't know exactly what happened with it though since I was knocked unconscious. I had hoped it would have finished him," Harry said sounding disappointed.

"Yes, that's very strange, not at all what I expected. So, you didn't even know that a dementor brought you out?" Larry asked.

"Nope, I don't remember anything until waking up in the hospital wing," Harry said, intentionally left out the part about being an animagus.

"We've worked it out for you to finish Auror training which should take about two weeks. I doubt it will be much trouble and we are going to bring in another person from the department that has no clue what you can do to finish it up. At least if nothing else comes out of this, you will be an official Auror. While you're doing that, we are going to keep working on some items."

"Fletch, you mentioned strange things at the ministry. What's going on?" Harry had been very interested in this.

The other three looked at each other and then Fletch said, "Officially, I don't know what you're talking about. But, between the four of us, we think something is up. In fact, we've moved some things we want kept private into secure areas the ministry doesn't know about. They've always wanted to know more about us, but this time it's different. I bet by the end of this summer you'll be able to tell for yourself it's different. Ok, ready to get started?"

Harry followed Fletch back to the entrance and down another hall. They came to a door and knocked. Inside was a pretty blonde woman who seemed to be in her mid twenties and looked slightly familiar to Harry. "Debbie Bell, this is Harry Potter. Harry this is Debbie. She will finish up your Auror training. We've already told her what areas you've covered. She may want to re-cover something just to make sure you haven't forgotten anything since you were here last. Just head down here each day when you come in. I'll see you in a couple weeks."

"Hello Harry, it's nice to meet you. My little sister used to talk about you a lot. You knew her, her name was Katie."

"Nice to meet you Debbie," said Harry realizing that's probably why she looked familiar. "I knew Katie; she was on the Quidditch team. We hated it when she left."

"Well let's get started," Debbie said sounding anxious to get going. "We're going to review spell blocking and how you handle a couple of the unforgivable curses since these are very

important. Then I want to show you some variations on the bind curse and then some advanced Apparation that the team has recently perfected."

"Great, I'm ready to start." Harry followed her down to the training area that was basically a larger room with obstacles that could be moved in and out. Training and practicing were some of Harry's favorite things to do and since he wasn't seventeen yet, he couldn't do magic with his wand outside of Hogwarts or the Unspeakable department.

"Ok, I'm going to cast some spells and I want you to try and block them. Let's put a protection charm on you in case one gets through," Debbie said sounding like she wanted to get this over with.

"No thanks Debbie. If one gets through, I deserve the full force. I'm ready," Harry said confidently, thinking he had already been through this before.

"Have it your way," she replied thinking Harry was being arrogant. Debbie started by sending a few slow moving spells that Harry easily blocked.

"I could have just dodged those," Harry joked back, the way a confident sixteen-year-old boy would.

"Just letting you get warmed up," Debbie said and then shot a few more powerful and faster spells. Again, Harry blocked them all rather easily. Debbie then did some quite powerful spells that are normally hard to block but again Harry was able to stop each one.

"Fine, I guess you remember how to block. Let's go on to handling the Imperious Curse. I won't make you do anything too embarrassing." She didn't sound very friendly when she said this. Debbie pointed her wand and said, 'Imperio'.

Harry felt the nice calming feeling and heard 'lay down on the floor'. His mind started off by thinking 'that sounds like a good idea, I'll do that', but then another voice came in stronger 'you don't really want to do that, just tell her no'. So, Harry said, "Nope, I don't want to." Debbie looked surprised and tried two more times with the same result.

"Ok Fine again," Debbie snapped and Harry could tell she wasn't happy. "Now the Cruciatius curse. Larry said you had worked on throwing this as well. It's not normal part of Auror training but he insisted you try it. I'll apologize now for doing this to you. 'Crucio' she said quickly and suddenly Harry felt enormous pain before concentrating on the thought that made him the angriest, Voldemort talking about killing Cho. Quickly the pain passed and Harry stood there obviously in no pain. She stopped the curse and said, "Damn them!"

"What's wrong Debbie? Did I do something wrong?" Harry asked concerned. He hadn't meant to upset her.

"No, of course not. Fletch and his team got me to bet on how many you wouldn't pass. I bet you would only block half the spells and fail the unforgiveables. Now I owe them ten galleons. I should have believed Katie. She said never bet against you." Debbie kicked a chair and caused it to fall over.

"Let's get right into the next part and maybe we'll have this over in less than two weeks." She showed him some variations on the bind spell. "You could target areas of the body so you

could bind someone's hands only. That way they could still walk but wouldn't be so dangerous."

Harry's favorite was binding just their mouth so they couldn't talk it was, 'Tiaree Linguis'. He put the spell on Debbie about ten times before she really started to get angry.

"Ok, that's enough for today. Practice the bind spells. Mrs. Figg mentioned that when you were younger and being chased, you ended up on the roof. This gave us the idea for something else to work on. So we'll start on advanced Apparation Monday." Debbie still didn't sound happy about doing this.

"Thanks Debbie. If you talk to Katie, tell her I said hi. I'm sorry you lost money," Harry said and walked back to the lobby and flooded home.

Cho was there waiting. "Cho! What are you doing here?" As usual, Harry had to smile and think how lucky he was that Cho was his girlfriend, still remembering the first time he saw her.

"I came to surprise you but you were out. Dobby told me you went to the Ministry. Anything going on?" She came over and hugged him.

"No, I wrote to Fletch and asked if I could come back to the Unspeakable department and do anything with them. I'm finishing my Auror training! Hopefully in two weeks, I'll be an official Auror," Harry said proudly. He could tell Cho didn't understand his interest in the department.

"That's what you're doing for fun over the summer? I wonder about you sometimes," she said smiling.

"This is a great surprise Cho. I'm really glad you came. What time do you need to go home?"

"Tomorrow evening," she said looking around, "Where's Sirius?"

Harry realized what she said and the implications. "Really? You can stay until tomorrow? Your parents are ok with that?" Harry couldn't believe her father would be happy about this.

"Yes, yes and yes. Now, where's Sirius?" Cho asked again, sounding impatient.

"Probably the south of France. He said someplace warm with girls in bikinis or less."

"Someplace warm with palm trees, blue water and one of those frozen drinks in my hand sounds perfect," Cho thought out loud.

"So, let's go someplace like that. After the Auror training I could get out for a week and we could just go. Sirius could recommend someplace when he gets back." Harry started to get excited about the thought.

"I can't," Cho said sounding depressed. "There's a lot to do at the store and, I haven't finished with Kristi's contract yet. She plays hardball way more than you did. It sure would be nice to go someplace like that with you."

"So, how's Kristi to work with?" Harry wondered how the two women would work together.

"Better than I expected, she really treats me like a professional. I hope to be done with the contract by the end of next week." Cho hesitated and pulled a parchment out of her bag and handed it to Harry. "Oh yeah, here's an invitation from my father. I told him to just have me ask but he wanted to do it himself."

Harry

My wife and I would like to invite you to our home three weeks from this Friday. We are having some other family in town and they would all like to meet you. If you could, we would enjoy having you stay until Sunday.

You could give Cho your response before she leaves.

Mr. Chang

Immediately, he felt his stomach drop. "Stay all weekend at your house. Now that will make me nervous. So, do you want me to come?"

Cho hit him and pushed him onto the couch. "Of course I want you to come. I'm going to tell him yes no matter what you say just to force you," she looked up and said, "So, when exactly is Sirius coming back?"

Harry didn't know, and when he said so Cho took that to mean they had time so she started messing around right there on the couch. After a lot of rolling around and laughing, the two were under a blanket in front of the fireplace with their clothes all around the room. Suddenly there was a 'pop' and Winky was standing there. Harry felt totally embarrassed but Cho didn't look bothered at all. "Would sir and miss like to have a warm bath?"

Cho answered, "Thank you Winky. That would be very nice." Winky popped away and Cho turned to Harry, "I could get very used to this." They laughed and talked until Winky said the bath was ready and popped away. Grabbing their clothes they went up to relax in the warm water. Winky had lit nice candles around the room.

After laying in the bath for a while, Cho started rubbing Harry again. He looked at her and said, "Miss Chang, what do you think you're doing?"

She smiled, "I've never done it in the water before." After much splashing and very heavy breathing, Cho looked at Harry very satisfied and said, "Damn you're good."

Harry looked back and said, "Damn you're beautiful."

Winky brought them some food that they ate in bed and didn't get up all night. They were in bed a little late in the morning when Harry heard the door open and Sirius say, "C'mon, let me tell you about St. Tropez. You should have seen..." Sirius quickly stopped once he saw Cho under the covers with Harry, "Um...Sorry...I'll be downstairs." Harry blushed but Cho just laughed it off. They both cleaned up and came downstairs.

"I'm sorry you two. I learned my lesson. From now on I'll assume that you could be here Cho," Sirius said obviously embarrassed.

"That's ok Sirius. At least you didn't come home when we were on the couch!" Cho said and then Harry turned completely red, not believing how open Cho was with these things.

Chapter 3

Winky came out and said, "Good morning sir and miss. Was everything to your liking?"

Cho answered, "Oh yes Winky. I can't tell you how lucky Harry is to have you working here." She turned to Sirius and said, "Sirius, did you know what Harry is doing for fun this summer?"

Sirius looked at Harry shrugged his shoulders and said, "Learning to read/write French?"

"No, working with the Unspeakables. He's probably getting himself blasted around again," she said sounding annoyed.

"Harry. What are you doing down there this time?" Now Sirius sounded annoyed.

"Can't say. Actually, I can say one thing. In less than two weeks, I should be an official Auror. But after that, I can't talk about it. I do have a question for you though. Have you heard about anything weird going on at the ministry? The people in that department say strange things are going on and they don't like it."

Sirius hesitated a minute before saying, "Actually I have. I think they're going to throw Fudge out. Now on face value this sounds like a good thing but I'm not sure. I think we may be in for some rough times ahead. Have your fun down there now Harry; just know when to get out."

Cho wanted the subject changed so she asked, "So, tell us about St. Tropez. Should we go there sometime?"

Sirius went on to tell about how much fun he had and how beautiful the women were and that they didn't wear any tops. "I may have to move there Harry." Sirius joked. Harry felt joy at hearing Sirius talk about having fun since so much of his godfather's life had been either in Azkaban or on the run.

Cho came out to go running with Harry but barely made it to the end of the lane. Harry walked back with her, hand-in-hand. Walking up the lane, he looked at the castle and said, "I wish I was out of school and you were here with me."

She squeezed his hand and said, "You've got half of that, I am here with you."

"Yeah, once a week or so. But, I'll take what I can get." They got back to the castle and Harry said he was going to run the route again since he walked all the way back.

Cho sat on the steps and waited. "Harry, I've been looking through those investments. There's a few business down Knockturn Alley that you are a partner in. There's even some in France and a couple other countries. It's going to take a while to figure out what they are worth."

"Should we ask the goblins for help? They probably have information on what the businesses are worth."

"Maybe. Let's see what I can find out first." Cho sat and read while Harry worked in the yard a bit and then went to lift his made up weights. "Why don't you get some real ones if you want

to lift?" We could order some and have them delivered. I thought George had a catalog with stuff like that in it. I'll steal it from him next week."

They had taken a long walk after supper and then Cho had to leave. "It was really nice being here Harry, I could really get used to it," she hugged him tightly.

"So, get used to it. That would only make me happy." He kissed her, not really wanting her to leave.

The next morning Sirius asked about the Unspeakables. "Couldn't you find anything better to do than go there?"

"It's fun there! And besides, I may still go to work there after school." Harry replied.

"Sure, give up being a Quidditch star to work in a little unknown department for the Ministry."

Harry couldn't understand why no one realized he liked the department. "Maybe I could do both. Besides, the stuff they taught me saved Cho's life and mine. However little the department is, I like it a lot. They work with stuff most people will never know of. I think I could really enjoy working there," Harry said irritated.

Sirius sighed and said, "You're right. I do owe them a lot for teaching you to handle yourself. I just couldn't imagine giving up the celebrity of playing Quidditch for that."

"Giving up Quidditch would be hard; I don't like the celebrity part." They talked a bit more before Harry went off on his run.

On Monday, Harry arrived at Debbie Bell's office ready to learn something new. "Have you forgiven me for costing you money last week?" Harry asked as he slowly poked his head in her office.

"Of course, it was my own fault for not finding out more about your last time here. So, Katie tells me you're some famous Quidditch star now. She says you're some big celebrity especially in France. I'm not really up on stuff like that. I pretty much just work most of the time."

"You sound like one of my best friends, Hermione. She could care less about Quidditch and only wants to read and study. I play Quidditch for the French National Team last year. We got beat in the finals."

"Then I say you should be off partying in France! This isn't a glamorous place to be." Debbie got up and walked to the training area.

"I like it here! I learned a lot last time and there's always strange things going on. And, look at you. You're obviously smart, nice and really pretty. Why are you down here?"

Debbie looked surprised at Harry's comments and he again saw the similarities to Hermione. "I've just never been good around people and I can make a difference here," she said in the nicest tone she had used yet.

"Exactly like Hermione," Harry said shaking his head.

"Ok, we'll quickly review the binding spells from last week and then go on to advanced Apparation," Debbie said and then had Harry bind various parts of her body. Harry left her hands and mouth bound longer than she enjoyed. "Don't mess around with me," she said sounding kind of mad.

"I'm sorry mam," Harry responded quickly.

"Ok, I wasn't really mad but now that you've called me 'mam' I am!" she said but smiled afterwards. "Ok, what do you think happens when you Apparate?"

Harry looked confused but said, "You just end up in a new place."

"Ok, but how do you get there? How long does it take?"

"I don't really know how you get there. My friend Ron and I learned over holiday last year so we didn't learn all the theory behind it. Sorry."

"You should really learn the theory behind things. Then you may learn that the rules you are taught can be bent a little. You are gone for longer when you Apparate further distances. If the distance is relatively short, can you be in two places at once?"

"Not without a time-turner." Harry answered remembering Hermione and how they saved Sirius with one.

"Well, that's being two places at the same time, not exactly at once. Different concept. Watch," Debbie demanded and picked up a cup from the table and threw it at the opposite wall. The next thing Harry knew she was standing at the opposite wall and caught the cup.

"Wow! That was great." Harry exclaimed.

"That was easy," Debbie replied. "There are two tricky parts. One is being able to concentrate enough so that you could go back and forth many times quickly. The other is being aware of your situation during the time you are gone. I'll close my eyes and you take the cup. Throw the cup into the air across the room. Tap my shoulder after you let the cup go. Whenever you are ready." She closed her eyes. Harry threw the cup into the air, aiming for the far corner and tapped Debbie's shoulder. She vanished and appeared in the corner waiting for the cup to get to her.

"How did you know where to Apparate to?" Harry asked still amazed at what he just saw.

"That's the whole point! Concentrate on what's happening when you Apparate No one even thinks about it. They just pop from one place to another not realizing what happens around them. Try going from this corner to the other, but instead of just waiting to arrive, as soon as you Apparate, try to focus on the room."

Harry tried a few times but couldn't really tell anything. "That's because you're trying to see the room with your eyes. It won't work like that. Let me blindfold you." She took out a black piece of cloth and tied it around his eyes. Then she moved him around so he didn't know

exactly where he was. "Now, Apparate to the corner." Harry did. "Now, Apparate back to where you were."

"How can I do that? I didn't know where I was." Harry said totally confused.

"When you apparated to the corner, your mind saw where you were. Try to not think about seeing where you are; think about knowing where you are. Your mind already knows this; you just need to figure out how to see what your mind knows."

Harry was getting frustrated but really tried to concentrate. Being blindfolded helped since he wanted to look around. Harry kind of felt an idea on a spot so he tried it. Then he heard. "See, it's not so hard." Debbie put him through these paces quite a few more times until he could get back to the spot each time.

"That's it for today. Next time we're going to work on deciding on your destination *after* you begin Apparating. That is how I caught the cup."

Harry went home still kind of confused. He didn't see much value in what he learned today but being able to change destinations sounded really neat. At least Apparation was something he could practice at home.

Harry decided to write his friends, he had only heard from them a couple times.

Ron

How are things at home? Nothing exciting is going on here. Sirius is gone more than he is here.

When is the twins' store going to open? Cho seems to think they're going to do ok.

Have you heard your dad or Percy mention anything about the Ministry? I heard things are kind of weird there.

Tell everyone hi.

Harry

He tied the note to Hedwig and sent her off. He was walking back in when a little owl fluttered in. It was Ron's owl. Now he wished he had waited on his own note. He asked the owl to stay for a response and pulled off the note. It was actually from Ginny.

Hi Harry

I haven't heard from you this summer and I did say I would take care of you so I wanted to see how you were. Ron and Hermione said you were fantastic in the Quidditch matches. Too bad you didn't win the Cup.

Hermione was really amazed that you sent her and Cho out shopping. She said that she really likes what she got. She also said you wouldn't believe what Cho bought and that you probably wouldn't let her wear it.

Well that's about it. I hope you come visit us this summer. I know everyone would like to see you.

Write back soon.

Ginny

Harry really liked Ginny. There was a time when he thought that something might develop between them, but then things got crazy and Cho was kind of just there. He often wondered how it would have been if he had asked Ginny out last year.

Hi Ginny

Thanks for writing. I've just been doing my own stuff this summer and it's my fault I haven't written. I should learn to be better. I was really upset that we lost the match but at least it was to Viktor. He's a really good seeker.

Did Hermione tell you why I sent them shopping? If not, I'll tell you the story at school. I'm glad she found something she liked. I don't know what she meant about what Cho bought. I thought it was one of the best things I've ever seen her in. Even if it wasn't, do you really think I could stop her from wearing something she wanted? I couldn't tell any of you three what to do or wear. None of you would listen to me.

I hope to get over this summer. I'm still trying to read/write French, and I just started going back to the Ministry last week. I don't know how long I'll be able to continue there.

I think that if France makes it back to the playoffs this year, you get first pick at coming with me. I wish I had more passes.

Take care

Harry

Harry quickly tied the note back on the little owl's leg, gave it a treat and it fluttered away happily. He would have to wait until Hedwig got back to write Hermione.

After his run the next day, Hedwig came back with Ron's note.

Harry

Things are normal here. Always kind of crazy. The twins are still living here until their store starts making money. They are building up some inventory right now, so they should open before long. I've never seen them work so hard. Even Mum seems proud of them.

You know, Dad's been mentioning things about the Ministry. Sounds like some shakeups may be coming. I think he's upset with Percy also. Keeps saying, "I don't think he knows what he's getting involved with."

Want to come over Sunday? Mum said it was ok. It will be a quiet house, the twins will be working and Percy has already moved out. If I don't hear from you, I'll assume you'll be here Sunday.

Ron

Harry thought that it would be great to see them this weekend. Harry went on to write Hermione.

Hermione

How have you been? Are you going anywhere with your family over the break?

I think I'm going to see Ron on Sunday. I haven't been writing as much as I should. Sirius has been gone way more than he's been here.

You should really come and visit sometime. Tell your parents I promise to be a good boy so they won't worry.

Have you been officially informed that you are Head Girl yet? We know it will happen; it would just be nice to hear it officially.

Take care

Harry

He tied the note to Hedwig who gave him a look of 'I just got back.' He stroked her, gave her a treat and asked her to take the note to Hermione.

Thursday brought a note from Cho,

Harry.

I won't be able to come over this weekend. I have a lot of work to do with the store getting closer and am going to do some things with my parents on the weekend. I'm really going to miss you. I promise to make it up to you.

See you soon

Cho

Harry was sad but thought he should get used to it. Once he started school, they would go much longer without seeing each other. At least he was going to see Ron on Sunday.

Harry got to Debbie Bell's office on time. At his last lesson, he had been able to have her throw the cup and he apparated to catch it every time. She seemed happy enough with his progress, but wanted him to get better about choosing a destination after Apparating. "Here's what we start on today. Just because you can Apparate between points almost instantly, does that mean you have to do it instantly? No. Since you can choose and alter your destination during the process, surely you can slow it down or even stop it for a time. Here are three cards with a location in this room. After I disappear, hold up one of the cards and I'll go to that location. Ready?" Debbie disappeared, Harry held up "Next to door" and suddenly Debbie appeared next to the door.

"That was great. How long can you stay gone?" Harry was really impressed with how much Debbie could do.

"Quite some time. You just start to feel tired after a while. So far, you've broken down the process into disappearing, then deciding where to go and appearing in one step. We're going to work on breaking the last to apart. We want three distinct steps. Disappearing, deciding where to go, and then finally appearing there." They worked on this until lunch, until Harry was actually able to stay gone for almost a minute. "After lunch we're going to try two more things and then we're done."

They went to eat in the cafeteria and Harry noticed a man sitting in the far corner talking to two other wizards, one was Percy Weasley. Harry tried to scoot around to avoid being seen but already people had started pointing and mumbling. Playing Quidditch had put him out in the public quite a lot. This was another reason he liked the Unspeakable department, they didn't treat him like a celebrity.

Debbie asked Harry why he was acting strange so he told her about Percy and the giants last year. "Well join the club. None of them like us. And, everybody in here has already seen you already. The taller man is Noel Gallah. He has been moving up quickly the last couple years. Somehow he just got promoted to the Minister of Education. We think that he really wants to control our department. There's something about him I'm not comfortable with."

"He looks familiar to me; I just can't place from where," Harry said. He and Debbie started to get up to leave but noticed the three men get up quickly and come over.

"Hello Miss Bell," the taller man said greeting Debbie. He then turned to Harry and extended his hand. "Now, what would bring France's star seeker to our Ministry today? I'm Noel Gallah, Minister of Education. I don't believe we've ever met." The tall man said staring at Harry.

Harry shook his hand and said, "I'm getting a little tour sir. I'm not sure we've met or not. You seem quite familiar to me." Harry stared back trying to place the man.

"Well, I do have one of those common faces. A tour you say?" The man said suspiciously but quickly went back to his original charming tone. "Yes, that must be interesting. I imagine they wanted to thank you for helping uncover a rogue ex-employee last year. Very thoughtful of them," Mr. Gallah added.

Percy spoke up in his same irritating tone. "You had a whole summer here just a couple years ago. Surely nothing has changed to make another tour very interesting."

Harry still hadn't forgiven him about leaking information to the press so he said, "Well they did want to ask some specific questions about the giants and I volunteered to tell them anything I knew."

Harry could tell that hit a nerve with Percy, but Mr. Gallah spoke again, "Yes, well everyone in the Ministry regrets that little incident. I'm sure there are no hard feelings here. We'll let you get back to your tour. Maybe you could tell me about it sometime. You probably know more than I do about that group."

The three men left and Debbie said, "I don't think Percy likes you."

Harry and Debbie went back to the training room. "Ok, what I want you to do now is to stand in this corner, cast a spell to the other corner and then go over and block the spell before it hits the wall." Harry was able to do it on the second try. The first time, he didn't block quick enough and was glad he only used the jelly-legs curse.

"The final thing on advance Apparation I want to see is if you can take an object out of the air. I will throw the cup without you seeing where; I want you to Apparate to it while it is in the air, get it and then Apparate back here before you fall." Debbie said sounding like this was just another obvious thing to do.

Harry looked worried but said he was ready. Debbie threw the cup and tapped Harry who had his eyes closed. When the cup started coming down, Harry appeared next to it and grabbed it but wasn't able to Apparate before he fell. Luckily Debbie had cushioned his landing and he wasn't hurt. "Damn!" Harry said loudly.

"Don't worry about it. That was very close. You got distracted by falling. You had plenty of time once you felt yourself fall to Apparate I've seen you do it faster than that. Don't worry about falling. Just concentrate on what you know you have to do. Think about it. If you ever fall off a ledge panicked, you're done for. If you keep your head, you can just Apparate away. Not many people would keep their head in a situation like that unless they had practiced and knew what to do."

They worked on this for the rest of the afternoon until finally Harry was able to do it. He even got to where he could get two cups out of the air. Debbie seemed pleased. "Well, that was all I am supposed to show you. But, since we have another day, would you like to learn some very basic medic spells? I can show you how to stop minor bleeding and to set minor bone breaks, and how to stretcher someone. Personally, I think all Aurors should know these things."

"I'd love that. Thanks. Will I need to take a test or anything like last time?" Harry said, happy to be able to learn something new.

Debbie looked confused. "No test, we just fill out the form that says you have done all the training required to be an Auror. That's it. See you next week."

Harry went home and heard voices from the kitchen. He walked in and someone was sitting with Sirius. "Hermione! What are you doing here?" Harry's already good mood just increased. Hermione was one of his two best friends and he had been feeling closer to her over the past year.

"Good to see you too Harry," Hermione said smiling as she came over to hug him, "You told me to come over sometime? Do I need to make an appointment now?" she joked as she sat back down.

"Of course not. You can come anytime you want. So, are you an official Head Girl yet?" Harry asked, knowing that she would be the obvious choice. Hermione had the top grades and she took responsibilities very seriously.

"No," she said with some disappointment. "I really hope to get it, even though it will mean even more teasing from you and Ron."

"I won't tease you. I'm going to try and be a good student and get this last year over with as quick as I can."

"That tired of spending so much time with us?" Hermione joked.

"He just wants to get out of school and marry Cho," Sirius added.

"Ha, ha... Next subject. Are you going on any trips with your parents this year?" asked Harry trying to get the subject off of him and Cho.

"I don't think so, they're really busy and I need to start studying before long. We've got N.E.W.T.s this year you know." Hermione's face turned very serious when she said this. Hermione had been planning for these tests for over a year already and wanted to get as many as possible.

Sirius talked about how much he hated those tests. Then he left Harry and Hermione alone to talk. After getting Hermione to tell him all about her summer so far, Harry really wanted to ask about something, "So, are you and Ron really ok now? I'm going over to the Burrow this Sunday."

Harry could feel her tense up a bit. "It just feels different. We don't fight or anything, but it doesn't feel like we're as close," she said. "I've owled a few times and he's only responded once. Ginny said he's been talking about Parvati a lot."

Harry thought that Ron had always talked about Parvati. "After the three of us do some things this year, it'll all be back to normal," Harry said quickly. "We should try to have some fun this year."

"I couldn't stand it last year when we were fighting. You and Ron can fight and Ron and I can fight, but never you and me," Hermione said sounding regretful.

"I didn't like it either. Let's not let it happen again," Harry said and then told her about Percy and Mr. Gallah. "That Mr. Gallah seems familiar." Harry mentioned, and then he thought of something else. "Can I try something I learned out on you? It won't hurt, I promise." Harry asked but still had a smile on his face. Hermione seemed nervous but agreed. "Ok, start telling me about the latest spell book you read." Hermione seemed confused but started talking.

"Oh it was really interesting, this was very advanced" and then she couldn't open her mouth. Harry had concentrated and thought 'Tiaree Linguis' and been able to perform the focused bind spell on her without his wand. He quickly released the spell.

"What was that? When did you learn it?" Hermione was excited, not at all upset about him doing that to her.

"I finished my Auror training today and they were teaching me some focused bind spells. I wanted to see if I could do any without my wand. So far I've only done basic banishing and summoning that way. Want to learn them?" Harry asked and Hermione wrote the spells down anxious to try them out when she got back to school.

"I can't wait to try this out," she said with a wicked look in her eye. "I really want to hear what else you learned but I need to get home."

"Come back soon, this has been great," Harry said hugging her. He felt more comfortable with Hermione than just about anyone else.

"As great as when Cho comes over?" Hermione asked jokingly.

"Well, parts of it," Harry said as she was leaving.

The next morning seemed to take forever to arrive since Harry was so excited about going to The Burrow. He was up early but couldn't leave for a while so he had his morning run and took his time getting ready. Finally once it seemed like a reasonable time he left for The Burrow.

Harry apparated outside and knocked on the door. Ginny answered and immediately hugged him tightly. It struck Harry that Ginny seemed to mature quite a bit, even over the short time since he had seen her last. "What did you knock for? You just come in. I'm so glad you're here. I hoped you'd come early."

Mrs. Weasley gave him a really big motherly hug and said, "We're sorry you didn't with the cup dear. Ron said you played great. Now all he talks about is working for a Quidditch team." Harry smiled at this because he knew the main reason Ron wanted to work for a team was to see all the pretty girls that came around. "The boys are out back doing who knows what," Mrs. Weasley added.

Mr. Weasley came over and greeted him warmly and asked about Sirius. After telling Mr. Weasley how Sirius was doing, Harry thought for a second and said, "Mr. Weasley can I ask you something about the ministry?" Mr. Weasley looked at him. "I met a man there the other day, his name was Mr. Gallah. He kind of gave me the creeps. Percy happened to be with him. What's he like?"

Harry heard Mrs. Weasley make a "frump" sound but then Mr. Weasley spoke up. "I'm really not sure Harry. He's definitely poking his nose into things a Minister of Education has no business looking into. I try to keep away from him as much as I can. Percy seems to like him though; he's kind of a role model now." Mr. Weasley now gave a questioning look to Harry and said, "You're not going back to the Unspeakables are you? I don't think it's a good time to be around the ministry."

"You're not putting yourself through all of that again are you?" Ginny asked concerned.

"I'm not doing any dueling this time. I just finished my Auror training the other day and I'm going to work on some other things for a while, like learning how to set breaks and things next week. That's useful considering my friends," he said thinking about all the minor things that had happened to Hermione, Ron and him. "I heard Mr. Fudge might be forced out," Harry said quietly.

Mr. Weasley looked up quickly. "We heard the same things. I wonder what else they know down in your department."

Just then the door flew open and he heard. "Harry! Why didn't you come out? How long have you been here?"

"Just got here." Harry replied as Ron pulled him outside. "Hey guys, how's the store coming? When are you going to open?"

"It's going great. We've got just about all our inventory ready. The opening is three weeks from yesterday. Got your invitation inside. I tell you, that girlfriend of yours has a brilliant business mind," Fred said.

"And, she laughs at most of our stuff," George added. "Couldn't be doing this without her, she's been a big help. We'll keep an eye on her while you're at school. Any funny business and we'll send an owl."

"Unless the funny business is with us of course," Fred added.

Ron's mom called him inside for a minute. Harry called the twins over. "If you guys need a real investor, let me know. I can't believe what they pay me to play Quidditch and I could spare some on a good investment."

"Thanks mate but your girlfriend beat you to it. She said she couldn't believe what you're paying her to be your manager and she just finished Kristi's contract so she wanted to invest and it came at just the right time," Fred said smiling. Harry wondered why Cho didn't say anything about finishing Kristi's contract or investing with the twins.

Spending the day at Ron's was great. Having this many people that he really liked around made the time go so much faster than at home. He spent quite a lot of the time talking to Ginny during the day. He had been feeling a lot more comfortable around her and was impressed by how composed and natural she was. It was a far cry from the girl he met the summer before his second year of school.

Later when it was about time to go home, Harry was talking to Ron alone, "So, heard anything from Hermione?"

"Yeah, we wrote once earlier. Not a whole lot to talk about anymore. I wrote Parvati a few times though. Thought about trying that again."

"That's good. I really liked having someone to date at school. You should make sure Hermione knows you still want her as a good friend." Harry thought for a moment about not having anyone at school this year. He realized it was getting late. "I need to be going." Harry said his goodbyes and Mrs. Weasley loaded him down with leftovers before he went home.

Sirius was waiting in the kitchen with a concerned look. "What's going on Sirius?"

"Death Eaters attacked the house next door to Cornelius Fudge. We think it was to send a message. Things are starting to happen more often. Dumbledore wants me to meet him at the school Friday night and said I could bring you if you're interested. He probably figures you'll find out even if you're not there."

Harry's attitude changed immediately. He had felt like a kid all day, but now suddenly felt the weight of things he thought were his responsibility back on his shoulders. "Yes I want to go. I wonder what other information he has."

"There was an owl while you were out." Sirius handed Harry the letter.

Harry

I really missed you this week. I shouldn't have gone with my parents and came to see you instead. My mom would have been upset, but my father would have understood.

I finished Kristi's contract so now all I have to work on is the business and your investments. Your invitation to the store's opening should be coming soon. I think you'll like it.

Hope you had a good weekend. Rub your charm before you go to bed and think of me. I can't wait to see you this weekend.

I love you

Cho

Well, she mentioned the contract, but why not the investment? Harry wondered. He decided to write her back tomorrow and went on to bed.

Chapter 4

After his run in the morning, he decided to write Cho before going to the Ministry.

Cho

I'm glad you wrote; I really missed you. I rub the charm every night, that's still one of the best gifts I've ever gotten.

If Kristi is happy with her contract, maybe by next year you'll get a few more players. I got the invitation to the opening; I'm looking forward to it. Any chance you'll be my date to it?

I won't be able to see you Friday. Dumbledore wants to see Sirius and I'm tagging along. There's been an attack so he's getting people together to get some information. That's Friday night and I don't know what time I'll be back.

Oh, I'm an official Auror now. Next week I'm going to learn how to mend minor broken bones and then onto other things. Did you know that Katie Bell's older sister works there? She was teaching me some advanced Apparation.

Have fun at work this week. I'll think about you every day.

I love you

Harry

Quickly, Harry cleaned up and went to the ministry. He spent two days learning to mend bones. If it worked the same on real bones that it did on the rubbery test body parts they had, this wasn't so hard. He couldn't believe Lockhart messed his up so bad. Before he finished for the day he was talking to Debbie. "Would you mind repeating that last part about concentrating on the bone one more time?"

Debbie looked slightly annoyed and said, "You've already done it four times, why..." And then she stopped because Harry had done the bind on her mouth without his wand. Her eyes got really big and she pointed at her mouth. After a moment of her looking angrier he released the spell. "Very funny. Now where's your wand, I didn't even see you have it."

"I didn't," he said. "I wanted to see if I could do it using wandless magic. Guess it worked, huh?" Harry laughed.

"You can be a real smart ass sometimes, you know that. I suppose the others knew you could do that as well? Fine, don't tell me anything. Get out of here, I'm done with you," she said but he could tell she wasn't really angry.

"Thanks for all your help Debbie, I learned a lot. Tell Katie I said hi. I'll see you again before I'm off to school."

Harry got back home in a really good mood, and immediately Dobby came to him looking serious and said, "Sir needs to come upstairs please."

"What is it Dobby? Is something wrong?" Harry asked following Dobby.

"Dobby can't say sir." They stopped outside of Harry's room and Dobby pointed.

Harry drew his wand and opened the door quickly, not knowing what would be in there. "About time you got home. Put that thing away," Cho said smiling, lying under the covers in bed.

"Cho! What are you doing here? Didn't you have to work today?" Harry said coming over to kiss her.

"I decided to leave a little early and come tell my boyfriend how much I miss him," she said hugging him and pulling him into bed.

Harry climbed in next to her and said, "I'll have to thank your bosses when I see them next."

After a couple hours of making love, they were lying there talking. "I can't believe how much I missed you Harry. What have you done to me?" she asked smiling.

She leaned over and kissed him. "So, Debbie Bell's been teaching you a few tricks, huh?"

"Yep, but she's done with me now. Man I'm glad you're here," said Harry before pulling her into a deep kiss.

"Now are you sure you'd rather go to some boring meeting with old people than see me Friday?" Cho was tracing circles on his chest while saying this.

"I really want to find out what's going on. I also wonder who else will be there. I'll miss seeing you a bunch." As much as Harry liked what Cho was doing, nothing would keep him from this meeting.

"Oh sure. After you get out of school, I'm going to have to teach you how to have fun in your off time," she said tickling him.

"Hey, I asked you to go to some tropical island and you wouldn't. I tried to have fun," he insisted.

"But I had to work!"

"You don't *have* to work."

"But I like my work right now. It's exciting to try and get this off the ground. Speaking of that, I have a surprise," she leaned off the bed and pulled out a piece of parchment.

Harry read it and looked at her confused. "What is this?"

"It's our company Harry! P/C Investments. I formed a company with us as equal partners. All you have to do is sign the form and it'll be totally official. We even made our first investment. We invested in the twin's store. I hope that's alright?"

Harry was amazed at how well Cho understood business. "Cho, this is amazing. How do you think of this? Of course it's alright," Harry said and hugged her. "How much do you want me to transfer to the account?"

"I put in 10,000. So, if you do the same that gives us enough to do some small-scale investments. I thought it would be fun. I invested 5000 with the twins."

"Your idea of fun to me is kind of like my idea of fun is to you. But, I'm glad you want to do this together. I'm all for it."

"Thanks Harry. I really wanted us to have something together." She paused and then gave him a suggestive look. "Sure there's no way I can talk you out of going to the meeting Friday?" she said while slowly getting dressed.

"I don't mind you trying but I really should go. The bad part is that I won't see you again until I come to your house the next Friday." Harry was obviously nervous at the thought of staying with her family.

Friday at the Unspeakable department, Harry went back to Fletch's office. "Congratulations Harry, you're an Auror now. Debbie said you learned a few new things, so it was worthwhile. Let's go into one of the artifact rooms." Fletch led Harry down a hall into a room with a few tables and some tools. There was a shelf in the corner with a bunch of weird items on it. Rose and Larry were already in the room. "These are some items that were recovered on a raid of a wizard's home who has been doing a lot of trade with known Death Eaters. We haven't identified all of them yet, but a few of them seem to be Egyptian."

Harry was trying to listen and pay attention to the charm Fletch had on the table, but the sound coming from the shelf kept distracting him. Fletch began talking again but stopped when he noticed Harry glancing at the shelves and asked, "Is something the matter Harry? You seem distracted?"

"How can you all concentrate with all that noise?" Harry asked, amazed the rest of the people could just block out all the sound.

The other three looked at each other and Fletch said, "What noise? We don't hear anything."

Harry looked stunned. He was hearing voices and it wasn't like a parsletongue voice, it wasn't like English either. "It's like a bunch of people talking. I can't understand what they're saying. It's coming from the shelf." Harry walked over to it and looked around.

Rose jumped up and stood next to Harry, "Careful Harry, don't just pick anything up," she said, obviously recognizing the risks of touching strange magical objects.

"I think it's this orb," Harry pointed to an orb that looked like amber. It was very irregularly shaped and not smooth at all. It looked like it had been knocked around for a long time.

Rose picked the orb up and brought it to the table.

"That's where the voices are coming from," Harry listened to the object closer. It sounded like a badly tuned Muggle radio where a lot of people were talking. "It could be one voice

speaking a bunch of languages. I can't understand anything." Harry looked at the others in amazement, "You don't hear this? It's really annoying!"

The other three studied the orb closely and kept glancing at Harry, almost like they didn't believe him. "Harry. To me this is just a lumpy amber orb. It doesn't look special and I can't hear anything," Rose said and Larry agreed.

Harry looked at it more closely. "I can definitely hear voices." He started to bring his hand close to the object but suddenly his fingers glowed like they did when he first did wandless magic. Little bolts of what looked like electricity jumped between the orb and his hand, causing him to immediately pull his hand back.

The others gasped, "What did it feel like?" Fletch asked sounding worried.

"Nothing, I didn't feel anything, it just startled me," Harry announced and slowly put his hand over the orb again until the little electricity bolts went to each finger. He lowered his hand until it was around the orb. As soon as he picked it up, the orb darkened into an almost maroon color. "The voice stopped!" he exclaimed and just stared into the thing.

"Set it back down." Rose said anxiously.

Gently, Harry set the orb back down and it changed back to amber. Harry told them the voices started again. Each of Unspeakables picked the orb up and there was no change for any of them. Fletch brought over a lot of other objects from the shelf but nothing else acted strangely. "What do the languages sound like?" Rose asked having retrieved some parchment and a quill.

"Not like anything I've heard before. One seems to come though clearer than the others but I can't make out anything. It could just be a bunch of mumbling for all I know." Harry sounded disappointed.

"Touch it with your wand. Carefully," Larry suggested drawing warning looks from the other Unspeakables. Harry quickly thought this was another reason he liked coming here. At school or home, people would be forcing Harry to stay away from things like the orb, but in this department, they encouraged him to get involved.

Harry pulled out his wand and touched the top of the object but nothing happened. He waved the wand over the top slowly and again, nothing happened. The team was mumbling ideas around when Harry tried pushing the tip of his wand up against the orb. He felt no resistance and then wand sunk directly into the object. The orb suddenly turned brilliant red. Harry quickly pulled his wand out causing the orb returned to amber. "Could you still hear the sounds when your wand was in it?" Rose asked still writing notes.

"Yes, they almost seemed to sound excited. It didn't feel like my wand was going into anything. I couldn't even tell it was even there." Each of the others tried with their own wands and nothing happened. They spent the rest of the day trying everything they could think of on the orb but nothing new came from it. "Sorry we didn't get any answers on that thing," Harry told them when he was leaving.

Fletch laughed. "That's usual in this department. We've worked on objects for months before finding the key and sometimes we never do. This was your first taste of the non-exciting part

of the group. More days go like this than trying new and exciting spells. Keep that in mind before you give up your glamorous career. Not a word about this object to anyone," Fletch said as Harry was leaving.

Harry got back home feeling both excited about the discovery, but depressed that they had no clue what the object was or why he could hear sounds from it. He talked to Sirius for a while about what they thought the meeting with Dumbledore would be about. After going for his run and eating, he and Sirius Apparated to Hogsmeade and then took a carriage to the castle.

Harry hadn't seen the castle so empty and quiet since the summer after he was hurt when he stayed there for a bit. It still felt like a very comforting place to him. He and Sirius walked to the statue guarding the entrance to the Headmaster's private area and after giving the password, went up to Professor Dumbledore's office. After knocking and hearing Dumbledore's voice call them in, he and Sirius entered a room where other people were already talking.

"Ah good. The final two invitees," Dumbledore said. Harry went to a chair a bit off to the side of the desk. "Harry, I don't believe you have met everyone here tonight." Harry recognized Professor Snape, Professor McGonagall, Mrs. Figg, and Mr. Moody but not a witch and wizard standing across from him. "This is Leopold McKenzie and Bethany Douglas, both old friends that we all trust well."

Harry shook their hands and greeted them warmly. "Well, now we can get down to business," Dumbledore said. Harry was ready to listen intently but Fawkes made a noise and landed on Harry's knee. Harry didn't say anything and began stroking the impressive bird trying to listen to the adult's conversations. "We have heard some troubling rumors about a change of strategy for the other side. It seems that Voldemort has instructed his followers to not carry out any attacks without specific instructions. The attack on the neighbor of the Minister of Magic was one such instruction. Also, there have been some rumblings about tighter control of the schools from the Minister of Education."

Hearing the Minister of Education mentioned, Harry spoke up, "I just met Mr. Gallah the other day. I don't think I trust him."

Everyone was now looking at him strangely. Dumbledore seemed to have a slight smile but Snape didn't seem amused when he said, "And how did you happen to meet the Minister of Education?"

"Um... I've been spending some time at the Ministry again this summer and Mr. Gallah introduced himself to me. Percy Weasley was with him. Percy still seems mad at me for the giant thing last year." Harry went on to tell them about how he thought Gallah was going to try and force Fudge out of office and about how it looked like Gallah was trying to find out information about other areas of the Ministry.

"Is that so Mr. Potter? Maybe we should have just come to you first instead of listening to any other sources we may have," Professor McGonagall spoke up.

"Why would you be at the Ministry instead of out enjoying your enhanced fame?" Snape asked coldly, but not as coldly as he used to, noted Harry.

"I would wonder the same thing myself Harry. There has to be something you'd rather do than spending your summer at the Ministry," Dumbledore added with a concerned look.

"I've been telling him the same thing," Sirius said giving Harry an 'I told you so' look.

"I like it there!" Harry exclaimed, "Also, I just completed all of my training so I'm an official Auror now. I can be more help if you need it." Harry seemed to have a pleading look on his face.

Harry could see Snape's face tightening like he wanted to say something. Before he could, Dumbledore spoke up. "I can't say I remember when a student still in school became an Auror. Well, your information is just another confirmation of what we have been hearing ourselves. Our guess is that at best, Mr. Gallah does not take the same stance against the other side as we do. If we give him the benefit of the doubt at this point, we can assume he would do nothing to aid us in preventing Voldemort from carrying out his plans."

"Is there anyone else in the Ministry who would become Minister if Fudge steps aside?" Mr. McKenzie asked.

"Not likely. He seemed to have everyone else afraid to challenge him," Mrs. Douglas added.

"So is there nothing we can do? If people who are at best sympathetic to their side gain control of the Ministry, how would we be able to stop them?" McGonagall asked.

Discussions went on for a while about how to stop Gallah and about who else could become Minister if Fudge really does step aside. Finally Dumbledore spoke, "Unless we have some hard evidence that Mr. Gallah is not against Voldemort, there is little we can do. We need to keep looking for Voldemort's real plan. Unless anyone has any specific ideas, we all need to continue trying to find out information."

"I could try to talk to Gallah," Harry spoke up drawing looks from the group. "Since he's so interested in what goes on, maybe he'll think I'll let something slip about the area I'm in."

"Why would he care about any area you may be in? He probably can get it from normal channels." Mrs. Douglas said since she didn't know which area Harry had been in.

"I don't think so. I'm pretty sure he's never been into the department. Fudge hasn't even been in there," Harry stated.

Mrs. Douglas looked confused so Sirius spoke up, "Harry is spending time with the Unspeakables Bethany. He did the same thing a couple years ago and doing so saved his life. He keeps joking that he may give up Quidditch and go to work full time there after school." Sirius informed the woman.

"I'm not joking!" Harry added in an annoyed tone.

"Ok, so you're serious. I'm still not comfortable with Harry trying to pry information out of the Minister of Education who has a good chance of being a Death Eater." Sirius said angrily.

Others in the room seemed to agree then Dumbledore spoke, "Does anyone have any other ideas how we could get information out of Mr. Gallah?" No one spoke for a minute. "Then

what I would say is that if Harry wants to talk to Mr. Gallah, then we shouldn't stop him. In doing so, we can hope that Mr. Gallah would let some information slip that we could use. I must insist that you do not let Mr. Gallah even suspect that you are trying to get information from him. Do you agree?"

"Yes sir I won't let him know," Harry promised, happy that the Headmaster approved.

"Professor Dumbledore. That man could well be dangerous. Do you really think this is wise?" Professor McGonagall asked.

"If Harry is comfortable with this, then I will support him. Gallah wouldn't do anything in a public place," Dumbledore said.

They talked for a while longer before Sirius and Harry made their way to Hogsmeade and then on home. They were still arguing when they arrived in the kitchen. "I don't know what you think you're doing Harry. He could be very dangerous."

"All I'm going to try to do is talk. He may not even want to talk to me," Harry replied.

"I don't think you should be involved. We can keep working other sources and try to find out more information first. I think there's too much risk."

"What risk? Even if he'll talk to me, we'll be at the ministry. What can happen?" Harry asked sounding exasperated.

Suddenly they both turned towards the living area when they heard, "What's risky?" It was Cho, standing in the doorway with a long nightshirt on.

"Cho!" Harry said and went to hug her. "What are you doing here?"

"I couldn't wait until next week to see you. Now, what's risky?" Cho asked in a firm voice.

"Nothing's risky. Would you think talking to the Minister of Education is risky?" Harry asked, looking at Cho.

"No, why?" she answered looking confused.

"See. Cho doesn't think it's risky either." Harry said staring at Sirius.

"Ok, what if the Minister of Education was a Death Eater working for Voldemort and planning on taking over the Ministry? Then would it be risky?" Sirius asked.

"You're not serious? Of course that would be risky. Harry, don't tell me you're thinking about it." Cho exclaimed now on Sirius' side.

"No one is sure he's a Death Eater and no one's sure he wants to take over the Ministry. Now, if I happen to talk to him in the Ministry, what could happen? Do either of you really think I would do something stupid?"

"YES." They both said at once.

"Fine, let me rephrase that. I've never been happier. Sirius, you're free, we live in this great place. I'm playing professional Quidditch. I'm in love with the most wonderful woman I could ever imagine. Now, given all of that, do you think I would do something stupid?"

"YES." They both said again.

"I'm just going to talk. That's all. Please, trust me? Why don't either of you have any faith in me" Harry pleaded. "The Unspeakables don't treat me like a little kid, why do everyone else?"

Cho came and hugged him. "I just worry about you."

"Same here," Sirius admitted. "You know it comes with the job."

"Thanks, and I'm glad you do. But really, I'm not afraid of Gallah, not at all," Harry said.

"That's what worries me," Sirius said. "I'm off to bed."

"You don't know how glad I am that you're here," Harry told Cho. "C'mon let's go to bed."

They just snuggled that night and Harry thought how good it felt to have her here. They got up late in the morning and before they left the bedroom Cho said, "You know, that's the first time we spent a night together and didn't -dance-."

"Is that a problem?" Harry asked having enjoyed just sleeping with his girlfriend.

"Not as long as we don't make a habit of it." Cho joked.

They went down and had breakfast. Sirius was already up. "I'm getting used to you being around Cho. It's kind of nice."

"Thanks. You're easier to take not being an escaped convict on the run too." She joked back.

Sirius looked at Harry, took a deep breath and said, "Harry, I wanted to apologize for last night. I shouldn't have been like that. You're every bit as capable as anyone else in that meeting last night and I didn't treat you like that. If any of the others had volunteered to talk to Gallah, I wouldn't have said anything. I just need to forget you're less than half the age of the rest of us."

"Sirius! Don't talk about my age. I keep trying to get Cho to think I'm not a little kid," Harry said looking embarrassed.

Cho hit him and added, "I didn't even think you were a little kid the first time you asked me to the ball. Even then I knew you were special."

"Ok, whatever, you just broke my heart when you wouldn't go with me," Harry said and tried to fake a sad look, but then changed the subject. "So, want to go to Diagon Alley? I could use some new clothes to wear to your house next weekend. And, I'm tired of being here and at the Ministry."

"Sure, you could definitely use new clothes," Cho joked. She sat on the steps waiting for Harry to get back from his run and they cleaned up and went to Diagon Alley. They were

trying to shop for clothes, but it was difficult because of all the attention Harry attracted. Cho finally found a place and started showing him some clothes that weren't normally what he would wear. They were way more modern than he was used to. "These are really in style now." Cho would say.

"Where would I wear something like this?" Harry asked, still feeling more comfortable in casual clothes.

"Kristi has been inviting us out to Paris. I thought we should go sometime. If we go to some of the clubs she talked about, you need to dress the part. There will be press there," Cho said sounding excited.

"I didn't think you wanted me going out with Kristi."

"I don't mind if I'm there. She can act like she wants you all night as long as you come home with me. That means I win!" Cho smiled. Cho finally talked him into some leather pants and dragon-hide boots. She picked out a few shirts that Harry thought looked questionable, but Cho and the lady in the store said were perfect. They also bought some more normal clothes that Harry could wear at her house the next weekend. She made him leave one outfit on. Cho also bought a couple new outfits.

Before they left, Harry had to buy some really ugly socks and a nice scarf for the house-elves. They walked by a couple jewelry stores and Harry noticed Cho didn't go towards the normal wizard rings. She kept looking at muggle-type rings. "Why don't you like the wizard rings?" Harry asked.

"Probably because all the women in my family are muggles. They all have nice traditional stones. Not magical rings. Even though I love being a witch, sometimes I want to feel connected with the rest of my family."

"That's nice," then feeling a bit hungry he asked, "Where would you like to eat tonight? You know more about these things than I do."

"There's this new restaurant that's really popular. I don't know if we could get in, but let's try." Cho said and they walked along toward the building. When they got close, Harry could see many people standing around outside.

He said, "It looks really busy."

"I heard it's always like this," Cho offered, "Let's see how long the wait is." They walked inside and the girl taking names spoke without looking. "Reservation?" Cho quickly answered, "No."

The girl was still looking down and said, "I'm afraid it will be at least an hour. You can wait." But then the girl looked up and stared... "Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't realize." She looked back at the chart and said, "I think we can seat you right now. Follow me."

Harry looked at Cho confused, but she just smiled back at him. The girl led them to a table on the second floor, looking out over Diagon Alley. It was a nice table for two in the corner. She kept apologizing about telling them they'd have to wait. When she seated them and left, Harry

asked, "Cho, what was her deal? Why did she say we'd have to wait and then just let us up here?"

Cho smiled and shook her head and said, "Because of *you* Harry, and not because of your scar. I said you were a Quidditch star and places like this love to have celebrities come in. It helps their business."

Harry had never been to a place like this before. People waited on them and actually brought things to their table instead of them just appearing. Cho ordered some fancy dish with seafood. Harry just ordered pasta. Cho had some wine with her mean, but Harry just had water. Cho thought the food was great, Harry thought it was ok. They did share a slice of chocolate cake for desert. The place didn't really impress Harry at first, but being here with Cho was great.

The bill came and Harry was surprised at how much it was. Cho told him how much to tip and Harry left that amount. Finally Cho said, "Let's go home Harry. I didn't get to see you much last night."

When they got back, Sirius had left a note that he had gone out and wouldn't be back until Monday. Harry called Winky and Dobby over. "Yes sir and miss. Is there something we can do?" Winky asked. Dobby just stood behind them.

"No thanks Winky, we just wanted to give these to you." Cho handed Winky the scarf and Harry handed Dobby the socks.

The two house-elves looked very happy. Winky maintained a professional attitude, but Dobby started to lose it. "Oh sir! You did not have to get Dobby anything. Sir is too great. Dobby is so..." then Winky gave him a look, turned to Harry and said, "We are thanking you very much for the gifts sir and miss. You are too good to Winky and Dobby. Thank you." she pulled Dobby away.

"How'd I get so lucky Harry?" Cho asked, sounding a little tipsy from the wine.

"What are you talking about?" Harry replied thinking how cute Cho looked being a bit drunk.

"I mean you, and this," she said pointing around. "How did I get lucky enough that this worked out?"

"I'm the lucky one Cho. I wouldn't have gotten over things without you being around."

"Oh yes you would have. You have two pretty girls around that would do anything for you."

"All I want around is you," Harry said smiling.

"Yeah, but they'll be around all year at school and I won't. You better behave," she said pointing a finger awkwardly at him.

"I'll behave Cho. Let's go up to bed."

"Ok, but I'm not letting you sleep this time," she said smiling.

After they woke up in the morning, Harry was looking at Cho when she woke up. "Morning," he said softly.

"Morning. Do I really have to go home today?"

"You are home. But you may have to go back to your parent's house, that's between you and them," he said smiling. Getting more serious, he asked "What should I expect this weekend when I come over?"

"It'll be fine. My father will show you off to my relatives and all of that. Prepare to be bored and to smile a lot. C'mon, let's go eat," she said jumping up and getting dressed. They stayed around the castle until early afternoon when Cho had to leave. "Promise me, nothing dangerous."

"I promise. I'm nervous about this weekend."

"Don't be. Just be yourself. I have to go. Thanks for a great weekend. Love you." Cho said before leaving.

Harry was at the Department of Mysteries with the others still trying to understand what the strange amber orb did. They had spent all of Monday and now all Wednesday morning with no luck. The Unspeakables didn't seem bothered by this but it was really annoying Harry. Fletch got called out of the artifact room and came back a few minutes later with a strange look on his face. "Harry. The Minister of Education would like to meet with you."

Harry looked up stunned. He hadn't tried to meet with Mr. Gallah yet so why would he want to talk to Harry? "What do you think he wants?"

"It could be he just wants to talk to a celebrity. But, he probably hopes you'll slip up and give some information. I'm not worried about that; just don't mention any of the artifacts or special spells you've learned. I think you should be careful though. I can't believe this is going to be a purely social meeting." Fletch walked Harry out to the floo. "If you get done early, come back. I'm interested in hearing what he wanted. I have a feeling he's going to cause trouble for us."

Harry left and arrived in a well-appointed lobby with a receptionist there. "Hello. The Minister of Education wanted to see me. I'm Harry Potter." The room was basically all off white and Harry couldn't see any doors or hallways.

The receptionist looked up and blushed a bit and tapped her wand to an area on the wall and said, "Harry Potter is here sir."

Harry heard some men talking and a few moments later, Noel Gallah seemed to walk right through the wall just off to the side of the receptionist. He came out acting very friendly and warm. "Harry. I'm glad you could make it on such short notice. Please come in." Mr. Gallah turned and went back through the wall. Harry followed as quickly as he could.

The view from the artificial windows was stunning. Even though most of the ministry was underground, this office seemed to have an entire wall of windows showing the London skyline. Harry was still staring out when Mr. Gallah spoke again. "Impressive isn't it. I

couldn't stand working underground without it. It's the actual view as if we were ten stories above ground. I doubt there's anything like it down in that department you've been at."

Harry thought it best to make it sound like he was willing to talk about the department. "Oh no sir. It's nothing like this. Sir, I wanted to apologize if I seemed less than friendly the other day. I still can't bring myself to forget what Percy Weasley did last year. I should have handled it better."

"Don't give it a thought Harry. I actually asked you here so that I could apologize for that meeting and to let you know that even though I am giving Percy another chance, that I don't agree with the way he handled that situation. Now then, since that's out of the way, what do you think of the Ministry?"

Harry thought for a bit. "I think some areas are really interesting, but most areas seem too political. I don't see how you can handle all of it so well. Everyone says you're doing really well and moving up quickly. There must be people printing and saying things about you all the time that aren't true."

"Yes, that happens a lot. The key is to help the right people with things that are important to them in return for them helping you. I think you could be a good politician Harry. People like you, that's most of the battle right there."

"They like me because I'm playing Quidditch right now. If I go on a losing streak, that would all change. Viktor Krum already warned me of that."

"Speaking of Quidditch. Have you heard there's a proposed modification to the education charter that would prevent students from playing professional sports?" Harry looked shocked. The Minister looked at Harry for a moment before continuing, "I'm lobbying against it of course, but some in the ministry think the two shouldn't mix. What do you think you'd do if that got passed?"

Harry could see the calculating look in Mr. Gallah's eyes and even though he was panicking inside, he said as calmly as he could. "I'd probably transfer to Beaxbatons, attend a private school or in the worst case just quit school."

"You'd quit school? Quidditch is more important than your education?" Gallah seemed surprised.

"That would be the last resort of course, but if the ministry passed this rule, it would obviously be aimed only at me so why would I care about what they wanted anymore when they would have attacked me like that. And, right now the press still seems to like me so I would also talk to as many of them as I could trying to highlight how this rule had to be a direct attack and not based on any merits."

Gallah laughed a bit. "See, I said you'd make a good politician. If it's something you feel strongly about, you use any means at your disposal to accomplish the task. I did a bit of checking after our meeting. Percy said you spent a whole summer down in the Department of Mysteries a couple years ago, but there is no record of it. How did that happen?"

"I don't know for sure. I came for a tour and they let me stay and do small things for them. They were probably being nice to me since some of them knew my parents. Each day I would just travel by floo and not have to sign in or anything."

"You didn't come back last summer, what brought you back this year?"

"I was just resting last summer sir. I had a difficult end of term that year and didn't want to do anything with magic for a while. Now, I wish I had come back. This year, I wanted something to do something where no body cared about me playing Quidditch and they were nice enough to let me come back. I don't think I help much, but I try to stay out of their way."

"I heard a rumor that some evidence our security department recovered from a raid on a prominent businessman the other week may be down in that department. Did you happen to see then working on any unusual items? Our security department has promised to try and track these down since the businessman was fully cleared."

Now Harry realized why he was here. "I haven't seen anything like that. They don't let me do much, I basically run errands and stuff like that." Harry said trying to make it sound like he wouldn't have much information.

The Minister stood up and moved to the edge of his desk in front of Harry. "I'd say it's a bit more than that. I saw some paperwork that you completed Auror training. That makes you currently the youngest Auror. Congratulations."

"Thank you sir. I'm surprised the Minister of Education has time to pay attention to such things."

"Oh, I think you'll find I pay attention to a great deal of things. Being a good politician is all about information," the man sat on the corner of his desk, "I have been curious about something. How did you know a former employee of that department was involved with the men who attacked you last year? No one has been able to determine that."

Harry decided to tell him at least most of the truth. He told him the story of being attacked by Voldemort and the Death Eaters. "And I recognized one of the Death Eaters when his hood came down from a picture I remembered seeing in the Department." Then he went on to say he and Voldemort were hurt in the duel.

"There was only a report that you were attacked by some wizards. Did you report all of this to the Ministry?" Gallah asked calmly.

"No sir. They didn't believe me when I told them about Voldemort getting his body back two years ago. I didn't think they would believe this either. Personally I don't think the Ministry is going to be any help in the fight. They don't want to admit that Voldemort is back," Harry said and then had to smile when he said the next part. "I have to think that Voldemort was surprised to find out that I was carried out of there by a dementor and how a majority of them weren't going to free Azkaban to help him. And, he had to hear that I recovered much quicker than he did."

Gallah didn't look impressed and Harry thought he detected a flash of anger. "Yes, well remember that rumors aren't always correct. How is it you hear these things? I could use sources like that."

"Just here and there sir. That's the only up side of being famous; people want to help you a lot. You don't seem surprised to hear me say Voldemort is back."

"I try to keep a more open mind than others in the Ministry. Don't want to alienate either side now do I." Gallah walked back and sat in his chair behind the desk. "There is a bit of bad news I have to share with you today. I've heard from the Minister of Security that we've had to increase security measures due to recent activity by some radicals. I'm afraid this means you won't be able to get into Department of Mysteries until all of these elements are stopped." Gallah almost seemed to smile. "I hope you understand it's for your own safety."

Chapter 5

Harry was livid but he didn't want Gallah to get the satisfaction of knowing it. "I don't think it's necessary to keep me out, but I do understand the need for security. I've learned enough already; I should be going sir."

Before Harry walked through the portal Gallah said, "Don't worry too much about that bill stopping you from playing Quidditch. I'm sure I'll be able to silence it."

Harry turned and said, "Don't go to too much trouble sir. I'm really not worried about it," and he walked out. Harry was really angry about not being able to go back to the department. He was going to try to anyway, but first he needed to stop at the restroom. The receptionist pointed to a slightly different colored area of the wall. Harry walked through that portal and found a hallway with restrooms. On the way back, he was about to go through the portal when he heard men talking loudly.

"You should have pushed him more on the artifacts. They have to be down there," One man whose voice sounded familiar was saying.

"He knew what he was doing up here. Potter's not as stupid as you would like to believe and no little bill is going to keep him from playing Quidditch either. You need to forget trying to discredit the boy and focus on what's important." Harry knew this was Gallah's voice. Harry had his head right against the wall.

"So, the plan is still on. Our friends will get the item back tonight as planned. And, I won't give up on Potter as easily as you," The other man said and Harry finally recognized the voice. It was Lucius Malfoy. They were going to break into the Unspeakable department. Harry had to warn them. He quickly came out of the hall and went to the floo. "Department of Mysteries Ministry of Magic" he said and the voice asked. "Identification Please," Harry responded, "Harry Potter." The voice came back, "Denied."

They had already stopped his access and Harry started to panic before he decided on one thing. He quickly said, "Department of Muggle Affairs," and felt himself being pulled into the floo. He was in the reception area and asked, "I need to see Arthur Weasley, it's an emergency." The receptionist tapped an area on the wall and in a minute Mr. Weasley was there.

"Harry! What are you doing here?"

"Mr. Weasley, can we talk in private, it's very important," Harry said quickly.

Mr. Weasley took him to his office and Harry told him the story. "I need to get a message down to them quickly."

"They'll track any message I send from here. I don't know how we can do it," Mr. Weasley said.

"How far are their offices from here?" Harry asked, still not willing to give up.

"I'm not sure since you can't walk there."

Harry thought for a minute and only had one idea. He pulled out his wand, concentrated really hard on Department of Mysteries being raided and also on Fletch and said, "*Fliari Memeori*" and a large silvery phoenix shot out and went through the wall.

"What was that?" Mr. Weasley asked but Harry continued and thought of himself being locked out and then on Larry and again said the spell, which caused another phoenix to fly off. Finally, he concentrated on Gallah wanting the artifacts and then on Rose and cast the spell again.

"That was a message spell. I don't know if they'll make it since I don't know how far the department is away. There's nothing else I can do until I get home," Harry said sounding depressed.

Mr. Weasley assured him that he would try to get a message to them also. After Apparating home, Harry quickly wrote a note that he hoped would get to Fletch in time and also wouldn't give away that what he had heard in case it was found.

Fletch

I've been informed that due to extra security, I can no longer come and do small errands for your group. You'll have to clean up that one room without me. You know which one, it's where I was making all the noise and you couldn't understand what I was saying. Since you are planning on having visitors tonight, I apologize for not cleaning it this morning.

Thanks again for everything.

Keep in contact.

Harry

He found Hedwig and asked her to hurry and deliver this to Fletch. Sirius wasn't around so Harry had no one to talk to about this. That evening was one of the longest he could remember. He waited up late for Sirius and ended up falling asleep on the couch. Harry filled Sirius in when he came back the next day.

"Are you sure it was Malfoy?" Sirius asked.

"Positive. I've heard his voice enough times to recognize it anywhere," Harry said pacing around feeling very helpless.

"Do you think Hedwig got there in time?" Sirius asked concerned.

"I don't know, I tried using message spells as well but I don't know if they worked."

"What's a message spell?" Sirius seemed concerned.

Harry concentrated on how worried he was about Fletch, pointed his wand at Sirius and said the spell. Sirius took a step back when the silvery phoenix came shooting at him but a second after it disappeared into his body he said, "Whoa. What was that? I felt how worried you were. Where did you learn that?"

"That's the message spell. I don't know how far it will go. The longest I've ever tried was outside of the castle and sent a message to Cho who was in her dorm. Dumbledore told me about it. I hope they made it to the department."

Sirius looked concerned. "I'm going to go and try to find out more information."

"I'll come with you," Harry said, not wanting to just sit around.

"No. Some people I may see won't want anyone with me. You attract too much attention."

Harry couldn't argue with that, but he was dreading spending another whole day here alone. He ran further than normal today and ended up keeping Mrs. Wilkins longer than normal for his lesson. He was getting ready to eat supper when three owls came in, two with notes and one with a box. Harry removed all of the notes and gave each owl, which included Hedwig some treats and water. He looked at the note Hedwig brought.

Harry

Sorry to hear about the security changes. Hopefully they will be relaxed sometime soon. Don't worry about cleaning the room we jumped right on it after some strange silvery phoenix's came in. You should have seen them; they were very impressive. We wouldn't want it to be in the shape you left it for the visitors.

I try to keep in contact.

Thanks for all your help

Fletch

Harry was happy that the message spell had reached them. He quickly opened the second note.

Visitors may not be limited to the office. Keep this safe. Trust no one. No contact.

F.

Harry quickly opened the box and heard the voices again. It was the amber orb from the department. Closing the box, the voices stopped. He wondered if the note's comment about visitors may not be limited to the office meant they might show up here. Harry looked around for a good hiding place and found one on a ledge near the rafters in the great room. He banished the box up there and walked around to make sure it couldn't be seen from anywhere. He also burned the second note. Harry wondered if he could really not trust anyone with it. His first thought was telling Sirius and Dumbledore but Fletch had trusted him with the orb and told him not to trust anyone. Harry decided not to talk about it for a while. Maybe Fletch would want it back before long and then no one would know.

Sirius didn't return until noon the next day. "You were right. Ministry security forces raided Department of Mysteries Wednesday night. It doesn't sound like they found what they were looking for so they raided the homes of many of the employees. Your friend Fletch has been taken in for further questioning."

"What do you think will happen to him?" Harry asked worried.

"Normally, I wouldn't think much. So, he took a couple items home to work on. But, it sounds like the Ministry is all upset about which artifacts he had. There was a raid on a pretty powerful businessman and some items were taken. The ministry cleared the businessman, but not all the items were returned. A couple of these were found in Fletch's home. That department has very wide authority so legally I don't see how he can get into much trouble. Politically that's another story. I'm guessing Gallah will push for more Ministry oversight of that department."

"My message spells got to them in time. I wonder why he didn't hide the items better."

"Did any of them seem special or very valuable to you?" Sirius asked.

Harry hated lying to Sirius but didn't want to talk about the orb. "No, there were just some charms and medallions. I told Gallah I hadn't seen anything."

"Well there's nothing we can do until we know more. I can't say I'm disappointed you won't be going back there this summer, but I know you're not happy about it. At least you're off to see Cho tomorrow."

"About that. Can I ask you something without you getting crazy and telling me I'm stupid?" Harry said and Sirius frowned at him. "Now, I'm not ready to do anything, but I would like to be prepared in case I ever am. Do you know anything about engagement rings?"

Sirius looked shocked. "Now that's not what I expected. Why would I get crazy and say you were stupid about that? And, I only know a little."

"I expected you to start yelling that I'm too young to be thinking of this and stuff like that. I'm just thinking about getting one in case I ever do get ready."

"Yes, I think you're young. But, I think you're too young to be an Auror, and I think you're too young to have your first love killed. So I won't complain even a little about this. The worst thing that could happen is it doesn't work out." Sirius hesitated and then said. "Do you have any idea what kind of ring you want? There're all kinds of magical jewelry shops."

"She likes traditional Muggle rings better. I saw her looking at them when we were in Diagon Alley. I can't go shopping for a ring there; everyone would know me, then she would find out."

Sirius thought for a minute and said, "I know. We could go to Belgium. That's a major place for jewelry. When do you want to go?"

Harry instantly got excited. "Now. It'll take my mind off of everything here. We just have to be back by noon tomorrow," then he thought of something, "If we find one I like, how will we pay? I don't have much Muggle money."

"Gringotts can handle it. The store would contact them and they would arrange it. As with everything at Gringotts, there will be a processing fee, but it's better than carrying a lot of Muggle money. Go pack and we'll leave in a few minutes."

After changing into Muggle clothes, the pair Apparated off to the side of a small hotel that Sirius had heard of before. Sirius had mentioned there wasn't a large wizarding presence in Belgium so they don't have facilities setup just for wizards, but this hotel was aware of their world. The two wizards checked into rooms and walked to the business district.

Harry felt comfortable in the Muggle world and since Sirius was on the run so long, he felt comfortable just about anywhere. They found a street with many jewelry shops and Harry decided he wanted a diamond.

When they entered a large store, Harry was glad that it didn't have many customers. A lady who seemed to be in her mid thirties with short brown hair came over and asked Sirius if he needed any help. "Not me, but Harry here is looking for an engagement ring." The lady looked at Harry, frowned and said she would be right back.

Instead of that lady coming back, a young girl came over, one that couldn't be more than nineteen. "I'm sorry, Miss Ella got called away. My name is Elis may I can help you?"

Harry knew why the first lady left. She didn't think he would be spending much money and wasn't worth her time. This really didn't bother him since Elis seemed nice. "I'm looking for an engagement ring, and would like a diamond." Elis started saying they had some nice ones in a case off to the side but when Harry looked in, they were all very small, nothing like what he wanted. "Oh, no. I had in mind something more like the ones over here," he said, directing Elis to a case with very nice rings in it.

"Sir, these rings range from \$20,000 to \$35,000." Elis said carefully not wanting to offend Harry.

Harry calculated this in his head. If he spent \$35,000 in Muggle money, that would take the rest of his first year Quidditch salary, but he would have all of this year's salary left. "That won't be a problem." Harry said and saw the girl's eyes light up. Elis had been showing Harry a few different styles, and he had it narrowed down to the three he liked best.

Harry had noticed the first lady kept looking over at them. Elis must have noticed it as well because she said, "Excuse me, Miss Ella wants me." Elis left and went into an office with the older woman.

Instead of Elis returning, Miss Ella had come back. "I'm sorry, that phone call lasted longer than I expected. I see you have excellent taste. These are stunning pieces."

"Where's Elis?" Harry asked, now annoyed at this woman.

"She went to check on other customers."

Harry looked at Sirius who said, "I'm afraid we'll have to leave then. We were comfortable working with Elis. Thank you." Sirius started moving to the door and Harry quickly followed. No sooner had they gotten outside than an older man came after them.

The man introduced himself as the manager and assured them that Elis would take care of anything they needed. Sirius and Harry went back to the case where Elis was waiting and blushing badly. "Thank you. I never get to make any big sales," she said softly.

"You were the one helping us, you deserve it," Harry said. Harry decided on an emerald cut ring and asked Elis to put it on since she was close to Cho's size. "What do you think Sirius?"

"It looks amazing Harry. I'm really proud that you're able to do this. You should have seen James trying to choose a ring for Lily. He had no clue at all." Sirius chuckled at the thought.

When Harry told Elis he'd take the ring, she began asking about payment. Sirius spoke up and mentioned a transfer from Gringotts. The girl looked confused and stated she needed to get the manager.

The man came over quickly. "Elis mentioned you wanted a transfer from Gringotts, is that correct?" Sirius said yes. "Please let me make a call, it is not often that we deal with them. What name is on the account?"

Sirius said "Harry Potter." The manager left but Elis stayed with them asking about Cho and if they were enjoying Belgium.

After a few minutes, the manager returned. "They want some positive identification before transferring this amount. The person on the phone told me to look at your forehead and describe what I see." The manager seemed confused but Harry and Sirius kind of chuckled. Harry lifted up his hair and showed the scar to the manager who left but returned in short order. "Everything is taken care of Mr. Potter. In fact, they said they would discount the processing fee on this transaction since you are such a valued customer."

When everything was done, Elis thanked them both and handed Harry the small box that he put in his jacket pocket. The manager stopped them at the door and asked, "Would you like someone to escort you back to your hotel for security?"

Sirius looked at Harry and said, "I think we can handle ourselves. Thanks." The pair had a nice meal before walking back to the hotel to sit in the small bar of the hotel for a few hours after eating, just talking about nothing important. Harry thought it was really nice being out with Sirius like this and planned on doing it more often.

They left early in the morning and walked around the hotel until no one could be seen and Apparated home. There was a note from Hermione when they got back.

Harry

I came to see you yesterday but Winky said you and Sirius went to Belgium. Is there something happening there? You're not doing anything dangerous are you?

What happened at the ministry? The Daily Prophet had an article about Department of Mysteries being raided. Were you there?

Write me back soon, I'm worried.

Love

Hermione

Harry thought she worried too much but was actually glad she did. He found a parchment and wrote out a reply.

Hermione.

I'm sorry we missed you. Nothing was wrong; we just took a quick personal trip. I'm not doing anything dangerous at all, I promise.

The Minister of Education wanted to talk to me. He said they were thinking about a bill that would prevent any student from playing professional Quidditch. I think he was just trying to get me worried. Then he said they were tightening security at the ministry and I couldn't go back to Department of Mysteries anymore.

I found out the next day that they had been raided, looking for some artifacts. I didn't know anything about them. I am worried about my friends who work there.

I'm off to spend the weekend at Cho's. Maybe you could come over next week since I won't be going to the ministry anymore.

Don't worry about me so much.

Harry.

Harry found Hedwig and sent her to deliver the note. He spent the rest of the day getting ready to go to Cho's. He kept asking Winky how he looked and what he should pack. Winky seemed to get annoyed with him by early afternoon. "Sir is looking fine. Winky has work to do."

Sirius kept giving him a hard time about being so nervous. Harry was glad when the time to leave finally came so he could get this over with.

Harry Apparated on the side of the Cho's house and quickly walked around to the front. It was a nice two-story home with a very large yard, at least three times the size of the yard at Privet Drive. There were four cars in the drive and wide street in front of the house. He stood there looking around at the other homes. This looked like a really nice Muggle neighborhood, much nicer than Privet Drive.

When he finally turned to knock on the door, it came open before he got a chance to knock and Cho came out. "It's about time you got here," she said, giving him a big hug and kiss. "Get in here," she said pulling him inside.

The home seemed much more open than the Dursleys. It was obviously much nicer but it was still clear that it was a Muggle home. Harry sat his bag inside the door and continued being drug into the living room where there were about ten people sitting with an Asian-language TV show on. Mr. Chang got up when he noticed them coming in.

"Hello Harry. We're glad you could make it. Welcome."

Shaking his hand, Harry said, "Thank you Mr. Chang. I appreciated the invitation."

Harry was being introduced to everyone; there were both sets of grandparents and Cho's Aunt and Uncle. Cho's older sister Chiang and her husband were there with their six-year-old daughter Hailan, and their little Siamese cat named Ming. Harry realized he never knew Cho had a sister.

Harry bent down to pet the cat and her sister said, "she doesn't like boys so be careful."

However, the cat sniffed and then started rubbing Harry's leg. He picked the cat up and it started purring loudly when he began petting it. Cho just beamed and Harry sat the cat back down. It didn't move far from his legs.

There was a lot of small talk and then Mr. Chang spoke, "Cho said you were working at the Ministry. With your sports contract, I didn't think you'd need to work this summer."

"I enjoy the work sir. It's a very interesting department."

"Cho mentioned something about a department being raided yesterday. Will that have any effect on you?" he asked.

"Yes sir, I'm afraid it will. That was the department I had been working for. The Minister of Education told me they had to tighten security so I won't be able to go back for the rest of the summer."

Cho spoke up quickly. "Well, I'm glad he can't go back. That's a very secretive department and he needs to enjoy his summer," she squeezed his arm.

Chiang said, "Cho says you're a big celebrity, especially in France," sounding unimpressed.

"I think Cho exaggerates," Harry replied, smiling at his girlfriend.

Her father jumped in. "Nonsense. Chiang, you know what her commission was for getting Harry his contract was.

"Chiang, how old did you say Hailan was?" Harry asked trying to change the subject. He thought that for her to have a six-year-old daughter, she must have been very young when she got married.

They talked about Hailan for a little bit and then Cho grabbed Harry and said, "C'mon, let's take a walk."

They were just starting down the street when Harry asked, "Why didn't you mention your sister before? I didn't even know you had one."

Cho frowned and said, "We don't get along that well. She's so much older and wasn't happy when they found out I was a witch that we're just not close." Cho perked up and said, "I'm so glad you're here. What really happened at the ministry?"

Harry told her the story and she said, "Do you think they'd really pass that bill? You can't quit playing."

"I don't think they will. If so, I'll finish at some private school or something. I'm not going to quit."

They had a nice long walk and when they got back, the women were in the kitchen cooking. Cho went in to help and left Harry with the other men. They were watching some Asian western show. "Would you like us to change this Harry?"

"No sir. I haven't seen TV for so long that just watching is fine. Maybe I should have been trying to learn Chinese instead of French," Harry added.

During one of the commercials Mr. Chang said, "Cho tells me you two are partners in some small investments. I think that's a very wise idea. Never too early to start investing for the future."

"I would have never thought of it sir, it was all Cho's idea, but I thought it was a great one when she told me. She did an amazing job with my contract and I heard the other player she manages is very happy as well."

Cho's grandfather spoke in pretty good English as well, "How long have you been seeing my granddaughter?"

Harry thought for a minute and said, "Sometime early last school year sir. I can't say exactly when. It just kind of happened. We've know each other for a few years and just got closer over time."

The old man talked in Chinese to the others for a minute, they were all saying things Harry couldn't understand and then her grandfather spoke again. "She spoke of you when she was in her sixth year at school as well. Spoke of you often."

"I didn't know that sir. We were friends at that time."

"Now, this is your last year of school?"

"Yes sir, my seventh year."

"What will you do after that?" The old man was clearly grilling Harry.

"I haven't decided for sure. I really like the sport I play but sometimes having everybody know who I am is annoying. I also really like the department at the Ministry I've worked at for a couple summers. They've said I can work for them when they get out. Many people want to work there so I'm fortunate to already have contacts."

"Playing your sport would make you a lot more money wouldn't it?"

"Oh yes. The Ministry is notorious for not paying well. I'm fortunate enough to be ok on money and to be able to do something I enjoy for my job."

There was more Chinese and the old man continued. "What about a family? Have you given that any thought?"

Harry hadn't really thought about a family, only marriage. "I've thought about marriage, but haven't thought about children yet. I know I want some one day, that's for sure, but not for quite some time."

More Chinese and then. "I don't know much about wizards, but my granddaughter also says you're the most powerful wizard she's ever known. She says you've battled the most evil wizard a few times and never lost."

"I think Cho is mistaken about me being powerful. I have fought an evil wizard a few times and since I'm still alive, I've never lost. However, each time I had help to be able to get away."

More Chinese and the old man got up and headed towards the kitchen. When he got back, Harry got up and went to the kitchen. All the women were speaking Chinese and stopped when he walked in. "Is there anything I can do to help?" Harry offered.

Cho got up smiling and came over to give him a kiss and said, "I think we can handle everything. Go back to the living room."

After sitting down, he said, "Mr. Chang. How was it when you found out that Cho was a witch? I lived with my Aunt and Uncle and they weren't pleased."

Mr. Chang looked at him for a moment and said, "It was difficult at first. We had always thought something was odd. Things seemed to happen when she was angry or scared. Once we found out, after the initial period of denial, things made sense. All of the family treated her differently at first, but have come to see she is exactly like the rest of us with an extra gift. We are very proud of her now and it has opened our eyes to another whole world. I'm sure your Aunt and Uncle were the same."

"Oh no sir they weren't. They hate me and anything to do with magic. I could only come home from school for the summer and they would lock all of my schoolbooks in a cupboard and forbid me to even mention the word magic in their home. I haven't spoken to them since I was hurt and spent the summer at the school."

"Cho told us the story of why you were famous even as a child. Even though your Aunt and Uncle didn't treat you as well as they could have, they did take you in. I'm sure you will work it out with them. It may just take time."

Harry just looked at him for a minute and said, "I suppose you're right sir. Thank you."

Mrs. Chang came out and said dinner was ready. Harry followed all the other men into the dining room and looked at all the food. It was amazing what they accomplished without magic. Harry wished he had grown up in a family like this. The meal was great and even though most of the conversations were in Chinese, Harry could tell they were happy conversations.

After the meal, Cho suggested that she and Harry clean up and the others go on outside to sit and talk. With the others out of the house, Cho used her wand, and Harry used wandless magic to make quick work of the cleanup. Once they were done cleaning up, instead of going straight outside, Cho kept Harry in the kitchen and kissed him deeply. "They all really like you Harry, especially my grandmothers. They say you just *feel right*. My grandfather came in

after talking to you and said he would disown me if I let you get away. I think that made Chiang a little mad because grandfather didn't like her husband at first."

"I think your family is great Cho. I wish I had grown up in a family like this."

"Even my sister likes you. She says that any boy that Ming likes must be ok. C'mon let's go out there."

They were sitting outside on a very clear night, just looking at the stars. Her grandparents were smoking. Then her sister's husband spoke up. "Harry. Cho said you've learned quite a lot of things that they didn't teach in her school. Can you show us any?"

"Diang, Harry can't use his wand until after his birthday. He'll get into trouble," Cho said angrily.

"That's ok Cho; I can still do little things." Harry smiled. "Tell them about Dobby and I'll try something."

Cho looked confused and started talking about how weird Dobby was and Harry concentrated and cast the bind spell on Cho's mouth using wandless magic. She couldn't say anything. All of the others started speaking in Chinese and then Harry released the spell. Cho hit him first thing and said, "That's another thing. He doesn't need a wand for some magic. I've never heard of any other wizard who can do that."

Mr. Chang was smiling and said, "I wish you could teach us all how to do that. As Chinese men, we could get great use out of being able to keep our women quiet." Everyone laughed at this.

After a lot more talking, it was getting late and everyone was going to bed. Cho led Harry upstairs and to a sofa in a small room. "Sorry about the accommodations Harry. I didn't know my sister was coming. My father allows me to stay with you but I wouldn't want to ask for you to sleep in my room."

"That's ok Cho. This is fine, really. Remember, I slept in a cupboard for many years. I'll see you in the morning," he kissed her.

"I love you Harry." Cho said and gave him a big hug.

Harry slept really well that night and was woken up by the sounds of giggling. When he put on his glasses, he saw Cho, her sister and mother standing in the doorway smiling. Ming, the cat that didn't like boys was curled up next to him still asleep. They laughed and let him get cleaned up before coming down. After breakfast, Mr. Chang came to him and said, "Harry. I need to get something at the market, would you like to come along?"

Harry knew this really wasn't a request and that he was supposed to go along, "Of course sir."

They rode in near silence and Mr. Chang bought a few things at the market and on the way back, he started talking, "Can I ask what your plans with my daughter are?"

"Sir? I don't actually understand what you mean."

"I mean do you intend to marry her?" he said flatly.

"Well I'd like to sir. I haven't asked her or anything but I think that I would like to spend my life with her."

"If you do decide to ask her, you have her mother's and my blessing."

"Thank you sir. Does it bother you that I'm younger than her?"

"Of course not. I was one year younger than her mother and we got married when we were both still in school. The first year after she graduated was difficult. I hated being away from her. But, after we made it through that it has been wonderful."

"Please don't tell Cho this, but my godfather and I went to Belgium and I bought an engagement ring for Cho. I haven't planned on when or how I would ask her, but I wanted to be ready if it ever felt right. Is that ok with you?" Harry asked nervously, still feeling strange talking to her father about this. It was weird enough talking to Sirius about it.

Mr. Chang smiled broadly at him. "You could ask her today and it would be ok with me. I've never seen her happier and we all think you would treat her well. May I ask what kind of ring you got her? She's always wanted a traditional ring, not a magical one."

"I got a diamond sir. Not magical at all." Harry was glad he had done this correctly.

"My mother offered to give you her ring to give to Cho, but she will be please when she finds out you picked one out on your own. I won't say a word to Cho about this."

"Thank you. If I was out of school, I would have asked her by now."

"Don't think of it as being in school. Think of it as your job for the next year and sometimes that job takes you away for a few months at a time."

They got back and Cho quickly pulled Harry away and asked how it went. "I'm not sure he really approves of me dating you while I'm still in school." Harry tried to keep a look of disappointment and Cho started to look horrified. Then Harry smiled and said, "It was fine. No big deal." Cho hit him and they went back with the others.

Mr. Chang announced he would be taking everyone to diner in London that evening. They all got dressed and Harry wore one of the new outfits Cho had picked out. He and Cho rode with her sister and husband. They all parked and went inside a nice, newer restaurant and were told it would be a few minutes before they could be seated. They went over to the bar area to wait. Everyone had some wine and Cho and Harry noticed a young couple pointing at them and talking. Harry asked Cho to make sure he was dressed ok, which he was. After a couple minutes, even her sister noticed the other couple and asked about it.

When their entire group was wondering about it, the couple came over and acted nervous but the girl said, "You're Harry Potter, France's seeker. May we have your autograph please?" then started giggling. Harry turned red but quickly signed the paper she had and tried to back away behind Cho.

She just beamed and said to her relatives, "They must be witches. I told you he was famous." During dinner, another couple came up and asked for an autograph that Harry politely gave them.

Harry and Cho were riding back with her sister and husband. Her sister started talking. "I can't believe those people just came up to you like that."

"Me either. I think they're all mental," Harry replied honestly.

"Harry, you're a Quidditch star. Imagine if we had gone to a wizarding restaurant in Paris. You should get used to it," Cho said trying to get the idea through Harry's head.

They sat around and talked for a few more hours once they got home and then everyone went to bed. Later in the night, Cho came in and said, "I just want to sleep here close to you." She snuggled up on the couch with him and went to sleep.

They both woke up to find her sister and mother giggling at them. Cho said something in Chinese and they both left, still giggling. Cho kissed him and went to her room to get cleaned up. Harry did the same in the spare bathroom.

Harry stayed around until early afternoon. He really liked Cho's family, and being felt very comfortable with them. He said goodbye to everyone and Cho walked him to the front. She hugged him tight before saying, "I'm really glad you came. Everyone really likes you."

"I think your family's great. I was really nervous at first, but they made me feel comfortable. I guess I won't see you until the opening party at the store."

"I'm not sure. The twins are really busy, but I don't have that much to do right now. I've taken care of all the permits and everything so until they start making some money I'm not that busy."

They finished saying goodbye, and Harry Apparated home. He was shocked to find someone besides Sirius in his house. "Professor Dumbledore! What are you doing here?"

Chapter 6

"Hello Harry. I trust you had a good time at Miss Chang's home? You don't mind me visiting do you?"

"Of course not sir," Harry replied. His mind was racing wondering why the Headmaster was at his house.

"I'm a bit concerned about the recent raid at Department of Mysteries. You know that some of the staff took artifacts home to try and prevent them from being discovered. Sirius told me how you were able to warn the department they may be getting a visit from security. The Minister of Education paid me a visit the other day wanting to know if you had mentioned any of these artifacts and also wanting to know where you were staying. I told him I knew nothing of the artifacts and in fact had only recently found out you were spending time at the Ministry. Do you know anything about the artifacts he was speaking of?"

Harry felt himself start to squirm. "I did spend a couple days in their artifact room. There were shelves full of stuff. I was going to help them try and determine what some of them were but after my meeting with Gallah, I couldn't get back to the department," Harry said honestly.

"They raided the homes of the employees and found a few items. None of the employees will face punishment for this; it is within their charter to take items home for further study. The Minister was convinced there are still some items unaccounted for. He wouldn't give any specific details, but I'm convinced he thinks you may be involved."

"Sir, why would the Minister of Education be involved in this? Shouldn't it be a security matter?" Harry asked trying to avoid directly lying to the Headmaster.

"I believe the items he wants are personally important to him. If you do know, or happen to come across any of the items, I would like you to bring them directly to me. Is that understood?"

The way Dumbledore looked at Harry; he knew this wasn't a request. "Of course Professor." Harry felt himself squirm. He hated lying to Dumbledore and always felt like Dumbledore knew when he was.

"I'm going to be gone for a while Harry," Sirius added. "If you hear something about the items, send a message to the Headmaster at once." Sirius and Dumbledore both left a few minutes later. Harry felt very conflicted. He trusted Dumbledore and didn't like keeping things from him, but also wanted to do the right thing with Unspeakables, and Fletch said not to trust anyone.

The next few days went by slowly with the only interesting part being talking to Mrs. Wilkins at his French writing lesson. He was really getting bored when Hermione showed up on Wednesday. "Hermione. Man I'm glad you came. I'm so bored since I can't go back to the Ministry."

"You could be studying for next term you know. I find that helps me pass the time," she said smugly and then got a sly look. "So, what were you doing in Belgium?"

"Um... I was just taking a personal trip with Sirius, nothing magical at all." Then attempting to change the subject he said, "You're going to the twins' store opening aren't you?"

She didn't look happy but said, "I suppose so. If I weren't good friends with them, I would skip it. Things still seem strange with Ron. I bet Parvati will be there."

"Maybe, she was friends with the twins as well you know. Why don't the three of us meet in Diagon Alley in a couple weeks? We could hang out and have a meal. I'll treat."

"We could do that. It may help to make things better. So, will you show me more of what you learned in Auror training? I've been studying those bind spells."

Harry thought for a minute and decided to tell her some of the story about the raid. He told her about seeing the items and warning Fletch, then about Dumbledore asking about the items. "Well of course you'd tell him if you had any information. Why would he even ask?" Harry was looking guilty and she quickly picked up on this. "You don't have any information do you?" Hermione was now giving him a very questioning look.

He knew that he could trust Hermione and really wanted someone to talk to. "First. Do you promise me that you won't tell a soul what we talk about? Not even if you think it will protect me from something bad. I won't say a word unless you promise me," Harry said this trying to make sure she knew he was serious.

Hermione whined for a bit but finally agreed to not tell anyone. "I think I know which item Gallah is interested in," Harry said looking a bit guilty, "They didn't find it when they searched the employee's house. I didn't tell Dumbledore."

"How do you know they didn't find it? And, why didn't you tell Dumbledore?"

"I know where it is and I didn't tell Dumbledore because Fletch told me to not trust anyone. He made it sound very important."

"But you're telling me?" she said smugly.

"I trust you more than anybody else and I thought maybe you could help me figure out what it is." Harry saw her look pleased. "I don't want to start this week since we're going to the opening Friday, we wouldn't have much time. Remember, this is just between us. No one else knows about it."

"I can't believe you trust me more than anyone else. Thanks Harry." Hermione hugged him. "But why won't you trust me and tell me why you went to Belgium?"

"Because that's really personal. Is the only reason you came back today to find out about Belgium?"

"Not entirely. I wanted to go running with you. I've decided to try and get in better shape as well. I brought my clothes and everything." They both changed and went out for a run. Hermione did better than Cho had on her first time. She stopped after the first trip to the road and back but Harry did one more. They each went to separate bathrooms to get cleaned up and when they were both back downstairs, Hermione got a serious look in her face. "Harry. Can I ask you something and you promise not to think it's stupid?"

"I'll try. You should go on since I've asked you bunch of stupid things before."

"Why do you think we never got together? I can take it if it's just that I'm not your type or anything. I've just been curious lately," she said this not looking directly at Harry.

This really surprised Harry. Hermione had obviously become more confident and direct over the past few months. He didn't know what to say for a minute, but decided to be honest. "I don't really know. By the time I started noticing how pretty you were, Ron already had it set that he wanted to date you, and then you and I just seemed like best friends. Then R.J. came along and then Cho," he thought for a second and then spoke in a firmer voice, "Besides, you never gave the slightest clue that you would have thought of me any way other than a friend." After another short pause he again spoke timidly, "I remember how amazing you looked at the ball with Viktor, but Ron was already crazy about you by then."

Surprisingly she looked pleased with his explanation. "I can live with that. I've just wondered about it for a while now. I was jealous when Ginny started letting you know how she felt. I guess Cho's it now, huh?"

"I think so, if we can make it through not seeing each other much for my final year. I was really nervous at her parents over the weekend. But, no matter what happens with Cho, you're my best friend and nothing will change that." Harry went on to tell her all about the weekend at the Chang's.

Winky brought them food and they continued to talk until Hermione had to go. "Ok, I'll see you at the store and then next week we talk about the thing." She hugged Harry and apparated away.

The opening was at noon, so Harry decided to arrive a bit early to see if they needed any help. He knocked on the door and heard someone yell, "Not until noon."

He knocked again and finally Cho noticed it was him and opened the door. "Sorry. Didn't know it was you. Let me show you around." The store looked much bigger on the inside. There were fake wands, fake brooms and many practical joke accessories. What looked the strangest was the area towards the back. The aisle leading to it seemed to twist and that entire room looked like it was on its side.

"What do you think of it? Fred and I worked weeks getting the spell right. Go on, walk into it," George said proudly. Both twins were watching him closely, trying to gauge his opinion of their store.

Harry started walking and felt himself rotate along with the aisle. By the time he was in the candy section, he was completely on his side but everything felt right side up. Looking back to the main section, it now looked like it was the part rotated. If the twins could see the huge smile on his face, they would have no doubt about what he thought of their store. Harry walked back out amazed. "That's great! I can't believe you guys are really doing this. Have the parents seen it yet?"

"Nope, just Ron and now you. I've never been this nervous," Fred said unable to stop smiling.

"Is there anything I could do to help?" Harry offered.

Fred and George looked at each other and then George spoke timidly. "Well, you could hang around for a bit and when people start talking to you, you could tell them how great all this stuff is. I mean a plug from a celebrity would help."

"You'll have to clear it with my manager; she's in charge of all my endorsements."

Harry hugged Cho who said, "Since he's an investor, I don't see a problem."

Just then Ron appeared, but not alone. Parvati was with him. "Ron! What did you bring her in here early for? No one is supposed to see it," George said angrily.

"Harry's got his girlfriend," Ron snapped back.

"Harry's girlfriend happens to work here *and* is a big investor," Fred yelled.

Harry got Ron off to the side when Fred and George were showing Parvati around. "So, she's your official girlfriend now. Have you told Hermione?"

"I guess she is. I didn't know I needed to clear it with Hermione," Ron answered curtly.

"I asked if you told her, not cleared it with her. It would have just been polite to warn her before she gets here," Harry said trying to not sound like he was complaining, he understood how things were when you had a girlfriend.

"Yeah, maybe it would have been, but it's too late now. This place is amazing isn't it? If it does well, I'll just work here after school." Ron quickly put any talk with Hermione out of his head.

A few minutes before noon, Harry noticed quite a few people outside the store. Most of them were current or former Gryffindors and their friends. Harry noticed Cho's friends were also in line. Ron opened the door right at noon and all of the people came running in. It was like a circus for a while. They were trying out all the gags and buying the candy. The twins had some of the less drastic treats out for trial and it wasn't uncommon for someone to sprout feathers on their arms, or fur on their backs after trying one.

Harry tried to stay in back while it was so crazy. After a couple hours, there was a steady stream of new people coming in and most ended up buying something. Finally, Harry noticed a reporter and photographer from the Daily Prophet come in and begin interviewing customers. After talking to four or five customers, the reporter made her way to where Fred and George were manning the checkouts and began asking questions about the store. Harry let them talk for a minute and then when the questions seemed to slow down, he came over and said he wanted some candy. The reporter immediately recognized him. "Harry Potter! Seeker for the French International Quidditch Team. What are you doing here today?"

"Everyone is here for the opening. This is going to be the best store in Diagon Alley. Can you believe these two invented all of this by themselves? I can't wait to get some and give it to my friends," Harry said, trying to not sound too obvious.

"You are rarely seen out and about. Rumor is you don't like the press much. Why did you make an exception to come here?" the reporter asked.

"I don't mind the press as long as they print what I really say. Normally I would just rather spend time with my close friends. I wouldn't have missed this opening for anything and I'm glad to see the Daily Prophet is devoting your talents to covering it," Harry said and moved around next to Fred and George who were beaming proudly. The reporter snapped a few pictures and the reporter got back to Harry.

"How have you managed to keep away from the clutches of your chaser Kristi Belig? I understand she's been trying to get some face to face time with you?" the reporter pressed.

"I don't know where you heard that. Kristi is a great person and a fantastic chaser. She's just being nice to me, and trying to make sure I felt like I fit in on the team. You're reading too much into that story. Here, let me give you and your cameraman some of the candy I just bought. I wouldn't recommend having your camera running when you try some of it." Harry smiled and gave the reporter and her cameraman an assortment of the candy he had bought, and quickly moved back away from her.

Fred and George both came over thanking him for the publicity. They said they couldn't have bought anything any better. Cho gave him a big hug and kiss. Harry saw a bunch of flashes going off when they kissed. After a few more minutes, he was about to say he was leaving and then noticed Hermione walk in.

She was wearing a really nice outfit that wasn't like what she normally wore. It made her look much older than normal. She also had her hair pulled back which showed off her features much better. Harry pushed through the crowd to greet her. "I didn't think you would ever get here. You look great!" Harry said honestly.

"Thanks. I almost didn't come. This is the outfit you bought me," she said happily and then looked around, "Have you seen Ron?"

"Yeah," Harry answered and then looked sad. "He brought Parvati. Sorry about that. I told him he should have told you he was bringing her."

"I figured he would bring her. It would have been nice for him to tell me though. He's not the most thoughtful person sometimes. This is what I meant about things still being strange. If he still thought of me as a best friend, he would have at least told me." Hermione looked really sad. "There're too many people here for me right now, I'm going to just go home."

"No, wait. Let's go to the ice cream parlor," Harry said not wanting his friend to leave. "I just need to tell Cho. I'll be right back."

Harry found Cho. "Cho. I'm going to go get an ice cream with Hermione. There's nothing for me to do here."

"I'm probably going to leave in a few minutes anyway. I'll meet you over there," she kissed him.

He got back to Hermione and they quickly went up the street to Fortescue's. Florean was nice enough to set them inside so they wouldn't be bothered. "I'm sorry about wanting to sit inside. I don't like people bothering me all the time."

"That's fine with me today. What's Cho doing at the store?"

"She's doing the business stuff for them. We formed an investment business and invested in the store. Actually Cho formed everything and did the investing, I just put in the same amount of money she did since I don't know anything about stuff like that."

"You just trust her with the money like that?" Hermione questioned.

"Of course. I'd trust you too. If you find something you want to invest in, I'll partner with you also. I mean I trust you with all my secrets already," Harry told her honestly.

"Not all of them. What about Belgium?" Hermione smiled.

"Next subject," Harry said with a smile, "So, it doesn't look like this year will be just the three of us, unless it's you, me and Ginny or something. Maybe Ron didn't see you since we left so quickly."

"He saw me. I saw Parvati point me out to him. I'm ok if it's just the two of us this year," Hermione said and toasted her ice cream to his.

"As long as it's the two of you just being good friends, I won't complain," Cho said having overheard the last part of the conversation. "Things not ok with Ron, huh? I think you're doing well. I know how I'd feel if Harry and I split up, even if we were on good terms. If I saw him with somebody else, I'd be a wreck. Of course, I'd go over and break her legs and then be a wreck," she gave Harry a look like she meant it.

"I'm not upset about seeing him with Parvati," Hermione said quickly and Harry felt she was being honest. "He didn't tell me he was bringing her and didn't even come over to say hi. That's just not being a good friend. That's what I'm upset about."

Cho agreed with her and said, "I have an idea. There's a restaurant with a nice bar that overlooks Diagon Alley right up the street. Let's go have a couple drinks and then maybe something to eat. It can't hurt, you're dressed really nice already," Cho suggested. After a little more convincing, Cho led them to the bar area of a restaurant. They got a table overlooking the street. It was nice and quiet. While trying to decide what to order Cho suggested, "Let's get a bottle of wine."

Hermione responded quickly, "Cho. Harry and I aren't of age yet. They won't let us have wine. We'll have to stick to butterbeers," she said this in her schoolteacher tone of voice.

Cho sat up straight and said, "Hermione. We're with a famous Quidditch star. They'll let us have whatever we want, especially since it's a waitress; watch."

When the young waitress came over, she was already blushing badly. Cho addressed her, "It's been a crazy day today, what with being at the opening for the store and all. Could we just get a nice bottle of Merlot please?" Cho asked calmly. The waitress didn't say anything and brought back a bottle and three glasses. Cho grinned before saying, "And this is in England. I'm going to get Harry out in Paris before long to see how he gets treated there."

"And, are you going to bring Kristi along with us?" Harry said with a sly smile.

"She'll probably demand it after the nice press you gave her. She said she would show us around and it would be nice to go with someone who knows everything," Cho said. "Harry

probably hadn't had a chance to tell you about the Ministry and that he can't go back to work there."

"Oh he told me all of that when I was at his house Wednesday," Hermione said and Cho suddenly didn't look happy.

"Harry didn't tell me you were at his house. I imagine you and Sirius both agree that it's a good thing he's not going back." Cho said giving Harry a slightly dirty look.

"I don't know about Sirius, he wasn't there," Hermione said and Cho looked even less happy.

"I didn't have a chance to tell you about Hermione coming over. I just saw you at the store and you were busy. I'm glad she came though. I was really bored since I can't go to the ministry."

"When I said find something to do, I'm not sure I meant have a girl over to keep you company," Cho said only half-jokingly.

"Oh Cho," Hermione said lightly, "Do you think for a second that Harry would ever consider doing anything unfaithful to you?"

Cho smiled and said, "Of course not. I just haven't been able to spend as much time with him as I'd like. And, my sister has been telling me I need to do more to keep him happy since all the girls want him. I don't know what got into me," she leaned in and gave Harry a big kiss. They talked for a while more and all seemed really happy.

By the time they finished the bottle of wine, they decided to get something to eat, so the three moved into the restaurant part. After a nice meal and listening to the girls talk without him most of the night, Harry asked, "Hermione, what time do you need to get home?"

She looked at her watch and said, "Before much longer. I'm having fun; I wish I had told my parents I'd be later. Cho, when are you leaving?"

"Whenever Harry does. I'm going home with him this weekend. Hopefully Sirius stays away until Monday," Cho said squeezing Harry's arm. Hermione looked a little down, but then dessert came and she cheered up. After finishing dessert and paying, they walked back toward the store and saw it was still crowded.

Hermione told Harry she would see him next week and then said goodbye before going home.

Cho looked at Harry and he knew she was questioning why Hermione said she would see him next week. "Since I told her I was bored, she's going to make me study. I'd rather be working."

"As long as all you do is study," she hugged him tight.

"You never need to worry about me Cho. I only think about you. C'mon let's go home," he suggested and they left for the castle.

"All of my family thought the world of you. My grandparents kept asking why we weren't married yet. I haven't gotten along this well with my sister in a long time. Even she seems

happy for me. She wouldn't stop talking about how her cat liked you when it hates every other guy."

"Probably because my animagus form is a kind of cat. That would have shocked them all if I had changed right in the middle of the room," Harry joked.

Cho laughed at the thought. Then Harry said, "Let's go somewhere before I have to start school. Take a few days off and let's go someplace with white sand, blue water and palm trees. Just like what you described."

She looked at him and said, "Deal. I'll take some days off the week after your birthday. You can surprise me by picking the destination. But, we go to Paris sometime after that. I'll set it up with Kristi. But for now, less talk more action."

Cho directed them to the soft rug in front of the fireplace in the great room. They spent the next couple hours laughing, talking and making love until falling asleep on the floor. The next day they went shopping and stopped into the store. Fred and George couldn't believe how good of a day they had. They were worried about finding time to build their inventory back up. The article in the Daily Prophet really pleased them. It ran on the inside of the front page and had the picture of them and Harry and even had a quote from the reporter about how impressed she was with the store and the candy.

Before going home, Cho promised to try and see him before the next weekend.

Harry had a note saying Sirius would be gone for at least another week. Harry wondered what he was up to but was glad he would be gone. This would give him and Hermione time to look at the orb. Hermione got there early Monday morning. "I really wanted to thank you and Cho for taking me out after the opening. That was just what I needed."

"Anytime. I liked having you there."

"Do you think Cho was really jealous of me being here?" Hermione asked.

"Probably. I think it's because you and I have been such good friends longer than I've known Cho. You know way more things about me than she does. That probably bothers her a little. She's not even that jealous about Kristi asking me out."

Hermione smiled, "Well I like knowing more about you than she does. Does she stay over here often?"

"Not often enough if you ask me," Harry blushed a little after saying this.

"So, let's see it," Hermione stated.

"Oh, the artifact. I'll get it," Harry quickly said.

"Not the artifact, what you got in Belgium. I know what it is," she said smugly.

Harry quickly turned back to her, "How would you know what it is?"

"You said it wasn't anything to do with magic. I looked up what Belgium is famous for and didn't think you would go there for chocolate. They're famous for jewelry and especially diamonds. And this was just before you visited her parents. I want to see the ring," she demanded with a very smug look on her face.

"Hermione! You never cease to amaze me. Moody was right you know, you should be an Auror. Nobody could keep anything from you." Harry quickly summoned the ring down from his bedroom and showed it to her.

Harry was nervous handing it to Hermione. Her opinion meant a lot to him. "Holy cricket! This is really nice. Is it magical?" she asked, still staring at the ring. She could feel the pangs of jealousy come up. Hermione had always had a little crush on Harry and had even thought at one time they may get together. All of that was pushed back when he met R.J. and she started seeing Ron. Now Harry was with Cho and she'd never know what could have been.

"Not magical at all," Harry replied, shaking her out of her thoughts. "Her parents are like yours and she mentioned one time that she would want a traditional ring. And, her father told me the same thing when he was talking to me privately. I haven't planned on giving it to her yet. I just wanted to be prepared in case I wanted to."

"Do you think you'll do it this summer?" Hermione asked not sure if she wanted to hear the answer.

"I'm not sure. Maybe for Christmas. Whenever feels right. I don't want her to feel like I'm pushing her or anything. If I wasn't still in school I would do it for sure this summer." Harry banished the ring back upstairs.

"There are a lot of wizards who get married at seventeen or eighteen. It still seems young to me. But look at me, I haven't even had a serious boyfriend yet," she hoped that sounded like a joke.

Harry quickly said, "It'll happen. You need to find the right one. So far, I don't know anyone who I think deserves you yet."

She thought that Harry always knew what to say to cheer her up. "Fine, let's get down to business. Let's see the artifact now," Hermione said trying to stay focused.

Harry summoned the box down from its hiding place. "Now, when I open the box, I hear what seems to be one voice speaking a bunch of different languages. I can't understand anything. No one else has heard anything." Harry opened the box and summoned the orb out.

Hermione studied it closely and asked, "Are you hearing things now?"

Harry shook his head and said, "Watch." He placed his hand near the orb and saw the electricity bolts go to fingers. Then he pushed his wand into it.

Hermione actually looked more scared than interested. "I agree with Dumbledore Harry. You should give this to him."

"Fletcher said to not trust anyone. He didn't say except Dumbledore," Harry said firmly. "You promised not to say anything. If you don't want to help, that's ok, but I'm still going to work

with it." Hermione quickly said she would help. She thought it would be better than Harry being alone when he did it. They spent the next couple of hours studying the orb. Hermione wouldn't touch it at all. Harry boxed it back up and banished it to the hiding place.

"I'm going to look some things up tomorrow but will come back Wednesday. Promise me you won't touch it until I get back," She said firmly, clearly worried about her friend.

"I promise mom," Harry joked. "Did you bring your running stuff?" he asked.

Hermione had brought it, so they had a run and she left without cleaning up first. Things got to be pretty routine for the next few weeks. He would see Cho at least on the weekends and had even been back to her house for a couple meals, but never stayed there. Hermione would come over at least a couple times a week to try out new ideas on the orb. Harry had been glad that Sirius was spending so much time away so that he and Hermione didn't have to hide so much. During one of the times when Sirius was home, he had helped Harry plan his vacation with Cho. Harry hoped it was going to be just what Cho had wanted.

Hermione came over the week of Harry's birthday and before they started looking at the orb Hermione got serious said, "Harry, this may sound stupid and not like me at all, but I want us to do something special this year."

"Sure. What do you have in mind? I bet Ron would be willing to join us."

She kind of looked down and said, "No, I want it to just be us. You'll always be remembered as the Triwizard Tournament winner and the youngest Quidditch player in a century. People will always talk about you and Ron flying the car into the Whomping Willow tree. No one will talk about me when we're gone." She looked embarrassed and added, "You think that's pretty stupid don't you?"

"Not at all. I don't see why you'd care. I don't care if they ever talk about me," Harry responded quickly.

"That's because they will talk about you. You've already got that. Think about how many times you've heard stories about your dad, Sirius, and Professor Lupin. Even the teachers now mentioned the things they've done once in a while. Fred and George will always be remembered as pranksters. I just think it would be nice for someone to remember me later." Harry could tell this meant a lot to her.

"They will remember you. You're the smartest witch to come through here in ages. You've tied or beat every score there is," Harry said honestly which made Hermione feel a little better.

"Who will really care about that except for the next person who wants really good grades? If you don't want to do anything, that's ok, I just thought maybe..."

"I'm all for it Hermione. It would actually be really nice for you and me to have something special. It'll probably be better than crashing into the Whomping Willow, and a lot less painful. I don't plan these things though. Did you have something in mind?"

Hermione looked nervous for a minute and said, "Actually, I did. It's a rare form of magic that they don't teach at all anymore. Most people couldn't do it and those who could didn't control it very well. It caused a lot of damage before they quit teaching it."

Harry was surprised; he never thought Hermione would suggest something dangerous. "I can't believe *you* would suggest something dangerous like that. What makes you think we can do it?"

"I don't know if we could or not, but if so we could request doing an Extremely Advanced N.E.W.T. presentation. No one has done that in a long time. Do you want to try?" Hermione asked pleadingly.

"You know I'm still doing Quidditch, so that takes time every weekend plus some practice during the week. You'll be Head Girl of course so you'll have extra duties. Do you think we'll have enough time to learn it?"

Hermione perked up. "You really think I'll be Head Girl?"

Harry rolled his eyes and said, "Of course you will, who else? Now, do you really think we can do it?"

"If we can't, who else could? And, if we start this summer, we should know before term if we even have a chance. I've already been reading a bit about it and could just tell you what I've learned. That way you won't have so much to read. This will really be something if we can do it," said Hermione becoming excited.

Harry shook his head and asked. "Ok, tell me what it is we're going to learn? I wish I could have stayed working. You're going to make me study all summer!"

"Thank you Harry, I really appreciate this." She hugged him tightly and then suddenly switched into her teacher mode. "Now, no one else can know yet. I mean no one, not even Ron. It's elemental magic."

The look of confusion on Harry's face made Hermione explain. "It's a good thing you can just pick things up naturally," Hermione said shaking her head. "Elemental magic is controlling elements. You can control water like making it rain, or large waves. With fire, you can use fire as a shield or as a weapon. Wind could make tornadoes or light breezes. Earth is the most complicated and we won't even try that but you could make earthquakes and things like that."

Harry's eyes were wide when he said, "No wonder they don't teach it. Where did you learn about this?"

Hermione looked around and said, "I sometimes go into the old bookstores in Knockturn Alley and noticed this really old book that had something in it. I bought it and the only other one I found that had anything to do with elemental magic. Guess what you're getting for your birthday now?"

"When did you go down Knockturn Alley?" Harry exclaimed amazed at the thought of his best friend spending time there.

"I go to the bookstores every now and then. I usually keep the hood up on my cloak so no one will recognize me. Don't worry; I just want to know about this stuff. Can't you see how impressive this will be even if we can only do very minor spells?" She saw some hesitation in Harry so she added. "Imagine making a puddle of water form into an object or making a wall of fire as a shield? There're even accounts of turning water and fire into creatures that can fight for you. I doubt we'd get that far but just think about it. Professor McGonagall would be so impressed."

"I'm not sure she'd be impressed if I sent a fire monster to attack Malfoy but I know it would make me happy. How do we keep this from Ron? If we have any progress, once we get back to school, he's going to wonder what we're up to," Harry joked.

"I doubt he'll notice anything, he's so wrapped up in Parvati that we could be gone for a week and he wouldn't know," Hermione said coldly.

"You're not bothered by him and Parvati are you? I thought you were over him."

"I am over him. Honestly. I just can't believe that he's giving so little thought to his two best friends just because of her."

"Is that what you two said about me when I was seeing R.J. and now Cho?" Harry asked suddenly feeling bad for doing the same thing to his friends.

"That seemed different. With R.J., it was only at night so it didn't seem so bad. And when you started seeing Cho, Ron and I were getting together so I guess that didn't seem so bad either. And, you always tried to do things with us, even if Cho came along. Ron's not like that. He'll just go with her and ignore us."

"I hate to say this, but I'm glad you haven't fallen for anybody else. If both of you were off snogging every day, I'd be lost this year," Harry said smiling.

"Harry! Ron and I weren't off snogging every day!" Hermione looked offended.

Harry kind of blushed and asked, "So, you two never... you know?"

Hermione hit him in the arm and said, "No! Of course not, I'm only sixteen."

"So, then you must think badly of me," Harry said softly since Hermione knew he was with Cho and R.J. already.

"Not at all. Jealous really. It just never felt right being with Ron, and I think he knew it too. I mean we kissed a lot but that's it. I know how private you are so if you felt it was right with Cho then I'm glad for you. I know she didn't mind mentioning it."

Harry blushed but said, "What about R.J.?"

"I can't say I ever quite understood you two but I knew you were really happy with her. That's why you didn't go to Ron's over holiday, so you could spend all your evenings with her."

"So, do you think if things had been different that we would have?" Harry surprised himself by asking this.

Hermione blushed quite a bit but got serious and said, "Probably. I've always felt more comfortable with you than anyone else. Sometimes I just need to talk to another girl and Ginny's really good to talk to but other than those times, I'd rather just us be together."

"I feel the same way, except for Ginny being Ron. I think being with R.J. really helped me be comfortable with girls. I guess when you're 150 years old you learn a few things!"

"Ok, enough about this. Let's look at the orb, but after you get back from vacation, we need to spend some time on our project as well."

They went to the table and Harry summoned the box with the orb in it. Harry picked up the orb and it turned maroon like always. Just before he sat it back down, Hermione stumbled a bit and Harry caught her hand with his free hand. Suddenly, the orb flashed bright white and Hermione's eyes got very wide and just stared into Harry's eyes. Harry quickly dropped the orb and Hermione fainted.

Hermione suddenly felt like she was Harry or at least that she could feel everything about him. She could feel the magic in him; it just seemed to flow all around him. She seemed to see things that had happened to him flash before her and she was able to understand exactly what Harry had felt during those times. She saw the green flash that killed his parents. She understood how worthless he was made to feel living with the Dursleys. She felt how scared he was before fighting Professor Quirrell and Voldemort. She felt how scared and yet determined he was when he was saving Ginny and saw how he beat the snake. She saw how close to death he was from the venom before Fawkes help cure him. She understood how alone he felt most of the time and how he constantly needed to prove himself. She knew instantly how much he cared for her and his other friends. She also knew how insecure he really was and felt how much things had bothered him. She felt the enormous guilt he felt over Cedric's death. She was seeing things flashing before her and she felt how worried and guilty he felt right now about her. Flashing forward, she felt the pain of his heart being broken.

She couldn't tell when or how and before she figured it out, she heard, "Hermione are you ok? Hermione." She opened her eyes and saw Harry standing above her with a terrified look in his face. Of everything she just felt about Harry, the two things that stuck with her were his heart being broken and the sudden realization of just how powerful he was. "Oh, Hermione," Harry said grabbing and hugging her. "Are you alright? Do you want me to get you anything?"

She stood back up not feeling anything other than confused by what happened and awed by the things she had just learned about Harry. "I'm fine Harry," she said trying to compose herself. "I just stumbled and must have fainted for some stupid reason. I feel fine now."

Harry still had a really worried look on his face. "Sit down. You stumbled and the orb flashed white. You only fainted after I dropped the orb. "

"How long was I out for?" Hermione asked

"Just a second or two. Are you sure you're ok?" Harry asked obviously worried.

"Harry, I'm ok, really." It physically hurt her to know how much Harry's experiences had scarred him. It also made her feel good to know that he cared for her as much as she cared for him. She had always thought he cared for her as a sister, but knew that it was more than that.

If only things had been different or maybe if she had been a little more aggressive a few years ago. She was really worried about how and when his heart would be broken. She was also a bit scared about how much magic she felt within him, still feeling it radiate from him.

Chapter 7

"We don't have to research the orb any more. I'll do it by myself from now on." Harry started to box the orb up.

"Nonsense. I just fainted, no big deal." Hermione didn't want Harry to work with the object by himself. Pulling herself together, she said, "After you get back from vacation we'll split our time between it and elemental magic. Take the book on vacation and when you actually leave your room read up on it." She tried to smile.

"Are you sure you're ok? You're looking at me weird," Harry said with worry in his eyes.

"I'm sure. I'm embarrassed enough," Hermione stated. She could still feel the magic all around him. Trying to change the subject she said, "Are you looking forward to your birthday party? You'll finally be of age."

Harry didn't want to change the subject but also didn't want Hermione to feel uncomfortable. "Are you sure you want to come to the party Friday? I'd understand if you don't."

"I wouldn't miss your party Harry. I totally ok with Ron and his little woman," she said with a flick of her wrist.

"Just the other day you were saying that you might not make it," Harry said confused.

"Women can change their minds. You have *so* much to learn about us. You were the one telling me to find someone who deserved me. I really don't care what he does. You're my best friend and I want to be there. By the way, where did you say you were taking Cho next week?"

"I didn't, it's all a secret. And, a better secret than Belgium was," he said smiling.

Hermione laughed. "You're leaving that little secret behind aren't you? Wouldn't want you to make any hasty decisions in the heat of the moment." Hermione secretly hoped he would suddenly admit to his feelings for her.

"I don't plan on giving it to her yet. I have to make sure I could handle it if she doesn't want it first. That would be horrible." Harry got a terrified look on his face.

Hermione laughed again. "You're kidding right? I'm surprised she hasn't asked you already. I don't see her willingly letting her hooks out of you. C'mon let's get back to business on the orb; I just don't think I'll be touching anything again today. I can't believe that the two best students in school can't figure this thing out." Hermione was still thinking about Harry's feelings.

"Maybe the top student in school and her good friend. I'm not close to the top," Harry corrected her.

"You're my *best* friend Harry. Ok, the top student in school and the most powerful wizard she knows. That's as far as I'll go," she smiled. "Ok, you say that when you pick up the orb, it quits talking. Do you think it really quits or maybe you just can't hear it as well? Try picking

it up, closing your eyes and concentrating really hard on only it." Harry sat down and picked up the orb. The voice stopped. He closed his eyes and tried to concentrate. "Don't think about anything else, just relax." Hermione was saying in a calm voice. She moved behind him and began rubbing his shoulders saying. "Don't think about anything but the voice."

After just a minute, Harry said, "I can't think about anything but you touching me, so if you want me to figure this out, you better quit."

Harry really felt relaxed and thought he was hearing the voice again. It was a single voice and clearer. He really tried to focus and then heard a sound from the other room. Quickly he threw the orb into the box and just got it shut before Sirius walked into the room. Harry looked guilty but he noticed that Hermione just looked annoyed. "Hey you two. What have you been up to?" Sirius asked sounding very happy.

"We were... um...we," Harry was stammering, but Hermione spoke up calmly, "We were just working on something for a school project. We'll finish it after Harry gets back."

"You're supposed to be having fun, not doing schoolwork," Sirius said and went to drop off his bag.

Harry quickly banished the box to the hiding place. He turned to Hermione and said, "I thought I was hearing something clearer just before."

Sirius came back down and Harry asked, "So, what's going on out there? Any news?"

Sirius looked between Harry and Hermione and said, "Something's strange. Voldemort's keeping a very low profile and only isolated things are happening. I wish we still had a spy in there. I think he's trying a different strategy this time."

Harry noticed that Sirius didn't seem as concerned about this as he expected, "Um Sirius. You don't seem too bothered about Voldemort?"

"I'm very bothered about it. It's just..." Sirius stopped for a minute and said, "I may have found something that I thought was lost for good," he kind of smiled while saying this.

"So, are you going to tell us what?" Hermione asked quickly.

Sirius grinned again and said, "Hopefully, when I'm sure I really found it."

Hermione stayed for just a little talking to Harry and Sirius and went home a bit early, promising to be at Harry's party on Friday.

As soon as Hermione got home, she kept trying to replay all the visions and feelings she had felt earlier when she had a connection to Harry. It had seemed to go on for hours but Harry had said it was only seconds. She couldn't get the feeling of just how powerful he was out of her head and wondered if Harry had any idea. These thoughts kept her awake well into the night.

Harry's birthday party was going to be in an area of the Leaky Cauldron. This was a more convenient place for his friends to meet. Harry was finally going to be of age, which meant he could legally use his wand for magic. Ron had already passed this milestone and it was a big

deal for his friend. Harry didn't think it was such a big thing; he was just looking forward to going away with Cho for a week.

Cho had come over earlier so they could arrive together. "Are you excited about your birthday Harry?"

"I'm more excited about going away with you," he said hugging her.

Sirius spoke up while the couple was hugging, "I think you're going to like the place he picked out Cho. Harry has never been anyplace like it before. It's great you two can go do this."

"So, where exactly is it that he's taking me?" she asked, trying to get some hints.

"Oh, I'll never tell. He's of age now and I don't want him practicing Auror spells on me."

"I want to give you your present now Harry." She handed him a large box with a bow on it. Harry opened it and it was an expensive looking outfit. He held it up and examined it. "Do you like it?" she asked expectantly.

Harry did like it. It wasn't like anything else he had, it was more modern. "This is really nice Cho. I suppose you want me to wear it tonight."

She smiled and said, "See Sirius, he is starting to learn." Harry went upstairs and put on the outfit, which went with his dragon-hide boots. He actually liked the outfit a lot. It reminded him of what older guys would wear when they were in Diagon Alley at night.

When Harry came back down Sirius spoke first. "There's no way I would think you had just turned seventeen. Cho, you have really good taste."

She smiled and said, "He does clean up pretty nice."

"I don't want you to open my gift until you get on your vacation. It's for both of you." Sirius said handing Harry a box. "I'll be just a little late to your party. And, since I'll be the oldest one there by far, I probably won't stay late."

"Shouldn't we be going Cho?" Harry asked.

"You can't arrive too early to your own party Harry. We've told the Innkeeper he can go ahead and serve our friends and just put it on our bill."

"There won't be too many people will there?"

"Just our close friends, don't worry about it. Are you sure you won't tell me where we're going next week?" she pleaded

"You told me to surprise you, so that's what I'm doing. I hope you packed your snowshoes," Harry replied smiling.

"Then we'll spend the whole week inside by the fire. You know I don't like the cold. Fine, we can go to the party. It will take my mind off of the trip."

Harry and Cho apparated to the Leaky Cauldron and were shown to the area in back that Tom, the Innkeeper had reserved for them. Harry saw George, Fred, Ron and Ginny Weasley. It looked like all the boys had brought dates. Harry also saw Cho's good friends from Hogwarts. "Harry!" Ron yelled and came over with Parvati closely in tow. Cho headed over to her see good friends.

"Hi Ron, Parvati." Harry said, "I'm glad you came."

"Hope you don't mind, we brought Padma along as well," Parvati stated. "I really like your outfit. It makes you look much older."

"Thanks. Cho got it for me. How long have you been here Ron?" Harry asked.

"Long enough for a couple of drinks. What do you think of the twin's dates? Owning a popular store has its advantages," Ron said and was quickly hit by Parvati.

Harry looked at the two girls with the twins and noticed they were twins as well. Two tall long-legged blondes. Harry was amazed at how Fred and George always seemed to easily meet and talk to pretty girls.

Harry hugged Ginny and asked. "How do the twins always get the girls?"

Ginny smiled and said, "Beats me. If they saw them around the house, they'd be running away." She laughed before saying. "Thanks for inviting me Harry. I wasn't sure if you would."

"Why wouldn't you be sure? You're one of my best friends. I'd rather have you here than most of the others," Harry said.

Ginny blushed and said, "Ron said you're going on a vacation next week. Can you tell me where you're going?"

Harry looked at her and said, "Ok, you'll be the only other one besides Sirius that knows and you have to promise not to tell anyone. We're going to a little island in the South Pacific. Sirius says it's exactly like the place Cho's always dreamed of going. She doesn't even know yet."

Ginny looked at him wishfully and said, "Why can't more guys be like you?"

"Hey, I'll swap. They can have my life pretty much anytime," Harry responded and then the twins joined their conversation. After talking to them for a couple minutes, he went to Cho and her friends.

Harry came up and hugged Cho and then Kelly said, "Nice outfit! I almost didn't recognize you for a minute. It doesn't look like Cho's robbing the cradle tonight."

"Thanks Kelly. I see you're as nice to me as always," Harry replied acting like the comments had hurt.

"Oh, you know we love you. So, where are you taking her next week? You can tell us," she pried.

"Nope, not telling. Only Sirius knows," Harry said and tried to pay attention to the conversations but was looking around.

"Earth to Harry," Kelly kidded after trying to get his attention for a couple minutes. "Are you looking for someone more interesting than us?"

Harry made something up. "Sirius should be here before long."

"Don't believe him," Cho jumped in. "He's looking for his 'best friend' Hermione. She's actually got him studying over the summer. She probably spends more time with him than I do," Cho pouted.

"But not the same quality time that we have," Harry said and kissed her.

"You better watch out for those bookish quiet ones Cho. They keep all those desires built up inside." One of her other friends added.

Suddenly Harry saw Sirius. "See, there's Sirius. I'll be back in a bit." Harry quickly left the girls and went to his godfather who had changed clothes and brought another friend Remus Lupin.

"Professor Lupin. I didn't know you were coming." Harry said happily.

"Sirius came and drug me out. He said we might not stay long since everyone will be so much younger. He promised to take me to some places where we may fit in better. So, you're off to the beach tomorrow."

"Yes, I can't wait. I've never been before." Harry was talking with the two of them when he saw them staring at something over his shoulder and then heard.

"So schoolboy. You're finally of age. Don't expect me to go so easy on you anymore." Harry turned around and saw the chaser from the French National Quidditch team.

"Kristi! How did you know about this?" Harry said staring at her. She looked amazing. Instead of dressed in black, she had a deep blue dress on. It was just as tight as normal but it gave her a totally different look.

She hugged him and said, "My manager mentioned something about it and I didn't mind canceling my plans for tonight so I came."

Harry was still staring at her until he heard Lupin say, "Harry, close your mouth and introduce us."

Sirius spoke up before Harry could. "Nice to see you again Kristi." Sirius shook her hand lightly.

Then Harry jumped in. "And this was another teacher, Remus Lupin."

Lupin stepped forward and took her hand and said. "France's top chaser and best looking woman in the game."

Kristi smiled and said, "Nice friends Harry. Escaped convict and a werewolf. This party may not be so bad." All the Weasley boys came over to talk with Kristi. She handled it well. Harry thought she must be very used to this. After a few minutes, he was standing next to Kristi and she messed his hair and said, "I see your little girlfriend has started dressing you. Tell her I totally approve."

"Tell me yourself Kristi." Cho had come over with her friends behind her.

"Cho. I see you've been busy teaching him the ropes," Kristi said and then hugged Cho.

"Well if I was going to be seen in public with him when he wasn't playing Quidditch, I had to do something." Cho joked back. The other guys standing around were in shock that the two women were getting along.

"Interesting place you chose to have his party at," Kristi said eyeing the rather drab surroundings of the Leaky Cauldron.

"It was Harry's choice. I would have picked one of the clubs down the street but he insisted," Cho said squeezing Harry's hand.

Harry backed away and saw the twins point at something behind Harry. He turned around and almost dropped his drink. Coming toward him was a pretty girl in a nice form fitting dress with high heels. Her hair was pulled back and she had a green necklace around her neck. She walked right up to Harry and gave him a kiss on the cheek and hugged him. "Happy birthday Harry."

He didn't say anything for a moment, and just looked. "I'll take that as a compliment," she joked.

"Hermione. You look amazing. Ron's going to flip. Parvati's going to flip more," Harry finally said.

"Hi Hermione. You look really nice tonight. Did you come alone?" Cho added.

"Thanks Cho. It's nice to get out. I met a friend just before coming in, he'll be right here," she said and just then a huge figure came into their area carrying a large box.

"Happy Birthday Harry! Got your cake right here." It was Hagrid.

"Hagrid! I didn't think you would make it. You never responded to the invitation."

"Well, didn't know if I would be around or not. Been traveling a bit. Secret business. What do you think of Hermione here? She's something huh?" Hagrid asked.

"She's always been something Hagrid. You know that," Harry said.

Hermione smiled and started talking to Sirius and Lupin.

Harry and Cho were talking to her friends when Ron came over without Parvati. "Hey Ron, where's the wife?" One of Cho's friends asked.

"Having second thoughts about Hermione now?" Cho asked playfully.

Ron looked angry. "No, I'm not having second thoughts. Parvati and her sister are just in the bathroom." Ron pulled Harry away. "What's up with the way Hermione's dressed?"

Harry laughed and said, "What do you mean? She wears a lot less than that when we go running?"

Ron looked shocked, "You're going running with her. Where? How often?"

"Yep, we run almost every time she comes over, at least twice a week. Parvati didn't seem too impressed when she saw Hermione," Harry added wondering what Ron's new girlfriend thought of Hermione's outfit.

"She about flipped. Padma keeps saying Hermione's dressed like that to try and impress me. What do you think?" Ron asked sounding very interested in getting Harry's opinion.

"I think she's just trying to look nice. She says that she's totally ok with you two splitting up," Harry said a little annoyed with Ron.

Ron started to ask something but Parvati had come back and then he quickly said, "I think we're going to walk around for a while. Sorry to leave so early."

Not long after that, Sirius, Lupin, Hermione and Kristi came over. "Well Harry, these two lovely ladies are going to accompany us to a club. And, don't worry I won't be back home until tomorrow." Sirius said with a quick grin.

"How's Hermione going to get in? And, I guessed you would want to pick someone up," Harry joked.

"Hermione will have no trouble getting in," Kristi said confidently. "And, it's easier to pick up a girl if you come to the club with one."

Harry wished them all well and went back to Cho and her friends. "Where are those four going?" Cho asked.

"Leaving for another club."

"Well us Ravenclaws are about to call it a night," Kelly said.

Cho and Harry said their goodbye's to the remaining people and said they had to go make sure they were ready to leave. They quickly left for home. "Thanks for a great birthday party Cho," Harry said giving her a big hug.

"Next year I get to pick the place," she said smiling. "So, what do you want to do for the rest of the evening?"

"Well, we can enjoy ourselves here or we can leave on vacation. There's a big time difference to our destination. It's already 2:00pm there. There's a package on the bed with some appropriate clothes, so change and we'll be off," Harry said calmly

"Really? We can leave now? C'mon let's go change," Cho said getting very excited.

Cho had an idea it was a beach vacation already and the sundress Harry had got for her confirmed it. They threw the final objects into their bags, which they shrunk down for easy carrying. Sirius had made a portkey to take them to their destination so that Cho wouldn't know the final destination until they arrived. They both touched the portkey, Harry said the spell and they were off.

The change in climate was immediately evident. It was hot and humid and the smell of tropical flowers was everywhere. They had appeared at the side of a building with palm trees all around. They didn't hear many people talking so they walked around to the front. They immediately saw a beautiful blue lagoon with a jagged island on the other side. Harry couldn't believe a place like this existed and Cho was totally speechless. They were still standing there looking at the scenery when a man came over with a thick accent. "Did you two miss the boat to the hotel?"

Harry turned to him quickly and said, "I'm afraid so. We're supposed to go to the Bora Bora Lagoon Hotel."

"Oh, no problem. I'll call them and they'll send a boat right over. Have a seat if you like."

Cho was still just looking at the island and water but came back to Harry in a couple minutes. "I can't believe there's anyplace like this. We're here for a whole week, right?"

Harry was just about to answer when a small powerboat pulled up to the dock and a man said. "Bora Bora Lagoon!"

Harry and Cho quickly walked to the boat and got in. "Is this all the luggage?" the man asked. Harry assured him it was and then they just watched the water and the island on the short boat ride. Coming up to the motu where the hotel was, Harry could see the huge smile on Cho's face. Each room was its own little bure and many of them were over the water. They got off the boat at the dock and walked to the registration area.

"Ah, Mr. Potter. We've been expecting you. How was the flight?" The clerk asked.

Harry looked at Cho and said, "Much shorter than we expected."

"You have bure 19. Here's the key. If you show your bags to the porter, he will escort you to the room."

"These are all the bags we have," Harry said quickly.

The lady behind the counter smiled and said, "Ah, must be honeymooners."

They smiled without correcting the lady and followed the porter out a long dock to the final bure on the end. He showed them in and Cho was immediately drawn to the table in the middle of the room with a glass bottom looking directly into the lagoon. The porter left and they enlarged their bags and put things away. Cho just wanted to spend the evening on their porch looking out at the island. They had a light meal and went to sleep quickly.

The days were passing quickly. They spent their days lying on the beach or just on their porch in the sun. Harry had been reading the book Hermione got him for his birthday every chance he got. He didn't understand most of the theory behind elemental magic, but was excited about the results. His first successful attempt at elemental magic had caused his glass of ice water to shoot up out of his glass and land on Cho. She didn't see the humor in it so Harry kept things completely away from her.

By the end of the week, he had been able to make his water come out of the glass and then go back into it. He had also thought he had made some waves on the normally calm lagoon but couldn't be positive. He made more progress with fire and was able to make the flames on the candles in the room move around and come to the ends of his fingers. It seemed easier to ask the fire to do things. He had tried making breezes but couldn't tell if it was him or just the normal tropical breezes blowing around. Cho kept telling him it was vacation and he shouldn't be studying but since she was reading some romance novel he decided to read whatever he wanted.

They had taken some glass bottom boat rides and had seen many sharks as well as colorful fish in the lagoon. They had eaten on the island twice and Harry loved the fact that there weren't many people around.

The day before they were to leave, Harry told Cho he had made plans for the day. Around 2:00pm, Harry packed a small bag and they went to the dock where a boat was waiting. The boat took the couple to a motu on the other end of the island that was totally uninhabited. There was nothing but sand and some palm trees. The captain unloaded a large basket and laid out a very large blanket. He then handed Harry a radio and said to call whenever they wanted to come back. Cho looked confused when the boat went away so she asked, "So, what are we doing here?"

"This is our island for the rest of the day. We've got food and wine and even some music. So, we can do anything. And I do mean anything you want here for the rest of the day, totally unbothered." Harry said with a sly smile.

"Really? No one will come around?" Cho asked and then removed her swim top. They spent the rest of the afternoon skinny dipping in the warm lagoon and making love in the sand. When it started to get dark, they lit the torches and ate supper watching the sunset over the ocean.

"Harry. This is perfect. I can't imagine being any happier," Cho said and kissed him passionately.

Harry just looked at her for a minute and said, "Really? Oh, I have one more thing for you. Close your eyes." Cho smiled and closed her eyes. Harry pulled the ring out and opened the box, holding it in front of her and said, "You can open them now." Cho opened her eyes and it

took a second before the ring registered. She looked at it and then back to Harry. He looked deep into her eyes and said, "Cho. Will you marry me? No hurry, we can wait until next year if you want. I really..."

She interrupted him. "Of course I'll marry you!" She hugged him and when she pulled back, tears were in her eyes. She hadn't taken the ring yet so Harry took it and put it on her finger. Cho just stared at it for a few minutes with tears in her eyes. "I can't believe this. I love you so much," she kept saying and then hugging him. They made love again before calling for the boat to come get them. The rest of the night Cho just kept saying how happy she was.

"We can wait until next summer to get married. That way I'll be out of school," Harry started saying.

"I don't want to wait!" Cho exclaimed. "Let's do it before you go back."

Harry really didn't want it to be so soon and began to panic. "That's too quick, how about over the Christmas holiday. That will give enough time to plan." Cho seemed to accept that it would take time to plan everything and agreed to this.

They got up very early and took the first boat to the airstrip. When no one was looking they stepped around the building and Disapparated back to the castle. They arrived in the early afternoon and Sirius was in the kitchen. Immediately Cho ran to him. "Sirius! Look what Harry gave me." She showed him the ring and Sirius smiled genuinely and hugged her.

"Congratulations you two. So, you couldn't wait could you Harry?" Sirius asked smiling and shaking his head.

"You knew about this?" Cho asked him with wide eyes.

"Well, someone had to take him to Belgium so he could pick it out."

"How long ago was that?" Cho asked still surprised Sirius knew.

"Over a month," Harry said. "I've been hiding it ever since."

"A month! Why didn't you ask me right away?" She said looking kind of scary.

"I wanted it to be the right time and be perfect," Harry answered putting his hands up like he was protecting himself.

"It was perfect. I want to tell my dad. Come with me!" Cho pleaded. Sirius just laughed and Harry gave in and went with her. It was crazy at Cho's house when they found out. Everyone was very happy for her and kept asking why they were waiting until the holidays to get married. Cho had called her friends and that was about as much as Harry could take. He said he was very tired after the trip and wanted to go home to sleep. Everyone congratulated him and he quickly went home.

"So, the time was right, huh?" Sirius asked shaking his head again.

"I think so. I love her and know I want to marry her. I wouldn't mind waiting until next summer though. It'll be weird being married and still at school," Harry said not sounding extremely excited.

"Don't worry about still being in school. How many other students have had to deal with what you have? If you feel that it's time, then don't worry about anything else. So, how was the island?"

Harry spent the next couple hours telling Sirius about how wonderful the island was and about how much fun they had. He then went to bed to try and get back onto a regular sleep schedule. Cho jumping onto his bed woke him up the next morning. "I missed you last night," she exclaimed seeming wide awake.

"Me too. What are you doing here?" He asked barely awake.

"That's a fine way to greet your fiancé." Cho joked. "I'm just excited. Let's go do something today."

"Ok, fine. Let me go shower and then I'm all yours," he said still sounding tired.

"How about we both go shower and you're still all mine?" Cho said following him into the shower. They emerged a couple hours later to find Sirius downstairs.

"I'm going to be in and out for a while. Dumbledore wants me to check on a few things, and then some personal business," Sirius said.

"Do you need any help? I could go with you." Harry offered and Cho gave him a dirty look.

"No thanks. I can take care of myself. Don't worry; I'll be back in a few weeks." Sirius hugged Harry and left.

"Why'd you offer to go with him? I don't want you doing anything to get hurt," Cho said seriously.

"I'm old enough to start helping them more. The bottom line is that it's me they're protecting so I should be with them," Harry replied not happy about being left out.

Cho looked at him and then said, "C'mon let's go to Diagon Alley. Sirius said he'd be ok."

They walked around and every time Harry tried to avoid people staring, Cho seemed to pull him back. She didn't seem to mind people staring and talking as much as he did. They had sat down for a late lunch at an outdoor restaurant when Harry noticed something. "Oh great. Cho, a reporter with the Daily Prophet is coming over."

Cho smiled and said, "Don't worry Harry, a quick interview and they'll leave."

"Harry! Harry! What a surprise it is to see you out. It seems like you're never out in public," the reporter said and Harry was caught in the flash of a camera. Harry just smiled back. "Was it terribly disappointing to have lost to Bulgaria in the finals?"

Harry just concentrated on being calm and nice. "Yes, it was disappointing. The team was playing great and I just couldn't beat Viktor to the snitch. The rest of the team kept us in the match."

The reporter started again. "Was the rest of the team terribly hard on ...Oh my!" The reporter stopped and noticed Cho's hand, which was resting on the table right in front of the reporter. "Is that? Are you two? It's Miss Chang, isn't it?"

Cho beamed and replied, "Yes it is."

"That's quite some ring. Is that from Harry?" The reporter asked with a gleam in her eyes.

"Why yes it is. Harry proposed while we were on a deserted beach in the South Pacific. It was the most romantic thing ever."

"So, you've taken one of the most eligible bachelors off the market. When is the big date?"

Harry started to reply. "We may wait until after..."

But Cho stopped him. "Around the holidays. We wanted to have time to plan everything."

"You've just smashed the dreams of many young witches Miss Chang. How about a picture of the two of you?" the reporter asked.

Harry really didn't want to but Cho was pulling him over and made sure the ring was going to be visible in the pictures. They took a couple pictures and even one of them kissing. Thankfully the reporter left quickly after that. "We should have just hid," Harry said.

"Why? Don't you want anyone to know?" Cho seemed kind of hurt.

"That's not it. I want all of our friends to know. I just don't care about anyone other than our friends. And, who knows how they'll twist the story around," Harry replied.

"Don't worry. I bet it will be fine," Cho replied still feeling happy about telling the reporter about the engagement.

The couple spent a couple more hours in Diagon Alley and then each went back to their homes. Harry got home and took some candles and went out back. He lit a couple of the candles and began to practice elemental magic. Harry was now easily able to make the flames move from candle to candle and even combine into one larger flame. He could hold the flame in his hands without feeling the heat at all. He was trying to concentrate and make the flame into shapes in his hand when he heard something behind him. He quickly sent the flame back to the candle and heard, "What exactly where you doing?"

Chapter 8

"Just practicing some new magic Sirius, why?" Harry tried to sound like he wasn't trying to hide anything.

"I'm not familiar with magic that can control fire? Where did you learn it?" Sirius sounded concerned.

"As hard as it may be to believe, from a book. Hermione gave it to me for my birthday and I was reading it on vacation." Harry handed the book to Sirius.

"Elemental magic. This looks kind of like Dark Art stuff to me," Sirius said sounding even more upset.

"C'mon Sirius. You can't really think that every kind of magic that isn't taught much or that people don't commonly use is Dark Art. Being a Parselmouth is supposed to be a bad thing as well. Surely you can see that learning as much about different kinds of magic is a good thing."

"Maybe. Why did she give you this book? And, where did she get it?" Sirius asked, obviously still not convinced.

"Ok, she didn't want me to say anything but since you found out. Hermione thinks that no one will remember her at school once she leaves. She's jealous that Ron and I have Quidditch and that we crashed the car into the Whomping Willow." Even Sirius had to chuckle remembering this. "See! She wants people to remember her for something other than good grades. She wants us to do an Extremely Advanced N.E.W.T. presentation in elemental magic and I agreed to do it with her."

Sirius thought for a minute. "Still, there has to be something else."

"She's never going to be a prankster like the Marauder's were or like the twins are. For her, it has to be something using her brains. Doing a type of advanced magic that isn't even taught anymore is perfect for her. I think the only reason she asked me is so I won't be left alone while she's studying all the time."

"But I just saw you doing some of it. Is it really that hard?" Sirius asked.

"I've only done very minor things. Imagine if I could create a fire creature that would fight for me. Or, what if I could get it to stop storming when I wanted it to. I didn't understand at first how powerful it could be but after skimming through the more advanced parts of this book, I realize why this isn't taught. So, are you ok with this?" Harry was worried about what Sirius thought.

"I guess so. I can understand where Hermione's coming from. I wouldn't have liked being left out knowing the rest of the Marauders were still being talked about."

"Promise you won't tell anyone. I have to tell Hermione that I told you. Hermione won't be able to do magic since she's not of age yet."

"I won't tell anyone but wouldn't mind being involved so I feel a bit more comfortable about it," Sirius said and watched Harry practice a bit more.

Hermione came the next day around noon. "So, you just couldn't wait could you?" She said kind of sarcastically.

"Nice to see you too Hermione. What have I done now?" Harry asked confused. Sirius looked confused as well.

"This," Hermione said and sat the Daily Prophet down on the table.

The Boy-Who-Lived No Longer Available

Sorry to say this girls, but Harry Potter, the star Seeker for the French National Team and runner up for the Quidditch cup last year has recently become engaged to his manager Miss Cho Chang. <a picture showing them kissing >

Miss Chang said she was in tears as Harry proposed on a deserted beach in the South Pacific. Further research found the couple was staying at an exclusive resort on the island of Bora Bora. Miss Chang said it was the most romantic thing she'd ever seen.

If our readers will remember, Miss Chang was the girlfriend of Cedric Diggory who was mysteriously killed during the final task of the Triwizard Tournament and Harry Potter survived. How the loss of her boyfriend and the ending of Harry's relationship with a vampire ended up with an engagement between the two is a story this reporter would love to hear.

However it happened, the couple seemed extremely happy and Miss Chang was obviously pleased with the exquisite emerald shaped diamond ring. She seemed anxious to have a wedding during the holidays. Maybe she can convince Harry to be a little more available to the press.

"I tried to get her to hide from them but she wouldn't," Harry said re-reading the article.

"Of course she wouldn't Harry! She wants everyone to know. I would if I were her," Hermione said amazed at how naïve Harry could be.

"She's right Harry. Women want to tell the world about this kind of stuff," Sirius said.

"But you would have let me hide from the reporter. At least Cho's happy now," Harry said trying to find the positive in this.

"Aren't you happy too?" Hermione asked noticing Harry's attitude.

"Of course. I would have been just as happy if we had told our close friends and no one else," Harry replied.

"You're really going to do it during the holiday break?" Hermione asked.

"I wanted to wait until next summer. I figured it would be better to wait but she didn't think so. She wanted to do it before I went back to school but I convinced her that was too soon," Harry said.

"You should have some say so in this. Don't let her force you into doing it too soon," Hermione said forcefully.

"Sure Hermione. If I was marrying you and you had your heart set on doing it at some special time, I'd give in to you as well. I just didn't want it to be weird with me still in school and being married."

Harry and Hermione went outside and he spent some time telling her about the vacation and everything. "It sounds wonderful. I doubt I'll ever go someplace like that," Hermione said sadly.

"Of course you will," Harry said confidently. "Just think if we were all still not committed next summer, we could have all taken a trip somewhere. That would have been great. Oh, there is something I have to tell you. When I came back from vacation, Sirius found out about the N.E.W.T. thing."

"Harry! You promised you wouldn't tell anyone," Hermione sounded mad.

"I didn't plan to. I was setting out here at night practicing with some candles and he wanted to know what I was doing. He wouldn't drop it when I just said school work. He demanded to know and to see the book. Sirius said it sounds like Dark Magic and wants to be around when we are studying about it this summer. I'm sorry; he just caught me practicing. He promised he wouldn't tell anyone."

"Fine, I guess it wasn't your fault. As long as Sirius won't tell. Wait..." Hermione stopped and looked at Harry with her eyes getting wide. "What do you mean he caught you practicing? You didn't actually get something to happen did you?"

"Um... Well yeah. Nothing big, just little things. You told me to read about it on vacation," Harry stammered.

"I didn't think you actually would! What can you do? Come on show me," Hermione demanded obviously excited.

Harry got a bunch of candles and lit one of them. He made the flame from one candle hop to each other candle and light them all. Then, he had the flames all combine into one much larger flame and come to his hand.

Hermione was watching Harry when he brought the candles out and lit one. She could tell he was nervous. He sat down and she could really feel the magic around him, it felt really good to her. She watched in awe as he made the little flames move to each candle and then form into one large flame. She saw the flame come toward him and land right in his palm. Ever since that day with the orb, she had this connection with him and could feel the magic all around him.

"Doesn't that burn?" she asked watching the fire burn in his palm.

"Not at all. I can't even tell it's there," Harry said.

Hermione reached out like she was going to touch it but pulled back when she felt the heat. "I can sure feel it," she said.

"How long did it take for you to be able to do anything?" she asked going back to her wanting to learn everything mode.

"By Wednesday I thought little things were happening. Remember, this is all I had to read and there wasn't much else to do. I thought I made some waves and maybe a breeze but I couldn't be sure it was me."

She looked at him for a minute and asked a question she had wondered about ever since the incident with the orb. "When you do magic, can you feel it flowing out of your wand?"

"Um...No, I don't think so. I don't notice any difference. Why, do you?" he asked confused.

"Yes. When I do magic correctly, I can feel it flowing through the wand," she replied.

Harry looked worried. "Maybe that's why you're so much better than me. I don't feel anything," Harry said sounding disappointed.

Hermione laughed but knew better. She had no doubt that Harry was much, much more magical than she could ever hope to be.

"So, do you mind if Sirius works on this with us when he's here? That may mean we have to put off the orb, but I'd rather work on this with you," Harry asked.

"That would be fine, especially since I can't do magic until we're back in school."

Harry picked up his wand and concentrated on Sirius coming out then said, '*Fliari Memeori*' to cast the message spell. He and Hermione continued to talk until they heard. "What the hell was that? This thing flies right into me and I get the sudden vision that I'm supposed to come out here."

Harry and Hermione were both laughing until she answered. "That's Harry's message spell. Kind of weird the first few times it happens. We thought you might want to work on elemental magic with us."

"Sirius. Just imagine if you ever bring a woman back here and I'm around. Once you two go to be alone, I could send you messages of all kinds of disgusting things. Or I could send her messages that could really get you in trouble," Harry said laughing.

"If one of those things interrupts any date I might have, bad things are going to happen to you. Very bad things," Sirius said not entirely joking.

They spent the afternoon talking about elemental magic. Hermione had read much more than Harry had and was able to understand much more as well. She would explain things and Harry caught himself thinking 'Oh, that's what that meant.'

Hermione and Sirius were discussing something from one of the books so Harry decided to try some magic out. He concentrated on the wind and instead of saying a spell; he mentally asked the wind to blow harder. It took a minute but then both Sirius and Hermione started looking around since it hadn't been breezy at all a few minutes ago. Harry sat there smiling. "Now you're just starting to show-off," Sirius said.

Harry suddenly remembered something. "I bet Dumbledore can do this. When I was seeing R.J., I asked Winky to setup a nice romantic diner for us on Christmas Eve. It ended up being on the roof of the castle. It was cold and snowing, but we had a path around the roof and where our table was that was dry and warm. I bet he did it with elemental magic. If you stepped outside the path, it was instantly cold and the snow hit you."

"You thought of having romantic diners back when you were fifteen?" Hermione asked surprised at learning something else about her friend.

"Just like his father. James always tried doing stuff like that for the girls he dated," Sirius added.

"Hopefully we can figure this out and I'll try that this winter. That would be great, we could walk around outside and never get snowed on." Harry thought out loud. "You know what I've figured out listening to you two talk about this. I think I can learn much quicker when you two do the reading and I just listen to you explain it to each other."

"You're not still worried about this being Dark Magic are you Sirius?" Hermione asked.

"Yes and no. I don't worry about either of you doing anything. But imagine if a Death Eater became really good at this and could start using fire creatures to attack people. That's kind of scary."

"They teach things in Auror training that aren't pleasant either. Those things could be used to torment and terrorize people just as easy," Harry said flatly.

"I thought it was advanced stunning, healing and things like that," said Hermione looking confused.

"Well that's there also, but there are some things that aren't very nice." Harry replied looking down.

"Why don't you show me a couple?" Sirius asked smiling. "We haven't dueled in a long time."

"And if I remember right, you, Lupin and Moody came out on the losing end. And, that was a couple years ago," Harry said with a laugh.

"Yeah right Harry. Why won't you duel him?" Hermione asked.

Sirius looked at her and said, "He's not kidding Hermione. He beat the three of us at Mrs. Figg's house. But, I've been practicing since then and have my own wand now. C'mon a quick one."

"Ok, but it's got to be quick. We're supposed to be studying. Do you want a protection charm?" Harry laughed which drew a crude reply from his godfather.

They stood up and Hermione started watching intently. She had never seen trained wizards duel before. Sirius and Harry bowed but didn't take their eyes off of each other. They started circling one another and finally Sirius started a curse but before he could finish, Harry Disapparated and apparated next to Sirius and just pulled the wand from his godfather's hand

before Sirius knew what happened. "That was pretty quick," Harry laughed, pleased he had beat Sirius so quickly.

"How'd you do that? I was still moving?" Sirius asked.

"Advanced Apparation. Actually it's pretty neat. Want a quick example before we try dueling again?" Harry asked.

It was Hermione that spoke up. "Yes!"

"Ok, you two each take a cup. I'll turn around and you throw the cups into the air at the same time. Yell as soon as you've thrown them."

They each took a cup and looked at each other; then they threw them and Hermione yelled, "Go!" Harry Disapparated then apparated next to the first cup in the air and then did the same for the second cup before finally Apparating back where he started from holding both cups.

"Whoa!" Sirius said. "I didn't know that was possible. I always heard you had to concentrate on the spot you wanted to end up at."

"That's not exactly true. You're still aware of things going on, even when you Disapparate, you just have to concentrate on it. So, I can still see you moving after I Disapparate and can change the destination. Cool, huh? Please don't tell anyone about this stuff. Other than the Unspeakables, you two are all that know."

"Ok, duel for real now," Hermione said wanting to see more of what the two could do.

They bowed again and Sirius cast a couple spells that Harry was able to create a shield for. After Harry blocked a couple more spells, Sirius said, "You can at least fight back."

Hermione could just feel how doing magic like this energized Harry. She could just tell that he really enjoyed it. Sirius was sending advanced spells and Harry didn't even look worried. She could see her friend focusing more and could tell something was about to happen.

Harry quickly cast a localized bind on Sirius' arms, keeping them locked to his side and then used the constriction curse on his throat like he had done on Lucius Malfoy. Suddenly Sirius' eyes got big and he started gasping. Harry summoned Sirius' wand and let the curse off. "I told you, some of them aren't very nice. You're ok aren't you?" Harry asked not intending to hurt his godfather.

"I'm fine! That's not a pleasant feeling at all. I didn't know they taught things like that," Sirius said.

Hermione asked. "What happened? What kind of spell was it?"

"First my arms were bound to my sides and then it felt like my throat was being crushed. I couldn't breathe at all. Pretty scary really, even knowing my godson was casting it." Sirius said sounding a bit miffed.

"You said you wanted to see some things I learned down there. Trust me; they were using those and worse ones on me. Man it was fun," Harry laughed thinking back to his training.

Sirius just started laughing but Hermione said, "I think you're idea of fun is seriously disturbed. C'mon let's get back to elementals."

Harry went inside to get something to drink, which gave Hermione a chance to ask Sirius, "Sirius. When you do magic, can you feel it flowing out of your wand?"

"Of course. That's when you know you've got it right," he replied quickly.

"Harry says he can't feel anything like that. He says it's just always the same." Hermione stopped for a minute and said. "I get the feeling that he's a lot more magical than he thinks. Actually I think he's more magical than almost anyone I've ever known. I don't think he has a clue either."

Sirius thought for a minute and said, "I know he's more powerful than I am. I think Dumbledore knows too. That's why he let Harry move here; so he could have the freedom to explore magic. I can't believe the changes in him since the first time I met you two."

Harry coming back with more drinks interrupted them and they went back to talking about elemental magic until Hermione left that night. She came over a couple more times that week to work on the elemental magic. Sirius hadn't been able to make anything happen. Harry had been practicing and reading about it every day. At first he thought this was going to be a pain, but now he was really anxious to learn more.

Harry spent the weekend with Cho and they made plans to go to Paris the next weekend. That would be the last full weekend before term started. He had received his book list from Hogwarts and only one thing surprised him. In place of Divination, he was to get a book called "Curses Hexes and Pain Spells, level 7". He showed this to Sirius who replied that he heard a new teacher from Durmstrang would be at the school.

When Hermione came over she was beaming about being named Head Girl. A boy named Justin from Hufflepuff was the head boy. As long as it wasn't Draco Malfoy Harry was happy.

"How about I treat you to lunch to celebrate?" Harry said and Hermione quickly agreed. "Sirius, can you come with us? I want to make a little detour and I'd feel better if you came along," Harry said mysteriously.

"What's this little detour?" Sirius asked.

"I want to go to a book shop in Knockturn Alley. The place where Hermione got the elemental books," he said flatly.

Hermione kept looking between him and Sirius. "And why would you want to go there?" Sirius asked.

"I think it would be good to be aware of the other kinds of magic out there. I didn't even know elemental magic existed until Hermione brought these books. That really got me thinking. I don't want to get into any Dark Art stuff or anything, but I would like to have some clue about things. Besides we're supposed to get a book called 'Curses Hexes and Pain Spells' for normal

school. You know, Hermione and I could have just sneaked down there, but I wouldn't want to make you mad."

Hermione spoke up, "I could go home quickly and get my cloak. If we keep our hoods up, no one will recognize us. When I went down there most people had them up."

"Fine but only the bookstore. We'll wait for you here Hermione," Sirius said still unsure about this trip. He and Harry went up to get their cloaks and Hermione was back in a few minutes. They all put their cloaks on and pulled up their hoods. Hermione noticed that Harry was at least as tall as Sirius and with their hoods up they made an intimidating pair.

The trio apparated to Knockturn Alley and quickly left the shop they had appeared in. Hermione led the way to the bookstore. There were many unpleasant looking people walking around in this area. When they went into the bookstore, Harry noticed it was much darker and dirtier than the one in Diagon Alley. Once in the store, they each split up and began looking on their own. Harry found a book titled 'Pathways to the Mind' that had chapters about reading minds and thoughts. He picked it up and continued looking. Eventually he found another book on personal security. It had disorienting spells and spells to make you unrecognizable. The one chapter that caught his eye while he was skimming was about a spell to become invisible. Harry took both of these books to the counter and quickly paid for them. He noticed both Sirius and Hermione had bought a book as well. They left and went back to Diagon Alley.

"I like this side so much better," Harry said. "So, what did you get Sirius?"

Sirius looked a little guilty and said, "How about I don't ask you and you don't ask me?"

"Yeah, I agree with Sirius," Hermione added.

This surprised Harry but he was glad not to tell which books he books he had bought. After eating, they stopped into the Twin's shop, which was quite busy. Hermione and Sirius looked around and Harry went to the back to see Cho.

"Harry! What are you doing here?" she said hugging him.

"Just buying some books. Remember, I'm still a schoolboy," he replied.

"Not much longer," she said happily.

"So, we're really going to Paris this weekend?" Harry asked.

"Yes, I can't wait. I'm going to get you a couple more outfits to take. I can't believe this will be the last full weekend before you leave me," she said pouting.

"I told you to come teach something or be a teacher's aid. Having a fling with the teacher would be pretty interesting," Harry said smiling.

Harry went to collect Sirius and Hermione and continue their real school shopping. While buying his real books, Harry bought four fake book covers that read, 'Standard Spells, Grade 7' and gave one to Sirius and Hermione so no one could tell easily what they were reading.

When they got back to the house, they each went to their own chair in the living room to read their new books. Harry picked the personal security one and turned to the section on making yourself unrecognizable. He read the technique over and over and made sure to read the counter spell at least that many times. He pulled out his wand, pointed it at himself and said the spell, "Can you see any difference?" he asked unable to tell for himself.

"In what?" Hermione replied.

"Never mind, it must not have worked," Harry said glumly. He got up and took his book to the kitchen and reread the technique. Realizing he had made a small mistake he tried again. Harry walked back to the living room and said, "Can one of you help me with this?"

He was greeted with a scream from Hermione and by Sirius jumping up with his wand. "Who the hell are you?"

Harry was shocked and threw up his hands. "It's me! Harry! It just tried out a spell and wanted to see if it worked. Who do I look like?"

They both looked at him strangely but Sirius wouldn't lower his wand. Hermione said, "You don't look like anybody I've ever seen."

Harry quickly did the counter spell, "Now, tell me what I looked like before."

Sirius and Hermione both looked at each other and said, "I don't remember."

"Wicked!" Harry exclaimed.

Sirius quickly asked, "What was that spell?"

"I thought you said you don't ask and I don't ask?" Harry joked.

"Ok, maybe we'll swap good ones," Sirius replied.

"Anything good in yours Hermione?" Harry asked.

She blushed a bit and said, "I doubt it." She quickly went back to reading.

Harry read in most of his spare time that week. Studying magic wasn't so bad as long as he got to study what he wanted for how long he wanted. It was just when he had to read hundreds of pages for a history of magic essay that he hated. He had been practicing an invisibility spell a lot of the time but so far had only managed to look more like a ghost. He had learned spells to make other people temporarily blind and deaf.

When Hermione was there, the three of them had worked on elemental magic most of the time. Hermione was really anxious to try out everything she had been reading, especially when Sirius had been able to make a flame move from one candle to the next. Harry had really made progress with fire but didn't demonstrate to Hermione or Sirius. Harry then started focusing on doing little things with wind and water.

Cho arrived at the castle not long after Hermione left on Friday. She had brought a couple new outfits for Harry to take. "Sirius," Cho exclaimed. "Kristi told me to invite you to the club with us on Saturday if you wanted to come?"

"Ah, let's check my date book," he joked. "Looks like I'm free. Also, how could I turn down an invitation from her?"

"Good. Meet at our hotel at 9:00pm tomorrow," Cho replied.

Harry and Cho apparated to the hotel they were staying at. It was a very nice older hotel on the edge of the wizarding community. Cho planned this weekend so the reservation was in her name. The girl at the check-in counter was being polite and quietly helping Cho until she heard another girl scream. "<in French>Oh my gosh. It's Harry Potter!"

Cho only caught the 'Harry Potter' part but quickly realized what they said. One of the girls came around and asked Harry for his autograph, which he reluctantly gave her. The girl behind the counter ended up upgrading them to a very nice suite.

The couple quickly unpacked their things. "Our last full weekend together for a while," Cho said sadly. "What do you want to do?"

"This is your weekend Cho. I'm all yours. Whatever makes you happy," Harry said hugging her.

"Kristi told me about a really nice restaurant that we could walk to. She said we wouldn't need reservations if they recognize you. It's so pretty here, let's walk around a while and then go eat," Cho said. The young couple walked along the streets and Harry realized that he liked Paris; it was a very romantic place. They got occasional pointing and people asking for his autograph, but it really wasn't too bad.

After a long walk, they got back to the street where Cho said the restaurant was and saw a crowd of people with drinks in their hands waiting to be seated. Cho had Harry go up to see how long it would be. He approached the girl seating people. "Pardon me. Is there any way we could get a table? We're from London and don't have a reservation."

The girl quickly responded, "The wait will be at least 2 hours. You are welcome to..." and then she looked up and realized whom Harry was. "Oh! You're the Seeker! Harry Potter!" Harry saw other people starting to stare now. The girl quickly called someone over who had just stepped away for just a second then returned. "We can seat you immediately. Follow me."

Cho grabbed Harry's arm and followed the girl to a nice corner booth. It was a nice leisurely meal that lasted at least two hours. Most of the staff was watching them after they paid and were leaving. Kristi had told Cho about a nice piano bar on up the street so they walked there. Once again, it was crowded but they were able to get a nice table by themselves. Quite a few people had come over to meet Harry and wanted to buy him drinks. Cho really seemed to like the attention they were getting. The people here were pretty polite so it really didn't bother Harry that much. They sat watching people and talking until early morning before making their way back to the hotel.

The two slept in very late the next morning and after finally getting ready, Kristi took them on a tour of the city. She had a muggle BMW car and was actually very nice to be around the

whole afternoon. With both Kristi and Harry walking around, the trio got noticed quite often, even a few times in muggle-Paris. After spending all afternoon walking around, Cho and Harry went back to the hotel to get ready for the evening. Actually Harry had time to take a nap while Cho got ready. She made him wear one of the new outfits she had bought for him.

When Cho finally came out of the bathroom after getting ready, all Harry could say was "Wow!" She had on a form fitting very short emerald green dress. She was also wearing the dragon that Harry had gotten for her.

"It never ceases to amaze me how fantastic you look," Harry told her.

"Just don't forget that when you're away from me for three months," she replied.

They went down to the bar until Sirius arrived. Sirius was dressed very nicely as well. They sat around talking until Kristi showed up. She was dressed in a very tight black leather dress with a silver choker necklace. She hugged each of them and then joined them for a drink. "I'm glad you could make it Sirius. It should be interesting for you to see how popular schoolboy here is. The people at the club really know their Quidditch."

"I think I have an idea how popular he is; it's Harry that has no clue," Sirius joked.

"He still can't believe we get seated in restaurants," Cho joined in the teasing.

"At least people aren't always staring at my scar anymore," said Harry.

"Ready to go? I've got our transportation outside," Kristi announced. Outside was a stretch black limousine.

"I would have never guessed black?" Harry joked.

When they arrived at the club, there was a very long line. A man opened the limousine door and Kristi got out first. Immediately Harry heard people yelling her name and clapping. Sirius came next and Cho followed him. As soon as Harry stepped out, the people became quiet for a second and then when they realized who it was, they really started yelling his name and clapping loudly. This was way more than Harry had expected. He thought the welcome Kristi got was great, but the crowd was even louder for him. Harry didn't know what to do but saw Kristi just ignoring everything so he decided to follow her lead. Cho pulled him and they walked right by the crowd waiting and into the club.

Inside it was a huge place with very loud music and spinning lights. Harry saw Kristi talking to a waitress who quickly led them upstairs into an area where they could look down on the crowd. It was a little quieter up here and Harry could see Cho just beaming and looking out at all the people.

Kristi came over and said, "I told you they'd like you here. Just think of the reaction if just the two of us had arrived as a couple." Harry looked nervously at Cho who hadn't heard and saw Kristi just smile and shake her head at him before sitting down. The manager of the club had come up, hugged Kristi and shook everyone else's hand. Everyone had gone down to dance a few times and had been introduced to many people. Harry was sure he wouldn't remember any of their names.

The group was back up talking and enjoying a drink when he heard. "Ah, France's two best players." Harry turned and saw Kristi hug a man who looked familiar. He was muscular with blonde hair and blue eyes. Kristi introduced the man as "Kevin Weisman", the seeker for Wales.

"We don't see you out much Harry. Don't you like being around your fans?" Kevin joked.

Harry really didn't care much for Kevin. He wasn't as bad as Draco Malfoy but had the same air about him. "Maybe next year. I've got another year of school so that kind of keeps me busy."

"Terrible luck in the finals. Kristi was carrying the team but you came up just a bit short against Krum I saw. Maybe a couple more years of growing will help." Kevin faked a smile as he said this.

Sirius quickly stood up and said, "But of course we didn't see you in the playoffs Weisman."

"Ah, Sirius Black. Is this your bodyguard Harry?" Kevin smirked.

Before Harry could answer Sirius said, "Harry's quite capable of handling himself. I'm his godfather."

"And my date for the evening," Kristi added linking her arm with Sirius'.

"Charming. Harry. You wouldn't mind me dancing with your lovely manager now would you?" he said while looking at Cho.

"Not at all, as long as Cho doesn't mind," Harry replied. He could tell Kevin was a very charming man but thought Cho could handle herself just fine.

Cho followed Kevin to the dance floor.

"He's pretty sleazy," Kristi stated and it was obvious she didn't consider the man a friend.

"Ya think!" Harry and Sirius both replied.

After a couple songs, Cho and Kevin came back up. Harry heard him say, "Think about what I said. Give me a call if you want," Harry saw him had a card to Cho.

She came over and said, "He wants to talk about me being his manager."

"Great Cho. See, I told you that you'll do great," Harry said and didn't notice the concerned look on Kristi's face.

"What's up Sirius? You look kind of bored," Kristi asked noticing Sirius.

"Not my normal kind of place really," he responded honestly.

Chapter 9

"I think I can come up with something more to your liking. C'mon let's try another place," Kristi said and they all followed her out. The limo quickly left the wizarding community and stopped in front of a large muggle pub. They all went inside, getting more looks for their nice clothes than for who any of them were. They found a booth in the back near some pool tables. Sirius was definitely in his element here. Kristi seemed very comfortable here as well. For the next few hours, Kristi and Sirius tried to teach Cho and Harry how to play pool. Cho said she was getting tired so Harry and Cho apparated back to the hotel, leaving Kristi and Sirius playing pool.

The next day, the couple spent more time walking around Paris before returning to the castle. Sirius wasn't around when they arrived. "Did you have a good time Cho?" Harry asked.

"It was nice. I would have liked to stay at the club longer though. That pub was kind of shady for me," she said sounding a little upset.

Harry had actually liked the pub better. "It wasn't that bad. Kristi seemed comfortable there," Harry replied. Cho said she was tired and left for home before long. Harry felt like she was upset about something but didn't know what. He had enjoyed Paris a lot and couldn't wait to go back.

When Hermione came over the next week, he told her all about the things they did in Paris and about how Cho seemed upset.

"She must just like the 'in-crowd' places," Hermione said not sounding like that was a bad thing.

"I liked it for a bit, but it starts to get old after a while. The other place was more comfortable and you could actually talk. Which place would you have liked better?" Harry asked.

Hermione thought for a minute and said, "Probably the same as you but it's hard to tell without being there." She was quiet for a bit and asked, "Before Sirius gets back, can we try the orb again? I want to see if the same thing happens as last time."

"I don't think that's a good idea Hermione. You really scared me last time." Hermione could tell Harry tensed up.

"C'mon Harry. I was fine; it just startled me. I really want to," she pleaded.

Harry looked at her pouting face and said, "Fine." Harry summoned the box. "Ok what do you want me to do?" he asked.

"I think it was when you touched the orb and then my hand as well," she said hesitantly. "Don't let go unless I look like I'm in pain or I faint," she said this very forcefully.

Harry held the orb in his right hand which caused the voices to stop and then grabbed Hermione's hand with his left hand. Immediately he could tell something was happening. Her eyes became very wide and she was staring right into his.

The same feelings as last time overcame Hermione. She was back feeling all the pain Harry had felt over his life. She also felt the immense magical power he had. She just passed the guilt he had felt the last time they had both touched the orb and then felt his heart breaking again. This time she realized it was Cho who was the cause. Then, she suddenly felt his fear and anger but couldn't tell why. This quickly passed and was replaced by extreme guilt and then rage like she'd never imagined. Just as quickly, this changed into blackness. Nothing. There were no feelings at all. At this point, she blinked and let go of Harry's hand.

"What happened? You were just starting at me for a second. Was it the same thing?" Harry asked concerned.

Hermione looked at him and could tell tears were starting to form in her eyes. "It's nothing Harry. I don't know what it was."

"That's a lie Hermione. I can tell. C'mon I got the thing out for you again. We've been working on this all summer. I want to know what it was," Harry demanded, not willing to let her get away without talking.

Hermione thought for a couple minutes and looked at Harry. She could tell how much he cared for her. "I don't know how to explain it. I saw and kind of felt all of your really bad experiences in life."

Harry looked confused. "What do you mean you saw and kind of felt?"

"I saw you get attacked as a baby. I saw you fight Quirrell and felt how scared you were. I saw you save Ginny. Everything. I saw exactly what happened with Cedric," she said with tears flowing.

Harry looked shocked and then became angry. "I told you about all of those things Hermione. You probably just flashed back to things I've said."

"No Harry that's not it. I felt your emotions. And, I saw all the parts you left out when you told us what happened."

Harry looked like that comment really hurt him. He quickly boxed up the orb and banished it back to the hiding place. "I don't feel like studying today if you don't mind. I'd rather be alone."

"No. I'm not leaving. Why didn't you tell us the whole stories? You left out quite a bit of information," Hermione demanded.

"You saw the same things last time didn't you? You just wanted another poke around in my head," Harry said angrily.

This hurt Hermione because she knew he was right. "I wasn't sure the first time. I was so overwhelmed with emotions that I fainted. I've been thinking about it ever since. I was better prepared this time. Why didn't you tell us?"

Harry finally turned and looked at her. "Because, I didn't want this. I don't want your pity. There's no reason for you to know everything that's happened to me. That's just another reason for people to act like they feel sorry for me."

"I just want to help Harry," Hermione said touching his arm.

"Why is it important to know the details? Why wasn't enough to know I had to fight Voldemort without knowing how much pain I was in and how scared I was. That's for me to deal with, nobody else."

She hugged him tightly, still crying. He couldn't stay mad and hugged her back. "I'm sorry Harry. I never imagined things had been like that. I don't know what I thought. I don't know how you handle it. You're so brave."

"Brave? Ha. You said you felt what I felt. If you really did, you wouldn't have found a single brave feeling in there. I was scared. Every time I was scared. See, now you just pity me."

"No, I promise I don't. I'm amazed how you handle it. I won't tell anyone." Hermione hugged him tighter knowing Cho was going to break his heart. She worried about what the blackness meant.

"Ok, so now you know all the details. I don't ever want to talk about them unless I bring it up, ok? And no telling this to Ron." Hermione nodded in agreement. They both sat back down in silence for a minute before Harry asked, "You only felt bad feelings, right?"

"Yes, why?" Hermione looked confused.

Harry kind of blushed and said, "Well there are things I've done that I wouldn't want you watching. And, there may have been a thought or two about you that I may not want you to know."

"Oooh. I think we should get it out again now," she joked but then became serious. "I should have told you after the first time. I'm sorry."

"Yeah, Yeah. How could I stay mad at you? You already knew more about me than anyone and now it's not even close. Just don't go writing a book or anything."

Hermione thought that Harry was right. She did know more than anyone and he seemed ok with that. Harry really felt comfortable enough with her that he was ok with her knowing his worst moments. This really made her feel very happy. She hugged him extra tight before leaving that day.

Cho came over early on Friday. "This is our last night together for a long time," she pouted.

"Are you sure you don't want to come and be a bed warmer for me?" Harry joked.

"That would be nice. I think we should just spend the rest of the time we have in bed. Surely Winky will bring us some food later," Cho said pulling Harry upstairs. They made love many more times that night and into the morning.

Harry hadn't gotten much sleep before he needed to leave to catch the train. He hugged Cho and kissed her goodbye. "Remember Harry. No 'dancing' until you come back to see me."

"I promise. You're the only one I want to dance with. You behave as well," Harry said.

"Don't worry, I will. I love you." Cho said with tears in her eyes. "I'll be planning for our wedding."

"I love you too Cho. I'll write often. See you before long," Harry said and apparated to the platform.

Harry hated leaving Cho but was really looking forward to this year at school. He was really enjoying learning things and was getting really comfortable being a wizard. He finally felt like he was fitting in and belonging someplace. Quickly boarding the train Harry found an empty compartment. It wasn't long before he saw Mrs. Weasley with Ron and Ginny outside.

Harry stepped off to greet them. "My how you grown," Mrs. Weasley said while giving Harry a big hug. "We wish you would have come over more this summer."

"As unbelievable as it may sound, I've been studying a lot. I think Hermione has rubbed off on me," Harry joked. "I've got a compartment already." He quickly went back to the compartment. Ron and Ginny came soon after.

"Ginny, you've grown a bunch this summer as well. You look really nice," Harry said.

Ginny still blushed, even though she tried to say her crush on Harry was over. "Thanks, it's about time I did grow up."

"Hey. Don't be eyeing my little sister. Besides, you're engaged. What the heck did you go and do that for?" Ron said shaking his head at his friend.

"I'm not going to be the only one eyeing Ginny this year Ron. You better get used to it. And, I guess it just felt right to get engaged. You know alone on a deserted beach rolling around in the sand naked and it just happened."

Both Ron's and Ginny's eyes were huge. "Harry! Don't talk like that in front of Ginny. Tell me about it later."

"To heck with that, I want to hear it now," Ginny demanded.

Just then Hermione walked in and saved Harry. "What are you three yelling about?"

"Harry and Cho rolling around naked!" Ginny exclaimed.

"Oh yes. Mr. impulsive here. Gets a girl alone on a beach and just has to ask her to get married," Hermione laughed and poked Harry in the ribs. "I just don't know how he's going to go three months without a girl sleeping in his bed."

Ron and Ginny looked at each other. "You two seem rather friendly," Ron said sounding surprised at how Hermione talked to Harry and how well he took it.

"Well we spent most of the summer together studying. I think I'm actually going to do pretty good this year," Harry stated.

"N.E.W.T.s this year. Something else for me to dread," Ron added.

"I'm looking forward to them." Hermione stated.

"You know; so am I," Harry agreed.

Ron looked confused. "Hermione. What have you done with the real Harry?"

"It's actually been really fun. Want to see something I learned?" Harry asked. They all nodded so he went on. "Ok, you all trust me right?" they hesitated "*Right?*" Finally they all agreed. "Remember who is sitting next to you."

"How hard is that? Jeez Harry," Ron snorted.

Harry pointed his wand at Ron and cast the unrecognizable spell on him. Ginny kind of slid away but Ron just said "What?" Harry then did the same thing to Ginny, Hermione and himself. "Ok, now who are you sitting next to?" Harry asked.

"Whoa! This is wicked!" Ron exclaimed.

Just then the door opened and Parvati poked her head in. "Oh, I'm sorry. I thought Ron Weasley was going to be here. I don't think I've ever met you four before."

Everyone in the car except Ron was laughing. He exclaimed. "Parvati! It's me. Ron."

"Get away from me you freak," Parvati exclaimed and ran off.

Ron started to go after her but Harry quickly said, "She'll never believe you're really you Ron."

"C'mon reverse the spell; I really need to find her," Ron pleaded. Harry quickly reversed the spell on everyone and Ron ran off after Parvati.

"You really have been studying," Ginny said looking at Harry proudly.

"You'd be surprised at all the things he learned this year," Hermione added.

"I wish I could have come over and studied," Ginny moaned.

"You could have. The floo would have let you through. I think this is going to be a good year. I can just feel it. Last year was good, this summer was great and I just know this year is going to be the best," Harry said smiling.

"Of course you say that. You're getting married over the holidays," Ginny said trying to sound happy. Internally she had been upset at the news.

Harry seemed to not be so happy about that. "I really hope I can convince her to wait until next summer. I should really be out of school first. I mean we won't see each other for months and then have a couple days together before getting married. I'm not entirely comfortable about that. Don't either of you ever mention I said that though."

The two girls both promised not to mention it. "You should really talk to her about it Harry. She should be willing to wait a few more months," Hermione stated.

"You know, I think I will. What difference will a few months make?" Harry said happily.

The three of them were happily talking in their compartment when the door opened and Draco stood with his two goons. "Well, if it isn't Potty, poor girl and mudblood. If this isn't the wrong side of the tracks, I don't know what is."

"Piss off Malfoy," Ginny said quickly. Harry and Hermione both stared at her.

"That just proves my point. You know there's going to be changes this year Potter. Things will start being run like they should have been. You won't be the Ministry's favorite son much longer."

"Oh, you mean the secret dealings between Gallah and Lucius?" Harry smirked back. Draco seemed shocked Harry had said this. "You should know then that their little raid on the Unspeakables didn't get them anything. You know that no matter what happens Draco, we'll still have friends that stand by us through anything and all you'll be left with Crabbe and Goyle. Now, who chose the wrong side?"

Draco looked like he was going to explode. "You know Potter. When my father..."

Malfoy was cut off by Harry saying, "We both know what I think of your father Malfoy. The only reason you still have a father is because I won't become like him. You're nothing to me and this year is going to be different. If you bother my friends, *any* of my friends, I'll make you pay and no one will ever know it was me. If you want to say something to me, say it to my face or I'll hunt you down and make you pay. Things are changing Malfoy; you need to be making your final choice of sides very soon."

Draco just stared but Harry kept a small smirk on his face. Malfoy and his goons continued down the hall.

"I'm not going to put up with him this year. This is the year for us to enjoy our time here and I'm not going to let him stand in our way," Harry said happily. He looked at the two girls and said, "You know, except for Sirius and Lupin who are old, you two and Ron are my best friends in the world. I can't believe how lucky I am to have you around. Promise me they'll be no fighting this year. If I do something stupid yell at me, I won't be mad. Don't keep it bottled up. I want this year to be perfect"

"Same here," Hermione said. Leaning into Harry.

"Ok, but knowing you, you'll get yelled at a lot!" Ginny added.

"So Ginny, how bad does Ron have it for Parvati?" Harry asked.

"Oh, he's got it bad, real bad," she replied and they all laughed.

When the train arrived, Ron still hadn't returned to their compartment so the three Gryffindors exited the train together and all ran to Hagrid who was near the front of the train. "Hagrid!" Harry yelled and then hugged him. "I'm glad you're here for the start of term this year."

"Same here Harry. You two ladies are looking very nice. Where's Ron? He made it back didn't he?" Hagrid asked.

"Oh, he's with his *girlfriend*," Ginny said in a mocking voice.

"Well good for him. Maybe he and Hermione here won't fight so much," Hagrid joked.

"I don't intend to fight at all this year Hagrid. It's going to be perfect," Hermione replied. The three of them got into the horseless carriages for the ride to the castle. Harry felt pangs of regret about this being his last year at school. By far, the best memories of his life had been here.

They took their places at the Gryffindor table. Harry and Hermione talking about how it didn't seem that long ago they were being sorted themselves. Harry didn't pay much attention to the actual sorting and just clapped absentmindedly whenever he heard the rest of the table clap. He was looking around, trying to notice as many details about the Great Hall as he could. Ron sat next to Harry with Parvati on his other side. Harry was really happy for Ron, but a little sad that he wouldn't be spending much time with him this year. Harry knew how Ron felt since that's how he had been with Cho.

After the sorting, Professor Dumbledore made the usual announcements about the forest being off limits and then introduced the new teacher. "Now, for the first time in Hogwarts history, we are going to be adding a class that is considered dark arts." The entire hall became quiet. "This year it will only be available to seventh year students. Professor Steiger has joined us from Durmstrang to give us a hand with this class." It seemed Snape was on quite good terms with the new professor, Harry thought. Harry was surprised glad to see Mrs. Figg at the table. He wondered if this meant Snape would be back teaching Potions.

After the feast, Hermione whispered to Harry that they should talk to Professor McGonagall about their Extremely Advanced N.E.W.T. presentation. They needed special permission to do one and a private place to practice. Ron had gone for a walk with Parvati so Harry and Hermione sneaked away from Ginny and caught up to Professor McGonagall while she was on the way to her office.

"Professor McGonagall," Hermione called, "may we talk to you for a minute?"

The professor turned and said, "Of course, follow me to my office." They all sat down and she said, "What can I do for you already this year?"

Harry decided to let Hermione do the talking since this was her idea. "Professor. Harry and I want to do a joint Extremely Advanced N.E.W.T. presentation this year."

McGonagall seemed shocked. "Miss Granger. You do realize that they are extremely difficult to get and count for 10 of your N.E.W.T.s? Are you willing to have that much of your score relying on something that you do jointly with Mr. Potter? No offense Mr. Potter but these things don't normally mean much to you."

Harry was irritated but knew she was right. "I'm quite sure professor," Hermione responded immediately.

McGonagall tried to read her for a minute and said, "Very well, I will need to check with the Headmaster about this. It is very rare for a student to request this. What will your subject be?"

"Elemental Magic," Hermione said confidently.

Again, McGonagall was shocked. "Miss Granger. Surely you could pick something a bit more... um...realistic. We wouldn't teach that here and I doubt our library would have any information on it at all. I don't see how we could instruct you on this."

Hermione once again was very confident when she said, "Harry and I already have a couple books on the subject and have been reading them all summer. He and I would be helping each other on this."

McGonagall almost laughed, "Mr. Potter has been reading schoolbooks over the summer? I hope you've seen this for yourself Miss Granger. Mr. Potter are you willing to put in the required effort to make sure you don't negatively affect Miss Granger's score?"

Harry was annoyed again. "Yes Professor. I'm capable of learning when I want to. And, I know that Hermione's punishment to me would be worse than anything I've ever gotten from a professor here."

"Very well. I hope you both understand this will be a very big deal here. I can't remember the last time one was done, and I'm quite sure it wasn't on a topic such as you've chosen."

"Um. Professor. Since this topic is a bit unusual. Is there a place Harry and I could practice that is a bit more private than the common room?" Hermione asked.

"I will give you access to my classroom for two hours after supper every night. If I find either of you doing anything other than schoolwork in there, it will be revoked."

"Yes Professor, we understand," Hermione said trying to contain her excitement.

"Just so you know; if you do pull this off it will be an amazing feather in Gryffindor house's hat. I'd rather have this than the house cup this year," McGonagall said smiling.

They left and were walking back to the common room. Harry could tell Hermione was very excited about this. He stopped her before they entered. "Hermione. If you change your mind and don't think I can pull my weight, just tell me. I promise I won't be mad. I don't want to hurt your grades."

She looked at him for a second, smiled and said, "Harry. I have no doubt in my mind that you and I can do almost anything we set our minds to."

This kind of shocked him but he replied, "Sure, as long as you figure it out and tell me how to do it."

They went in and joined the rest of the Gryffindors. Everyone stayed up late talking about their summers. Harry was one of the first ones to go to bed. It was good to be here but this was when he really missed Cho. Instead of sleeping, he pulled out the book on personal security and read more about it until he fell asleep.

When he finally woke up the next morning, all the others were already gone. He had missed breakfast and found his friends sitting outside on the steps. "So, you finally decided to wake up," Hermione yelled. Harry went and sat down next to her. She had the fake Standard Spells Grade 7 on her elemental magic book. "I'm so excited about being able to try this out. You've had half the summer to practice and I'll finally get to tonight."

"Tonight? I thought we'd wait until classes actually start," said Harry, not hiding his disappointment.

"Oh no. You're not slacking off on me already. We're going to practice every day. I want people talking about what we did and not laughing about us not doing anything. So, how did you sleep without Cho in your bed?" she said poking him in the side.

"I'll have you know that I slept alone during the week quite often this summer."

"Well, I've been hearing the girls talk and I'm sure that if you need company, there would be a few who could help you out," Hermione joked.

"Hermione! You know I'm not like that. I don't mind sleeping...just sleeping with Cho. She's the one who gets annoyed if nothing happens. I don't know about you women," he replied.

"Do you miss her?"

"It's weird. I do miss her but not as much as I thought. Being back here just feels natural"

"I know what you mean. Did you really just go to sleep last night?" Hermione said with a smug look on her face.

"No, I studied one of my books. I don't know what you've done to me Hermione Granger, but I can't say I'm entirely happy about it," he replied laughing.

"What are you trying so hard to learn?"

"I really want to become invisible. I can look kind of like a ghost so far but that's it," he replied.

"That's still really good. That's very advanced magic. I wish you were practicing elemental magic though."

"What could I do in bed? I'd set something on fire."

Hermione and Harry slipped away from the others after supper and went to McGonagall's classroom to study and practice. Hermione re-read the section on elemental magic with water and wanted to try it out. Her first few attempts didn't result in anything happening. She was getting frustrated and Harry noticed this. "Hermione. I don't think this is like normal magic. Don't take this the wrong way, but sometimes you're kind of bossy." She kind of 'huffed' but Harry continued. "With normal magic, you kind of make the magic do what you want. Elemental magic feels to me more like you ask the element to do something for you. The

more you want it and the more sincere you are about asking, the better things happen. Try thinking like that."

She looked at him and said, "I'll try it but I have you know, I'm not bossy." She looked at the large tub of water and tried to make some waves. She said the spell and Harry saw a small puff of mist come out of her wand and could kind of make out a ripple in the water. He went behind her and whispered, "Just concentrate on what you want the water to do. Focus on feeling like you really want waves in the water."

Hermione became very relaxed and almost hypnotized by his voice and said the spell. A much larger puff of mist came out and there were definitely waves in the water. She exclaimed, "I did it!"

"Of course you did it. I knew you could," Harry replied.

Hermione felt like she could do anything as long as Harry was with her. He gave her such confidence. She was surprised at how patient he was with her since he had already mastered the things she was trying. This was the first time he had helped to teach her something. He was working on harder things but took time to help her whenever she started to feel frustrated. She could read and re-read a section but would still have trouble with this kind of magic but hearing Harry tell her what to do made everything fit into place. Their first session passed much too quickly for Hermione.

The first day of real classes started with double potions with the Slytherins. Harry picked a table with Hermione. Ron and Parvati were right behind them. Snape strode in glaring at the Gryffindor students as usual. "This year we will be working on very potent and dangerous potions. As such, any student who so much as breathes wrong will be out of here and fail." He glared directly at Harry who didn't blink and kept staring right back. Harry had made up his mind he was going to do his best in classes but wasn't going to back down when he knew he wasn't doing anything wrong. Snape had stopped the personal attacks on Harry last year, but was still very critical of Gryffindors. The class seemed to drag on but Harry was glad he was sitting next to Hermione and not Ron who always seemed to make him laugh.

After lunch they had Defense Against the Dark Arts with Mrs. Figg. She announced they would be working more on shields, counter curses and dealing with other dark creatures including vampires. This made Harry uncomfortable since he dated a vampire for most of a year. He was thinking about that when he heard Hermione ask a question. "Professor. Why are we having to take the 'Curses Hexes and Pain Spells' class? Doesn't that fall into the Dark Arts?"

The whole class sat up and paid attention. Mrs. Figg was eyeing Hermione closely, clearly uncomfortable with answering this question. "You are correct in that particular class is associated with Dark Arts training. However just because you learn those techniques doesn't mean you approve of Dark Arts. The Minister of Education insisted on it being taught this year. I can't say I agree with that decision but since my class is defense I will be tailoring this class to responses to curses you learn in the other class."

Harry was walking out after the class when he heard, "Mr. Potter. A word please." From Mrs. Figg. He walked to her desk and when the rest of the students had gone she said, "I doubt there will be much new information for you in class this year and I don't think you would appreciate sitting through lessons on fighting vampires. If you give me your word that you

will use the time studying, I will exempt you from this class. However, if I find out that you aren't using the time studying useful magic, you will be required to return and to make up any work. Do you agree?"

Harry's eyes lit up. "You mean that I don't have to come to class as long as I study some other magic?"

"That's right Mr. Potter."

"Then of course I promise. There are other things I've really wanted to study. Thank you Professor."

"Is it true that you and Miss Granger are planning to do an Extremely Advanced N.E.W.T. presentation?" Mrs. Figg asked.

"Yes Professor. I really think we can do well."

"That would be something to see. I hope you use the time wisely to prepare. You may go now."

"Thank you Professor," Harry said and ran to catch up with his friends.

Harry found them in the common room. Ron with Parvati sitting on his lap, Hermione and Ginny were sitting on the couch. He went over and sat down between Ginny and Hermione. "So, what did she want?" Ron asked.

"Oh, just some extra study stuff," Harry said not wanting to come right out and tell them.

"Right. You extra study! No way," Ron joked.

"Actually she said that since I'm already an Auror that as long as I use the time studying, I don't have to go to class anymore. I get a free period to study whatever I want," Harry said smiling.

Hermione smiled. "That makes sense. You should make good progress on our project then."

Ginny looked confused as well as Ron. "What project?"

Hermione said, "Harry and I are doing an Extremely Advanced N.E.W.T. presentation. It is worth 10 N.E.W.T. s. Professor McGonagall can't remember when the last one was done. It's going to be very difficult," she said this as if it being difficult was the best thing ever.

"And you went along with this Harry? What did she do to you over the summer?" Ron exclaimed.

"I don't know what she did but for some reason, I'm actually having fun learning this new stuff," he said smiling at her.

"So what kind of presentation are you doing?" Ginny asked.

"We're not allowed to say. It's not taught at school so we have to practice in private," Hermione said seriously.

"Well Ron and I will just have to practice things in private also," Parvati joked giving Ron a kiss.

"They don't teach those things here either," Ginny smirked.

"I wonder why the Minister of Education wanted Dark Arts to be taught here," Hermione asked causing the mood to change.

"I don't trust the guy. If Fudge leaves, I bet he takes the Minister of Magic position," Harry said. "Ron. Why doesn't your dad try for the job?"

Ron kind of got red and said, "Well, I overheard him and mum talking a while back about it. He thought he may have a chance but running a campaign like that would take a lot of money."

"I wish he would run; he'd make a great Minister," Hermione said causing both Ron and Ginny to look proud.

After supper, Hermione and Harry went to McGonagall's classroom to practice. She quickly went back to trying to make ripples in the water. Harry was going to focus on fire. They were each working on their own part and not paying much attention. "Harry! I think I've got it. Look at..." then Hermione screamed.

Harry turned and looked at her with concern but she was staring at him terrified. "What's wrong?" he asked still not sure what was wrong.

"Your arms!" she screamed.

Chapter 10

Harry then realized that he had been working on getting more fire to cover him and his arms were totally in flames but of course not burning him. He laughed and sent the fire back to the lanterns in the room. "Hermione. This is what elemental magic is about. You can't go screaming about everything." He smiled at her. She was kind of embarrassed but he quickly said, "So, show me what you've done."

The water in the tub was calm and she focused and cast the spell and there were clearly significant ripples in the water. They stopped the second she stopped the spell. "Excellent! See, there's no doubt we'll pull this off," Harry exclaimed hugging her.

Hermione again was still just amazed by him and could just feel the power he had. Harry was so much further along than she was and yet he was just as happy for her as she had been. "It's not as impressive as yours. Do something with the water," she asked.

"Remember I've been practicing for over a month already. I had a head start." He focused on the water and caused it to make a small whirlpool in the middle before stopping.

Hermione hit him and said, "Ok, quit showing off. You should have just done this by yourself."

"Oh no. If you weren't doing this I would just take my minimum N.E.W.T.s and be happy. You'll be way better than me after you've gotten a couple months practice. C'mon that's enough for today," Harry said and they went back to the common room.

Harry was sitting very quietly thinking more about what Ron had said. Mr. Weasley considered running but just didn't have the money. Harry excused himself and went to the dorm and wrote a note.

Mr. Weasley

I hope you and your family are doing well. I've been thinking a lot about the Minister of Magic position. You know that I really don't trust Mr. Gallah and that I believe Fudge will be forced out soon. Is there any chance you would consider running for Minister of Magic? I couldn't think of anyone who would do a better job. I think we will all be in for trouble if Mr. Gallah got the position.

I've been doing some research into what it takes to run for the office, and I know it can cost a bit of money. I'm sure that Lucius Malfoy would fund Mr. Gallah in his campaign. You know that I've been lucky enough to get a contract for playing Quidditch for France, and R.J. left me her assets. I really don't need that much money and would be honored if you would let me contribute to your campaign if you do decide to run. My manager also says that Quidditch players often appear at fundraisers for people and I would also be willing to do that for you as well. I would like to contribute 20,000 galleons to your campaign and offer to attend a fundraiser. If it takes more, hopefully I could help out more. Please don't think of this as a gift. I'm very worried about how things would be if Gallah became Minister. If you decide to back someone else, I would be willing to donate some amount to his or her campaign as well, but I would rather support you.

I haven't told Ron or anyone here about this letter so if you decide you don't want this; they will never know I offered. Please consider how things would be if Mr. Gallah actually became Minister.

Harry

He folded up the note and put it in his robes. The next morning he ran up to the Owlery before breakfast and gave the note to Hedwig to deliver. That afternoon, only Ron was excited about the new Dark Art class. They took their seats with Harry and Hermione in front of Ron and Parvati. Professor Steiger walked in looking like a larger version of Snape. During role call, he didn't even glance up when Harry's name was called. This made Harry hopeful that he wouldn't be singled out like he had been in Snape's class. Harry had already read the first couple chapters of the book. None of the spells seemed that hard but Harry didn't really like learning spells that were specifically made to hurt people.

The professor had a thick German accent. "Let's get started. I'm glad your Minister of Education finally put his foot down and required this class to be taught. You can't spend your entire education only being exposed to one form of magic. How you choose to use this magic is a personal decision, but you should know how to use it."

Harry quickly raised his hand, "Yes Mr. Potter." The professor said before Harry continued. "Sir. Why would the Minister of Education want us to know how to inflict pain on others?"

Steiger smirked and asked, "Can any student answer Mr. Potter's question?"

Malfoy's hand was quickly up. "Torture sir. To get information."

Another Slytherin said, "Intimidation." And yet another said, "Punishment."

Hermione raised her hand, which shocked Harry, "Yes Miss Granger."

"Power. To show who has the power," she said coldly.

Steiger looked directly into Harry's eyes and said, "Exactly. 10 points to Gryffindor."

Hermione had her head down the rest of class. They had just started with theory and Harry didn't pay attention since he had already read the chapters. After class Harry was walking with Hermione, "What did you mean power?"

"The Minister just wanted to show everyone that he had power over Dumbledore and how the school is run. This class isn't the point. The fact that he forced Hogwarts to allow a class like this is," Hermione said and continued walking.

Harry realized she was right. This was just Gallah letting everyone know he had some control over Hogwarts. Harry and Hermione were both quiet at supper. Harry was thinking about Gallah and what he really had planned.

The next day, Harry received his first Owl from Cho. She told him how things had been going and that she missed him very much. She also told him that her mother wanted them to get married in a large church near their home. Harry quickly wrote a response and sent it back.

On Friday right after lunch, Harry was sitting outside with Hermione when Sirius came up. "Sirius! What are you doing here?" Harry said hugging his godfather.

"Meeting with Dumbledore. How's your practice coming?" he asked.

Hermione spoke up quickly, "Coming along well. I'm actually able to make some small ripples in the water."

"After less than a week, that's pretty good. What about you Harry?" Sirius asked.

"Pretty good. I think Hermione will be passing me before long though. What's the meeting about?" Harry questioned.

"Can't say. I'm supposed to take you to Dumbledore's office. He wants to have a word with you. Bye Hermione," Sirius said. Harry shrugged his shoulders and followed Sirius up to Dumbledore's office. Upon entering the office, Harry was shocked to see Mr. and Mrs. Weasley there as well.

"Harry," Mrs. Weasley said before giving him a big hug. "How are you dear?"

"Fine Mrs. Weasley. Is everything ok? Why are you here?" Harry asked concerned.

"Everything is fine Harry, don't worry. Sit down," Dumbledore said. "Arthur told us about the note you sent him and we wanted to talk about it." Harry felt embarrassed but Dumbledore and Sirius looked happy. "We had been trying to convince Arthur to run for the Minister position for a while now without much success. It seems your note struck a cord with him and he has finally agreed."

Harry became excited. "Really? That's great Mr. Weasley. I know you'll do great."

Mr. Weasley spoke, "Harry. I don't really feel comfortable taking any of your money. I'm going to try to raise it myself."

Harry interrupted him. "That's not necessary! I play Quidditch for fun. It's just a bonus when they pay me. I can't think of anything better to do with the money than finance your campaign. Really. This is the only thing I can do to help. It would really mean a lot to me." Mr. Weasley turned red and started to protest but Harry cut him off. "Sirius, tell him that I don't really need the money and he should take it."

"Arthur. R.J. left Harry many times more money than he could ever hope to make playing Quidditch and he hasn't touched it. His parents left him a sizeable amount as well. If he gave away all his Quidditch money, he would still be just fine. Trust me," Sirius stated.

"I want you to be able to match Gallah and I know Malfoy will be financing him," Harry added feeling angry at the thought of Malfoy.

Mr. Weasley shifted uncomfortably but finally said, "If you're sure, I would appreciate your help."

"Excellent," Dumbledore said. "I told you Arthur that you had many people on your side. Now we should let Gallah handle pushing Fudge out and then when he does, you can

announce your candidacy. Our sources say Fudge may be resigning as early as next week. Now Harry. Once Gallah realizes you are helping Arthur, the press may not be so kind to you. They will probably bring up all the things that have happened in the past. Are you comfortable with this?"

Harry could see Mr. & Mrs. Weasley looking down. "As long as that won't hurt Mr. Weasley's campaign, I'm fine with it. It's old news to me."

"It won't hurt me Harry. The vast majority of people in and out of the Ministry hold you in the highest regard. There is nothing Gallah could say that would change their minds. He would have to be very careful about getting any negative comments attributed to him as well. I still can't thank you enough," Mr. Weasley said shaking Harry's hand.

"No problem. Like you've always said, you're just like my family as well," Harry replied. "If you do win, get my access to the Unspeakable department restored. Gallah had it taken away."

The adults laughed but Mr. Weasley said, "I'm sure that would be no problem Harry."

Harry quickly said, "Want to go see Ron? I think he's right outside."

Harry walked out with the Weasley's and quickly found Ron and Ginny near Hermione. "Mum, Dad! What are you doing here?" Ginny ran over first hugging them.

"Meeting with Dumbledore," Was all Mr. Weasley said. Ron and Ginny both kept trying to get the real reason they were here out of them but neither of the parents said anything. Hermione kept looking at Harry and could tell he knew. The students had to get to class so they said goodbye and Mrs. Weasley gave Harry hug so big that even Ron and Ginny noticed.

"Does it seem like Mum likes Harry better than us?" Ginny joked.

When Hermione and Harry entered the classroom for practice, she immediately turned to him and said. "Ok, what's the real reason the Weasley's were here?"

"Now Hermione. Why would you think I know anything?" Harry said with a sly smile.

"You said no secrets this year and I'm holding you to it," she challenged.

"Are you promising me right now that you aren't keeping anything from me?" Harry looked intently at her. Hermione started to squirm. She hadn't told Harry everything about the connection they had during the orb. Suddenly Harry spoke again. "It doesn't matter. I'll tell you, but no one else can know, not even Ron." He went on to explain about the letter to Mr. Weasley and then about the meeting.

"I can't believe you're going to finance his campaign. That's so nice. It would be great if he won. I just can't believe you thought of this," Hermione said.

"So now you think that I'm too stupid to have a good idea," Harry smirked. "Ron can't know. There is no way he could keep quiet about it. Hopefully it will be out in the open in a week or two."

"I didn't mean it like that," Hermione said feeling bad about saying it. "It's just that you don't seem like the kid I've been going to school with for six years. That's a good thing though."

"Whatever you say Hermione," Harry said and then began practicing.

On Monday right after the post was delivered there was a lot of mumbling and Hermione told Ron and Harry to listen. "It says that Mr. Fudge is resigning as Minister of Magic as soon as a new minister can be elected. It says he is resigning for personal reasons, and goes on to say that immediately after this announcement, Mr. Gallah announced he is going to run for the office."

Harry just nodded at Hermione but Ron was angry. "I wish my dad would run. That Gallah can't be trusted."

Both Hermione and Harry wanted to tell Ron but promised they wouldn't. Ron was upset all day but received an owl that evening.

Ron

Make sure you have Ginny there when you read this.

I've decided to run for the Minister of Magic. I had been considering it for some time, but didn't think I could make a serious run. Harry wrote me a note last week offering to finance my campaign and gave me some reasons why he thought I should run and it helped me make the decision.

It will probably be announced tomorrow but I wanted to make sure you two knew before you read it in the paper. There may be some unpleasant articles in the Daily Prophet about me and/or Harry, but that's just part of the campaign. I plan on doing everything I can to win.

Love

Dad... And Mom

Ron and Ginny read the note a couple times before turning to Harry. "You knew? Why the hell didn't you tell me?" Ron exclaimed.

"I wasn't sure he would actually run and if I told you I offered to finance the campaign and he didn't run, you would have been mad at him. I promised your dad I wouldn't," Harry replied.

Both Ron and Ginny looked angry but Ginny quickly understood and gave Harry a big hug. "I can't believe you did this for my dad," she said with tears in her eyes. Ron was still looking angry but quickly realized Ginny was right and he hugged Harry as well. Not to feel left out, Hermione joined in the group hug.

They all pulled away and Ron was kind of red and said, "Harry, campaigns can cost a lot of money."

"Ron, I'm a professional Quidditch player stuck in this school with all of you. What else am I going to spend my money on? Besides, I bet Malfoy will finance Gallah's campaign," Harry

said with a smile. Ginny hugged him again and Harry said, "Hey, he hasn't won yet. Not that I'm complaining about you hugging me Ginny just don't come and hit me if he doesn't win."

They all sat down and Ron and Ginny were working on a note to send back to their dad when Harry noticed Hermione staring at him. "What?" He asked.

"Oh nothing," Hermione said but then added. "You know you're really special Harry."

Harry leaned over to her and whispered, "Think logically Hermione. What are the odds that I'm going to actually live long enough to spend my money? If Mr. Weasley can win then it will help everyone, even if I'm gone."

Hermione was shocked because she could tell Harry was serious. She flashed back to the blackness she felt while connected to Harry. That must mean his death she thought. She was seriously considering talking to Dumbledore about it but she didn't know how to explain it without revealing the orb, which she promised not to do.

Hermione kept a close eye on Harry the next day and the only thing she noticed was Ron and Ginny being extra nice to him. That day in the Daily Prophet the article read.

Minister of Magic Position is now a Race!

Arthur Weasley from the Department of Muggle Affairs has announced his candidacy for Minister of Magic. Mr. Weasley is highly respected in the community and has worked closely with many officials. This announcement was a surprise to all involved. When asked for a comment, the Minister of Education said. 'I'm happy to have a challenger. The community should have choices for their Minister.' Mr. Weasley has a son who is currently an assistant to the Minister of Education and is widely expected to support the Minister of Education's campaign.

All the Gryffindors were congratulating Ron when they heard. "Do you think your father actually has a chance?" Turning around they saw Malfoy standing there. "He obviously has no idea what it costs to run a campaign."

Ron quickly added. "I think my dad is quite aware what it will take." Ron was too happy to let Malfoy get to him.

That night, Harry decided he better tell Cho about this before she read it. He wrote a note telling her about the campaign and telling her how much he missed her and had Hedwig deliver it.

The next day, the article in the Daily Prophet was again interesting.

Weasley Campaign for Minister Gets Surprise Financial Backing.

This reporter has learned that the Weasley campaign for Minister of Magic is being funded by none other than The Boy Who Lived; Harry Potter! France's star seeker has decided to back Arthur Weasley in his bid to become Minister of Magic. This is a surprise move that will surely increase Mr. Weasley's odds in the race. Mr. Weasley's campaign now has more assets at its disposal than the Minister of Education's campaign.

What was considered to be a run away win for the Minister of Education now has turned into a real fight.

"No more secrets now," Harry joked. The Gryffindors were once again talking to Harry and Ron when they heard.

"What do you think you're doing Potter? You should learn to invest your money better. I told you to choose sides better." Malfoy smirked.

"I'm choosing the winning side Malfoy. Same as I always have," Harry said smiling.

"My father will match what little you've done for the Weasley's and then some Potter," Malfoy spat.

"If I thought it would help, I'd give every dime I have to the Weasley's, Malfoy. Can you think of any person who would do that to help you or your father? Now, tell me who chose the right side," Harry said and turned away. Malfoy actually looked hurt and slinked off.

Ron and Ginny were both looking strangely at Harry. "What?" Harry asked.

"You wouldn't really give us all your money would you?" Ron asked.

"Of course I would! I'd do anything for you guys," Harry said and turned to Ginny. "Come on, aren't you going to hug me again?" then he smiled.

Harry received an owl from Cho the next day.

Harry

I don't think you should have gotten involved in politics. The Minister of Education is very powerful and won't be happy that you're supporting his opponent. I guess it's too late now but I wish you had talked to me about this. It could cause a lot of negative publicity.

I love you

Cho.

This annoyed Harry and he showed the note to Hermione who agreed with him. "It's your money Harry. She is right that there may be negative press but still, it's what you wanted to do and I think it's the right thing."

There was an article in the next Daily Prophet about neighbors of two more Ministers being attacked and seeing the Dark Mark above their house. The article tried to pass it off as small time attacks. "Why won't they just admit Voldemort's back?" Harry asked.

"They don't want everybody to panic," Ron stated.

"Did people just go around in a constant state of panic before? It sounds to me like my parents and their friends still had fun. I think people would handle it just fine. They have a right to know," Harry stated loudly.

"Hey, I agree with you, but I don't think the Ministry wants to deal with it," Ron said.

Harry received an owl reminding him that the French Quidditch team started practices the next weekend. He was looking forward to playing again. Harry was still annoyed with Cho's note but it almost seemed that he just focused on studying and learning new magic more when he was upset now. He had actually turned completely invisible the next time he tried. He had written Cho back telling her how important he thought this was and that he didn't care about Gallah. He asked how things were going with the wedding plan and how her family was.

Hermione could tell Harry was annoyed but she was also debating on talking to Dumbledore about her connection to Harry. She finally decided to do it the next time the opportunity arose. Little did she know it would be the next day. Hermione was just leaving Arithmancy the next day when she almost ran into Dumbledore.

"I'm sorry Professor, I wasn't paying attention," she quickly said.

"Quite alright Miss Granger. After an Arithmancy lesson I can completely understand it. I understand you are doing an Extremely Advanced N.E.W.T. presentation with Harry. I trust you are both contributing to the outcome."

"Oh yes sir. I know that in the past Harry hasn't liked to do much studying outside of class but he's really committed to this project. In fact, I wanted to talk to you about something, do you have a minute?" Hermione asked.

Dumbledore looked at her and said, "Of course, let's go into this classroom, it shouldn't be occupied." They both went into a room and Dumbledore continued. "Now, what can I do for you?"

Hermione kind of squirmed but said, "Well, over the summer, something strange happened between Harry and me. We were studying when I tripped and when Harry grabbed me; we kind of had this connection." She didn't want to mention the orb or anything.

"What do you mean Miss Granger? This isn't anything that would be between Harry and Miss Chang now would it?" Dumbledore asked.

"No sir, nothing like that. It's just that when he grabbed me to keep me from falling, I kind of saw and actually felt many experiences he's had. I saw his parents getting killed and saw the curse being placed on him. I also saw him fighting Professor Quirrell and Voldemort in our first year. I saw him fighting the snake when Ginny was there and exactly what happened after the third task."

Dumbledore thought for a second and said, "Maybe you were just re-visiting things Harry had already told you."

"That's not it Professor. I now saw that Harry left out many details of the incidents. There were many things he didn't tell Ron or I. Much of the pain he felt or how scared he was, I now saw and felt."

"Did you tell Harry about this?" Dumbledore asked.

"Yes, I did. At first he was upset that I knew more than he wanted us to know but then he was ok with it."

"Well, I can't explain what happened, but if you and Harry are ok with it, than I don't see any problems," Dumbledore said and kept looking at Hermione. "But, you didn't tell Harry everything did you?"

Hermione looked down. "No sir I didn't. I think I saw some of the future. I felt how he felt when he was helping me up and then I also felt his heart breaking. I know it is in the future. Then, after that I felt guilt and then anger like I've never known and just as quick it changed into total blackness. There was nothing. I'm worried what it all means."

Dumbledore looked at her. "Well we will just have to wait and see how things play out. He is a seventeen-year-old boy, so having his heart broken wouldn't be unheard of. Let's just see how things go from here. I wouldn't suggest telling him about this extra information."

"Thank you sir," Hermione said and then thought more. "Professor. Do you know how when you do magic you can just feel it flowing out your wand?"

"I've heard Miss Granger," the Headmaster said this but didn't really answer the question.

"Well I asked Harry about this and he said that he doesn't feel any different. Even when he is doing advanced spells, he says that he can't tell any difference. When we had this connection, I think I realized that he is much more powerful than I ever imagined. Even now, I can almost feel the magic around him."

Dumbledore looked at her with a twinkle in his eye. "Does that concern you?"

Hermione didn't expect that question. "Um... No, it doesn't concern me. It actually feels good to be around him. Do you know how powerful he really is?"

Dumbledore smiled again and said, "I have my suspicions Miss Granger. I understand you've been able to convince him to study and even practice magic over the summer."

"Yes sir. He's been working quite hard," Hermione stated.

"Harry has had two years of no serious incidents and has been able to spend the summers being around other magical people. Before that, he had to work to keep the magic suppressed over the summer. Now, he's being made to feel like it is a good thing to be magical all year." The Headmaster hesitated, looking directly at Hermione. "I often wonder what would come about if your thirst for knowledge was somehow combined with Harry's magical ability," Dumbledore said. She could tell that was the end of the conversation and she headed

That night at practice, Hermione spent more time watching Harry than actually practicing. She could just feel the magic around him. He just did things so naturally and without any effort. Sure, he may say he didn't get it but after only a couple tries, he always made progress. She knew that her progress was due to research and learning technique, but that wasn't what made Harry progress. On the way back to the common room, Hermione asked, "Harry. Do you regret that we have to study so much and work so hard because of our project?"

Harry seemed shocked. "Of course not Hermione. I know it sounds weird, and a couple of years ago, I wouldn't have said this but I'm enjoying what we're doing. I am really having fun learning all this new stuff. I can't believe I'm turning into one of your kind but I'm not complaining," he lightly hugged her.

This made her feel really good. She knew everyone thought she was no fun and always wanted to study and actually felt guilty about it. Hearing Harry say that he was enjoying it really made her feel good.

Once back to the common room, Harry wrote another note to Cho.

Cho

I really miss you.

Now, as my manager, can you help me setup a fundraiser for Mr. Weasley? What can I do to help raise some more money for his campaign? You're the brains behind us so I need your help.

Did I mention that I really miss you?

I love you

Harry

He quickly found Hedwig and sent the note.

One evening before supper, Dumbledore made an announcement about their being two balls again this year with Beauxbatons. One would be held before the holiday break at Hogwarts and one near Valentines' Day at Beauxbatons. Harry had expected something like this but was kind of worried. He wanted to go but knew he couldn't ask Hermione or Ginny because Cho would be upset. He decided to put it off for a while.

Harry received a response from Cho during the week.

Harry

I miss you too.

I don't think you should do any more campaigning for Mr. Weasley. It isn't wise to get involved in politics, specifically against the current Minister of Education.

If you want to do fundraisers, make them for something less controversial.

I hope to see you soon.

Cho.

This really annoyed Harry, so he quickly wrote another note.

Sirius.

I want to do a fundraiser for Mr. Weasley but my manager thinks it's a bad idea. She thinks I should be doing fundraisers less controversial causes. I think that's a good idea as well, but right now, I want Mr. Weasley to have a chance at getting the Minister position.

Do you have any ideas?

Harry

Harry quickly sent this with Hedwig. Harry started Quidditch practice this weekend and everything seemed quite comfortable. He liked the way the team was playing together. Harry received a response from Sirius the following week.

Harry

I think a fundraiser is a great idea. I can set something up for you. I'll have it ready three weeks from Saturday and I'll clear it with Dumbledore. If you can convince any of the English Quidditch players to come it would help a lot. I'm really proud of you getting involved like this.

Sirius

Harry quickly wrote a note to the coach of the English Quidditch team.

Mr. Simpson

I know we've never met, but we are both English residents and concerned about the future of our community. I am hosting a fundraiser for Mr. Arthur Weasley who is running for Minister of Magic. Having England's popular players at this fundraiser would make a huge difference in the turnout. If you would pass this along to any of your players, I would really appreciate it. In fact, in gratitude, I would gladly help you with any fundraiser you have planned in the future. I know that we play for different teams, but I do live in England and am greatly concerned about this election.

Thank you

Harry Potter

Harry sent this letter with Hedwig. He didn't tell anyone about the fundraiser in case something didn't work out.

Harry was actually enjoying all of his classes except for the Dark Arts one. He didn't know how things would be once they actually started practicing the spells. All of the Gryffindors were worried about this as well. Hermione kept saying there was no way Professor Steiger would have them practice on each other but Harry didn't agree with her.

The next week, Harry received a note from the coach of the English team.

Harry

I must say your note surprised me. It's too bad we weren't in need of a seeker when you started playing, having you play for England would have been a real crowd pleaser.

Most of the players don't like to get involved in politics, but fortunately a couple of them have friends or relatives in the Ministry and feel personally involved in the election. Keith Warner our seeker and Martin Shales our keeper have agreed to be part of the fundraiser. They both know people who think highly of Mr. Weasley. Just send the date and time to me and I'll pass it on. And, I may hold you to attending one of our fundraisers. Nothing political I assure you.

Neil Simpson

Excellent Harry thought and quickly responded with the date and time. Harry also told Sirius about this. Quickly he wrote Cho a note as well.

Cho

I miss you a lot.

I really wanted to do a fundraiser so Sirius is setting one up. The seeker and keeper from the English Quidditch team agreed to come as well, so it won't be just me. I asked Sirius to tell you when it is and I really hope you will come over to it. I want to see you really bad.

I love you

Harry

Most classes were going by quickly, but History of Magic and Potions just seemed to drag on. Harry slept through most of History of Magic but knew he couldn't do anything to annoy Snape in his potions class so he had to make sure he did everything correctly. Mostly Harry liked his free DADA period where he could study anything he wanted. Lately he had been reading his 'Pathways to the Mind' book. Instead of trying to learn to read minds, he was focused on the chapters about using the mind as a weapon. One spell seemed to work like a virtual boggart. It projected the thing the other person feared the most. They should really feel like their biggest fear is happening to them. Harry kept coming back to those chapters.

Harry didn't like the Dark Arts class either. The students had already started casting pain curses on each other. Each curse was different, but they could all be blocked using similar techniques that Professor Figg would try to teach as soon as she learned which pain spells were being taught. The Slytherins were really enjoying the Dark Arts class and were all too happy when practice started.

Harry had gotten permission to go to the fundraiser right after Quidditch practice. Practice felt like it was taking forever but Harry was sure this was because for once, he was anxious for it to be over. After the coach finally released, then Harry planned on heading directly to the locker room for a shower and then to Diagon Alley. However while he was walking toward the locker room he heard.

"Schoolboy." Turning around he saw Kristi coming behind him. "Didn't you think I'd fit in with your fundraiser?"

"How did you know about that?" Harry asked quickly.

"I keep up with things. Any reason you didn't ask me to come?" she asked seriously.

"I didn't want to bother you. Since you live and work in France, I didn't think it would be important to you. I only asked players on the English team to come." Harry looked at her and added. "However, if there is any way you have some free time, it would really help if you would come with me."

She looked at him for a second and then smiled and said, "I'd be glad to help you out. You should have asked right away. I know how much you hate the press so if you're doing something like this, it must be for a good reason."

"Thanks Kristi! I really owe you for this," Harry exclaimed.

"C'mon we should get cleaned up before we go," she said and they both went to have a shower. She had brought nice clothes the same as Harry had.

"It looks like you planned on coming all along," Harry said.

"I knew I could convince you it was a good idea," she joked back before the two apparated to the Quidditch Supply Shop in Diagon Alley.

Chapter 11

They arrived before the other Quidditch players, but there was already a line of people waiting to get in. "Looks like it will be a good turnout," Sirius said clapping Harry on the back.

"Nice to see you again Kristi," Sirius said. "I didn't expect you."

"I already gave him grief for not asking me to help. Where's the man we're here to help? I'd like to meet him," Kristi asked before Sirius led him to Mr. Weasley.

Harry was looking around when he was suddenly grabbed from the back. "I've missed you," Cho said turning him around.

Harry hugged her and gave her a big kiss. "I've missed you too. Are you upset that we're doing this?"

"Of course not. I didn't think other players would want anything to do with it. I should have listened to you. I think Sirius and Kelly did a great job setting this up," Cho said.

"I'm glad you're ok with it. I think it looks..." Harry suddenly realized something. "Who's Kelly?"

Cho looked like she said something she shouldn't have. "Um... I need to let Sirius explain that one."

Luckily Sirius was just walking over with a very attractive natural blonde woman. Before Sirius could say anything, Harry extended his hand and said, "I'm guessing you're Kelly."

The woman took his hand and said, "You guessed right. Nice to see you again Harry. You wouldn't remember me. Sirius has told me so much about you."

"Nice to meet you Kelly. I wish he had told me as much about you," Harry said looking at Sirius who was squirming.

"I wanted you to meet her before saying anything. Kelly went to school with me. She was also knew your mother. We fell out of touch after I was sent away but ran into each other a while back," Sirius said with a smile.

"So, have all these trips you've been taking been for Dumbledore or to see Kelly? I wouldn't have worried so much if you had just told me they were to see her," Harry added.

"A little of both. Kelly works for a muggle advertising agency and did most of the work setting the fundraiser up," Sirius replied.

"Well I think you've done an excellent job. I'm much happier knowing he's off seeing you than doing anything stupid." The other Quidditch players arrived and Harry greeted them and talked for a while before it was time to take their places along a long table. They were to give out autographs on things the customers had bought. The English keeper was first, then the English seeker, then Harry and then Kristi.

As soon as people were allowed to come over, it was a non-stop rush of people. They had to sign all kinds of things, brooms, books, and posters and on more than one occasion various body parts of some of the women. Harry could tell Sirius did enjoy watching Harry get embarrassed when he had to sign a strange woman's chest. Everything was going like clockwork until a little boy came running up with tears in his eyes carrying a box. His mother was following close behind looking very sad.

"Can you help me? My snake is very sick," The boy said pushing the box in front of Harry.

Harry looked in the box and saw a small snake that didn't look well. "He's been getting worse for a few days and I don't know what to do?" The boy was crying. His mother also added, "Tommy just loves that snake and would be devastated if anything happened."

"I don't know what I can do," Harry said. He really didn't want to talk to the snake in front of so many people since they all thought it was a sign of a dark wizard.

"Please, help him," The boy cried out loudly.

Harry looked around and saw most people just staring at him. He reluctantly looked at the snake and asked, "*Can you tell me what's wrong? I'd like to help you.*" The crowd gasped and started mumbling to themselves.

The snake looked up a bit and hissed softly. Harry had to lean down to hear. "*The boy pushed a stone down my throat. I can't breathe well.*"

This shocked Harry who quickly asked the snake, "*When did this happen?*" The snake hissed back. "*Just a few minutes ago.*"

Harry looked up and could almost see an evil smile on the mother's face. Looking back to the boy, Harry felt he was faking the concern so he asked, "When did you say your snake was starting to feel bad?"

The boy cried, "A few days ago. Please help him."

Harry realized he had been setup but it was too late to do anything about it. He turned to the snake and said, "*I'm going to help you. Please stay still after this happens and it will be ok.*"

The snake replied. "*I trust you. Don't let the boy near me.*" Harry quickly put the snake on the floor, pulled out his wand and said 'Engorgio'. Instantly, the snake swelled to four times his original size.

There were many screams but the snake just lay there calmly and said. "*Thanks, I can breathe now.*"

Harry told it. "*I'm going to get someone to remove the stone, stay here.*" Harry stood up and concentrated on the snake's problem and then the owner of the magical pet store and quickly cast the message spell. A large silvery phoenix erupted from the end of his wand and flew off quickly over the crowd. This also caused many gasps.

The mother was yelling, "What have you done to Tommy's snake?" The boy started crying. Harry didn't respond and just stayed down with the snake.

Quickly the owner of the pet shop had pushed his way through the crowd and looked at Harry. "Did you send me that thought?"

Harry nodded and said, "This snake has a stone stuck in his throat. I enlarged the snake so it could breathe. Can you remove the stone?"

The man said, "Of course. I'll need to push these forceps down its throat. Will it bite?"

Harry turned to the snake and said, "*This man works with pets and can remove the stone. He needs to put the tool into your throat. Is that ok?*" The snake quickly responded, "*Yes.*"

The man was starting wide-eyed at Harry when he responded, "I told the snake what you are going to do and he won't bite. The crowd was straining to watch as the man pushed the forceps down the large snake but was finally able to remove the stone. Harry quickly whispered to the man, "That boy did this just a few minutes ago and the snake doesn't want to go with him. Can you take the snake back to your shop after I return it to normal size?"

The man nodded. Harry turned back to the snake, "*You should be fine now. I'm going to return you to normal size.*"

The snake quickly said, "*Don't give me to the boy. He just found me this morning.*"

Harry responded, "*I won't. You can go back with the man who just removed the stone.*" Harry could tell the snake relaxed. He quickly returned the snake to its normal size and put it back in the box. Then he handed the box to the man and turned to the boy and his mother. "Your snake will be fine, but he needs to go back to the pet shop to be looked after. You can pick him up there tomorrow."

Harry could see the evil smile on the woman's face, but then he started hearing clapping coming from the crowd. This soon grew into everyone clapping. The woman's face turned from an evil smile to anger. The boy wasn't being able to maintain his concern for the snake either. They faked following the pet shop owner out of the crowd and Harry thought there was no way they would go to claim the snake.

Harry was starting to sit back down when Sirius came over. "You did the right thing helping them out."

"I don't think this is going to help the campaign though," Harry replied. He didn't want to get into the facts right now.

Kristi leaned over and whispered, "They weren't faking their concern very well were they?" Harry looked at her shocked. Kristi had been able to tell they were setting him up right away. "I don't think they were happy when the crowd started clapping though."

The players got back to signing things and almost everyone told Harry they were proud of him helping that boy's pet. After a couple more hours, the fundraiser was over. Harry had asked Sirius to go over to the twin's store and get three large boxes of samples. When he returned, Harry gave a box to each of the Quidditch players who had come to help with the fundraiser. The two English players were very nice and had enjoyed talking to Mr. Weasley. Harry explained to Kristi that the box was from the twins she had met at his birthday party. She promised to stop into their store sometime.

"I really appreciate you coming to help out. If it could have been in the advertisements, we would have drawn a bunch more guys," Harry told her.

"Just ask next time. If I don't want to do something, I'll just say so. Besides, it was a learning experience. I'd never heard anyone talk to a snake before. What did it say?" Kristi asked.

Harry told her what the snake said, "That just proves my theory that there are a lot of assholes in the world. You did good today. I'll see you at practice," Kristi said before leaving. By now, most people had left, leaving Harry, Cho, Sirius, Kelly and Mr. & Mrs. Weasley.

Mrs. Weasley hugged Harry tight, "Thank you so much for helping Harry. You're parents would be so proud of you."

Mr. Weasley shook his hand and added, "There is no way we could match Gallah without your help."

Harry was blushing but responded, "You've always treated me like family, it's the least I can do. I hope the thing with the snake doesn't hurt."

"Didn't you hear the crowd? I think it will end up helping with the publicity," Mr. Weasley said.

Harry quickly told them what the snake had said about the boy just picking it up. Sirius caught on quick. "So, you were being setup. Someone wanted to sabotage the fundraiser."

Kelly asked, "Who would want to do that? And, why use Harry?"

Sirius quickly responded, "Gallah of course. He wants to hurt Arthur's campaign and hurting Harry in the process would just be a bonus. I don't think Gallah will be too happy with the way it turned out. He gave us some more good publicity."

Harry was only able to spend a few minutes alone with Cho before he needed to return to the school. "How's the wedding plans coming?" he asked.

She hesitated and it felt to Harry like she was making something up. "It is taking more time than I thought. You know, we may have to put it off until next summer like you suggested. Is that ok?"

Harry thought she didn't seem too bothered by this but just assumed she had come around to thinking it was best. "That's fine with me. I'd rather be out of school."

"I heard there are a couple of balls this year. So, who are you taking? Better not be either of your little fan club girls," Cho said flatly.

"I didn't figure you would be happy with me asking Ginny or Hermione. I haven't decided what to do yet," Harry responded.

They talked for a while more and Harry thought things seemed a bit different with her. He just wrote it off to not seeing her for a month. This was a Hogsmeade weekend so there were still some students when he arrived back there. He was able to get a carriage back to the castle with some of them.

Ron and Ginny were waiting outside by the steps when he came back. "How did it go?" Ron quickly asked. Harry told them all about the fundraiser and that it seemed like they raised quite a bit of money for their dad.

"That means dad got to meet Keith Warner and Martin Shales. That lucky git. I wish I could have gone," said Ron sounding upset.

Harry explained about the snake and that he was very worried about the bad publicity it may bring. Ron was also worried about this but Ginny didn't think there would be any problem. Harry wanted to run it by someone else. "Where's Hermione?" Harry asked.

"Studying," Ginny said quickly. "She's still reading the level 7 standard spells book. I bet she's gone though that thing a hundred times."

Harry laughed but knew that she was probably using the fake cover and really reading about elemental magic or the book she bought in Knockturn Alley.

When the owl post came the next week, Harry was watching Hermione intently. He saw a small smile cross her mouth. "Well, how bad is it?" he asked. Hermione handed him the paper.

Unintentional gift from You-Know-Who's saves pets life

During the recent fundraiser for Arthur Weasley's campaign for Minister of Magic, a distraught boy brought his pet snake who was on the verge of dying to the one person the boy thought could help his beloved pet. Harry Potter. Harry quickly used the gift You-Know-Who inadvertently passed to him during the vicious attack many years ago to ask the snake what the problem was. After determining the problem, Harry summoned the pet shop owner to quickly work on the pet. After a successful visit, the owner took the snake back to his shop for further observation. The boy and his mother were obviously very stunned and appreciative of Harry's effort

With the support of Harry Potter as well as the Seeker and Keeper from England's own Quidditch team, Arthur Weasley is quickly becoming the favorite in the election.

Ginny, who had been reading over Harry's shoulder finished she said, "I told you it wouldn't be any problem. You two should listen to me more."

"You know, dad could actually win this thing," Ron said sounding confident for the first time.

Things were going smoothly for Harry and his friends. Harry and Hermione were both making progress on their project and Ron was getting along good with Parvati. Mr. Weasley's campaign was going very well. There were more and more random Death Eater attacks, but no one could see any pattern, and as of yet no muggles were targeted. Even though people weren't sure it was Voldemort, Harry heard rumors that many in the magical community were starting to talk and get worried.

The week of Harry's first Quidditch match, he gave the usual passes to Cho and Professor McGonagall. He gave Hermione a pass and asked Ron if he wanted to come, but Ron declined if Parvati wouldn't be able to go, so Harry gave it to Ginny.

This match was against Romania, and Harry felt confident in the way his team was playing. His friends were very excited when they left for the stadium. They met Cho who had dressed a little more risqué than Harry expected. Not as bad as the finals over the summer but differently. "Is this your standard wardrobe now?" Harry joked while hugging her.

She pulled back quickly and said, "What if it is? Can't I wear what I want?" she said this much more coldly than Harry had expected. Even his friends looked at her. Before he could say anything else, the coach was calling him into the locker room.

The match was pretty much uneventful, France was clearly the better team and Harry had no trouble catching the snitch, which caused tremendous clapping, even in the Romanian stadium. After showering, Harry saw the reporter he talked to along the side of the crowd of other reporters. He went directly to her, bypassing all the other screaming voices.

"Congratulations on starting the new season off right."

"Thank you Ms. Mishmas. The team really played well today."

"Do you think you can make it to the playoffs again this year?"

"I don't see why not. If I can ever figure out how to deal with Viktor Krum, maybe we can do better than last year."

"I understand you're engaged. You know there are many young French women who were disappointed to hear that."

"I doubt there were many, but yes I'm engaged to my fantastic manager, whom I need to be getting over to. Thank you."

Harry quickly made his way over to his friends. They were all congratulating him and watching the other people. Cho came up after only a couple minutes, "I need to be getting back Harry. There are just a lot of things I need to take care of."

"Is there anything wrong Cho?" Harry asked knowing she was acting strange.

"Of course not, I'm just really busy back home. See you soon," she said and apparated away. His friends could tell something wasn't quite right but didn't say anything at this point. They all went back to Hogwarts.

That night at practice, Hermione wanted to talk. "Harry, is there anything wrong with Cho?"

Harry was silent for a minute and then spoke. "I don't know. She said there wasn't, but something didn't feel right. She hasn't been sending as many owls either."

"Maybe she's just really busy," Hermione added.

"That's what I thought at first, but Ron said the twins thought business was running just fine and since Kristi and I both have our contracts, I don't know what would keep her so busy. Did I tell you we're waiting until summer for the wedding?" Harry added.

"No, you didn't. Was it your idea or hers?"

"I suggested it right after asking her, but she just recently said it was a good idea. I think it's the right thing. C'mon, we're wasting valuable practice time," Harry added and went back to practicing.

Harry and Hermione had been making good progress in their practice and were involved in a session when they heard a sudden scream. Professor McGonagall had decided to check on their progress but was greeted most unexpectedly by a wall of fire as soon as she opened the classroom door. After hearing the scream, Harry quickly banished the flames. "I'm sorry Professor; we just didn't want people walking in on us," Harry said quickly.

McGonagall still clutching her chest and trying to catch her breath said, "Yes... um well I guess a raging inferno would deter people. However, a simple locking charm would be effective as well."

"Yes professor, we'll remember that," Hermione added sounding a bit embarrassed.

"I just wanted to see if you two had made any progress, but I'm assuming the reception I got was an indication," McGonagall stated, still breathing faster than normal.

"Yes professor. We've been making good progress. Would you like a small demonstration?" Hermione asked. McGonagall nodded and Hermione whispered to Harry. Hermione quickly made a whirlpool in the water tub and then made the water form into a cone and rise out of the tub before returning.

Harry then had all of the lanterns in the room send fire to his palm which he held out so McGonagall could see how hot it was. Then looking to Hermione, he nodded. She started sending small droplets of water into the air. Quickly, Harry started sending small bits of fire out to collide with the water droplets causing mini explosions all around them. After a couple minutes, they quit and could both see a very wide grin on McGonagall's face.

"Fine, I see there was no pressing need to check up on you. Do you expect to progress much further before the presentation?" McGonagall asked.

Instantly both Harry and Hermione said, "Much further!" They looked at each other and started laughing.

"Would you mind if I informed the headmaster about your progress? I personally didn't expect the final demonstration to be more than this."

"We don't mind at all professor," Hermione said. "But, if you wouldn't mind, we'd like the presentation to be a surprise, even to you so we'd rather not do another demonstration."

Harry was surprised she was saying this to a teacher but McGonagall took it well and even smiled, "I see no need to check on you again. Potter, don't let her down."

"No professor," Harry quickly said.

On the way back to the common room Harry asked, "So, what are your plans after this year? I'm sure you have it all planned out."

Hermione smirked at him and said, "I'm going to continue on at a specialized university closer to London. I decided to become a Doctor. I want to do research into new potions. I may also try to teach some."

"I wish I had all your energy. That sounds like too much work," Harry joked.

"I don't suppose you've given any thought to what you're doing. I mean except for Quidditch."

"You don't think Quidditch is a real career?"

"It is, but how long can you really do that for. Even if you do it for ten years, what would you do after that?"

"Hermione, that's too far to think. I may decide to go back to school and join you in your research. I'd probably be more suited to doing security for you, but it's something."

She laughed. "Seriously, do you think about anything else other than playing Quidditch?"

"If Mr. Weasley wins the campaign, I may join the unspeakable department. I have a feeling they do a lot of exciting things."

"Probably dangerous too. You haven't gotten the orb out again have you?" she asked quietly.

"Not since our last time. I probably should try it again," He replied.

She looked worried. "Not without me. Make sure I'm with you."

"Fine. That means you have to sneak into my bed since that's where I plan on trying it," Harry said with a grin.

"That's not fair," she exclaimed. "Well, then don't be surprised if you find me in there sometime."

Later that week they were all in the common room late one night talking about the Holiday Ball. Ron said, "So, who's taking you to the ball Ginny?"

Ginny quickly spoke up, "Colin Creevy, got anything against that?"

"Not at all. Just tell him I'll kill him if he touches you or keeps you out too late," Ron replied.

Harry laughed. "C'mon Ron. Ginny's sixth year now. Do you know what most of the sixth year's were doing last year?"

Ron got angry and said, "Ginny's not like most sixth years. I don't want to hear anything she's doing until after I'm gone."

"Ron! I'll never get to have any fun with you here," Ginny exclaimed.

"Exactly," Ron replied satisfied.

"You should have heard Cho telling everyone all the things her and Harry were doing last year," Hermione said.

"Hey!" Harry said but Ron quickly added. "But Cho was a seventh year."

"Harry was sixth though and it sounded like he was a very willing participant," Hermione replied.

"I'm leaving if my name comes up again," Harry said harshly.

"Who's taking you Hermione?" Parvati asked.

"Not sure yet. I've been asked but I haven't decided," she replied quietly.

"And what about you Harry?" Ginny added. "Is Cho letting you go?"

"I get to go; she just said I couldn't ask you or Hermione. It seems she considers you two far too much competition. I think I have an idea who I'm going to ask but don't want to say anything yet," Harry replied.

This comment made Hermione feel both good and bad. She felt good that Cho considered her competition but bad because she knew Harry would never do anything to upset Cho and that meant he wouldn't ask her to go with him. She may as well accept the invitation she was given already.

Later that night Harry went up and retrieved his invisibility cloak, even though he could become invisible, he felt more comfortable with the cloak right now. Walking back down, his friends confronted him. "So, where are you sneaking off to?" Ron asked.

"Harry, you know it's past curfew. I could take points away," Hermione added.

"I need to work on my plan for the ball. Now Hermione, I could have put the cloak on earlier and you wouldn't know I was gone. Just pretend it happened that way. If I get caught, I'll never say you saw me leave." He smiled and stepped out of the portrait hole. His friends thought he must have been asking someone from another house to go with him. However, this wasn't the case at all.

Harry covered himself with the cloak and made his way to a location he hadn't visited in quite a while. Entering the room he heard. "Who's there?" coming from nowhere in particular.

"Myrtle? It's me Harry," he said dropping the cloak.

Quickly, Moaning Myrtle came into view smiling. "Harry! You haven't been to see me in so long. I thought you forgot all about me."

"Of course not Myrtle. I've come to thank you and ask you something," he replied. "I wanted to finally thank you for helping me in the tournament a couple years ago. I don't think I ever properly did that."

"You're welcome Harry. We couldn't have those foreigner's winning now could we?" she replied. "What do you want to ask me?"

"Well, you know that I'm seeing Cho Chang, right?"

"Of course Harry. Even I can't say anything bad about that."

"Well, since she's gone, I was wondering if you would like to be my date to the Holiday Ball?" he asked looking at her ghostly figure.

She looked very stunned and then kind of angry. "If this is a joke, I'll haunt you long after you're gone."

"No Myrtle, I'm serious. I think you'd be good company and I don't think Cho would get upset, if you know what I mean," Harry said.

She looked at him. "I guess you are being honest." She started smiling. "I'd love to Harry. I suppose you could have asked living girls and Cho wouldn't have minded."

"I supposed so, but I really wanted to ask you," Harry said. "Will we be able to dance? I've never danced with a ghost before."

Myrtle laughed. "Of course we can. I can be somewhat firm when I need to be, that's how I turn the water on. Oh Harry, I can't wait. You don't know how long it's been since I've been to a ball."

"Don't tell anyone, I want it to be a big surprise," Harry said.

"Oh, I promise. And tell Cho, she has nothing to worry about," Myrtle said bubbling.

Harry snuck back up to the common room to find his friends still talking. "That was quick," Ron said. "No luck, huh?"

"Actually, I now have a date for the Holiday Ball. I can move pretty quick when I want to," Harry said sitting down next to Ginny.

"So, who is it?" Ginny asked.

"I'm not telling. *Anyone*," Harry said turning toward Hermione. "Now, I'm going to bed," Harry said before heading up to the dorm. He lay in bed for a while quite happy with himself. 'I owed her for her help in the Triwizard Tournament and Cho can't get mad at me. But, what to do about the Beauxbatons dance?' he thought before falling asleep.

Harry had been getting less than one owl a week from Cho now. This was starting to bother him but he tried not to let his friends know anything was wrong. Ron was fine, he didn't notice anything this year except for Parvati. Ginny and Hermione both asked him often how things were going. He just kept saying everything was fine. Just last night, he had received an owl saying she had too much work to do and wouldn't be able to make his next match.

His second Quidditch match of the season was coming up the next weekend and Harry was trying to focus on that. Harry and his friends were having lunch one afternoon and soon after the mail came, Hermione stopped reading her Daily Prophet and quickly said, "Harry, I need to talk to you in private."

He looked at her and said, "I'm eating, can it wait?"

She grabbed his arm and said, "No, right now." And started pulling him out of the hall.

"Hermione, what's going on?" Harry demanded but Hermione was silent and kept pulling him until they were away from the hall.

"I thought you should read this in private," she said, handing him the paper.

Betrayal of The Boy Who Lived

<Picture showing Cho kissing a man> Miss Cho Chang, engaged to France's star seeker Harry Potter, and also his manager has been caught in the arms of another man. This picture recently taken shows the brazen Miss Chang publicly showing her passion for Kevin Weisman, seeker for the Wales Quidditch team. There had been reports of Miss Chang visiting popular clubs with the Wales' seeker for some time now but no proof had been available.

It was only a couple months ago when Miss Chang was showing off her exquisite diamond engagement ring, but as this picture clearly shows, that ring is nowhere to be found. Maybe Miss Chang couldn't wait for Harry to finish his final year at Hogwarts.

Mr. Weisman has always been known as a ladies man and a regular at all the popular clubs. Mr. Potter on the other hand has shied away from the publicity and crowds of such places. It seems Miss Chang has developed a taste for the glamorous side of professional Quidditch.

This reporter hopes she had the consideration to end things with Harry correctly. Either way, this is good news to the countless ladies who are no doubt eager to take Miss Chang's place as Harry's companion. If you read this Harry, give us a call if you need some company

Chapter 12

Harry was floored and didn't know what to feel. Hermione could see the look of desperation in his eyes. "I want to be alone for a while," he said as calmly as he could and headed for the secret room in the tower. Hermione followed behind not saying anything. Harry knew she was there and didn't protest.

Reaching the room, he sat down and read the article again. He kept watching the moving picture of Cho kissing the man over and over. The first thing he said was, "Thanks for getting me out of there Hermione. I owe you."

She didn't quite know what to say. Before she had a chance, a silvery bird flew into Harry. He looked at Hermione and said, "Ginny is looking for us. Maybe you should go. Tell her I'll be fine."

"I'm not going to leave you now," Hermione said. "I'll get Ginny and come back. We have a while until next class." Harry didn't answer as Hermione left. A couple minutes later the two girls came back.

"I'm sorry Harry," Ginny said hugging him.

Harry couldn't cry or anything, he just felt numb. "Don't be Ginny, you didn't do anything."

They sat in silence for quite a while until finally Harry asked, "Can I ask you two something?" He paused, not really expecting a response. "What's wrong with me? I tried to do everything right. I gave her gifts, treated her nice, never touched other girls. What did I do wrong?"

This tore both of the girls up. "You didn't do anything wrong Harry, this isn't your fault," Hermione said.

"You've been perfect Harry," Ginny added.

"I must not have been. If I had been perfect, she wouldn't have done this," Harry said quickly. "I just don't understand."

"It's not anything you did or didn't do Harry. Maybe there's an explanation," Hermione said.

Harry looked between the two girls. "If I had been engaged to one of you two and was away for a couple months. Then, if my letters started getting shorter and I wasn't acting quite right around you. Then, you saw a picture of me kissing a girl and read I had been out to clubs with her, would you *really* think there was an explanation?"

He kept looking between them but they wouldn't answer. "That's what I thought," he said. "I knew things had been going too good. No one tried to kill me last year and there were no major incidents. This summer had been the best. It was just going too good. I'm not that lucky."

"Harry. Don't talk like that. This has nothing to do with you or what you did," Ginny said.

"Listen, you two have classes. This is my free period and I'm going to stay here for a while. Remember, nobody knows about this place so don't tell them," Harry said.

"I'll stay with you Harry," Ginny offered.

"I'd rather be alone please. I'll be fine. It's not like someone died or anything. I've dealt with worse things," he said softly. They both hugged him and left. He spent the rest of his free period thinking about what he could have done wrong. He loved and trusted Cho completely. What happened?

Harry made his way to the final class of the day, which was the Dark Arts class. Harry was the first one there and was waiting until the other students came in. Luckily it was Hermione, Ron and Parvati. Hermione sat down next to him and Ron came over. "Harry. You can do better than her. Don't worry about it. That git Weisman isn't worth squat."

Harry appreciated the comments from Ron even though it didn't help the situation. Then he heard. "Finally, someone saw the real Potter and decided to throw it out." Malfoy was saying. Harry wasn't even angry since that's how he felt as well.

However, Ron and Hermione were both quickly up. "One more word Draco and I'll turn you back into a ferret," Hermione said sounding scarier than Harry had ever heard.

Draco saw the seriousness in her eyes and backed away, but not before saying, "What were you saying about having friends standing by you Potter? Seems like one of them just stabbed you in the back."

"Don't listen to him Harry," Hermione said. "He's just trying to pick a fight."

Harry turned to her and said, "I can't argue with what he said, he's right."

Hermione was about to respond but the teacher came in.

Harry didn't go down to supper that night; instead he snuck into the kitchen to have a private meal, and then quickly back to the common room. Hermione found him there. "We can skip practice tonight if you want Harry."

He stood up quickly and said, "No way. I want to practice. This doesn't change what we have to do." And then he headed to the classroom. Hermione could tell the difference in him right away. Harry was total no-nonsense and she could feel the power radiating from him. He wasn't messing around tonight and quickly had his entire body encased in fire. Hermione was actually intimidated by the things Harry was doing. At one point, she could feel him trying something and then felt everything shake for a few seconds before stopping suddenly.

"Did you do that?" she quickly asked.

Harry looked at her with a guilty look and said, "Must have been an earthquake, it wasn't me." Quickly he went right back to doing fire elemental magic. Hermione was sure Harry had caused that but didn't want to push him.

Back in the common room, everyone was talking about the earthquake but neither Harry nor Hermione said a word. None of the Gryffindors wanted to say anything about Cho to Harry and he was glad for this. Being the oldest group of students had many advantages.

The next day during mail, an owl dropped a note in front of Harry. His friends watched him intently pick it up. He could tell by the writing it was from Cho. Instead of opening it, he pointed his wand at it and mumbled something. Suddenly the note burst into flames and fell as ashes. Ron turned and asked "Was it from her?" Harry nodded. "Well, didn't you want to see what it said?"

Harry kept his head down and said, "It doesn't matter." Then he looked at Ron and said, "Your brothers promised to keep an eye on her. I wonder what happened to that deal?" This came out rather harshly Harry realized after he said it.

"Maybe they didn't know. They have a business to run," Ron shot back.

"Yeah, a business I funded. Where do you think they got the money to get started?" Harry said angrily.

Ron and Ginny looked at each other before Ron said, "They said they found an investor at first."

"They did; me! That's where the Triwizard winnings went," Harry said angrily.

"You can't blame them Harry. They're not her keeper," Ron replied.

"You're right. They only promised to watch her for me. That investment really paid off now didn't it?" Harry said getting up and walking out. He went straight to his room and wrote a note.

Cho

I want to dissolve the P/C Investments partnership. Please transfer ½ of the cash assets back to my vault. I also want my part of the investment in Weasley Wizzing Wheezes company transferred to my vault also.

I am sending this same note to the Goblins so there is a record of the transaction.

Also, if you still have any of the documents from my vault, have them sent to my home.

Harry

He went straight to the owlery and gave the note to Hedwig. The snowy owl looked at Harry longer than normal, almost sensing he was in pain. She affectionately nibbled his ear before flying away.

The rest of the week was a blur to Harry. He only remembered things being very tense between him and Ron. Quidditch practice had been a place for him to forget about everything and just focus on playing. It had gone very well but before he left he heard, "Schoolboy." Kristi was coming over.

"You're not going to let this affect your game next week are you?" she asked.

This really rubbed Harry the wrong way. "No. I can keep my personal and business issues apart. However, I may get a penalty or two trying to take his head off."

The beautiful chaser studied him. "I won't complain about that and will probably be trying the same thing myself." She hesitated and continued, "I'm sorry about this. If you hadn't come to Paris, she wouldn't have met him."

Harry looked at her and said, "If it wouldn't have been him, it may have been someone else. Paris was great, I'm not sorry we came. I don't blame you in the least."

"Are you going to be ok?" she asked.

"Sure. I'm a schoolboy, remember? These things happen all the time. See you at the match," he said before leaving. This was a Hogsmeade weekend so things were quiet when he got back.

He was enjoying the peace until everyone came back in. His friends came over as soon as they were back. "We were hoping you'd come join us after practice," Ginny said.

"Too beat. Maybe next time," Harry said.

Ron came over. "The twins said they didn't really know anything was going on. They thought he was just trying to get her to be his manager or something."

Harry looked at him and said, "I believe them, I was just irritated before."

Ron seemed to accept this better than Harry had thought he would.

Ginny asked softly, "So, what did she say about it?"

"I don't know," Harry answered quickly. "I torched all her notes. It doesn't really matter now does it? You have to trust someone to really love them. C'mon let's go eat."

Everyone except the Slytherins were not saying much to Harry since the article. Even most of the Slytherins were being pretty good about it. Only Malfoy rubbed it in any chance he could. Harry was starting to get more comments about going out from other girls, but he wasn't interested at all in that.

Now that Harry wasn't going to send a pass to Cho, he could take Hermione, Ron and Parvati to the match this week. Ginny was ok with this since Ron didn't get to go last time. It seemed a coincidence that France would be playing Wales this week. Harry was going to have to really work to focus on the snitch. He really didn't blame Weisman for the issue with Cho. Cho was the one who was engaged.

During the introductions, the Wales' team was being treated courteously until their seeker was announced. Hearing Weisman's name, the crowd started with the loudest booing Harry had ever heard. Then, when Harry's name was called, it was like they had just won the cup, everyone was clapping very loudly.

The match started normal enough, but when Harry caught a slight smirk coming from the Wales seeker's mouth, things changed. In Harry's mind, he just wanted to take his frustration out on someone. Suddenly, Harry was breaking up every Wales' scoring run. France was soon up by a lot. Harry had even intentionally not caught the snitch a couple times to run up the score. Weisman was marking him pretty good and finally Harry made a run with Weisman right on his tail. Just before one of the towers, Harry went to make a turn to avoid colliding with the stone column and felt Weisman following. Quickly, Harry turned back and nudged the other seeker so he couldn't turn. Weisman slammed full speed into the stone tower and crashed to the ground. Harry was called for a foul, but he didn't care as the crowd cheered again. Weisman was out with a concussion and broken arm. The match ended soon after when the snitch next appeared.

Harry went directly back to the locker room and showered quickly. Walking out, he hadn't planned on talking to the reporter but saw Ms. Mishmas looking at him, so he went over.

"Quite a different game for you today."

"Maybe. At least the team won." Harry answered.

"I think the crowd approved."

"It sounded like it. I want them to know I really appreciate their support. Without it, there's no way I would have played well today."

"Any regrets about how the match went?"

"None at all." Harry said and ended the interview.

He quickly made his way to his friends. "Man, you were scary today," Ron said.

"I can't say I approve of your techniques today," McGonagall added giving him a scolding look.

"I doubt it will happen again," Harry responded.

"Why not?" Harry heard, and turned to see Kristi coming over. "Only one foul, I say you controlled yourself fine."

"Thanks Kristi. I told you I'd be ok to play," Harry responded.

"So, sometimes I underestimate you. I'll try to keep that from happening again. That was a classic plough," she said hitting fists with him.

Ron just said, "I still can't believe you shower with her each time," and was quickly hit by Parvati. The rest laughed and went back to the school. The next day, Hermione quickly showed Harry the Daily Prophet article.

Don't Mess with Potter

Kevin Weisman, the seeker from Wales probably wishes he had heard this advice before yesterday's match against France. After sneaking around with Harry Potter's fiancé, Weisman

was treated to a thorough thrashing at Potter's hands. The French seeker was toying with the Wales team for the majority of the match before ploughing Weisman into a column, resulting in a concussion and a few broken bones. Potter is known as one of the cleanest players in the game and this reporter hasn't met a single person that holds the foul he received against him. Personally, I recommend Weisman call in sick during any rematch.

Many students came over to congratulate him on the match. Harry didn't feel at all bad about his foul on Weisman, even though he knew it was Cho's fault this had happened, not the other seeker's.

Harry had just burned the second letter of the week from Cho when Hermione said, "You should hear what she has to say."

"Next summer I will. Once I'm out of school, maybe things will be different," Harry replied.

"What about the Holiday wedding?" Ginny asked.

Harry looked stunned. "What wedding? It had already been postponed until next summer. She said it was taking too long to plan, but that's probably not the real reason. I'm not going to marry someone I don't trust. I mean there's only like five or six people in the world I trust and she's not one of them anymore."

"You really need to tell her this," Hermione said seriously.

Harry thought about this for a moment before sighing. "You're right. Why do you always have to be right?"

Harry was summoned to the Headmaster's office after lunch one day. He heard two men talking when he opened the door. He was stunned to see the Minister of Education in the office. "Ah Harry," Dumbledore said. "I'm sure you remember the Minister of Education, Mr. Gallah."

"Good to see you again Harry," Gallah said shaking Harry's hand. "I was wondering if you would mind taking a short walk with me?"

Harry glanced at Dumbledore and caught him nod so he agreed to walk with Gallah. Nothing was said until they got outside. "Is there something you wanted sir?" Harry asked.

"I wanted to see if I could convince you to reconsider your support for the campaign. I really feel I have more to offer as Minister of Magic than Mr. Weasley does," the man said with a smooth confidence.

Harry wasn't in the mood to play any games so he said what he felt, "I don't feel anyone who is so close to Lucius Malfoy has anything to offer the Ministry sir."

Harry could tell this wasn't what Mr. Gallah expected, but the man regained his composure quickly. "Why would you think Mr. Malfoy has anything to do with my campaign?"

"Well, first of all Draco keeps bragging about Lucius financing your campaign. Secondly, I heard you and Lucius talking after I left your office. You were going to search the Unspeakable department. I didn't know that was any of the Minister of Education's concern."

Now, the man wasn't even trying to hide his feelings. "You are really too arrogant for your own good boy. I had a feeling you had warned them about that. I don't know how you were able to do it with the security keeping you out, but that's not important now."

"I don't think you ever found what you raided them for did you? Even after searching their private homes. I wonder what was so important to you and Lucius? Is the press was aware it was you who pushed for that raid?" Harry said, taking out all his aggravation on the Minister.

"You have no idea what you're messing with. Maybe we should have searched your house as well? I think there's a bit more to your relationship with that department than getting special tours. You know, campaigns can get rather unpleasant for people involved. Do you really want your friends going through this?"

"My friends are already at risk from Voldemort. Do you really think that anything you or Malfoy can do concerns me at all? However, if anything can be even remotely tied back to you, I think the press is in a mood to see Mr. Weasley's side of things. They seem to like the underdog story. And, think how it will be when Mr. Weasley beats you. The press will love it. Even if Mr. Weasley doesn't win, it is obviously going to be a very close race. The shame of him pushing you so close will be priceless."

"Boy, you should never have walked out of that forest. You're living on borrowed time right now. And, if you had a clue on what artifact we were looking for, you'd realize how close we are to calling in that debt. Don't think you've won anything," Gallah said before storming off. Harry couldn't quite figure out all that went on.

Harry went back to Dumbledore's office to fill him in on the conversation, but left out the part about the orb. "So, he's really that worried about the election?" Dumbledore said. "We've been hearing rumors as such but this confirms it."

"Won't this just mean he and Malfoy will get dirtier?" Harry asked.

"Probably not. You see if it becomes obvious that Lucius is behind him it will raise a lot of questions. You know Lucius isn't in the best of standings with most of the ministry. And, Mr. Gallah is probably worried about his position as Minister of Education if he does lose the election." Dumbledore looked at Harry for a moment. "I understand you've been making considerable progress on your presentation with Miss Granger."

"I hope so sir. Hermione has really been helping me."

"Ah yes. Quite fortunate to have such a smart witch as your best friend. Other teachers have commented on how much progress you've made since last year as well. I'm glad to see you becoming so comfortable with your gifts."

"Thank you sir. I want to learn as much as I can to help the next time Voldemort comes for me," Harry said without emotion.

"Of course. However, remember that you do not have to face him alone. Even if you want to protect your friends, there are always things they can do to help without being face to face with him. Don't forget that."

This weekend was another Hogsmeade weekend but Harry didn't want to go. "C'mon Harry you missed last time," Ginny pleaded.

"I really need to practice. You go have fun," Harry responded.

"We'll stun you and drag you there if we have to," said Ron trying to fake a threat.

They were all picking on him so he relented. "Fine, I'll go. Don't blame me if I'm not good company"

Actually, Harry found it good to go. He was enjoying hanging out with his friends. The weather was great and they ended up at Three Broomsticks enjoying a few butterbeers. They were talking about all kinds of things, and especially how well Mr. Weasley's campaign was going. Suddenly Harry noticed things get quiet. Harry looked at Ron who kind of nodded for Harry to turn around. Cho had just come up behind Harry. "Um. Harry, can we talk?" she asked quietly.

All of his friends glared at Cho. Ginny quickly grabbed his arm and said, "You don't have to go Harry."

Harry smiled at Ginny and said, "Yeah, I do." Harry got up and followed Cho outside, and the two started walking down the street.

Finally Cho said, "Why didn't you respond to my owls?"

"I didn't read any of the notes, I torched them," Harry said honestly.

This obviously stunned Cho. "Do you hate me that much?"

Harry looked at her and asked, "Why did you come here Cho?"

"I want to explain, and to apologize. I don't know why I was with him. I just missed you, missed going out. Nothing happened. Nothing other than what was in the paper," she said.

"You actually went to Paris to see him. Then you're snogging him in public here. And yet you say nothing happened," Harry said quite harshly concentrating hard to control his emotions.

"Nothing happened other than a few kisses."

Harry looked at her and said, "And, why would I believe that?"

"Because I swear it's the truth. I'm so sorry," she said coming to hug him but he backed away.

"I may believe that nothing else happened, but it really doesn't matter. I trusted you Cho. I don't trust many people but I trusted you with everything," Harry said.

"Harry please. We can fix this. Tell me what to do. Please. The twins are barely talking to me and Kristi has fired me as her manager. Everything's falling apart," Cho said crying.

"I didn't tell any of them to do that. I've never said a bad word about you to any of them," Harry quickly added.

"I know. Kristi made it clear it was her choice. The twins feel awful and blame me." She hesitated before saying, "We can fix this. There's time before the wedding, I can make it up to you."

"What wedding Cho? As far as I'm concerned, once you went out with him without the ring we're not engaged anymore."

Cho was crying openly now. "Don't do this Harry. I said I was sorry. It won't ever happen again. Don't you love me anymore?"

Harry was starting to tear up now. "I do love you Cho, I just don't trust you. I think trust is more important. We're back to square one. No, we're worse than square one. Once I'm out of school, maybe things can change but not until then."

"Don't say that Harry. Please. You don't know how upset my parents will be."

Harry was nearly ready to give in and then flashed back to the picture of her kissing the other man. What made him hurt more than anything was that she wasn't wearing the engagement ring. "You knew what you were doing Cho. You took off the ring before meeting with him. I'll never, *never* get that picture out of my head. I never had any doubts you were the perfect woman for me, and never considered anyone else. You obviously didn't feel that way about me. And, you made me look like a fool to everyone."

"I love you Harry, I promise I do," she pleaded.

"You know the problem with that Cho. From now on, when any woman tells me that, I'm going to flash to the picture of you kissing Weisman. How can I ever believe that again?" Harry waited and then said, "How did it end with you two?"

"What do you mean?" Cho asked.

"With Weisman. How did it end?"

"After the article, I was going to meet him to end it but he sent an owl saying he never wanted to see me again."

"This just keeps getting better," Harry said softly. "You're back talking to me because he dumped you. You must think I'm a total git."

"I was on my way to end it. I knew I had made a mistake." Cho was crying openly now. Harry couldn't help but to hug her. He did still love her and it tore him up to see her cry. It did feel good holding her but he wasn't about to forget what she had done. "I promise I'll make this up to you. We'll work it out over the Holidays. That will give us a couple weeks together."

Harry quickly stated, "I don't think that's wise. I can't just pick back up. We can try to meet somewhere over the Holidays, but that's it."

"Please. I want to be with you all the time. I want to wake up with you," Cho said hugging him.

"You don't know how much I wanted that too, but I can't get that picture out of my mind. If this hadn't happened, we would be together the entire time. It's only a couple days or nothing," Harry said firmly.

"Fine, if that's what you want. We can fix this, I know we can."

Again, Harry was about to totally give in and then the reality of the picture hit him. He pushed back from her and said, "We're just friends as of now. I don't trust you to be faithful so you can do whatever you want. If we both still want to give it a try next summer, then it was meant to be. I can't handle sitting around here wondering if you're cheating on me."

"I promise I wouldn't do that again. I don't want anybody else." She hesitated and then said, "You want to date someone else don't you?"

"I'm not the one who caused this Cho. I would have waited for you forever. Not once did I even think about kissing another girl. I always thought you were perfect. Why'd you have to do this?"

Cho hugged him tightly again and Harry said, "I should get back to the school. I'm glad you came; this had to be talked about. I was just trying to pretend it didn't happen."

"I'll write all the time if you'll start reading my notes."

"I will. I should have read them all along. Goodbye Cho," Harry said and walked back towards the castle. He went straight back to the common room and sat in the corner thinking. He did love Cho and really wanted to be with her but couldn't bring himself to tell her that. She had lied to him. She hadn't really done anything serious with Weisman and he could have forgiven a common weakness with the kiss. But the fact is she removed the engagement ring to be with him. Harry barely noticed his friends come back in.

"So, she convinced you to give her another chance, right?" Ginny asked.

"Ginny! That's none of our business," Hermione said, but was looking at Harry like she wanted to know.

"As far as I'm concerned it is your business. You guys are my best friends. Cho said she was sorry and it wouldn't happen again. She also said that Kristi fired her and the twins are barely speaking to her. She asked about the summer wedding, but I said there wouldn't be any. I told her were back to being friends and she could do whatever she wants. She wanted to spend all of the holiday break with me but I only said I'd meet her a couple times."

This shocked them all. "Really? We thought you'd cave in and take her back," Ron admitted with a guilty look.

"If it would have just been the kiss, I would have. She took off the engagement ring and went to Paris to go be with him. That I can't forgive. I can't trust her anymore. A mistake is one thing, but this was intentional."

"So, now you're free to ask anyone to the ball," Ron said trying to lighten the mood.

"True, but I've already asked someone and I'm comfortable with my choice," Harry stated.

"Are you going to start dating other girls now?" Ron asked expectantly.

Hermione hit him. "What?" He replied.

"I don't know. You know I kind of had a crush on Cho since our third year and just thought she was perfect. Now it's not the same. I mean I have this picture of my mom and dad and always see them as perfect for each other and never having any problems. I don't really know if that's true or not but I thought that would be how Cho and I were. This has just kind of burst my bubble about the perfect relationship. Nobody's perfect and I just now figured that out. I'm not going to go searching for someone to go out with but if something happens, I'm not going to stop it. If neither Cho nor I are seeing other people by next summer, maybe it will work out with us. If not, then I was just a big git for asking her to marry me while I was so young."

"Hermione and I wouldn't have cheated on you Harry," Ginny said confidently getting a stare from Hermione.

"I know that. You know, I think I was wrong. I said nobody's perfect but I'd say as far as girls go, you two are as close as it gets," Harry said and no one questioned he was being honest.

Hermione kind of blushed but said, "You say that now but I'm still dragging you off to practice. C'mon let's go."

Harry was leaving Quidditch practice a couple weeks before the break when he heard. "Big plans for the holiday schoolboy?"

"Hey Kristi. Haven't decided yet. Probably go to Ron's house for Christmas but that's it. How about you?"

"Nothing here. I expected you and your girlfriend to be holed up somewhere."

"Not likely. That's kind of over for now. I'm concentrating on being a schoolboy," Harry replied.

"Ok, then you have no excuse. Come to Paris for a couple days. No strings."

Harry looked at her and said, "I don't know."

She quickly responded, "It would be good to get some new scenery. How about right after Christmas?"

Harry thought about it and said, "You know, that sounds like a great idea. Thanks Kristi, I'm really looking forward to this." Harry hesitated and said, "You didn't fire Cho just because of me did you?"

She looked at him squarely and said, "Nope. I hired her because you trusted her and she screwed you. That means I don't trust her anymore. Business, nothing more. Are you keeping her?"

"I hadn't thought about it. We were partners in an investment company and I dissolved that. I need to think about the manager part. I should get back," Harry said and then left.

When the sign up sheets came for the holiday break, Ron asked Harry if he would come to the Burrow.

"I don't know Ron. I mean Percy would just as soon kill me and now things with the twins aren't too great. Maybe this isn't the best time," Harry replied.

"Mum thought you might say something like that. She basically said I'm allowed to do anything, including stunning you to get you there. Percy won't be there since he's furious at dad for running against his boss. The twins understand how you feel about them and are beating themselves up about it. You have to come."

"As long as you promise me no one will mention Cho. Nothing about her. I'll come over Christmas morning."

"No problem. I'm having mum set the rules. It'll be good, you'll see," Ron said cheerfully.

"You're not going to sit around by yourself the rest of the time are you?" Ginny asked.

"He'll break down and spend the whole time with Cho," Ron joked.

"Oh no I won't. Two days, tops," he said and turned to Hermione. "And, no nights!"

That night at practice Hermione asked, "Harry, do you want to come to my parent's house for New Years? They're having a party and would really like to meet you."

"I don't want to be any bother Hermione; I'd be fine at home."

"No, I really want you to," she said a bit quicker than she intended. "You can stay a few days. C'mon, we'll have fun," she pleaded.

"Thanks Hermione, that sounds like fun"

"What are you doing the rest of the time? Big plans with Sirius?" she asked.

"I'm going to go to Paris for a couple days. Kristi said it would do good to get a change of scenery."

"You're not wasting any time finding a new girlfriend," Hermione said kind of coolly.

"It's not like that! She's like you and feeling sorry for me. It annoys me you do that, but I have to admit, I like the results sometimes." Harry was quiet and then added. "I'm through with serious relationships. Nothing good comes from them."

Hermione thought that Harry was right in that Kristi probably was like Hermione. He just didn't know that she wanted something more than friendship. Hermione really wanted to let him know this before he found another girlfriend or went back to Cho, but she wouldn't do anything to risk their friendship.

Harry had been receiving almost daily owls from Cho. If he could just put the picture of what happened out of his mind, he would be very happy. She had told him to invite anyone he

wanted to the ball but he replied that he had already asked someone. He wouldn't tell her who but did say he asked while they were still together.

Harry had been told to meet Mrs. Figg after classes the day before the ball to demonstrate something he'd learned. He grabbed his invisibility cloak to help with a demonstration and went to her office and she showed him in. "I've asked you here to see if you've been using your free period wisely. I want to show me what you've learned during this time. It can't be anything you learned in Auror training or in another class."

Chapter 13

Harry quickly cast the unrecognizable spell on himself. "Good. I hope that's not all," she said not sounding very impressed.

Harry handed her the invisibility cloak and turned around. "Put something under the cloak. I've learned to see through them." Harry turned back around and mumbled a spell then quickly said, "It's a nice quill as well as your wand."

"Very good Harry. Do you know that mastering that spell is the first step to learning to become invisible?" she asked.

Harry chuckled as he said, "I found that out *AFTER* I learned to be invisible. I kept jumping around the book so I missed this spell at first."

"You've learned to be invisible as well?" she asked and Harry quickly became invisible and moved something around on her desk before reappearing.

"That's very advanced Harry. I think Dumbledore is the only one in the school that has accomplished it. Maybe you should start reading the books in the order they're written. It may make things easier for you. I don't suppose the cloak is important to you anymore."

"Oh yes it is. I have to go by myself without it," he said this before catching himself. "Um I mean not that we...I ever do anything like that."

"Of course you wouldn't. You have done very well staying out of trouble again this year," Professor Figg said but still gave him a knowing look.

"It's all the studying Hermione is making me do. She's a slave driver," Harry joked.

"That may be but I'd say it's paying off. Is there anything else you'd care to demonstrate?"

Harry thought. "I have tried learning a couple other things, but I'd rather not demonstrate on you. I don't think they're very pleasant."

"Don't be silly Harry. I am an Auror after all. Show me one. I give you full permission," she said confidently.

Harry didn't feel comfortable but he had wanted to see if he could really do this spell. He concentrated on her and without waving his wand mumbled the spell to force her mind to see her deepest fears. Suddenly Mrs. Figg's eyes got a terrified look and she stumbled back into the bookcases. Harry quickly released the spell and went to her. It took her a couple minutes to regain her composure. "I'm sorry Professor. Are you alright?" Harry asked concerned.

She was just staring at him. "Yes, Yes, I'm fine. Where did you learn that Harry?" she demanded.

"In a book I got over the summer. I should have picked something different to demonstrate, I just really wanted to know if it would work. I'm sorry."

"No, it's fine. I told you to do it. Now, this book. Where did you get it?"

Harry hesitated. "Um... Knockturn Alley," he said softly.

"When were you in Knockturn Alley? It's not safe there," she demanded again.

"I wasn't alone and we had our hoods pulled up on our cloaks. Once I saw we were going to be taught Dark Arts, I wanted to see what else was out there. That's where I got the book on becoming invisible as well."

"I can't say I approve, but we are being forced to teach some Dark Arts here so I can't complain. How do you intend to use these new spells?"

"I don't intend to, but if I need to I will. I don't go around tormenting people, even though the thought of doing it to Malfoy is almost too much to bear." He smiled.

The day of the Holiday Ball had arrived and all the girls were going crazy. They were talking all the time and running around. Harry and Ron just sat at the back of the common room laughing at them all. "What the heck gets into them?"

The two friends played a few games of chess and kept laughing at the chaos going on around them. With about thirty minutes left before the ball started Harry and Ron decided to go up and get ready. They were still back down before any of the girls were ready. Parvati was one of the first girls down and Ron could barely speak. "Um...you...nice," he muttered before she gave him a long kiss.

"Meet you down there Harry." He heard as Ron stepped out the portal. Ginny was the next one of his friends down. She looked great as well. Harry couldn't believe the changes in her over the past couple years. Colin was a very lucky person to be taking her. Harry was still remembering Ginny from previous years when he heard Neville say something. Turning he saw Hermione come down. She looked simply amazing. Harry just followed her down the stairs with his eyes. He was silently wishing it was him who would be taking Hermione to the ball. When she reached Neville, Harry said, "Neville. I think you're going to be the luckiest bloke at the ball."

Hermione blushed and said, "We'll see you down there Harry. Go pick up your mystery girl."

Harry followed them out and headed towards the girls bathroom. He made sure no one was around and yelled in. "Myrtle. It's Harry, are you ready?" He was about to yell again when she floated out. "Hello Harry. Sorry I'm late."

Harry was stunned. Myrtle actually looked great. You know, for a ghost. She had on a flowing dress and her hair was pulled up. She wasn't even wearing her glasses. "Myrtle. You look great! I didn't know..."

Myrtle chuckled. "No one's given me a reason to put much effort into it before." She held out her semi-transparent hand and Harry took it softly. Good thing since it felt almost like an over ripe peach. He tried not to flinch but Myrtle didn't mind. "That's the best I can do Harry."

"It'll be fine Myrtle. You know that after everybody sees you tonight, you may not be able to keep people out of your bathroom."

The corridor leading to the Great Hall was quiet since all of the other students had already gone in. Harry had been nervous about taking Myrtle. He originally asked her mainly to keep Cho happy. But, since Myrtle seemed so happy and was actually looking nice, he felt better about his choice. Harry opened the door for her and tried to walk along the side to where he knew his friends would be. The room was decorated magnificently again this year and Harry could already see many students from Beauxbatons on the dance floor. He could tell by all the mumbles that they had been spotted. He turned to his date. "Don't let anything they say bother you Myrtle, I'm glad you came with me."

"Oh, I won't Harry. I'm sure I've heard worse before," the ghost said still smiling.

They got to the table where Hermione and her date Neville had saved them some seats. All of his friends and their dates were just staring awe-struck. Ron was the first to say something. "Do you have some problem with brining living women to the ball?" Hermione and Ginny both hit Ron but surprisingly Myrtle just laughed.

Ginny was the first to ask, "So aren't you going to introduce us to your date?"

Harry quickly regained his manners and said, "I thought you all knew her already. Everybody, this is Myrtle. Myrtle, I imagine you know most everybody."

"That's Moaning Myrtle?" Ron exclaimed which resulted in Myrtle giving him a frightening look.

Parvati quickly saved Ron by saying how nice Myrtle looked. Harry noticed Myrtle seemed to enjoy talking to the other girls. Hermione leaned into him, "Why did you bring a ghost?"

"I was still seeing Cho when I asked her, remember. I didn't think she would get jealous of me bringing Myrtle." Harry shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"I suppose not," Hermione replied shaking her head.

The reason the other girls took to liking Myrtle so quickly was that the ghost knew so much gossip about other girls at the dance. Harry had been getting teased about bringing her non-stop since he sat down. It really wasn't bothering him much, Myrtle was a better date than he expected. He was actually about ready to interrupt her conversation with Ginny and Parvati when he heard.

"'Arry! There you are." Fleur had come up behind him. "I was 'oping your wouldn't miss it."

Harry stood up to greet her. "Hi Fleur. I couldn't miss the ball after all the lessons you gave me. I've been looking forward to it."

"Where's your date? Would she mind me stealing you for a couple dances?"

"Haven't you ever met Myrtle? Fleur, this is Myrtle, she's my date tonight." Harry presented the ghost to Fleur.

"Oh! 'Ello Myrtle. I wouldn't have recognized you. You're 'Arry's date this evening?" Fleur said with a questioning look to Harry.

"Oh yes! Isn't it grand? I promised Harry I wouldn't do anything to make Cho jealous," Myrtle said laughing

Harry asked Myrtle if he could dance with Fleur and quickly made his way to the dance floor with her.

"What are you doing bringing a ghost? After what Cho did, you should have brought the best looking girl in school," Fleur said

"I asked Myrtle before I found out about Cho. I didn't know if you heard about Cho or not."

"Of course I heard. Gabrielle was quite happy about it. How are you?" she asked with a concerned look.

"I'll be ok. It's my own fault. I just rushed into things,"

Harry said while really enjoying his dance with Fleur. "How about you, no serious beaux yet?"

"Me? Oh no. It will take a special man to handle a veela 'Arry!" she said smiling.

"How are things now with you and Cho?" the beautiful woman asked with genuine concern.

"We're not engaged or anything. I'm going to meet her during the Holiday, but the more I think about what she did, the less I even want to meet her. It's not the same."

Fleur was silent for a while and they were dancing more. "I don't think she would be safe near any of the Delacouer women anymore. Gabrielle may be small but she's learning more spells every day." The dance was over and while walking back, Fleur whispered, "If you ever need to talk or anything, I'll always be around."

"Thanks Fleur, that means a lot," Harry said before returning to Myrtle. "Well Myrtle, are you ready to give this a try?" Harry said extending his hand. Myrtle took it and giggled at Harry's reaction to her squishy hand.

After a couple minutes, Harry and Myrtle figured out just the right amount of contact between their hands. She was an easy partner to dance with since she just floated around. Harry could tell the other students were backing away from them but he didn't care at all. Harry was just enjoying looking around when he felt someone run into him. Harry lost his balance and ended up in a heap on the floor with Pansy Parkinson on top of him.

"Potter. Let go of my date." Harry heard Malfoy yell and pull Pansy up. "I didn't think you could stoop any lower than your mudblood girl Potter but I was wrong. You're all the way down to bringing a ghost who haunts a bathroom."

"Sod off Malfoy. Myrtle's my friend and she doesn't just stay in the bathroom," Harry spat back getting up off the floor by himself.

"Are you too scared to try another living girl since Cho dumped you? You were way out of your league with her Potter," Malfoy smirked.

Harry was about to respond when Myrtle came directly in front of Malfoy. "One more word Draco and you won't have another peaceful night's sleep."

Harry saw Pansy pulling Draco away, but not before Malfoy said, "Always having some other pitiful creature fight your battles aren't you?"

"Don't worry about him Myrtle. It's just me he hates," Harry said rubbing his head.

"I won't do anything to him *tonight*," she said with a giggle. "Are you and Cho really broken up?" Harry nodded. "So why didn't you bring another girl tonight?"

"I asked you Myrtle. You're who I wanted to bring," Harry said and tried to twirl her around. They went back to the table and Myrtle seemed to be in a very good mood. She just sat there without saying anything while everyone else ate, but was back talkative afterwards.

Harry shifted down and asked Neville if he could have the next dance with Hermione. Once Neville agreed, Harry went to the other side of Hermione and whispered, "So, do you want to start working on you being remembered here?" Hermione just gave him a confused look but Harry whispered his plan to her. Her eyes got really big and then a grin came to her face.

"Do you think we can do it? You know we'll get into trouble," she said sounding nervous.

"I know we can do it and I don't care what the teachers think. Remember, this is about making a lasting impression. If we do it right, no one would get hurt and they'll be talking about it for a long time," Harry whispered back.

"Oh Harry, I don't know."

"Hermione, c'mon. You know that even if we get into trouble, McGonagall will love it. None of the other houses could pull this off."

Hermione finally agreed and the couple went to the dance floor just as the next song was beginning. They both got their wands out without anyone noticing but knew that once they started to cast spells, they needed to hurry before being stopped by a teacher. Hermione went first and was able to get most of the way through her spell before any of the students noticed what she was doing. Suddenly dark clouds began forming inside the Great Hall distracted all of the students. Everyone began looking up and there was a lot of mumbling.

Harry started his spell next and just before he finished, he saw the rain start to fall from Hermione's clouds but was able to finish his spell before any hit the ground. The lanterns around the Great Hall started flickering much brighter and suddenly hundreds of sparks of fire were shooting from the lanterns to hit the falling raindrops. With the clouds, the sky was dark and it was like watching a meteor shower with all the small fireballs flying across the sky. Each time one connected with a raindrop, there was a small sparkle and a hiss. The students seemed to be in awe and even Hermione was staring up with her mouth wide open in amazement. Harry smiled when he saw her and said, "Now, may I have this dance Ms. Granger?"

Hermione was obviously blushing but took Harry's hand and they began to dance. Everyone else was just standing around watching the sky. "I can't believe we just did that," she said. "I never thought it would look that amazing."

Harry smiled. "I told you we could do it. They'll be talking about this for years." It was almost the end of the song when most other students started to dance. Hermione was as happy as she had ever remembered being. She felt so safe and content in Harry's arms. He always made her feel confident and like she could do anything. Other students were trying to talk to them during the dance but they ignored every attempt to interrupt the dance. After the song, they looked into each other's eyes. Hermione always loved the brightness of Harry's green eyes.

"Should we leave it for the rest of the dance?" she asked.

"No way! This was for our song, not for them," Harry said firmly. They both took out their wands and ended the spells much to the disappointment of the other students. The couple pushed their way back to the table where the rest of their friends were still in shock.

"That was brilliant. What the hell was it?" Ron exclaimed.

Hermione was beaming, but Harry just said, "Part of that special project we're working on."

Harry and Hermione were in the middle of being congratulated by everyone when they heard. "Potter, Ms. Granger." Turning they saw Professor Snape with a very angry look on his face. "As Head Girl, I'm sure you were aware that there was to be no magic during the ball."

Hermione lost all the beaming in her face. "Yes, Professor I was aware of that."

Before Snape could say another word, Harry spoke up. "It was my fault Professor. I talked her into helping with that."

"I have no doubt about that Mr. Potter. However I would have expected Ms. Granger to take her duties as Head Girl more seriously. You will both be receiving detention and Mr. Potter, you will be receiving two," the Potions professor said before leaving.

Hermione suddenly became upset. "I shouldn't have done that. I knew better. What was I thinking?"

Harry grabbed her shoulders and said, "Hermione, think about what he did. He gave us detention but didn't take house points. He's either not really upset or McGonagall wouldn't let him take points. She can't be upset at all or we would have lost points."

Glancing at the teacher's table, they could see Professor McGonagall getting questioned by many of the other teachers and had a very satisfied look on her face. Seeing this made Hermione feel much better. The rest of the ball passed quickly. There were almost non-stop questions about how Harry and Hermione had made that magic happen. Harry was getting tired of answering the questions but it seemed Hermione was enjoying the attention.

The group of Gryffindors walked out of the Hall when they heard Professor Dumbledore say, "Ms. Granger, Harry a word please."

They broke away from the group who waited on them. "That was an impressive show you two put on. However I trust there will be no more public displays until your presentation."

Hermione quickly said, "No Professor. We won't do it again outside of our practice."

Dumbledore looked at Harry who quickly said, "I agree sir, we won't do anything like that again."

"Good. The staff had already been placing bets on if you would be successful in your presentation or not. The losers should be paying up now." Dumbledore grinned and then focused on Harry. "Harry, I can't remember Myrtle looking so happy. I'm glad you convinced her to come out. Well I must get back to collect my winnings. Goodnight."

They both said goodnight and went back to the group. Harry broke off and took Myrtle back to her bathroom before joining some of the others in the common room. Ron and Parvati, and a few of the other real couples quickly found quiet spots for themselves. Harry sat at the end of one of the couches listening to everyone talk about the ball. He was about to head up to bed when Hermione plopped down next to him. "Done with Neville already?" Harry asked.

Hermione laughed and said, "Oh yeah. He was nice to ask me to go with him." She looked at Harry and smiled, "Wasn't that great! I can't believe we did that. Can you believe Dumbledore bet on us?"

"I can't believe you're happy about getting detention. Of course Dumbledore bet on us. You're probably the smartest witch ever here," Harry said.

"It's not the first time I've had detention you know. At least no points were taken," she said happily. She wrapped her arm around his and said, "I'm so glad you talked me into that."

Harry was in the mood to tease her so he smiled slyly at her and said, "Exactly how glad are you? I've been sleeping alone for almost four months now."

She quickly blushed and slapped his arm. "Harry! With those kinds of comments, it will be a lot longer than four months before you convince anyone to help you out there."

"But you told me at the start of term that there were plenty of girls who could help me out. Surely you can suggest one of them." Harry tried to look serious.

"Harry I know you. You're not serious. You wouldn't do that."

"You're right. But, I did say sleep, not *dance*," he laughed.

"I'll tell you what. Since tonight was so fantastic, I'll sleep with you," she said seriously.

Now Harry blushed. "Hermione, I was kidding. You can't do that."

"Get your mind out of the gutter. Let's go up and change into normal clothes and get our books. Then we can read for a while and fall asleep on the couch. But, if you try anything, I've been learning some new hexes I'd like to try out."

They both changed quickly and came back down. They got on either end of the couch with their legs stretched out, Hermione's on top of Harry's. After a couple of awkward and embarrassing minutes, they both were reading their elemental magic books when Ginny and Colin came back in. "Where have you two been?" Hermione asked, trying to sound motherly.

Colin tried to mutter a response but Ginny spoke up. "Just having a walk. We're not that late, you wouldn't take points off for a few minutes." Colin came over and kissed Ginny on the cheek before running up to his dorm. Ginny came over near the couch and sat on the floor. "That was really amazing tonight. You two make a great team."

"I try to keep telling her that we could do anything but she doesn't seem to believe it. She must keep thinking I'll let her down or something," Harry joked.

"I think you can do anything and it's me I'm worried about. You're picking all this stuff up too easily. I keep struggling with it," Hermione responded.

"Ginny knows the truth. She's seen you have to explain things to me before I get it," Harry said.

Just then Ron and Parvati came in, both with their nice clothes very wrinkled. Now it was Ginny's turn. "Where have you two been? Maybe mum would like to know how late you've been out and the state of your clothes."

Ron blushed but Parvati didn't seem to mind. They both came over to one of the smaller couches to talk for a while.

"Ron, I had the map out a while ago and it sure didn't seem like there was much space between your two dots. Why do you think that was?" Harry joked.

"You did? I don't know, maybe we were just walking close to each other." His face going bright red.

"Nope, the dots weren't moving. At least not horizontally," Harry said and everyone laughed.

Ginny went up to bed and was quickly followed by Ron and Parvati. Harry and Hermione told them they were going to read a bit more but as soon as they were gone, Hermione turned around and laid back into Harry. "I'll let you out of the deal Hermione, you don't have to sleep with me."

"That's ok Harry. If I say I'm going to sleep with someone, then by gosh I'm going to sleep with them," she giggled. They both quickly fell asleep.

The next morning, Ginny was the first one down and was shocked to see her two friends still on the couch. Harry's head was at one end and Hermione's was at the other but they were both flat down on the couch asleep. She thought for a moment about waking the others but decided to be nice to them. Walking over near the couch she softly shook Hermione awake but held her hand over her mouth so she wouldn't make a sound. Once Hermione was aware of what was going on around her, Ginny went to the other end and whispered. "C'mon love its time to get up."

Harry smiled in his sleep and said, "Ah 'Mione, let's stay in bed today." Hermione and Ginny both gasped at this, which woke Harry up. "What? Is everything ok?"

Hermione was blushing but Ginny started laughing and said, "Oh, everything's great, isn't it Hermione?"

Hermione and Harry quickly sat up and decided to get cleaned up and ready to go home for the holiday. Hermione was silently wondering what Harry had been dreaming about. She hoped his dreams were as nice as the ones she had been having. She had felt herself getting closer to Harry all year but kept flashing back to her vision of his future. She kept telling herself that it might not mean anything. She wasn't going to let that worry stop her from getting closer to Harry. If he had a worry about his future, he would try to push her away to keep her from being hurt, but she wanted to know him as well as she could, no matter what.

The group got a carriage down to Hogsmeade so that they could catch a train. Harry didn't take much home so he was just going to Apparate. "I can't wait until we learn to Apparate.," Ginny said.

"You'll love it," Harry said. "It's so much better than the floo."

"Oh and it's so easy just to pop over to say Paris isn't it Harry?" Hermione said.

"Paris? Why would Harry want to go to Paris?" Ginny asked.

"Kristi! You're going to see Kristi aren't you?" Ron asked.

"I'm not going to see *her*, she just felt sorry for me being alone and invited me over for a couple days. That's it, no big deal," Harry stated.

"No big deal? You're not with Cho anymore and this is a gorgeous woman you see naked on a regular basis. I say that's a big deal," Ron exclaimed.

"It's not going to be anything like that. Maybe if you could convince Ginny to get naked I'd spend more time at your house," Harry joked before being hit by all three of them.

The train pulled away and Harry apparated home. Sirius and Kelly were there waiting for him. "Hey you two," Harry said giving Sirius a hug.

"Good to see you Harry," Sirius said.

Kelly came and hugged him and said, "Good to see you again Harry."

They spent a couple hours catching up. Harry was enjoying hearing that Sirius and Kelly had been enjoying themselves. Sirius was the one person Harry wanted to have a good life. "We heard about your little demonstration during the Holiday Ball," Sirius said trying to sound stern.

"What? It's not fair that you're friends with most of the teachers. I can't get away with anything," Harry groaned.

Sirius laughed. "I received a few owls the next day. They all wondered how and why you were learned to do it. I really think you made McGonagall's day with that stunt. All of the other head's of houses are envious that her students could do something like that."

Harry laughed. "Hermione was worried we were really in trouble when Snape came over after we stopped the spell. Once we realized he only gave us detention we knew that we weren't in any real trouble."

"That git gave you two detention? He's such a low-life," Sirius started.

"He gave two detentions to me and one to Hermione since I confessed it was my idea. It's no big deal; I haven't had detention in a long time."

"Um Harry. How would you feel if Kelly and I went to see some old friends over the holidays? Would you mind too much if I'm not around?" Sirius asked, looking worried.

"Not at all. I think that's great. It works out pretty good since I'm going to Ron's for Christmas and then to Paris for a couple days and then to Hermione's for a few days."

"Well aren't you just Mr. Popular," Kelly joked.

"Nah, they all feel sorry for me. They don't want to risk me being alone. I may as well play it for all I can."

"Let me take you two out to supper for Christmas Eve before you leave," Harry offered.

"You don't have to do that Harry," Sirius answered.

"C'mon I want to. I don't feel like sitting around here much," Harry said and Sirius could tell something was up.

"Fine, you can take us out," Sirius hesitated. "What's up with Cho?" Seeing the look on Harry's face, he added, "You don't have to tell me if you don't want to."

Harry looked sad. "Really, I think it's over. I'm going to meet her tomorrow in Diagon Alley and we're going to talk more, but it's just not the same anymore."

"I'm sorry Harry. I wish she hadn't done that. Actually, I don't want to be around if she comes over. I doubt I'd be very polite to her," Sirius said before Kelly added.

"I've seen him when he was mad at one of Remus' girlfriends who did something bad. It's not a pretty picture."

"Yeah, it hurt a bunch. I'm lucky I have good friends. Who knows, maybe it can still work out but it won't ever be the same."

"Is this trip to Paris part of your plan to get over Cho?" Sirius asked.

"Why? Are you taking someone?" Kelly asked.

"The chaser from the Quidditch team invited me, so I'll be with her. And no, it's not my plan to get over Cho. Kristi is just being nice. She said no strings attached," Harry stated.

Both Sirius and Kelly chuckled. "No strings attached? That means she's going to try to get you flat on your back before you can say Quidditch," Sirius said.

"I don't see that happening. But, that reminds me. Sirius, would you be my Quidditch manager? Cho did good because she's so pretty. I'm counting on the fact that everyone knows

you were in Azkaban for twelve years to give you an edge in negotiating my contract. Same deal, 25% of the contract."

"I don't know Harry. Surely you can find a professional manager. I don't think I could do as well as a professional. Maybe Kelly could, she's great with business."

"C'mon Sirius. I know you can do it. Cho did great and it only took her a month or so. I need someone I can trust. If you want to split the money with Kelly and have her help, that's fine with me. C'mon it should be easy money."

"I'll tell you what. If you're not back with Cho by the time the contract comes around, I'll do it and I'll beg Kelly to help me so I don't mess up."

"So, what's been happening with Voldemort?" Harry said causing the couple to seem a bit shocked.

"Now that was a quick change of subjects. There's no news from him, but there have been more Death Eater attacks. They don't seem that coordinated. Our intelligence still says that Voldemort hasn't fully recovered from the time you two dueled in the forest."

"That's been a long time Sirius, there must be something else. I mean I'm totally fine now."

"True, but we don't know how bad he was hurt. We've also heard that there was an Egyptian man trying to help him recover but may have been stealing some of his powers. This man was rumored to have an ancient relic that has the power to absorb the power of dark wizards."

"Why couldn't we have used this thing before and just absorbed all of his power?" Harry asked.

"Well it's not that simple. We could have taken his power, but then the relic would still contain all that evil. It's supposedly been used before. If a wizard can find out how to harness all of that dark magic, they could potentially become much more dangerous than Voldemort ever was. Both sides are trying to find the relic. The Dark Side wants to give it to Voldemort so he can be stronger and our side wants to hide it."

"Why hide it? Why not destroy it?" Harry asked.

"It can't be destroyed by magic and there hasn't been any muggle means to destroy it either. At least that's what the minimal information we've found on the thing say."

"Ok, why can't we at least go and kill Voldemort why he's weak?"

"If we could find him, that's what we would do."

"Ok, so how's the campaign going?" Harry asked.

Sirius and Kelly both perked up. "Very well. I really think Arthur is going to win. Gallah hasn't turned to the dirty tricks we all expected. Probably because most people like Arthur and everybody except Death Eaters like you. The press is totally on our side."

"When's the final election?"

"The end of January. There have been rumors that Gallah may withdraw instead of risking defeat. If he drops out with some good story, he can retain the Minister of Education spot with many of his followers still intact. If he loses to Arthur, there's a good bet he would get forced out of his current position."

The next evening, Harry, Sirius and Kelly were ready to go to the restaurant. Harry had told them all to dress nicely but wouldn't say where they were going. They were all able to Apparate. at the same time and follow Harry to the restaurant. They arrived to find a long line of people since it was the holiday and this was a very popular place. Harry led them around the line of people, ignoring all the screams for autographs and pictures. He had actually made a reservation this time so they didn't need to push people back to get to a table. Harry had gotten used to getting right in and getting good tables but both Sirius and Kelly were still surprised at how Harry got treated in public. The female staff always flirted with him and laughed whenever he said anything remotely funny. After getting seated and getting drinks, both Sirius and Kelly were laughing at him. "What?" Harry asked.

"You're really don't even notice how differently they treat you than normal people, do you?" Sirius asked.

"Hey, I had a reservation. I followed the rules," Harry stated trying to convince the other two that he did everything correctly.

"I know. But you do know that it wouldn't matter. You could just walk in anytime and they'd find a place. You get these great tables and all the girls flirt with you."

"They don't flirt with me. They're just being nice. Quit making fun of me or I'll hex you both, right here in public," Harry snapped back.

"We're not making fun of you Harry," Kelly said. "I'm amazed you act so normal through it. Most people would be letting it go to their head and pushing for everything they could get."

Chapter 14

Neither Kelly nor Sirius had been to the restaurant before and they really liked the food and being able to watch the people down on the street. They had teased Harry to no end when a beautiful girl came over saying how terrible Cho was and that he deserved someone who would appreciate him. Harry blushed and made some story about still trying to get over Cho and not wanting to date right now.

"See Sirius. This is why I liked that pool hall place the last time we went to Paris. Nobody treated me special."

Kelly turned and said, "You went to Paris with him? Wasn't he with Cho then? I can't believe you would have been a third wheel like that."

Harry's eyes quickly lit up and he got a mischievous grin. "Oh, he wasn't a third wheel, he was with Kristi."

Sirius started stammering, "Well yes, I went as a chaperone and just played pool with Kristi, nothing more. Tell her Harry."

Harry smiled slyly and said, "That's all they did, at least until they went to her bedroom." Sirius gave him a look that said he better fix this so Harry said, "I'm kidding Kelly. They only played billiards."

"I knew you were kidding Harry. That's not the look Sirius gives when he's been caught in a lie. It was sweet that it bothered him," she said before kissing Sirius.

Kelly had mentioned about wanting to go to a small jazz club she had heard about so they went there for a few hours before Harry left them and went home.

Harry agreed to meet Cho in a back booth of the Leaky Cauldron so that the press wouldn't find them right away. When he saw her walk toward the booth, he immediately was torn between too strong emotions. On one hand, she was gorgeous and he wanted to be with her and flashed back to all the fun they had. On the other, he wanted nothing to do with her and flashed back to her kissing Weisman. He didn't see how that second emotion would ever go away. They hugged quickly and began a somewhat strained conversation.

Harry asked if she wanted to go for a walk and she seemed very interested. However, he said that he didn't want to be around any press and wanted to get away. He took her hand and apparated to a spot Sirius had mentioned being good for walking. When they appeared and walked out into the cobblestone streets she asked where they were.

"We're in Rome. I've learned how to pull you when I Apparate. Have you ever been here?" Harry asked. Cho hadn't so they just started walking around looking at the marvelous architecture. They ended up in the Muggle part of Rome so no one paid any attention to them; they were just like two ordinary people wondering around.

Harry was really trying to act as normal to her as he could, having made a decision to give this a fair chance of working out. The two had a nice quiet meal and walked around a bit more. They were sitting in a small café having a drink before heading home when Cho said,

"I've really messed this up haven't I?" Harry looked confused. "I can tell you're having to try and be nice to me."

"I'm really enjoying being here with you Cho, I'm not faking it," Harry responded. "It can't all go to normal after one date."

"Be honest Harry. If this was our first date, would you ask me for another?"

Harry thought for a minute and said, "But this isn't our first date. I know how good things were for us. We wouldn't have the issue to work through if it was our first date."

Cho looked at him. "So, how was the Holiday ball?"

"It was pretty good. You know how they are."

"I hear you took a ghost. You're right, I wouldn't have been jealous, even though I heard she looked pretty good."

"I owed Myrtle anyway. She helped me out once and turned out to be a better date than I expected."

"Everyone is talking about your and Hermione's dance. I think they will be for a long time," Cho said sadly. "That did make me jealous."

"Sorry. I didn't mean for it to hurt you. Hermione just wanted to be remembered for something other than being smart. This was one part of it."

"I know you would never do anything to hurt me Harry. My gosh, you risked your life to save me. That's why I think we should make a clean break." Harry was kind of stunned. "I can tell you're not comfortable being around me right now and I can't really blame you. Let's go back to just being friends from school. No forced dates or notes." She reached into her pocket and gave him the engagement ring back.

"Cho, you don't have to do this. I'm willing to try and get over how I feel," Harry said surprised that Cho was returning the ring right now.

"I know you are. You'd keep trying even if it made you unhappy. That's not what I want. I don't want us to do any more damage to whatever friendship I haven't destroyed. I know I won't be your manager any more either. Take me back to the Leaky Cauldron please; I'd like to go home."

Harry did just that. No one was home when Harry got there so he just slept on the couch. Winky was good enough to wake him the next morning so he could get to the Weasley's at a decent time. Harry was going to have to try really hard to be good company. Even though he didn't think it would work out with Cho, knowing it was officially over still hurt.

Harry apparated right outside of the Burrow. They always told him to just pop inside but he felt more comfortable going to the door. Stepping up, he knocked on the door, which was quickly answered by Mrs. Weasley. "Harry!" she said giving him a huge hug. "How many times do we have to tell you, family Apparates inside."

"Happy Christmas Mrs. Weasley," Harry said.

"Harry!" Ginny yelled and gave him a hug.

"Hey Ginny," Harry replied and went into the other room where the rest of the family greeted him.

"It's about time mate," Ron said. "We were just about to start without you."

The greeting from the twins was a bit tense but Harry tried to make them see he didn't blame them. The next hour was madness with everyone tearing open their presents. This is how Christmas is supposed to be Harry thought, a great family enjoying their time together. Harry was removing his robe to put on the sweater Mrs. Weasley got him and didn't notice something fall out of the pocket until he heard. "Oh my gosh!" from Ginny.

Ginny had picked up the box the ring was in and opened it. "I'm sorry Harry. It fell out of your pocket and I just opened it." Mrs. Weasley saw it when Ginny handed it back.

"That's ok Ginny. I forgot it was in my pocket. My fault." The family was looking at him expectantly so he went on. "We tried having a *date* last night. I took her to Rome for the evening. We could both tell it wasn't going to work so she officially ended it. It was better than dragging it out." Harry put the ring back in his pocket.

Ron said, "You took her to *Rome* for a date?"

"I wanted to give it a fair shot at working. If it didn't feel right in the Muggle part of Rome without any press around, it's not going to feel right in Diagon Alley where people pester me all the time. Now, how's the campaign going Mr. Weasley?" Harry asked signaling an end to talk about Cho.

The others took the hint quickly and Mr. Weasley spoke up, "Actually very well. It should be very close. I still can't thank you enough Harry."

"Nonsense. Remember if you win, I want my security clearance back so I can visit the Unspeakables," Harry joked.

"Fletch has already asked for the same thing so that won't be a problem."

They talked for a while about how great it would be for Mr. Weasley to become the Minister of Magic. The twins were talking about how much trouble they could get out of by having their father in an important position.

Later that evening, Ginny asked, "Want to take a walk with me?"

"Sure. After eating so much, I need the exercise," Harry responded.

"Let me grab my cloak and we'll go," Ginny said but Harry stopped her.

"You won't need it." She looked confused but Harry just said, "Trust me."

It was very cold when they stepped outside and Ginny looked at Harry who just smiled and quickly cast a warming charm around them so they felt comfortable again. They walked for a ways before Ginny said, "Are you ok with the breakup?"

Harry didn't answer for a bit but then said, "You know, I really am. It just wasn't right anymore. I'm upset that it ended and really hate the thought of finding another girlfriend. I don't want any of these girls who just want to go out with me because of Quidditch or my damn scar." Harry looked at Ginny and said, "I'm sorry, I'm whining aren't I?"

"No you're not. It's just so unusual for you to talk about anything that's bothering you. You should do it more often." She smiled back.

"I can just talk to you and Hermione better than anyone else, even Sirius or Ron." Harry studied her for a minute. "So Miss Weasley, how am I ever going to find a girl that likes me for being just Harry? Keep in mind that I'm pretty slow on figuring out what women are thinking. And, she's got to be able to handle the fact that anyone who I'm close to becomes a target of an evil madman"

"She's out there Harry, you just have to make sure you see her," Ginny said silently wishing it could be her.

"Wouldn't it be easier if she just hit me over the head and told me how she feels? Even I couldn't miss a signal like that," he joked before saying, "C'mon the others are probably wonder what we're doing out here."

"Let them wonder, it gives them something to do." Ginny laughed.

Harry left late that night and arrived at an empty home. He once again fell asleep on the couch, and slept in before finally getting cleaned up and ready to go. Kristi had told him not to pack much since she was taking him shopping. He wore some of the clothes that Cho had picked out since they were the most modern he had. After Apparating, he found himself outside of Kristi's flat. Harry knocked on the door and Kristi greeted him warmly. Harry thought she had a fantastic apartment overlooking a busy pedestrian street.

"First things first, we need to go shopping," Kristi announced. "Come with me." She grabbed his arm and he followed her out the door. The two walked along the street; Kristi pointing out interesting areas. For December in Paris, it was a pleasant sunny day outside. They had been in and out of at least six clothing stores before Kristi was satisfied with the results.

The teammates spent the rest of the day doing very Muggle-like things and had completely avoided the wizard areas. Harry was enjoying seeing a different side of Kristi and how she acted away from the press. That evening she was taking him to a rock club where a good friend of hers was playing in the band. She made him wear his dragon-hide boots and black leather pants with a black shirt. Harry thought he looked very strange but she assured him it would be perfect for the club they were going to. Kristi also was dressed in all black, which made her platinum blonde hair all the more striking. The club was at the far end of one of the side streets in the wizarding community. It didn't look like a very safe place to be but Kristi didn't seem to mind. There were people standing around outside that reminded Harry of 'biker gangs' that he had seen on TV at the Dursley's.

Kristi noticed Harry's look of apprehension and said, "These people look tough but their bark is much worse than their bite." She appraised him and added, "Now you on the other hand, I'd say your bite is worse than your bark." She smiled before pulling him inside. The music was very loud and was the kind that you really couldn't make out most of the words. Kristi pushed her way directly to an area where about five tables were pulled together in a corner. Once the occupants of the tables saw her, she was immediately greeted warmly. Kristi introduced Harry to all of her friends but Harry knew he wouldn't remember many names since it all went so quickly. There were about ten girls and four guys. Most were dressed in black and a couple of the girls had large tattoos on them. The guys seemed much bigger than Harry; he thought they looked like Slytherins. However, they did seem nice to him, which definitely wasn't like a Slytherin.

After a while, Harry actually liked this club. There wasn't any real dancing, mainly people listening to the music and hanging with their friends. It was a very loud club and it was hard to tell the people were even wizards and witches. Harry thought that Sirius may enjoy this place and he would have to bring his godfather back sometime. It was nice listening to the stories the other guys were telling about things they had done recently. Harry found out a couple of them were very successful business people and they all had good jobs.

Kristi didn't make Harry stay trapped with anyone for very long. Even when she was off talking to someone, she would break away and introduce him to other people. Not one of her friends mentioned anything about The-Boy-Who-Lived. After being uncomfortable at first, Harry started to feel more confident around her friends and was really enjoying the evening.

The band quit playing around one in the morning and the crowd thinned down considerably within the next hour. Harry met the members of the band and found out they played all over the country and had known Kristi for many years. Some of her friends wanted to go other places but Kristi declined and spent the next few minutes saying goodbye to everyone. They all were very nice to Harry and said they hoped to see him again sometime. Harry had told Kristi he didn't mind if they went with her friends but she said she'd rather just go home.

Back at her place, they changed into comfortable clothes and Harry was again struck by how different Kristi could look. You almost wouldn't think it was the same person that had just been dressed in all black. She had a blue soft cotton nightshirt that almost hung to the floor. She poured them both some wine and put on some music. For the next couple hours, they sat on the floor just talking. Harry was feeling very comfortable with her and began asking about her past. Kristi gave him an appraising look and told him about her parents. It seemed Voldemort had killed them as well when she was younger. She happened to have been at her grandparent's house that day but found out when the Ministry officials came to give her grandparents the news. She had only been four years old and it had been two months before Harry's parents were killed. Harry sat there in shocked silence while Kristi told what she remembered of the scene. She then grew up with her grandparents.

"I'm sorry Kristi, I never knew," Harry said feeling bad for not knowing this before.

"How could you know? There were so many attacks back then; none of them were special until yours. It may sound stupid, but when I was little, I used to be kind of mad that he hadn't attacked you before getting to my parents. I wasn't mad at you, just mad at the timing." Harry didn't know what to say and was feeling a bit uncomfortable. She must have sensed this and said, "You were different than what I expected when I met you. I thought you would be bigger," she said and laughed.

After that, things moved back to more pleasant topics and Harry felt glad Kristi had told him about her past. It made him understand more why she had treated him good from the start. Kristi said goodnight and went to her room. Harry took the blankets she had given him and curled up on the couch. He felt like he slept better than he had in a long time that night.

They both slept late and when Harry was coming out after taking a shower Kristi mentioned a couple of owls had delivered two notes. Harry grabbed a piece of toast and opened the first note.

Harry

Good news, your security clearance is back. The Minister of Magic authorized it last night. I hope you'll be able to come and see us before long. With everything that's happening, I'd like to remind you that we'd love to have you work for us once you get out of school. I'm sure we can easily work around your Quidditch schedule. I understand from Professor Dumbledore that you're making great progress this year.

Have a good holiday and come see us soon.

Fletch

P.S. Keep the item for a bit. Some things aren't fully secure yet.

Harry was beaming so Kristi asked, "I take it that was good news?"

"My security clearance for the Ministry got re-activated. The Minister of Education locked me out a while back. This is great news," he said with a smile.

"The other one looks important. Minister of Magic seal on it and everything," Kristi said with an amused look.

Harry

Sorry to bother you while you're in Paris but I wanted to send this. It was announced today that the Minister of Education dropped out of the race. The official reason was that he thinks we could make a better team if he retained the Minister of Education position. In some ways, I wish it had gone to a real election so he would have lost some power but at least it's over. I actually won!

I can't thank you enough for all your help and I know I couldn't have done it without you. I talked to your friends in the Unspeakables and your access is being restored. I know they were anxious for that to happen.

I thought you would get a kick out of me using official parchment and everything.

Thanks again Harry and I'll try to do everything I can to help our community. I'm working on how to spread the news that You-Know-Who is actually back.

Minister of Magic

Arthur Weasley.

"Mr. Weasley became the Minister!" Harry shouted and hugged Kristi. "I can't believe it." Harry went on to tell her everything he knew and she seemed happy as well.

"How did they find you here?" Kristi asked.

"Oh, they tend to keep pretty close track of me," Harry said rolling his eyes. "They don't think I can take care of myself. I really wouldn't be too surprised to find out that we were followed the whole time last night. If there was some big attack, I bet they'd be here dragging me away in no time."

"That must make you feel pretty good that they all care about you?"

"It makes me more annoyed than anything. Why do they worry so much about me? They don't do these things for any other wizard. It's not right. And, I can take care of myself," he said adamantly.

"Think about it. If people start believing You-Know-Who is back they're going to be more worried than they are already. Then, if they find out you've been killed this time, they'll really be a panic. Older people would really be bothered by that. To younger wizards, you're more of a Quidditch player but to older ones, you're the one who stopped him the first time."

That was all the conversation about Voldemort, but for the rest of that day, Harry was in a fantastic mood. He almost wished he could leave and head to the Burrow to celebrate but was enjoying the time with Kristi. That evening Kristi said they were going to the opening of an art exhibition. A friend of a friend of hers was some big artist and they were going to the big party. Kristi picked out the clothes for Harry to wear and he really liked them, and they weren't totally black. Kristi also dressed very nice in a longer form fitting dress. She had arranged for a limo to take them to the opening and had warned Harry that there would be press there.

When the car stopped and the door opened, Harry heard the press calling Kristi's name, then as soon as he stepped out he heard even more yells. Harry just followed her lead and stopped a few times with her for pictures. She had said that any publicity would help the artist so Harry didn't mind. Kristi led him around most of the night. She amazed Harry by being so comfortable in almost any situation. She fit right in at the rock bar and also at this high-class party. Harry tried to pay attention and learn how she did it. The night wore on and it was rare that Kristi wasn't right by his side. Harry was amused that Kristi obviously felt more comfortable leaving him with her friends at the bar than with the people at this party.

Back at her apartment, they sat around talking again for a couple hours before Kristi went to bed and Harry fell asleep on the couch. The next morning, they had a late breakfast and Harry told her how much he enjoyed the couple of days. "This has just been great Kristi, thanks again."

"No problem. Next time I want to see your place."

"That seems fair. I don't know as many exciting things to do though."

"It'll be fine doing anything. Trust me," she said kind of mocking him since he always told people to just trust him.

He gave her a hug and apparated away. Dropping his stuff, he decided to go to the Burrow to congratulate Mr. Weasley in person so he quickly popped over there. The house was in even more chaos than normal. All of the children except for Percy were still there. He had to tell Mrs. Weasley that he couldn't breathe she was hugging him so hard.

Mr. Weasley said, "I hope you don't mind me sending the owl to Paris. I didn't want you to find out in the papers before I told you."

"Not at all. I think Kristi was impressed an owl from the Minister of Magic came to her apartment," Harry responded.

Immediately the twins said, "So, you were staying at Kristi's apartment were you?"

Harry saw Ginny and Mrs. Weasley look at him sternly but all the boys looked anxious. "On the couch! I stayed on the couch. I promise."

Ron grabbed him and said, "C'mon mate, we can talk in private about your trip."

They were having supper still talking about all the changes that Mr. Weasley wanted to do when Charlie looked up from the paper he was reading and handed it to the twins who started laughing and went to pass it to Ron but Ginny grabbed it. After reading a bit she said, "You don't dress like that for us? Been doing some shopping?" Harry looked confused until she turned the paper around to see a picture of Kristi and Harry at the exhibit opening.

Harry blushed and said, "She thought I could use some new clothes. She has a friend who is an artist, that's all."

Charlie looked again and said, "You make a good couple she's a babe."

This comment drew an angry look from Ginny who said, "She's not Harry's type and probably just using his fame."

"I don't think so, she's pretty famous on her own. She told me that her parents were killed by Voldemort about six months before mine were. I think she's just being nice to me, that's it," Harry said convinced he was right.

This caused the subject to be changed back to Mr. Weasley. Before leaving Harry asked Ginny to take a walk. He was asking about how excited she was for her father. On the way back she stopped and asked, "You're not going to start dating Kristi are you?"

Harry looked at her deeply and asked, "You don't like her?"

Ginny kind of blushed and said, "I don't think she's your type, that's all."

"I can't even think about dating right now. Every time I do, I keep seeing that picture of Cho. Kristi was just being nice to me."

The next afternoon, Harry was preparing to go to the Grangers. He was kind of nervous about this. He had only met them quickly a couple of times either near Diagon Alley or the train station. He packed some nice clothes for the party and apparated outside of their home. It looked like a very nice home with a large yard. The other houses on the street looked great as

well. He knocked at Mr. Granger answered the door. "Harry. Come in, we're glad you could join us." The man said shaking Harry's hand.

Harry followed the man into the living room where Mrs. Granger greeted him. "It's good to see you again Harry. I'm looking forward to getting to know you better."

"You have a great home Mrs. Granger," Harry said looking around.

"Thank you. Hermione's upstairs reading," she said.

"Probably studying," Harry joked.

"Yes, she keeps saying that she needs to catch up to you," Mrs. Granger said.

"I seriously doubt that's the case," Harry replied just as Hermione was coming down.

"Harry! I thought I heard the door." She hugged him tightly. "C'mon let me show you your room." She grabbed his arm and dragged him upstairs and to a room across from hers.

Harry put his bag down and said, "This is a really nice house Hermione."

She blushed a bit and said, "My parents work really hard. Isn't it great about Ron's dad? You should see the owls I got from Ron and Ginny. They went on and on about how they couldn't believe you made this happen for them."

"I didn't make anything happen. Mr. Weasley was the best person for the job."

"But he wouldn't have run without your help and that note. You really did good," she said. "So, what do you want to do for the next few days?"

"Anything you want Hermione. The only thing I want to do is to take your family out for being so nice and letting me stay here."

"You don't have to do that, but it would be nice to get out. I'm sure we can talk them into it. After that it's anything I want huh? I'll think on that." She looked down and said, "I heard about you and Cho. Amazing you went all the way to Rome to break up."

"I didn't plan on breaking up, it just happened. At least I've seen Rome now," he said.

They spent a few hours down talking to her parents and she showed him all around the house. Mrs. Granger fixed a nice supper and they were all sitting around talking. "That was a very nice picture of you in the paper Harry," Mrs. Granger said.

Harry looked confused until Hermione said, "The one with Kristi."

"Oh. Thanks. I'm sure she asked me to go since I talked her into helping with Mr. Weasley's fundraiser a while back. She has a friend who is the artist," Harry replied.

"Still, it must be exciting to go off to Paris for something like that," Mrs. Granger said.

"Hermione can do that too," Harry said not understanding why they thought it was special.

"But I won't be able to go to exhibit openings or anything like that," Hermione added.

"Sure you can. We'll find some way to get invited and then you and I will go." He hesitated and said, "If your parents don't mind that is."

Mr. Granger chuckled. "Nice manners Harry, but she is an adult and could go if she wanted."

They went on to talk about school and the special project Hermione and Harry were working on. Harry got up and insisted on doing the dishes since Mrs. Granger cooked. Hermione came in to help and they made a mess by hitting each other with soap suds. Before her parents could find out, she magically cleaned all the mess they made.

Hermione and Harry stayed up much later than her parents talking and practicing little bits of magic. The next day the pair went to the Leaky Cauldron and was deciding whether to walk down Diagon Alley or out into muggle London when Hermione had an idea. "Let's go down Knockturn Alley."

Harry looked at her. "Hermione. You're really getting into this dark art stuff."

"No I'm not. It's just really interesting watching the people. Come on, we'll pull our cloaks up. Ron will be shocked when we tell him."

They went out into Diagon Alley and found the street leading to Knockturn Alley. Standing off to the side, they pulled up their cloaks and went down, staying very close to each other. Harry had to admit it was interesting being down here seeing all the strange people and creatures. He was letting Hermione lead and hoped she knew how to get back out. They spent a couple hours wandering around Knockturn Alley, going into the strange shops before returning to muggle London and going to see a movie.

On the way to supper that night, Hermione warned her parents that Harry would be recognized and it may be uncomfortable. They both laughed slightly and told her that they would be fine if some sports fanatic came to talk to Harry. Hermione looked at Harry and whispered, "They'll see. I tried to warn them." They got to the Leaky Cauldron, which her parents knew well by now. Tom greeted them all warmly.

They had only gotten to the main street in Diagon Alley when Harry started hearing his name being talked about. He instinctively took Hermione's hand to make sure he didn't lose her and felt good when she squeezed it back. It was a crowded evening and by the time they got to the restaurant he could tell Mr. & Mrs. Granger didn't know what to think about everyone pointing and calling his name. Harry took them to the same restaurant that he had taken Sirius and Kelly. Even with the line, they were seated immediately and the staff all called him by name. They got Harry's favorite table overlooking the street and started to look through the menu.

"My godfather and his girlfriend both really liked the food here. I hope you do," Harry said.

Mr. Granger looked at him and asked, "Is it always like that when you go out?"

Hermione spoke up, "I told you how it would be dad. You should have believed me."

"It gets old; I just try to ignore it. It's much crazier in Paris since I play for the French team. I wouldn't go there by myself," Harry added

They ate a very relaxing meal and Harry liked watching the look on Hermione's parent's faces while they were looking out the window at all the wizards. They talked about their dentistry practice and about things Hermione did growing up. It was a very enjoyable evening and before they knew it, they had been there for over three hours. Harry insisted on paying and Hermione seemed annoyed at the way the waitress was flirting with Harry.

Walking back out, Harry took Hermione's hand again without thinking. She looked up at him and smiled warmly. She was thinking about how nice it was the two of them having a good time with her parents. They got back out to muggle London where Harry wasn't recognized and he started to let go of Hermione's hand but she squeezed it a bit so he held on. Harry had become more comfortable touching girls since being around R.J., and now Kristi and all of her friends. They were always hugging and taking him by the hand for something.

All the way home, the Grangers were talking about things they had seen along the street. Hermione kept laughing and having to explain what things were. Hermione's parents went to bed not long after getting home but Harry and Hermione sat up talking.

"I think they had a really good time tonight Harry," Hermione said, sitting on the couch next to him.

"I hope so. They're really nice. I had a good time too," he replied.

"Not as good as being in Paris I bet," she said, only half joking.

Harry answered quickly. "I'd rather be with you than in Paris any day."

Hermione could just tell by the way he said it that he was being totally honest. She was kind of lost in a daydream when he asked. "When you go to the university, are you going to live here?"

She thought for a second and said, "I'm not sure. They don't have dorm style housing so I either have to live here or find an apartment."

Hermione could tell there was something on his mind. "What is it Harry? You look like you want to say something."

"You know that after this year, I'm probably going to work with the Unspeakables and play Quidditch." Hermione had said of course. "Well what do you think about the idea of us being roommates someplace?"

Hermione was shocked; this was not at all what she would have expected. Harry could guess her shock and said, "I understand if you don't want to. I mean you'll be on to bigger things and all."

"No. That's not it. I'm just amazed you asked that. You never ask things like that."

"I'm trying to get better with you guys."

"You know, I'd love to be your roommate. Where would we live your castle?" she asked.

"Really? We could live anywhere you want. I'll see if Sirius wants to stay at the castle. I didn't think you'd want to live there. I can't believe you'd be my roommate," Harry said happily.

"We could try the castle. No sense letting it sit there. Why didn't you think I'd be your roommate?"

"I just thought you'd probably want to move on. I mean you're going to be moving into bigger challenges and everything and I'll be doing the same old stuff."

"If I have new challenges, I'd want you there for support. I think it's a great idea. I wish I had been the one to think of it," Hermione said.

"You could do whatever you want to the castle to make it more like what you want. I wonder what your parents will think."

"I imagine my parents would be thrilled. They'd be much happier than having me live on my own. Oh Harry, this will be great."

They went back to lying on the floor reading and both ended up falling asleep only to be woken up by Mrs. Granger the next morning. Luckily, they had the books between them so it was obvious that nothing happened. "Wake up you two. Today is the party and I've got to clean up."

Hermione smiled but Harry was nervous. "I'm sorry Mrs. Granger; we were just studying and fell asleep."

"That's ok Harry, I don't mind. Now go get cleaned up and we'll have breakfast. Mr. Granger is already in the kitchen."

Harry quickly gathered his things and went upstairs, yelling at himself for falling asleep in their house with their daughter. He was about to go into the bathroom when Hermione stopped him. "You really looked embarrassed," she said.

"Of course I am. They probably think I'm a big git about now," Harry replied worried about what her parents thought of him now.

"They do not. My mom said they thought we were really cute lying there. She almost hated to wake us. Now get cleaned up," Hermione said before ducking into her room.

Harry took a quick shower and got dressed. He sat there for a few minutes trying to get all the embarrassment out of his system before going down. He sat down at the table waiting for Hermione and having some juice. Neither of her parents said anything, which made him feel nervous. After a bit, Hermione came down and sat next to him. Mr. Granger spoke up. "Now, I want to talk to you two about sleeping together."

Harry dropped his toast and all the color faded from his face.

Chapter 15

"Dad!" Hermione exclaimed before reaching across to hit her father's arm. Then they all started laughing.

"I'm sorry Harry I couldn't resist. When my wife said how nervous you were this morning I just couldn't help myself," Mr. Granger said.

Harry's color started returning but he just nodded and tried to smile.

"I can't believe you did that after he took us to supper last night," Hermione said then turned to Harry. "He's terrible sometimes."

It took a while before Harry felt totally comfortable again. But then they started helping to get ready for the party. Harry went to the store with Hermione and her mom and then helped her dad move some things around. Other family members started arriving early that evening.

Harry met her grandparents and a few cousins. None of them knew she was a witch so this was a very muggle party. Hermione was doing her best to make sure Harry wasn't left out. With an hour or so before midnight Hermione asked Harry if he wanted to take a walk. They both headed out and quickly cast a warming charm. Hermione was excited that all of her family liked him. They got back with about fifteen minutes to go before midnight. With a minute left, her aunt announced to everyone that it was bad luck if you weren't kissing at the stroke of midnight. Harry looked at Hermione nervously and saw her blush and kind of shrug her shoulders.

With everyone counting down, Harry was just worried about kissing his best friend. It's not like that didn't interest him, it would just be the first time he's ever kissed her. When the count got to two, Harry leaned into Hermione and kissed her lightly until they heard the clapping on television. He pulled back and Hermione was smiling at him. He smiled back and hugged her. The guests started leaving soon after and after the last one left Harry helped them clean up. Soon after that her parents went upstairs. Harry and Hermione were sitting on the couch quietly. He wanted to say something but didn't know how.

"Hermione," he said and then added. "Oh, never mind."

She looked and could tell he was bothered by something. "What is it? You can tell me anything."

He looked at her and she just gazed deep into his bright green eyes. "Has Neville already asked you to the Beauxbatons dance?"

"No, why?" she replied.

"Well, would you like to go with me?" he asked looking directly into her eyes.

Internally she could almost melt but she responded with. "Sure, it'll be fun."

"Great, thanks," Harry said before getting the concerned look on his face. "Um... I wanted to apologize for the kiss. I was just nervous and everything. I don't normally kiss that bad."

Hermione just started laughing. "It's not funny Hermione. I don't want my best friend thinking I'm a bad kisser," Harry said angrily.

"Oh Harry. It wasn't supposed to be an earth-shattering kiss; it was supposed to be a friendly kiss at midnight. Besides, I've already heard from Cho about how fantastic you're supposed to be. What did Kristi think of your kisses?"

Harry blushed but said, "I haven't kissed Kristi! Why don't you believe I just went there as a friend and nothing more?"

"It's just that she's so beautiful and aggressive. And, she's got the reputation of a man-eater. I thought she would just have her way with you," Hermione said.

"Have more faith in me Hermione. I'd tell you the truth. Nothing happened; we hung out and sat around her apartment talking, nothing more. Give me some credit."

"You've got to admit that most guys; and all of the Weasley's would take all that someone like Kristi would give them, and you had been used to having Cho crawl all over you."

"Well I do miss being crawled all over but I can hold out a while longer," he jokingly said. "Ron wouldn't do anything with Kristi if he was still seeing Parvati."

"I'm not so sure. The only reason I'd agree is that he'd probably pass out if she came on to him," Hermione joked back.

The next day when Harry got home, Sirius was there looking upset. "There's been an attack on muggles," he said. "It was out the outskirts of London and three families were killed."

"Was Voldemort there?" Harry asked.

"We don't think so, just Death Eaters."

"Not a good start for Mr. Weasley," Harry said.

"True, but at least he's not trying to hide it," Sirius said. "How were you holidays?"

"I took Cho to Rome and we decided to officially break up. But other than that the rest was pretty good," Harry said.

"I saw the picture of you and Kristi. Is anything going on there?"

"Nothing at all. I slept on the couch. How was your time with Kelly?" Harry asked.

Sirius perked up and told him about how good of a time they had. This really made Harry feel good. He wanted Sirius to be happy.

Harry was waiting for the train to arrive at school so he could see his friends again. He watched many students get off the train and then he saw his friends. Ron ran over and said, "Oh man you should have seen Malfoy. He won't even come near us he's so mad about dad becoming Minister. This is going to be great."

"Our compartment was crowded with people congratulating Ron and Ginny the whole time. Aren't you lucky that you don't have to ride the train anymore?" Hermione said.

Things quickly got back into a routine of classes, practice with Hermione and studying in the common room. Ron got back in the routine of disappearing with Parvati almost every night. They were in the common room before Ron slipped out one night talking about the upcoming dance. "So Harry, are you taking Myrtle to Beauxbatons?" Parvati asked.

"Nope. A real, live girl has shown me pity and has agreed to be my date. I know it will be hard for all of you to believe." Harry joked as he gave a quick glance at Hermione who just smiled.

"So who is it?" Ron asked.

"I'm not sure I should say. She may not want anyone to know. I'd like to tell you but I'd probably get in trouble," Harry said with a grin. The next thing he knew he was hit in the head with a pillow. "Ow!"

They all turned to Hermione who was blushing. Parvati picked up on it and said, "You and Hermione are going aren't you?" Hermione nodded and Parvati spoke again. "That's great. You two looked great dancing at the last ball."

Neither Ron nor Ginny seemed to be thrilled about that idea. "You two are just doing everything together this year aren't you?" Ron asked.

"What's the big deal?" Harry asked.

"Nothing. It's just that you two have this special project, you made some grand spectacle at our ball and now you're going to the other ball together," Ron replied.

"Yeah, and you've been pretty busy with Parvati. I think your priorities are a bit different this year. Not that I blame you," Harry said looking at Parvati who smiled. "I say spending time with your girlfriend ranks way above schoolwork."

"Yeah, I guess," Ron said before leaving with Parvati.

Harry could tell something was wrong with Ginny, but he was going to leave it to Hermione to figure out. "I'm heading up to bed. Goodnight."

In the Dark Arts class, Professor Steiger was having them move to a new level of pain spells. Every minute in this class made Harry annoyed. He didn't see why they had to practice these spells on other students. They watched some of the Slytherins cast the spells on each other and they looked very painful. Ron got partnered up with Parvati and went to the front of the class. Ron was supposed to go first but was hesitating. "Now Mr. Weasley, say the curse." Steiger said.

Ron still was hesitating and finally said, "I don't want to hurt my friends sir."

Everybody in the class sat up straight and was paying close attention to what was going to happen. "Say the curse Weasley or it will be 50 points from Gryffindor."

Ron only hesitated a second before saying, "No sir, I won't hurt my friends."

"Fine 50 points. Miss Patil please demonstrate the spell," the professor said.

Parvati looked at Ron then lowered her wand as well. "No sir, I won't hurt my friends."

"50 points. Next group. Potter and Granger."

Hermione stood up and quickly said, "No sir, I won't hurt my friends."

"50 points. Potter."

"I won't do it either sir." Harry said following what all the other Gryffindor's were doing.

"Fine, we'll see how many points your house wants to lose."

Hermione shot her hand up. "Yes Miss Granger."

"Sir, as Head Girl, I'd like to request the presence of the head of Gryffindor House. In the inter-house rules, it states..."

"I know the rules girl," the professor yelled. "Will any of the Gryffindors come up to demonstrate the spell or do I need to take points for all of you." None of them said anything. "Very well, we'll move on."

Hermione's had shot up again. "Granger," the teacher said.

"Sir, I requested the presence of Professor McGonagall. The rules say that if you insist on the punishment, we have the right to have our head of house present if the punishment seems arbitrary to us. If we are losing that many points, I would like Professor McGonagall now please."

The Slytherins were snickering but the teacher looked like he could explode. Suddenly the teacher seemed to relax and say. "Very well Miss Granger. We'll write off today as a learning experience. There will be no points taken from Gryffindor. You will all have to demonstrate your ability to cast the spell on someone. Does anyone volunteer?"

Harry raised his hand and heard the Professor say, "Potter."

"Yes sir, they can cast it on me," Harry said and Hermione gave him a strange look.

Harry came up and went to the front of the class with Hermione behind him. He said, "Go ahead Hermione. It'll be fine."

Hermione said the spell and Harry quickly cast a shield charm, which absorbed Hermione's spell.

"No shield Potter," The teacher spat.

"Why not? You can see them perform the spell and it come at me. That's obviously proof enough that they can do it," Harry said and heard a bunch of "Yeah's" from the other Gryffindors.

The teacher reluctantly gave in and all of the Gryffindors cast their spells at Harry. "Now Potter I want to see your spell." Steiger said smiling.

"I won't hurt my friends but would gladly demonstrate on Malfoy," Harry said turning to glare at the Slytherin.

"Mr. Malfoy has already had it cast on him so that won't work."

"Well I'm sure that a student's spell wouldn't bother you much sir, maybe Harry could cast it on you to prove he learned the spell," Ron said surprising everyone.

The teacher was looking at him harshly but then the bell sounded to end the class. Hermione handed Harry his books and they all left. "Ron, that was brilliant. I can't believe you stood up to him like that," Harry said, followed closely by all the other Gryffindors. Ron was going very red but obviously liked the attention.

Hermione fell back next to Harry and said, "We should still tell Professor McGonagall about Steiger."

"Absolutely," Harry agreed.

Before their practice that night they went to Professor McGonagall and told her everything. The Professor seemed very annoyed. "You did the perfect thing by stating the rules Miss Granger. I don't know why we're still allowing that class here. I can assure you that there will be no punishment for refusing to knowingly inflict pain on other students."

"What about if he pairs us with Slytherin? They won't hesitate to use them on us," Harry asked.

"You can refuse that as well. I will speak with the Headmaster and try to prevent something like that from happening," McGonagall said.

Harry's Quidditch had started again and the French team had won their next two matches. This week they were playing Viktor Krum and Bulgaria the week before the Beauxbatons Ball. Harry was very nervous all week since Bulgaria was the only team to beat them last year. Harry had given his passes to Sirius, Kelly, Professor McGonagall and Hermione for this match.

They arrived at the stadium and wished Harry good luck before he went to the locker room. They heard the Bulgarian team being announced to loud boos until Krum came out. At this point everyone cheered. He was the best player in the league and everyone showed respect toward him. The crowd cheered just as loud when the French team was announced and it even got a bit louder when Harry came out. Harry tried to tune it out and concentrate on finding a way to beat Viktor. Harry met Viktor in the middle of the stadium and they wished each other good luck. Harry really admired how hard Viktor played the game and yet how he still treated Harry nicely.

The match started with a blur. Harry quickly tried to focus on help break up Bulgaria's scoring drives along with making sure Viktor didn't see the snitch first. The French team was every bit a match for the Bulgarian team this time. Viktor and Harry had both performed very dangerous feints but so far neither had crashed. Suddenly they saw the snitch and were both following it closely bumping into each trying to throw the other one off course. The snitch was heading straight for a tower when Viktor bumped Harry and caused him to veer off a little. Luckily, the snitch veered in the same direction and Harry didn't lose much distance. The two seekers were both able to stay right behind the snitch as it flittered all around the stadium. Each player had made a grab but had just missed. They were focusing exclusively on the snitch now and seemed to be closing in on it. Harry couldn't hear any sounds and as he was making another grab, he could feel another hand start to close, when suddenly; SLAM! Both seekers ploughed into one of the stand platforms and fell a good seven meters to the ground.

The crowd suddenly became silent with both seekers in a heap on the ground and no one knowing who had the snitch. The whistle was blown to stop play but the official couldn't call a winner since they didn't know if the snitch was caught or not. Once the medi-wizards got to the seekers, they huddled with the referee who blew his whistle again and yelled, "FRANCE WINS!" The crowd erupted in thunderous clapping but quickly died down once they saw both seekers being carried off on magical stretchers not moving at all.

Harry woke some time later to a familiar smell. He ached all over and thought he was in Madame Pomfrey's care. However the voice he heard wasn't familiar. Ah! You are awake. You had everyone worried.

Harry reached for his glasses but didn't find them. The lady with the voice presented them to him. Harry realized this wasn't Hogwarts. "Where am I?" Harry asked.

"This is the Mt. Rouge Hospital in Paris. You came here straight from the match. You two were much too foolish. It's just a silly game," the nurse was saying.

"Two? Is Viktor alright?" Harry asked.

"Yes, the other seeker left this morning. Broken arm, leg and concussion. You were a bit worse. Arm, collar bone and major concussion."

"Who won?" Harry asked.

The nurse laughed and said, "Well you did of course. Look at all the cards!" She pointed out a table that was lined with get-well cards. She also handed Harry his glasses.

At this point Harry heard the door open. "Harry! You finally woke up." Sirius came over and grabbed his hand. "How are you feeling? They said you had a major concussion."

"I'm just sore but feel pretty good since she just said we won!" Harry exclaimed.

"Winning makes the pain seem not so bad doesn't it?" Kristi said. He hadn't seen her come in behind Sirius.

"Kristi! We beat Bulgaria. I finally beat Krum. This is so great," Harry exclaimed.

They both laughed at him. "When can I leave?" Harry asked the nurse.

The nurse smiled at him and said, "I'll send the doctor in soon. I'm sure he'll keep you until at least tomorrow."

"Tomorrow! I don't want to miss any classes," Harry complained, not wanting to miss any school.

Sirius looked at him and said, "Harry you've been here two days already. You won't be getting back to class until Wednesday at the earliest."

"Two days! Have you been here the whole time?" he asked.

"Most of it. Kristi spent quite a bit of time here as well," Sirius said.

"Thanks you guys. You didn't have to do that Kristi," Harry said feeling bad that they had stayed for so long.

"I had to make sure to protect the team's investment didn't I? I wouldn't want them doing anything to keep you from playing again. Being out two days is bad enough," the beautiful chaser said.

"I've been out longer," Harry said with a smile. "I can't believe we beat Bulgaria."

The next afternoon they released Harry and he and Sirius apparated to Hogsmeade. Sirius talked him into a butterbeer before walking back to the school. All the patrons were congratulating him. There had been articles about how amazing he and Viktor played. Sirius walked him to the common room and told him how proud he was of his performance.

Harry went to his room and got the list of the homework he had missed. It was a good thing he had been ahead in some classes and had a free period. He should be able to catch up in a couple days. Harry went back down to the common room to study and was sitting in the back corner when some of the other students came in. Most didn't notice him at all. In fact it was Neville who first came running over. Soon Hermione came over and gave him a big hug. "How are you? We were so worried."

"I'm fine. No big deal. Can you believe we beat Bulgaria?" Harry said.

"What did you think you were doing? You ploughed right into the wall!" Hermione said sounding mad.

"I had to get the snitch," Harry said. "Ginny, help me out here. You're a seeker, tell her what I mean."

"Oh no. Hermione was furious and after hearing her describe what you did, there's no way I would have done it," Ginny said.

"We stayed until late that evening but then Professor McGonagall said we needed to return," Hermione said sounding upset.

"That's ok. Kristi and Sirius stayed with me," Harry said causing both Ginny and Hermione to flinch a little. "At least I got back before the ball," Harry said smiling at Hermione.

She had been so worried about him and angry that he could be so reckless while flying and yet when he looked at her with those eyes and smiled, she just melted. She didn't think it would be a good idea to let him have any idea about her feelings. They had agreed to be roommates, friends after school. Maybe that's all he would ever want. Merlin knows he's the nicest person she's ever known. Still wrapped up in her thoughts she finally heard. "Hermione. For the third time, will you *please* come to supper with me? I haven't eaten any good food in a few days." Looking up she saw Harry smiling and holding out his hand for her.

Harry had to force Hermione to come and practice elemental magic with him. She kept insisting that he needed to rest. In the end, he said he was going by himself and that got her to come along. She seemed to be more intent on making sure he was ok than in practicing herself. "I was really worried. The sound you two made when you hit the stadium was terrible," she said.

Harry smiled and said, "I'm glad I didn't hear it then. I didn't even know I had the snitch until the nurse told me after I woke up. I thought I was in Madame Pomfrey's ward until the nurse started speaking French." He hesitated and said, "Thanks for worrying about me. It means a lot."

"I just don't want you to back out of our deal to be roommates by getting yourself killed or anything," Hermione said trying to make a joke.

"If I do, I'll try to come back as a ghost and still be your roommate," he flashed back.

The day of the ball, they were all in Hogsmeade so the women could do some last minute shopping. Harry and Ron held back and followed the women around. They walked by the jewelry store where the women were trying on some clothes and Harry noticed a small simple necklace with what looked like a cat's-eye stone in the middle. It really looked like something Hermione would like so he bought it. The group headed back to the castle so the girls could start to get ready. Ron and Harry played a couple games of chess. "So are things getting serious between you two?" Harry asked.

Ron didn't really even get red and replied, "Maybe. It just feels right with her. We don't fight or anything, it's really nice."

"That's great. I'm really happy for you," Harry said honestly happy for Ron.

Ron looked at him and said, "So what about you? Are you two really dating?"

"No, I told you she's going with me because she feels sorry for me because of Cho. Hermione doesn't think of me that way," Harry said honestly feeling this way.

"But do you think of her that way?" Ron asked.

Harry thought for a second and said, "You know, more and more I do. But, I'd never do anything about it. I don't think things between you two are back to being perfect and I don't want that to happen to me."

The two friends headed upstairs to get ready and were easily back down before the girls were. The first down was Ginny who looked stunning. Ron had to keep saying things to the other boys who were making comments about her. She and Colin quickly went out the door. Parvati was next and Ron greeted her with a kiss and she took his arm and they left. Even though Harry always thought Ron would end up with Hermione, he was glad to see his friend so happy with Parvati.

The next minute Hermione came out and Harry was just amazed at how pretty she looked. Here she was, his best friend and now he was seeing her as one of the prettiest witches he knew. She was wearing a shimmering golden gown and had her hair pulled back. "You look amazing. Thank you for coming with me," Harry said meeting her on the bottom step.

She blushed as she said, "Thank you Harry."

She started to take his arm but he stopped her. "Here, I go this for you today." Harry held out the necklace.

"Harry! This is beautiful. You didn't have to do this." Hermione was floored by Harry's thoughtfulness.

"I wanted to celebrate our last school ball together. Actually our first and last school ball together. Here, let me put it on you," Harry went around and slipped the necklace around her neck. She lifted her hair so he could hook the clasp and he felt her jump a bit when his hands touched the back of her neck. Harry fumbled for a second but finally got the clasp hooked. "Now Miss Granger, let's go to France."

There were portkeys setup and when the couple arrived and stepped through the door into the hall, the French students started clapping and before long it was very loud. Some of the students came up to him and congratulated him on the match. It was the first time France had beaten Bulgaria in over fifty years. Harry kept trying to direct Hermione to the table where Ron had saved them seats. He whispered, "Sorry about that Hermione."

She smiled and said, "That's just part of the package, I can live with it." They only sat for a few minutes and Harry asked Hermione to dance.

"I don't think we'll be as adventurous this time," she joked.

"Whatever you say. You're the boss," Harry joked with his best friend.

"Don't forget that when we're living together," she said.

"Oh, are we going to live together or be roommates?" Harry said with a sly grin.

Hermione gave the same sly grin back and said, "Is there a difference?"

"Definitely," Harry responded.

The two friends danced for a couple songs and sat back down with Ron and the others. A few of the French girls had come up to ask Harry to dance but he always replied with, "Ah, thank you but I want to spend all my time with my date tonight."

Hermione kept blushing each time and finally Parvati asked, "Ok, what is he telling them."

Hermione wouldn't answer so Harry said, "I told them I want to spend all my time with my date thanks."

A bit later, Harry heard a familiar voice. "'Arry! All the girls are saying you won't dance with anyone other than your date. Say it isn't so." Gabrielle had come up behind them with a pout on her face.

Harry replied, "Then I'll pretend you're my date for a couple songs. Is that ok?" The young veela girl smiled brightly and pulled Harry to the dance floor. The Delacour women really knew how to dance, Harry thought. Just like at the last dance, Gabrielle led him around toward tables where she knew her friends were.

After a couple songs, he left Gabrielle at her table and went back to Hermione, "I hope that was ok with you?" he said smiling.

"Of course. I know you can't resist a veela," Hermione joked having a wonderful time with Harry. They had danced a few more times and were again sitting with the full table when Harry got a familiar feeling; a terribly familiar feeling. Suddenly he sat straight up and looked around.

Hermione noticed right away that something had changed with him; she could just feel the difference. "What's wrong Harry?"

Harry didn't answer immediately but then the feeling became stronger and he saw some of the younger students at the far end of the dance floor acting strangely. "Ron, Hermione, get the Hogwarts students back to the school. Dementors are coming."

Chapter 16

Hermione started to say something but could tell immediately that something had changed. Harry almost seemed like a different person and she could just feel the magic radiating from him. His eyes seemed so focused. Harry turned to her and said, "Trust me Hermione, and get them out now!"

Harry pulled out his wand and started heading to the far entrance door. He hadn't gotten very far when it burst open and two dementors started coming through. The hall erupted in screams and Harry yelled, "Expecto Patronum!" A huge silvery stag came out and changed down the dementors, causing them to back out of the doorway. Harry passed the Headmistress and yelled, "Which teachers can cast a Patronus? There are more of them, and I bet Death Eaters are close as well."

"None can make a Patronus that I know of. I'll find the defense teacher; he may be able to help."

Harry kept walking toward the hall and heard the sound of students screaming. Pushing through the door, he saw two hooded wizards come in and start shouting spells. Harry quickly fired a couple spells back that got their attention. The wizards didn't seem to be trying to hit the students, but instead to do damage to the school. From their position, the hooded wizards could hit the students trying to get up into the school further but hadn't as of yet.

Harry was able to get close to the hall the students were using and cast a shield charm to prevent them from being hit. This was working fine, except he couldn't cast any effective offensive spells while he was holding the shield. Harry was able to quickly drop the shield and cast a couple spells to keep the death eaters from coming closer. He also had to cast another Patronus when he felt the dementors coming closer.

In another area, the Headmistress was speaking to Dumbledore through the fire. "Dumbledore. We are under attack! There are dementors and hooded wizards. I don't think our teachers can handle this. One of your students; Potter is protecting the students and trying to drive off the dementors. He can not do this alone."

Dumbledore spoke quickly but calmly, "Madame. I'm afraid I cannot leave Hogwarts undefended in case this is a distraction. Please believe me when I say that Harry can be of great help."

"But Dumbledore. He's too busy protecting the students to drive off the wizards," the Headmistress said not able to hide her panic.

Dumbledore turned to the man standing next to him, "Sirius! Go help Harry." Quickly the Headmaster turned back to the fire. "Madame. I am sending another friend to help. Now please do me a favor. If Harry asks you to do anything, please don't question him and just do it. If it is really a few death eaters and dementors, he should be able to deal with them once the students are protected. Please trust him."

Back at Beauxbatons, their defense instructor finally made it over but couldn't cast a Patronus or a strong enough shield so Harry told him to try and stun the death eaters of which there were now at least four. Harry thought he could handle the four death eaters if he didn't have to

hold the shield and was really getting worried because there seemed to be a long line of students still passing, but then he suddenly heard. "Harry!" It was Sirius.

"Sirius. There's at least four Death Eaters and some dementors. Make sure the students don't get hit and I'll try to stop the attack," Harry yelled and Sirius didn't question anything, he quickly cast his own shield.

Harry moved positions and blasted the short wall two of the death eaters were hiding behind and was able to stun them quickly. The Beauxbatons defense instructor wasn't very good but did keep the death eaters occupied from time to time. The door burst open and four more dementors came in causing all the students to scream even louder. Harry quickly cast another Patronus that drove the dementors back outside and was also able to stun another death eater in the confusion.

Harry knew there was at least three more death eaters but could only tell where two of them were. Then he heard a scream from back in the ballroom. Poking his head inside, Harry saw a girl; Gabrielle; at the far end, obviously hurt and then saw a death eater cast a spell at the large chest along the wall causing it to start to fall. Harry quickly cast a summoning spell on the little girl and she flew directly into Harry causing him to fall back onto the ground. He was able to cast a spell at the death eater to drive him back to the corridor.

Harry started pulling Gabrielle with him and saw the three death eaters start to run outside. He was able to stun only one of them. The defense teacher went to the door and announced that the wizards seemed to be running off.

Harry picked up Gabrielle and told Sirius he was taking the girl to the hospital wing and for Sirius to make sure all the students got up to safety. No sooner had he passed Sirius than the doors flew open again and four wizards stepped through. Harry and Sirius both started sending stunning spells and the four wizards dropped quickly. Then they both heard, "Ministry Aurors. Don't attack us."

Harry looked at Sirius and said, "We just stunned French Ministry Aurors. I'm going to the hospital wing, you explain it." Harry picked up Gabrielle again and ran upstairs yelling at everyone to get out of the way and also yelling for directions.

In the Gryffindor common room, Professor McGonagall had just followed Ron and Hermione through the portal. The two Gryffindors had been the last Hogwarts students to leave Beauxbatons before the portkeys were disabled. They had helped make sure all the students were back before returning themselves. "Now students. You've all been through a terrifying ordeal, but thanks to the guidance of Miss Granger and Mr. Weasley all the students got back through the portkeys without further incident. Now, Mr. Potter is still at Beauxbatons but we're sure he is fine."

Before she could continue, Neville spoke up, "But Professor. We saw Harry leave the common room just a few minutes ago. He said he was looking for Hermione." A couple other students agreed with Neville.

"Professor, there is no way that was Harry. We saw him start to carry Gabrielle up the stairs when we left," Hermione said.

"Sirius was there as well, he can back us up," Ron added.

At Beauxbatons, Harry burst in to the hospital wing and was shocked to see at least fifty students. Most of the injuries seemed minor but at least ten looked bad. "Gabrielle is hurt. At least a broken arm," Harry yelled.

The nurse looked at him and said, "Minor things must wait; lay her on one of the cots."

Harry turned and saw a line of cots with students already on them. He turned back to the nurse and said, "I can handle some of the minor things while you worry about the serious ones." The nurse looked at him like he was crazy but noticing the look in Harry's eyes, she just nodded. Harry quickly placed Gabrielle on one of the cots and pointed his wand; which he still had out and ready. He first cast a simple pain relieving charm and then went to work fixing her arm. It was a simple break and Harry was concentrating hard on his Auror training to make sure he got it right. He didn't want to pull a Lockhart on her. In a couple minutes, he could tell it had mended and he quickly healed the small cuts and scrapes on her.

Harry yelled, "Where's the chocolate? The ones exposed to the dementors will need some?" The nurse pointed to a cabinet and Harry summoned chocolate and began giving it to anyone who seemed to be bothered by exposure to the dementors. He then moved from student to student, mending any bones he could and healing all the minor cuts and bruises.

After a few hours, all the simple cases were fixed and Harry offered his help on the more serious ones. The nurse had to tell him what to do and Harry just followed instructions. After a bit more, the nurse was doing everything and Harry sat on the floor next to Gabrielle. He brushed her hair with his hand and she looked up at him. "You saved me again 'Arry."

Harry smiled and replied, "I couldn't let anything happen to my pretend date now could I?" That's where Harry fell asleep. Sirius had gone back to Hogwarts after the last of the students were accounted for but came back early the next day to find Harry asleep on the floor outside of the hospital wing. He shook Harry awake.

"What? Is everything ok?" Where Harry's first words and Sirius assured him that everything was fine. "Did Hermione and everyone get back?" Sirius again said that only two Hogwarts students had been hurt and they were minor. Hermione and Ron had directed all the students quickly back to the portkeys before any more could be hurt.

Harry stretched and groaned and just felt achy. The nurse came out and insisted on taking care of the minor cuts and bruises that Harry had received. "Thanks for coming Sirius. I didn't know what I was going to do."

"It's my job to protect you Harry," his godfather said trying to joke.

"I didn't need protecting, it was the students. I could have handled this if they hadn't been here," Harry continued the joke.

"I believe you. When did you learn to be a medi-wizard?"

"I only know a few minor things in Auror training. With the things Ron and I get into, being able to fix breaks and cuts seemed like a good idea," Harry said. "Can we go home now?"

"The Headmistress wants to see us but after that we can Apparate to Hogsmeade. They've stopped the floo and portkeys," Sirius said and started leading Harry to the Headmistress. The

two spent some time with the Headmistress and other teachers going over exactly what had happened. Harry found out that only three students had any serious injuries and those were from being hit by falling debris. The teachers thanked Sirius and Harry over and over but finally let them leave.

Walking out, Harry was stunned with the total amount of damage that had been done to the hall and the entrance corridor. It was obvious the attack was meant to damage the school more than to hurt students. Once they were outside Harry said, "I can't believe their teachers couldn't do anything to protect the students."

"This is more of an artistic school," Sirius added. "They only do very basic defense and teach almost no offensive spells. They didn't think they would ever need much protection. Only the anti-apparation barriers are in place and they don't extend very far. I think the French Ministry will be adding extra security after last night."

"What kind of Ministry Security people were they? Who barges into the middle of a fight like that?" Harry asked. "Did they give you much trouble for stunning four of them?"

Sirius laughed. "No trouble at all. They were more embarrassed that you and I took them out so easily. We made a pretty good team last night."

"Definitely. Maybe we should work for the Unspeakables together," Harry joked before they both apparated back to Hogsmeade.

Professor McGonagall was waiting as soon as Harry and Sirius got to the castle and led them straight to the Headmaster's office. Some of the students who had witnessed what happened were pointing and mumbling about them. Finally looking at his robes, Harry understood why. The robes were torn in many places and had dried blood all over them. Not all of it was Harry's blood but it still looked bad. When they entered Dumbledore's office, Professor Snape and Professor Figg were already there. The two instructors gave Harry a strange look and Sirius gave Snape an evil glare. "You don't look the best Harry, are you sure you're alright?" Dumbledore asked.

"Yes Professor. Most of the blood isn't mine and the nurse took care of my cuts this morning," Harry replied.

"I understand from the reports that you disobeyed the rule about returning immediately if anything strange happened," Dumbledore said with a twinkle in his eye. Before Harry could object the Headmaster continued. "We may have to revise that rule. I also heard the reports of how you protected the students."

Before Dumbledore could continue Harry interrupted, "Hermione and Ron made sure they were out. And, I couldn't have done it without Sirius."

Dumbledore raised his hands. "Yes, yes. I'm well aware of all of their contributions. In fact for once, the Daily Prophet seemed to get the story quite accurately from the version Sirius has told. What is your opinion of the attack?"

"I don't think they were really trying to hurt the students," Harry started but was interrupted.

"Oh, is that so? They why may I ask were you helping to heal injuries in their hospital wing most of the night? You don't call that hurting students?" Snape spat out.

"Sir. The Death Eaters were casting spells against the school, not aiming at individual students. They only directly attacked Sirius and me when I started stunning them. The students were injured by falling debris, not by spells. It was very strange."

"Indeed. Did you know that there were at least ten students who will swear they saw you leave your common room last night?" Dumbledore said causing Harry and Sirius to look shocked.

"Professor, I can assure you he was there with me. How do you think those monsters were stopped? Their teachers couldn't protect anything." Sirius was saying before Dumbledore stopped him.

"I know you and Harry were at Beauxbatons, but nevertheless students did see Harry leave the common room. Once Miss Granger and Mr. Weasley heard this, they checked your belongings and it seems your trunk had been searched."

Harry went white. "Um... Was anything taken sir?" he asked immediately worried about the orb.

"Mr. Weasley didn't think so; however Miss Granger came to me later and mentioned that she thought something was missing and you would know what that was. Do you know what she was talking about?"

Harry started to squirm. He could tell Dumbledore had an idea so he decided to come clean. "Maybe sir. I had a strange amber colored orb in my trunk."

"And what exactly did this orb do Potter?" Snape asked with a smirk.

"I'm not sure. When I was working with the Unspeakables we started looking at some artifacts they had gotten in a raid. I could hear this orb making noise but none of the others could hear anything. When I picked it up it changed colors but wouldn't do anything for any of the other people. It was very strange."

"That's very nice but why do you have this artifact in the school?" Snape again asked.

"After overhearing Galleys and Malfoy talk, I warned the Unspeakables that they were going to be raided. The day after the raid, I received a package with a note that just said 'keep it safe. Trust no one.' The orb was in the package. So, I've had it since the summer."

"You had this at home the whole time and didn't tell me?" Sirius asked sounding upset.

"I knew it came from the Unspeakables and they said not to tell anyone. I expected them to ask for it back and I would have just sent it to them. I really want to work for that department, they have to know they can trust me," Harry pleaded.

"Did you ever find out what it did?" Dumbledore asked calmly.

"No sir. I worked with it over the summer and did get it to where I was sure it was voices, or at least one voice trying to talk to me but I couldn't understand it. I've been so busy with other things here that I haven't done much with it since school started," Harry said.

"Would this object have anything to do with the incident you and Miss Granger had over the summer?" Dumbledore asked and Harry looked at him with shock and confusion. "The incident where she found out more details than you had originally given her?"

"How could she?" Harry thought. "Yes sir it did. I was holding the orb when she tripped and when she touched my other hand, she fainted."

"You told Hermione about this and not me?" Sirius said sounding hurt.

"Sirius. When you were in school, would you have gone to your parents or to a teacher with this? Or, would you, Remus and my dad have just tried to figure it out yourselves?"

Sirius kind of mumbled but McGonagall spoke up, "We all know the answer to that Mr. Potter. He would have done anything to keep it from an adult."

It was quiet for a minute until Sirius spoke. "I bet it was the relic the Egyptian man was using to try and steal the rest of Voldemort's powers."

"That would be my guess as well," Dumbledore said.

"You've had something that dangerous in this school all year? How could you be so stupid Potter?" Snape spat and Sirius stood up.

Harry stopped Sirius from saying anything. "If I didn't get the thing in the first place, they would have gotten it over the summer. The homes of all the Unspeakables were searched. I'm sorry I didn't tell anyone but I would do it the same way next time. I wasn't going to betray their trust," Harry yelled.

"What's done is done," Dumbledore said stopping the argument. "Harry's right that at least he was able to keep the relic safe for some time. My theory is that the attack on Beauxbatons was nothing more than a diversion so that someone could steal the relic from Harry. They had to assume he had it since they thought it was with the Unspeakables and they didn't find it during their searches."

"What will the orb do for them?" Harry asked.

Dumbledore looked very tired and said, "That orb is rumored to contain the essence of many evil witches and wizards. With the right spells, it can absorb the evil essence of dark wizards. This Egyptian man had planned on taking Voldemort's power and then using the combined power stored in the relic, he would be nearly invincible. It was pure luck when he was raided and the Unspeakables obtained the orb. If that hadn't happened, we would be facing an evil potentially worse than Voldemort. Now, we have to assume that Voldemort has the relic and will quickly regain his power. If he is able to draw out the additional power from the relic he will be many times more powerful than he has ever been."

Everyone sat there in silence until Harry asked, "Do we know who the person was who stole it last night?"

"Obviously someone with polyjuice potion. We found no trace of them when we realized something was wrong," McGonagall said. "Do you have any idea who could have impersonated you?"

Harry's obvious thought was Malfoy but didn't know how he could have gotten a part of him to use in the potion. Suddenly, Harry remembered the ball and being knocked down by Pansy Parkinson. She was lying on top of Harry for a few seconds and Harry remembered his head being sore. She could have easily taken some hair at this point, but Harry knew there would be no way to prove it. Harry was brought out of his thoughts by hearing, "I asked you if you had any idea who could have impersonated you?" McGonagall was saying in a harsh tone.

"I would bet money on Malfoy," Harry said turning to Snape. "However, I can't prove it."

Snape started to say something but was interrupted. "May I speak to Harry alone please?" Dumbledore asked and the others left. The Headmaster looked at Harry for a bit and Harry felt like the man was reading him like a book. "I don't blame you for any of this Harry. You delayed the inevitable of this happening. Sooner or later, Voldemort would have gotten this power." The Headmaster hesitated and went on. "You are old enough to make your own decisions on these things and upholding someone's trust in you is a hard thing to do sometimes but you managed it. Don't be upset. We may not have been able to protect the relic much better. Remember the Sorcerer's Stone? The brightest minds in the school were protecting it and yet Voldemort nearly got it. Nothing is perfect."

Harry sat there thinking for a minute and asked, "Sir. What did Hermione tell you?"

"The same as she told you Harry. She told me she was worried about you and never knew the true pain you had been through. She's a good friend Harry, you are fortunate to have friends like that."

"Yes Sir," was all Harry said before starting to leave.

"Oh Harry. I can't tell you enough how proud I am of how you handled things at Beauxbatons. Even if the Death Eaters weren't attacking the students directly, with dementors there it could have been a disaster. I'm sure they will never forget what you did for them."

At the bottom of the stairs, Harry didn't really feel like talking to his friends right now. There would be all kinds of questions and he was still too angry with Hermione to go into anything. He focused hard and turned himself invisible and quickly snuck up to the secret tower room. He hadn't been up there very long when he heard people coming up. Since only Hermione and Ginny knew of this place, he knew who it was.

Hermione ran over and hugged him. "I'm so glad to see you. We were all so scared."

He only lightly hugged her before pulling back. "No reason to be scared," Harry said.

"No reason? There were dementors and death eaters. I'd say that's plenty reason enough," Ron added. "Now, why didn't you tell me about this room?"

Harry gave him a look trying to say there are more important things but just replied. "I didn't want you and Parvati getting it all messy if you know what I mean." Ron went bright red but Harry continued. "How did you guys know I was here?"

Ginny held out the Marauder's Map. "So, you guys raided my trunk as well?" They started to apologize but Harry stopped them. "I don't mind. I heard you two did really good getting everybody back through the portkeys. Dumbledore said the Daily Prophet got the story right."

Ron and Hermione both blushed but Hermione said, "But you held them all off. If you hadn't stopped them, we wouldn't have been able to get the students through."

"Were you really healing people in their hospital?" Ginny asked.

"Only minor things. Broken bones and cuts. Nothing major," Harry said.

"What do you think they were looking for? Nothing seemed to be missing from your trunk," Ron asked.

Harry glanced at Hermione who looked guilty. "Who knows? Maybe they thought I had something I didn't. At least nothing was gone."

"Come down, it's about time for supper. Everyone wants to see that you're ok," Ron said.

"Nah. You guys go ahead. It's just been a bad week for me. I want to stay a bit longer. I'll ask Dobby to bring me something here," Harry said. "Go on Ron, I know Parvati can't stand for you to be away for long," Harry said and smiled at his friend. Ginny hugged Harry and told him how proud she was of him and left with Ron.

Hermione told Ginny she would be down in a couple minutes. Hermione sat there in silence with Harry for a bit. "They took the orb didn't they?"

"Yes," was all that Harry said.

There was silence again and Hermione asked, "What else is wrong?"

Harry looked at her and she knew he wasn't happy. "You told Dumbledore about poking around in my head. You promised you wouldn't say anything."

Hermione felt guilty. "You only told me not to tell Ron."

"I never thought you would go running to anyone else about it. That was very personal. I can't believe you did that."

"I'm sorry. I was just so worried about you. Please don't be mad," Hermione said sitting next to him.

"Why don't you go on down to supper. I'm going to skip our practice tonight. I'll make it up," Harry said calmly.

"I'd rather stay here. I don't mind skipping tonight," Hermione said looking very sad.

Harry didn't answer but got up and sent Dobby a message spell asking for some food to be brought up. They ate in silence but then Hermione asked for details about everything that happened at Beauxbatons. After that, Harry told her everything that Dumbledore has said.

"So we've been handling the evil essence of who knows how many dark wizards?" Hermione asked in amazement. Harry just nodded. "Why do you think it was trying to talk to you?"

"Maybe it thinks I'm evil and it wanted me to use the power."

"No, you couldn't understand it. That should show you're not evil."

"Then why could I hear anything and no one else could?" Harry asked still sounding distant.

Hermione sat for a second and said, "I think it's because you're so much more powerful than most wizards."

"Get real Hermione," Harry snapped back.

"Harry I'm serious. Sometimes when you get serious about magic, I can almost feel it coming off of you. The only other time I feel anything like that is when Dumbledore gets angry."

"I think you've had too much stress Hermione."

"When you realized dementors were near, you seemed so different, so confident. It's the same thing. You just knew what to do. I think the orb could sense the power and tried to communicate with you. The only reason it couldn't is because you're not evil."

"I'm not buying it. There has to be another reason. If I'm so powerful, why do I struggle with everything?"

"You haven't struggled at all this year. Think about it. Even you said that things were getting to be fun and you liked learning. Everything has been easy for you this year."

"I'm getting too tired to think Hermione. Let's go back to the common room." They both stood up. He turned to her and said, "Thank you for staying with me. It helped my mood a lot," then he hugged her tight.

She felt so warm and protected when hugging him. "No problem. That's what I'm here for."

It was now very late and they carefully snuck down and back to the common room. Hermione was pulling Harry by the hand and they were going to go to bed when they heard. "I thought you said you'd be down in a few minutes Hermione." They both turned to see Ginny sitting on the couch.

"Ginny! You scared me," Hermione said. "We ended up talking longer than I thought."

"Hermione was nice enough to pull me out of my bad mood," Harry said.

"I bet she did," Ginny said. "This showed you two pretty close most of the time." The redhead held up the map.

"May I have my map please?" Harry said taking the Marauder's Map and wiping it. He turned to Hermione and said, "Thanks again. I'm going to bed. Goodnight Ginny. Thanks for coming to see me earlier."

Harry left the girls to work things out. He couldn't figure out one girl at a time so if two of them were involved he would be hopeless. He had just got into bed when he heard Ron come up. "Are the girls still talking?" Harry asked.

"Yeah, they don't seem too happy. What's up?"

"Who knows? So, was Parvati glad to see you back?"

"She wanted to properly thank me for helping all the students get back," Ron said with a smile.

Harry was kind of envious of Ron right now. Ron had a girlfriend and they were getting along really well. Harry wished he were able to feel like that now.

Harry headed down to breakfast a bit late and was lucky to only have to talk about what happened at the ball a couple times before landing in a seat between Ron and Hermione. Neither Ginny nor Hermione were smiling much so Harry was eating in quiet when he was suddenly hugged from behind. "'Arry! You saved her again. I can't thank you enough." Fleur had him in a death grip.

All of his friends were now laughing at him. "Fleur. C'mon you're a teacher."

"Oh 'Arry. You really saved her. I heard exactly what happened. She means everything to me." Fleur was saying with tears in her eyes.

"No problem Fleur. I wouldn't let anything happen to her," Harry said.

"You healed her broken arm as well. She can't believe all you've done for her," Fleur said.

Harry was blushing and said, "Tell her I'm glad she's ok and I'm sorry I didn't see her before I had to leave."

Fleur hugged him tightly again and said, "My parents are so grateful to you. You'll come see us so they can show you."

Harry nodded and went back trying to eat. Everyone started teasing him after that. Even Ginny and Hermione were laughing now. Harry read the Daily Prophet article about the attack and was fairly happy with it. There was more about what Harry had done but there was also quite a bit about Ron, Hermione and Sirius and the roles they played. Harry also liked that both Ron and Hermione were getting many congratulations from other students and teachers. Ron liked this because it gave Parvati an extra excuse to reward him. Everyone was blaming it on Voldemort and Harry could tell that people were a little uneasier about things.

The trainer made Harry take it easy at Quidditch practice the next week. Harry felt fine and had wanted to try some feints but the trainer told him not to. Everyone was in a good mood after the victory over Bulgaria and they all made Harry feel very good.

Harry saw Kristi before leaving. "Hey. I just wanted to thank you again for staying with me in the hospital. I hate waking up and no one being around," Harry said.

"No problem at all," Kristi said and then looked at him closely. "Do me a favor though. Stop throwing yourself in the middle of trouble." Harry looked shocked because Kristi seemed so serious. "You should have just gotten out of that school." Harry couldn't quite make out the expression on Kristi's face.

"I couldn't do that. The students would have gotten hurt."

"I wish you'd worry a bit more about yourself. That's all," the chaser said with a strange look in her eye.

"I didn't get hurt. I'm not trying to get hurt or anything. Don't worry; I'll still be able to play Quidditch," Harry said trying to smile.

"I don't give a damn about Quidditch," Kristi said sharply causing Harry to jump. "I'd just rather not read about you dying in some attack. We both went through the same things with our parents."

Harry moved closer and said, "There were just a few dementors and Death Eaters. I can handle that."

"That's your problem. You think you're invincible. I read the articles. You couldn't even stun the wizards since you were too busy protecting the students."

"I had help and everything was fine. C'mon get back to treating me like a stupid schoolboy. Too many other people worry about me all the time." Harry hesitated and added, "And I don't want to hear you say you don't give a damn about Quidditch. That's all we should be thinking. We beat Bulgaria!"

Harry sat with her for a while and got her to tell him about the big party they had gone to after the match. Harry promised that next year he would be going to these parties since he would be out on his own.

When he got back to the school, Sirius greeted him and they went straight to Dumbledore's office. "There's been another attack on muggles. At least ten families in a small community outside of London," Sirius said.

"So he's back," Harry said sounding dejected.

"There's something else," Sirius said. "Written on the wall of one of the homes was 'Thanks for the gift'"

This hurt Harry bad. He knew that Voldemort was talking about the orb. He sat in the office hearing them keep saying it wasn't his fault and things like that but Harry didn't want to listen. Harry had resigned himself to the fact of having to face Voldemort again. He just wished that all those innocent people weren't being hurt. The Ministry and the papers were openly talking about Voldemort being back at least. Harry heard Sirius mention that he thought the community was handling the news pretty well.

Most of the students seemed to be walking on eggshells around Harry. His friends still acted the same but he could tell they were more worried. Voldemort hadn't done anything at all in

almost two years and everyone kind of got used to things being like that. Harry and Hermione continued practicing and they were making good progress.

Sirius had started coming to Quidditch practices with him, making the excuse about wanting to watch Kristi but Harry knew better.

The next big muggle attack came on the week of Harry's next Quidditch match. Harry was eating when Hermione showed him the article. Fifteen homes were destroyed and there was a picture of the home left standing. In big letters was written. 'I'm coming Potter'.

His friends looked very pale but Harry just shrugged his shoulders. "It's not like I'm surprised or anything. I'd understand if you guys want to stay further away from me," Harry said softly.

They all hit him and started yelling that they would never do that. "Ok, Ok! Man you're hurting me more than he would," Harry tried to joke.

"Don't joke about stuff like that," Hermione said sounding very angry.

Harry and Hermione were practicing the night before the match when Harry said, "Why don't you skip coming to the match."

"Why? Don't you want me there?" Hermione asked sounding hurt.

"That's not it. You've just seen us play Poland before and it probably won't be very exciting anyway," Harry said trying to seem up beat.

"You just don't want me to go in case something happens don't you?"

"So, what's wrong with that?" Harry replied.

"What's wrong is that I want to be there. You said I could go to every game this year and I'm holding you to it. Who else are you taking?"

"McGonagall, Sirius and Lupin," Harry said. "Bodyguards I guess."

"Do you think anything would happen?" Hermione asked.

"I don't think so. He's getting arrogant so I think he'll do something at the school to show that he can. A sneak attack while I'm playing doesn't quite fit."

They got to the match and Harry could see everyone looking at him a bit differently. He went to the locker room and changed quickly. The coach came over. "Are you sure you're up to playing today? We could put in Smith<the reserve>."

Harry stood up angrily. "I'm fine to play coach. This is no different than any other match. The only thing now is that you realize he's after me. He has been for years, nothing has changed."

The coach backed off and Harry saw Kristi come up to the coach. "Don't ever screw with him like that again. He could be asleep and play better than Smith." She went straight back to her locker and tried to get focused again.

There wasn't as much clapping for Harry this time but he quickly ignored that once the match started. It was a very anti-climactic game. France walked all over Poland and Harry got the snitch the first time it came out.

After showering, he was dreading the interview but he went up to the reporter as normal.

"Good game again Harry."

"Thank you. Ms. Mishmas."

"I have to ask if you're taking any extra precautions because of You-Know-Who?"

"Not at all. I would be very surprised if he did something at a match. He would probably want to do something less cowardly than attacking during a match. I doubt he would sneak up while I'm playing. If so, it would just show he's afraid to come straight at me."

"You seem to have recovered fine from the last match."

"I had to play all out to have a chance against Viktor. All it takes is one mistake or hesitation and he will win every time. When we meet again in the playoffs, I hope to get lucky again."

Harry made his way to his friends who congratulated him. They were starting to walk away. "Schoolboy. I guess you showed the coach today."

"Hey Kristi," Harry said before giving her a big hug, which caused the photographers to go crazy. "Thanks for sticking up for me in there."

"No problem. I didn't have any doubts. I liked your comments to the reporter. Now there's no way he would do something during a match without confirming that he's just a coward," Kristi said.

"That's what I hope. See you in a couple weeks," Harry said and hit her fist before leaving.

"Well, you seem a bit friendlier with her than I remembered," Lupin said nodding toward Kristi.

"He stayed with her in Paris over the holiday," Sirius added trying to embarrass Harry.

"Potter. Don't you let her drag you into her lifestyle," McGonagall added and Harry heard Hermione laugh.

"I think it's time to go home," Harry said and they went back to the school.

Chapter 17

The atmosphere around the seventh years was pretty stressed. Everyone was worried about N.E.W.T.s as well as Voldemort being back. Hermione spent every free minute studying and even Ron and Parvati could be found in the common room studying in the evenings. Harry was concentrating on Potions and History of Magic. He felt comfortable with the special presentation, defense and charms. Actually, Harry would be fine getting the 10 for their special presentation but wouldn't live it down if he didn't get defense and charms as well.

Many of the other sixth years were also having issues with the Apparation lessons. They had completed the theory and were beginning to try practical things in Hogsmeade. No one had been able to master it yet and being in Hogsmeade made everyone nervous.

The students were all down for breakfast one morning when Harry noticed Professor Dumbledore come out of the teacher's room with a very strained look on his face. The other teachers all turned to him and in a loud voice he suddenly said, "Prefects immediately lead all students to their common rooms and do not come out until a teacher personally tells you to." Everyone started moving and Harry saw Sirius run out of the teacher's room and speak to Dumbledore. They both looked at Harry and Sirius pushed his way up to where Harry was walking with Hermione.

"What's up Sirius?" Harry asked.

"Let's just get to the common room and then we'll talk. We need to move faster." Harry had never seen Sirius so focused before.

Harry suddenly had a feeling he knew what it was. "He's here isn't he?" Harry asked but Sirius didn't answer. When they got to the common room Professor McGonagall told all students except for seventh year to go to their dormitories. No one questioned her at all. Once only the seventh year students were left she was about to say something when they all heard a voice so loud things shook. **"Give me the boy or you all die."**

Harry looked at Sirius who looked like he wanted to cry. "Just let me go out there Sirius. I can't let anyone else get hurt," Harry pleaded loudly.

Hermione and Ron were saying, "No way."

Sirius said, "Do you really think he won't hurt others even if he has you? Can't you think of other people he wants to wipe out as well?"

Harry looked at Hermione and knew Sirius was right. "If I can get to the forest, maybe he'll come after me and then you can have a chance to get away," Harry said trying to think of any options

Sirius started to answer but was interrupted by the booming voice. **"The first person out of the door who isn't the boy dies."**

Professor McGonagall turned to Sirius. "Could you please wait outside? Make sure he doesn't get out that way."

"If you come through that picture, I'm stunning you," Sirius said and Harry realized his godfather wasn't kidding at all.

One of the students yelled. "Dumbledore's out there."

"You can't stop me old man. Not this time." Voldemort yelled.

They couldn't hear what Dumbledore was saying but Voldemort just laughed in response.

Harry got up and started pacing back and forth. The other students moved out of his way. Hermione could feel the rush of magic around him. Even some of the other students and Professor McGonagall obviously sensed something different about him. "This is my fight." Harry was saying to no one in particular.

People were talking to Harry but he wasn't paying any attention. He heard more noise from outside and some loud explosions and knew the two wizards were dueling. Harry again said more forcefully this time, "This is my fight."

Suddenly, in his head he heard, "So go fight."

Harry perked up and looked around but found no one. The next explosion caused him to pace again until he heard some screams and McGonagall gasp. Looking up Harry was directly in front of what looked like a ghost but no ghost he had ever seen. This was a large regal looking man with a long beard. The man looked strangely familiar.

"If this is your fight, then go fight," the ghost said looking directly at Harry.

"How can I get out there? Either the teacher or Sirius will stop me," Harry replied as if talking to a ghost was just natural.

Harry could hear other students saying things but couldn't really focus on what they were saying. Hermione was just staring at Harry and the ghost. Hermione had been able to feel the difference in Harry throughout this year and now everyone in the common room could see something had changed. He was totally focused on the large ghost in front of him and Harry almost seemed to give off his own light. Everyone other than Hermione backed up.

The ghost smiled broadly at the young man. "Just go. You're right, it's your fight."

"How can I fight him? My wand won't work against him," Harry asked seeming to understand instantly who this ghost was.

The ghost laughed and appeared very calm despite the terrifying sounds coming from outside. "You asked for help once before and it was provided. Just ask for it again."

Suddenly a picture formed in his mind and Harry asked, "May I have the sword?"

The ghost smiled broadly and said, "Of course. It is yours after all."

Godric Gryffindor's sword suddenly appeared in Harry's hand. It was exactly as he remembered it from the Chamber of Secrets.

"Can I defeat Voldemort with this?" Harry asked trying to ignore the sounds from outside.

"Of course. However, Voldemort is not your real concern. Do you want to fight Voldemort or evil?" the ghost asked coming closer to Harry.

"But the orb can't be destroyed," Harry said with some confusion, but not backing up from the ghost.

"No? Are you sure? What is one of the most destructive forces in nature?" The ghost stared at Harry. Harry turned to look at Hermione and thought of lightning. "That's right," the ghost added. "You can destroy Voldemort alone but not evil. You will need help."

Harry turned and said, "Hermione I need a storm, the best you can do."

This hit Hermione just like a request from Dumbledore would do when the Headmaster was being very serious. It was polite, but there was no doubt you didn't have a choice. "But Harry, I don't..." Hermione was saying before she was cut off.

"I can't do this by myself Hermione. I need your help," Harry said with total confidence.

"Harry, you can't go out there," Hermione yelled back.

"I'm going whether you help me or not. Please," Harry pleaded looking deep into his best friend's eyes.

Hermione was taken aback but moved to the window and started elemental magic to gather a storm.

Harry barely heard Professor McGonagall say, "Mr. Potter, we are not allowing you to leave this room!"

"Can I save Dumbledore?" Harry asked the ghost having made up his mind and ignoring McGonagall.

"No," the ghost said not looking very sad, "the destruction of so much evil cannot happen without the loss of good as well. Your Headmaster is doing all he can to help you in your fight."

Harry heard the thunder and then heard Voldemort. **"Even the gods know you've lost old man. The boy will be helpless without you."**

"How do you know I can do this?" Harry asked the ghost.

The ghost gave a loud laugh and said, "You are my heir. Of course you can do this if you use the sword as it was meant to be used." Then the ghost changed to look very serious and very powerful. "Just go do it!"

Harry stood up tall and just radiated power before Apparating out of the common room to the ground outside just as Dumbledore fell from the killing curse Voldemort had cast. Voldemort was hovering about twenty feet in the air in front of the castle. It was thundering and lightning was crashing around.

"No!" Screamed Harry but was drowned out by Voldemort's laugh.

Hermione could feel it again; the terrible sensation of loss that she had felt while looking into Harry's future. She was terrified that the next feeling was about to come true as well.

The screams from the common room made Sirius come in and he immediately panicked when Harry wasn't there. The ghost had already gone but McGonagall who could barely catch her breath said, "He...He...just apparated outside."

"So Harry. You got to witness the last breath of an old fool," Voldemort said relishing in the defeat of Dumbledore. **"You want to fight with a sword? Why not use your wand? I assure you it will work now. You see with all the extra power I've acquired from this relic you basically handed to me the little problem of our wands being brothers has been overcome, as you will soon find out. Crucio,"** Voldemort screamed and Harry held the sword defiantly in front of him. The blade suddenly glowed green and seemed to absorb the spell.

"Interesting." Voldemort said without fear. **"You know that when I'm through with you all your mudblood friends will be next. And then any family that won't support me. This is the end Harry, and your protector Dumbledore knew it."** There was another flash of lightning.

Harry just had a sense about what needed to happen, almost like a voice in his head. "You're still a loser Tom," Harry yelled. "You've tried to kill me five times and failed each time. You want to blame it on your pathetic helpers but you've been the failure."

"Silence boy. Let's see how you like some of the new spells I've come across." Voldemort said in a rage before casting another spell that hit the sword but still sent Harry sailing back, and causing him to land hard on the ground. Voldemort laughed loudly.

Harry had the wind knocked out of him but slowly got up and came back towards Voldemort. "Is that all you've learned Tom?" Harry yelled.

Harry watched as Voldemort said another spell and saw the orb flash back to amber while the monster was casting the spell. Harry once again went sailing back again from the force of that spell and landed on the steps of the school. He could tell the sword was getting heavier with each spell it absorbed.

"All of your friends who consider you their savior are watching your defeat Potter. How does it feel to be facing death alone?" Voldemort yelled.

"I'm never alone Tom. I have people who truly love me and will always be with me. That's something you will never have," Harry yelled back struggling to get back up.

Voldemort laughed and said, **"Then see how much help their love gives you now."** Harry watched as Voldemort started saying the killing curse. Everything seemed to slow down and Harry saw the green flash come straight toward him. Harry held the sword in both hands out in front of him and was sent flying against the castle wall from the force of the blast.

Voldemort laughed and the volume shook the castle. Then he yelled, **"There; your precious savior is dead. Send me the Mudbloods and I'll spare the rest of you. Now!"**

In the common room Hermione screamed, "No!" She couldn't believe that it happened so quickly.

Voldemort yelled, "**The next person out of the castle had better be a mudblood or you will all die.**" His voice was so loud everything shook.

Suddenly there was a small pop and Harry said, "I don't think so Tom." The sword was already in motion before Voldemort turned to see Harry standing face to face with him. The cut was clean and just as R.J. had told him; almost any creature will die if you remove its head. There was a huge gust of wind and Voldemort's body seemed to evaporate into a dark smoke and was being pulled into the orb, which glowed black almost seeming to suck the light in.

In the common room there was a second of silence and then. "He did it! Harry killed Voldemort," Ron yelled. Hermione still stared outside and knew something else was going to happen.

"What's he doing?" Sirius yelled. "He won already."

Harry was still hanging in the air with the orb levitated in front of him. He raised the sword above his head and began saying the spells to increase the lightning. The bolts were now crashing all around him and finally, one connected with the sword causing it and in fact all of Harry to glow bright white. Harry held on until he knew he couldn't anymore and roared at the same time as bringing the sword down onto the orb. There was a blinding flash of light. That was the last Harry remembered. He didn't see the wave of energy that roared through the forest and over the lake. He also didn't feel what every other person in the wizarding world felt. For most of them, it was like stepping from a smoky room into fresh air. They knew something remarkably good had just happened, but had no idea what. For some however, it was quite the opposite. They felt something being ripped from them, leaving only emptiness.

Chapter 18

Inside, Hermione screamed again and after the flash, the students saw Harry falling. She was feeling the final thing she felt when viewing Harry's future. She knew he was dead.

The students saw a huge white hand that seemed to be made out of clouds come down and catch Harry before he hit the ground. Another hand lifted Professor Dumbledore and then both bodies disappeared into the sky. The clouds cleared and the sky returned to normal within seconds.

The students were crying and Hermione was almost hysterical. She and Sirius were hugging each other when she looked up and said, "The diary! Maybe he's not..." Sirius looked at her confused but she sprinted up to the boys dorm and threw open Harry's trunk. Digging around, Hermione found the diary she had given him for a birthday present. As soon as she opened it, she went back into a fit of crying, since she was able to read everything.

McGonagall and Sirius came up and asked what it meant. "He's really dead. The diary was charmed so no one could read it until he died." She handed it to Sirius.

"Maybe there's a mistake," Sirius said not willing to give up on his godson. "Did he do the charm?"

"Professor Figg did, there's no mistake," Hermione said still crying openly.

"I want to ask her. There must be a mistake," Sirius yelled.

"Sirius, you saw what happened," McGonagall said looking obviously upset.

"What did happen? What was that hand? I'm not sure of anything. I'm not giving up hope. Where's Figg?" Sirius yelled.

Sirius, McGonagall, Ron, Hermione and Ginny all ran out of the room to find Professor Figg.

Harry felt strange. There was no pain and he suddenly felt very small. He was standing somewhere but could see no walls, no floor, and no sky. He was about to start walking when he heard. "I never doubted you could do it Harry."

Turning he saw Professor Dumbledore looking very normal. "Professor! Harry yelled hugging the man. I thought I saw you die."

"You did see me die Harry," the old man said looking quite happy.

Harry looked shocked. "But, that means I'm dead as well."

"Yes it does Harry," the Headmaster said not looking upset at all.

"Was I able to destroy the orb then?" Harry asked.

"Of course you did. Didn't I tell you that you could?" Harry suddenly saw the ghost again, except this time it didn't look like a ghost; it was a solid body.

Harry looked confused and heard Dumbledore say, "Harry, this is Godric Gryffindor. A very distant relative of yours."

Harry looked stunned. "So, Voldemort is gone for good."

Godric laughed. "So concerned with Voldemort. He was but a small player in the story." Harry now had a very confused look. "The essence of evil wizards thousands of years old are now destroyed."

"Voldemort was an evil wizard, no doubt about that but evil will come and go. That orb contained so much evil that it threatened more than anything Voldemort could dream of. Now, that threat is gone," Dumbledore said. "If Voldemort hadn't been so anxious to show everyone he could defeat you, he would have probably become invincible. If he had taken the time to learn more from the orb, we would not have been able to stop him."

"So then all of the students and my friends will be alright?"

"More than all right Harry," Godric chuckled. "There will be celebrations for many days. If I remember right they lasted about a week last time and Voldemort wasn't truly gone."

"But will people believe he's really gone this time. They just started believing he was really back. Won't the death eaters just keep causing trouble?" Harry asked.

"Oh they'll believe. You see when Voldemort made someone a death eater; he gave them a small bit of his power. He could easily replenish it of course but that power became the dark mark on their arm. If you would have just destroyed Voldemort they could have still caused problems. But since Voldemort's power went into the orb and you were able to destroy that; any being that was enhanced by Voldemort's power will no longer be magical. They may try to cause problems but cannot use magic to do so."

Harry smiled. "I didn't want to die, but if that was the way to end the run of evil wizards, I can't complain." Harry paused for a second. "It feels different than I expected. Will I get to see my parents?"

Godric laughed out loud. "I'm afraid there has been a slight change of plans. You are dead, but the deal was this realm needed a good wizard to leave your world to offset the evil. When this realm realized how much evil was going to leave your world, they needed two good wizards. That is why you were brought here." Harry looked totally lost.

On the way to find Professor Figg, Hermione not being to take anymore suddenly fainted. "I'll take her to the hospital wing. Please find Arabella," Professor McGonagall said before levitating Hermione and heading up a different corridor.

Sirius led the rest to the teacher's lounge where the other teachers had now gathered to get information. Sirius burst in. "Arabella. Could you have made a mistake with Harry's diary?"

"Oh Sirius. We're so sorry about Harry. The teachers who saw were just explaining what happened. How did he get out there?" Professor Figg started saying while crying.

"Please Arabella, could you have made a mistake? If the words show, are you sure he's gone?" Sirius asked almost pleadingly.

She came up to him and took the diary. "I'm sure Sirius. I did not make a mistake."

Sirius fell to his knees right there and started crying openly.

Professor Snape asked what the diary had to do with anything and Arabella explained about enchanting it so that it couldn't be read until Harry had died.

For the next couple hours, it was all the teachers could do to keep the students settled down. They were all moved to the Great Hall so all of the teachers could be around. The rumors spread quickly about both Harry and Professor Dumbledore being dead. Sirius stayed in the teacher's lounge with Professor Figg, Ron and Ginny and wouldn't let go of the diary. He had been flipping through it and found the page where Harry had described the thought that finally allowed him to cast a powerful Patronus. That thought was when Sirius asked Harry to come and live with him in his fourth year. Sirius began crying openly again. Ron and Ginny tried to comfort him and when Sirius went back to skimming the diary, he got a very strange look on his face. He quickly flipped through the pages he had just been looking at. "It's blank!" he said loudly.

The others turned to him and he stood up. "It's blank again."

Professor Figg took the diary and said, "That's impossible. It was revealed when he died."

"Then he's not dead!" Sirius exclaimed.

"Sirius. Something must be wrong. That's impossible," Professor Figg added.

"You told me earlier that nothing was wrong with the diary. He must be alive," Sirius said confidently. Just then Professor McGonagall came in. "It's blank Minerva! You can't read it!" Sirius said holding up the diary.

"There must be some mistake. I saw the writing myself. Arabella do you have an explanation?"

Before she could answer Sirius yelled, "He's alive. That's the only explanation."

"You saw what happened as well as I Sirius. There has to be another reason," McGonagall said.

"No! He's alive. I'm not giving up!" Sirius said and headed out, followed by Ron, Ginny, and the teachers.

"Harry. What Godric is saying is that you were brought here as the other good wizard. However the change in plans is that another wizard has offered to take your place and that offer has been accepted. You will be returning," Dumbledore said smiling.

"I don't understand. Who is taking my place and how is it possible for me to go back?" Harry said.

Godric spoke up sounding quite cheerful. "Almost anything is possible Harry. There is so much power in the world it is unimaginable. And, I am taking your place. I've been a ghost far too long and now that I have an heir who has been shown to the world, my work is done."

"No! Send Professor Dumbledore back. Hogwarts needs him," Harry demanded preferring the Headmaster go back.

"No thank you Harry," Dumbledore quickly said. "Even by wizard standards, I am very old. The only thing that has kept me around was the events of this day. I got to see the destruction of Voldemort and so much more evil. I am ready to stay here."

"But sir, I don't want you to stay," Harry said starting to cry.

"Don't be sad Harry. I am ready for this new adventure. Hogwarts will be fine. I have never known a happier moment in my life, so what better way to end it."

Harry looked at the Professor and was still crying.

"I would like to ask you for a favor before you go back," Dumbledore said looking at Harry. "Please go directly to my office. There is a small shield behind my desk. Place your hand on it and an alcove will open. Remove the box. Inside there will be four letters, two in white and two in black. Immediately destroy the black ones without reading them. Give one of the white ones to Fawkes and give the other white one along with the box to Professor McGonagall. Do this directly when you get back. Do you understand?"

"Yes sir. Um... What is the password for your office?" Harry asked.

"You won't need one Harry. Oh, one more thing. Would you please allow Fawkes to live with you? He is quite fond of you and I'm sure will enjoy that arrangement."

"Sir, I would trade with you and stay," Harry said.

"I know you would Harry. Please do not grieve. This is time for celebration. Do not change your life and don't miss Quidditch for this. Please tell Professor McGonagall to resume classes as soon as possible."

Harry turned to Godric and said, "Sir. What do you want me to do with your sword?"

The man laughed again and said, "That is your sword Harry. It should go in your home."

"What is expected of me now?" Harry asked not knowing what he was supposed to do.

This time Godric looked very serious and said, "Nothing. Live your life as you desire. Enjoy your friends and experiences; you will learn something from each and every one. I would ask that as a favor to me, you never stop learning. You have more ability than you know and only by continuing to learn will you be able to realize it. As you probably realized already, I had a knack for Apparation and you will find that if you keep an open mind, established rules will not necessarily apply to you."

Dumbledore added, "Things won't always be easy for you Harry. We kept you away from everything the last time this happened. This time you will need to deal with it, but you've

already been exposed to much already. This is not the end of evil either, only true death eaters have lost their power. There are many other dark forces in the world and they will not simply go away because of this."

Harry thought for a second and asked, "Did every death eater lose their magic?" Dumbledore nodded. "Is there any way to make them magical again?"

Dumbledore seemed to know what Harry was talking about and obviously Godric did as well. "Of course there is. It works somewhat like the spell Voldemort uses to mark his death eaters." Godric handed Harry a parchment and said, "Make sure you truly believe they are good before doing this."

"You know he won't accept that willingly," Dumbledore said with his familiar twinkle in his eyes.

Harry got a slight smile and said, "I can handle him." Harry hugged Professor Dumbledore one last time and allowed himself to be sent back.

Just as Sirius and his group were getting to the entrance hall the door flew open and Harry walked in. Harry was extremely sad and in shock about Professor Dumbledore being gone and just started walking towards the Headmaster's office. Sirius yelled and ran to him engulfing him in a hug. "I knew you were alive!"

"I have to go directly to Professor Dumbledore's office please," Harry said sounding very unhappy.

"Harry. Tell us what happened," Sirius said.

"After I get to the office. I have to go there first," Harry said in a calm and emotionless voice and just kept walking. The group of people looked confused but walked after him.

"Where is the Headmaster Potter?" Snape asked.

Harry's head fell even more and he said, "He's dead."

The group stopped but Harry continued on. "If he's dead, why are you going to his office?" Snape asked again.

"He asked me to sir," Harry responded not slowing down.

Even though everyone was very confused, they didn't ask any more questions and just followed Harry. When Harry was getting close to the statue guarding Dumbledore's office, Professor McGonagall yelled to him. "We haven't been able to get in since he vanished."

Harry just continued walking and sure enough, the statue moved to the side revealing the stairs to the office. This caused the other members of the group to stop and stare. Once inside, Fawkes gave a long single note that filled Harry with a warm feeling. Harry laid the sword on the desk and walked directly behind it. Seeing the shield he began to put his hand on it and heard. "What do you think you're doing?" from Snape.

Harry just ignored the comment and placed his hand on the shield. Just as Dumbledore had said, an alcove opened up. He heard Professor McGonagall gasp. Harry quickly took the box and removed the two black letters. Using elemental magic, he summoned fire from the fireplace to his hands and held the letters until they were only ash. Snape started to say something but McGonagall stopped him. Harry then took the two white letters and gave one to Fawkes who gave another note and quickly flew away. Then he placed the second white letter on the box and handed it to Professor McGonagall. After that he looked around and noticed someone missing. "Where's Hermione? Is she all right?"

McGonagall answered, "She's in the hospital wing. She fainted and will be fine."

"I want her here before I answer questions," Harry said firmly.

McGonagall nodded and Ron spoke up. "I'll run and get her."

"No! I'll get her," Harry said and then just vanished, leaving the others to wonder what just happened.

Harry appeared next to Hermione's bed. She didn't look like she was sleeping well. He took her hand and stroked her hair with his other hand. Almost instantly, she got a small smile on her face and looked more peaceful. After a couple seconds of this, he saw her eyes flutter and a grin come across her face. Almost instantly, that grin faded and she said, "It can't be. I saw the diary."

Madame Pomfrey came in and gasped at seeing Harry and quickly moved to Hermione's other side. Harry took Hermione's hand again and said, "I promise it's me Hermione. Not a ghost, me."

She flung herself forward and hugged him tightly. "How? The diary. There were words."

"Shhh," Harry said, "I'll explain it all later. Thank you for your help earlier. I couldn't have done it without you."

"Is he gone?" Hermione asked.

"Yes. And there's more but the others are waiting in Professor Dumbledore's office. I wanted you to be there"

Madame Pomfrey came over. "It doesn't look like I'll be able to hold you down, but you should at least put on some clothes before running out."

Hermione blushed and Harry waited outside until she came bursting out and hugged him again. She started asking questions but Harry wouldn't answer until they reached the office. Once there, they both sat down and Harry said; "Now you can ask me whatever you want."

The questions came non-stop. The one he remembered most was when Professor Figg said, "Harry. We all could read the writing in your diary. It is blank now. Can you explain how that happened?"

"Your charm worked perfectly. I was dead. That's when Professor Dumbledore told me to come up here," Harry answered without any change in emotion.

"Obviously you weren't dead Potter. You're here now," Snape said clearly not believing Harry's explanation.

"Then Professor Figg must have made a mistake. And then I must have dreamed Professor Dumbledore told me exactly what to do and that Godric Gryffindor was there as well. And, I must also have dreamed that every death eater, past or present can no longer do magic," Harry said and saw Snape give a little stumble.

"What are you saying Harry?" Sirius asked.

"That it's over. Voldemort is gone. The death eaters can't do any magic anymore. It's over."

McGonagall asked, "How did you get out of the common room, and how did you leave this office earlier?"

"I apparated to the ground by Professor Dumbledore," Harry said calmly.

"You can't Apparate at Hogwarts," Ron spoke up.

"I know Hermione is going to be mad, but she's wrong. That's what I did," Harry said. "Voldemort is really gone. But Dumbledore is really dead as well. Voldemort did kill him."

Harry answered many more questions and then remembered he had to say something. "Professor McGonagall. Professor Dumbledore said you were to resume classes as soon as possible. He didn't want people grieving for him. His words were, 'I have never known a happier moment in my life, so what better way to end it.'"

The rest of the day was a blur. There were many people from the Ministry of Magic asking questions. Harry had also talked to Mr. Weasley for a while. The people from the Ministry were saying things about a few employees couldn't travel by floo anymore and were having trouble with their wands. At first they didn't believe Harry when he said they had been Death Eaters but Mr. Weasley promised their arms would be looked at. Harry asked about Gallah and Mr. Weasley said that other than seeming extremely depressed, the Minister of Magic was still able to come and go. This surprised Harry because he assumed the man was a Death Eater.

Harry heard some people talking about the celebrations that were going to happen but Harry didn't feel like celebrating. He had just lost someone who seemed like his grandfather. Even if Dumbledore didn't want Harry to grieve, there was no way to stop it.

Later that evening, Harry pulled himself away from the others and went to the dungeons. Knocking on the office he heard, "What." Harry continued in.

"What do you want Potter?" Snape asked without too much venom.

"I think I can help you," Harry said with no further comment.

"Why would I want your help? It was a fair trade. The world is rid of that monster and people who made a bad choice are the only ones punished. I can't complain."

"I know you had already changed. I want to help," Harry said again.

"I'm sure there is nothing you can do. I'm going to finish the tests this year and decide what other options I have. I can still brew potions but not being magical makes every thing else difficult."

"I think I can do something if you let me," Harry said very firmly this time.

"No thank you Potter. I like to think I paid my debt to your father and don't want another one."

"That's what Dumbledore thought you would say. I really hope this doesn't cause another lifelong feud," Harry said before binding Snape to his chair.

"What are you doing Potter. Using magic on a teacher is grounds for expulsion."

"One more word and I can silence you," Harry said before grabbing Snape's left arm and pulling the sleeve back to expose the dark mark. Harry froze the arm in place on the desk and placed his right arm next to it. Then he laid his wand across his arm and onto the dark mark. Harry started saying the words from the parchment over and over. In a few moments, his wand began to glow green and then the mark on Snape's arm began to fade. After a couple more minutes it was completely gone. Harry stopped saying the spell and stood up. Then he released Snape from the bind.

"So. Try something," Harry said, tired of looking at the strange expression on the Potion Master's face.

Snape didn't look like he wanted to but tried levitating a chair that quickly came off the ground. Snape looked at Harry as if he'd never seen anything stranger. "Are you really the heir of Gryffindor?" Snape asked.

"That's what Godric said. I'm not going to argue with him," Harry replied and then added. "You're not going to hold a grudge about this are you?"

Snape actually smiled and said, "No. In fact, I haven't felt this clean in a long, long time." The Professor extended his hand and Harry shook it.

Harry turned to leave and heard. "This doesn't mean I'll go easy on you with the test." Harry didn't turn around and went back to Dumbledore's office where Sirius was.

McGonagall came in and said, "We're going to have the memorial this Saturday. I'm sure Professor Dumbledore wants the grieving over as soon as possible." The Professor still had tears in her eyes.

"Professor. He said that he was sure Hogwarts was going to be in great hands," Harry said wanting her to know that Dumbledore had confidence in her.

"Thank you Harry. It's just hard to imagine him gone," she replied suppressing her emotions.

"He once told me that people we care for are never truly gone. They will always be there to help and guide us. I've always tried to believe that is true," Harry said.

Classes were canceled for the next two days before the memorial. Harry had sent an owl to his coach and to Kristi saying he wouldn't be at practice because of the memorial. The press had been trying to get into the castle to interview Harry but Hagrid and the teachers had kept them out. The worst thing Harry remembered about the day Dumbledore died was telling Hagrid. Hagrid hadn't seen it happen and was devastated by the news that Dumbledore had died. After a few hours he composed himself but was obviously shaken.

McGonagall and Sirius sat Harry down and were trying to explain what was happening out in the wizarding world. All magical people felt it when Harry had destroyed the orb, and the word quickly spread out of the school about what happened. Every paper had been running articles about what Harry had done and some had also mentioned the help he received from Hermione. Sirius and the Professor told him that he should expect people to treat him very differently. Even within the school, the students that weren't his close friends had already begun treating him strange. Not exactly like they were afraid of him, but they weren't coming as close.

Harry spent most of his time in the secret tower room with Hermione, Ginny, Ron and Parvati. Ron had promised not to bring Parvati up here without the group. Harry felt this was his special spot and Ron respected that. The group of friends would just sit around talking.

"Have you been reading the papers? They are all talking about how you saved the wizarding world and that everyone believes he's gone for good this time. Hermione is becoming a celebrity as well," Ginny said looking proudly at her friends.

"So much for your nice quiet life Hermione," Harry said. "We may have to move to a little island or something."

"I'll deal with it. You know that things are going to be weird for you," Hermione said.

"Why? How can they get weirder?" Harry asked confused.

"You see how even the students are acting. Not like you're a celebrity, but like you're more powerful than Dumbledore was. It's kind of like they're in awe of you," Hermione added honestly.

"Now, that's a joke. It just seems like they're afraid of me or something like that," Harry said thinking of the expressions on the student's faces.

"I still can't believe you're really the heir of Godric Gryffindor," Hermione said shaking her head.

"Hermione. How many times do you have to say that? You're making me start to feel really inadequate," Harry said.

"It's nothing like that. It's just so amazing. What do you think it means?" Hermione asked.

"It means just that. I'm an heir. He helped me stop Voldemort," Harry replied not fully understanding what it meant to be the heir.

"He probably had some special talents. I'm going to research what they are and I bet you'll be good at them," Hermione said.

Harry shook his head and Parvati said, "Maybe that's where he got the talents Cho always talked about."

Parvati started laughing but everyone else was looking at her in shock. "What? Come on, she told everyone about his talents."

Harry blushed brightly.

The day of the memorial came about. The teachers had transformed the Quidditch pitch into seating for a great many people. Harry had taken his seat in the front row with Hermione and Ron. He heard a gasp and loud noise and turned to see Duram, the leader of the giant clan Harry had met. Harry stood up and went over to him.

"Duram. It's good to see you again. I didn't know you would be here," Harry said.

"Good to see you again as well Harry. My clan was very proud of you. It is the topic of many discussions how you used a giant's weapon to defeat that evil. It goes to show how our two races can learn from each other."

"I agree Duram," Harry said before returning to his seat.

Harry saw many Ministry officials as well as many old wizards that he had never seen. The stadium and grass seating were packed by the time Professor McGonagall got everyone's attention.

"Following the wishes of Professor Dumbledore," McGonagall was saying but was interrupted by the loud song of Fawkes flying in. The large phoenix circled once and landed on Harry's knee. Harry immediately stroked the bird and smiled at McGonagall who continued. "As I was saying Professor Dumbledore wants to keep this part short and let you all get on with the second part. Therefore, I turn the stadium over to him," McGonagall said and everyone looked confused. She tapped a piece of parchment on the table and suddenly an image of Professor Dumbledore appeared. It looked almost like a ghost but then Harry thought it was closer to Tom Riddle looked when he was fading back into the diary.

"Ah Friends. If you are gathered together watching this then I have passed. Please do not grieve for I am sure that if you look past your feelings of loss for me you will see that it is a joyous occasion. I say this with confidence due to a prediction Sybill Trelawney made many years ago. Now we will see if it has indeed come true. She came to me one evening and said that I would perish at the hands of great evil but my passing would allow a greater power to destroy the evil. I have thought for many years that Harry Potter would be that greater power. It has been obvious to some that he has not even begun to tap into his abilities. My guess is that he is there with you now and was the cause of evil being defeated. Now it is for you to judge if this has indeed come to pass or not but I believe it has. Please do not grieve, for even as I make this statement, I am old. I live for the day when the prediction will come to pass and on that day my time will be done. It is not a sad thing but the beginning of a wonderful journey. Please celebrate the journey and don't mourn the loss." With that the image disappeared and the parchment faded away. The crowd started clapping and then McGonagall announced there would be food and drinks.

Harry stayed in his seat thinking. Hermione got up and was talking to Professor McGonagall. Harry could see Sirius and Lupin talking nicely to Professor Snape and this made him smile. Then he heard, "That must have been a good thought." Kristi sat down next to him.

"Kristi. What are you doing here?" Harry asked not expecting to see his teammate.

"Just wanted to see how my star seeker is doing. You skipped practice."

"I'll be ok. I miss him a lot. I can't believe you came," Harry said glad to see his friend.

"Can I ask you something?" Kristi asked.

"Of course, anything."

"Is he really gone this time?" she asked softly.

Harry looked deep into her dark eyes and said, "Yes. He's really gone. No doubt about it."

"I never really had closure with my parent's death. Somehow I never believed he was really gone before but now I do," Kristi said. Harry leaned over and hugged her. She went on, "I knew it was you when I felt it. I don't know how, but I just knew it was."

"At least you're not yelling at me for doing anything stupid," Harry said trying to smile.

"Not today, but I will, don't worry," Kristi responded. He sat and talked with her for a while and then walked her to the carriage that went to Hogsmeade and gave her a hug before she left. Turning around he heard a familiar voice. "Always the gentleman."

"Hi Cho," Harry said suddenly feeling uncomfortable. "I didn't know you were here."

"I sat in the back. I wasn't sure if I was going to say anything or not."

"Why not? I thought you wanted to still be friends," Harry asked.

"I do. It still hurts to see you. I'm really glad you came through the battle ok. It must have been terrible."

"Yeah. I wish he had lived. How have you been?" Harry asked.

"Oh fine. Still working with the twins. I think the store is really taking off. They're thinking about opening a second one later this year," Cho said.

"That's great. I haven't been in a while. Too many people for me."

"Especially now. With you going back to the playoffs and saving the wizarding world everybody seems to think you're up there with Merlin," she hesitated "I kick myself every day for what I did."

"Don't think about it Cho. Just try to be friends. A lot has happened since then and I almost feel like a different person. I don't knot up inside like I had been when I saw you so I'm getting better," Harry said with a smile.

The two stood there without talking for a minute. "I should head back. Any chance we could meet sometime for lunch or something?" she asked.

"I'd really like that," Harry said before she left.

Harry was walking back to the celebration in his own thoughts when he heard. "Anything going on with you two?" Hermione had come up. She was trying to smile and be supportive.

Harry put his arm around Hermione and said, "Nope. How are you holding up?"

"Better than I expected. It's nice hearing all these people say so many good things about him."

"I agree. This has really helped me." Harry stopped and looked at her. "Having you around since it happened has helped more than anything." He gave her a big hug and took her hand to lead her back to the celebration. Harry spent the majority of the time hanging around the giant. He really enjoyed hearing Duram talk about his clan and life.

All of Harry's friends were noticing how the Slytherins would try to avoid him. They saw this as just an added benefit of Voldemort being gone. Classes started again the next week and the N.E.W.T.s started a few days later. The Dark Arts class was quickly cancelled and Professor Steiger left.

Hermione and Harry elemental magic practiced very hard in the evening and had requested the use of the Quidditch pitch a couple nights to practice on a larger scale. Hermione was once again very stressed out. Harry wasn't at all. None of this mattered that much anymore. He hoped to do well but either he knew it by now or he didn't. This irritated Hermione to no end.

They all had potions N.E.W.T this week and Hermione had History of Magic and Arithmancy. The next week they all had Defense Against the Dark Arts and Charms tests. Ron and Hermione also had Herbology.

Ron got his goal of four N.E.W.T.s which tied the twins. Harry was at four also and Hermione was now at seven. This week ended with the final regular season Quidditch match for Harry against Spain. Harry arrived and was almost mobbed by people wanting to talk about the defeat of Voldemort. Sirius, Kelly, Hermione and Ginny came along since Professor McGonagall was so busy. They left Harry to find their seats and he went directly to the locker room and changed. Everyone was quiet as usual in the locker room, but Harry could tell the others were looking at him differently. The coach gave his pep talk about not letting down since they had already locked up a playoff spot.

France was the visiting team and got announced first to polite clapping. When Harry was announced it was to thunderous applause. The entire wizarding world was celebrating the defeat of Voldemort. The home team got welcomed loudly as well. The match started and France was doing well against Spain and moving out to a nice lead. The first time the snitch came out Harry and the other seeker both made grabs for it before it disappeared again. Before either seeker had really adjusted, it appeared again and Harry was able to spin around

and get a jump on the other seeker. Soon after, Harry had grabbed the snitch and finished an undefeated season for France.

Harry quickly gave his interview and tried to sidestep any questions that weren't about Quidditch. Kristi had just come over and messed up Harry's hair. "The first undefeated season in over fifty years. You're going to miss one amazing party schoolboy."

"Next year after our second undefeated season I'll be there," Harry promised.

"I'll hold you to that," Kristi said before hitting fists and leaving.

That night Harry and Hermione were still practicing when she said, "Do you still want to be roommates?"

"Of course. Why don't you?" Harry asked concerned.

"Of course I do. I'm really looking forward to it. I just wanted to make sure. It seems like Kristi wants to be more than just friends," Hermione said worried about her relationship with Harry.

"I'm looking forward to it as well. I doubt she wants anything more. And, if she did and it bothered you at all, I'd pick being your roommate over dating her any time. I think it will be great," Harry said.

Hermione was debating on pursuing something more with Harry but was really worried about risking their friendship. Now with Voldemort gone, she knew Harry could open up more and get close to people. She felt like if she didn't give it a chance with him that he could find someone else and she would just remain his friend. She didn't want to rush anything and didn't feel like tonight was the time to say anything so she concentrated on practice.

The day came for their Extremely Advanced N.E.W.T. presentation. All of the teachers were present. Some of their close friends were invited as well. Even some people from the Ministry were there. Hermione was very nervous but Harry kept telling her they would do fine.

A large tub of water had been provided and there was already a fire going. They took turns doing small things. Hermione would make the water do actions and then Harry would make the fire do some things. At first they were very basic. Before long, they did something similar to what they had done at the holiday ball that worked very well. Next Hermione had made a tall wall of solid water before returning it to the large container. Harry then had the fire completely cover his body and he walked around like that for a couple minutes. Then Harry and Hermione separated and she summoned a water creature to stand in front of her. Harry did the same thing with fire and for the next few minutes, their creatures did battle continuing to draw extra energy from the tub of water or from the fire. Finally, Hermione summoned a very localized but powerful storm. Harry banished a large rock into the air and then caused a bolt of lightning to strike the rock with a loud explosion and then watched as small pieces of the rock fell back to the ground. Hermione quickly banished the storm and their presentation ended.

Their friends who had been watching came down to congratulate them while the teachers were determining the scores. This was the first time some of the people had seen anything like that.

"Those elemental creatures were wicked!" Ron exclaimed. "We should send them after the Slytherins."

Hermione quickly admonished him for those thoughts. Lupin and Sirius were very impressed and Sirius promised to try and study the techniques harder now. Harry recognized someone he hadn't seen in a long time come up. "Fletch! Why are you here?"

Fletch was shaking Harry's hand and said, "Arthur told me about this and since I like to keep an eye out for interesting things, I wanted to watch. You two were very impressive." He looked serious for a second and said, "I want to apologize for exposing you to so much danger with the orb. We had no idea it was that bad."

"That's part of the job," Harry said with a smile. "At least it's gone now."

"Are you still going to come to work for us? We can easily work around Quidditch," Fletch asked.

"I'd love to. The finals are in a few weeks and then I'll be there. I'm really looking forward to it," Harry said excitedly.

"It'll be good to have you. See you in a few weeks," Fletch said before leaving.

The teachers came over and Harry went to stand by Hermione. "That was a very impressive display. You performed your actions on the three elements perfectly but since you did not use all four techniques, we can't award full marks," McGonagall said. She was about to continue when Hermione spoke.

"One moment professor." And she whispered something to Harry. He was shaking his head and looking uncertain but then Hermione addressed the teachers. "If we could do something from the other one would we get full marks?"

McGonagall looked at the other teachers who nodded and said, "Yes, that would be acceptable."

Hermione said to Harry, "You can do it. I know you did it that day you were upset during practice."

Harry whispered back, "I'm ok with not getting full marks."

She pleaded, "Please do it for me. I want us to get full marks."

"Mr. Potter. Will there be anything else?" McGonagall asked.

Harry saw the pleading look in Hermione's eyes and said, "I'll try professor." He put his wand back in his pocket and started trying to focus. He tried to remember the last time he caused this to happen and remembered that he didn't really know what he was doing that time. Harry started to get the picture of what he needed to do and within seconds the ground started shaking around them. For a few seconds it got quite intense before he concentrated on calming back down and released the spell.

When he finally opened his eyes, he could see the look of shock and in some cases fear on the faces of the people around. Only Hermione was beaming. She stepped up and gave him a big hug. "I told you that you could do it."

"Very well Mr. Potter. Full marks as well," McGonagall said still looking at him warily.

The friends went back to the common room and Harry felt relieved. "No more tests," he said. Then he thought of something and went to grab an item out of his trunk. He told his friends that he would be back and headed to the Headmistress' office. It still seemed weird that he didn't need a password to get up anymore but he did knock on the door and she called him in.

"What can I do for you Mr. Potter? Please don't tell me there is a problem," McGonagall said.

It was weird being in here. Harry had already sent Fawkes to his home and the room seemed different without the stunning bird. "No problem Professor. I wanted to give you something. I won't need it anymore." He handed her the parchment.

She looked at it and said, "What exactly is this?"

"As Fred and George Weasley put it. 'It is the secret to our success,'" Harry said and laughed. Then he took out his wand and said, "I solemnly swear I am up to no good." And tapped the parchment. It quickly filled in to show the map of the school with little dots all over it."

McGonagall looked stunned. "Does this show what I think it shows?"

Harry smiled. "Yes Professor. I thought you might find it useful. The only other person I thought about giving it to was Ginny but she shouldn't be sneaking around anyway."

"Wise choice Harry. How did you get this?"

Harry told her the story and about who had made it. They ended up talking for a bit about the marauders.

The students were all relaxing in the common room talking about their future plans. Ron was going to help the twins open a store in Hogsmeade and he was going to run that location.

Parvati was going to work in a fashion store in Diagon Alley. Hermione was going to get ready to start at the university. They all were getting a bit sad about leaving. This bothered Harry more than any of the others since he still considered Hogwarts his home but he tried to hide his feelings.

The final meal was a mixture of sadness about Dumbledore and happiness about Voldemort being gone. McGonagall gave her speech and mentioned that she was proud of how everyone handled the events of the past month. She announced that all the teachers would be returning and that Remus Lupin was going to take over the Transfiguration classes as well as become the head of Gryffindor house. This seemed to please everyone at the Gryffindor table.

The next day, Harry rode back on the train with his friends. This was how he met them and he wanted to end their school experience the same way. Hermione, Ron, Parvati, Ginny and

Harry were all sharing the coach back. Ron and Parvati kept kissing each other. "C'mon get a room you two," Harry had to keep saying.

After the third time of this Parvati announced. "Actually Ron's going to. He's going to look for an apartment in Hogsmeade tomorrow."

Ron turned bright red and Ginny asked, "Does mum know about this?" Ron shook his head no and Ginny added, "Oh, I want to be around when you tell her. She'll be crying and saying that she's losing her baby boy."

The rest of the group just laughed about this. Then Ginny looked sad and said, "That means I'll be all alone at the house. I hadn't thought about that."

Ron said quickly. "You can come and stay with me sometimes." But when he noticed Parvati give him a glare he added. "Well once in a while."

Hermione quickly added, "That's ok Ginny, you can come and stay with us whenever you want."

Harry's eyes got big and the others looked at her confused. "Who's us?" Ginny asked.

Hermione didn't blush at all and said, "Harry and I. We're going to be roommates."

Ron sat up. "What? When did this happen? Where are you going to live?"

Harry answered, "We've talked about it for a while. Hermione's going to move into the castle but if that's inconvenient for her school for any reason, we'll find some other place."

Hermione added, "Harry said I could change anything I wanted to make it more comfortable for me."

Ron started to say something but Ginny got there first, "And I can really stay with you sometimes."

Hermione answered, "Absolutely."

Harry looked worried and said, "Hermione, do your parents know about us being roommates?" He knew that he would be seeing them when they got off the train.

"Of course. I asked them a couple weeks ago. They said they were sad to see me go but was glad I wasn't living by myself. They trust you Harry."

"Everybody trusts Harry," Parvati added with a laugh.

"Then why don't I ever get any dates?" Harry joked back.

"That's because you don't trust anybody," Ron replied.

They were just about to the London station when the door opened and in came Malfoy without his bodyguards Crabbe and Goyle. "I bet you think you're just too good for words now don't you Potter?"

Harry kept quiet but Ron spoke up. "Where are your bodyguards Malfoy? I can't believe you came here without them. Especially now that your father can't threaten anyone with dark magic anymore." Ron laughed.

"Why do you think my father can't threaten anyone with magic?" Malfoy spat back.

Hermione replied. "Well because all death eaters lost their magic when Voldemort died. Surely he told you?"

"Don't expect me to believe you Granger. There's no way my father lost his magic. No way."

Harry was still quiet but Ron spoke up with a snicker. "Then just ask him to do something when you get home. Better yet, do something really bad and see if he punishes you with magic or just beats you muggle-style."

Malfoy's eyes got a furious look. "I swear, one of these days I'll wipe that smile off your face Weasley. If all death eaters lost their magic, then why can Snape still do it? I've seen him acting normal. Well not exactly normal, too cheery but he was doing magic," Malfoy hissed.

Ron, Ginny and Hermione looked confused but then Hermione spoke up, "Maybe because he changed sides and was with us and the end."

"That's not why," Harry said calmly causing everyone to look at him, "I gave Snape some of my magic," he hadn't told anyone about this.

Everyone sat there stunned until Hermione said, "That's impossible Harry. You can't give someone magic." Malfoy agreed.

"You said it was impossible to Apparate on Hogwarts grounds," Harry replied calmly causing Hermione to get a thoughtful look.

"Snape would have never let you help him," Malfoy spat.

Harry kind of chuckled. "True. I had to bind him and force him to sit still during the process. I wanted to leave him like that."

They were all looking at Harry until Malfoy said, "You're lying like usual Potter. My father will be fine when I get home. You and your little fan club will never change." He slammed the door and left.

Hermione was the first to speak. "Did you really give Professor Snape some of your magic?"

"Yes. Godric gave me an enchantment to use," Harry said still without emotion.

"You wouldn't have done that if we were coming back to school would you?" Ron asked causing everyone to laugh.

Mrs. Weasley was the first to hug Harry when they got off the train. Ginny came up and said loudly, "Mum. I think Ron has something to tell you." Harry stood back and saw Ron get really red.

Harry then followed Hermione to greet her parents. She hugged them both and Harry shook Mr. Granger's hand. "Is it good to be out of school?" Her father asked.

"For me it is. It's just another break for Hermione. She can't get enough of it," Harry joked.

"Would you like to ride back to our house Harry? Maybe we could talk about you two being roommates on the way," Mr. Granger said.

Harry turned white and muttered, "Um...sure."

Hermione hit her father and said, "Dad!"

Mr. Granger started laughing and Mrs. Granger said, "Why don't you ride with us and we'll just talk. We're happy you two are being roommates." Harry followed them to their car.

Later that evening Harry arrived home to find Sirius and Kelly there. Sirius had setup the perch that Fawkes used in the corner of the main room and the large bird was sleeping there peacefully. They talked for a while and Harry could tell that Sirius was nervous.

"I want to tell you something Harry. Actually we want to tell you something. Kelly and I are getting married," Sirius said looking nervous but Kelly looked happy.

Harry could tell the next year would be very interesting.