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# Parallels (part 1)

## Number 12 Grimmauld Place...

Harry looked out the window of the library of Number 12 Grimmauld Place and felt the weight of the world on his shoulders. He was used to the feeling. What he wasn't used to was the gaping hole where his heart had once been. It was the summer between his sixth and seventh years and Voldemort had been dead exactly three weeks.

If Voldemort had been the only death, then Harry might have been out celebrating like the rest of the Wizarding world. But his hadn't been the only death. Dumbledore, Ginny and Bill Weasley, Tonks, Remus, Flitwick, Fudge, a third of the student body of Hogwarts, the entire Malfoy clan. The list went on and on.

The final battle had lasted all day and it had pitted every Ministry Auror and every member of the Order of the Phoenix against the Death Eaters. Harry sighed and fought to keep the tears from flowing again. He had cried once, and only briefly, when he had stumbled upon the body of Ginny Weasley. She had been one of the two women who loved him for who and what he was, rather than the legend he had become. He had knelt next to her broken body and shed the only tears in public since he was a child. He was used to crying alone, although he fought that as well. He loved her, so much so he had intended to marry her.

*Well, that's not going to happen now,* he thought bitterly.

Harry lifted a silver chain and placed it around his neck. Attached to the chain was his shrunken warlock's trunk containing multiple compartments, all his possessions and all of his money. He had emptied out the Potter and Black family vaults earlier in the day. He had known days ago that he would be doing this, and he had been preparing since Ron and Hermione had left Grimmauld Place.

He was tired, dead tired, and he needed to go someplace where no one knew him or of his fame. He had come up with an idea. He wasn't sure if it would work, but he knew there could only be two results. Either the spell would take him to a place where he could be free, or it would kill him.

In the summer of his fifth year, when his Mage abilities began to emerge, Dumbledore had started to teach him about the nature of magic. It was that training that gave him hope for a peaceful life somewhere.

"Hedwig," he called softly.

Hedwig ghosted in from the kitchen and landed on a nearby table. He stroked his owl fondly, then handed her a note.

"Take this to Hermione, and then stay with her. She'll take care of you from here on, girl. Be good for her, for my sake, please?"

The large snowy white owl trembled under his fingers. If she could, she would have wept. Hedwig knew exactly what Harry had planned and there was nothing she could do to stop it. Her wizard had set himself on this path since the death of his mate.

With a mournful hoot, Hedwig bobbed her head once and flew out the open window.

He donned his cloak, pulling up the hood, and took one final look around. He then traced a series of complex runes in the air and a rift appeared in front of him. On his side was Grimmauld Place, on the other, total blackness. Harry summoned his staff and stepped into the rift. There was a sucking sound and then the rift closed up behind him, leaving only silence in the Noble House of Black.

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## The Burrow...

The Burrow was a much more subdued place these days. The deaths of Ginny and Bill had hit the Weasley clan hard. They had rallied around each other, taking comfort and strength from the survivors, but the joy, the merriment and sure knowledge of love, family and security had been shattered.

Molly was a changed woman. The deaths of two of her children had affected her deeply. She had dropped weight and had lost her loving smile. Shortly after the final battle, she had confronted Harry, who still lay in his hospital bed, and accused him of not trying to save Ginny. Arthur stopped her immediately, but the damage had been done. When Harry had finally been released from St. Mungos, he had refused to go to the Burrow. Molly came to her senses eventually, but the breach was wide and would be a long time in healing.

Ron and Hermione were now staying at the Burrow. They had left Harry a week ago, against Hermione's better judgment, but Ron had insisted. After all, they had a wedding to plan for and the planning would go a long way to healing the surviving Weasleys. Hermione tried to convince Harry to come to the Burrow, but he refused outright. He told the two he had things to do and they were preventing him from doing them, then ushered the pair to the floo.

They were just sitting down to dinner when Hedwig flew into the kitchen and landed in front of Hermione and she hesitated to take the letter the owl carried. For the first time in her life she wondered if she didn't have a little bit of Seer in her, as she suddenly felt a cold wave of fear wash over her. This letter, she was sure, wouldn't be good. With shaking hands, she reached out and took the letter. Free of her burden, Hedwig sprang aloft and landed on Hermione's shoulder.

"That's strange," commented Ron with a frown. "If she were waiting for a reply, she would have stayed on the table."

Hermione opened the letter and started to read. As she did, her eyes filled with tears and her hands began to tremble. When she finally put the letter

down, she stood carefully as to not upset Hedwig and quickly walked out of the kitchen.

From the living room the entire family could hear her sobbing.

Perplexed, Ron started to reach for the note when Mr. Weasley snatched it up and started to read aloud.

*My dearest family,*

*They say life is a journey. Well, it is time to end one journey and start another. I find myself alone in a world that considers me either a type of god figure or a dangerous freak. Few know me for what I am, and fewer still are willing to learn who I am. The hole that exists where my heart once was is raw and deep and it will never heal as long as I remain here.*

*I have loved two women in my life. I lost one to the war, and I gave up the other so that my brother would have his own happiness. Ron, treat Hermione with love and respect always. Life is fragile and your loved ones can be ripped from your life if you aren't careful.*

*Dearest Hermione, I must confess that I felt more for you than simple brotherly affection. I never acted on those feelings because, as much as I loved you, I also loved Ron. He's a good man, Hermione, one of the best, and he deserves your love.*

*Fortunately for me, I met a wonderful girl who captured my heart and gave me happiness. Ginny filled my heart like you could have. I have been blessed to know both of you. What can I say, except that it has been fun. Please care for Hedwig and have fun. Break some rules, play a prank on someone. Live, Hermione. Live richly, and hold tight to those around you.*

*By the time you read this, I will have already attempted a cross dimensional transport. Dumbledore spoke of it often during the final days of my training. I think, even then, he was priming me for what I had to do. This will either work, or I will end up being with Ginny tonight. In either case, I'll welcome the results.*

*I have left instructions with Gringotts. They are holding the deed to Grimmauld Place for Hermione. Fix it up and live in it, or sell it, I don't care. I have also opened an account in the name of Ronald and Hermione Weasley. I'm sorry, Ron, I know you hate charity, but please, accept this money from your brother. The ten million galleons will go a long way to buying a house and your own Quidditch pitch. I've also placed another ten million into your parent's vault. Since I'm gone, they, and you, can't give it back. Use it well.*

*May your future be filled with peace and love.*

*Harry Potter*

Molly sank heavily into a chair, buried her face in her hands and sobbed. The war had just claimed another member of her family, another one of her sons. There would be no time for her to mend the breach she had created, no way to help heal the hurt she had caused.

Ron stood shakily and walked into the living room where he embraced Hermione. He tried to be strong for her, tried to support her in her sorrow. But the knowledge that, in this life, he would never again see his best friend, his brother, broke his resolve. Tightening his grip around the woman he loved, his grief rose in him like a living thing and he wept.

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## **Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry...**

Albus Dumbledore sat drinking a cup of tea with his Deputy Headmistress in her office. In just a week's time, students would arrive to begin another school year at Hogwarts.

"So, Minerva, do you think you might manage to get your lions to win the house cup this year?" Dumbledore said teasingly.

"I can hope, Albus, but you know as well as I do that I have more than my share of..." she paused as the castle echoed with a soft tone, then shook gently.

"Albus?" Minerva asked in alarm.

Dumbledore stood and stared at the ceiling in confusion. "Something powerful has breached the wards, very powerful. A what ever it is, Hogwarts is recognizing the intruder and accepting him or her. This is most strange... Minerva, alert the staff and let's search of the castle from top to bottom."

The search was quickly called off when one of the castle ghosts reported a student in the Great Hall, where no student should yet be.

Dumbledore led the staff into the Great Hall. Up near the head table was a young man wearing a hooded cloak and kneeling on the floor. From the sound of it, he was weeping. The Headmaster moved closer to the young man, but he sprang to his feet before Albus could reach him.

In one hand he held a sword, in the other, a staff! An unknown shield snapped into place around the young man and his eyes glowed brightly under his hood. The skylight charm shimmered in response to the waves of magic pouring off him.

"Stand and identify yourself," hissed the young man. The staff pulsed and Dumbledore could feel this man preparing himself for combat.

Albus knew that this young man, whoever he was, held extraordinary power and he had to be very careful in dealing with him. Straightening to his full height, the Headmaster waved his wand, bringing up the lighting level in the hall. "I am Albus Dumbledore, Headmaster of Hogwarts. And you are?"

The green eyed man swayed for a moment, then the sword vanished from his grasp. "Dumbledore! Thank Merlin" he whispered. "It worked!"

"May I enquire as to what worked?" pressed Dumbledore again.

The man straightened himself out and pushed back his cloak. "Albus, I am a dimensional traveler."

Dumbledore arched an eyebrow at the announcement. "Indeed? There has not been a dimensional traveler for nearly two hundred years. Might we know your name, Sir?"

"I am Lord Harry James Black-Potter, Chief Warlock of the Order of the Phoenix and Battle Commander, three time winner of the Order of Merlin, first class, a Founders Heir... Damnation, I hate those enchantments!" he muttered.

Dumbledore nodded, letting a small smile slip, while behind him, one of his teachers fainted and another looked ready to join her.

"Minerva, Sirius, please see to Lily. I can quite agree with you, Mr. Potter. When I received my Order of Merlin, the enchantment period was five years, not the single year it is now. My colleagues seemed to enjoy asking me my name because of it. Now, however, it would seem we have some important issues to discuss. I think, perhaps, it would be best if we sat at the table and you told us your story, or what you can of it."

Harry nodded and waited for everyone to sit down. Sirius and Minerva carefully helped the woman, Lily, to a chair. Harry gasped when he got a closer look at her. It was his mother! He ruthlessly pushed that emotion back and walked over to her. She was awake and eyeing him in disbelief.

"Lily Potter?" he asked in a whisper.

"Lily Evans-Potter," she whispered back, then she nodded, tears forming in her eyes. Harry's own eyes grew moist.

He reached out to touch her, then pulled back his hand as if in denial. He closed his own eyes as a wave of emotional pain washed over him. "I think we'll have much to discuss later," he offered with a sad smile, then he turned back to face Headmaster Dumbledore.

"Headmaster, one quick question before I begin please... Is Voldemort alive in this dimension?"

"No, he died when the spell he cast on you as a baby backfired, killing you both."

Harry breathed a silent prayer of thanks, then sighed with relief and nodded, acknowledging the older wizards words. He tapped the floor with the butt of his staff, and then released it. The staff hovered, waiting for his hand to retrieve it.

"In my dimension, Voldemort has been dead for just over three weeks. He died in the second battle of Hogwarts. That battle resulted in the deaths of nearly everyone I loved, including the girl I intended to marry.

"In my universe, the night Voldemort attacked my parents and cast a killing curse on me, he was torn from his body and I survived. It was prophesized that Voldemort would return and I would have to kill him. Return he did, and I fought him to a standstill several times before he became corporeal again at the end of my fourth year.

Since it's late, I will only touch briefly on what happened. I'm sure in the days to come we can sit down and compare histories."

Harry told them of his parents death, and his being sent to the Dursleys to live. Lily gasped and shot a hateful glare at Dumbledore for that. He touched on each of his years at Hogwarts briefly, omitting a great many details. Then he explained how Sirius died, after only a few short years of freedom. Finally, his voice flattened out, becoming monotone, as he described his sixth year, the war and his training, the first battle of Hogwarts, and then, just two months later, the second cataclysmic battle.

He kept shooting looks at Lily and Sirius, both of whom were shedding silent tears during his story. He wanted nothing more than to find someplace quiet where he could finally weep for those he's lost.

When he finally stopped talking, Dumbledore stood. "Mr. Potter, tomorrow we will have to test you under Veritaserum, but I daresay I... we will do everything in our power to help you rebuild your life here. Since you were sorted into Gryffindor, we will make arrangements for you to complete your final year as a Gryffindor. We will also have to register your presence with the Ministry. Every dimensional traveler is registered, as I'm sure you are aware.

Now, however, I think it's time to retire. It's after ten, and I daresay you have two family members here who would like to speak with you.

"Lily? Do you have any objections to him staying in one of your guest bedrooms?"

Lily shook her head. She kept staring at Harry and finally stood and walked to him. Offering him her hand, he reached out shyly and took it. She looked at Sirius, arching an eyebrow in silent inquiry.

Sirius shook his head. "No, Lily. Tonight I think you should get to know your son. There will be time for his Godfather tomorrow, a whole lifetime of tomorrows."

Lily beamed a smile at him and nodded. Then, ignoring the murmur of the staff behind her, she led Harry to her quarters.

She opened the door and held it open long enough for him to enter, then followed him in. The short corridor opened up into a cozy living room with a couch in front of the fireplace. Harry gestured and his staff returned to his dimensional compartment. Then he removed his cloak and turned to look at Lily.

Lily examined this young man, a visitor from another dimension; yet somehow of her own flesh, as well. He was broad in the shoulder and dressed with an economy of motion. He had a wicked scar on his forehead and another that began on his neck and went below the collar, which looked new. His eyes rarely stopped, as if he was looking for danger. He seemed to be well built, leanly muscled, as if built for speed instead of strength. He was dressed in Dragon hide from head to toe. He had apparently made his jump thinking he might end up in a fight when he arrived.

Harry looked at his mother. She was older than she appeared in his photo album. There was gray mixed here and there in her brilliant auburn hair. Her clothing looked to be frayed slightly, which surprised him. It was not something he had expected. She moved closer and he wondered what she was doing. When she reached out to touch him, he flinched slightly.

Her eyes widened at his reaction. "I'm sorry."

"No, it's alright, really. I just... well, except for Mrs. Weasley and Ginny, no one ever wanted to touch me," he whispered back, his eyes filled with pain again.

"I know you're not my son, but in a way, you are. I can't give you back your childhood, but we both lost something a long time ago. And you being here, now, gives us both a chance to recapture a little of what we lost."

He nodded, his own eyes filling with tears to match hers. "Mum" he said softly, tasting the word, trying it out.

Lily choked and grabbed him by the shoulders and, despite being a good six inches shorter than he was, pulled him into a tight embrace. That was the breaking point for both of them. Harry let out a soft cry of anguish and began to cry in her arms, while Lily cried in his.

How long they stayed like that, neither could say. Eventually their weeping stopped and they both heard a cough behind them. Harry looked up to see a black haired green eyed girl staring at him. She was nearly the same height as his mother, and dressed in pajamas decorated with little snitches.

Lily released Harry and held a hand out to the girl. She couldn't have been more than thirteen. "Harry, I want you to meet Althea Lily Potter, your sister."

Althea looked at her mother as if she were insane, while Harry stared at the girl who could have been a carbon copy of Lily, except for the hair.

It took Lily a while to explain to Althea, but she finally caught on, then she sized Harry up and down. "Dang Mum! Are you sure he's my brother? He's a hottie!"

"Ally, stop teasing your brother," Lily said absently as she bustled about making tea for everyone.

"Yes, Mum," replied Althea, then she giggled looking at Harry again.

"Mum? Where's dad?" asked Harry. He loved the idea of having a sister. He had a family, at last!

Lily looked at her son and sighed. "I guess for every piece of good news, there's bad to go along with it."

Harry looked at her, concerned. He barely noticed when Ally grabbed one of his hands.

"Harry, when we lost you, your father and I started having trouble. When I became pregnant with Ally, two years later, things got better for a while. After Ally was born, he up and divorced me. He blamed me for your death because I was muggle born. He disowned Ally, but Albus managed to prevent him from making that legal. I kept my married name, but that's all I have from the Potters, except for Ally, and now you.

"He died in a broom accident a year later, and the Potter fortune was split among many distant relatives. Anyone who could claim any relation to the family got a share, except us."

Harry could hear the bitter resentment in his mother's voice and, he scowled, his aura flaring. Both women in the room were shocked by the amount of raw power he was displaying. He wasn't sure if his mother resented being made a pauper, or his dad's attempt to disown Althea.

"He left you with nothing? I thought it strange you are wearing frayed clothing. I'm going to fix that tomorrow. Tomorrow we're going to Diagon Alley."

"Harry, we're doing alright. Maybe we don't have enough money for everything we want, but we get by. My job..."

"Your job is worthwhile and a good thing, Mum, but with dad gone, that makes me head of the family. In my reality, I was head of the Black and Potter families, to name a few," Harry said angrily. Then he removed his Warlock's trunk and placed it on the floor. He traced a set of runes in the air with a finger and the trunk expanded to enormous proportions. Then he touched the correct set of runes on the trunk. There was an audible click and the lid popped open. Harry threw the lid open to the shocked gasps of Lily and Ally.

"Harry, how much... where did you get..." Lily stammered.

"I told you, I was Lord Potter, and Lord Black, where I came from. I suppose I'm just Lord Potter here, what with Sirius still alive. I brought everything that was in our vaults with me, just over two point eight billion galleons. One of the other trunk compartments holds all the heirlooms," Harry answered softly. As he spoke, the rings of the two families, and the rings of the four founders, became visible on his hands.

Lily and Ally stared at him like he had three heads. "I'm not saying we go crazy Mum, but I want my mother and my sister wearing good clothes. I want my Mum to teach because she enjoys teaching, not because she needs to put food on the table. Come Christmas, we'll go house hunting and buy us a home we'll be proud of. A place where, someday, you'll be able to play with your grandkids."

Turning to Ally, he grinned. "Something tells me my little sister would probably enjoy owning a new broom as well," he said, eyeing her pajamas.

Lily smiled broadly. Harry's return would have farther-reaching effects than even she could imagine. *A house*, she thought wistfully, *a house would be so nice to have again. Maybe even a garden*.

Lily awoke a few hours later. The previous night had been an emotional roller coaster for her and she still wasn't sure if it wasn't just a wonderful dream.

Unable to control the impulse, she got up and did something she hadn't done in years. She threw on her robe and went to check on her children. Althea slept soundly like she always did. Opening the door to the room where Harry was sleeping, she was startled to discover there was a silencing charm on the door.

Stepping inside, she watched Harry thrash about in the throes of a nightmare. His brow was beaded with sweat and he rolled from one position to another without a moments rest, moaning and saying names over and over. Then she jumped when he bolted upright in the bed screaming.

"Ginny! NO!!!!" he shouted, then broke down crying. He wrapped his arms about his knees and rocked back and forth on the bed. His weeping tore at Lily's heart. It was the sound of a man who had lost everything.

She couldn't take it anymore and rushed over to his bed and swept him into her arms. This may not be her Harry, but she didn't care. Her mother's instincts took over. He stiffened at first in her embrace, then he relaxed and wept on her shoulder. A moment later another pair of arms joined her, holding Harry. Lily glanced over through her own tears and smiled in gratitude at her daughter. She wondered if Ally's abilities as an empath would be able to help Harry. But that was a question for another day. For now, it was important to get him talking to them.

The two waited until he had finally stopped crying. He leaned back from them with a surprised expression on his face.

"Thank you. No one since Ginny has done that," he whispered.

"Ally, put a pot of tea on for us and then come back in here. We need to talk about this," Lily said softly, searching Harry's eyes.

She reached over and tried to straighten out his hair, but it was a futile attempt. A few minutes later, Ally entered carrying a tray with some tea and biscuits.

"Harry, would you tell us about Ginny?" Lily asked softly.

He jerked as if he had been slapped, then placed his cup of tea on the nightstand. "Ginny entered my life the summer I caused Sirius' death in the Department of Mysteries. Or, I should say, I first noticed her at that point. Before then, she was just the little sister of my best mate."

"But Sirius isn't dead," exclaimed Ally.

"Hush, Ally. Sirius is dead where Harry came from. But let him talk," Lily said gently. "Go on, Harry."

Harry nodded and began to speak again. "That summer was the worst of my life. Vernon would make up reasons to beat me. They rarely fed me, and I felt I deserved the beatings because of what happened. But by the third week of the holiday, I gave up," he said in a monotone. His fingers traced scars on his wrists.

Lily paled at the sight of the ugly scars, but held her tongue.

"Mad-Eye Moody was on guard duty that day. He got me away from the Dursley's and took me to the headquarters of the Order of the Phoenix. Poppy healed me, but I didn't care. I didn't eat, couldn't sleep, refused to talk to anyone, not even Ron, Hermione or Remus. It was purely an accident that they left Ginny to watch me one day. She had had a crush on me practically her whole life. When I saved her from Voldemort and his Basilisk in her first year, she decided that I was what she wanted. She... she slapped me, hard. It shocked me and we started fighting. It ended with her holding me while I cried for Sirius. Then she got me eating and talking to everyone else again. It wasn't easy, it hurt, but she loved me and helped me in more ways than I can count.

"You would have liked her, Mum. She was a red head, like yourself, and a whiz with charms and potions. She was also a practical joker. We started dating. Even when half the school was afraid of me because of my abilities, she stood by me. She nursed me through my injuries from the first battle of Hogwarts. I asked her to marry me then. Not long after that, we became lovers. She made me feel complete. She's the one who taught me what real love was, something Dumbledore and Dursley's tried to deny me all my life.

"When the second battle of Hogwarts started, everyone was surprised. No one expected him to attack again so soon, or in such numbers. He came at us with Giants, Trolls, Vampires, Werewolves and nearly two hundred Death Eaters.

"Ginny..." he shuddered a few times and choked back a sob. "She wasn't supposed to be out in the battle at all. Her station was in the infirmary. I didn't see how she died. The final battle is... all disjointed... like pieces of my memory are missing. I remember starting the fight with Voldemort and I remember standing over his body and watching his followers shriek as his death caused theirs. Then I wandered around the field for a while, wounded. I saw Dumbledore, Bill, Minerva, Filius... so many dead.

"I think the healers found me kneeling next to Ginny," he said finally, ending in a whisper. He was struggling not to cry again.

"Harry," Lily began, "finish your tea and rest. Ginny wouldn't want you making yourself sick over her. And that's exactly what you're doing. Tomorrow we're going to talk about this and other things."

Harry nodded and curled up on his bed. Lily gently stroked his hair and soon he was asleep again.

Ally looked at Lily curiously as she ushered the younger girl out of the room. "Mum, did he say he tried to kill himself?" she asked in a hushed tone.

Lily nodded and, trying to keep her composure, she reached out and pulled her daughter into a hug. "Your brother has had a lot harder life than we have, Ally. He's going to need our love and support. He came to us from his world, hurting and looking for family to help him heal. That's exactly what we're going to do."

Ally thought about it for a moment then nodded. The two women went back to bed. Tomorrow would come soon enough.

The next morning Lily awoke to the sound of someone knocking on her door. Throwing on a robe and rushing out of her bedroom, she opened the door to her quarters and found herself facing Dumbledore, Sirius, Professors McGonagall and Snape, and Kingsley Shacklebolt.

"Ah, my apologies for waking you so early, Lily. I know you probably had a very late night last night but, if possible, can you wake up Harry and bring him to my office?" asked the Headmaster.

"I'm already awake," came a voice from behind Lily.

"Excellent, Harry. As you know, we have to register you as a dimensional traveler, which is why Mr. Shacklebolt is here. I thought we might get the veritaserum out of the way early, so that we might get to more important matters, like enrolling you in your final year here at Hogwarts?"

Harry nodded. "Very well. Coming, Mum?" he asked softly.

Lily placed a hand over her heart in surprise, and then nodded, smiling with pleasure. "Of course. Albus, if you would just give me a minute?"

A short while later, in Dumbledore's office, Harry sat in a chair facing the Headmaster's desk. Fawkes trilled a welcome to Harry as he entered the room, then glided over to land on his leg when he sat.

"lo Fawkes," Harry said softly, smiling and stroking the large bird. "I've missed you, my friend."

To the amazement and amusement of everyone, Fawkes trilled a reply to Harry, then sprang aloft and glided back to his perch.

"He always was a talkative bird," Harry said in way of an explanation. "Before we begin, Albus, here is a copy of my Hogwarts records, including medical and academic. You'll also find records of the various citations in there, as well. You'll need these to place me in the school," he concluded, passing over a folder with a thick sheath of parchments.

Dumbledore accepted the thick bundle without comment. Then Harry turned and nodded to Kingsley.

Kingsley pulled out a vial of veritaserum and placed three drops on Harry's tongue. After a few minutes wait, his eyes glazed over.

Dumbledore leaned forward against his desk. "What is your name?"

"I am Harry James Potter, Chief Warlock of the Order of the Phoenix and Battle Commander, three time winner of the Order of Merlin, first class, and a Founders Heir."

Sirius and the others shook their head in disbelief. That someone so young could have achieved so much...

"Are you from this universe?"

"No."

"Why did you come here?"

"I had no one, no reason to stay where I was. I... wanted to find a reason to keep on living... I wanted peace for once..."

Lily paled and sagged in her chair, hearing him articulate what she'd only suspected. Sirius placed a hand on her shoulder and she looked up at him gratefully.

"Did you defeat the Dark Lord in your universe?"

"Yes, I killed him, several times in fact. But now he's dead and will stay that way."

"How were you able to kill him?"

"I am a full Elemental Mage. Voldemort didn't know that and I used those powers to crush him."

Dumbledore glanced around the room. In all of recorded history, there had been Mages and there had been Elementals, but never an Elemental Mage. Mages were extremely powerful wizards. Dumbledore was currently the only living Mage in the Wizarding world and he was only a fifth order mage.

"What order Mage are you, Harry?"

"I'm not sure."

Dumbledore frowned at that answer so he refined his question. "Why are you unsure of what order Mage you are, Harry?"

"Albus Dumbledore tested me himself. He said that if the results were correct, then there were six orders of mage, not five, and I would be a mage of the first order. I think he was trying to imply that I had more power than what a first order mage would have had."

Everyone in the room was shocked to hear this. Harry was basically saying he was the strongest wizard the world had ever seen.

"And your elemental aspect?" asked Dumbledore. The old Headmaster was becoming very excited. Harry offered an opportunity where he'd be able to help train the greatest wizard since Merlin.

"Which one?"

"You have more than one aspect?"

"Yes. Fire, earth, air and water." Harry replied groggily, then he shook his head and his eyes cleared.

"Mr. Shacklebolt? Do you have enough information to register this wizard?" asked Dumbledore, his tone gleeful as Harry shook off the effects of the drug.

"I believe so, Headmaster. I can't promise there won't be a follow up investigation into his claims, but there is sufficient evidence to register him as a dimensional traveler. Do you also wish me to file those adoption papers as well?"

Harry raised an eyebrow and looked over at Dumbledore. "A mere legal formality, Harry. Lily is your mother and yet isn't. By allowing her to adopt you, you can legally claim kinship, despite your being an adult."

Harry nodded and smiled at Lily, who returned it.

Kingsley looked at Harry for a moment and then offered to shake his hand. "I'm pleased to meet you, Mr. Potter. I hope you'll find the peace here that you sought."

Harry gripped his hand firmly and forgot for a moment that he wasn't talking to his friend and one time mentor. "Thanks, Shack," he muttered, blushing.

Shacklebolt beamed him a dazzling white smile, then nodded to Dumbledore before stepping into the floo and vanishing.

"By noon, Harry," Dumbledore said, catching his attention, "you'll be registered in our world. I'll work up your enrollment papers. I think it's best for now, however, if we keep most of your abilities secret. The fact that you are a mage will be leaked, as it is a matter of public record. And since I'm on the subject, besides being the only Elemental Mage on record, are there any other things you'd like to share with us?"

Harry sighed and nodded. "In my second year, people were afraid of me when they discovered I speak parseltongue. In my sixth year, they were even more afraid when they learned I was capable of traveling in shadows. But I'm only a partial shadow mage. Shadow-travel is one of the few aspects of that skill I've been able to develop. I don't need a wand to cast magic and my magic will take steps all by itself to protect me, if pressed."

Dumbledore nodded and stared at Harry, his eyes twinkling brilliantly. Harry felt that vague sensation of his mental shields being tested.

Harry sighed again. "Headmaster, I would really prefer you ask me your question instead of trying to invade my mind. I have several automatic defenses set up and would really hate to see you get hurt."

Dumbledore smiled and Harry could feel his probe quickly retreat. "And an accomplished Occlumens, I see."

Harry nodded in affirmation.

"Mr. Potter, might I ask, what house were you sorted into?" Professor McGonagall asked, forgetting what he had told them last night..

"Well, Floppy wanted to put me into Slytherin, but I convinced him to put me into Gryffindor, Professor."

"Floppy?"

"Ahem... Harry, you promised you'd never reveal that name," said the sorting hat, startling everyone.

"I'm sorry, Floppy, I couldn't help myself. Have you been well?" asked Harry with a grin.

The hat frowned at him. "You do realize I have to sort you still, don't you, Harry?"

"I could always tell everyone what you wanted to be called. And don't blame me for the name. Rowena named you, not I," Harry said with a smirk.

"Oh, very well, Harry, be in Gryffindor if you want. But I still think you would have done well in Slytherin," the hat declared, then it fell silent. Everyone else in the room sat in stunned silence. The hat never spoke outside of the sorting ceremony!

"Albus," Harry said in a serious tone, breaking the Headmaster from his bemusement. "I'd like to go to Diagon Alley today, with my family. Are there any problems with that?"

Dumbledore looked at Harry in confusion. "Why would I have a problem with that?"

"Well, let's just say that the Dumbledore I knew had control issues and it took me threatening his life before he backed off and became more



reasonable," he replied, scowling.

"I can assure you, my boy, you have a mother to see that you do the right thing. Besides, according to your records, you are an adult. The only thing I'm going to ask of you is that you let me help you develop your skills further."

"That, I can live with, Albus. But for now, I'd like to get to Diagon Alley. I learned last night that my deceased father left my mother a pauper and I intend to correct that. Oh, that reminds me!" Harry reached up and pulled one ring off his hand and passed it to Sirius. "I believe this belongs to you now. I don't want to be Lord Potter-Black anymore. Especially since my Godfather is still alive," he said softly.

Sirius looked at the ring in shock. He hadn't seen it in years. His family vault was off limits to him since his mother had disowned him, but with the ring, he'd be able to access the vault again, despite her wishes.

"Headmaster, do any of the Weasleys still attend Hogwarts?" Harry asked suddenly.

"I have two of them in my house now, Potter," said Snape. Severus was unsure how to treat this young man. The abilities he claimed to hold meant he could be a powerful ally or a powerful enemy.

Harry scowled. "In Slytherin, you say? Ron and Ginny?"

Snape nodded and Harry's frown deepened. "I must tell you, Harry, that even though Voldemort had been dead many years, there is still a strong prejudice against all who aren't from pure blood families," added the Headmaster in a serious tone.

Harry scowled at him. "They'll get over that feeling mighty fast with me around, Albus. I won't stand for it." His tone was laced with a hint of power and many in the room felt the urge to flinch away from him.

Dumbledore looked grim. "I understand the power you hold within your grasp, but please do not abuse it."

"I have no intention of abusing it, Headmaster," Harry said stiffly, "but by the same token, you cannot expect me to stand by and watch some muggle born be tormented strictly because of their birth status. I won't put up with it. And Merlin help anyone who tries anything against me directly."

Dumbledore stared at the young man over his half moon glasses and finally nodded in acceptance.

"Albus, one final thing. Has anyone opened the Chamber of Secrets recently?" asked Harry.

"The Chamber of Secrets? No, Harry, no one has managed to find it again. I'm beginning to wonder if it exists at all. And I was present in the school when it was supposedly last opened," replied the Headmaster, his smile slightly condescending.

Harry frowned and gestured with his hand, causing his staff to appear. Holding the staff vertical, he brought down the end with a sharp crack against the floor of the office. The light in the room dimmed and his eyes glowed with power. The fist sized emerald mounted in the top of his staff began to glow brightly.

"There are a total of four secret chambers, Albus," murmured Harry. As he spoke, a three dimensional image of the castle appeared above his staff. "The room we call the Chamber of Secrets is just one of the rooms created by the four founders as a private sanctuary. In three cases, these rooms are benign." The image of the castle rotated and Harry highlighted four rooms.

"The room that Godric created, Gryffindor's Sanctuary, contains a live Griffin that has been sleeping since his death. The other two sanctuaries no longer contain the living totem of their creators, having died long ago. Slytherin's sanctuary is the problem. In my world, it contained a Basilisk that I fought and killed in my second year. Tom Riddle was responsible for releasing the beast that killed Moaning Myrtle. The entrance to the chamber is in the third floor girls bathroom."

The image expanded, showing the chamber and its entrance. "The images you see are not something from my memory. Hogwarts is creating this map, using my staff to project it," he murmured. Then he lifted his staff and the map faded from view and the lighting in the room returned to normal.

Dumbledore exchanged a concerned look with the other teachers. "Thank you for this information. Do you know how to open the chamber?"

"You need a parselmouth to open it," Harry replied softly. "It might just be best to seal the entrance and wall up that bathroom. I'd rather not have to go kill that beast again. I would have died the last time, had it not been for Fawkes."

Fawkes trilled at him, preening and puffing up his chest, Harry smiled fondly and muttered, "You silly bird. You're such a show off."

Dumbledore blinked, then smiled again. "Thank you, Harry. I'll discuss the situation with the staff and the Board. In the meantime, you should be able to go get what you need in Diagon Alley later today. Professor McGonagall will give you the book list for a seventh year student. Looking over the records you have given me, I realize that you can probably take your NEWTS early, so we'll endeavor to make sure that you are challenged this coming year."

"Thank you, Albus. I'll return to my mother's apartment for now."

"Please, Harry. I need to discuss the information you've given us with the staff, that includes your mother."

Harry bowed his head in acknowledgement and walked from the office. The staff watched his retreating back for a moment before turning back to Dumbledore.

"So? Comments?" Dumbledore asked, his eyes twinkling like mad.

"Headmaster, I need to know what classes the boy has been taking," Professor McGonagall asked politely.

Dumbledore handed McGonagall Harry's transcript along with additional notes made by his counterpart in the other universe. She took one look and frowned. "Albus, he's been trained by Nicholas Flamel, as well as a half dozen other experts in their fields."

"Yes, I noticed that myself, Minerva. It seems that young Harry is something of a prodigy. It also appears that he is rather modest about it. His abilities would probably have not been revealed to us without the veritaserum and our direct questions."

"Merciful Merlin," exclaimed Minerva, "he's been awarded his Mastery in defense and an apprenticeship in Runes without even taking his NEWTS!"

Dumbledore nodded and smiled slightly. He had no doubt that young Harry Potter was going to provide for an interesting coming school year. He turned to Lily. "I realize that even a single year here at Hogwarts for a second student will put an undue financial burden on you, but I'll try to..." he stopped talking when he saw Lily smiling and holding up a hand.

"That won't be a problem anymore, Albus. Please don't think I'm not grateful for what you've done for myself and Ally. But Harry brought with him the entire fortune of the Potter and Black family vaults from his world. He's already told me that he's paying for everything from here on and that, come Christmas, we're going house hunting. He wants a real home." she said softly.

"Black Family vault? He brought my family's money with him?" asked Sirius.

Lily nodded and turned back to Dumbledore.

"This is all well and good, Headmaster, but what can we possibly teach this boy? I'm sure he's going to be nearly as much trouble as his father was in school," sneered Snape who had been looking over his records.

Dumbledore, looking up from a parchment he had been reading, frowned. "This," he said, holding the parchment up, "is a letter from myself, to myself. It's been charmed so that Harry wouldn't notice it.

"It seems that I had been instructing Harry in the art of dimensional manipulative magic, which is what he used to travel here. I seem to have anticipated that Harry would wish to leave his world behind and I ask myself to look out for him. Due to mistakes in my decisions regarding Harry, I was afraid that he would become another Dark Lord if he didn't learn to love, something which I apparently denied him," Dumbledore said with an unhappy expression.

Lily looked unhappy. "He did learn to love, Albus. But she was killed in the battle in which he killed Voldemort. I'm not positive, but I think he was in love with Ginny Weasley."

"My word. One of my Lions in love with a Snake?" asked Minerva.

"I don't think so, Minerva. His description of 'his' Ginny is nothing like the Ginny Weasley we know. I wouldn't be surprised if 'his' Ginny had been a Hufflepuff or even a Gryffindor." Lily frowned in thought for a moment. "The real problem is, can he learn to love again? Will he risk it?" she asked seriously.

"Only time, a loving family and friends can help him with that," replied Dumbledore as he placed the parchment down on his desk and looked up at his staff. "Here is what I propose. I suggest we all spend time evaluating where Harry stands in his studies for each of your subjects. Then we can address how to help him. In the meantime, given his grades and his abilities, I think we should seriously consider assigning him as Head Boy.

"I suspect that Harry is about to turn this school on its ear and we have one of two choices. We either fight him every step of the way, and lose, or help him. His attitude concerning blood issues is correct and we all know that."

"That will pit him against Pansy Parkinson. She's head girl this year. I wish we could have given it to Miss Granger, but she is too intimidated by the pure bloods," murmured Minerva.

"The purebloods walk around like they own this school. If Harry can put a few in their place, I won't complain all that much," Sirius said with a grin.

Lily looked up from the records she was examining in concern. "Do we want to put him in the position of having to fight like that?"

Dumbledore nodded. "You make an excellent point, Lily, but I don't think we have any choice. You heard him. He will not stand for any sort of bullying. His record suggests that Mr. Potter has a sense of responsibility that is quite strong. From his file, every recorded rule he's broken has been either in defense of this school or in defense of a student. He's prime Head Boy material, in my opinion."

The others shared a look, and then nodded to the Headmaster, who leaned back with a smile. "Excellent. Now that that's settled, we have the business of Professor Sprout requesting to open another greenhouse..."

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## Diagon Alley...

Lily, Ally and Harry exited from the floo in the Leaky Cauldron and Harry picked himself up off the floor, grumbling about floos and the crazy ways wizards traveled.

After brushing himself off, he looked at his little family and smiled to himself. Family!

Lily caught his smile and, though she was unsure of its cause, she shared it with him. He put an arm around her shoulder and hugged her gently, then motioned with his staff to move to the back of the building.

They entered Diagon Alley proper and he turned to the two of them. "I think the first stop should be Gringotts to open several accounts."

"Several accounts?" asked Lily.

"Yeah, I thought it was strange also, but when you're as wealthy as we are, multiple accounts becomes a better way of handling things."

He led them to the large marble building and into the lobby. There he stopped a passing goblin. "Excuse me, kind sir, but can you direct me to the new accounts manager?" he asked in flawless Gobbledegook.

The goblin blinked in surprise and grinned broadly at them before he pointed to a lone Goblin sitting at a table.

"Thank you, sir, may your ancestors be at peace," Harry replied in way of thanks.

Turning to his mother and sister, he chuckled at their confusion. "Whatever you do, never smile showing teeth to Goblins. It's a mortal insult," he warned then he motioned for them to follow him.

Approaching the lone Goblin, he waited politely to be noticed.

"Yes? Step forward! I haven't all day you know!" snapped the Goblin.

"Good sir, I wish to open an account with multiple vaults," Harry said in English.

"Name?"

"Lord Potter, Harry Potter," he replied, then sighed in relief. Albus had shown him a way of counter acting the charm from the Order Of Merlin so he didn't have spout all his titles any more.

The goblin looked at him closely for a moment. "You're that dimensional traveler they're talking about, eh? Well, we'll be able to handle your banking needs. Just let me know how much you're depositing and what kind of vaults you require."

"I need two class C vaults. One will have fifty thousand galleons and will be made out to Althea Lily Potter. This will be a trust vault and she will be allowed to withdraw a maximum of fifty galleons per month without family approval. Withdrawals beyond the fifty galleon limit will require the approval of Lily Potter, until she is sixteen years old. Then the monthly limit shall be increased to two hundred galleons a month. Once per year the vault will make an automatic deduction for her Hogwarts tuition.

"The second vault will be assigned to Lily Evans-Potter with an initial deposit of one million galleons, no restrictions on it.

"I also require one class A, high security heirloom vault, as well as one class A, high security money vault."

The Goblin blinked in surprise. "Just how much money will Lord Potter be depositing today?" he squeaked.

"I'm unsure of the exact amount, but it's a hair over two point eight billion galleons."

The Goblin gulped loudly and excused himself from the desk for a moment. Minutes later, several Goblins appeared at the desk and the three of them were ushered into a back room.

Harry removed his trunk from around his neck and expanded it until it was big enough to walk into. Opening it, the Goblins began levitating the money to counting stations.

All three of them watched in awe as the money was counted and placed into special carts to deposit in the vaults. Thirty minutes later, Harry was given a complete accounting of the money. The Goblins presented Harry with three keys, then they proceeded to remove the items to the heirloom vault.

By the time they were done, Harry had also obtained three Gringotts debit cards, which were good in wizard or muggle society. Harry and his family were ushered from Gringotts with much bowing and scrapping. Ragnok himself had come down to introduce himself to Gringotts newest and largest single depositor. He promised to provide any help to Harry should he require it.

Directing his mother and sister to Madam Malkin's Robes for all Occasions, he followed them into the store, then handed Madam Malkin his Gringotts card with instructions to outfit them both. Dress robes, new school robes, casual wear and even more private wear. Harry sat nearby, commenting occasionally, but mostly reading the article about himself in the Daily Prophet and grumbling about how the Ministry couldn't keep secrets in this world any better than they had in his.

While his family was busy shopping for clothing and enjoying a girls outing, Harry stole away for a trip to Quality Quidditch supplies, where he purchased a new Nimbus 2002 for Ally.

Ally spotted Harry entering the store while she was being fitted for dress robes and she nearly fainted when he showed her the broom, saying she could have it when they got back to Hogwarts.

Lily frowned. So far they had spent nearly five hundred galleons on clothing, then he went and bought a broom worth thousands for a thirteen year old. "Harry, you shouldn't spend your money so freely. She has a perfectly good broom, a Cleansweep five, I think," she said, trying to soften her

tone.

"Mum, I have nearly eighteen years of no family to make up for here. I have a little sister for the first time in my life and I've missed out on thirteen of her birthdays. This one gift isn't going to spoil her," Harry replied mildly.

Lily scowled for a moment before relenting. "Oh, alright, but that's it."

Harry nodded and winked at Ally, who hid a smile behind her hand and winked back at her big brother.

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### **Malfoy Manor...**

Lucius sat in his office, considering his options. Before him on the desk was a copy of the Daily Prophet and its headline proclaiming the arrival of a dimensional traveler who also happened to be a Mage, although it was unclear as to what order of Mage he was. That the boy was also of the house of Potter was disturbing. The Malfoys and Potters had never gotten along.

Lucius needed at least a fourth order Mage to further his plans. Voldemort had been such a Mage and Lucius had been able to control him with ease. The man's ambitions and petty ego had been easily stroked. When Voldemort had died and Lucius brought up on charges, it had been pitifully easy to convince that idiot of a Minister that he had been under the influence of an *Imperio* us curse. No one knew that the last Dark Lord had been under the control of the House of Malfoy.

Lucius owned a very special talisman. With it, he could command extraordinary powers. The downside of the talisman was that it needed a Mage nearby to power it. Eventually, with the right Mage, the talisman would drain the power into Lucius, turning him into a Mage.

Few knew that Lucius, thanks to Voldemort, had increased his own powers until he was at the border point of crossing into being a fifth order Mage. Now, if he could get close to enough to Potter...

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### **Hogwarts Express...**

Ally sat across from Harry in the compartment. She was nervous. It was the first time on the train for her, but the Headmaster had insisted that she join her brother. *Brother*, she thought and smiled at the idea. She and Harry had danced around each other slowly, feeling out the other, trying to figure out where the relationship began. It took a trip to Hogsmeade and an obnoxious local shopkeeper who didn't want to sell to her because she was a half blood to cement their relationship.

*"Do you have any bar chocolate?" Ally asked the clerk behind the counter at Honeydukes.*

*"Go away, you filthy half blood. I don't sell to your type," snarled the clerk.*

*Harry, who had been browsing one of the displays near the front of the store suddenly appeared next to the clerk, holding his sword to the man's throat. He raised the sword slowly and the man raised up on his toes in fear.*

*"You will sell to my sister and smile while doing so, or I will challenge you to a Wizard's End duel and your widow will be crying over your remains tonight," Harry said in a low monotone. The building rumbled with the magic radiating off him. "Now, what's it to be? Sell to my sister and smile while you do it? Or do you have a death wish?"*

*"I'll sell! I'll sell!" choked the man.*

*Harry stepped back and the sword vanished. He handed Ally a 10 galleon coin. "Don't forget to get something for Mum, Ally," he said with a smile.*

*Ally started to pile items onto the counter. "That's my big brother. He could probably make me a hat out of your entrails and level the building without thinking about it. He's really a nice guy, but he hates it when people think blood is important. He says that the only importance of blood is to keep you alive. Of course, he's seen plenty of his enemies bleed. You wouldn't want to be one of them, would you?" she asked, her eyes wide and innocent.*

*Harry shook his head and laughed. Somehow she had managed to say all that in a single breath and still spend time piling the counter high with sweets. The terrified clerk merely shook his head, pushed her purchases into a bag and handed it to her.*

Now Ally sat with Harry in the compartment and she found herself liking the idea of having a big brother. Especially one that obviously cared about her. She became even more impressed as she learned about his code of ethics. They governed his life, almost like something straight out of the age of Merlin.

For Harry, coming to grips with having a sister had only one drawback. His sister was a fully functioning empath. That meant she was acutely aware of what he was feeling and she had caught him a few times on the edge of a deep depression. Harry discovered that the women in his life were pushy and refused to accept his standard "I'm fine" as an answer. And Ally's abilities made it impossible for him to hide his pain like he was used to doing. His mother and his sister would confront him over it, and make him face it. It was a slow healing process, but it was a healing process, and

Harry had come to love his little sister in a very short amount of time.

Ally sat next to the window and tried to take up as little space as possible. She had heard the horror stories from the other non-pure bloods about what happened on the train. In school, she was protected by the fact that her mother was a teacher. On the train, that meant little. She was very glad to be riding with her brother, but wasn't sure if even he would be able to help her if the pure bloods wanted to make trouble.

The compartment door opened and a girl stepped in. Ally recognized her immediately, and so did Harry.

"Do you have room for one more?" asked the girl in a timid voice.

Harry straightened up in his seat and nodded for her to take a seat. She shot him a grateful smile.

"Hi, I'm Hermione Granger. And you are?" asked Hermione softly.

"Harry, you can call me Harry, Hermione," he said with a broad smile.

Hermione looked back and forth between Ally and Harry, noting the family resemblance, then it dawned on her.

"I've read about you! You're that dimensional traveler they wrote about in the Prophet," she exclaimed.

"Yep, but now I'm just Harry, a seventh year Gryffindor, like yourself," he replied.

"And Head Boy, Harry," added Ally.

Harry shot her a glance, then smiled. "Yes, Head boy as well," he added with a sigh.

"Of course! You were going to Hogwarts in your own universe? Then you probably already knew me. This is wonderfully exciting," Hermione said with a bit more enthusiasm.

"And you're still the smartest witch I know, Hermione," countered Harry.

Hermione blinked and her mood dampened. "Can I ask you why you came here, Harry? You're a half blood."

He frowned. "Someday, Hermione... someday you and I will sit down and I'll explain it all to you. You're probably one of the few people I know who would be capable of understanding it. In the meantime, let me get to know you and trust you again. Please?"

The look he gave her was enough to make both girls gasp. Harry's eyes were alight with magic and a pain that seemed never ending. His expression was clearly a plea and an offer of friendship.

Hermione smiled shyly and nodded at him. Then she rooted around in her bag for a book to read.

Harry went back to looking out the window as the train moved north. A while later, the door to the compartment opened again and Harry was startled to hear a familiar voice.

"Stand up, mudblood!"

Hermione whimpered and slowly stood. Ron Weasley smirked at her. This Ron was shorter than the one he knew, and his expression was harder. It reminded Harry of the expressions Malfoy wore.

"Grab her tits, Ron!" said Ginny from behind him, and then she giggled.

Ron nodded and reached up to paw one of Hermione's breasts. In a blink, Harry was standing next to Hermione and pushing her behind him. He then snatched Ron's hand away from her. He twisted and there was a snapping sound. Ron pitched to his knees, howling in pain and pulling at his hurt arm. Harry released his wrist and stepped back.

Ginny reached for her wand. She froze as the point of the Sword of Gryffindor pressed against her neck and a single drop of blood trickled down to her chest.

"Don't make me do this, Gin," Harry said with pain filled voice.

"You won't get away with this, whoever you are," snarled Ginny.

"You may not know who I am, but I know who you are not. You are not my Ginny," Harry said sadly, his eyes filling with tears.

"Sleep," he murmured and both Weasleys collapsed soundlessly to the floor. Harry shoved Ron into the corridor next to Ginny and slammed the door closed. Then he turned to Hermione. She stared, with huge eyes, at the point of his sword.

Harry grinned sheepishly and the sword disappeared.

"Are you alright, Hermione? Merlin, what makes them think they can get away with that?"

"They've been getting away with that for years. I've been lucky so far. Some of the girls have been raped on this train," Hermione said still watching him with something akin to awe.

He sighed, recognizing her look. "Hermione, I need friends, not worshippers... please?"

Hermione blinked in shock and it took her a moment to realize what he was asking of her. With a jerky nod, she sat down.

"As for their attitude, I plan on putting a dent in that later tonight," Harry said firmly, and then he placed a hand gently on her shoulder and tried to ignore her flinch. "I promise I won't let them hurt you," he said softly.

Word quickly spread throughout the train and no one bothered them for the rest of the ride.

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## Hogwarts Welcoming Feast...

Harry was shocked when he entered the Great Hall. Ally and Hermione dragged him over to a table before he could go to his usual spot at the Gryffindor table. Instead of sitting by house affiliation, people were separated by blood, with two thirds of the school being pure blood, the rest being mixed bloods. He frowned and sat next to Hermione and Ally. His magic kept flaring as he took in the situation.

Floppy gave his usual song about uniting the school and then sorted the new first years. Instead of going to their house tables, they were sent to a special table until the prefects had time to sort out their blood affiliation later.

Dumbledore stood and a hush fell in the hall. "Welcome! Another year at Hogwarts and I suspect this year will be the start of something truly great. I know you are all hungry so I'll just say a few words. Peach fuzz and Swizzle Sticks! Now, tuck in."

The food appeared on the tables and everyone began to eat. Harry was further surprised to see that the food coming to their tables didn't seem to be of the same quality as what went to the pure bloods and his scowl deepened.

After dinner, Dumbledore arose to speak again. "Now, for some start of term announcements. The Forbidden Forest is forbidden to all students who do not wish to die a horrible death. There is to be no magic practiced in the hallways between classes. And Mr. Filch asks me to remind everyone that the list of contraband objects is posted on his office door."

"We will have a Yule ball this year. It will be held the day before we break for the Yule holiday. And finally, I'd like to introduce Mr. Harry Potter of Gryffindor House. He is Head Boy this year. Some of you might recall reading about him in the Daily Prophet. He is a registered dimensional traveler. Stand up, Harry, let them get a look at you," Dumbledore called.

Harry stood and walked to the front of the hall, then turned to face the head table. As he approached, there came a faint rumbling sound and the castle vibrated in rhythm to his magic.

"Professor Black, as Defense against the Dark Arts Professor, I'll ask you to name your three best seventh year pureblood students," Harry said loud enough to be heard throughout the hall.

"Easy there, Harry," said Sirius nervously. The castle rumbled ominously, so he continued, "As to who the best are, I'd say Draco Malfoy, Blaise Zabini and Zacharias Smith."

Lily and the other teachers exchanged thoughtful looks. Harry nodded and turned to face the students.

"Malfoy, Zabini and Smith. I find your bloodlines offensive and insulting. I challenge you three to a duel, here... now... Three against one. If I win, you will apologize to every half blood and muggle born in this hall for your inbred stupidity."

Malfoy stood and sneered. "Three against one. Who are you kidding? What if you lose?"

"I won't lose," Harry said simply, and in a tone that caused many people to shudder. It was cold and filled with the promise of pain.

"I accept your challenge, half blood! Name your rules."

"No rules. Use any curse or weapon you want, Malfoy. But I promise you, it won't matter."

People up at the front of the hall moved to the back as Malfoy, Zabini and Smith moved forward. Harry walked to the other side of the hall. As he turned to face them, three curses were sent streaking toward him.

Harry continued to turn and held out one hand. All three curses merged into a single beam of light and came to rest in his hand.

Malfoy's jaw dropped in surprise, while Zabini and Smith quickly cast shields on themselves. Smith, being a Ravenclaw, recognized that he was up against an opponent, the likes of which he had never seen before. Harry bounced the ball of glowing energy in his hand for a moment longer, and then he hurled it back across the hall. Zabini and Smith cringed behind their shields, while Draco tried to dodge. The energy split into three unique balls of blindingly white light and plowed through the shields of the two boys. In each case, the balls came to a halt atop the head of each lad.

The boys froze in their positions and were then lifted off the ground and dragged to the wall where they were held, pinned. Harry held up his hand and three wands appeared in it. Then he walked to the center of the room in front of the head table. He placed the three wands in front of the Headmaster, whose eyes twinkled gaily. Then he turned to face the students.

"Everyone stand up and go to your house tables. Now!" he roared. There was a mad scramble as people ran to the appropriate tables.

I'm telling you all right now. The next person I catch picking on a half blood or a muggle born will be begging to be expelled and sent home. I will not tolerate it. I didn't tolerate it in my old world and I bloody well won't tolerate it here. From here on in, you will treat each other with respect, or I will burn your power to ash and let you weep and wail as a muggle for the rest of your lives!"

Harry walked as he spoke, waving his arms to emphasize points. Every eye, student and teacher alike, followed him. His aura was clearly visible and he created ripples in the stone with each step. His eyes blazed and people cowered back from the display of power. Finally, he wound down and turned to the three students pinned against the wall.

"The Headmaster will oversee your apology. Your blood isn't what gives you power, gentlemen. Remember that. And you don't have the power to take me on," Harry said.

He turned then and walked to the Gryffindor table. He saw that everyone was cringing away from him, so he sat at the empty end with a sad sigh.

Dumbledore stood and looked around at the shocked students. "I'd like to say that I approve of Mr. Potters statements. We have long let this stupidity about blood color our reasoning. I wholeheartedly support Mr. Potter in this. Now, Harry, if you would release Mr.s Malfoy, Zabini and Smith, please?"

Harry nodded and did nothing visible, but the three students fell to the floor. He reached for a platter of food, trying to ignore the fact that, once again, people were afraid of him. He was startled when someone sat next to him. He looked up to see Ally smiling at him, then he felt someone else sit opposite him. He glanced over to see Hermione smiling shyly. The next thing he knew, a boy sat next to him. Harry knew him.

"Seamus Finnegan," offered the boy as he held out his hand.

"I know," Harry said softly and smiled, taking his hand.

"I can't believe you did that, Harry," Hermione said seriously. "Challenging the three best defense students in the school?"

"Hermione, why don't we put this under that category of things you and I are going to have a long talk about someday? Let's just say that there is nothing they could have done to hurt me and I will not allow someone to be bullied because of their blood."

"But Harry, it's always been that way," she protested.

"Just because it's always been that way doesn't make it right. You know that," he chided gently. He could sense that a number of people were listening to his conversation. "You're the smartest witch I know," he continued. "I bet you know hundreds more spells than Pansy Parkinson. Does that make you better or worse than she is?"

"But the number of spells you know doesn't mean anything," protested Hermione.

"Alright, let's simplify it even more. The Patil twins. Pure Bloods of Indian decent. Why don't we pick on them because they have very dark, almost black, skin?"

"Hey!" came a voice from down the table.

"Hush, Parvati, I'm trying to make a point here," Harry said absently, still intent on Hermione.

"I see what you're saying, Harry. But you can't expect pure bloods to love you just because you know more magic than they do," protested Hermione.

"You're still missing the point. Blood is sometimes used in magic, but blood doesn't influence your magic. Your blood isn't what gives you your power. You can be a pureblood and still be a squib. The magic is irrelevant. It's what you do that defines you, not your blood, or your power."

He sighed then and reached out with his hand. In it appeared a smoky blue orb about the size of a handball. "Do you know what this is, Hermione?" he asked, holding the orb out.

"It's a Merlin's orb," she whispered in awe. "I've never seen one before, but I've read about them."

Harry placed the orb on the table in front of him. "That's right. Now watch. Hey Parvati! Come here for a second," Harry called down the table.

The pureblood witch stood and approached him warily. "Tap the orb with your wand, Parvati."

She looked at him for a moment, and then she glanced up at the head table, where she saw Dumbledore smile and nod at her. Reaching over Harry's shoulder, she tapped the orb and, within seconds, the number seventy-two floated above the orb.

"The number represents the amount of power Parvati has. Seamus, tap the orb with your wand," Harry commanded.

Seamus tapped the orb and a moment later it read seventy-five.

Harry looked around and could see a crowd of students forming. "Parvati, a pure blood, is a seventy-two, while Seamus, a half blood, is a seventy-five. Lavender Brown, tap the orb, you're a full blood."

Lavender's number was seventy. Hermione's number was eighty-four. Ally was a solid eighty-seven. One by one students walked over, even a few Slytherins, and tapped against the orb. Finally, when everyone was done, Dumbledore stood and walked over to tap the orb. His number was one hundred and ninety seven.

“There you have it,” Harry said. “Most of you range from mid sixties to the low eighties. There are pure bloods in the mid sixties and muggle born in the low eighties and vice versa. Blood doesn’t make you stronger. Spells don’t make you stronger. A very wise man once told me we aren’t our magic. We are defined by the choices we make. What you do *with* your magic is what makes you, not your blood and not your magic,” Harry said, addressing a now quiet hall.

“Harry, you didn’t show us your number,” said a voice from the Ravenclaw table.

“Yeah! Touch the orb,” said another voice.

“I think, perhaps, that is quite enough for this evening,” interrupted Dumbledore. “Prefects, please escort your students to their houses.”

Harry shot Dumbledore a grateful look and he banished the orb back to its dimensional cubbyhole.

He then stood and began to follow the students from the Great Hall when he felt a hand land upon his shoulder. He turned to see Dumbledore smiling at him.

“Harry, I dare say you are filled with surprises. I think you changed some minds tonight and got others thinking,” said Dumbledore.

Harry ducked his head in acknowledgement of the statement. “I hope so, Headmaster. If I can convince some of them that they’re wrong, then it is worth the effort.”

“Quite so, Harry. Now, off you go. Classes begin tomorrow.”

Harry nodded and moved towards his apartment.

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## Slytherin Common Room...

Ginny Weasley sat in the Slytherin common room and scowled at the fire. Both her and her brother had been shown up by a half blood and he had made it look incredibly easy! But that wasn’t what was bothering her the most. What bothered her the most was what Potter had accomplished at the Feast.

He had single handedly defeated the three best duelers in the school and, as far as she could tell, he hadn’t even cast a spell to do it! And then he had the gall to produce a rare training device and demonstrate that blood had little to do with magic levels.

*“Don’t make me do this, Gin,” Harry said with pain filled voice.*

*“You won’t get away with this, whoever you are,” snarled Ginny.*

*“You may not know who I am, but I know who you are not. You are not my Ginny,” Harry said sadly, his eyes filling with tears.*

My Ginny? What did he mean by that? What could he have meant? And why the tears?

*Potter, a cross dimensional traveler. He wouldn’t know me, she thought. And then it hit her. Of course! He would know my counterpart in his world! It was obvious now. He had some sort of relationship with my counterpart!* She shuddered at the thought of letting a half blood touch her, and then stopped to reconsider.

According to the Daily Prophet, Potter was the single richest wizard in the world, bringing to this world the entire Potter and Black fortunes. And he was moderately famous, plus he was more powerful than anyone she had ever seen before. Add to that that fact that he was incredibly handsome and well built, and perhaps being with a half blood wasn’t that bad after all.

The Weasley family was pure blood, but had little else going for it. An alliance between herself and Potter would give her access to money, power and fame. Perhaps she should talk to her father about tendering an offer of marriage?

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## The Next Day...

“Mr. Potter, please remain after class.”

Harry sighed and put his book bag down. “Yes, Professor,” he said.

Lily waited until the last of her Ancient Runes students filed out of the class room before turning to Harry with a frown.

“Harry, I know that some of this is new to you, but in the future, I would hope you would refrain from picking duels! I nearly died of a heart attack last night!” Lily exclaimed.

Harry looked down at his hands for a moment, then he smiled and looked up at Lily. When she saw his look, she placed both hands on her hips, getting angrier.



“Just what is so funny young man?” she said, then she shook a finger under his nose.

“No one ever cared enough to yell at me like this before. It’s scary, but somehow comforting as well,” he said in a whisper.

Lily’s anger instantly faded into the background and she moved to sit in a chair facing him.

“I’m sorry, Harry...”

“Don’t be, Mum. I shouldn’t have done that, but I was so mad at what I saw happening around me that I didn’t think,” he replied, interrupting her apology.

“Very well then, what is this about you putting the Weasley boy in the infirmary?”

Harry frowned. “He’s lucky I decided to let him live, Mum. He was about to sexually molest Hermione.”

“Harry, these incidents...”

“Are going to stop, or I’ll start turning the pure bloods to muggles. That wasn’t an idle threat I made. Look, Mum, I have always hated bullies, perhaps because I was bullied myself when I was growing up. There are few people I will protect with my life if necessary, you and Ally are two. Hermione is another. I know she’s not the same person I knew, but she’s darn close and I want to learn who this Hermione is.”

Lily looked at Harry shrewdly for a moment, her eyes narrowing. “Besides Ginny, you also loved Hermione, didn’t you?” she asked softly.

Harry looked down at his hands again. “Maybe, yes, no... Oh, I don’t know. I had two friends who were close enough that I thought of them as family. Ron Weasley and Hermione. Ron loved her. So I did nothing about her and eventually she went with Ron. They became engaged after I killed Voldemort. I confessed my feelings to them both in a parting letter. I only hope they’re mature enough to stay together.”

“And you think that maybe you have a chance with this Hermione?” she prompted gently.

“Maybe,” he whispered. “I don’t know. It’s too soon yet. But I know I want her friendship. I know I need that much from her. I’ll always need her friendship.”

Lily smiled and hugged him to her. “She’s a very nice girl and I think she’s always needed a good friend like you, too.”

“I hope so,” he replied wistfully.

“I know you have a free period next, so tell me about the runes for your trunk?” she asked him gently.

Harry’s eyes lit up and he began to describe the alterations and changes he had made in the trunk.

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## Defense Against the Dark Arts Class...

During the week before the start of the term Harry had sat down with his Godfather for a long talk. He had offered to give Sirius the Black fortune he had brought with him, but Sirius turned him down. Harry’s gift of the ring was enough to allow Sirius access to his family vault here, and there was more than enough money in that vault as far as Sirius was concerned.

It was during his conversations with Sirius that Harry had learned that Remus Lupin had been killed shortly after Harry’s death in this world. Remus had cornered Peter Pettigrew and, in the ensuing fight, both men died. Harry grilled Sirius intensely on the subject. He wanted to be absolutely certain that Pettigrew was dead and hadn’t simply snuck off, leaving a piece of himself behind. Sirius assured him that there had been two bodies and Pettigrew had been positively identified by himself, Lily and James.

Sirius was a bit unhappy that Harry wasn’t a rule breaker for the sake of pranks, but he was thrilled to discover that he was an expert in defense. He appealed to Dumbledore and managed to get Harry assigned to him as his defense assistant. The added title meant that he would help Sirius in some of his classes, and he would also help with the dueling club.

Harry stood along the back wall of the Defense class and winked at Hermione when she entered the room. His expression froze when some other familiar faces entered. Ron Weasley walked through the door, laughing at something Draco Malfoy had said.

Sirius coughed and stood up from behind his desk. Everyone quickly found himself or herself a seat. “Starting this year, sixth and seventh year students will be tested like never before. Thanks to Mr. Potter, we have some unique and highly rare training tools that we will be able to use. Just having access to a Merlin’s orb is a wonderful tool.”

Sirius then launched into a lecture about how training aides could be useful in helping people improve their abilities. As he walked in front of the class, his outfit slowly morphed into a chicken suit with bright yellow feather. But he took no notice of it until he noticed the whole class laughing.

Sirius shot Harry a suspicious look, but continued his lecture.

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## Head Boy's Apartment...

Over the next week, Harry made it clear to all the students that his door was always open. Pansy, the Head Girl, much preferred to hold court, while Harry simply enjoyed the company of the people who came to visit him for advice, help with class work, or because they felt safe around him.

Harry cemented his reputation in the school when he came up against several fifth year mixed blood students picking on a first year pure blood. He had stopped them, and made them apologize. Word quickly got around that he would treat anyone with respect, regardless of his or her blood affiliation. Even the pure blooded began to think of Harry as a friend they could turn to.

Like he had predicted, many of the pure bloods weren't into tormenting others. They'd just gone along with their fellows to fit in. Once Harry had shown them that being a pure blood didn't necessarily mean they were better, a lot of people began to moderate their behavior.

Every evening, Harry would do his homework in the small sitting room his apartment offered, and the room was usually filled with students coming and going. A few students, like Ally and Hermione, were fast becoming fixtures there. Others moved in and out as Harry helped them.

He was quickly learning that this Hermione was still a different person than his Hermione. She was every bit as smart as he remembered, but she was influenced by six years of school, where she was put down as a muggle born witch. Her confidence had been greatly boosted when she saw her numbers from the Merlin's orb. But she still had a long way to go before she felt equal to some of the others at Hogwarts.

And while she was quickly coming into her own, there were a few issues about Harry that bothered her greatly. He knew all the signs coming from her. He waited until Saturday, when they were alone, before he finally confronted her.

"Alright, Hermione, you might not like this, but I know you better than you think and I know you are dying to ask me some questions. I've arranged for a few hours where we'll be alone, so ask them. I don't promise to answer everything, but if I can, I'll try," he told her.

She was surprised, but didn't waste any time. Nodding in acknowledgement, she bent down and pulled out a piece of parchment from her book bag. Harry chuckled when he realized she had written down a list of questions.

"Tell me about the Hermione you know, Harry," she said softly.

"She's a lot like you, smart as a whip and staggeringly beautiful. She and I became best friends in our first year when I helped save her from a mountain troll. She's less shy and more sure of herself than you are but, basically, you're pretty much the same person."

Hermione blushed during his answer and jotted some notes down on her parchment. "Why didn't you touch the Merlin's orb at the welcoming feast?"

Harry sighed and reached out with a hand, pulling the orb from its holding place and putting it on the table. "Do you remember the numbers people had, Hermione?" he asked her softly.

She thought for a moment. "Yes, the highest number was one hundred ninety seven and the lowest was sixty five. So I assume it's on a scale of one to two hundred?"

Harry shook his head. "No, the scale has no upper limit. If I had touched the orb in front of everyone, most of the students would have been either terribly jealous or terrified of me."

"Harry?" she asked in alarm, "how can it be that bad?"

She looked startled when she heard him mutter under his breath, "Please don't be afraid of me."

Harry reached over and touched the orb after activating the charm. The orb vibrated a moment before the numbers appeared over the orb and she gasped. Four thousand eight hundred and ninety eight!

"Legend has it that Merlin himself was a solid one thousand," he told her quietly.

"What are you?" she whispered.

He flinched away from her. When she realized what her question sounded like, she cringed. "I didn't mean..."

"I know," he said sadly, interrupting her. "But to answer your question, in my world, Voldemort didn't die when he tried to kill me as an infant. In fact, we both survived. Though he lost his body, his spirit remained. I was fated by prophecy to have the power needed to kill him. And kill him I did, but only after I lost most of my friends, all of my family... everyone I loved and nearly everyone who loved me... I am an Elemental Mage who wants to live in peace with his family..." He trailed off.

"Didn't you wonder why I use a staff most of the time? Even Dumbledore doesn't use a staff. I own a wand, but rarely touch it because I can cast spells wandlessly and just as powerfully as with my wand."

She shook her head, trying to keep up with his sudden topic change. She was surprised to see tears rolling down his cheeks. "Hey... I'm sorry, Harry... I didn't mean to make you cry," she said, shaken by his revelations and his tears.

Harry looked away and angrily wiped at his tears, then he turned back to her and tried to smile. "It's alright, it was in another life," he replied, trying to shrug it off.

Hermione found herself strangely moved by him. He controlled truly frightening amounts of power, but also had a quality about him that made him

endearing at the same time.

"Was I one of the friends you lost?" she asked.

Harry smiled and shook his head. "No. When I left, you were happily engaged to be married and were living with your intended's family. I waited until I knew you would be alright before leaving."

"And your Ginny?"

"She's dead. There and here," he spat, his anger and grief evident in his voice. He stood and paced the room.

She waited until he passed her and she reached out to grab his hand. Startled, he looked down at her and saw a myriad of emotions on her face, shock, fear, pity and finally resolve as she settled down, determined to help her new friend.

"You loved your Ginny and the one here is too different?"

Mutely, he nodded at her.

"Harry, many of the pure bloods have come to realize their mistake now that you've pointed it out to them..."

"No! You need to understand, Hermione. Ginny..." he stopped and smothered a sob, "...my Ginny would never participated in anything like this in the first place. The idea would have been repugnant to her. Just like I know you're not exactly my Hermione, I know the Ginny here isn't my Ginny. The difference is that you and my Hermione are very close. This Ginny is nothing like the girl I loved," he said flatly.

"I'm sorry," she whispered, her own eyes filling with tears.

He collapsed on the couch next to her and ran a hand over his face. "I didn't mean to snap at you. It's all so raw and painful right now. You and Ron were the last people I wanted to leave. But when you two got engaged, there was no room for me. I was alone and it only made the pain hurt more."

"Ron? Ronald Weasley and I? Ugh! Well, that isn't going to happen here," she said firmly.

"And that might be a good thing," Harry blurted out, then he blushed and looked away from her. Hermione looked shocked for a moment, then she smiled shyly to herself.

"So you left because you basically had no family, no one to tie you to your reality?" she asked softly.

Harry nodded.

"And here? I mean, you're capable of dimensional travel. You could leave this place and go to another until you find one to your liking."

Harry frowned and shook his head. "I suppose I could do that. But life isn't perfect. Here, I have found a family. My Mother is alive and I'm getting to know her. I have a wonderful sister who is simply amazing. My Godfather is alive again, and at least one of my best friends is still the same.

"I could jump again and risk losing all that, but I'm not going to. When you've lost as much as I have and suddenly get part of it back, you don't want to risk it again on a maybe," he concluded quietly. Then he turned to her. "Why do the muggle born and half bloods put up with this bullshit about blood, Hermione? It's ridiculous."

"Most of us only put up with it until we graduate, then we move. America, Canada, Australia, there are plenty of places that accept us as wizards and witches and don't care about our blood. A few unlucky ones get trapped by the marriage laws, but most escape it because no pureblood wants to sully their line with a mixed blood marriage. The purebloods don't realize the damage they're doing to their own society."

"Marriage laws?"

"Yes. Normally pure bloods marry other pure bloods, but occasionally a pure blood will demand to marry a half blood or a muggle born. The half blood or muggle born can't refuse to marry them. It was fortunate that your mother loved your father. She would not have been allowed to refuse him when he proposed."

Harry frowned and held out his hand. A moment later, a large volume appeared in it. As he flipped through the book, he nodded to let Hermione know he was listening as she described the marriage law. Finally, he sent the book back to its place and looked at her.

"So why hasn't some pure blood picked you, Hermione? You're incredibly smart and really very pretty," he asked, then he realized what he had said and blushed.

Hermione gasped and then looked down at her feet.

"I-I'm sorry, Hermione. I shouldn't have said that. If I have offended you, I apologize," he offered.

Hermione smiled shyly at him. "... ummm... think I better go finish studying. I'll see you at dinner?" she asked hopefully.

Harry nodded and she bolted from his room. He watched her retreating back for a moment, then sighed and decided to go for a walk.

An hour later, Professor Dumbledore found Harry standing atop the Astronomy tower, staring at the sky. As he approached, the young man spoke.

"It's strange, Albus. Everything looks the same, but the differences are there. Some are very subtle, some are profound, like the Weasleys. It's all so

different, and yet so similar. It's like coming home to the house you were raised in to find another family living there now. You recognize the place, but not the people," he said quietly.

"The last dimensional traveler, Fredrick Twinion, said something similar," Dumbledore offered.

"When I traveled here, I wonder if other Harry's also traveled, seeking something better."

"It is one of the true paradoxes of dimensional traveling. But that isn't why I came to talk to you this afternoon, Harry. I have spoken with many of your Professors and we have come to a consensus about your academic needs."

"Would you prefer to do this in your office, Albus?" Harry asked.

"Well, it would be less windy, and I have asked your mother to join us..." Dumbledore said.

"Very well," Harry said. He then took Dumbledore's hand and slipped the both of them into the shadows. A second later, he stepped out of the shadow, leading Dumbledore. They were in his office.

Albus looked shocked and he felt his body, as if examining it for missing parts. He then grinned like a boy. "Oh, my. That was a truly novel experience! What a wonderful way to travel!" he exclaimed.

Harry smirked, then smiled as he spotted Lily. He walked over and kissed her cheek before sitting next to her.

"Harry," the Headmaster began, "I have to begin by saying that nearly every Professor was impressed by both your knowledge and your abilities. There was some talk about sending you to the American Institute for Advanced Magic and Sorcery, but most of us felt that wouldn't be in your best interests right now.

"We understand that part of your reason for coming here is the need to connect with family and friends again. Sending you to America might advance you academically perhaps, but do little to allow you that connection. We have several people here who are willing to tutor you in their fields above and beyond what a NEWT level student would ordinarily see.

"Professor Black has been telling me you have all the makings of a fine teacher. He suggested that we allow you to do independent studies under my tutelage and that you take your remaining NEWTS early, perhaps as early as next week. He wants you to ultimately take over his position as Defense Professor," Dumbledore said, his eyes twinkling merrily.

Harry thought about it for long moment. "I did enjoy it when I taught the students in the DA. I have to confess, however, that some of the classes have been quite boring. I'd like to continue attending the classes and maintain my schedule though. I've friends I'd like to stay with," he replied quietly.

Dumbledore laughed. "Well, let's see about changing that, shall we? I will schedule you to begin your NEWTS this coming week. As for keeping the schedule, I don't see why you can't sit in the classes and use it as both study time and time to assist the Professors. I'd like to offer you as much teaching experience as possible, if you'll accept it."

He looked over at his mother and she nodded to him, her expression telling him how very proud she was of him. Harry turned and nodded in agreement to Dumbledore.

Dumbledore smiled and made a mark on a piece of parchment. "Now that that's out of the way, Professor McGonagall would like to know if you intend to try out for Seeker this year. Your records indicate that, with the exception of your fifth year, you were the Gryffindor seeker since first year."

"I'd like to, Albus..."

"Harry, you can't address the Headmaster like that," Lily exclaimed, frowning.

"No, it's quite alright, Lily. While I am coming to enjoy the relationship your son and I are building, my counterpart was not a good influence in your son's life. That Harry is willing to call me by my given name indicates he's willing to give me a chance. It is an opportunity I hope not to ruin, like my counterpart did. Now, what were you going to say about the seeker position?"

"I'd like to, Albus, but I have to decline. I resigned my position as seeker half way through my sixth year because I had advanced to the point where I see magic. Now it's automatic with me. I can spot the snitch no matter where it's hiding. However, if Gryffindor could use me to help coach their seeker?" he offered with a hopeful tone of voice.

"An excellent suggestion!" exclaimed Dumbledore, "And it should help Minerva calm her nerves. She was most interested in your helping them this season."

Dumbledore made another mark on his parchment, then his eyes lost their twinkle. "Now it's time to deal with one more item, this more serious than the others."

Harry motioned for him to continue.

"First off, sometime this coming Monday, a team from the Ministry is coming to Hogwarts to test your claim of being a Mage. There is considerable anxiety about your status within our world, Harry. You are a legal adult, and you are the oldest male issue of James Potter. That makes you his heir and Lord Potter.

"The title fell to the side when he passed away, but the numerous families that helped themselves to his fortune are afraid that you will seek to have them return it..."

"As they should be, Albus. I have already talked to a solicitor about it," Harry replied seriously.

"Harry!" Lily exclaimed in shock.

"Mum, they robbed you, leaving you and Ally penniless. If we can sue them and get the money back, all the better," he said calmly. "Besides, nothing is decided yet. I have a firm looking in to it, that's all."

Dumbledore steepled his fingers in front of his face and looked at Harry seriously. "I want you to tread carefully here. You are in a precarious position because of your heritage and your origin."

"Yes, Hermione mentioned something about marriage laws to me today. But I don't think that will be much of a problem."

Dumbledore arched an eyebrow. "Oh? Why is that?"

"If a family tenders a pureblood offer of marriage to me, I can force them to retract it. I've checked the laws. As a holder of an Order of Merlin, First Class, and heir to all four Hogwarts founders, I am legally a pureblood. That same legal fiction extends to my mother and my sister. And finally, as head of the Potter House, I have the ability to turn down any offers made on the behalf of my mother or my sister.

"In both of those cases, I would hope and pray that they would trust me enough to tell me what their hearts wanted. I wouldn't want to deny them the love they want, but I will use my position to protect them."

Dumbledore smiled grimly. "I see you have thought this out. Well that will be all for now."

Harry stood and turned to leave. He gave Lily a questioning look and she shook her head. Nodding, he left the office after telling her that he'd see her at dinner.

"Merlin, Albus! He's a stubborn man. He's as hard as steel at times," Lily exclaimed after Harry had left.

"He is his parents son," Dumbledore said softly. "He has the hardness of James, but it's tempered by your thoughtfulness and concern. He has your stubbornness and your intellect. He has grown up in the forge of war, Lily, and he's fiercely protective of those he considers his. Did you hear how he said he'd protect you both, but hoped you'd guide him in the decisions? I've watched him carefully this past week. My counterpart was concerned about him, unnecessarily I might add. Harry leads his life by a highly structured moral code. I am certain he is fundamentally a good man and will never change that. But I am also certain he will be a very difficult man to love. His value system is diamond hard and he'll need a strong woman to put up with that."

Lily glanced at the closed door and couldn't help but agree with Dumbledore.

"Maybe, Albus, but I know he's reaching out to one girl already. In his world he loved two girls, Hermione Granger and Ginny Weasley. Our version of Miss Weasley is repugnant to him. But Miss Granger is very close to the one he once knew. I'm not saying he's looking for a romantic involvement, but he's definitely seeking her friendship."

Dumbledore looked thoughtful for a moment. "Indeed? Interesting. I think our Miss Weasley would probably be stronger and more suitable for him, but he must be allowed to make his own choices. Miss Granger is a very strong witch, but not very strongly willed, although that might change, with his friendship to help guide her. I will watch them and see where this goes, Lily."

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## Great Hall, Dinner that day...

Harry sat at the Gryffindor table with Hermione and Ally. His sister was scribbling something onto her charms homework while Harry and Hermione debated charms and controlling the power behind them.

"I think the book is wrong. It's not the wand motion that controls the strength of the spells, it's the concentration and volume you put into the casting," Hermione offered.

Harry chuckled. "It's neither of those things, Hermione. It's what you do with your magic and how well you can connect to it. Do you honestly believe that a *Wingardium Leviosa* is really influenced by a swish and a flick? Or for that matter, how did the wand movement first become associated with any spell? It's all really unnecessary, in my opinion. Even the incantation is suspect, if you ask me. How you connect with your magic is what is important."

She cocked an eyebrow at him. "What do you mean by connecting to it?"

He sighed and put down his fork. "Alright, try this. Pull out your wand and cast the light spell."

She did as instructed. So did Ally and nearly a half dozen other students who had been listening to him.

"Now, what do you feel?" he asked.

Hermione frowned and looked at him. "Nothing, why? What should I feel?"

Ally nodded in agreement with Hermione.

"Do you trust me?" He asked in a serious tone.

Susan Bones, one of the more moderate purebloods from the Hufflepuff table leaned across the aisle towards Harry. "I trust you, Harry."

Harry nodded to Susan and smiled, then glanced over to Ally and Hermione. Both nodded, although hesitantly.

"Susan, come sit next to Hermione for a few minutes and I'll explain what we're going to do."

Once Susan was settled, Harry looked at her and asked, "What number did the orb give you?"

Susan looked crestfallen and whispered, "Only a sixty-seven."

Harry nodded, recalling the number now. "Magic isn't in our wand, it's in our bodies. The wand acts as a focus for the magic, but it's not necessary. We are born with our abilities to do magic because our parents passed that ability to us. But magic is like a muscle. Your number, Susan, isn't permanent. You can work to raise it by exercising your 'magic muscle', if you will. The problem is, no one is taught how to feel that muscle.

"Now, here's what I am going to do. I'm going to cast a sensory dampening field over the three of you. You won't be able to see or hear while the field is in place. It will wear off in exactly one minute. As soon as you can't hear or see, cast the light spell and concentrate on what you feel. Feel the power leaving your fingertips and entering your wand."

The three looked at him nervously for a moment, then he cast the spell. All three girls cast. A minute later, they cancelled the spell. Susan looked stunned, while both Ally and Hermione seemed thoughtful.

"By depriving you of two of your senses, you were able to process that faint sensation of your magic entering your wand," he said, and then he looked Susan in the eye. "If you concentrate on making that feeling stronger, you can improve your number by as much as twenty points."

Susan beamed at him and he smiled back at the girl. Then he turned back to Hermione, who was looking a little put out with him for paying attention to Susan.

"That's the connection, Hermione. How strongly you feel the magic, that's what controls the strength of your spells. It's the difference between levitating an object and putting it into orbit. Now, if the three of you want, I can give you a set of exercises you can do just before you go to bed that will improve your control and your strength. It won't be easy in the beginning, but it's worth the attempt if you're serious about it."

All three girls nodded eagerly. He had shown them something they'd never seen or felt before.

"You continue to surprise me, Harry," Dumbledore said from behind him. "Not only do you hold an amazing view of magic, but you're able to convey that view to others with ease. Perhaps it wouldn't be a bad idea for you to give a lecture to the first years on the nature of magic with Professor Flitwick?"

Harry looked at the Headmaster for a moment. "I'd be honored, sir"

"Professor, that wouldn't be fair!" protested Ally. "Harry's showing us things we've never learned. Shouldn't it be available to anyone?"

"An excellent suggestion, Miss Potter, take ten points for Gryffindor. Perhaps, instead of lecturing the first years, it could be a general lecture after dinner one evening, Harry?"

Harry shot his sister an evil glance before nodding his acceptance. Dumbledore smiled and moved towards the head table to speak with Professor Flitwick. Susan thanked Harry and returned to her own table, still considering what he had shown her. Even Ally and Hermione were deep in thought about what they had felt.

Harry turned back his dinner.

"Sucking up to the teachers, Potter?"

Harry looked up to see Malfoy, Ron, Crabbe and Goyle. Hermione and Ally both flinched and tried to look insignificant.

Harry smiled up at the four and then turned back to his meal.

"I'm talking to you, Potter. Look at me when I speak," snarled Malfoy.

Harry grabbed another slice of roast for his plate and started to cut it up. "No, Malfoy, you're whining like a spoiled three year old who isn't getting his pudding and is going to have a tantrum because of it," he replied, not bothering to look up.

A shocked gasp ran through the hall.

Ally snickered. Draco heard it and pulled his wand.

"Malfoy," Harry said in a tone as cold as ice, "unless you want me to shove your wand up your arse and cast a *Reducto* curse, put it away."

Malfoy backed up in alarm, bumping into Ron. "You can't threaten me, Potter. I'm not afraid of you."

"You should be, Malfoy," he replied calmly. "Now, why don't you and your girlfriends run along and play?"

Malfoy and the others staggered back as their clothing suddenly changed into frilly pink dresses.

"I don't think pink is your color, Malfoy," Harry quipped. "Now, go away," he added, and made a shooing motion with his hand. The four suddenly turned and skipped from the hall.

There was a moment of total silence in the hall, then Ally broke it with her giggle. Soon everyone was laughing except for some at the Slytherin table.

At the Slytherin table a lone red head sat and watched the hall laughing. Internally, her mind was awl with possibilities.

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### **Ministry of Magic, Minister's Office...**

"Lucius Malfoy is here to see you, Minister." said a receptionist from the door.

"Excellent, Maggie. Please send him in," Cornelius Fudge said from his desk. Then he stood and walked around it to meet Lucius.

The door opened to admit a tall blond man carrying a cane. Fudge smiled and walked forward, extending a hand. "Lucius! How marvelous to see you again."

Malfoy shook Fudge's hand and let himself be led to a comfortable armchair in front of a fireplace. Fudge took another chair nearby.

"Now, Lucius, what can I do for you?" asked Fudge.

"I'm concerned, Cornelius. I have heard from my son at Hogwarts about this dimensional traveler, this heir to the Potter Household, and I believe there is cause for alarm here. The boy is disruptive at school and is deliberately insulting to purebloods. And then there is the claim that this lad is a Mage?"

Fudge nodded knowingly. "Yes, Lucius, I share your concern there. That is why I am sending a team to Hogwarts to investigate the boy's heritage claims, as well as his abilities. Did you know the boy has the audacity to claim he is heir to all four founders?"

Malfoy blinked in surprise. "A founders heir? Surely you are joking?"

Cornelius shook his head. "No. I know the claim is outrageous, but we'll show that with the heritage tests, along with his claim of three orders of Merlin, I'm sure."

Malfoy frowned for a moment. It would be impossible for the boy to have one Order of Merlin, let alone three of them! Having even one Order of Merlin would indicate that this boy might not be controllable through guile.

"Cornelius, I think it would be best if you, yourself, led the investigative team to Hogwarts," Malfoy suggested. "This way, when you see him for the fake he is, you will be able to announce it immediately to the press."

"Yes. Yes! That would be excellent. Perhaps even bring some press with me?" Fudge offered back.

Lucius nodded in agreement. It was so easy to manipulate this old fool. Lucius was getting tired of all these back room manipulations. Things were so much easier when Voldemort was around and he was running things behind the scenes.

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### **Hogwarts, Monday Morning...**

Dumbledore sat at his place at the head table. He was not happy. Minister Fudge had shown up this morning, along with Amelia Bones of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, five Aurors, and an unspeakable from the Department of Mysteries. He also managed to convince a half dozen reporters to come along. Dumbledore had sent for Harry ten minutes ago, but as yet, he had not shown up.

Fudge paced in front of the head table and most of the school watched him warily. Fudge had a reputation for being vicious and vindictive.

After nearly a twenty minute wait, Lily stood and was about to go get Harry when he showed up in the doorway to the Great Hall. Lily's jaw dropped at the sight of her son. He was dressed from head to toe in dragon hide. A row of medals adorned his right breast, far more medals than he had originally laid claim to. Over his shoulder was a scabbard for a sword. On his belt were several daggers and a pistol. In his hand he carried his staff, the emerald pulsating slightly. He walked calmly and with dignity up the aisle to the head table and every girl in the room held her breath. His outfit molded to his body like a second skin and every muscle could be seen as he moved.

He stopped a few feet from the head table, placed his hand over his right breast and bowed to the Headmaster. Dumbledore, recognizing the protocol between two holders of the Order of Merlin, stood and returned the bow, his eyes twinkling gleefully.

Harry tapped the floor once with his staff, then released it. It hung there, motionless, waiting for his hand to retrieve it. Then he turned to face Fudge "Minister, I understand you have some questions for me?" he said in a bored tone.

"Mr. Potter, you have made certain claims and we wish to verify them," Fudge said imperiously.

"Fine then. Verify away," Harry replied with an airy wave of his hand.

"You claim to be the recipient of three Orders of Merlin, yet I see only one," sneered Fudge.

"Look closer, Minister," Harry replied. "You will see there are two repeat clusters attached to the medal."

Fudge huffed for a moment in annoyance. "How do we know that's a real Order of Merlin? You could have forged it."

Harry rolled his eyes. "Tell you what, Minister. Take it off my shirt and have it tested. I think you will find it's quite real."

Fudge moved to approach Harry to remove the medal when the Unspeakable smacked his hand away. "You idiot! Don't you know it's death to touch an Order of Merlin that doesn't belong to you? That's a real Order medallion, I can see that from here!"

Fudge stepped back in fear and Harry chuckled softly.

The Unspeakable turned to Harry. "Excuse me, my Lord, but I don't recognize some of the other medallions you're wearing. Can you identify them for my records?"

Harry went through the medallions on his chest, which included an American Magical Freedom Award as well as a French Legion of Merit, the Norwegian Order of the Lion and the German Order of Valkyrie. The Unspeakable made a few quick notes on a parchment, smiling as he did so.

"Now, we need to check your heritage, my Lord," the Unspeakable said respectfully. "If you would provide a drop of blood, please?"

Harry removed a glowing dagger from his belt and drew a drop of blood, which he placed on the offered parchment. The man proceeded to run the heritage incantation over the parchment while Harry glanced around the Great Hall.

He finally noticed all of the girls staring at him, even Hermione and he blushed. The man from the Department of Mysteries gasped and Harry glanced over at him. "Harry James Potter, born 31st July, 1980, son of Lily Evans-Potter and James Augustus Potter," the Unspeakable mumbled as the parchment continued to fill in both sides of the bloodline.

Finally the parchment stopped and the Unspeakable bent to look at it. He stiffened. "On his mother's side, he is heir to Slytherin and Hufflepuff. On his father's side, he is the last scion of Gryffindor and Ravenclaw!" exclaimed the man. "He is heir to all four founders! No doubt about it."

Fudge paled noticeably and a nervous murmur echoed through the hall. Harry had just been declared to be of the purest blood there was, ever. And yet he was champion of the half blood and muggle born. Many of the girls and some of the boys in the hall continued to look at him with lust in their eyes, but now it was a calculated lust. Many of the boys looked at him with expressions that ranged from shock to envy.

Harry tried to hide a grin. Fudge was not having a good day and it was about to get a whole lot worse.

Fudge was worried. Here was an heir of all four founders, and a three-time winner of the Order of Merlin, First Class, as well as head of the House of Potter. This boy could be a serious political threat to him!

"Harry," interrupted Dumbledore, "might I ask, what sword are you wearing? It looks very familiar."

"It's the Sword of Gryffindor, Albus. I also carry two of Ravenclaw's daggers, as well as the House rings of all four founders," Harry replied.

A gasp ran through the entire hall. Even Dumbledore stiffened in his chair. "You're wearing the House rings for all four founders?" he asked with a gasp.

Harry lifted both hands, showing his Potter Family crest and four other rings with very familiar crests on them. "Yes, I am, Albus. And I have access to the Founders vaults, although I must say the rumors of riches beyond reckoning in those vaults are just that, rumors," he replied with a chuckle. "Their vaults contain personal effects, notes and books, mostly. A real treasure, if you ask me."

Dumbledore's eyes went into overdrive as he thought about the possibilities of reading the founders notes. Harry laughed and nodded to the Headmaster, letting him know he'd make the material available for him to read. Then he remembered a certain bushy haired book witch who would want to read the material as well, so he smiled at Hermione and she breathed a sigh of relief. She had been watching and listening to these proceedings with intense interest.

"Not so fast, Potter," Fudge said angrily. "There is still the matter of your claim to being a Mage to settle."

"I am open to suggestions as to how you'd like that proved without compromising my own personal safety or that of my family, Minister," Harry replied calmly.

"Perhaps if Harry were to demonstrate one of his known abilities?" offered Dumbledore.

Harry glanced at Dumbledore for a moment, then his expression slowly changed to an evil smirk.

"Oh, no! Hold onto your socks," murmured Sirius to Lily. "The last time I saw that look, he turned me into a chicken!"

Harry reached out and pulled a large book and a scroll out of thin air. "Of course, Headmaster. I know many have been interested in my method for storing things. Basically, it's a piece of a fractal dimension, which I have contained within a runic container."

As he spoke, he traced glowing runes in the air in front of him and then started in on the arithmantic equations. The Unspeakable was practically



jumping up and down in joy at what Harry was saying to him. Lily and Dumbledore were both taking notes, as were most of the Ravenclaw table and Hermione.

“The drawback of hyper-space storage is that you cannot use it to store living creatures of any kind within the hyper-space. You can store organics, like food, indefinitely, but nothing living will survive the experience.” Harry concluded, then he turned and handed Amelia Bones the tome and the scroll.

Amelia opened the scroll and she started to read. Then she paled and started to thumb quickly through the large book.

Fudge spotted her distraction and called her to task. “Director Bones, I didn’t say we were finished here and you could start other business,” he stated pompously.

Amelia turned to Fudge with a critical eye. “Minister Fudge, Mr. Potter here has been gracious enough to supply me with documents from Gringotts including a letter from Ragnok himself, in which he accuses you of accepting illegal campaign contributions and bribes. The book, supplied by Gringotts, details more than seventeen years of illegal transactions including bribes made to you by accused Death Eaters in exchange for lighter sentences or being acquitted.

“As of this moment, you are under arrest and charged with corruption and conspiracy to aid accused Death Eaters evade justice. Take him,” she said, motioning to her Aurors.

Fudge wilted as she talked and began to tremble as the Aurors moved in on him. Dumbledore stood in alarm and looked at Harry, who stood smiling at the Minister.

“You know, Cornelius, I would have left you alone to continue your career, but you and your office leaked the information about me to the press. Then you come here, with the press in tow, expecting me to perform in your dog and pony show. Not going to happen, Cornelius. Enjoy Azkaban,” Harry said coldly.

An Auror stepped up behind Fudge and roughly placed a pair of manacles on his arms.

“Madam Director,” Harry called, “the Houses of Gryffindor, Ravenclaw, Hufflepuff and Slytherin, as well as the House of Potter, will support your candidacy for Minister of Magic, since the position appears to have suddenly become vacant.”

Amelia stopped as if struck and stared at Harry for a moment, then a grin slowly appeared on her face and she made a half bow to him. “Thank you, Mr. Potter. Your support is appreciated.”

Amelia motioned to her Aurors and they escorted Fudge from the Great Hall. She followed, clutching her precious evidence. The reporters looked torn between talking to Harry or following the Minister. Finally, they ran after Amelia, shouting questions.

“Harry, this...” Dumbledore started to say, then stopped.

“One of my advantages, Headmaster,” Harry said, holding up a hand, “is that I know where many skeletons lie. Fudge pushed me. Had he been polite about his business, I would have left him alone. Besides, some of those bribes came from men who were directly involved in the attack on myself and my parents seventeen years ago.”

“But Harry,” breathed Lily, “you just accused the Minister of being a criminal!”

“Actually, Mum, I did no such thing. I merely gave Amelia evidence she didn’t know existed. I didn’t fabricate the evidence. Gringotts was kind enough to allow their largest depositor the opportunity to copying their documents. If you want to be precise, Ragnok accused him.” He paused for a moment, his eyes wide and innocent. Then he grinned. “Now, can I go get some breakfast?”

Dumbledore nodded and Harry walked to his table, putting his sword and daggers away. He pulled the pistol from his holster, ejected the magazine and cleared the chamber before putting that away. Standing by the table, he looked down at his outfit and scowled. It wasn’t what he wanted to wear to class today, but there wasn’t time enough to change. He thought about transfiguring his outfit, but this suit was charmed so that it couldn’t be transfigured.

He sat across from Ally and Hermione, both of whom were staring at him. He grinned, then reached out and tweaked Ally’s nose. She blinked and shook her head, realizing that she was drooling over her big brother. Then she nudged Hermione, who blinked and looked at her before blushing.

“Sweet Morganna, Harry! All I can say is, if I find myself a guy who looks half as good as my brother does, I’ll be one lucky witch,” Ally breathed.

“This outfit is great for fighting, but I’m not going to get any work done if I have every girl in school drooling over me. I’ll catch you at class, Hermione. I need to go change.”

Hermione reached out and placed a hand on his arm. “No, Harry, that’s really fine... I mean it’s quite... no what I mean is...”

Harry snickered and stood up. “I rest my case. The outfit is too much for this place.”

He left the Great Hall and headed towards his suite. He hadn’t gone far when he found himself staring into a pair of very familiar brown eyes.

“That was quite a display you put on back there, Harry.” Ginny said, leaning closer to him. As she did, her blouse slid forward, giving him an impressive view.

“Glad you think so, Miss Weasley,” Harry said, refusing to look at the offered view. His stance tensed and his eyes flashed dangerously, warning

signs that anyone who knew him would have backed off from. But few here knew him that well.

"So tell me, Harry, do you have a date for the Yule ball?" she asked in a sultry tone. Then she leaned closer to him and ran her tongue over her lips ever so slowly.

Harry stepped back and folded his arms across his chest and stared down at her. "This isn't going to work, Ginevra, so you might as well forget about it," he said coldly.

Ginny blinked in confusion. She had never met a man capable of ignoring her charms before! *Concentrate!* She admonished to herself.

"Why, Harry! What ever do you mean? Can't you and I have a nice quiet conversation?" she asked him.

"You may look like the Ginny I once knew, but you're nothing like her. She'd find you as repugnant as I do," he said, and then he slipped into the shadows and vanished.

Ginny Weasley's eyes widened in amazement. Where did he go? That wasn't an apparate, was it? Rumors had him able to apparate into Hogwarts and do it silently. And what did he mean by her being nothing like the way he remembered? This was going to take a more structured and researched approach, she decided.

Harry dressed slowly in his room. His encounter with Ginny had depressed him. It was hard to think of someone as dead when they were running around quite alive in front of you. He sat on his bed, his head bowed low.

"Harry?" said a familiar voice.

Harry looked up in surprise. "Ally? Shouldn't you be in class?"

The younger girl shook her head. "I had Mum in Runes and I told her I could feel your unhappiness. She sent me to see if you're alright."

He shook his head ruefully. "Just my luck to get a little sister who's a fully functioning Empath. Tell me, do you think it's possible that Mum and Dad might have had a normal kid if they had stayed together?"

Ally smiled softly, then shook her head. "Of course not, and quit evading my question."

He sighed. "I ran into Ginevra Weasley in the hallway. I was coming back here to change. She tried to come onto to me, wanted to know if I had a date for the Yule Ball yet."

Ally's face fell while Harry tried hard to suppress his feelings. "Harry, listen to your little sister. I know exactly what suppressing your feelings is doing to you. If you can't talk to me, or Mum, you need to find someone who can help you through this... But I'd really like to help you," she offered quietly.

He looked away, afraid to meet her eyes, and his voice dropped low. "It's hard, Ally. I spent most of my life alone. I came here and found the family I'd hoped I'd find. But I'm still learning what family means. The hurt seems to be getting less, but every so often it sneaks up on me."

She sat next to him on the bed and put an arm around his shoulder. "I know it hurts, Harry. I can feel it every time I see you. I also know about the nightmares you've been hiding from Mum."

He glared at her, but she only smiled back at him.

"Don't worry, I'm not going to tell her about it. That's your job. But I am telling you now, either you let me start helping you, or you find someone who you will trust enough to help you, or I'll tell Mum. And don't you go and give me one of those famous Harry Potter glares. They don't work on family!"

He chuckled. "Alright, Sis. I get the message and I'll try to let you help me. If nothing else, you won't be able to muck me up worse than I already am!"

"Prat!" she said, punching him in the arm playfully.

By the time he had walked Ally back to her class, the two were laughing and teasing like any siblings would do. But in the back of his head, Harry knew he had to do something.

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Slytherin Common Room...

Ginny Weasley wasn't a Slytherin for nothing. She started a book she called the Book of Potter and began keeping notes on everything she knew about him. She broke it down into two groups, facts and speculation.

Some things were obvious. He was a powerful wizard, more powerful than anyone in the school, and he had a level of knowledge that even impressed the teachers. He attended classes, but rarely participated. Instead he sat in the back working on something different and the teachers had no problem with that.

The few times he did participate in class, it was usually in a capacity of assisting the Professor.

Other things she knew for a fact, he was incredibly handsome. Plain and simple, the boy had every girl in the school, including the ice queen, Pansy, drooling over him. It was a situation that made him uncomfortable. Most boys in his shoes would capitalize on it and take advantage to play the

field, but not Harry. That spoke of some sort of moral code that governed his life.

She also knew that he seemed to be sweet on that muggle born bitch, Granger. She had trouble understanding that. Granger wasn't all that attractive in her opinion, unless you liked the mousy type with big tits.

Clearly he had had some sort of friendship or relationship with her counterpart in his universe. But to her, he was coldly formal, refusing to call her anything but Ginevra or Miss Weasley.

The one time she went to his suite under the pretense of needing transfiguration help, he had helped her, but he was immune to her charms. And that was what bothered her the most. She was used to using sex as a weapon and a bargaining chip. To find someone who held it at zero value confused and confounded her.

She tried befriending his little sister in the hopes of finding out more information, Ally Potter was only two years behind Ginny, but Ally had been as unapproachable as he was, although for different reasons. Ally suspected her motives and made it painfully obvious that she didn't trust her.

She knew he hated bullies with a passion. He'd step up to protect anyone being bullied, muggle born or pure blood. Thinking back over their encounters, she was a little shocked to realize that their very first meeting had put her in the position of being a bully against Granger of all people!

Ginny stood and began pacing. That was the root of her problem, she was sure of it. The problem was, short of a memory charm, was there any way to fix it?

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### The Room of Requirement...

Harry ducked the curse sent by his opponent and sent a curse back in return. Three other opponents fired lethally powered explosive hexes and Harry dived onto one shoulder, rolled, and then rose from a crouch to take all three opponents out with a single curse.

The room was about to cycle more opponents for him when he felt the door open and a familiar presence enter the room.

"Freeze trainer," he called. The two still viable opponents froze mid-cast. Harry turned to face Dumbledore.

"Most strange. The last time I entered this room it was full of the most marvelous chamber pots. Now it appears to be an advanced dueling center."

"Welcome to the Room of Requirement, Albus," Harry said. He picked a towel up off the floor, used it to wipe the sweat from his chest and then wrapped it around his neck. He was barefoot and bare-chested, wearing only a pair of jogging pants.

Harry concentrated for a moment and the room shimmered, transforming into a sitting room with two comfortable armchairs and a small table with snacks on it. He motioned to the delighted Headmaster to take a seat.

"A remarkable room! You must tell me how it works sometime," Dumbledore said, his eyes twinkling.

"I'd be happy to, but I think you're here for another reason?"

Dumbledore smiled gently. "Quite so, Harry. I meant to talk to you today anyway, but as I approached the room I could sense your agitation quite clearly. Your teachers, and even your mother, have commented on how you seem distracted, and have been that for the past week, since Minister Fudge came to the school. Would you like to tell me what's bothering you?"

Harry opened a small red and white box next to his chair and pulled out two bottles. He opened one and passed it to Dumbledore, before opening the second bottle for himself.

Albus lifted an eyebrow at the clearly muggle beverage.

"It's a drink a friend from America showed me. Considering your love of sweets, I think you'll really like this."

"Root Beer? Are you trying to get me drunk?"

Harry chuckled. "There's no alcohol in the drink, Albus. Try it," he replied, then he took a long pull from his bottle.

Dumbledore took a sip of the muggle beverage and his face lit up in surprise and pleasure. "Astounding! What will those muggles think of next?"

Harry leaned forward in his chair and gently twirled his bottle between his hands, and then he sighed. "It's Ginevra Weasley, Albus. Where I came from, I loved her. And I loved Hermione Granger. I think I could get my Ginny out of my mind and put her to rest, as she deserves, if only Ginevra, who seems to have made up her mind to pursue me, would leave me alone. Every time she ask me to the ball, or asks for help on her homework, or rubs herself against me like a cat in heat, I compare her to my Ginny and the pain of her loss becomes a living thing once more. I need to put Ginny to rest, Headmaster, but I can't. Not while Ginevra keeps chasing me."

Dumbledore arched an eyebrow. "You call our Miss Weasley Ginevra as a way of keeping them separate?"

Harry nodded. "They are separate, sir. They might have the same body, but personality wise, they aren't even close to being the same."

"And Miss Granger?" Dumbledore asked gently.

"She's different too, sir, but in a good way. She's nearly the same person I knew and everyday she becomes more and more like the Hermione I knew. It's almost as if I somehow molded Hermione into what she became." Harry paused, frowning. Trying to keep everyone separate was beginning to give him a headache. "Does that make sense, sir?"

"It does if you think about it. Your Miss Granger came to Hogwarts as an intelligent young girl, but still muggle born. Powerful, but basically friendless and in a totally alien environment. You found people objecting to half bloods and muggle born in your own world and did something about it. Along the way you became friends with your Miss Granger and, in doing so, you helped shape her development, just as she helped shape yours.

"Now take our Miss Granger. Let us say that she is, for all intents and purposes, identical to your Miss Granger, except in one critical aspect. She didn't befriend Harry Potter in her first year. Now that you have befriended her here, she's starting to grow to be closer to what she had the potential to be, because you are encouraging her. It's not a bad thing that you're doing, Harry. In fact, Miss Granger will greatly benefit from your friendship.

"I think that, if you loved your Miss Granger, you will probably find you can love this one. The problem is putting your Ginny to rest once and for all. It torments you and haunts you. I cannot insist on our Miss Weasley wear a glamour for one student, nor can I order her to keep her distance from you if she is not trying to deliberately hurt you.

"You were sick in the hospital when they laid Ginny to rest and you never visited her grave, correct?" Dumbledore asked gently.

"I couldn't, Albus... I just couldn't face it..." he whispered in reply.

"Then, young Harry, I think it's time that you collect your family and your friends and ask them to help you say goodbye to Ginny. Put her to rest. She wouldn't want you to be in pain, and until you do this, it will eat at you. Give her the goodbye she deserves," Dumbledore said. He stood then and laid his hand on Harry's shoulder fondly before leaving the room.

Harry took another drink from his root beer. Putting the bottle down, he stood and slipped into the shadow to return to his quarters. Dumbledore was right. He needed to say goodbye to Ginny and he needed his family to help him.

Hermione and Ally were in the little common room that Harry had, both working on their homework. Hermione squeaked in fright when Harry stepped out of the shadows and into the room. He hadn't expected anyone to be there.

Ally looked up at her brother's sweaty form and couldn't help but admire the sheen on his muscles. She then shook her head and resisted the urge to growl. He was everything a wizard should be. Powerful, respectful, moral and handsome...and he just happened to be her brother! She looked down at her homework and scowled. *Damn, karma sucks, sometimes*, she thought ruefully.

Hermione struggled to concentrate on her homework, but she kept stealing glances at Harry as well.

He refigured the towel around his neck into a comfortable t-shirt and then cast a cleaning charm on himself before putting it on. Neither girl commented on the scars crisscrossing his back, or the one that descended from his neck half way down his torso. It was still red and puffy, indicating it was a relatively new injury.

"Squirt, would you mind getting Mum and Sirius and asking them to meet us here in about half an hour, please?" Harry asked, the plea obvious in his voice.

Ally looked between the two for a moment, then nodded with a smile.

Hermione looked at Harry in confusion. "Harry? If you're going to be busy with your Mum, then perhaps I should go..."

"No!... I mean, no please. I want to talk to you, Hermione, and I'd like you to stay here when the others get here," Harry said, and then he glanced at Ally, who took the hint and left the room.

Harry stood and walked over to the fireplace, and then he turned to face Hermione and leaned against the mantelpiece. "I know you are not the Hermione I knew. That Hermione I fell in love with, but never told her because my best mate also fell in love with her. You could say I got over you and fell in love with my Ginny," he said softly.

Hermione sat silently, looking at him, not knowing what to say.

"The problem, Hermione, is I'm falling for you all over again, or at least I think I am. But there's one roadblock in the way."

"Your Ginny," she replied in a matter of fact tone.

Harry nodded, grateful for her understanding. "It's worse than you think, Hermione. I need to put my Ginny to rest. I need to close that chapter of my life before I can move onto to another. And I need your help to do it," he said softly.

"My help?" she asked in confusion.

"Yours and Ally's, my Mum and Sirius too. I need my family and my friends along to help me say goodbye..." he stopped for a moment and forced himself to focus on what he was doing. "I never got the chance to say goodbye to her. I was still in the hospital when they buried her. And I couldn't bring myself to visit her grave. Maybe if I say goodbye, then I'll be able to move on. And I do want to move on. I want stop the nightly nightmares where I wake up screaming her name and crying. I want to find out if there's a chance that a Hermione Granger might like to date a Harry Potter. But I need my friend, Hermione Granger, to help me put my past behind me," he said softly.

Hermione stood, walked to him and gave him a chaste hug. Then she stood on her tip toes and leaned in close to his ear. "I think Hermione

Granger would like to date Harry Potter," she whispered shyly. Coming down off her toes, she looked into his eyes. "And I'd be honored to be there as your friend, Harry."

A short time later Harry, his family and Hermione, found themselves deep in the heart of the Forbidden Forest. Harry had taken them all there by shadow travel.

He looked at his friends and family for a moment before examining the clearing he had selected. "This clearing is deep enough in the forest that the chances are even Hagrid wouldn't find it. I just need to make a few modifications. Give me a moment."

He concentrated for a moment, and then he started changing the clearing to suit his needs. First, he squared the clearing, giving it a more defined shape. Then he laid down a thick carpet of lush grass. In the exact center of the clearing he created a simple fountain with an obelisk in the center.

Harry circled the obelisk several times before he engraved writing on each of the four sides. When he was done, water gently rose up the interior of the obelisk and cascaded down the four sides of the shaped marble.

He then stepped back to let everyone examine his work. Lily stepped forward to look at the handiwork and choked back tears when she saw one side of the obelisk had a list of the names of those that had died in the first war in this universe, ending the list was the name Harry Potter.

Stepping around to the side, she saw a much larger list of names. It was a list of people who had died in Harry's universe.

Stepping to the side once more, she read his simple inscription of 'Ginny', and choked back another sob. His pain was evident in the inscriptions simplicity.

Stepping around for the last time she read: 'These are the names of those who chose to do what was right over what was easy. May they never be forgotten.'

One by one they all read the sides of the obelisk before returning to where Harry stood.

"I guess it's probably hard for anyone here to understand my Ginny, considering the Ginevra Weasley you know. But let me try to explain. Ginny wasn't a Slytherin. She was a Gryffindor, brave and loyal, and almost as smart as Hermione. She was tough and strong when she needed to be, and soft and feminine when she wanted. She had a temper, and a loving touch. She was friendly, compassionate and passionate.

"She stood up to bullies and fought for people she didn't even know. Ginny was my friend, she was my lover. She was going to be my wife someday and the mother of my children. And then it all ended."

Harry laughed bitterly. "She wasn't even supposed to be at Hogwarts that day. She was supposed to go to St. Mungos for a seminar, but it had been cancelled at the last minute. Somehow she ended up out on the battlefield instead of up in the infirmary."

He glanced to a small rise visible in the distance and his eyes grew distant, as if viewing the battle once more.

"Most of the forest had been destroyed in the first battle of Hogwarts. I found her body on that small knoll over there. I was pretty badly wounded myself. Before I got to Voldemort, I had endured more than a dozen Cruciatus curses and several cutting hexes. There was fire everywhere and bodies, so many bodies. The Death Eaters died when Voldemort died, but not before they killed many of my friends, people I considered family."

As he spoke, he began to tremble and his eyes shed tears steadily. "I tried to make sure she was safe, but my place was in the fight and hers was in the hospital. If I had only known she had left her station."

Both Ally and Hermione moved to stand next to him, offering what comfort they could.

He turned to face the obelisk. "Ginny, I'm so sorry," he whispered. "I never meant for this to happen, but it did. Now it's time for me to say goodbye, my Ginny. It's time for you to rest, as you deserve. And I must find the strength to go on..."

Harry swayed and both girls tightened their grip on his arms. Lily moved to stand in front of him and she hugged him tightly. "She must have been very special indeed for such a strong man to love her."

He broke down then and wept. Both Ally and Hermione joined them in the embrace, while Sirius watched and wiped the tears from his own eyes.

When the tears ended, Harry looked up at those surrounding him, comforting him, and smiled gratefully. "The grass will always remain fresh and green, and the fountain will flow all year long. It will provide water for the forest creatures. Within the clearing all creatures will be safe," he said quietly.

"I like it," offered Ally. "The forest creatures will discover this refuge soon enough. It's fitting, a place of peace surrounded by danger."

"It is very appropriate, Harry," offered Sirius.

Harry felt a hand slide into his. He glanced down, then looked up at Hermione who smiled back at him shyly. She squeezed his hand in support.

"Shall we go back to the castle?" he asked.

Everyone nodded, eager to try shadow traveling again. He took Ally's hand in his free one, while Hermione reached for Lily and Ally grabbed Sirius. A moment later, they stepped out of the shadows near the Great Hall.

Harry turned to face them. "... thank you," he offered, looking embarrassed.

Lily leaned forward and lifted his chin. "That's what families are for, love. Now, let's get to dinner."

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## Gryffindor Head Boy's suite...

Over the next few weeks things settled into a routine. Harry's nightmares receded and he smiled and laughed more. By unspoken agreement, he and Hermione decided to take their time building a relationship. Hermione was a little put off initially when she realized that Harry had far more experience than she did, but she was also comforted by the fact that he seemed nearly as shy around her as she was around him.

Three nights every week, Harry had a small group of people over in the evenings to explore the magical connection. Lily and Sirius never missed a session, as Harry spent time helping everyone get in touch with their magic. Susan Bones had managed to show a remarkable improvement, and her power level rose dramatically. It greatly boosted her own confidence.

Another person whose confidence had been greatly boosted was Hermione. Not only had she quickly mastered the exercises necessary to touch her magic, but she had boosted her own power by a respectable five points. Harry smiled and tried to ignore the pride he felt in her.

He was supposed to be working on his own project, but Hermione and Ally were off in the corner, whispering. Every so often, they look at him and giggle. It was disconcerting to say the least. He turned away from the giggling pair and glanced around at the others in the room, all of who were involved in exercises designed to touch their magic. The only unusual addition was one lone Slytherin girl in the same year as Ally who had been hanging on the fringe of the group for the last week until Harry had invited her to participate.

Meloney Marchbanks was not your typical Slytherin. But then, Harry's view of Slytherin's had been turned upside down enough lately. She was a quiet girl, shy and smart like Hermione, but she had a strong urge to prove her abilities.

The problem, at least for her, was her magic. She was a pure blood who, until she had received her Hogwarts letter, had shown very little magical aptitude. Her parents had thought her no better than a squib for many years. Being in Slytherin House had cemented the idea that to be powerful and accepted in the wizarding world, one had to be magically powerful, and she wasn't. Her housemates were rather scornful of her abilities, and she was determined to change that.

And if it meant being taught by someone who her housemates looked at with suspicion, who was she to complain? She would learn what she could from him and be grateful for it.

Harry shook his head and stood. He needed a breath of fresh air. He walked to the window and gazed out.

"I wish we could get you to teach this to everyone, Harry. You've improved the abilities of everyone in the room in the last two weeks," Sirius said, coming up to stand quietly next to him.

"It's not that simple, Paddy. Everyone here is willing to put in the effort involved. This takes discipline and a strong will to succeed at what you set out to do," he replied.

"Like you out there every morning at five A.M. running around the Quidditch Pitch? And Albus has told me about your fighter training sessions. Albus says they are quite dangerous," Sirius said.

"Yeah, like that Paddy. I worked too hard to get to this point to let it slip."

"Do you expect to get into another major battle then?"

"Not really, no. But if it did come down to it, I wouldn't want to be unprepared either."

Sirius grunted in acknowledgement. "It makes sense, I guess. It's not like the next Dark Lord is going to owl you and introduce himself."

Harry leaned on the window ledge, his fists clenched. "It's more than that. I have a family now. It's small, but it's a real family. I'm also the head of my house. It's my job to ensure your safety - you, Mum, Ally and even Hermione. It's a small sacrifice to pay and if nothing happens, then at least I stay in shape."

"This sounds like an important conversation. Can anyone join in?" came a voice from behind.

Harry and Sirius whirled to see that everyone except Ally, Hermione and Lily had left. Lily stood in front of them, grinning.

"Lily, you know my heart isn't that good so don't sneak up on me," whined Sirius.

Harry chuckled and walked over to the sofa, leaving Lily to fend off Sirius by herself. He sat next to Ally, while Sirius tried to play the weak heart routine, not that it ever worked with her.

Ally tugged on his sleeve. "Harry, look! Check this out!"

Ally pointed a finger at Harry and murmured, "*Lumos*". Suddenly her fingertip lit up like the end of a wand.

Harry smiled broadly. "Excellent, Ally!"

The smaller girl was practically bouncing in her seat. "Hermione and I both can do it now."

“That’s great, but try the same thing with this incantation; ‘Lux lucis meus pectus pectoris’.”

Hermione raised an eyebrow him and Sirius began to laugh. Even Lily smiled gently at her daughter as she tried but failed to produce the light again using that particular incantation.

She finally poked him to stop his snickering. “I don’t see what is so funny,” she pouted.

“Oh, sweetie,” Lily said, stepping away from Sirius. “Harry is just teasing you. That incantation is Latin for, ‘light of my heart’ and it’s only supposed to work in the presence of your true love.”

Ally pouted a moment, then glared at Harry.

“Actually, Mum, that’s a mistake. The spell does work, but it will work for anyone you can fall deeply in love with.”

“Oh, come on Harry. That spell’s been bandied about for centuries and it rarely works. Watch. Lux lucis meus pectus pectoris,” Sirius intoned, waving his wand. He began to laugh at his own foolishness when his wand suddenly started to glow.

Harry blinked, and then he grinned while Ally howled with laughter. “Oh really, Sirius? Now the question is, is that for Mum, Ally, Hermione or me?” He asked, grinning widely now. “And in case you’re wondering, I don’t bat for that team.”

As laughter bounced off the walls, Sirius sputtered, embarrassed. Lily, Harry noted, blushed brightly.

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## The Great Hall...

Harry sat at the Gryffindor table, engrossed in a notebook, when he noticed a sudden drop in the noise level nearby. It was as if someone had flipped a switch and all of the Gryffindor’s had fallen silent.

He looked up to see that Hermione had been moved from her seat. She sat huddled next to Ally, looking worried. Across from him sat Ginny Weasley and behind her were several Slytherin girls and boys.

“Did you ask Hermione to move, Weasley, or did you just shove her out of your way?” Harry asked in a cold tone.

Hermione shot Harry a warning look, which he ignored.

“Harry,” purred Ginny, “I think we’ve gotten off on the wrong foot and I think we should start over.”

“Ginevra you are wasting your time. Return to your table. I’m trying to enjoy my meal.”

Ginny leaned back on the bench and pouted a little, then leaned forward again. She wore an enchanted perfume and it should help weaken his resistance.

Harry blinked, then his eyes narrowed and a small, but very visible shield snapped into place around him.

Ginny looked at him in surprise. She never thought he’d detect the perfume.

“Miss Weasley, I do not appreciate this attempt to deceive me. Twenty five points from Slytherin and detention with Mr. Filch this evening,” He told her coldly.

Ginny stood in anger and leaned across the table. “I don’t understand you, Harry Potter! I’m just trying to be friendly. You obviously knew me in your other world and no matter what I try, you refuse my overtures of friendliness! It wouldn’t hurt you to bend a little, you know.”

Sirius, up at the head table, grabbed Lily’s hand. “Oh, Merlin. Get ready to duck!”

Harry stood from his seat, As he did, his magic flared ominously. His aura became visible and the air around him crackled with power. Ginny shrank back fearfully from him, as did the Slytherins she had brought with her to support her cause.

“Friendly? The Ginny Weasley I knew, a Gryffindor like the rest of her family going back for eleven generations, was kind and gentle! I will remind you, Miss Weasley, our first introduction was your exhorting your brother to grope the breast of my friend while she whimpered in fear! The Ginny Weasley I knew never would have done that. Why you continue to pursue me is a mystery. I’ve made it plain that I am not interested. What more do you need to know?”

*Bobmin*  
*FanficAuthors.net*



## Parallels (part 2)

"I think it would have been clear to you by now that I'm not that boring bitch you're probably running from. Hell, Potter, you seem to be unable to make points with the mudblood here! Maybe girls don't interest you? Maybe..."

He turned white as her words cut into him. Ally gasped and she tried to shut down her empathic abilities. The pain Harry was feeling threatened to overwhelm her.

Harry's mouth moved, but nothing came out, then his expression froze and became totally blank as he ruthlessly tried to smother his feelings.

"Miss Weasley, I will give you this last warning. Leave me alone, or you will regret what I do," he snapped. He then turned his back on her and strode from the hall.

There was a moment of silence in the hall, and then Hermione stood up and tapped Ginny on the shoulder. The short red head turned and frowned, seeing the taller girl. Then Hermione did the unthinkable. She reared back and punched the Slytherin in the face, barely missing her nose. Ginny stumbled back from the blow, tripped and landed on the floor with an audible thud.

There was a moment of shocked silence as Hermione walked from the hall with her head held high. Ginny climbed to her feet, snarling, and reached for her wand.

"Miss Weasley!" called Professor Snape.

Ginny froze, ignoring her head of house, as she faced down the collective wands of Gryffindor house. Harry had managed to unite his house, crossing the blood boundaries.

"Miss Weasley!" Snape called again. Reluctantly, she put her wand away and walked to the head table to face her head of house.

Lily stood quickly and rushed to join a visibly upset Ally. As she approached, her daughter leapt to her feet and wrapped her arms around her. "Mum, he's in so much pain right now," she sobbed.

Hermione finally caught up to Harry out by the lake. He was sitting on a rock and staring off into the distance. She approached him carefully, nursing her hand.

"Harry?"

He jumped, startled by her voice, and turned to face her. "I'm sorry, Hermione, I didn't hear you coming up on me."

"And I didn't mean to startle you. I just wanted to know if you were alright," she asked softly, one hand rubbing the other.

Harry glanced down to her hands and his eyes widened. "Hermione? What did you do to your hand?" he asked, grabbing it gently in his own. His hand glowed gently for a moment as he healed the bruising.

Hermione looked ashamed at herself. "I hit Ginny Weasley," she whispered.

Harry's expression went from disbelief to shock to amazement. "That's bloody brilliant!"

Hermione looked at him in horror. He just didn't understand! She had struck a pure blood. The retribution, when it came, would be brutal.

"Brilliant? Harry, don't you get it? All of them will be out for revenge now. Bloody hell! I don't even know why I hit her. It figures you wouldn't understand. Your blood is so pure it's like fresh fallen snow!" she growled, beginning to pace as she finally realized the magnitude of her actions.

"Hermione," Harry said gently, "be reasonable here. We both know that's a legal fiction. By pure blood standards, I'm a half blood because my Mother was born to squibs. Besides, the only people who will be gunning for you will be the Slytherins, and I'll make sure I'm available to pull their fangs, if necessary. I still can't believe you hit Ginevra... for me?"

Hermione stopped short and whirled to face him. The entire situation shifted again and she stood, dizzy from the dynamics. Harry reached up and gently grabbed her hand in his own.

Hermione's senses reeled. She looked from their joined hands to his face and his eyes looked back up at her, conveying a message she had never seen before in them. There was a hunger there, a passion. She knelt beside him and he gently pulled her into his embrace.

For nearly seven years she had avoided any sort of relationship at Hogwarts and had been convinced that, if she were to have a sexual experience at school, it would have been a violent one. Now it was happening and it was nothing like she had imagined.

He reached over to brush a few stray hairs out of her eyes and then he leaned in and kissed her. It was a gentle, teasing kiss, like the brush of a butterfly's wing on her lips. Her arms moved of their own accord, wrapping around him.

He kissed her a second time. It was gentle, but more demanding. With a jolt, desire flooded her body, threatening to overwhelm her. When he ran his tongue across her lips, she opened for him, accepted him. It took her a moment to realize he was holding himself back. He was allowing himself only as much as she was willing to give. His hands stayed safely on her back, running down her spine and back up to her shoulders. With that realization, she deepened the kiss further, letting her own hands roam just a little.

When they broke apart some minutes later, Hermione rocked back on her knees and stared into his green eyes, eyes that could be so expressive... when he let them. She shook her head in bewilderment. He could have anyone. Why would he want her? There wasn't anything special about her. She considered herself plain, not very well built, and she came from a muggle family.

More disconcerting was the happiness she could see dancing in his eyes.

"I-I don't understand. You could have anyone! You could have a wife and several mistresses and no one would complain. They could all be pureblood and still no one would complain. Why me? I have nothing to offer you. I'm a nobody," she said, dropping her eyes to stare at her knees.

Harry frowned as he reached over and gently lifted her chin.

"Hermione, I've known you twice in my life. The first time, you became my best friend, one of the few who stayed by my side. You never saw the Boy-Who-Lived. You saw Harry. The second Hermione, you, never knew the Boy-Who-Lived because, in this universe, he didn't. Instead you became my best friend all over again, seeing me. Even when you learned what I was, you stayed when most would have run. Ally and my Mum don't know my power level because I'm afraid to show it to them. I was never afraid that you'd run.

"The first Hermione I fell in love with, but I didn't do anything because my best mate had loved her longer than I had. Now, by some strange quirk of fate, I have a chance to fall in love with Hermione all over again and I find she's as wonderful as she was in my world. She's beautiful...downright sexy, in fact. She's smart, so smart she'll be able to keep me on my toes. You say you have nothing to offer? I say you're wrong," he said, caressing her cheek softly.

"Your heart is the greatest gift of all. It's worth more than every galleon I own," he murmured, smiling.

Hermione looked at him in stunned silence. When a giggle intruded on their privacy, Harry looked up to see his mother and his sister standing not far away.

Lily was holding a squirming Ally back as the girl tried very hard not to giggle.

Both Hermione and Harry blushed to their roots, but Harry waved them over anyway.

"Apparently family also exists to embarrass you to death," he muttered.

As the newcomers joined the pair, Ally began making kissing noises. Lily shot her a glare and she desisted, her giggles fading as she turned serious. "I know I shouldn't tease you, Harry, but you went from the depths of despair to soaring happiness so fast I didn't think it was possible! We were both frightened for you."

Hermione narrowed her eyes and looked at the younger girl for a moment. "You're an empath!" she exclaimed.

Lily made a hushing noise. Ally looked around quickly to make sure no one was around, and then nodded.

"She's a pain in the arse, is what she is," Harry said teasingly. Ally's temper flared. Quickly realizing she was being teased however, she stuck her tongue out at him.

"Harry, the Headmaster wants to see you both in his office," Lily said carefully, knowing she was breaking the mood.

Hermione looked ready to panic.

Harry took her hand in his and she calmed. "Don't let the old goat scare you, Hermione. He's just a man, like any other man. He wears socks with holes that his toes stick out of."

In another moment, Hermione and Ally were laughing as Harry did an excellent imitation of Albus Dumbledore.

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## Malfoy Mansion...

Lucius Malfoy stood, looked at the crowded study and smiled thinly. "Friends! Thank you for coming here on such short notice," he said with a slight bow.

"All of you represent the greatest of the great houses. In our hands we control our world, and help keep it pure. But we are faced with an attack that we must unite to face. Since the political demise of our dear Minister Fudge, and the rise to power of Minister Bones, old laws have been thrown away in favor of laws that favor all, rather than the pure blooded community.

"Minister Bones has become a ruler over us all because she has the support of the houses of the four founders, as well as the House of Potter, the House of Black, the House of Dumbledore, to name a few."

"But Lucius, what can we do about it? Bones has the majority support of the Wizengamot and the DMLE in her back pocket," protested Albert Greengrass.

Lucius frowned. Greengrass was correct. Bones was untouchable. "Bones is just a politico, Albert. Take away her support and she'll fade into the woodwork like Cornelius did. Take away Harry Potter, and the support he represents, and Bones will fold like a house of cards."

Several men stood and made their way to the exits. One stopped and faced Malfoy. "I don't like where you are going with this, Lucius. I came here only because I thought I owe you at least a hearing on the subject. But this sounds like something I want no part of. Don't embarrass the pure bloods like you did in your last venture," warned William Abbott before he turned his back on the blond man and left the room.

Lucius smiled thinly again and turned to those who remained, less than ten families! "No matter. We have between us adequate support for what needs to be done. I have alerted my son. He is going to work with us to assure that something permanent happens to Harry Potter."

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## The Great Hall...

As intimidating as he could be, Albus Dumbledore had been strangely gentle in administering punishment to Hermione for punching Miss Weasley. He took twenty-five points from Gryffindor for her actions and, since Harry had agreed to give a series of lectures to the staff and interested students on his views of the nature of magic, he assigned Hermione as Harry's assistant.

After that, it took less than a day for the rest of the school to realize that something drastic had changed between Harry and Hermione.

Harry, Hermione realized, was an intensely private person who was not prone to excessive emotional displays, but he held her hand now in public, and always stayed close to her. Her concern regarding the Slytherin's getting revenge turned out to be valid.

*A few days after the punch, Harry was in the back of the potions classroom. He was working on a treatise on the nature of potion ingredients when he happened to glance up and notice a small lead pellet flying towards Hermione's cauldron. He didn't think, he just shielded the cauldron. The pellet hit the shield and it rang loudly as it ricocheted off the shield towards the front of the class, narrowly missing Professor Snape.*

*"What is the meaning of this?" demanded Snape angrily.*

*Harry raised his hand and Snape glared at him. "Mr. Potter? Did you fire that pellet at me?"*

*"No, sir, I don't know who controlled the pellet. I saw it just before it was about to enter Miss Granger's cauldron. I shielded the cauldron and, unfortunately, when the pellet bounced off the shield, it went in your direction."*

*Hermione gasped and paled. Lead, added to this particular brew, would have caused the potion to fail in a spectacular and dangerous fashion. Putting lead into the potion would have amounted to a deliberate attempt on her life.*

*Snape frowned and glared at the class. "Which of you miscreants tried to destroy Miss Granger's potion?" he asked with a snarl.*

*The silence in the room was deafening. Harry held his tongue. He could have replayed events in the classroom, but that would have only made matters worse.*

*"Very well then. Ten points from everyone and, with the exception of Miss Granger, I want a four foot essay on the dangers of lead in potion making. Seal your cauldrons, class is dismissed." Snape said angrily.*

*Harry packed up his books and followed Hermione from the room. He was about to reach for her hand when Ron Weasley angrily pushed between them.*

*"Watch out for lead pellets, mudblood," he snarled. Malfoy, Crabbe and Goyle laughed as they followed him.*

*Hermione flinched away from Ron's touch and nearly fell to her knees. She glanced over at Harry and gasped.*

*"Harry don't," she hissed at him.*

*Harry slowly pulled himself under control and his magic settled. He cocked his head to the side for a moment, and then smiled mischievously. His eyes flared once before he turned to Hermione.*

*She stared at him, her eyes narrowed with suspicion. "Alright... what did you just do?" she asked him.*

*He smiled and placed a finger to the side of his nose. "Padfoot isn't the only Marauder still alive, you know. As to what I did, watch and enjoy. It won't hurt them, but it will be... humiliating," Harry replied with a grin that even Hermione had trouble ignoring.*

The results had been as spectacular as Harry had promised. Spectacularly humiliating for the Slytherins as the repeated loose bowel curse hit them every time they were confronted with twenty or more people in the same room.

The results had all of the school laughing at the embarrassed students and even those pure bloods that normally sided with them looked down on them with disgust.

Now Harry and Hermione sat next to each other at lunch discussing what they would be talking about during the lecture and how they would present it. Harry tossed out ideas and comments from time to time regarding their presentation. They had worked up a full eight hour lecture series and had enough material.

"I think that should do it, Hermione. We have everything we need," Harry offered, covering her hand with his.

Hermione agreed. Silently she marveled at how the touch of a friend could suddenly affect her so much. They had held hands before they had kissed, but it was different now. There was an element to his touch that comforted and excited her.

Harry tore his gaze away from Hermione's when he realized there was a commotion in the entrance to the Great Hall. A couple of first years had collided and books had gone flying everywhere. He chuckled and rolled up the notes they had been working on. He made a duplicate, which he handed to Hermione, and placed his in their dimensional storage space.

Harry turned to Ally, then frowned as a ripple of pain seared through his head. He gasped and turned to the Hall invoking his mage sight to its fullest. Hermione and Ally looked at Harry in alarm as they felt his magic flaring. Ally's hands trembled as she felt a faint echo of the pain that was washing through him.

Harry stood and staggered over to the head table.

"Albus," he gasped. "clear the Hall and shield me..."

"Harry? You're pale."

Harry clutched at his head and pitched to his knees. Above his head appeared the ghostly image of his multi-dimensional container, one section of the container bulged outward alarmingly.

Dumbledore stood. "Students to your houses immediately. Prefects, escort them please," he called.

Then he cast a strong shielding bubble over the writhing young man.

Ally and Hermione ran to Lily, who stood watching Harry, the blood draining from her face.

"Albus, what's wrong?"

"I'm not sure, Lily, but it looks like something's wrong with his runic container spell and he's suffering from a massive spell failure backlash."

"Look!" Hermione cried and pointed to her own book bag, still sitting at the Gryffindor table. The bag had split open and a huge parchment was still growing in its place.

"Now this makes sense," muttered Dumbledore. "Someone has cast an *Engorgio* charm on the parchment and it's growing, causing his container to warp."

Then there was a flash of light and the container faded from sight again. Harry lay collapsed, motionless on the floor, with blood seeping from his nose and mouth. Ally buried her head against her mother and Hermione stared at the still form in horror. Dumbledore cast a few spells, then dropped the shield he'd cast around Harry.

Madam Pomfrey quickly went to Harry and began to run a diagnostic series on him. She frowned over the results, and looked up at Dumbledore. "He's alive, Headmaster. The damage is severe, but nothing a day or two in the hospital wing won't fix," she said. She then conjured a stretcher and levitated Harry onto it. A moment later she had him levitated again and was walking him to the exit.

Dumbledore nodded to the healer, then he cast a "Finite" on the parchment overflowing the Gryffindor table and reduced it to normal size. "Miss Granger, if you would retrieve that parchment, I would like to look at it later. We may be able to determine who cast the enlargement charm on it."

Hermione nodded and rushed to the table to collect it and her books..

Dumbledore turned to Lily and Ally. Noting their pale expressions, he smiled gently. "Let's go to the infirmary to see how Harry's doing, hmm?"

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## Hogwarts Infirmary...

Harry awoke slowly; every muscle in his body ached and screamed at the slightest movement. He blinked and mentally inventoried himself. It was a process he had started back in his first year and it was a habit he continued to this day. Once he was sure all his parts were connected, he reached out with his magic and sighed in relief to find everything seemed to be fine there as well. He turned his head. There was only a little light coming through the windows. Looking in the other direction he saw Hermione, Lily and Ally sitting on a bed several feet away, whispering to each other. He was surprised to see all of them were dressed in their pajamas.

He started to sit up, then he gasped in pain and sunk back down on the pillow again. All three women turned and spotted him. Lily stood and went to the office to alert Madam Pomfrey, while Hermione and Ally moved to sit by his bed. Harry reached out and grabbed Hermione's hand, wincing as he did. She sat on the chair next to his bed and leaned over, brushing his hair out of his eyes.

"Hey there," he whispered. His throat was parched. Ally reached for a pitcher and a cup and poured him a cup of water. Hermione lifted his head as Ally helped him drink.

"Better," he murmured gratefully.

Awake are we, Mr. Potter?" asked Madam Pomfrey.

Harry grimaced at the older woman. "Poppy, you are probably the only person in this universe that I sincerely hoped to get to know socially and never need your professional services."

Poppy stared at him for a moment, then she snorted and laughed. "Yes, Harry, I can see you and I had a very close relationship in your universe. In six years of school you averaged twenty hospital visits per year, four of which each year resulted in excessive stays. I've been through your record several times now and all I can say is it's a wonder you aren't dead."

Harry chuckled, then he shocked the other women nearby. "You still have that wonderful bedside manner as well, I see. So tell me, what's the problem this time and how long am I sentenced to this bed?"

Poppy sniffed and shook her head. Everyone could see she was trying hard not to laugh at him.

"Well, Mr. Potter, your sentence will be up come in the morning, although I want you to rest for the next five days. No running, no heavy lifting, no major spell casting. You took quite a beating from that spell and you're going to feel like you've been locked in a dark room with six bludgers for a few days at least."

She leaned over and gave him a dose of a pain-killing potion, then handed Lily a sleeping potion, before returning to her office.

Harry looked between the three women. "So why are you all hanging out here? I mean, this is a strange place to hold a pajama party."

"How much do you remember, Harry?" asked Hermione softly.

Harry frowned. "I remember us working on our presentation in the Great Hall, then my runic container surged strangely. Something went wrong after that. The container is supposed to eject any object that disturbs it."

Lily and Hermione shared a look. "That must be what happened, eventually, but not before it nearly killed you. Would it require a lot of magic to review your runes for the ejection?" Hermione asked curious.

"No, it's simple stuff," he said, and then he waved a hand causing the runes to burn brightly in the air above his bed. Lily walked around so that she was on the same side as Harry and Hermione.

"Here," Harry said, pointing to four runes out of the forty or so visible ones. "These control the ejection process."

Hermione frowned at the equation. "I don't see anything wrong there. Can you back it up a few steps?"

Harry scrolled the runes backwards and the four in question slid to one side.

"Stop," commanded Lily. "Here, this is where your ejection gets triggered right?"

Harry nodded, then he frowned. "Wait a second..."

Lily smiled and nodded at him, then looked to Hermione, whose eyes were narrowed as she examined the runes before her. "You've got the condition reversed. This rune is backwards and it's throwing off everything after it."

"Twenty points to Gryffindor," murmured Lily proudly.

Harry stared at the rune for a moment, then he gestured and the rune flipped around. His hand flared with purple light and the rune mimicked the glow.

"Harry, how come you haven't written this down for anyone to study?" asked Ally.

Harry grinned sheepishly. "I don't let anyone have it because they would freak out if they saw the entire construct and how I designed it, Ally."

Hermione frowned at him and even Lily gave him a strange look. "Don't you think we can understand it, Harry?" Lily asked in a dangerous tone.

"No, it's just... Oh, bloody hell. Let me show you. When I show it to you, I show you the relevant sections I want you to see. But that's not how it was constructed. Let me show you the construct as it really is."

Harry waved a hand and a group of bright blue runes appeared, then directly under them, red runes, finally under the red runes, another set of green runes. Each set of runes was in a layer of its own, but at certain points the layers connected.

"Merciful Merlin, it's in three dimensions!" exclaimed Hermione.

Harry smiled. "I knew you'd figure it out Hermione."

"How do you connect the layers?" asked Lily.

"That's my secret, Mum. I created a bridge rune, allowing me to bridge between the layers. There are several variations of the bridge... unidirectional, bi-directional and power limiting. But it's what makes the whole thing work. Tricky beast it was too, took me nearly a month to make my first bridge rune."

Harry looked at the three dumbfounded women and decided it was time to change the subject.

"So, somehow someone messed with my container?"

"Someone put an enlarging charm on the parchment you were working on," Ally said softly.

Harry scowled and folded his arms across his chest. "Do we know who it was? Or should I just assume Slytherin House and start with the seventh years and work my way down?"

Lily shook her head. "You'll do no such thing. Albus is looking into the matter. He is quite upset that someone would do something so cowardly. That could have killed you. It's only pure luck that somehow your ejection sequence managed to get triggered. You've been in the infirmary, unconscious, for two whole days," she said. Her vibrant green eyes sparked with anger.

She handed Harry the potion she had been holding and he winced. She gave him a stern look and he sighed in resignation before drinking the potion down. Within moments, he was sleeping soundly.

Hermione looked at the sleeping form and shook her head. "What other secrets do you hold, Harry Potter?" she asked in a soft voice.

Lily placed a comforting hand on her shoulder. "In time, you, more than anyone else, will learn his secrets, I think. Imagine, seventeen and he's created a whole new class of runes."

All three women watch the sleeping form for another minute before returning to their conversation on the nearby bed.

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### **The Quidditch Pitch...**

Harry was quick to recover and within a few days, everything was back to normal, although Madam Pomfrey seemed to keep a close eye on him, a fact that annoyed him greatly.

Professor McGonagall had accepted Harry's offer to coach the Gryffindor Seeker, so he, Hermione and Ally were out on the quidditch pitch. Hermione and Ally were there for moral support and because they liked to watch Harry fly. His flying skills were both a source of pride and a source of disgust for the Gryffindor team. They admired his skills, but they hated the fact that they couldn't use those skills in a game.

Hermione watched him closely as he put his professional standard racing broom into a vertical climb at top speed. She swallowed nervously and reminded herself to breathe as he topped out of his climb over a thousand meters up, then pitched over into a power drive.

Ally glanced at Hermione, who sat motionless, not breathing, and she nudged the older girl.

"Breath, Hermione. You're worrying about the wrong things. He's not going to hurt himself flying," she said with a chuckle.

Hermione shook herself, but was unable to tear her eyes away from Harry plummeting towards the ground at lethal speeds.

"I know, Ally. He seems like he was born to fly, but that doesn't mean I have to like it, or that I can't worry about him. Look at him!" she said in annoyance.

Harry pulled out of his dive at the last second and was skimming along the pitch just inches above the ground. He let out a loud shout and the two girls could hear his laughter. Then he carefully climbed to his feet on his broom and stood, guiding the broom by his feet alone.

He continued to zoom around the pitch for a few more minutes before he noticed that his sister and Hermione were no longer in the stands. With an adept tilt of his feet and a shifting of his weight, he pulled the broom into a gentle climb and remounted it properly. He circled the pitch slowly coming to a halt over the stand they had been sitting in. He could detect the faint traces of a portkey and a cold knot of fear formed in his belly. He frowned and took off as fast as he could for the window to the Headmaster's office.

Dumbledore looked up when he heard an urgent knocking sound. Turning in his chair he was surprised to see Harry Potter sitting on his broom and knocking on his window.

Dumbledore got up, smiling, and opened the window. "Harry, I don't think there's anything wrong with my Gargoyle. Why..."

"Not now, Albus. We have a problem. I was down at the pitch. I had finished coaching the Gryffindor Seeker and was making some practice flying runs for myself. When I looked up, Hermione and Ally were gone. There's a faint portkey trace where they were sitting," Harry said in a rush, flying the broom through the window and climbing off it.

Dumbledore frowned and checked one of his instruments. "Yes, there was a portkey exiting the wards a short while ago. What do you intend to do?"

Harry looked him in the eye. "I intend to follow the trail before it fades away completely. Once I find out where they have been taken, I'll contact you," he said, stripping out of his quidditch robes.

Albus eyed the young man with some surprise. It wasn't often a student stripped in his office. Actually, students never stripped in his office! However, when Harry began pulling his combat clothing and weapons from their dimensional storage, the old wizard understood

Harry looked up at the Headmaster, his expression intent. "You realize that you can check the students for a portkey trace signature don't you? Someone on the inside had to have that portkey."

Dumbledore nodded wearily. "Yes. I will alert the Professors and begin checking students right away."

Harry belted on the holster for his pistol. "Check the Slytherins first." he murmured. Then he climbed onto his broom. Dumbledore opened the window again for him.

"Good luck, my boy. I'll be awaiting word from you." Dumbledore said in a worried tone.

Harry nodded and slipped out the window. The broom dropped for a moment, then he was off at top speed, heading southwest and gaining altitude.

Harry sped along at nearly one hundred miles per hour on his broom. He cast a warming charm on himself as he went. The portkey trace would only last four hours at best, even to his mage sight.

Dumbledore watched the speck dwindling in the fading daylight and he shook his head, concerned. He then turned and walked to the fireplace. He had several fire-calls to make.

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## **Malfoy Manor...**

Hermione and Ally looked around in fear. One moment they had been watching Harry and talking about his flying skills, the next they woke up here, wherever here was. The two girls were in a stone room. Somewhere along the way, they had had their wands taken from them. In fact, all jewelry and their school books had been taken from them.

When Hermione regained consciousness she found Ally weeping in a corner of the dank room. What little wandless magic they had learned was enough to light the room and provide some added warmth. There was a single, heavily locked door and the walls glistened with moisture and lichen. Other than that, the room was bare of furniture, windows, everything.

Now the two young women sat huddled together in the corner of the room, facing the door. After what seemed like hours it was opened and Lucius Malfoy stepped into the room, followed by Draco. Hermione's eyes narrowed seeing Draco and Ally gripped her hand tighter.

"You can't get away with this," spat Hermione, going for a show of bravado.

"And a good evening to you as well, Miss Granger. See Draco? That school of your has been failing to teach the mudbloods their proper place in our society. Well, no matter. Our trap has been properly baited. Now to see if we catch any flies," Lucius said in a conversational tone to his son. "I suspect we have ample time if you want to play, Draco," he added, almost as if it were an afterthought. The vicious gleam in his eyes gave lie to his tone, however.

Draco stepped up to Hermione, shoved his hand into her blouse and yanked down hard, tearing her clothing and exposing her bra. When Hermione whimpered and tried to push him away, he grabbed the front of her bra and pulled hard. The bra gave way, but not before the metal closures in the back ripped open her skin. She cried out in pain and flinched way.

Draco sneered. "Nice tits, Granger. I'll take great pleasure in leaving my mark on them."

Ally's expression grew fierce and she pointed a finger at Draco. "*Incendio!*" she shouted, and then screamed in pain as her index finger flared with flame.

The wash of flames caught Draco off guard, hitting him in the face and one side of his head.

Draco howled in agony and clutched at his burned flesh. Then he kicked out at Ally, who was whimpering and cradling her burned hand. Ally gasped and cried out in pain when Draco's boot connected with her chest.

Lucius ran forward just in time to receive an off center kick to the balls by Hermione. His normally pasty complexion turned whiter and he grabbed his son by the scruff of his neck, dragging him out of reach of the two girls.

Harry was over southern England and cursing when the portkey trace finally faded into nothingness. Grumbling, he started spiraling in to a landing, bleeding off speed. He wanted to get his bearings and consider his next move. He was about fifty feet from the ground when he felt a burst of fear course through him. Coupled with that emotion was an ardent plea for help.

He halted his descent and climbed to a higher altitude. He had to be close! His magic flared and he scanned the countryside with his mage enhanced sight. On the horizon he spotted a country manor house that glowed from the power of its wards.

He put his broom in motion again, taking off for the distant house. He wasn't sure if it was the source of the plea he had felt, but it was the only magical structure in the region that he could spot. He landed only a few hundred yards from the manor and then put his broom back into its container space.

Walking slowly towards the house, he was overcome by another wave of emotions. This time the fear had an added element of pain. He was sure it could only be coming from Ally. As an empath, she could be broadcasting her own emotions.

Harry stopped and frowned. He recognized this place! He circled around to the back of the property until he had found a good hiding spot.

"Fawkes," he murmured, his eyes glazing over. Then he reached and pulled a parchment and quill out of another container. He scribbled a note to

Dumbledore, then repeated his call to Fawkes.

After a moment of silence, a phoenix appeared in the sky above him. The phoenix folded its wings and plummeted downward. It flared its wings suddenly and appeared to hover right in front of Harry. He blinked surprise as he looked at a small, pure white phoenix. This definitely wasn't Fawkes!

The two stared at each other for a moment, and then Harry reeled with vertigo as the phoenix bonded herself to him.

*Harry wizard, are you in trouble?* Came the thought. The voice in his mind was clearly female.

"I'd like to spend time talking to you, gentle phoenix, but my friend and sister are in danger. Can you take a message to Fawkes, companion of the wizard, Albus Dumbledore?" asked Harry, offering the parchment to the small phoenix.

*Niamh can and will, Harry wizard. Then we will have much to talk about. Go, save your mate and nestling. Then we'll talk.*

Harry blinked in surprise as the little phoenix grabbed the parchment and vanished in a flash of flame. It dawned on him that he had just bonded to a phoenix. Shaking his head, he peered over the brush he was hiding behind and examined the manor carefully. He had been here once before, he had even dueled Voldemort here.

A moment later he slipped into the shadows and entered the house, sliding from room to room. He had to stall for the twenty or so minutes it would take for the Aurors to arrive after Dumbledore got the message he'd sent.

Harry found the girls locked in a basement room and then found Draco and Lucius being healed in a room on the first floor. His reaction to finding the girls and the shape they were in was enough to alert the occupants that he was nearby. The house shook with his anger.

Lucius and Draco exchanged panicked looks and had the girls brought up to them by Nott and Avery.

Harry watched, enraged, as Hermione tried to hold her torn clothing together and still help Ally, who was injured and not breathing well. The two girls were shoved into the study where they fell to the floor. Harry started to move forward, but stopped when Lucius pulled a staff from a case. The staff had a carved cobra for the end piece and its eyes glowed balefully.

Harry blanched and flinched back from the staff. It was a dangerous, dark object and he could feel sucking at his power even while encased in the shadows. Lucius held the staff in both hands and his eyes took on a red glow, pulsating in time to match the eyes of the cobra. He smirked and smacked the wall with his staff. There was a moment of silence just before both Malfoy Manor and Harry Potter exploded.

Harry screamed in agony as he was ripped from the shadows. Although everyone else in the room seemed to be shielded, Harry was ripped to pieces by flying debris. He stumbled and collapsed on the ground, bleeding from dozens of wounds.

Lucius tilted his head back and laughed. Glancing around, he saw the crowd of shocked people, Ministry Aurors and Dumbledore, standing out on his front lawn. Lucius smirked and gestured with his staff, freezing them all in place.

"FOOLS!" he roared. "For years I needed only but to find another mage I could use to tap the Staff of Tsaris. Voldemort was nothing! He worked for me! I created him, set him up as the Dark Lord. It was I who truly controlled things, behind the scenes of course.

"But now it is time for me to come out of hiding. Potter here has boosted the Staff of Tsaris, and me, so I am powerful beyond all reckoning! And I shall rule our world!"

He turned to look at his son, who stared at him in awe. "Stand, my son. This will be your birthright. These puny wizards will be your playthings and servants," he said to the eager Draco.

Lucius reached out to clasp Draco by the shoulder when a voice interrupted his gloating.

"You can't give what you don't own. And you certainly can't give it to a dead son." came a voice as cold as ice.

Lucius whipped his head around. Harry Potter stood a few feet away, his body glowing a bright red. Harry held out a hand to Draco.

The younger Malfoy writhed and then he began to scream as his clothing burst into flame. Harry raised his hand and the heat coming off Draco doubled, and then doubled again, causing everyone but Harry to step away from him. A moment later Draco collapsed to the ground, a smoking husk.

Lucius screeched and whirled to strike Harry with the Staff of Tsaris. Harry ducked and pulled his own staff from its container space. Lucius snarled and swung again. Harry's staff glowed bright blue as he raised it to block Lucius' blow. The two staffs touched and, with a flash of light, the Staff of Tsaris broke in two.

Lucius stumbled back in shock and black, acrid smoke poured off the two pieces and billowed high into the air. The two clouds merged and slowly formed into the figure of a cloven hoofed creature with horns. The figure leaned down and reached into Malfoy's torso.

The blond man screamed pitifully and begged for mercy as the creature drew out a splotchy white orb of light from Lucius' chest.

Lucius went limp when the orb was removed from his body. The figure swallowed the orb and, throwing back its head, bellowed in triumph. It then looked around carefully. When it spotted the two girls weeping on the floor not far away, waves of satisfaction flooded the room. The figure reached out for them, but paused when Harry stepped between it and them.



"Stop," Harry commanded, his voice echoing with power. With the destruction of the staff, his full Mage power flooded back to him.

"You cannot stop me, mortal. I am free of my prison at last!" the figure said, its voice vast.

"But I can stop you, Tsaris. This is not your realm and you do not hold sovereignty here," Harry replied grimly.

"Stand aside, mortal. I will taste virgin souls before I taste yours," Tsaris commanded.

When the figure moved once more towards the two girls, Harry held up his staff and his full power blazed, throwing back the night. His staff sang with the energy coursing through it and the figure faltered in its advance, covering its eyes and hissing in outrage.

"I return you to the hell from which you came," Harry said. With his words still echoing across the clearing, he slammed his staff into the ground.

There was a cracking sound and the ground split open under the figure. From deep beneath the earth came an eerie red glow and Tsaris screeched before falling into the bottomless pit. Then the earth shuddered again and the chasm closed.

Harry turned and saw Dumbledore and the Aurors cautiously moving closer. Fawkes rode on Dumbledore's right shoulder. On his left was the phoenix Niamh.

"Oh good," he said, his voice casual, "the cavalry has shown up."

Then he pitched forward and darkness claimed him.

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### Hogwarts Infirmary...

Lily Evan-Potter paced back and forth in the central corridor. In one bed lay her daughter, suffering from burns and multiple broken ribs. In another bed lay the girl she considered most likely to someday become her daughter-in-law, suffering from some mild bruising and severe psychological shock from nearly being raped.

The third occupant of the infirmary worried her even more. Currently that bed was hidden behind curtains and Madam Pomfrey had been in there for over an hour.

Both girls and Lily anxiously awaited Madam Pomfrey to come from behind that curtain and tell them about Harry's condition.

"Mum, please sit," Ally pleaded. Then she grimaced. The bone knitting potions were still doing their job and she wasn't supposed to talk or move unnecessarily. Lily moved to the chair placed between the girl's beds and sat down.

Hermione lay curled up on her bed. She watched everyone, but had said very little since they had brought them all back to Hogwarts nearly two hours ago.

Lily leaned over Hermione and brushed the hair from her eyes gently. "Hermione, are you alright?"

Hermione stared at her for a moment and then her eyes filled with tears. Lily scooped the girl up into her arms, holding her while she wept. Hermione clutched at her as if afraid someone would tear her away.

"Oh, dear. I've been waiting for that," Poppy said, sticking her head out from behind the curtain. The medi-witch walked briskly to a cabinet and pulled out a potion. She handed it to Lily and, between the two of them, managed to coax Hermione into drinking it.

"I'm sorry, my dear," said Madam Pomfrey gently, "but I absolutely had to wait for you to start realizing what you had gone through before I could do much to help you."

It took a while for Hermione to calm down, but she eventually released Lily and smiled gratefully. Lily pushed hair away from the girl's forehead before turning to watch the medi-witch examine Ally.

"Poppy, please, how is Harry?" Lily asked.

Poppy snorted. "That one? I'd be out of business if more students were like him. He's got a lot of cuts, which I've healed, but he'll be sporting some new scars. He arrived magically exhausted. But in the short time he's been here, his magic has been flooding back into him. He's already more powerful than Dumbledore, and the Murchesen Index is still climbing!"

Hermione sat up on her bed, horrified. "Oh, no, Madam Pomfrey. You mustn't tell them."

Poppy stood up straight and frowned. "Miss Granger, not that it's any of your business, but I know exactly how strong Mr. Potter is. It's in his records, which I've read extensively. What happens between my patients and myself is confidential."

Hermione relaxed back on the bed. "I'm sorry, Madam Pomfrey. I just knew Harry was afraid to let his Mum and sister know how much power he has."

Poppy's expression softened, while both Lily and Ally exchanged a glance.

"Aye, I can understand that, Miss Granger," Poppy said after a moments reflection. Then she turned and removed the curtains from around Harry's bed. She frowned at the sight of the white phoenix, but kept her opinion to herself. The little phoenix had been helpful, supplying tears for some of the larger wounds. "He'll sleep for now. He might wake up later, or could sleep until morning. Either way, he's in no danger now."

"What's with the bird?" asked Ally, carefully trying not to move.

"The bird, Miss Potter, is Harry's phoenix," replied Dumbledore from the doorway. "I was quite surprised when she showed up in my office earlier this evening. I had been wondering how Harry would contact me when he found you two, but I never expected he'd sent his familiar with the message."

"Harry has a phoenix for a familiar?" asked Lily incredulously.

"Well, he does now. I'm not sure he even realizes yet. The bonding is quite new. And more extraordinary, a white phoenix," replied Dumbledore proudly.

The aging Headmaster walked into the infirmary and conjured several comfortable chairs for the adults.

"A white phoenix," murmured Hermione, wondering at the significance of it.

"I'm surprised, Miss Granger. I would have thought with Fawkes being my familiar you would have looked up the legend of the phoenix. No matter, it is an interesting tale, suitable to tell two students confined to infirmary beds," Dumbledore said, his eyes twinkling. There was a flash of light from behind him and Fawkes appeared, landing on the back of his chair.

Lily and Poppy took the other two seats. It was rare that the Headmaster told these stories and few people wanted to miss them when he did.

"Legend has it that it was the phoenix that brought magic to mankind long before the start of recorded history, even before the loss of fabled Atlantis. The first phoenixes, according to legend, were creatures of pure light. Made entirely of magic, they were so bright it was hard to look upon one without being blinded.

"No one knows when the first bonding happened, or why, but we suspect it is because a phoenix stumbled upon someone who was pure of heart and in the middle of performing a selfless deed. So impressed was that phoenix that it reached out and touched the mind of the human. In that instant of touching, magic poured through the link from the phoenix to the human and a bond of love and respect was formed.

"The phoenix lost itself in that bond, giving up its pure magical body in exchange for one of flesh and blood, though it's magic was still strong. But in the exchange, it learned about love and loyalty and devotion. Some say the phoenix gave up too much that day, but no one who has ever bonded with one would say so.

"Most phoenixes are red and gold, like Fawkes here." Dumbledore reached back and caressed the phoenix's breast. Fawkes crooned gently. "But a few," he continued, "a very rare few, are white, in memory and honor of the time when they were made entirely of magic. A white phoenix is considered to be royalty among phoenixes. There are very few records of their abilities or of them bonding with a wizard. I like to think a white phoenix is the closest to light magic you can come. Our young Harry here has been blessed indeed. No one will ever be able to accuse him of practicing dark magic as long as he has his familiar. A white phoenix would not allow it."

Lily stared at the sleeping boy and the bird sitting on the headboard.

"Albus, what can you tell me about what happened tonight?"

Dumbledore frowned and his voice became heavy with sorrow. "I suspect that Lucius Malfoy felt that Harry was a danger to what he considered the status quo. Apparently he arranged for Miss Granger and your daughter to be kidnapped, knowing that Harry would take steps to rescue the ladies.

"What none of us suspected was that it was Lucius behind Voldemort in our reality. Lucius had a dangerous dark artifact. It was staff containing the ensnared spirit of a demon. It gave Lucius great powers, but at the expense of drawing power from Harry. I suspect he used the staff originally on Voldemort to control him. And he would have used it on Harry, but Harry is more than just a mere Mage. He is also an elemental, which is an entirely different type of magic.

"Harry used his elemental powers to kill Draco Malfoy, then he and Lucius dueled. He broke the staff Lucius used, which released the demon. The demon killed Lucius, and then turned on Miss Granger and your daughter. He would have killed them as well, but Harry banished the demon back to its dimensional plane."

"Next time, Albus, I'll let you deal with the bad guys. You could talk them to death," said Harry from his bed, gently teasing the older wizard.

Dumbledore chuckled.

Throughout Dumbledore's story, Hermione's tenseness had returned. When she heard Harry voice, she actually cringed. Poppy shot her a questioning glance which Hermione ignored.

"Perhaps, my boy, perhaps. But it does this old man good to see that you are awake and feeling better."

Harry nodded sleepily and his head fell back to the pillow. Then his eyes sprang open again. "Hermione?" he choked out.

Before any adult could say a word, he was up out of his bed and kneeling next to hers. He looked at her, his eyes filled with tears. She pulled the blanket tightly about her and stared up at him.

Poppy tried to stand and protest, but Dumbledore laid a gentle hand on her arm. She glanced at him and he shook his head. She huffed at him and walked to her office, shutting the door behind her.

"I think perhaps we should give them a little privacy," Dumbledore murmured to Lily. "Perhaps a visit to the kitchens for a cup of tea and then we can come back?"

She tore her gaze from the two and nodded to the Headmaster before sending her daughter a warning glance.

Harry reached out to brush the hair from Hermione's face and she flinched away from his touch. He jerked his hands behind his back and leaned away from her. "I'm sorry, Hermione. I came as soon as I could," he whispered.

She didn't reply, only watched him with huge, haunted eyes. She wanted to say something, anything, but the experience was too fresh in her mind. Her own pain and fear overwhelmed her so much, she could do nothing to ease the pain she was causing him.

Harry tried to touch her once more, but she flinched away again. His shoulders slumped in defeat. "I'm sorry I failed you," he whispered, and then he stood and went back to his own bed, head bent to hide his anguish.

"Alright there, Ally?" he asked softly.

Ally closed her eyes and tried to shut down her empathic links again. Between the two of them, the pain they were sharing... and yet not sharing... was beating at her. She nodded and watched as her brother climbed into bed.

He grabbed a sleep potion, downed the contents quickly and then stretched out on the bed. He pulled the blankets up around him, facing away from both Ally and Hermione.

Ally glanced over at Hermione and glared at her, but the girl had turned to face away from her as well.

When Lily and Dumbledore returned, the three of them were fast asleep.

Harry awoke at dawn. It took a moment for him to remember why he was in the infirmary again. It took him a moment longer to remember Hermione's reaction last night and his shoulders slumped. He sat up and spotted Ally and Hermione, both in beds next to his. He climbed out of bed and slipped into the shadows to go to his own room to get dressed.

Ally cracked open an eye and watched her brother vanish, then she turned to face Hermione. The older girl hadn't been asleep either and the two girls locked eyes for a moment.

Ally's eyes narrowed. She was furious with Hermione. "A word, a thank you for saving us, you could have said anything, Hermione, and he would have been happy. But you said nothing! I know you're hurting, but you hurt him far more than Malfoy did last night," she hissed.

Harry stepped from the shadows and smiled when he saw Niamh perched on the headboard of his bed.

"Well, girl, I guess I'll have to get you a proper perch. Maybe something really nice for such a special phoenix. What do you think?"

Niamh preened her feathers, and then looked at him.

*I think it would be proper. And I also think Harry wizard left the place of healing before he should have.*

Harry chuckled. "I'm afraid that you'll just have to get used to. I don't stay in the infirmary any longer than absolutely necessary. But I'll tell you what, Niamh. Today we'll take it easy. I'll give you a tour of the castle and introduce to you some of my friends and teachers."

*I would like to meet Harry wizard's friends and family and see his home,* offered the little phoenix.

The phrasing struck Harry. Was this home? Was home where his family was or was home something different, something special? He shook his head and laughed to himself as he dressed. It was far too early to think of such things, especially before a wake up cup of coffee!

"Come on, Niamh. Let's get something to eat and I'll introduce you to some people I know."

The little phoenix glided over to land on his shoulder and they walked out of the Gryffindor Head Suite.

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## The Great Hall...

Niamh turned out to be hugely popular in the Great Hall. Most of the students had heard about Fawkes, but the large magical bird was rarely seen. A number of the first years were so enamored of the little phoenix it looked like they wanted to steal her away from Harry.

Not long into breakfast, Dumbledore entered the Great Hall and spotted Harry and Niamh. He chuckled to himself and continued to the head table. Behind him came Lily, Ally and Hermione. Harry glanced at Hermione and then he looked down at his plate, his demeanor changing in an instant.

Lily stopped next to him. "I see Madam Pomfrey released you earlier than I thought she would. Or is this a case of the patient releasing himself?"

Harry grinned up at his mother sheepishly. "Well, since I wasn't unconscious, I figured it would be alright to leave early."

Lily shook her head. "You will take it easy today, won't you?"

"Yes, I promised Niamh that I'd show her the castle and introduce her to some friends, but that we'd relax today."

Lily continued on to the head table. Up near the front of the hall, Ally and Hermione sat at the Gryffindor Table. Both of them kept shooting Harry glances, but he was refusing to look at them.

*Harry wizard, your mate is hurting. She needs you.* Came the thought from the little phoenix.

"I know, Niamh, but she shut me out last night. I think it's up to her to make the move this time," Harry said softly to the phoenix, while stroking her gently.

The conversation between wizard and phoenix would have continued, but Dumbledore stood and called for everyone's attention. He looked solemn as he faced the students.

"Last evening," he began, "two of our students were kidnapped off the grounds by a third student under the orders of his father. Draco Malfoy used a portkey to remove Althea Potter and Hermione Granger to Malfoy manor in the south of England.

"Once there, both girls were abused and their very lives threatened. Our very own Harry Potter tracked them down. In a fight that resulted in the deaths of both Lucius and Draco Malfoy, Harry freed the two girls.

"It was during this fight, witnessed by myself and more than twenty Aurors, that it came to light that it was Lucius Malfoy, not Voldemort, who was the true Dark Lord during the last war. Mr. Malfoy used a very rare dark object, called the Staff of Tzaris, which held the essence of a chained demon within it. It was with this staff that Lucius Malfoy controlled Voldemort from behind the scenes.

"I would ask that every one stand for a moment of silence. A student has been lost to the light. Though he made poor choices, Draco was still one of us."

The entire student body stood. Harry stood as well, thinking that it had been the second time he'd had to kill Draco. Some things never change. When the students sat down once again, Dumbledore looked out across the students for a moment before continuing.

"I would ask that no one bother Miss Potter, Miss Granger, or Mr. Potter about this. Mr. Potter has saved the world from an ascending Dark Lord, who we didn't even know existed. That he had to take several lives in order to accomplish it troubles him greatly. If anything, we owe him our thanks."

Dumbledore turned to look at Harry directly.

"Harry, Minister Bones realizes that awarding you with another Order of Merlin, First Class would be a useless gesture. So, she told me that she is planning to send you a personal note of thanks to be included in your file, and an offer, at a later date, to visit with her and explore the possibilities of working at the Ministry. Both the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, as well as the Department of Mysteries, have voiced interest in having you work for them," Dumbledore said with a smile.

Both Lily and Sirius smiled proudly.

Harry bowed his head in acknowledgment. He wasn't sure what he wanted to do. In reality, he could leave Hogwarts tomorrow if he wanted. He had already taken and passed his NEWTS. The studies he was involved in at Hogwarts were more advanced than NEWT level. He didn't want to leave the school, but maybe it would be for the best. Maybe he couldn't recapture any of what he had lost. Perhaps it was time for him to move on.

After breakfast, he went to the library. Not knowing exactly what he was looking for, he made a beeline for Madam Pince, who eyed his approach warily.

"Can I help you, Mr. Potter?"

"Yes, ma'am. Can you tell me, is there a book that describes magical schools at levels above what Hogwarts teaches?"

Madam Pince frowned for a moment. Few students ever wanted to attend schooling beyond what Hogwarts had to offer. "Yes, there is the collegiate guidebook. It's not very big, as most students wishing to study further go on to accept an apprenticeship rather than going on to a school." She opened her desk and pulled out a small book that could hardly be called a pamphlet. She handed it to Harry and he sat down at a nearby table.

Flipping through the book Harry was surprised to see how few institutes of higher learning there really were. In France, there was the "Université de Supérieur Magique Érudition", located in Paris. Germany had its "Einführen über Magie und Zauberei". Neither sounded all that attractive. Maybe over the holidays he'd apparate to America and check out the campus of the American Institute for Advanced Magic and Sorcery. At least there he would come close to speaking the language.

He handed Madam Pince the pamphlet and thanked her before leaving the library. From there he wandered about the castle and the grounds until he eventually found himself down by the lake...and the rock where he and Hermione had shared their first kiss.

He sat on the large flat rock and watched as Niamh soared over the lake.

"Harry?" came a very familiar voice from behind him.

"It's funny," he said in reply, "no matter how much one hopes things turn out, it seems that fate always intervenes to make them turn out another way."

"I'm sorry, Harry." replied Hermione. He still hadn't turned around to look at her.

"So am I, Hermione. More than you can imagine," he replied tiredly. "More than you can imagine," he repeated in a whisper.

"When you tried to talk to me last night, I wanted to say something, anything. I was angry at you for being so reckless, and proud of your bravery and ashamed that you saw me after being pawed by the likes of Malfoy. I didn't know what to say... in the end, the shame won and I said nothing, which hurt you terribly..."

"And now?" he prompted. The two still hadn't looked at each other yet. A glimmer of hope grew in him and he held his breath. The icy knot that had existed in his stomach slowly began to loosen.

"I'm still ashamed of myself, Harry. I treated you badly," she whispered.

"I know you had no control over what happened last night. It's not like you went to Malfoy and told him to tear at your clothing. I admit I was angry, terribly angry with both Malfoys for what they had done to you. But part of that anger came from a possessive feeling about you."

"Possessive?"

Harry turned and looked up at her standing just out of arms reach. "I'm going on eighteen, Hermione. Can I help it if you haunt my dreams and fuel my fantasies? And then to find Malfoy pawing at you? It made me insane for a while," he replied pensively.

"I knew you found me attractive, Harry, but why did you never say you liked me that much?"

He turned to look at his feet and wrapped his arms around his knees. "I couldn't. That's just not my way."

She sat next to him and looked at him. "What do you mean?"

"I'm terrible with relationships. Ginny showed me a lot, but I'm still not very good at expressing myself. What am I supposed to say? 'Gee, Hermione, I think I'm falling in love with you and I want your body?' Is there even a polite way of saying that? Damned if I know. Growing up the way I did didn't teach me a lot about relationships and other people," he said in an exasperated tone, shaking his head.

She laughed and Harry looked up at her in shock. Laughing was one reaction he hadn't expected. He blushed and looked away, embarrassed.

She stopped laughing seeing his reaction and she grabbed his chin and gently turned his head back to face her. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to make fun of you. But even you have to admit, it did sound funny."

He shrugged and her eyes narrowed. "Ally told me you would be tough to talk to. You're an intensely private man, Harry Potter, but if you expect to have a woman in your life, you better get used to sharing at least parts of what you're feeling."

He turned and looked out over the lake.

Hermione sighed, realizing she hadn't managed to reach him. As she shifted her weight to stand up, he began to speak.

"It's not easy for me to express my feelings well. You have some idea of what my life was like, but not a complete picture. Ask me sometime when you have all day and I'll tell you about it. You won't like it, and neither will I, but I'll tell you about it. I care about you, Hermione. The feeling is as intense as what I felt for Ginny. I've come to learn and love *you*, not the Hermione I left behind, but I don't want to scare you away. You inhabit my dreams most nights and make me want to hold you close and make love to you. I don't know if you're ready for that, but there it is. And I refuse to push you into that decision."

She reached out and caressed his cheek. "You know something, Harry? You're probably the only boy in the world who can compliment a girl and say you think she's sexy, then, in the next breath apologize for saying it, let alone thinking it."

He grinned sheepishly at her and she smiled.

"Right now I need to know you forgive me for last night. You saved my life and I treated you horribly. I never even thanked you," she continued seriously

"Of course I forgive you. I couldn't stay angry with you. I was afraid I had lost you... and it was breaking my heart," he said with a small smile. Then he reached out and touched her hand. Their fingers interlocked and she leaned in to kiss him.

When they broke apart she rested her forehead against his and, blushing, whispered, "I'll have you know, Mr. Potter, that while your dreaming about my body, I'm having similar dreams about yours."

"I won't deny I want you, Hermione, because I do. But it's got to be your decision and in your own time. But when you're ready to explore your dreams for real, I'll be waiting for you," he replied, matching her blush.

The two smiled at each other. He stood then and helped her to her feet. They walked back to the castle, hands clasped, with Niamh on Harry's shoulder.

From an upper floor window of the castle, a redhead watched the two with interest.

## Slytherin Common Room, that evening...

It was an all house meeting the likes of which had rarely been seen in Slytherin house. Ron was flanked by both Crabbe and Goyle.

"You all heard Dumbledore! That bastard Potter killed Malfoy and his father!" Ron said forcefully.

"And what are you suggesting to do about it, Weasley?" asked Blaise Zabini. "The Ministry has exonerated Potter of any wrong doing and has all but proclaimed Malfoy's father as an ascendant Dark Lord."

"Alright, fine, but we still can't allow things to continue the way they have. I actually had to push my way through a crowd of half bloods and mudbloods the other day. They aren't stepping aside for purebloods anymore!"

"Look, Weasley, you may not like it, but the simple fact is, there isn't much difference between them and us. What's worse, I think our attitude is hurting us," Zabini replied.

"Impossible! We are the purebloods. And I say we start making the others remember their place!"

Blaise looked at Ron for a moment, then threw up his hands. "I want no part of this. You morons are going to be served up as sacrifices to the god of stupidity." Then he turned and walked from the common room.

"Blaise is right," said Ginny Weasley, surprising many. "Look, I don't like this anymore than anyone else, but the simple fact is, there isn't a single witch or wizard among us who can stand up to Potter."

"You're just saying that because he turns you on! How could you, Ginny? He's a half blood," spat Ron.

Ginny shrugged. "Why not? He's rich, he's more powerful than any boy in this room can ever hope to be and he's not bad to look at. He's also of the purest blood in the world, despite his mother's background. Potter's problem is he hasn't seen the advantages of being pureblooded. If I could get that mudblood out of the picture for a while, I'd probably be able to change his mind. But mark my words; if you start pushing the half bloods and mudbloods around, Potter is going to make you wish you were never born.

"I'm ambitious. I want Potter. I want to make him mine. When the time comes, I'll make a move to eliminate my competition and take him. But I'm not stupid and no one said Slytherin's were supposed to be purebloods, just ambitious," she said, sitting down in a chair and glaring at her brother.

Ron returned her glare, and then tried to rally more support around him, but people slowly drifted off to their rooms. Harry had clearly demonstrated that blood wasn't the issue at all, and too many of the Slytherins had no wish to invoke his wrath after what he had done to the Malfoy's.

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## The Library...

Ally was working on her transfiguration homework when she was interrupted. She looked up when Meloney Marchbanks sat next to her.

"Don't look up or at me," hissed Meloney.

Ally blinked and nodded slightly, continuing to look up notes for her essay.

"You've got trouble coming from both of the Weasley's. Ron wants to fight back over what happened to Malfoy and what the non-purebloods have been doing here in school. People are going to be hurt by what they're planning to do."

"And the other Weasley?" asked Ally under her breath, then she scribbled a few notes, still ignoring Meloney.

"She's going to be a harder problem in the long run. She wants your brother and is planning on 'eliminating' her competition. And before you ask, I don't know what she means by it. But knowing her reputation, it could be anything from an outright attack to character assassination. She doesn't love your brother, but she wants his money and power," the Slytherin muttered under her breath.

"I'll see Harry finds out about Ron, and I'll warn Hermione. But without any specifics, there isn't much anyone can do but be careful," Ally said, then she closed her book, stood and went to put it back and get another. When she returned to her table, Meloney was gone.

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## Here and there...

The election of Minister Bones came as no surprise. The backing of the Houses of Potter and Black, as well as the four founders, sealed her election. Minister Bones immediately began a series of reforms aimed at repealing some laws and softening others.

Harry had largely been silent on the reforms the Ministry had been making, but that was only because he had carefully chosen to work behind the scenes this time. Shortly after the election, a front corporation brought up all of the outstanding shares for the Daily Prophet and, in a very quiet takeover, replaced the editorial staff with people who understood that journalists were to factually report the news. Some of the staff, like Rita Skeeter, were placed on probation and shunted to writing obituaries.

Harry Potter owned the front corporation, GEB LIMITED, though it was run by his solicitor. The 'GEB' stood for Gryffindor Evans Black. Eventually Harry planned on splitting it into three equal parts between Ally, Sirius and his mother. The Prophet wasn't the only company that GEB had either bought outright or purchased an interest in. Nimbus Brooms, Zonko's and Ogden's all became part of the new Potter portfolio.

Through GEB, Harry was slowly influencing attitudes around him. The Daily Prophet had several high-profile pure bloods fired for their bigotry. Nimbus announced the hiring of two of America's premiere broom designers, both muggle born and both graduates the American Institute of Advanced Magic and Technology. Quidditch Monthly Magazine did a full profile article on the two engineers and how the Americans were at the forefront of broom design around the world.

All of this was done very subtly; a small article here, a firing there with a public notice. Internal memos coming down from management telling employees that certain behaviors would no longer be tolerated. Years of being manipulated had left a mark on Harry, but it also left him willing to be the manipulator if need be, and he deemed it was needed.

It was his second phase of manipulations that finally alerted Dumbledore to his machinations and he summoned Harry into his office once he realized what was going on.

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## Hogwarts, Headmasters Office...

The door opened and Harry's head poked through the opening. "You wanted to see me, Albus?"

Dumbledore smiled and waved Harry into his office, where he took a seat. Harry smiled seeing that Niamh was visiting with Fawkes. The two men hoped that, between the two, a clutch of eggs might be produced. Phoenix eggs were quite rare and participating in increasing the species, even if it just mean providing perch space, was quite an honor.

"Harry, I asked you here today because I have some questions I'd like to put to you. As you know, at the end of this month, one third of the Wizengamot will be up for re-election. In talking with some of my colleagues I noted that quite a few of those running for re-election were having financing problems, while others seemed to have an abundance of funding. Strangely enough, a new company on the scene, a holding company no less, seems to be responsible for the funding problems of some of my colleagues.

Now, you wouldn't know anything about a holding company named Gryffindor, Evans and Black, Limited, would you?" Dumbledore asked with a twinkle in his eye.

Harry chuckled. "Oh, it's just something I started as a hobby, Albus. Certain attitudes needed to be adjusted and I'm nudging them in the right direction."

Dumbledore frowned. "I'm not certain that this is a good idea. The people..."

"With all due respect, Headmaster," Harry said flatly, "the people are sheep who allow themselves to be led by the loudest voice. I'm providing them with a new voice to listen to, and I promise you, it won't be a voice that hurts them. The problem is a simple one and it started right here in this school."

Dumbledore blinked in surprise and motioned for him to continue.

Harry reached and pulled a very old spell book out of storage. "This book, written by a former Headmaster of this school, is considered one of the principle guiding resources on the theory of magic. I know it's dead wrong. I've taught a number of Hogwarts students techniques that go against everything written in it. And yet, when Professor Flitwick begins his theory of magic to his first year charms students, he still consults this book."

He tossed the book on the desk and Dumbledore looked surprised to see a first edition "Theory of Magic by Godric Gryffindor" on the desk. The book was worth a fortune and Harry was tossing it around like an old quaffle!

"There is a process called Critical Thinking, Albus. The Americans are very fond of it, but its never been taught here. It describes a process whereby you take what is an accepted fact and challenge its validity, no matter how many people think its true. I want to see our students challenging long held ideas and concepts. If they learn to do that in school, they will do it at home, and in their everyday lives. Bigotry cannot stand under such scrutiny. What I am starting today is a process that will probably take the rest of my life. Change can't be forced upon a people from outside. But it can be forced on them if you grow it from within, and that's exactly what I intend to do.

"Right now my plan is a simple one. Stop the bigotry slowly, weed out the bad apples legally and safely, and replace them with forward thinking moderates. Then I'm going to go to work on the educational system. I don't want to leave England. It's my home. And yet Hermione and most of the muggle born and half bloods are planning to do exactly that because Wizarding Britain doesn't want them. America welcomes them with open arms. The situation is absurd! Some of our best and brightest minds are leaving the country and we're left with the dregs and those so stuck in tradition they wouldn't recognize a new idea if it bit them on the arse. It's not right. I don't want to leave, I don't want Hermione to leave, and I want to stop the self-inflicted hemorrhaging of our society."

He paused and grinned broadly at the Headmaster. "Someday, Albus, I want to sit in your chair and tell some muggle born firstie that his or her dream of being Minister of Magic is a good dream and that, if they work hard enough, they just might achieve it."

Dumbledore leaned back in his chair and pinched the bridge of his nose, then looked at Harry closely. "When I called you to the office, Harry, I thought you were acting out of some malice towards the pureblood bigots. I can see that really isn't the case. Nor did I have any idea that you were interested in getting my position, although I do hope you'll allow me to retire gracefully before you kick me out of it?" Dumbledore asked, his eyes

winkling.

Harry laughed and bowed from his chair. "But, of course, Albus. I promise to give you at least a five minute warning."

Dumbledore chuckled merrily. But there were still things that needed to be discussed. He eyed the young man before him for a moment and then turned serious once more. "Harry, I'm not totally convinced that the first years are the best group to learn your form of touching magic, but I'm open to an experiment. You've passed all your NEWTS with flying colors and your mother couldn't be prouder of you. Which leads you to your next decision. What will you do next term?"

Harry opened his mouth to speak, but Albus raised a hand, stopping him.

"I'd like to simplify that, if I may. Professor Flitwick will be accepting an apprenticeship for a charms mastery candidate next year, his first in many years. Consequently, he will be busy and won't be able to cover all of his classes. He asks that I find him a suitable assistant. Ordinarily, an assistant wouldn't be a full time position, but I have Professor Black also asking for your services as an assistant professor in Defense, as well as your mother, who seems to think you have some talent in runes, and might be interested in a mastery in the subject."

Harry nodded eagerly and Dumbledore smiled. "Fine then. I will get started on the necessary paperwork. Fortunately, it's many months to the next term. Right now, however, I suspect you have more important things on your mind, like what to wear when you escort your Miss Granger to the Yule Ball next week?"

Harry grinned. "I have that part already solved, I think. No, the hard part will come over the holiday. I plan on taking my family house hunting and I'm not quite sure how to go about it."

"Ah, Gringotts can help you there. Contact them and they can show you the properties that are for sale."

"I hadn't thought of that. I'll contact them right away. Thank you, Albus," he said, standing and making ready to leave the office.

"Harry, before you go, I do have one other item of business to discuss with you. Surprisingly, it ties in with your house hunting project..."

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### **Gryffindor Head Boy's suite...**

Harry was pleased to have had that talk with Dumbledore. As the Headmaster had suggested, he had contacted Gringotts and found that they were more than helpful. They had provided him with a list of properties, photos, and descriptions, from which he had winnowed the list down to one candidate he thought was really attractive. It was a huge home. The previous owners had family who they had wanted close, but still living separate. As a result, there was a large, twelve bedroom manor house and two other, smaller homes on the property, including a two bedroom cottage and a four bedroom home. In between the two was, of all things, a Quidditch pitch, which made it, in Harry's opinion, the perfect property.

Harry knew he should have consulted Lily, but he made his decision. If Lily didn't like the property, then it would be his home and he'd buy Lily a home for herself and Ally.

The next few days were crazy. He had snuck off to visit his home and instruct his newly acquired house elves as they decorated the house and made it ready for the holidays. It was going to be a surprise to his family. He also snuck out a few times for clandestine meetings with a few people, making arrangements for the holidays.

He shook his head and tried to concentrate on what he was doing. He was wearing his finest dragon-hide tonight and in ten minutes he would be meeting up with Hermione for the Yule ball. To say he was nervous would be an understatement. His relationship with her was one of the best parts of his life. They hadn't progressed past kissing yet, but both were comfortable with the pace they had set.

Ally's warnings had set them both on edge for a while. But in the three weeks since it had been delivered, nothing had happened and they were beginning to relax.

He gave himself one more look in the mirror. This was his best dress outfit. Made from a Hebridean Black Dragon hide, it had been buffed until it shone. Over his right breast was the embroidered crest of the Potter family. Below the crest were the symbols of his rank and his citations. The cuffs and collar were trimmed in gold.

Harry stepped away from the mirror and moved toward the exit of his suite. The exit was selective. As head boy, he could exit into any of the common rooms just by concentrating on the house he wanted to enter. Entering the Gryffindor common room, he smiled at the group of boys clustered around the staircase to the boy's dorm. They were all watching the girl's staircase fearfully.

When the girls began to come down, Harry smiled at a fourth year boy and nodded to him. The boy gulped nervously and moved to greet Ally. Harry had pulled him aside a few days earlier and told him, in the strongest possible terms, to make sure they both had fun, and if he did anything to hurt her he'd turn him inside out.

When Hermione came down the stairs she looked carefully around the room until she caught Harry's expression. She blushed and dropped her eyes before approaching him. She had never thought much about make up and the like, but the other girls in her dorm had spent the better part of the last hour helping her get ready for the dance. Lavender and Parvati told her that Harry would die when he saw her. And while he hadn't keeled over, he did look gob smacked.

Hermione wore a light gold gown with black trim and a plunging back. In that regard, it matched Harry's robes perfectly. The two stopped about two



feet apart and just stared for a moment.

"You're beautiful," he whispered.

Hermione blushed prettily and reached out to take his hand. His outfit was a cross between the muggle and magical worlds and it was doing things to her that made coherent thought difficult. It fit him like a glove and she was certain she could see his muscles rippling underneath it.

He led her out of the portrait hole and down the stairs towards the Great Hall. Hermione couldn't help noticing that he almost never took his eyes off her. She wasn't sure if it was the help Lavender and Parvati had given her or if he was just that taken with her. It gave her confidence a boost like none she had ever received before.

Lily caught the couple before they entered the Great Hall. Harry smiled at his mother and she beamed back at him.

"Look at you two!" Lily exclaimed. She smiled proudly and wiped away a tear. "You look so much like your father," she said warmly.

Harry frowned. His father's attitude towards his mother, and in particular to Ally, had not been welcome news to him. To be reminded of a man he now thought of as a bigot wasn't exactly a welcome comparison.

"Oh, Harry, looking like him doesn't make you him. He was a good and loving man who allowed his upbringing to cloud his judgment. Besides, you may be devilishly handsome like he was, but you combined the best of both of us. Without that, I doubt you would have caught Hermione here," Lily said with a smile.

Hermione blushed again and looked down. This was the first ball she had ever attended. Like so many muggle born and half bloods, they had avoided these gatherings in the past. But not this year... this year, the entire school turned out.

Lily laughed at Hermione's reaction, and then scolded Harry, telling him to be a gentleman and treat her right.

"I will, Mum," he said softly, staring at the beautiful young woman beside him. Then, taking her arm in his, he led her into the Great Hall.

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## The Yule Ball...

Hermione gaped. She'd never seen the Hall decorated for the Yule Ball before and it was beautiful. It looked like a snow-covered field; the light coming from gaily lit trees and the skylight charm showing the moon and stars. The hall had been magically enlarged to allow for a large dance area in the middle and the tables running along the edge of the room.

Harry led her over to a table where Ally and her date had settled in. Ally shot him a quick, resigned look, but in a way, she was grateful. Her date was a pureblood Gryffindor and, before Harry had come, the boy would have never asked her out, no matter how much she might have wished for him to.

Harry held Hermione's chair, helping her to sit, then he looked out over the multitude of tables and chuckled as he settled in next to her.

"Something funny, Harry?" asked Hermione.

"Look around," he replied. "Nearly every half blood or muggle born is here with a pure-blood date."

Harry chuckled again and reached for two menus from the center of the table, handing one to Hermione.

"It's largely thanks to your efforts," Hermione commented quietly.

He shook his head. "All I did was show that blood didn't mean as much as people thought it might. They did the rest. They decided to take the extra step to discover that this particular girl was pretty, or that boy was handsome and worth getting to know."

He glanced at the menu, and then placed it back in the center of the table. Hermione watched him curiously as he tapped his plate and announced his selection. He motioned to Hermione and she tapped her own plate with her dinner selection.

"Your spending the holiday at home, aren't you, Hermione?" he asked as the meal arrived on his plate.

Hermione nodded, her eyes looking sad. "Yes. My parents wanted to have a family Christmas. I wish I could spend it with you," she said, trailing off.

He smiled. His surprise should work out well. "I think I might be able to work out something so we'll be able to see each other, even if it's just for a few hours. Don't worry about it, love," he said, then he blushed.

She dropped her eyes from his and hitched her breath in surprise. Then she smiled.

Harry's eyes twinkled and his smile grew... until Ally noticed.

"Alright, you. You're up to something. I can see it and I can feel it!" Ally hissed quietly.

Harry looked around in a panic. No one knew about Ally's abilities and she wasn't supposed to be so blatant about them! "Shut it Ally," he hissed back. "And watch what you're saying."

Hermione's eyes narrowed as she watched the byplay between the two of them. Ally was onto something. He looked as if he'd just played a prank on someone.

When dinner was complete, Headmaster Dumbledore stood and waved his wand, shooting sparks to catch everyone's attention.

"Welcome, welcome one and all to our Yule Ball. Tomorrow, many of you will return to your homes and families to celebrate the holiday. Tonight, we give you the chance to celebrate with your Hogwarts family. Tonight's music is provided to you by our favorite band, the Weird Sisters."

As he spoke, everyone at the head table stood up and moved towards the edges of the Hall, while the table itself disappeared. Everyone applauded as the Weird Sisters began to play.

The dance floor was still empty when Harry stood and bowed to Hermione. "Would my lady honor me by granting me a dance?" he asked, his eyes sparkling with mirth.

She swallowed nervously and nodded, then took his offered hand. He led her out onto the floor, her hand held high in his own. When he stopped, he allowed her to continue walking and he gently spun her into his arms.

For the next hour he led her around the dance floor and she had trouble believing just how well he could dance. And what was more amazing, he made her look good at it! Eventually they headed back to their table for drinks and to rest. From Hermione's point of view, the evening had turned into a fairy tale and couldn't get any better.

First Lily and Sirius, then, later, Ally and her date, joined them at the table.

"Happy Christmas everyone," toasted Sirius quietly.

Together they all raised their drinks and toasted.

"Ah, Harry, just the person I wanted to see," the Headmaster said from behind him.

Harry turned to look at the man. "Sir?"

"I've looked over your plans for the holiday and I wholeheartedly approve of them. Also, on behalf of the staff, I thank you for the invitation. Some of us will be able to attend. In the meantime, if you stop by my office tomorrow, you'll get what you requested," said the old man, chuckling at the confused looks from those around the table.

Harry grinned at Dumbledore, then turned back to the table to meet the suspicious glares of his friends and family.

"Harry James Potter, just what are you up to?" asked Lily.

"Mum, tomorrow everything will be clear. I promise," he replied, and then he turned to Hermione.

"Do you trust me, Hermione?" he asked softly.

"You know I do," she replied.

"Then tomorrow, when everyone is going to the carriages to get on the Express, I want you and everyone else to meet me in the entrance hall. You'll not be taking the Express home. Oh, and wear a warm cloak."

"Harry, my parents are expecting me to be on the Express," she protested.

"Trust me, Hermione. You will not get into one bit of trouble over this. I expect you as well, Paddy," he said, turning towards the man. "Be there or I'll show you this really interesting Arabic flea curse I found."

Sirius huffed with laughter, but nodded his acceptance.

Lily, Ally and Hermione all frowned at him. Sirius knew Harry was building up to some sort of surprise, and surprises were almost as good as a prank, so he let Harry have his fun.

Harry led Hermione back onto the dance floor just as the music changed to an old slow ballad. He gathered her in his arms and she rested her cheek against his chest, listening to the music with one ear and his heartbeat with the other. He rested his own head atop hers. As the music stopped, he tipped her chin upwards and smiled at her. She melted against him and he leaned down and kissed her so softly it seemed like a brush of a breeze against her lips.

"Thank you for a wonderful evening," he whispered.

She tightened her grip on him and the two continued to hold each other until the snickers alerted them to the fact that they were the only couple still out on the dance floor and people were heading back to their dorm rooms. Blushing, they walked hand in hand back to their table to gather their things.

At the entrance to the Great Hall, one lone figure watched them for a long moment, frowning. Ginny Weasley realized that if something wasn't done soon, Hermione would cement her claim and nothing she could do would change that. Something would have to be done soon, like right after the holidays.

Angry, she turned and stormed back to Slytherin house.

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## Christmas at Potter Mansion...

Harry looked at his family and friends. He'd shrunk down everyone's trunks, so they were lightly encumbered. Smiling, he pulled out an old sock.

"This is a portkey to our destination. Everyone should make sure they're touching it, and then I'll activate it. We'll arrive outside and have a short walk to our final destination," he said before he held out the sock.

"This isn't one of Sirius' old socks, is it?" asked Ally with an impudent grin.

"No, Ally. Dumbledore gave it to me, which probably explains why he always wants socks for Christmas. He keeps using them for portkeys," Harry replied with a laugh.

With everyone touching the sock, he activated the portkey and felt that customary tug behind his navel. A moment later they were all picking themselves up off the ground.

"Strange. Portkeys never knock me over," muttered Sirius.

"I'm afraid that's my fault, Sirius. The portkey took power from me to work since I triggered it. I limited how much power it took, but I can never get it right, so I always overpower them. That's why we land and fall," Harry said with a shrug.

"Alright Harry, now where are we? Hermione here is worried that her parents are going to kill her and we seem to be on a country lane in the middle of nowhere," said Lily.

He grinned at her, and then laughed. "If you'll follow me, you'll see where we are. I will tell you that we're roughly an hour's drive northwest of London. Now, no more questions. Just follow me everyone," he replied, beginning the walk up the lane

They hadn't traveled more than a hundred feet when the road turned and the trees fell away to reveal a large, manicured lawn. Several hundred yards up the road was a mansion. In the distance, two other structures were visible. The lights of the mansion glowed a warm welcome. Off to one side, a Quidditch pitch could be seen.

Lily put her hand on his arm. "Harry?" she asked in alarm.

"Welcome home, Mum. Welcome to Potter Mansion. I hope you like it," he said shyly. Ally gripped Hermione's arm and was practically bouncing up and down. Hermione looked intrigued.

"But...how? When?" breathed Lily.

"I bought it last week. I've been getting it cleaned up and ready for all of us to spend Christmas at home," he replied. Then he turned to Hermione and looked at her meaningfully. "All of us," he repeated.

"Way to go, Harry," Sirius said with a grin.

"But the cost... Harry, this is too much..." protested Lily.

"Mum, don't worry about the cost. Besides, we're probably going to spend more money before its finished. It came furnished, but it might not suit your tastes. I just know I saw the place and decided I wanted it. It's a place to raise a family," he told her quietly. No one missed his comment, or the fact that, as he said it, he had reached out for Hermione's hand.

"Come on, let's get out of the cold."

Harry led his family up the road to the mansion. As they approached the entrance, the doors swung open and several house elves and two humans stepped out.

"Mum! Dad!" Hermione squeaked and rushed forward to hug her parents.

Harry turned to his mother. "Mum, this is my friend Dobby," he said, introducing her to the little elf, who beamed a huge smile at Harry.

"Dobby, would you show everyone to their rooms, then bring them down to the study where Mr. and Mrs. Granger and I will be waiting for them?"

Harry ushered them all inside. He followed the Grangers into the study, while the house elves led a group of bemused people to their rooms.

Harry stopped in surprise when he spotted the Christmas tree with boxes of trimmings nearby.

"How did it go, Harry?" asked Mrs. Granger.

He grinned. "Exactly as I planned, Mrs. Granger. And I can't thank you both enough for letting me include Hermione."

"Yes, well, I knew she wasn't very happy when we told her about the Christmas plans. But with my sister so ill, we needed to be close by, just in

case. This suits and allows us to still be a cell phone call away," Jane Granger replied.

"Hermione's had nothing but good things to say about you in her letters, Harry. But I have to admit that some of it confuses me," Frank Granger said seriously.

"I can understand that, sir. How about if we sit down later tonight and discuss some of that? For now, all you really need to know is that I care for her more than I could ever put into words and would rather die than see her get hurt," Harry said quietly.

Frank Granger eyed the tall, dark haired young man in front of him and nodded approvingly. "Well said, lad. Nothing like cutting straight to the chase, as it were. We'll talk more tonight," he said, and then looked up as the door slid open to let the others enter.

Ally's eye's lit up when she spotted the huge Christmas tree in need of decorating. In short order, everyone was pulling bulbs and lights from the boxes on the floor and set to work on the forlorn looking tree. The Grangers even got into the mood, seeing magic used to enhance the decorations. In a corner of the room a muggle stereo played Christmas music. House elves, under the supervision of Dobby, cycled in, bringing decorations, drinks and snacks.

The day began to wind down and, as the sun set, they lit the tree. Hermione stood next to Harry and was surprised to see a tear run down his cheek.

"Harry?" she said softly, taking his hand in hers.

He wiped the tear away and gave her a weak smile. "Sorry," he said softly. "It's my first real Christmas tree."

He released her hand and wrapped his arm around her waist, pulling her closer to him. She closed her eyes for a moment, not caring that her parents were watching them both. He leaned his head against hers and stared at the tree in wonder.

"Master Harry? Dinner is being served, sir," announced Dobby from the doorway.

Harry smiled and took Hermione's hand. "Thank you, Dobby. Shall we have dinner?" he asked, leading everyone to the main dining room.

Sitting at the table, Harry placed Lily to his right and Hermione to his left. Dobby had outdone himself in getting dinner ready.

"Harry?" asked Lily, "I can understand the house, but the elves? Where did you get them from?"

"They came from the Malfoy estate, Mum. Dumbledore told me about them a few days before I bought the house. I bought the elves, then I freed them and hired them on here."

"You bought them, Harry?" asked Hermione in outrage.

Harry took one look at her and started laughing. "Hermione, whatever you do, think of a better name this time."

She blushed when she realized he was talking about something her counterpart had done and apparently she was interested in as well.

"Oh... well still, Harry, despite what the other Hermione did, I want an explanation."

"I promise you'll get one, but not tonight, I think. From the look on your parents faces, I'd say you've opened a can of worms that needs to be addressed."

"Dear," said Jane Granger, "what do you mean by 'other Hermione'?"

"Yes," piped up Frank, "that's something I've wanted explained for awhile."

Harry sighed and put down his fork. "Alright, this will require some time, so please bear with me. I first need to set the stage for the explanation..." Then he paused, thinking.

"Imagine a world and, next to that world, is a mirror. What happens in one world happens in the other. The only differences between the two worlds are minor ones." He waited a moment for the Grangers to catch his meaning. The both nodded for him to continue.

"Now, instead of one mirror, imagine an infinite number of mirrors. The difference between adjoining mirrors are minor, but the differences between one mirror and another one hundred mirrors away could be profound.

"Alright, let's pretend for a moment that someone could travel from one mirror to another. What would they find?" asked Harry.

Ally made a move to speak, but Lily stopped her and watched the Grangers carefully.

"I suppose that traveler would find a world similar, but not quite the same," offered Jane.

"That's precisely what I've done, Mrs. Granger. I've traveled from one mirror to another. In the Wizarding world, I'm called a Dimensional Traveler. I left my universe for this one. It was not a decision I made lightly, but I felt it was one of the two options left to me at the time," he told her.

"So you knew Hermione in your world, Harry?" asked Frank, his brow furrowed, trying to wrap his mind around the concepts.

Harry nodded. "I met Hermione in her first year and she became one of my best friends, Mr. Granger. In our first year, I helped save her from a mountain troll. After that we were very close friends, her Ron Weasley and I. They called us the golden trio."

“Why did you make the jump?” Jane asked.

He sighed and looked at Lily pleadingly. She smiled and placed a hand on his arm.

“In this world,” Lily said softly, “my son was killed as an infant. An evil wizard killed him, but the curse he used bounced back for some unknown reason and killed the evil wizard as well.

“In Harry’s world, neither Harry nor the evil wizard died. The evil wizard went on to lead a war against Wizarding society, and Harry here went on to lead Wizarding society to victory in that war. But the victory came at a cost that he couldn’t easily handle. He had no family, and most of his friends had been killed in the war. He faced a life alone, or he could risk a dimensional trip and maybe find family again,” she concluded, shivering. Harry had risked everything in his jump and she knew he had no way of returning to his universe.

During her explanation Harry stood and walked over to the window, staring out blindly.

“In my world, my family is gone, the woman I loved is dead. My friends, my teachers, all killed. I had almost no one and people thought I was either a hero to be worshipped or a deranged killer who should be executed. I didn’t know if the dimensional trip would work or not, I just knew that even death would be better than what I was living without...” he murmured.

Ally jumped from her seat and rushed over to Harry, hugging him and crying softly. He wrapped both arms around her and smiled gently.

“Imagine arriving in a new place and discovering the mother you never met, the godfather you watched die two years previous is still alive, you have a wonderful little sister who is growing up to be a beautiful young woman and, best of all, one of your best friends, a girl you’ve loved for years, is still the same kind and gentle soul she always was. There’s no evil wizard and you have a chance to recapture a little of what you lost. A man would be a fool not to take advantage of what the fates had served up.”

Harry led Ally back to the table, where he kissed her on the cheek and motioned to her to sit again. Then he placed a hand on Lily’s shoulder, but his eyes, and his heart, were fixed firmly on Hermione.

“This world isn’t perfect, Mr. and Mrs. Granger. No world is. But the world is what we make of it. And this world is now my home. It contains my family... and people whom I love.”

Jane looked at Hermione, who stared up at Harry with misty eyes, and she reached out, placing her hand on her daughters. “I, for one, am glad you came here, Harry,” Jane said. “Hermione’s letters home have changed completely from her previous years. For the first time in ages she sounds happy at school.”

“I hope that’s the case as well, Mrs. Granger. I know she’s made me very happy. She’s my best friend. I couldn’t imagine life without her,” he replied, not looking away from Hermione.

“Master Harry? If everyone would retire to the study, we’ll serve coffee and dessert,” announced Dobby.

“Thank you, Dobby.”

Once they had moved into the study, Frank turned to Sirius. “You’ve been awful quiet during all this, Mr. Black.”

Sirius looked at the muggle for a long moment. “Mr. Granger, I teach defense. It’s a required course. Before school began, I watched Harry challenge three of my best students to a duel, at three to one odds. After he’d beat all three, he made them apologize to every muggle born and half blood in the school.

“Harry has been awarded our societies highest honors and it hasn’t gone to his head. I’ve watched him stand up to bullies on both sides of the blood question. Before he came to Hogwarts, a girl like Hermione was in danger from the bigots in our society. At the dance last night, I saw every muggle born and half blood in the school who was able to attend had a date, and most of those dates were with pure bloods. Harry did that. He’s forcing people to change their attitudes. He’s showing them where they’re wrong, and most are smart enough to see the error of their ways.

“I didn’t say anything because Harry coming to this world is, in my opinion, a precious gift. Oh, not just because I get to know him, but because I’ve learned that he is an honorable man with honorable intentions. I’m proud to know him and prouder to have him as my godson.”

Frank Granger looked at Sirius for a moment longer before nodding and turning to look at Harry. “I didn’t really expect to ask this question of anyone just yet, but what are your intentions towards my daughter?”

Jane choked on her tea.

“Dad!” Hermione exclaimed.

“No, Hermione. It’s a fair question,” Harry said calmly, but watching Frank carefully.

Hermione blinked and looked surprised. Everyone else watched curiously.

He took a deep breath. “Sir, it is my intention, with your permission, to court your daughter. It is my greatest hope that someday she might find me suitable and agree to become my wife.”

Jane’s jaw dropped and she stared between Harry and Frank. Hermione leapt to her feet and grabbed Harry in a hug, burying her face in his chest.

He reached down and tilted her head up. “I’m sorry if I’ve embarrassed you, sweetheart, but he asked. I know I haven’t even told you that, but I had to

tell him the truth," he whispered.

When she smiled, he turned to face her father once more.

"You're both a bit young for that sort of thing," protested Jane when Frank didn't say anything. Frank reached over and gripped his wife's hand.

"Actually, it's not uncommon for witches and wizards to marry early. James and I went from graduation to the wedding. There were twenty other weddings that day, and only one pregnant bride, if I remember rightly," Lily commented.

Frank heaved a great sigh and smiled weakly. "My old grandfather once told me that if you didn't want to hear the answers you shouldn't ask the questions. Harry, you have my permission to court Hermione. I rely on both of you to do the adult thing. And please, do try not to make us grandparents before you hit twenty?"

Hermione blushed and buried her head in Harry's chest, embarrassed once more, but Harry grinned.

Much later that evening Harry stumbled into the kitchen looking for a cup of tea and was surprised to see Lily still up, sitting with Sirius.

He stopped and looked at the two in surprise for a moment. "Mum?" he asked, and then he smiled and shook his head.

Lily looked a little guilty, but she poured Harry a cup of tea.

"I hope we didn't wake you," she said, putting the teapot back on the table.

"Me? Merlin no, Mum, I was having problems sleeping again. I didn't expect to be going through all that with the Grangers tonight. So, are your rooms all right? Is the furniture to your liking? The colors?"

"Everything's perfect. I still can't believe you managed to do all this in a little over a weeks time," she replied.

Harry ducked his head and looked at his cup. "It wasn't all that hard. Money helps grease the wheels. But to be honest, if it weren't for the elves, it wouldn't have been ready in time."

Sirius stood up and stretched. Lily glanced at him, and then stood also. Harry smirked into his cup and, as they headed for the door, he stopped them both.

"Sirius."

"Harry?"

"I approve... but if you ever hurt her, there won't be a hole deep enough for you to hide in," he told the older man, his tone firm and matter-of-fact.

"I won't, Harry. I can't. She has become my life," Sirius said quietly, gazing into Lily's eyes.

Lily touched his cheek gently before turning to smile at her son.

Harry waved at the pair as they left the room. He then picked up his cup and went into the study, where he could look at the lit tree in the dark. He sat in one of the comfortable armchairs and stared for a while until the door opened again.

"Mrs. Granger?"

"Oh, I'm sorry, Harry. I didn't think anyone would be in here."

"No, please, it's fine. Why don't you sit down and join me?"

"I'm sorry for what my husband put you through this evening, Harry. It wasn't called for, and on the first night in your new home?" she shook her head as she down in the armchair next to his.

Harry waved his hand at her. "Please, Mrs. Granger, if I had a daughter like Hermione, I'd want to protect her too."

Jane Granger leaned forward to stare at him for a moment. "Harry, Hermione wasn't the woman you loved in your world, was she?"

He frowned for a moment and then started to chuckle sadly. "You know, had you asked me that question at different times, you would have gotten different answers. A year ago, I would have said no, but a life without Hermione would have still been unthinkable, even then. Then not six months ago, I would have said no as well, but I would have stressed how much I still needed her in my life.

"The simple fact, Mrs. Granger, is that I truly loved two women. One I thought I was going to marry. The other? Well, I worked hard to convince myself that she was nothing more than a sister to me, even though she was much more than that. In my universe, Hermione is married by now, or at least she should have been... over the summer actually.

"It's funny how things change a person. I had to finally admit to myself that I loved Hermione and I couldn't stand the thought of her marrying, even if it was to my best mate. I suppose it's one of the reasons why I attempted the dimensional jump."

He fell silent and reached for his cup.

"I'm sorry, Harry. I didn't mean to press you," Jane began.

"It's alright. I've had a lot of time to examine my feelings for Hermione, as well as my feelings about a lot of things. They say introspection is a healthy thing. Maybe it is, I don't know. I do know this, however. I once felt as though I had my heart ripped out of my chest and I seriously considered taking my life, as it was too unbearable to go on. Maybe the dimensional jump was a halfhearted attempt at suicide. I didn't know what would be here on the other side, or if I could even make the jump. Now, here I am, and I reached out to Hermione because I needed her friendship above all things. I found my friend and I learned to love her again. And, more surprising, she loves me."

Jane smiled gently. "So what are your plans for the future?"

"After graduation I'll be entering a mastery program at Hogwarts, ma'am. I'll be going for my second mastery. My first mastery, in defense, was awarded back in my old world. Now I'll be going for my runes mastery. I've also accepting a teaching position at Hogwarts. But, from our surroundings, I'm sure you can see that I don't need to work a day in my life. I'll be working because I want to. Hermione will have the same option."

Jane remained silent for several minutes before she stood. "Thank you for being so honest and open with me. Good night, Harry, and do try to get some sleep," she said patting his shoulder fondly.

Harry nodded as the older woman left the room. A few minutes later he also returned to his bedroom and slipped into his bed.

It was two days after Christmas before Hermione finally managed to get some private time with Harry. She found him sitting in the library. He had been pensive and quiet all morning and she was worried about him. The weather had turned particularly foul, a wet freezing rain whipped across the property. She found him sitting in front of a fire, a book open in his lap.

"Hey there. Are you alright?"

He smiled up at her as she leaned over the back of the couch. "I'll be alright."

"But you're not alright. Ally said you were in pain."

Harry frowned and shook his head. "You know, having a sister who's empathic is a liability."

"Maybe, but why are you in pain?"

"It's just the weather, sweetheart. When it gets bad, like now, several of my old injuries ache. It will pass with the weather."

"I know you seem to have a lot of scars."

"I know I'm nothing much to look at, Hermione," he said, annoyed.

She walked around to the front of the couch and sat on the footstool in front of him. "That wasn't what I meant. You seem to have more scars than your fight with Voldemort can account for. I tried asking Madam Pomfrey about it, but she wouldn't tell me anything." Her tone softened. "Harry, I'm not trying to pry, but you said some serious things to my parents about us having a life together. I find the idea very appealing, but if I'm going to marry you, I think I deserve to know why the man I love has more scars than he should. I deserve to know why his beautiful body has been marred like that."

He blinked in surprise. "It's not a pretty story. Will you settle for the short version, or are you going to insist on the full version?"

She grinned... he knew her so well. She moved to the far end of the couch, sat down and patted her leg. He smiled, put his book on the footstool she'd just vacated and stretched out, his head in her lap.

"Tell me what ever you can," she said, turning serious.

He closed his eyes and shivered slightly as she ran a hand through his hair. "Most of what you see isn't from Voldemort and his Death Eaters. It's from my aunt and uncle."

"They abused you?" she asked in a hushed tone. Her eyes grew wide in horror.

Harry nodded. She bent over him and kiss his head. "I won't ask you any more. In time, when you're ready, you'll tell me. But it explains a lot of things, like why you wept at the sight of the Christmas tree."

"I may know little about being a good parent, or being a good lover, but I know exactly how not to act. Just don't act like my aunt or uncle. I don't really like to talk about it. It's even harder to talk about that than it is to talk about Voldemort," he whispered, his expression was haunted and grim.

She continued to run her fingers through his hair, trying to comfort him. "It's alright. Just relax. We don't have to talk about it."

He slowly relaxed against her, his eyes still closed. She thought that he'd drifted off to sleep when he suddenly spoke.

"I don't want you going to America or one of those places, Hermione. I'd really like you to stay here in England, with me," he said softly.

She smiled down at him. "I'm not going to America or Australia or Canada, Harry. I've accepted an apprenticeship with Professor Flitwick. He told me the last apprentice he had was your mother."

Harry bolted upright and turned to face her. His gaze met hers for a long moment before he reached out and pulled her into his arms. "Good, then we'll be together. I'll be pursuing a mastery in Runes and have accepted the assistant professor post in defense at Hogwarts."

“Why do you think I accepted the offer from Professor Flitwick? When he told me you would be at the castle as part of the staff, and that your mother would be overseeing your mastery in Runes, I knew that I had to stay. The apprenticeship will allow me a chance to go for my mastery in charms in a few years, and it will give us both time together.”

The two sat cuddling for a long while before Harry spoke again.

“Hermione, I know it’s probably proper for me to get you a ring first and then ask you to marry me, but if I asked you first, then you’d be able to help me pick out a ring that you’d like to wear. That would make sense wouldn’t it? I mean...”

“Harry?”

“Your helping to pick out a ring would be a smart thing. Right?”

“Harry!”

He blinked and looked at her blankly.

“You’re babbling. Are you trying to ask me to marry you?” she asked incredulously.

He swallowed nervously and nodded. She stared at him for a long moment and noted the look in his eyes. She’d seen the look before. He’d let down all his defenses and was laying his heart bare.

“I’d be honored to marry you,” she told him softly before shyly dropping her eyes from his.

He stared at her a moment, then reached out with a shaking hand to touch her cheek. “Really?” he asked in a whisper. When she nodded, he pulled her into a hug. “Tomorrow we’ll get a ring, then we’ll tell our families. What do you think?”

“It’s perfect,” she replied softly. “Perfect. Oh, Harry, thank you!” She tightened her hold on him and wondered if she’d ever had a better holiday.

The next few days were hectic for the couple. They had traveled to Diagon Alley where he had her pick out a modest sized diamond ring. She had initially picked out a much smaller ring, but he finally gave the sales person a minimum value and she led them over to a group of rings with much larger stones.

Hermione protested about the cost until she spotted a three carat pear cut diamond surrounded by emeralds and fell in love with the design. Harry didn’t flinch from the price, he merely handed the sales person his Gringotts card and had it sized to her finger and charmed right there in the shop.

Their return to Potter Mansion later that day caused quite a stir. Initially, Lily and the Grangers were shocked by their announcement. Once the shock wore off and people began talking rather than shouting, they calmed and realized that Harry had everything worked out.

They were planning on a wedding next Christmas. In the meantime, both would continue with their educations, although Harry was asking that, this summer, both families take an extended vacation together. He felt it would be a good chance for the two families to get to know each other better and, as Harry put it, ‘to see the mountains... I’ve dreamed of it, but have never seen real mountains... or the ocean...’

With his statement, those in the room vowed to overcome all obstacles to make sure his dream came true.

Harry explained his plan concerning his long-term career goals. That little bombshell left Hermione, Lily and Sirius speechless, and Ally on the floor laughing her head off. None of them could ever imagine telling Dumbledore that they were out for his job.

The remaining days were spent with Hermione, Jane, Lily and Ally closeted in the study, making plans. Harry, Frank and Sirius wandered about the property, discussing ways to improve it. Frank was impressed with the size of the property and the buildings. They explored the unfinished out buildings and tried to decide what to do with them. Frank suggested that a swimming pool might not be a bad addition.

Dumbledore had asked that Hermione, Ally and Harry return to school via the Hogwarts Express. He made an exception for their leaving because of Harry’s desire to surprise his family, but the return trip was another matter. As head boy, it was expected that he be on the train.

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## Return to Hogwarts...

The trip back to Hogwarts was largely uneventful, until Lavender Brown stopped in to greet them and spotted Hermione’s engagement ring. That started a parade of Gryffindor girls, and more than a few Hufflepuffs and Ravenclaws, to their compartment.

Harry sat back and watched Hermione carefully. This was a different Hermione than the one he had left behind. When that Hermione had gotten engaged after the final battle, it had been a subdued affair. This Hermione, *his Hermione*, was sharing her happiness with her fellow classmates and it made him feel good. It made him feel like he was seeing an aspect of her he hadn’t noticed before.

The parade of girls continued for most of the trip. Harry sat next to Hermione, holding her hand and dozing lightly while she told and retold the story of his clumsy proposal and their trip to buy the ring.

Harry had to agree. In retrospect, it had been clumsy and badly executed. He had been terrified, waiting for her answer. But it worked out in the long run. He did promise that he’d try to be more romantic with her. It wasn’t something that he was used to, but for her, he’d make the effort.



Though he hadn't wanted to make the trip back to Hogwarts on the train, he discovered one thing to be grateful for during the trip. With all the girls visiting their compartment, it got him out of the ever-constant discussion about wedding issues. He had come to realize that a man asking a woman to marry him initiated one of the most complex processes known to mankind, Wizard or Muggle. He really didn't care about colors or fabrics, flowers or food, but quickly discovered that, to the bride-to-be, they could be life-altering choices. When he realized just how important these things were to her, he made the effort to at least *look* as though he cared.

He was surprised to discover that Hermione wasn't the only seventh year girl coming back to school with a major change in their status. Four others, one a pureblood, were betrothed, and two mixed bloods were also engaged. Surprisingly, one muggle born girl was engaged to a pureblood Hufflepuff.

Later, in the Great Hall, Dumbledore stood and made some second term announcements, then congratulated the happy couples. While he smiled merrily at the happy couples, each head of house glared down at the boys involved, trying to convey a message of, 'You will behave yourselves'.

McGonagall stared sternly at Harry for roughly half a minute before she smiled slightly and lifted her own cup in salute. She wasn't about to try to stare him down, and he was more responsible than some of the teachers. Not to mention the fact that his mother worked at the school.

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### Slytherin Rage...

GINNY WEASLEY slipped into the Slytherin common room after dinner. She had been working in the dungeons and was nearly ready to put her plan in motion. She had returned to Hogwarts and was incensed to discover that Hermione Granger had accepted a proposal of marriage from Harry Potter.

She paced in front of the fireplace, her mind whirling with possibilities and plans. *How could he be attracted to that cow?* She thought frantically. *She must have ensorcelled him. He knew better than to fall for a mudblood. His blood was too pure, too perfect, too muddy with such filth!* She stopped suddenly, her eyes narrowed. *This would take a character assassination of the highest order.*

She smiled as the plan formed in her mind. She'd ruin the mudblood bitch and do it in such a way that he'd never want to touch her again. Her smile broadened as her eyes fell upon the two Slytherins who would be most likely to help her... with little convincing. She turned and unbuttoned a few buttons on her blouse to show some cleavage. Then she turned and walked over to Vincent Crabbe and Gregory Goyle.

"Vinny? Greg?" she purred, "I need a favor and, if it works out right, you'll get the chance to have some real fun."

Both boys looked at her briefly then their eyes dropped to her cleavage and they nodded dumbly.

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### Lust in the classroom...

"Harry, while you received your Defense mastery based on deed, I'm quite afraid that the Runes mastery will only be partially based on what you've already accomplished. I've talked with your mother on the topic, and she quite agrees with me."

Harry leaned back in the chair and crossed his legs before motioning for Dumbledore to continue.

"Your mother and I feel that the area where you're weakest isn't your magic skills or even your talents in those areas, but in your ability to write them down."

"Excuse me, sir?" Harry replied, shocked.

"My boy, you've created a completely new set of runes and have taken the talent to a new level. When you explain them, even in a classroom setting, you have no trouble conveying your ideas. No, the problem comes in when you try to express your ideas on paper."

Dumbledore took one look at Harry's face and laughed deeply. "Oh, my dear boy! If only you could see yourself. This isn't the end of the world, Harry. We have several options open to us to correct this problem, so we'll try the simplest first. We've enrolled you in a muggle school for classes in writing. Twice a week, for two hours a day, you will attend the school and, hopefully, learn the skill you need."

Harry sunk down a little further in his chair as the Headmaster continued.

Hermione exited the Arithmancy classroom, her last class of the day, looking forward to meeting up with Harry for dinner. The classroom was at the far west end of the castle and most of the students who took the class had already left the corridor, heading back to the Ravenclaw common room.

"*Imperio*," hissed a voice behind her. She tried to spin around, but it was too late. A calm, happy, almost giddy sensation washed over her.

"Follow me," hissed Ginny Weasley, after checking the corridor for witnesses.

Hermione turned and followed the redhead happily.

When they entered a small, unused classroom, Ginny shut the door behind them and held out her hand. "Give me the ring, then strip out of your clothes."

Greg Goyle and Vincent Crabbe were both in the room and, after hearing Ginny's command, they grinned at each other.

Hermione's brow furrowed and beads of sweat appeared upon it, but she was unable to break the compulsion. She removed her ring, and then began taking off her clothing.

Ginny shoved the ring in her pocket. She'd return it, tearfully of course, to Harry, but only after Hermione made her public confession.

"Strip, you two," she ordered Goyle and Crabbe. "She's going to blow you both, and maybe more, before she's ready to leave. Make sure you're long gone from here before Potter shows up!"

Ginny waited until Hermione had stripped down to her nickers before she stopped her and handed her a potion. "Drink this," she ordered. "Lust of Athena," Ginny said to the others, trying not to look at their nakedness. "In three minutes, she'll be horny enough to fuck the entire Royal Navy, and she'll stay that way for twenty four hours."

Hermione drank the potion quickly, and then stood waiting for the next set of orders.

Ginny waited and watched as her eyes glazed over. "She's all yours," she said over her shoulder. Opening the door, she left the room, laughing at the thought of the mudblood's coming humiliation.

In the Headmaster's office, Harry held up a hand and Dumbledore stopped talking. He watched Harry intently. The young man's complexion went from a normal, healthy color to a pasty white before he stood, his legs shaky.

"Hermione's in trouble. Her ward just triggered," he told the Headmaster, his voice low. His magic flared ominously and the castle vibrated as Hogwarts responded to his commands.

"Albus, go to the west wing, near the Arithmancy classroom," he ordered, then slipped into the shadows.

Still laughing, Ginny closed the door to the classroom. She had taken only a few steps before she froze, and then blanched. Coming down the hall was a wave of blackness so dense it looked solid. The darkness stopped a foot from her nose and coalesced into Harry Potter.

She gave a frightened squeak and reached for her wand. Harry's hand snapped out, catching her wrist. With a deft twist, he snapped the bones. He summoned her wand to his other hand while she screeched in pain. Still holding her wrist, he lifted his hand and Ginny found herself dangling in the air, the broken bones grinding against one another. He then moved her to a wall and stuck her there with a quiet command. Her wand was stuck to the wall next, though well out of her reach.

"It's too late, Potter!" she sneered, grinding her teeth against the pain. "Besides, she's not good enough for you! Right now she's probably giving Crabbe or Goyle a blow job!"

Harry turned to look at her and she fell silent under his gaze. "She's not, Weasley, you are. I can sense the Imperius curse you used on her...and a lust potion?" He tilted his head and examined her, his expression telling her just how much he loathed her. "Did you think I wouldn't find out? Did you think I wouldn't forgive her? You're nothing but a petty, foolish child, Ginevra, and I'll see you get the kiss for what you've done," he told her, his voice so cold she actually shivered.

She whimpered in fear then. Looking up the corridor, she saw several teachers, and the Headmaster approaching and nearly breathed a sigh of relief.

Harry waved a hand and set a shield, preventing anyone from coming closer. Then he turned to the classroom and vanished the door.

The spectacle before him was enough to cause even Harry to pause in shock. Crabbe and Goyle were fighting over Hermione, who sat on the floor, staring at the two half naked boys. Her body was ridged, her eyes hot and hazy with desire.

Harry stunned both Slytherins and moved them out, pinning them to the wall next to Ginny. He then ripped off his cloak and transfigured it into a blanket.

Hermione turned to him and her eyes lit up. She was breathing hard and, as he watched, she licked her lips suggestively.

"Sleep" he murmured.

Her eyes fluttered closed and she relaxed, sliding down into sleep. He wrapped her in the blanket, lifted her in his arms and carried her out of the classroom. He walked up the corridor where a crowd of people stood, anxiously awaiting his news.

Dropping the shield, he spoke directly to Dumbledore. "She's been drugged and placed under the Imperius curse. Check their wands. I'm taking her to my mother's apartment, where I can guard her until the drug wears off. Albus, call the Aurors. If they're still in the castle by tomorrow, you'll not like my reaction."

The Headmaster nodded mutely. His eyes had lost their customary twinkle and he seemed to have aged fifty years. He knew Harry wasn't making an idle threat. Miss Granger had been the victim of a violent sex crime and, before that, an unforgivable curse.

"Minerva, collect the wands and test every one of them. Search them thoroughly, and bring them to my office. I'll contact their families, then the DMLE."

Lily stepped forward and placed a hand on Harry's shoulder. "Let me help you."

He nodded, his eyes grim.

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### **Lily's apartment...**

Harry gently laid Hermione down on the bed, and then transfigured the blanket into a warm, long nightshirt.

Lily watched, her heart breaking, as Harry made her as comfortable as possible, and then pulled the blankets up around her.

"Shouldn't we talk to Professor Snape or Poppy about an antidote, Harry?" Lily asked in concern.

"We can't, Mum," he told her, his voice filled with anguish. "The potion they used was the Lust of Athena. Any attempt to dose her can cause permanent damage. We have to ride it out. She'll sleep four hours or so, and then I'll have to let her up for an hour before putting her back to sleep. It's going to be a long twenty four hours before the potion wears off." He paused for a moment, his eyes closed. "Niamh!"

The white phoenix appeared on the headboard of the bed and trilled a welcome to Lily and Harry.

*You called, Harry wizard?*

"Niamh, I need you to watch Hermione. Some bad people attacked her today and made her very sick. If I'm not here when she wakes up, I need you to come get me. Will you do that for me?" he asked the white phoenix softly.

*I will watch for you, Harry wizard. The old one with the glass eyes wants to speak to you.*

He nodded. "Mum, I'm going to go talk to Dumbledore. Will you stay with her? I'll be back as soon as I can," he entreated.

Lily hugged her son. "Of course I'll watch over her."

He glanced at Hermione's sleeping form for a moment, his eyes grief stricken. Then, taking three steps back, he slipped into the shadows and was gone.

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### **Headmasters Office...**

Harry stepped out of the shadows and into a crowded office. He was surprised to see so many teachers, several Aurors and Molly and Arthur Weasley. Everyone was talking at once and Dumbledore looked like he was ready to pull out his hair. On a chair placed before the Headmasters desk was Ginny Weasley.

"QUIET!" shouted Harry. Many people jumped, startled, and most turned to stare at him, shocked to find him there. "I'll stun the next person who opens their mouth. Now, Headmaster, you have the floor." He moved then to stand behind Albus and watched those in the room.

Dumbledore shot him a grateful glance before facing Kingsley Shacklebolt. "Earlier this evening, Miss Weasley placed another student under the Imperius curse, robbed her, then drugged her against her will. The student was then left to the machinations of two young men, the intended victim of a sexual assault..."

"Which never happened," Harry interjected.

Shacklebolt looked at Harry in surprise. "Did you witness this, Mr. Potter?"

"Not the initial assault, Auror Shacklebolt. When I arrived on the scene, I found Miss Granger on the floor, naked, while Vincent Crabbe and Gregory Goyle fought over which one would be first to use her. I disarmed Ginevra and stunned the other two. Then I did an assessment of Miss Granger's condition. She had been placed under the Imperius curse and forced to drink the Lust of Athena potion.

"Miss Granger is currently being watched by my mother. As you probably know, the potion has no antidote and to try to mitigate the effects using another potion can cause her permanent harm. I can bypass that somewhat by inducing sleep, but I can't make her sleep the entire twenty four hour period it takes for the potion to run its course," Harry said scowling.

"What will happen to my little girl?" whimpered Molly Weasley.

"I'm afraid I cannot fully answer that as yet, Mrs. Weasley. At a minimum, her wand will be snapped and she'll be expelled. Miss Granger, when she recovers, can opt to press charges. Mr. Potter also has the right, as Lord Potter and her betrothed, to bring the matter directly to the Wizengamot and demand a trial. Normally the Ministry will accept our snapping her wand and expelling her in lieu of a trial," said Dumbledore heavily. He then glanced at Harry and everyone's eyes turned to him.

"If Miss Granger fails to recover entirely, I will demand a trial in front of the Wizengamot. If necessary, I will invoke a Familial Requitat," Harry told them, his eyes hard, his expression grim.

Ginny broke down and wept and Molly clutched at husband. "By what right do you claim justified vendetta?" whispered Arthur.

Your daughter has harmed my betrothed. I have spurned her advances and warned her repeatedly during the year, so she decided to vent her spleen on the woman I love. I will not stand idly by and allow that to happen. If Miss Granger recovers, unharmed, then she will be expelled and forever banned from performing magic. If, on the other hand, Miss Granger suffers permanent injury, I will demand justice before the law.”

He stepped back then and stood silently. Arthur pushed Molly away from him and straightened to his full height. His expression turned grim as he realized that his options were few and his daughter’s actions truly reprehensible.

“Ginevra Molly Weasley, this day you have brought shame to yourself and to your family name. If I could disown you, I would. But I cannot, as you have brought upon us the threat of Familial Requit. However...” He turned quickly then and reached towards Dumbledore’s desk and picked up her wand. As she watched, her eyes wide with horror, he snapped in half.

Ginny wailed and slid to the floor.

Arthur seemed to age twenty years in a few short minutes and his gaze softened. He turned to Shackbolt. “Auror, I surrender my daughter into your custody until all legal proceedings have run their course... I cannot condone her actions, but I beg of you to treat her gently. She is my only daughter.” The grief in his voice was like a living thing to those in the room. Turning away from his daughter, he looked at Harry, who nodded, accepting the situation.

Shackbolt stepped forward and placed manacles around Ginny’s wrists. He then laid a portkey around her neck and a moment later, they were both gone.

“Headmaster, unless you’ve need of me, I’ll return to my betrothed side,” Harry said quietly.

Albus nodded and watched him vanish before turning back to deal with Arthur and Molly.

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### Lily’s apartment...

Harry reappeared in Lily’s apartment to find Sirius and Lily sitting at the small table, sharing a pot of tea. He joined them, drained from the events of the day.

Lily poured Harry a cup of tea, while Sirius watched as the younger man tried to wipe the fatigue from his face.

“Well, Weasley has been expelled and turned over to the Aurors. Crabbe and Goyle were already gone when I got up there. The Ministry is waiting to see if Hermione recovers completely before deciding whether or not to press charges,” he told them.

“Are you sure you want to do this, Harry? I can deal with Hermione when she wakes, dear,” asked Lily.

He shook his head. “I’m sorry, Mum, but you can’t really deal with it. When I put her to sleep I used a spell you can touch. I’m directly manipulating her brain’s sleep center.”

Lily’s expression grew shocked. “Is that even possible?”

He smiled tiredly and waved a hand at Sirius. “Sleep,” he murmured, and the man slumped over in his chair, snoring gently.

Lily laughed wickedly at the sleeping Sirius. Harry stood and walked to the door to his old room.

“You realize that the potion’s going to make it just as hard on you as it will on her, right?” his mother asked.

“I know, but I have to do this,” Harry said softly.

Stepping into the room, he cast a binding spell on Hermione, to keep her body frozen in bed, though she would be able to move her head. He then cast a silencing charm on the room. Conjuring a damp cloth, he gently wiped Hermione’s face with it. The potion had subtly enhanced her features. Her allure was now almost Veela-like in its intensity. He brought up his full occlumency shields, hoping they would help a little.

When Hermione blinked and looked around groggily, he tried to smile. “Shh... don’t talk, sweetheart. You’ve been drugged with the Lust of Athena. It’s going to take some time to work out of your system.”

She wet her lips. It was a simple act, so natural and done many times a day. And yet, when she did it, he trembled and tore his eyes away from her. She had turned the act into something loaded with sensuality and promises of pleasure.

“Harry,” she purred, “release me, my love. I’ll make it worth your while. It’s so warm in here. Wouldn’t you like to remove my clothes for me?”

An hour later, a sweat soaked Harry stepped out of the bedroom and sat at the table. Ally handed him a cold glass of pumpkin juice, which he quickly gulped down.

“Merlin, facing Voldemort was easier than this! She’ll sleep for another four hours, thankfully, but it’s going to be a long night. Why don’t you get some sleep, Mum?”

“I can’t sleep,” she protested. “Not like this. My future daughter-in-law has been drugged and my son has condemned himself to the torture of caring for her while she’s awake. I don’t know if your own father could have resisted me had I been Hermione’s situation. You have an enormous strength

of will, Harry.”

“Perhaps, but she’s testing me sorely, Mum. I haven’t wanted to pressure her into going further than kissing, and we haven’t. Now she’s offering freely what I want so much from her and I don’t dare, lest I risk losing her forever. I want her. I want to awake up and see her sleeping next to me. But not like this. Never like this. I want her to want me because she wants me, not because of a potion” He paused then, scowling at what he’d just said. “Does that even make sense?” he asked, shaking his head tiredly.

Lily smiled at her son. “It makes a lot more sense than you can imagine, Harry. And she’ll respect you even more when this is over. She loves you and she wants you as much as you want her. When you’re both ready, it will happen and it will mean more than any casual romp you might have had.” She then reached into her pocket and pulled out Hermione’s engagement ring. “When she becomes more lucid, put this back where it belongs. It will give you something else to talk about for a while. The Headmaster dropped it off earlier, while you were with her.”

Harry nodded gratefully and pocketed the precious ring. He stood then and walked to the couch. Stretching out upon it, he set his watch to chime in three and a half hours. Moments later, he was asleep.

Lily stayed close to her quarters, having the house elves serve meals there for the next twenty hours. She was worried about Harry. He had given up trying to sleep and was wearing himself out. She watched him go into his old room for the last time. Hopefully he would emerge with Hermione, clear of the drug. She had become more lucid as time passed, but he’d had to explain the situation to her every time she awoke.

Harry closed the door behind him. He was exhausted, his body felt like it had been beaten and his mind was sluggish. He stepped over to the bed where Hermione lay and she looked up at him. She was unable to move, as he hadn’t ended the binding charm.

“Hang on, Hermione. Let me check that the potion is gone, then I’ll see if it’s done any permanent damage,” he told her softly. He reached and pulled his staff from the air and waved it over her once with no apparent reaction. Nodding to himself, his next spell caused the emerald on his staff to pulse brightly when he slowly ran it from her head to her toes.

He sat on the edge of the bed and leaned against the bedpost. With a flick of the staff, he released her binds.

Hermione sat up and looked around in shock. This wasn’t any room she knew. “Harry, where am I and why am I here?”

He reached into his pocket and pulled out her ring. He hadn’t given it to her earlier because he hadn’t wanted to risk touching her. The effect she had on him had been too much for him and the drain of keeping his occlumency shields in place had contributed to the condition he now find himself in.

He handed her the ring and smiled tiredly at her. “You were attacked, Hermione…”

The door to the bedroom opened and Lily, Sirius and Ally came in. Hermione pulled the covers up to her neck.

Harry could see the unasked question in Lily’s eyes. He nodded and she closed her eyes, giving a silent prayer of thanks. Then she became all business. “Good, you’re finally awake. We’ll get you something to eat in a moment, dear. Harry, Sirius and Ally are here to take you back to your room so you can rest. You’ve exhausted yourself taking care of Hermione. Now it’s time for you to sleep. I’ll explain everything to her.”

Harry stood wearily and let Sirius lead him from the room. Within ten minutes, he had kicked off his shoes, fallen into bed and slipped into sleep.

He slept nearly twelve solid hours, so tired he never moved, even when he dreamed. It was the smell of food that finally woke him, stiff and uncomfortable. Someone nearby was eating and he could clearly smell bacon and coffee.

He climbed out of the bed slowly, groaning to himself as his muscles protested and his bones creaked. Then he stumbled, barefoot, out to the little common room. Hermione was sitting in the small kitchen area, reading over her homework. Nearby was a full pot of coffee and breakfast was kept warm under a charm. She looked up when he entered.

“Good morning, sleepyhead. You’ve slept a long time,” she said, smiling. “Madam Pomfrey checked you over about an hour ago and thought you’d be up around now, so I took the liberty of having breakfast brought up, even if it is five in the morning. I think we’ve both managed to mess up our days and nights a little.”

He sat at the table and ran a hand through his hair. She still affected him like she was under the potion! He accepted the cup and smiled thankfully at her, but he kicked his occlumency shields up to full power.

“Did Madam Pomfrey check you out? Are you alright?” he asked in a concerned voice.

Hermione nodded and pulled up a chair next to his. “She did. She says I’m fine and that all traces of the potion are gone. She was more concerned about you.”

“Me? I wasn’t the one attacked,” he protested.

“Harry,” she replied softly, “that potion does things to people. You spent hours with me while that potion was at full power. How you managed to control yourself is beyond me. I can see from here that you’re still affected and fighting it. You’re trembling and trying hard not to look at me.”

He dropped his eyes and mumbled an apology.

When she reached over and touched his hand, he closed his eyes and bit at his lip nervously.

“So it’s true, then. Madam Pomfrey said that your desire for me would be a bit extreme.”

"Maybe I'll hop into the shower," he offered, standing up quickly.

"It wouldn't help, you know. We need to work this out the regular way."

Harry snatched his hand away from her. "No. I want you, Hermione, more than I can possibly say, but not like this. I didn't give in while you were quite graphically offering me every possible delight I could imagine and I'm not going to give in to this now."

"Harry..."

"Please, I don't want our first time to be because we were caught up in some potion's effect!"

Hermione moved to him and wrapped him in her embrace. He trembled against her and groaned into her shoulder.

"Oh, love, the potion impacted you, but all it's done is magnify the desire you already felt. Most of what you're feeling is because I've been teasing you unmercifully for the last day." She pulled away slightly and gazed into his eyes. Then, taking him by the hand, she led him back into the bedroom. Her expression was calm, though her eyes spoke of deeper emotions.

"I may be free of the potion, but that doesn't mean I don't want you. I'll always want you, in this world and the next," she murmured huskily, pushing him onto the bed. She followed him down, flowing over his body and kissing him softly.

Harry wrapped his arms around her, sinking into the kiss as his thoughts spun away.

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### **Around the lake...**

Harry sat on a large rock, Hermione close beside him, and they both watched as the giant squid performed lazy back flips in the lake.

"It's not gone, you know," he said.

"Hmm?" she replied. He was kneading her shoulders and she was leaning into his touch, enjoying the sensation.

"The desire. It's not gone, just temporarily under control," he told her.

"Good. I don't want you to lose that, ever." she replied with a smile.

"Ah... what did I tell you, Lily? Young love is a wonder to behold, with a magic all its own," came a voice.

Hermione stood and began to turn around, but Harry stopped her, pulling her back against him. "And a good day to you, Albus," he said, looking up at his friend and mentor. Lily stood next to the Headmaster, smiling at the young couple.

"Tell me, young Harry. How is it that everywhere around us, the country lies in a deep winter freeze, but here at Hogwarts, the conditions more resemble early summer or late spring?" asked Dumbledore, his eyes twinkling gaily.

Harry looked around the grounds for a moment, surprise. Then, gazing at the older man, he grinned impudently. "Magic, Albus. Magic."

Hermione giggled softly. Lily laughed outright.

"Ah, I thought that might be the case. Will it last long?" Dumbledore asked.

"At least until Graduation, Albus. Let's say it's a gift to the school this year, an early summer."

The old wizard gazed around and nodded thoughtfully. "Strangely enough, when your father reached a certain point in his courtship with your mother, he managed to arrange for the house elves to serve her favorite dessert dish every day for a month. I haven't been able to look at an éclair the same ever since. I dare say this is a better demonstration of the joy one has when a soul mate is found."

"Éclair's! Merlin, I'd almost forgotten that," Lily said, her face flushed with embarrassment.

Harry and Hermione both laughed. Dumbledore watched her with affection, smiling at her blush, before he turned back to Harry.

"I wanted to thank you both for not pressing any further charges against the Weasley's. Young Ronald has been withdrawn from the school at his own request. We could never prove it, but we think he helped make the potion used on Miss Granger."

"I am truly sorry it came down to that, but Ginevra crossed a line that should not have been crossed. She got off lucky," Harry replied.

Hermione tensed in his arms and he reached up to caress her cheek.

"I agree. It was a terrible business, but it's behind us now and even the Slytherins are disgusted by her actions. I've had more than a few come to me, asking if they could apologize to you both."

"That's not necessary, Albus. We don't hold them responsible for it. Like you said, it's past. Now I think it's time to look to the future."

"And what do you see in our future?" asked Hermione curiously.

Harry smiled at her, his eyes glowing. "I see magic, of course, and family. But mostly, I see love... always love."

**FINIS**